

***“As Soon As We Got Here We Lost Everything:”***

**The Migration Memories and Religious Lives of  
the Old Believers in Australia**

by

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**Abstract**

The Old Believers are a group of Russian Orthodox Christians who claim to preserve the primordial ritual form and religious dogma of their faith. These claims and the Old Believers' religious lives have been challenged by the global dispersion of their diaspora and the experience of forced migration. Political and religious persecution forced the Old Believers to spread across Europe, North and South America, New Zealand and Australia. After they were forced to leave their former settlements in China during the 1950s and 1960s, several hundred Old Believers settled in Australia. There they formed church communities in Melbourne, Sydney and the country town of Yarwun in Queensland.

My thesis focuses both on the impact that religion has on individual migrant journeys, and on how the Old Believers' religious lives and identities have been transformed by their migration experience. Life story interviews, participant observation, and a range of archival material highlight the various meanings that the Old Believers have attached to their migrant past, their diasporic present and their religious tradition. Their migrant memories offer contested interpretations of their migration and settlement experience in Australia, their religious practice and diaspora identity.

My analysis presents the Old Believers' migratory movement as a process which conveys a sense of shared history, origin, displacement and belonging. The Australian Old Believers identify strongly with the origins of their Russian Orthodox faith. Their ancestral homeland offers an imaginative and often idealised identification with their diaspora. Memories of the Old Believers' former settlement and forced migration from China focus on notions of place and displacement; they reveal a more ambivalent and contested aspect of their migrant identity. The idealised reminiscence of a traditional life-style and pious religious practice overlap with memories of state terror, persecution and violence, which had forced the Old Believers to leave Communist China.

Various resettlement countries, international organisations and immigration policies had an impact on the trajectory of the Old Believers' migrant journey. Different political and individual decisions shaped their migration to Australia and influenced their present settlement and diasporic condition. The Old Believers' often restrictive religious dogma and ritual practice stand in conflict with a modern and mostly urban lifestyle. The Old Believers' religious practice has adapted to the changed cultural and social setting of their diaspora, and their ritual practice shows aspects of change and continuity.

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Last but not least, I thank my family and friends for their constant encouragement which made this thesis possible.

## **Declaration**

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award to the candidate of any other degree or diploma, except where due reference is made in the text.

To the best of my knowledge this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Where the work is based on joint research or publications, this thesis discloses the relative contributions of the respective workers or authors.

Stefanie Scherr

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## Prologue

A crisp clear winter morning has brought relentless cold to Moscow. Clouds of frozen breath and the noise of crunching snow hang in the air. A dirty white *marshrutka* (share taxi) takes me from the Taganskaia metro station, in the city's southwest, to the Rogozhskoe cemetery. My *Lonely Planet* guide has recommended a visit to its Russian Orthodox Old-Rite church<sup>1</sup>, “one of Russia's most atmospheric religious centres”.

At my destination I circle the various church buildings and the belltower, and then enter the central church through a side door, escaping the frosty cold. As I step out of the anteroom and into the nave, my eyes need to adjust to the dimness inside. The shapes of large wooden icons emerge in the flickering twilight of a dozen candles. Their paintings begin to gleam in vivid purple, marine blue and ochre. A candlelit chandelier hangs from the ceiling, and enhances the shine of sumptuous frescos and gilded arches. My eyes wander from the dark wooden floorboards, along the silver candelabra, up to the altar front, which is illuminated by the winter sunlight. A golden iconostasis, painted with the highest ranks of saints and angels, ascends to the vaulted ceiling.

Suddenly I glimpse a little girl, pacing down the aisle in front of the altar. Her long red dress sways around her feet and a colourful tasseled belt is girt around her waist. Her hair is covered with a bright headscarf. Its thin layer of white satin frames the girl's face. Evenly spreading over her back and shoulders, the headscarf gives her childish figure a solemn look. The girl has stopped in front of the side altar. Her hand reaches carefully up to the top of the candelabra, where she places a small thin candle. She crosses herself, tapping her fingers with utmost fervency against her chest and bowing deeply. I am struck by the devoutness of her gesture, its intensity and sincerity. The girl seems totally immersed in the ritual movement of her body and the church atmosphere. The candlelight that shines on her face makes her appear mysterious and angelic.

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<sup>1</sup> My use of the term “Russian Orthodox Old-Rite Church” refers to the church hierarchy of Belokrinitsa. It is headed by Metropolitan Korniliy (Titov) who resides at the Rogozhskoe cemetery in Moscow. The “Orthodox Old-Rite Church”, also known as the Lipovan Orthodox Old-Rite Church, belongs to the Austrian concord of the Belokrinitsa Hierarchy and is currently lead by Metropolitan Leonty (Izotov) in Brăila. (For the establishment and historical development of the priestly Old Believer church hierarchies see: Peter Hauptmann, *Rußlands Altgläubige [Russia's Old Ritualists]* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005), 124–195).

As I look around and observe the worshippers around me, I become even more amazed by the mystical world which I have entered. A group of men, dressed in high laced boots and Cossack pants, are standing near the entrance. Their stature is imposing, and the expression on their faces betrays their religious devotion. Immersed in their prayers these men stand with arms crossed over their chest, responding to the melodic chants of a choir.

After a while I leave the church, mesmerised by its splendour, by the sweet smell of incense and the fervour of the worshippers. I like to think that the magic spell, which was cast on me that day at the Rogozhskoe cemetery, eventually led to my research interest in the Old Believers' religious faith and history.

## Introduction

### Gympie – Last Refuge for the Old Believers

It is still pouring with rain. A pair of gumboots has stained the white tiles near the front door with a puddle of rainwater, gravel and soil. Vlas's<sup>1</sup> lumberjack shirt is dripping; his short silver hair is all wet. He was outside to check the garden and the gutters. Back in the house he calms his wife down: "No worries – everything's fine." During the summer months heavy rain falls are not unusual in Gympie, a small country town in the hinterland of Queensland's Sunshine coast. Vlas's wife has been nervous and worried. Their adult children have promised to come for a visit, as the family is about to celebrate Christmas. If the small creek in front of their house overflows, their farm can no longer be reached.

Looking through the window and down towards the small valley, the winding gravel road leading up the hill has already disappeared behind a front of rain and wind. Clouds of thunder and lightning loom over Vlas's new house, which for the moment only consists of a wooden frame and electric cabling. Further down the valley I recognise the silhouettes of a few houses and a small prayer hall. Vlas and his wife belong to a group of Russian Orthodox Christians who reject the reformed Russian Orthodox Church. This dissident group opposed reforms that Patriarch Nikon (1605–1681) had introduced in the mid-seventeenth century. Refusing any ritual changes and revisions of their sacred texts, the opponents of the reform were denigrated as *raskol'niki* (schismatics), whereas the dissenters began to call themselves Staroobriadtsy (Old Ritualists) or Starovery (Old Believers). This designation indicated their devotion to the old rituals of Russian Orthodoxy.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> If my interviewees chose to be identified in the course of my project, I have used their given names. When more than one individual carried the same name, their *otchestvo*, their father's first name, which in Russian usually serves as a middle name, is added. Well-known individuals of the Australian Old Believer communities such as priests, deacons and other high-rank church officials, whose names have been published previously, will be identified. In cases when my interviewees chose to stay anonymous their names have been changed; only the year and place of their interview is given. (see Appendix A).

<sup>2</sup> Roy R. Robson, "Liturgy and Community among Old Believers, 1905–1917," *Slavic Review* 52, No. 4 (1993), 713; Georg B. Michels, *At War with the Church: Religious Dissent in Seventeenth-*



With their rejection of Nikon's reforms, and their persistence to preserve the Russian Orthodox faith in its 'traditional and pure' form, the Old Believers' continuous and forced migratory movement began. In fear of religious persecution many Old Believers fled to the peripheries of the Russian Empire during the first decades after the schism. The persecution that the Old Believers suffered at the hand of the state authorities varied under the reign of the Romanov tsars. State and church ceased their violent persecution and vilification of the Old Believers only for a short period of time, between the decree on religious tolerance of 1905 and the October Revolution in 1917.

In the aftermath of the revolution and the upheaval of the civil war, several thousand Old Believers, who opposed the new Bolshevik regime on account of its atheist politics and collectivisation plans, fled to northern China. Many of them settled in the north-eastern province of Manchuria, in Harbin and the district of Trekhrech'e (Three Rivers), north of Hailar. In the north-western province of Xinjiang, close to the Russian-Chinese border, many Old Believers joined Russian settlements around the cities of Kuldja and Urumchi. For several decades, the Old Believers who had settled in China were free to practise their religion. However, after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, their living conditions changed drastically. Many families lost any means to make a living, were dispossessed, persecuted and imprisoned. From the early 1950s the Chinese government encouraged the Russian settlers in northern China to return to the Soviet Union, but many refused to leave. After 1956 the Communist authorities changed their policies, and granted the Russians permission to seek resettlement in Western countries, including Australia.

The Australian Old Believers is a religious migrant community which shares a history of forced migration, displacement and resettlement. In this thesis I look at the meanings that the Old Believers make of their migrant experience, and how this experience affects their religious lives and identities. A range of archival material, as well as life story interviews and participant observation shed light on the Old Believers' interpretations of their present diasporic condition, their migrant past and religious tradition. Numerically the Old Believers constitute only a small component of Australia's postwar migrant intake. However, the particularities of their migrant journey, and the

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*Century Russia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 22. My interviewees used the terms Staroobriadtsy (Old Ritualists) and Starovery (Old Believers) as self-designations for their religious community and belief.

circumstances of their settlement, make the Old Believers' migratory experience an interesting chapter in Australia's immigration history. The story of the Old Believers' migration to Australia offers insights into the effects of religion on individual migrant journeys, as well as the establishment of religious migrant communities.

Vlas winks at me as he smooths the last drops of rain off this beard. In his baggy clothes he looks slender and small. Vlas grins at the raging storm outside; he does not disguise his excitement and pride in defying the force of nature. Still looking through the window and down the valley, he says: "We came here [to Australia] because there were Old Believers here; that simply meant that we were able to pray here."<sup>3</sup> Vlas is an elder of the Chasovennye<sup>4</sup> Old Believer community in Gympie, which seeks to preserve the original ritual forms and religious traditions of their religion. The Old Believers who have settled in Queensland are priestless for practical, rather than doctrinal reasons.

We are Old Believers! That means that there are no priests remaining [who could serve] us, but we still believe in our faith. We still believe in all the dogmas and rules that they [the Russian Orthodox Church] abolished. Nonetheless, we believe in these dogmas! We don't take on anything new; we don't recognise 'the Nikonian style'. That is why they [the adherents of Nikon's reforms] have taken away a lot from us. They have killed a lot of people – many, many people. [...] That's why they [the Old Believers] fled from the cities; they fled into the wilderness where they could survive.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Vlas, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 6 January 2011, Gympie.

<sup>4</sup> Chasovennye derives from the Russian word *chasovnia* (chapel) and indicates the Old Believers' loss of access to proper churches. This de-facto priestless group of Old Believers does not celebrate all church sacraments after they lost access to priests who were consecrated by Old Orthodox rituals; many communities were widely spread across Siberia and the region of the Ural Mountains. Their liturgical services were lead by elected elders and the *nastavnik*. As preceptor of the church community the *nastavnik* confers baptism, presides over marriage ceremonies and assumes responsibility for the spiritual welfare of the congregation. (Roy R. Robson, *Old Believers in Modern Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1995), 32–34; David Scheffel, "Chasovennye Old Believers," in *The Modern Encyclopedia of Religions in Russia and the Soviet Union*, Vol. 5, ed. Paul D. Steeves (Gulf Breeze: Academic International Press, 1993), 139–140).

<sup>5</sup> Vlas, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 6 January 2011, Gympie.

The Old Believers' migration to the Antipodes seemed to be yet another episode in a series of displacements and expulsions that spread their diaspora across Eurasia and the Americas. Between the early-1950s and late 1960s, up to 400 Old Believers arrived in Australia, where they established small and scattered communities near the regional town of Yarwun in Queensland, and in the suburbs of Sydney and Melbourne. Smaller family groups also settled in Tasmania.

Vlas was eighteen when he arrived in Australia by ship, in 1962. He settled with his family on a share farm near Yarwun. Like many first generation Old Believer migrants, Vlas thought that the Old Believers' century-long journey had come to an end; that they had finally found a refuge. In Australia the Old Believers could resume a life free from state and church persecution, dedicated to preserve their religious practices and traditions, their rituals and dogmas. "Back then there were many Russian people in Yarwun," says Vlas with a smile. "We were strong back then! We observed Lent and observed [all the church laws]."<sup>6</sup> By the mid-1960s, a large Old Believer community, with many young people, had settled in Yarwun. Since then much has changed, Vlas remembers:

But then everything fell to pieces! People went into the cities and now everything is torn apart. There is nothing left of our religion, there are just four or five families left. We have just moved to Gympie. We have built our prayer hall and bought our little farms here – I planned my whole life to have my own farm, but now I am already starting to get old. I just don't know how we will continue to live. Nothing is left of our religion! I don't know what we are going to do. Maybe...?<sup>7</sup>

Vlas does not finish the sentence. Recently, Vlas and his wife moved to Gympie, about 350 km south of Yarwun, together with half a dozen other Old Believer families. When the mining of the Stuart oil shale deposits began in 1999,<sup>8</sup> environmental pollution

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<sup>6</sup> Vlas, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 6 January 2011, Gympie.

<sup>7</sup> Vlas, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 6 January 2011, Gympie.

<sup>8</sup> Thom Blake, *Targinnie: The History of a Central Queensland Rural Community* (Brisbane: Queensland Government, 2005), 39.

affected the Yarwun district. Some Old Believer families decided to move away, and settled in the lush green valleys of Gympie. Their religious community has been shrinking over the last two or three decades. Many young people moved to the cities, to find work or to go to university, instead of clinging to their Old Believer community. Now only a handful of elderly people who were knowledgeable about their religious rituals are left in Gympie. Only a few families still practise the traditional lifestyle that their religion prescribed. Of all Old Believer communities in Australia, the situation for the group in Gympie is most precarious.

Vlas shrugs his shoulders and gives me a questioning look. “Just look at our children – they are Australians – they already live the Australian way of life! They are not concerned about fasting – actually, nothing concerns them.” I ask Vlas what he means by “the Australian way of life”, and he explains: “Everything is possible! Just eat everything you like to eat! Whatever you like to drink, just drink it! There is no need to go to church!” Vlas smirks, “Australians don’t even go to church. That’s because they don’t have many faults – probably, as few as we Old Believers.” All of Vlas’s children have moved away from the Old Believer community and only occasionally attend the Holy Liturgy, for high holidays such as Christmas and Easter. They find their parents’ ‘old ways’, their traditional lifestyle and religious traditions too restraining. Only two generations after the Old Believers arrived in Australia, their communities are fighting against the alienation of the younger generation from their religion. For Vlas, and other Old Believers who have settled in Gympie, it is a constant worry that, once the last elders of their community have passed away, no one will be left to preserve their religious tradition and practice.

Two questions are central to my thesis: how do the Old Believers in Australia make sense of their migrant past? And what relevance does this past have for their present identification as a religious diaspora community? Five motifs, which use narrative strands and analytic frames, structure my answers. Narrative strands describe the Old Believers’ migration journey, their settlement experience and religious practice. They provide the context for my exploration of the embodiment of ritual forms and traditions, and of Old Believers’ shifting identity formations.

These motifs identify various aspects of the Old Believers’ religious lives that have been transformed by their migration and displacement. The first of these five motifs is the Old Believers’ imagination of a shared history, which includes the identification with their Russian cultural heritage and Orthodox faith. The second motif of my analysis

concentrates on the Old Believers' migrant experience and their memories of place. It focuses on their attachment to and displacement from places of their former settlement in China, as well as their re-emplacment in the Australian diaspora. The third motif highlights the expectations and hopes that the Old Believers attach to their migration, as well as the temporal trajectory of their migrant journey. The fourth motif is concerned with the Old Believers' arrival and settlement in Australia, as well as their sense of belonging and identification with their diaspora community. The fifth motif looks at the ritual and religious practice of the Old Believers in the Australian diaspora. I introduce these motifs by means of the conversations I had with Vlas and his daughter Erine.<sup>9</sup> Our discussion reflects the intergenerational conflict that prevails in all three Australian Old Believer communities.

### **Migrant Memories and Religious Lives in the Diaspora**

The storm clouds that are hanging over Gympie while I am talking to Vlas and Erine are creating an apocalyptic atmosphere, which seems symptomatic of the uncertain future, the tension and the conflict that emerge from the Old Believers' diasporic condition in Australia. A thunderstorm is just about to unleash its fury. A thick blanket of rain clouds has rolled in. Lightning flashes on the horizon, followed by waves of thunder. The corrugated iron shed, Vlas's temporary home, trembles under the force of rain and wind. The volume of the TV is turned up, and drowns the noise of water clashing against the roof. News reports inform us about the floods in northern and coastal Queensland; rising water levels for the Brisbane River necessitate emergency and evacuation plans. "What will God still hold for us?" Vlas's wife asks angrily, turning towards me and her husband, but no one answers. "It is God who punishes us already for our sins! But we don't understand. Everywhere you hear people talking about Mother Nature," she smiles scornfully: "Mother Nature, Mother Nature! Look what she is giving us!? It's God who does this." She points out the window that has gone opaque from the rainwater.

Sitting down at the kitchen table, Vlas quietly pours himself a cup of tea: "I am named after a saint, a *velikommushennik*," he says proudly. Vlas's patron-saint is the priest-martyr Vlasii of Sevastiia<sup>10</sup>. "Whenever you pray, for example, every time you pray the

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<sup>9</sup> This conversation is constructed from interviews that I conducted with Vlas on 6, 9 and 11 January 2011, and with Erine on the 7 January 2011.

<sup>10</sup> According to the Old Orthodox calendar Vlas's patron's day is on 11 February, which is 24 February according to the Gregorian calendar. (Mitropolii Moskovskoi i vseia Rusi Russkoi

*natshal*<sup>11</sup> – [in church] or at home – you always need to pray to your patron-saint.” Vlas explains that when a person passes away one’s patron saint and one’s guardian angel meet the soul in the afterlife. For forty days they will guide its journey through the kingdom of heaven and the abyss of hell. After this restless wandering the soul will be judged. “You get what you get: either heaven or hell, either good or bad,”<sup>12</sup> Vlas says, and chuckles. Suddenly, he gets up to switch on the light, as clouds have darkened the sky. He gets a heavy book from the cupboard and puts it carefully on the kitchen table. He thumbs through the pages which illustrate the Last Judgment. Brightly coloured pictures show in much detail the torture and suffering of the doomed: burning bodies are spiked with lances and lacerated. Little demons and devils are pointing fingers and laugh viciously. Blazing red flames flicker around pale human bodies, bent in pain with snakes gorging on them.

“The ruthless,” Vlas says, while pointing at one of the pictures, “he doesn’t have mercy for anyone or doesn’t take pity on anything. For example, if someone or something needs help, he doesn’t help. And he doesn’t share his wealth.” Vlas turns a page. “This is a slanderer,” he says, and points at the little black devils, “they have cut out his tongue because he was lying a lot. And that one, he is a robber and murderer, a person who has killed people. What has he got?” Vlas takes a closer look, “Darkness – he lives in darkness.”<sup>13</sup> These apocalyptic visions of the Last Judgement resonate with Vlas’s religious world,<sup>14</sup> which seems to be densely populated with angels and demons, with visions of saints and devils. Vlas imagines the afterlife according to the biblical descriptions and images that his church books, liturgical readings and prayers provide.

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Pravoslavnoi Staroobriadcheskoi Tserkvi, ed., *Pravoslavnyi Staroobriadcheskii Tserkovnyi Kalendar' 7518/2010 [Orthodox Old-Rite Church Calendar 7518/2010]* (Moscow: Krasnaia Zvezda, 2009), 17.

<sup>11</sup> The *natshal* is a short prayer that is recited at the beginning and the end of every church service or prayer at home.

<sup>12</sup> Vlas, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 6 January 2011, Gympie.

<sup>13</sup> Vlas, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 9 January 2011, Gympie.

<sup>14</sup> These eschatological beliefs are widely shared among the priestless Old Believer community in Queensland, but not amongst the priestly Old Believers in Melbourne and Sydney.

Erine tells me that her imagination of the apocalypse and the afterlife have been fed by the same religious books and illustrations. With disgust in her voice she remembers some of the devilish faces, and “their facial expression, saying: haha, we got you down here!”<sup>15</sup> Erine remembers that her grandmother enhanced these imaginations of the afterlife and the apocalypse, of devils and demons.

She was the one who was really religious, and she would always put the fear of God and the fear of the devil into us. [...] She would pull out the bible and different books [and show me]: this is heaven and this is hell. That is how you have to live your life so you don't end up here [in hell]. And just the books and images used to scare the shit out of me. She did it on purpose, so you would still have that in you, the faith.<sup>16</sup>

Erine's grandmother used these apocalyptic visions and images to teach her grandchildren how to live a life according to the Old Belief's religious traditions. Vlas and Erine use their imagination to make sense of the Old Belief's eschatological teachings and dogmas, as well as the symbolic meanings of its sacred texts and ritual practice. They also make sense of the Old Believers' religious past, to position themselves within a religious migrant community in the present, and to envision the future of their diaspora in Australia.

### **Imagining the Past and the Present**

The first motif of my analysis, the Old Believers' historical and social imagination, is central to their meaning and history making. The Old Believer diaspora in Australia uses imagination to make sense of their migrant past, their cultural tradition and their religious lives. A central reference point for the Old Believers' imagination of their past and diasporic present is their century-long church history, especially the schism in the mid-seventeenth century. This recurrent referencing to a shared religious and cultural tradition includes idealised notions of a once united and strong Russian Orthodoxy.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Erine, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 7 January 2011, Gympie.

<sup>16</sup> Erine, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 7 January 2011, Gympie.

<sup>17</sup> Boris Uspensky's and Paul Meyendorff's work illuminates in much detail the schism of the Russian Orthodox Church, presenting it as a result of ritual and textual change. (Boris A. Uspensky, "Schism and Cultural Conflict in the Seventeenth Century," in *Seeking God: The Recovery of Religious Identity in Orthodox Russia, Ukraine, and Georgia*, ed. Stephen K.

Like Douglas Rogers in his anthropological study of a post-socialist Russian Old Believer community, I choose to analyse the lived practice of the Old Belief, the contested meanings of their religion's symbolic meanings, church history and religious tradition.<sup>18</sup> My analysis gives a greater understanding of how my interviewees negotiate the meanings of their religious past, of the church schism and its repercussions, for their present diaspora community.

My interviewees identify strongly with the past of their Russian Orthodox religious tradition. Imaginations of their religious past construct continuity, and connect their religious and cultural heritage with their present and future diaspora community. However, this community is by no means homogenous in its historical interpretations

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Batalden (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1993), 106–143; Paul Meyendorff, *Russia, Ritual, and Reform: The Liturgical Reforms of Nikon in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century* (Crestwood: St Vladimir's Press, 1991)). However, these studies are largely descriptive and provide little insight into the repercussions and the significance of the Old Believers' split from the Russian Orthodox Church. Basing their interpretations on a vast amount of archival material and secondary literature, Sergei A. Zen'kovsky and Michael Cherniavsky have contributed very detailed accounts of the events which caused the church schism. (Sergei A. Zen'kovskii, *Russkoe Staroobriadchestvo: Dukhovnye Dvizheniia Semnadsatogo Veka [The Russian Old Ritualists: Spiritual Movements of the Seventeenth Century]* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1970); Serge A. Zenkovsky, "The Russian Church Schism: Its Background and Repercussions," *Russian Review* 16, No. 4 (1957), 37–58; Michael Cherniavsky, "The Old Believers and the New Religion," *Slavic Review* 25, No. 1 (1966), 1–39; Michael Cherniavsky, "The Old Believers and the New Religion," in *The Structure of Russian History: Interpretive Essays*, ed. Michael Cherniavsky (New York: Random House, 1970), 140–188). However, their studies largely concentrate on a narrative of reform, dissent and persecution. Many of these "standardised" historiographies dismiss the highly fragmented character of the Old Believer movement, or give homogenised accounts of Old Belief as "popular" or "traditional" culture. See for example: Robert Crummey, "Old Belief as Popular Religion: New Approaches," *Slavic Review* 52, No. 4 (1993), 700–712; Robert Crummey, *Old Believers in a Changing World* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011); I. V. Pozdeeva, "Drevnerusskoe Nasledie v Istorii Traditsionnoi Knizhnoi Kul'tury Staroobriadchestva (Pervyi Period) [The Old-Russian Legacy in the History of the Old Ritualists' Traditional Book Culture (First Period)]," *Istoriia SSSR*, No. 1 (1988), 84–99. For a more nuanced approach to the Old Believers dissent, the fragmentary character and loose organisation of its movement in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century see Michels, *At War with the Church* (see note 2).

<sup>18</sup> Douglas Rogers's study of an Old Believer community in the Upper Karma gives insight into the lived experience, as well as the contestation of symbolic meanings and religious beliefs: Douglas Rogers: *The Old Faith and the Russian Land: A Historical Ethnography of Ethics in the Urals* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009).



and social imaginaries of the future. This thesis does not explore the origins and exact nature of the doctrinal differences between various communities of Old Believers in Russia, China, Hong Kong or Australia, and is therefore not engaging with this issue in any detail. It acknowledges, however, that important ritual and dogmatic variations have divided the various Australian Old Believer communities; a generational divide exists between the 'old ways' of practicing their belief and an adapted Australian way of life.

Vlas and I are still sitting at the kitchen table. The little farm on top of the hill has turned into a mysterious place. A foul yet sweet smell of soil has risen from the dark forest that adjoins the few acres of Vlas's farm. Dampness creeps into the carpet, into the curtains and every piece of clothing. Leaning back in his armchair Vlas stretches his feet under the table. I know that he would rather be outside, wandering around, down to the creek or into the woods behind us. He has shown me his garden, pointing out the onions, birch cherries and blackcurrants he grows. They are vegetables and fruit he knows from his life back in China. Before Vlas's family settled in Australia, they lived in Manchuria, in a small Russian settlement called Romanovka. Vlas remembers that life in the border region between the Soviet Union and China had become unbearable for his parents during the upheavals of the civil war and the Bolshevik antireligious campaigns. His family fled from the Soviet Union in the mid-1930s, and settled in a little village in northern China:

First, they fled because of their religion; second, because they would have been executed, killed or shot. [...] They thought they could stay [in the Soviet Union] – just keep going. But they saw that it was not safe. They were oppressed; it wasn't possible to live there anymore. [...] They were hunters, and that was how they did it: they chose a place [in northern China], which was scarcely populated at the time, and then they just went over there. There were animals everywhere, even tigers! And then they built their houses there. [...]

All the other people who came over [from the Soviet Union] were Old Believers, they all prayed. Not one Chinese person lived there, everyone was Russian. [...] Our village was so beautiful! It was built on a hill, and we had our gardens there. In summer when everything was blooming – white, white – it was stunning! When a train arrived, and you would be sitting in the train, you could

already see Romanovka from far away. It was such a beautiful place!<sup>19</sup>

As Vlas is speaking of Romanovka, I can sense that he misses the village where he was born: the fragrant smell of apple trees and the view of a dozen log houses, decorated with painted window shutters. Maybe he is still longing for his childhood days, an idyllic life in the northern Chinese wilderness, and a close-knit Old Believer community. While Vlas remembers and talks about his former home in China –the emotional attachment, sensual experience and perception he associated with it – I begin to appreciate the complex sense he has made of this place and his displacement from there.

### **Place and Displacement**

The second motif of my thesis describes the meaning my interviewees make of place, and engages with various spatial implications of attachment to place and emplacement, as well as displacement and mobility. The Old Believers' attachment to the places of their former settlement in China, and their geographical and cultural displacement from them, reveals a multi-layered and complex memory. In contrast with idealised descriptions of an imagined Russian homeland, the Old Believers' memories of their former settlement in China are ambivalent: precious childhood memories easily shift to horror stories of persecution and violence under the Soviet occupation, or the Communist takeover of northern China at the end of the Second World War.

Many of my interviewees remember that the peaceful and prosperous living conditions came to an end for the Russian settlers in northern China with the Soviet occupation of Manchuria. Vlas remembers that "when the Japanese surrendered, the last Soviet soldiers withdrew [from Manchuria]. They seized our father and took him as a prisoner to Russia."<sup>20</sup> Vlas's father was taken to Soviet Russia where he had to work in a labour camp, leaving his wife, Vlas and his two sisters behind. At a very young age Vlas became a hunter. He had to support his family, while the living conditions for the Old Believers in Romanovka continued to deteriorate. After the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, in the wake of communist collectivisation and repression, many families decided to leave the country. By the late 1950s

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<sup>19</sup> Vlas, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 6 January 2011, Gympie.

<sup>20</sup> Vlas, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 6 January 2011, Gympie.

thousands of Russians had left China, either to return to the Soviet Union or to seek refuge in Western countries. Vlas remembers Romanovka again. The village he had earlier described as beautiful and idyllic has turned into a place marked by persecution and displacement:

Life got very hard, very difficult when everyone had left. Everyone just left! I was still little – how old? – 10 years. It was just awful, terrible. All of a sudden it was completely deserted, [the place looked] all barren and empty. Everyone had left, it was empty, no people, nothing. Just the dogs stayed. A lot of the dogs stayed behind, and they barked, howled and bellowed.<sup>21</sup>

Not all of Vlas's memories of Romanovka are idealised. Some also speak of the detachment and emotional disturbance with which the Old Believers perceived, experienced and remembered their former settlements in China.

I do not want to look at my interviewees' experience and memory of place and displacement solely as unattached movement and mobility. Such a focus would deny their emotional attachments, sensual perceptions and experiences of place. However, sedentarist concepts of place lead us also to an analytical dead end. They limit the experience of place to our dwelling in them; they emphasise places as fixed points for identity formations and memory processes.<sup>22</sup> I argue for a dynamic perception of place, and show how my interviewees make sense of place in the practice of moving through these places – either in their memory, by telling stories about these places or in their lived reality.

“They really went through the wringers,” Erine says, with admiration for her parents who endured and survived the harsh living conditions of the northern Chinese wilderness, and Communist rule. “Dad had a lot on his shoulders, a lot!” she says,

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<sup>21</sup> Vlas, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 6 January 2011, Gympie.

<sup>22</sup> Human geographers like Edward Relph and Yi-Fu Tuan have put forward sedentarist concepts of place, and stressed the importance of people being “placed” and rooted. (E. Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, 2nd rev. ed. (London: Pion Limited, 1976); Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977). For a critique of these concepts see: Liisa Malkki, “National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity among Scholars and Refugees,” *Cultural Anthropology* 7, No. 1 (1992), 24–44.

recalling her father's living conditions in China: "He was a hunter by trade – at [the age of] thirteen! Surviving off the land! And even now he says every now and then: 'I would survive in Russia and in China, no sweat. But in the middle of Australia, I would be dead'<sup>23</sup>. Erine admires her parents and grandparents for keeping up with the hardships and struggles they had faced in China, and also later during their migration to Australia.

They had a lot of labour, really physically hard. But religion is what they hung onto, it's what they knew and that's what kept them all together. And even trying to get out of China and all the communism, even getting out was getting pretty tricky and hard [at the end]. Lucky that they did! I remember Granddad and all of them saying: "Did we do the right thing? Should we have stayed and waited it out?" But you don't know what could have happened. They could have been taken in, gone to the military, got killed, whatever.<sup>24</sup>

Erine gets agitated, and demonstratively shrugs her shoulders. She is glad that her parents migrated to Australia. Erine could not imagine what their lives would have looked like if they had stayed in China. Their journey could have easily taken another trajectory: many Old Believer families returned to the Soviet Union, or made their way to the Americas.

The Old Believers' emigration from China offered a range of different migrant paths, which did not all end up in Australia. Irrespective of their final destination all these journeys were marked by the Old Believers' hopes for a life free from political persecution, and the wish to resume their religious lives somewhere else. About two thousand Old Believers who decided not to return to the Soviet Union left China and moved to Hong Kong where their resettlement in Western countries was administered and organised. From there they made their way to the United States, Canada, Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, Argentina, Australia and New Zealand. Under the auspices of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Committee for European Migration (ICEM), and with assistance from the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Red Cross, most of the Old Believers from China had been resettled by the mid-1960s.

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<sup>23</sup> Erine, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 7 January 2011, Gympie.

<sup>24</sup> Erine, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 7 January 2011, Gympie.

### Time and Temporality

The experience of time in migration and the process of the Old Believers' migrant journey stand at the centre of the third motif of my analysis. To make sense of their present diasporic condition means for many of my interviewees to reflect on the effects and outcomes of their migration to Australia, their lost chances and fulfilled wishes. These reflections often include the Old Believers' experience of time in migration, which is perceived as time in limbo and endured in waiting. This focus on the lived temporality of migration reveals that the Old Believers' migration process was a tug-of-war between their personal interests and choices, and those of various political actors and agendas involved in this international refugee resettlement project.

Western governments were at first hesitant to take the Old Believers. Many Old Believer families in Hong Kong were comparatively large and often included several elderly people; therefore, they were considered to be unattractive for countries of resettlement. I argue that the Old Believers' emigration from China influenced the international refugee resettlement policies of the post-war era, as well as Australia's refugee resettlement scheme. The Old Believers from China became the first group of resettled refugees which the UNHCR identified as falling into the "hard core" category.

When Erine's family decided to leave China and moved to Hong Kong, they were hoping to find a place where they could live free from religious and political persecution. After they had cleared security checks and medical examinations, Erine's family received their visas and boarded a ship to Australia. Her parents hoped that in their new host-country they would be able to resume their community life, and raise their children in the Old Belief's religious tradition. "Mum and Dad came as youngsters from China", Erine says, remembering her parents' arrival in Australia:

They had a real big community [in Yarwun]! That makes it so much easier when you have a lot of people. Because then you can go to the movies, and you just have a group of people to go with. [...] But every generation has its own little devils and demons to deal with, and their own lifestyles. I would love being back in their days. It would be so much simpler and a lot happier – you can see the photos and just the stories – they would have a hoot of a time!<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Erine, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 7 January 2011, Gympie.

After her parents settled in Yarwun, the situation quickly changed. Her parents' hopes for a strong community which could preserve the Old Believers' religious and cultural traditions vanished. Pensively, Erine looks at me and says: "they saw the community dissolving. That was the biggest headache for a lot of people: Where is it going? We had this big community but everyone goes to the cities, they are all leaving. [The community] gets smaller and smaller. That is when you just get the core group left."<sup>26</sup>

### **Migrant Belonging(s)**

Australia's postwar assimilation and settlement policies affected the Old Believers' arrival and led to the establishment of three distinctly different communities in Yarwun, Melbourne and Sydney. The process of arriving and settling in Australia had an effect on the individual migrant and the Old Believer communities, which had to adjust to a foreign culture, language, and lifestyle. The fourth motif of my analysis highlights the negotiation process that marks the Old Believers' arrival in Australia. This arrival appears as a constant process of adjustment, of shifting and contested identifications, and of conflicts about assimilation and integration strategies. Individual adaptations, in particular towards religious practices and the Old Believers' cultural heritage, became a contested field of identification and belonging in their Australian diaspora.

Religion has been an important aspect of the Old Believers' migrant journey and settlement process, during which they continued their ritual practice and re-established their religious communities. Refugee and migration studies have paid comparatively little attention to migrants' religious identities and practices, and how they affect migrants' settlement.<sup>27</sup> Many studies focus instead on the economic, social, and political side of migratory movements. The Old Believers' religious lives and identities have been challenged through their migration experience: they needed to re-define the role of religious traditions and practices, and articulate their identity as a religious community in relation to the wider Australian society. This negotiation process gives an

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<sup>26</sup> Erine, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 7 January 2011, Gympie.

<sup>27</sup> For scholars who have paid attention to migrants' religious identities, and the role religion and faith play during their migrant journey, see: Helen Rose Ebaugh and Janet Saltzman Chafetz, eds., *Religion across Borders: Transnational Religious Networks* (Walnut Creek: Alta Mira Press, 2002); Stephen Warner and Judith G. Witter, eds., *Gatherings in Diaspora: Religious Communities and the New Immigration* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998); Jacqueline Maria Hagan, *Migration Miracle: Faith, Hope, and Meaning on the Undocumented Journey* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008); Peggy Levitt, *God Needs No Passport: Immigrants and the Changing American Religious Landscape* (New York: New Press, 2007).

understanding of how religious identities and cultural traditions determine migrant journeys and settlement processes, and how, in turn, religious lives are affected by such changing identity formations.

Not only Erine, but also her father Vlas was concerned about the dissolution of their religious community, the extinction of their religious belief and tradition. Vlas has been sitting back in his armchair. The thunderous rain makes it hard to talk without shouting. Vlas is leaning forward over the table; unfazed he says:

As soon as we have passed away that's it, it will all come to an end. Everything is already changing now. In Sydney and Brisbane there are still some [Russian Orthodox] churches, they are going to keep a lot [of our cultural traditions]. But ours will come to an end soon. Why? Because nobody does anything anymore, nobody knows anything. People don't even know how to bury, how to baptise, how to wed someone – they just don't know and leave."<sup>28</sup>

The rain is beating against the window, the walls and the front door. I am shocked by what Vlas has just said: "I can't imagine that! Your religion is so old!" Vlas interrupts me: "Yes, very old and very strong!" In disbelief I continue: "The Old Believers have always been persecuted! You have been displaced for so many times. And now you are here in Australia and suddenly you are going to lose everything?"<sup>29</sup> Vlas straightens his back, and defends himself:

We still preserve as much as we can. We do as much as we can! But we are worried that our children won't do that anymore. They are already used to live the Australian way – freely – they don't do anything. Praying is simply unnecessary! [...] First they started to speak [Russian] pretty badly, and then they gave up more and more. They didn't feel like praying anymore, because they already got used to their freedom.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Vlas, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 11 January 2011, Gympie.

<sup>29</sup> Vlas, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 11 January 2011, Gympie.

<sup>30</sup> Vlas, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 11 January 2011, Gympie.

Vlas's vision of the Old Believers' future in Gympie irritates me. I empathised with the Old Believers because of their troubled past and hoped that they had finally found a refuge in Australia. I refused to think about the extinction of their community and religion, after the last elders have passed away and with them their ritual knowledge. In Australia the Old Believers' religious tradition is not threatened by expulsion, persecution or other acts of state terror. Their diaspora is, however, at risk as community bonds have weakened and the young generation feels alienated from their religious tradition.

### **Ritual and Religious Practice**

The last and fifth motif of my analysis describes the ritual and religious practice of the Old Believer communities in Australia, which have been challenged by transcontinental migration and repeated displacements. I focus on the embodiment of these practices, and show how religious traditions are perceived, memorised, experienced, learnt, and transmitted to the next generation. Many ritual practices have been continuously performed and incorporated into the Old Believers' present diasporic setting. The dispositions associated with the Old Belief's religious and cultural tradition have sedimented in the bodies of the faithful.<sup>31</sup> Focusing on the Australian Old Believer diaspora, I explore to what degree their religious practice has been responsive to new environments and changing social and cultural settings. Church regulations, doctrinal norms and aspects of a traditional religious lifestyle, prescribed by their church books, have often been adapted to an individual and Australianised way of life.

With these five motifs in mind, my thesis challenges three assumptions that are perpetuated in many studies about diaspora communities in general, and the Old Believers in particular.

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<sup>31</sup> Some scholars have drawn attention to the perseverance of the Old Believers' religious dogma, as well as the continuity of an invariable and repeated ritual knowledge and practice: R. Robson, "Kul'tura Pomorskikh Staroobriadtsev v Penssil'vanii [The Culture of the Pomorski Old Ritualists in Pennsylvania]," in *Traditsionnaia Dukhovnaia i Material'naia Kul'tura Russkikh Staroobriadcheskikh Poselenii v Stranakh Evropy, Azii i Ameriki [Traditional Spiritual and Material Culture of the Russian Old Ritualists Population in the Countries of Europe, Asia and America]*, ed. N. N. Pokrovskii and R. Morris (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1992), 30–31; Richard A. Morris, "The Dispersion of Old Believers in Russia and Beyond," in *"Silent as Waters We Live": Old Believers in Russia and Abroad: Cultural Encounter with the Finno-Ugrians*, Studia Fennica. Folkloristica 6, ed. Juha Pentikäinen (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 1999), 105–106.



1) I argue that the Old Believers' migration must not be analysed under the assumption that they constitute a homogenous migrant community, although their migrant memories convey a sense of shared history, traditions and belonging.<sup>32</sup> The Old Believers' diaspora in Australia has emerged as a result of many journeys and individual migrant experiences, each with its own history and its own particularities. Individual migrant paths have to be taken into account, as much as the establishment and development of three distinctly different Old Believer communities in Yarwun, Melbourne and Sydney. Not only did the circumstances and trajectories of individual migration journeys vary significantly; the meanings that my interviewees attached to their migrant past were also often ambivalent and contested.

2) My thesis challenges assumptions about the Old Believers' migratory movement as a linear process, between a country of origin and a country of resettlement. The Old Believers are concerned with making meaning of their migrant past for their present diaspora community. This meaning making is a complex process and shows that the Old Believers continuously move in-between; between their imagination of a Russian homeland, their memories of their former settlement in China and their present living in the Australian diaspora. My interviewees remember, identify and negotiate their belonging, in various contexts, times and places. Therefore, the emphasis which diaspora studies puts on the homeward looking, and migrants' identification with their country of origin, cannot be sustained.

3) My thesis seeks to contest stereotypes about the Old Believers as keeper of a traditional, essential Russian culture, and as guardians of an invariable ritual knowledge and unaltered religious practice. With a focus on the lived experience of their religious tradition, I establish an understanding of habituated, not repeated, dispositions of the Old Beliefs ritual practices. This

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<sup>32</sup> A similar argument has been made by Richard Morris for Oregon and David Scheffel for Alberta. (Richard A. Morris, "The Problem of Preserving a Traditional Way of Life amongst the Old Believers of the USA and the USSR," *Religion in Communist Lands* 18, No.4 (1990), 356–362; R. Morris, "Mir Molodykh Starobriadtsev v Oregone [The World of Young Old Ritualists in Oregon]," in Pokrovskii and Morris, *Traditsionnaia Dukhovnaia i Material'naia Kul'tura*, 17–22; David Scheffel, *In the Shadow of Antichrist: The Old Believers of Alberta* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1991).

concept of embodied ritual knowledge allows for a more nuanced look at the variations, the continuity and the adaptations of the Old Believers' religious practices.

### **Thesis Structure**

My **first chapter** introduces Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics as the epistemological grounding of my thesis. It centres on the question: how can we gain an understanding of the sense that the Old Believers in Australia make of their migrant past and their diasporic present? Gadamer's hermeneutics informs my use of life story interviews, which constitute my primary source of data. These interviews focus on individual migrant memories and identities, as well as the Old Believers' shared histories and religious practices. My hermeneutical reflection on life story interviews acknowledges the dialogical character of every interview situation, as well as the subjective pre-understanding that I as a researcher bring to it.

The analysis of my life story interviews makes use of oral history which has drawn attention to the validity and value of oral sources, their immediacy and candour, as well as the complex workings of memory. My thesis also draws on a range of written documents, such as archival material and secondary literature, which supplement my interviewees' interpretations of their migrant past and diasporic present. For this complementary usage of oral and written sources, I have chosen the methodology of life history. Life history draws on life story resources such as my life story interviews – and positions them within their historical context.<sup>33</sup> This approach provides me with guidelines of how to present the multivocal, complex and at times ambivalent interpretations of the Old Believers' migrant past and religious identity. The following five chapters are structured according to the five motifs mentioned above, and the course of my interviewees' migrant journey.

The Old Believers' imagination of a common religious heritage, a shared cultural tradition and migration history is at the centre of my **second chapter**. The Old Believers' historical imagination encompasses visions of their religious past and church history, as well as of their present diaspora and its future in Australia. This chapter

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<sup>33</sup> For this distinction between life story and life history see: A. James Hammerton and Alistair Thomson, *Ten Pound Poms: Australia's Invisible Migrants* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 24, note 15.

draws attention to the Old Believers' continuous identification with their Russian Orthodox faith, but also the fragmentation of their diaspora, and the alienation of the younger generation from their religious tradition.

The **third chapter** analyses the spatial implications of the Old Believers' migrant experience and focuses on their memories of place. The Old Believers' practices of place – remembering and telling stories about these places, as well as sensually perceiving and experiencing them – reflect emotional attachments they have to the places of their former settlement in China. These emotional bonds to place, however, weakened during the Soviet occupation of northern China and the Communist takeover in 1949. The Old Believers' experience of displacement and migration is also described as a practice of place – of sensing the destitution and decay of their settlements, of leaving these places and comparing them with new dwellings in the Australian diaspora. The often ambivalent memories of their former settlement in China encompass various notions of displacement and movement, of emplacement and attachment to place.

The Old Believers' migration through Hong Kong stands at the centre of my **fourth chapter**, which highlights the process of their migrant journey. This chapter explores the experience of time in migration, as well as the constraints and possibilities that time imposes on migratory movements. The prolonged time that the Old Believers spent waiting in Hong Kong shows that two major agendas guided their onward journey to respective countries of resettlement. On the one hand, my interviewees' hopes and expectations, namely the future they anticipated in their country of resettlement, informed the decisions and actions they took during their journey. On the other hand, the political actors involved in this international refugee resettlement effort administered, organised and determined the trajectories of the Old Believers' migrant journey. Both of these agendas framed the process and outcome of the Old Believers' migration and resettlement in Australia.

The **fifth chapter** is concerned with the Old Believers' arrival in Australia, the re-establishment of their diaspora communities, and the shifting identity formation their migration experience brought about. The Old Believers' arrival and settlement is set at a time when Australia's post-war refugee resettlement scheme was consolidated and assimilation policies prevailed. This chapter highlights the integration strategies that individual migrants and their community adopted. It identifies the conflicts that arose from these strategies, and the opportunities for new identity formations and belongings. Many of my interviewees see their arrival in Australia as a constant process of

contested identification, adjustments and adaptations. The adaptation of certain religious practices to a new environment, as well as to social and cultural change, shows what role religious tradition and its continuity still play in the Old Believer diaspora.

The Old Believers' diaspora community is defined by their religious practices, the focus point of my **sixth chapter**. The practice, preservation and transmission of supposedly unchanged and primordial rituals of Russian Orthodoxy stand at the centre of the Old Believers' religious doctrine. Although their religious practice and ritual tradition has been challenged by their migration experience, the Old Believers have continued to perform and embody these rituals and traditions in their present diasporic situation. Their religious practice has been to a certain degree adapted to a modernised and mostly urban lifestyle; their rituals have been responsive to the changing social and cultural settings of their Australian diaspora.

### **My research journey**

During more than two years of fieldwork between 2009 and 2011, I visited the Old Believer communities in Melbourne, Sydney and Gympie on numerous occasions. I spent hours standing in the back of a church hall, observing and participating in the Holy Liturgy. I attended the regular Saturday night and Sunday morning services, as well as church ceremonies for high holidays. I conducted life story interviews with twenty-seven Old Believers, whom I met on the occasion of these services. Often Old Believers invited me to their homes, for a meal or even to stay overnight. With many of my interviewees I had conversations about their migrant past and present diasporic existence at community gatherings or barbecues for church holidays and special celebrations. I became more closely involved in the daily life of the Melbourne Old Believer community, when I helped out at fundraising events, and learned how to bake the traditional Russian Easter cake, *kulich*.

As I met most of my interviewees at these church and community events, I did not gain access to people who previously belonged to the Old Believers' community in Australia or China, and no longer associated with this community. Most of my interviewees were in their 60s and 70s when I spoke to them, and all of them were children or teenagers when they left China and migrated to Australia. The few elderly people I met, who had experienced their emigration from China during their adulthood, declined to be part of my research project.

My research journey did not only include fieldwork among three Australian Old Believer communities. It also took me to an Old Believer community in Moscow, to the Russian State Library, and to archives in Hong Kong and Geneva. Half a year into my research project, I had already attended several church services and established a good rapport with the Melbourne Old Believer community. By then I had read much of the English-language literature on the Old Believers' church and migrant history.<sup>34</sup> As my fieldwork intensified, I felt an increasing uneasiness and frustration about my uninformed gaze at the Old Believers diaspora. Many of my interviewees claimed strong ties to their Russian origins, and the authenticity of their religious and cultural traditions. However, to me their religious practices appeared unauthentic and diluted. Whereas their ritual practice and church services were supposed to preserve the 'original and pure' form of the Russian Orthodox liturgy, I observed a variety rather than a unity of practices, movements and gestures. Some women dressed traditionally in colourful *sarafans*, others wore short skirts and thongs. Prayers were often spoken in dissonance, and worshippers were unsure about how to properly venerate an icon.

In October 2009 I befriended a young Old Believer in Moscow, where I spent three months at the Old Believers parish of Rogozhskoe. During my stay in Russia, I expected to find the pure forms and rituals of the Russian Orthodox Old-Rite Church. While observing church services in the largest priestly Old Believer parish in Russia, I sought to become more familiar with the rules and regulations of liturgical readings, with the conformity and structure of church ceremonies and ritual forms. My friend gave me a deeper understanding of her belief system, its symbolic meanings and ritual practices. She showed me to what extent her religion regulates every part of her daily life. She gave me her personal reasoning for following the Old Belief's dress codes, dietary restrictions and daily prayer routine. Most importantly, she made me aware of the individual meaning making processes that formed and informed her religious life.

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<sup>34</sup> Publications on the Australian Old Believers were limited to a few newspaper articles, and short notes in the literature about Russian migrants in Australia. See, for example: Vladimir Kuz'min, "Staroobriadtsy v Avstralii [Old Ritualists in Australia]," *Edinenie*, 9 March 2011, <http://unification.net.au/articles/read/966> (accessed 11 January 2013); B. Christa, "Russians," in *The Australian People: Encyclopedia of the Nation, its People and their Origins*, ed. James Jupp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 641; Charles Price, "Russians in Australia: A Demographic Survey," in *Russia and the Fifth Continent: Aspects of Russian-Australian Relations*, ed. John McNair and Thomas Poole (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1992), 72–74.

She made sense in her individual, everyday life of the many religious rules that forbid her to watch TV, listen to worldly music, dance or smoke.

I realised that the variety of meanings my interviewees in Australia attached to their religious lives emerged from similar individual meaning making processes, and their life in the diaspora. Compared to my friend, many of my interviewees in Australia seemed less informed about their church history, religious dogmas and canonical teachings. Some Old Believers, especially in the priestless community in Gympie, also relied to a lesser extent on the authority of a priest or the church hierarchy to make sense of religious practices, liturgical texts and their symbolic meanings. Although the Russian Old Believers were to a lesser degree affected by experiences of displacement and a diasporic existence than their Australian counterpart, I realised that their ritual practice was also by no means uniform, consistent and unaltered.

During my time in Moscow, I unearthed a wealth of literature about the Old Believers' church history and their religious communities in post-socialist Russia and abroad. Since the 1990s, Russian historians, archeologists and ethnographers have become increasingly interested in the Old Belief and its adherents, and published extensively on historical, political and social developments within Russian Old Believer communities from the seventeenth to the early twentieth century.<sup>35</sup> Several recent studies have also made use of ethnographic fieldwork in diasporic Old Believer communities in the Baltic States, Poland and Romania.<sup>36</sup> Many of these studies, focusing on Old Believer

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<sup>35</sup> Most prominent in this publication effort are Irina V. Pozdeeva and her colleagues at the Moscow State University, as well a group of scholars at the University of Novosibirsk around Nikolai N. Pokrovskii, who have published several influential monographs since the 1970s. (I. V. Pozdeeva; E. B. Smilianskaia and N. N. Pokrovskii, eds., *Lichnost', Kniga, Traditsiia [Identity, Book, Tradition]*, Mir Staroobriadchestva, Vyp. 1 [World of the Old Ritualists: No. 1] (Moscow: Khronograf, 1992); I. V. Pozdeeva, ed., *Istoriia i Sovremennost [History and Modernity]*, Mir Staroobriadchestva, Vyp. 5 [World of the Old Ritualists: No. 5] (Moscow: MGU, 1999); N. N. Pokrovskii, *Antifeodal'nyi Protest Uralo-sibirskikh Krest'ian-Staroobriadtsev v XVIII v. [The Anti-feudal Protest of the Uralo-Siberian Peasant Old Ritualists in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century]* (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1974); N. N. Pokrovskii, *Puteshestvie za Redkimi Knigami [A Journey for Rare Books]* (Moscow: Kniga, 1984); N. S. Gur'ianova, *Krest'ianskii Antimonarkhicheskii Protest v Staroobriadcheskoi Eskhatologicheskoi Literature Perioda Pozdnego Feodalizma [The Peasant Anti-monarchist Protest in the Old Ritualist Eschatological Literature in the Period of Late Feudalism]* (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1988); V. F. Milovidov, *Sovremennoe Staroobriadchestvo [The Contemporary Old Ritualists]* (Moscow: Mysl', 1979).

<sup>36</sup> N. N. Pokrovskii and R. Morris, eds., *Traditsionnaia Dukhovnaia i Material'naia Kul'tura Russkikh Staroobriadcheskikh Poselenii v Stranakh Evropy, Azii i Ameriki [Traditional Spiritual*

communities in the diaspora, have assumed a once strong and coherent belief system that has been challenged by recent migratory movements, settlement processes and modernisation. This focus obstructs, however, a closer look on the effects that forced migration has had on the Old Believers' diasporic condition. It provides little interpretation for the individual meanings that people make of and attach to their religious lives, after they have experienced the geographic and cultural displacement of their community. My thesis differs from these studies on the Old Believer diaspora in its greater emphasis on the lived experience of migration and displacement. It seeks to understand the meanings that the Old Believers in Australia have attached to their migrant past, religious tradition and present diasporic condition. Instead of focusing on the impacts that the Old Believers' migration has on their community as a collective, I am interested in individual migrant experiences and the personal interpretations my interviewees make of their life in the diaspora.

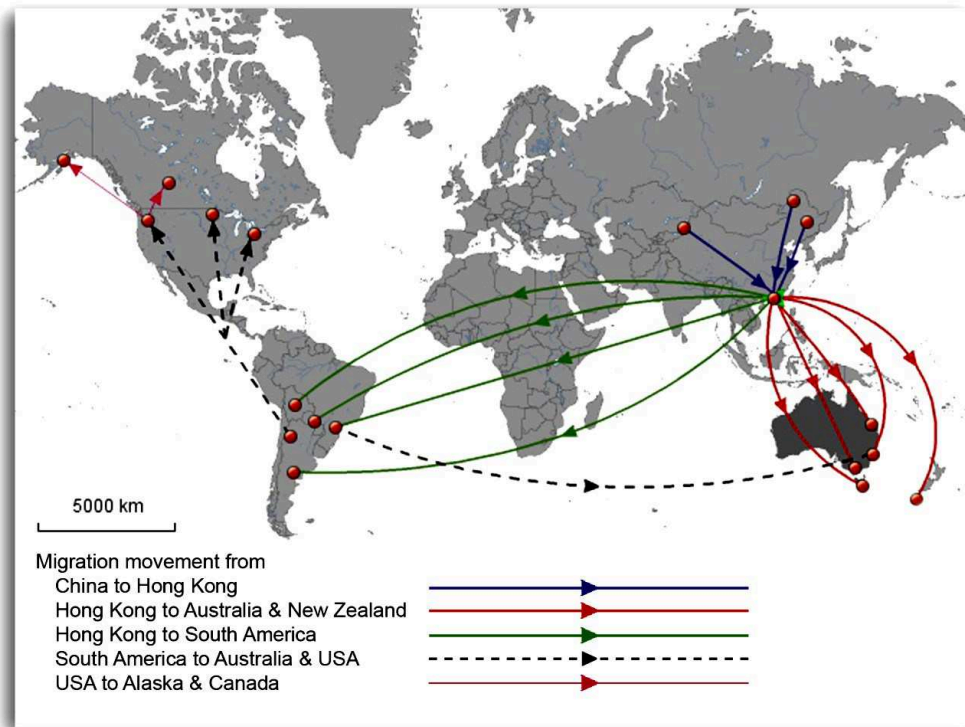
My thesis is the first detailed study about the Old Believer diaspora in Australia. My work draws on anthropological and sociological studies that have focused on Old Believer communities in North America since the mid-1970s.<sup>37</sup> The Old Believer communities in Australia, North and South America share the migrant experience of leaving Communist China and finding resettlement in Western countries (see map 1). The settlement patterns of these communities are, however, very different: most American Old Believers followed a rural settlement pattern; their communities are fairly large and relatively closed, compared to the Old Believers in Australia. Many studies about the Old Believers in North America are guided by assumptions that the Old

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*and Material Culture of the Russian Old Ritualists Population in the Countries of Europe, Asia and America]* (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1992); Juha Pentikäinen, ed., *"Silent as Waters We Live": Old Believers in Russia and Abroad: Cultural Encounter with the Finno-Ugrians*, Studia Fennica. Folkloristica 6 (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 1999); Jaanus Plaat, "The Identity and Demographic Situation of Russian Old Believers in Estonia (With Regard to the Period of the 18<sup>th</sup> to the Early 21<sup>st</sup> Century)," *Pro Ethnologia* 19 (2005), 7–31; O. A. Gantskaia, "Russkie Staroobriadtsy v Pol'she [The Russian Old Ritualists in Poland]," in *Etnicheskie Problemy i Politika Gosudarstv Evropy [Ethnic Problems and the Politics of the European States]*, ed. Marina Iur'evna Martynova, N. N. Gratsianskaia and Institut im. N. N. Miklukho-Maklaia (Moscow: Staryi sad, 1998), 357–376.

<sup>37</sup> Anton S. Beliajeff, "The Old Believers in the United States," *Russian Review* 36, No. 1 (1977), 76–80; Alexander B. Dolitsky and Lyudmila P. Kuz'mina, "Cultural Change vs. Persistence: A Case from Old Believer Settlements," *Arctic* 39, No. 3 (1986), 223–231; Morris, "The Problem of Preserving a Traditional Way," (see note 32); Morris, "Mir Molodykh Staroobriadtsev v Oregone," (see note 32).

Believers struggle to preserve their religious culture and cultural traditions against a process of assimilation and acculturation. Some publications have highlighted specific aspects of the communities' religious lives, such as food consumption, the maintenance of ethnic and moral boundaries, as well as linguistic characteristics of particular groups.<sup>38</sup>



Map 1: Old Believers' Migration, 1950–1970.  
(adapted from Google Maps, <https://maps.google.com>)

<sup>38</sup> Richard Artells Morris, "Three Russian Groups in Oregon: A Comparison of Boundaries in a Pluralistic Environment" (PhD diss., University of Oregon, 1981); Michael A. Colfer, *Morality, Kindred, and Ethnic Boundary: A Study of the Oregon Old Believers* (New York: AMS Press, 1985); Margaret Esplin Bentley, "Diet, Culture and Nutrition among Oregon's Old Believers" (Master Thesis, University of Connecticut, 1983); Michael Edward Biggins, "A South Russian Dialect in Oregon: The 'Turkish' Old Believers" (PhD diss., University of Kansas, 1985); Iu.V. Samoilova, "Leksicheskie Osobennosti Russkogo Govora Staroobriadtsev Sela Nikolaevsk (Shtat Aliaska, SShA): Na Primere Bytovoï Leksiki [Lexical Characteristics of the Russian Language in the Old Ritualists' Village Nikolaevsk (State Alaska, USA): The Example of Everyday Language]" (PhD. diss., Severo-Vostochnyi Gosudarstvennyi Universitet Magadan, 1999).



Michael James Smithson was one of the first researchers who wrote about the Old Believer diaspora in North America. His research is largely based on ethnographic fieldwork, such as participant observation and interviews, conducted in the mid-1970s amongst Old Believer communities in Oregon and Alaska. Smithson writes in a distant and unengaged voice about the different Old Believer communities, discussing their assimilation and acculturation into the American society. He positions himself outside of these communities, looking at them as an observer who remains at a distance. Often the information Smithson gains in conversation with his informants is taken at face value, and his engagement with the community seems to leave him unaffected.<sup>39</sup>

The account of my fieldwork among the Australian Old Believer diaspora is more in tune with the work of David Scheffel, who did ethnographic fieldwork in a relatively closed Old Believer community in northern Alberta, Canada.<sup>40</sup> Scheffel writes about the Old Believers who live in the village of Berezovka, and reflects on the shifting relationship between him as a researcher and the community during his fieldwork. He addresses the pitfalls and difficulties of getting access to their little village. Despite the rumour of allegedly spying on the community, he later gained the trust of his interviewees.<sup>41</sup>

My thesis is guided by an understanding of the Old Believers' migrant past as a formative element of their diaspora community. Amber Lee Silva's research on the

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<sup>39</sup> Smithson makes a rare personal comment about the Old Believers' dietary practices: Some of his informants brew the traditional home-made wine, *braga*, but deny its alcoholic content as the community prohibits the consumption of alcohol. Smithson comments: "as fieldworker, and guest in their homes, however, I can assure you that it is most potently alcoholic." (Michael James Smithson, "Of Icons and Motorcycles: A Sociological Study of Acculturation among Russian Old Believers in Central Oregon and Alaska" (PhD diss., University of Oregon, 1976), 194).

<sup>40</sup> In the last decades, the Canadian and South American Old Believer communities have also attracted academic interest, see: David Scheffel, "Russian Old Believers and Canada: A Historical Sketch," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 21, No. 1 (1989), 1–18; Scheffel, *In the Shadow of Antichrist* (see note 32); R. F. Piotrovsky, "Russians from China," in *Russian Canadians: Their Past and Present*, ed. T. F. Jeletzky et al. (Ottawa: Borealis Press, 1983), 101–118; I. V. Dynnikova, "Starobriadtsy Brazili: Zhizn' i Traditsii [Old Ritualists of Brazil: Life and Traditions]," in *Starobriadchestvo: Istorii, Kul'tura, Sovremennost' [Old Ritualism: History, Culture, Modernity]*, ed. V. I. Osipov and Muzei Istorii i Kul'tury Starobriadchestva (Moscow: Muzei istorii i Kul'tury Starobriadchestva, 2002), 241–244.

<sup>41</sup> Scheffel, *In the Shadow of Antichrist* (see note 32), 5–6.

Alaskan Old Believer community of Nikolaevsk has touched on similar aspects of identity formation and meaning making. Her research is relevant for my thesis, because of the structures she identifies within the global Old Believer diaspora. According to Silva, this diaspora is characterized by internal divisions and fractionalism; by migration as a means of preservation of their cultural and religious heritage; and a general lack of affiliations with a geographic origin or territory. Silva seeks to correct the ethno-nationalistic orientation of diaspora studies and territory-bound foundation of diaspora identities.<sup>42</sup> My thesis, however, provides a more nuanced look at the Old Believers' multiple ethnic and national identities, as well as their relation to place. In their Australian diaspora my interviewees' belonging and identity focuses on their host-society, and on memories of their former settlements and the imaginations of a distant homeland.

In addition to life story interviews and secondary literature, my thesis draws on a range of archival material which documents the Old Believers' emigration from China, international refugee resettlement efforts after the Second World War, and Australia's immigration policies. The emigration of several thousand European refugees from Communist China after 1949 is – except for the exodus of Jewish refugees – scarcely researched and documented.<sup>43</sup> I contextualise my interviewees' life stories by drawing on written sources because their stories would otherwise stand uncoupled and disconnected from the historical, social and political background in which they are set. The additional use of archival material supplements my interviewees' interpretation of their migrant past and diasporic present.

Most relevant for my archival research were the archives of the World Council of Churches, the Red Cross and the archives of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Geneva, the Hong Kong Heritage Collection and the Public Records Office in Hong Kong, and the National Archives of Australia in Canberra. The material I

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<sup>42</sup> Amber Lee Silva, "Unsettling Diaspora: The Old Believers of Alaska" (Master Thesis, McGill University Montréal, 2009), 2–5, 25–30.

<sup>43</sup> Antonia Finnane, *Far from Where? Jewish Journeys from Shanghai to Australia* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1999); Glen Peterson, "The Uneven Development of the International Refugee Regime in Postwar Asia: Evidence from China, Hong Kong and Indonesia," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 25, No. 3 (2012), 326–343; Marcia Reynders Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort: The Diaspora Communities of Shanghai* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

collected provides insights into the Old Believers' migratory movement, as well as the political actors and agendas that marked their migrant journey and resettlement in Australia.

I hoped to have written the history of a religious migrant community, which is closely connected and affected by the experience of their previous migration movements. This thesis does not seek to offer a comprehensive picture of a diasporic group, its religion and culture as if these could be captured in full detail. I have provided a picture of a relatively small group of people who interpret their migrant past, religious life and diasporic presence in Australia. I do not represent the life stories of my interviewees as typical or commonplace, for either the Old Believer diaspora or the migrant experience of other refugees in Australia. Individual life stories are meant to blend uniquely personal experiences and memories with the more common historical context in which they are told.<sup>44</sup>

Vlas's life story, for example, is different from that of his daughter who grew up in Australia and did not experience the Old Believers' forced migration from China, from that of a priestly Old Believer who settled in the suburbs of Sydney, and from that of a Russian migrant who arrived from war-torn Europe in Australia. However, Vlas's life story also echoes experiences and memories of other Old Believers in Australia, and his arrival, like that of many other Old Believers, was governed by post-war immigration and assimilation policies.

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<sup>44</sup> Hammerton and Thomson, *Ten Pound Poms* (see note 33), 54.

# Chapter 1

## The Art of Questioning: Methodological Reflections

*In order to be able to ask, one must want to know,  
and that means knowing that one does not know.*

(Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*)<sup>1</sup>

### Gadamer's Advice

The whirring of an industrial sewing machine fills the room, and every time it stops, the noise of a chirping parakeet cuts through the silence. I am at my friends' house, sitting at their kitchen table and fiddling with a tea bag in the cup in front of me. Tomorrow morning I am going to visit Melbourne's Old Believer community of Melbourne for the first time. My fieldwork is about to begin. During the last couple of months I contacted refugee services and multicultural hubs, journalists, community centres, priests and health service workers in an attempt to make contact with the Old Believer community. Eventually, I talked to Father Paul from the Orthodox Old-Rite Church in Hallam, an outer suburb of Melbourne. He invited me to attend one of his Sunday services and assured me that he would introduce me to some of the elderly members of his congregation who might remember their migration from China to Australia more than fifty years ago.

There I am sitting at the table preparing myself for my first encounter with an Australian Old Believer community. I am lost in thought, and suddenly feel a fatherly pat on my shoulder as Hans-Georg Gadamer sits down next to me on the kitchen bench. He takes a sip of my tea and says:

*Let me give you this simple advice, young lady: You have to imagine!*

*Imagination serves the sense for what is questionable, the ability to expose*

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<sup>1</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, rev. ed. (1975; repr., London: Continuum, 2004), 357.

*real, productive questions. I mean, it is not so much the laws of ironclad inference which will present you with fruitful ideas within your scientific experience. Rather, unforeseen constellations will kindle the spark of your inspiration. Think of Newton's falling apple!*<sup>2</sup>

What kind of advice is that? Am I supposed to wait until an apple falls from the sky and answers the questions I have on my mind? That is not the kind of advice I am looking for as I am about to start my fieldwork and ponder interview questions, expected research outcomes, hypotheses, research designs and methodologies. I get up and put on the dark green skirt which my friend hands me from behind her sewing machine. Father Paul advised me to come to church dressed properly: long sleeves, a long skirt, and a scarf to cover my hair. The hem of the stretch fabric already reaches down to my ankles and I ask my friend to lower it a bit more. "It needs to look as modest as possible!" I say; and my friend chuckles as she returns to her sewing machine.

Gadamer has followed me around the corner to where the sewing machine is rattling again. He speaks to me in a calming voice:

How do we come to pose our questions? When we pose them, how do we go about answering them? No problem just falls from heaven. Something awakens your interest – that is really what comes first! At the beginning of every effort to understand is a concern about something: confronted by a question one is to answer, one's knowledge of what one is interpreting is thrown into uncertainty, and this causes one to search for an answer. In order to come up with an answer, the person then begins asking questions.<sup>3</sup>

Gadamer advises me to look at the phenomenon of understanding and how to gain the correct interpretation of what has been understood. He tries to convince me that every

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<sup>2</sup> The above text is a paraphrase from Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. and ed. David E. Linge, rev. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 12–13. The text of the following imagined conversation with Hans-Georg Gadamer is based on Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (see note 1), his collection of essays in *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (2008), and his conversation with Carsten Dutt (2001) in which he discusses the historicity of understanding and the hermeneutic priority of the question. (Hans-Georg Gadamer, Carsten Dutt, et al., *Gadamer in Conversation: Reflections and Commentary*, trans. and ed. Richard E. Palmer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 50).

<sup>3</sup> Gadamer, Dutt and et al., *Gadamer in Conversation* (see note 2), 50.

understanding and all knowledge I can gain from my research will be informed by my questions. At this point I see myself in a precarious situation: the plethora of questions on my mind makes me feel rather unprepared and anxious. A comprehensive history of the Old Believers' migration to Australia has not yet been written; only a few articles, essays and books mention them as part of a bigger Russian migration movement.<sup>4</sup> The little information I gained from my readings only throws up more questions: Where did the journey of the Old Believers begin? Under what circumstances did they make their way from Russia to China? Why did they arrive and settle in Australia during the 1950s and 1960s? How did their community change and evolve since these early days of their settlement?

In the following I outline the framework within which I approach these questions. Reflecting on the hermeneutic epistemology of my research, I position my work in the tradition of oral history. I identify the limitations of the analytical framework of oral history for my project, and show how my methodological approach of life history overcomes some of these limitations. I also introduce my method of life story interviews and highlight more closely the expected outcomes and findings that this methodological framework can offer.

### **Inside or Outside the Field?**

A concern that I faced at the very beginning of my fieldwork – even before my first visit to the Old Believer community of Hallam – and which followed me through my research process was the question: how am I going to address the relation between me as a researcher, my interviewees and the Old Believer communities in Melbourne, Sydney and Gympie? The multiple perspectives that were involved in my role as a visitor, student, interviewer and potential convert to the Old Belief were to shape my research process and influenced the dynamic of my research and its outcomes.

My friend hands me my 'Old Believer' skirt again, hoping that she does not have to

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<sup>4</sup> Charles Price, "Russians in Australia: A Demographic Survey," in *Russia and the Fifth Continent: Aspects of Russian-Australian Relations*, ed. John McNair and Thomas Poole (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1992), 74; Boris Christa, "Great Bear and Southern Cross: The Russian Presence in Australia," in McNair and Poole, *Russia and the Fifth Continent*, 105; B. Christa, "Russians," in *The Australian People: Encyclopedia of the Nation, its People and their Origins*, ed. James Jupp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 636–642. Vladimir Kuz'min, "Starobriadtsy v Avstralii," *Edinenie*, 9 May 2011, <http://unification.net.au/articles/read/966> (accessed 11 January 2013).

rework the seam line again. I put the skirt on, turn in front of the mirror and wonder: “Is my skirt long enough?” This is seemingly a trivial question, but I am not sure how strictly the Melbourne Old Believer community enforces its dress code. It seems that I almost want to disguise my appearance under these layers of fabric, and that I am anxious not to attract too much attention or upset anyone in church. However, the clumsy shuffling steps I make in this overly long skirt can hardly disguise the fact that I am a ‘newcomer’ who entered the church community from the outside.<sup>5</sup>

Neither my biography nor my familiarity with the community could offer the intimate and tacit knowledge of an insider. I was a female researcher who had recently arrived from Germany to do her PhD in Australia. Neither my ethnic or national background, nor my migration experience was in any way connected to the Russian Old Believer diaspora which had migrated from China to Australia. My religious affiliation made me a non-believer rather than an Old Believer, even though I was brought up in a Bavarian Roman Catholic family and grew up with church liturgies, holidays and rituals.

Alison Griffith argues that researchers are rarely either insiders or outsiders. Both categories appear to her as fluctuating positions which are not mutually exclusive. She challenges the assumption that insidership can provide a deeper insight and intimate knowledge about a researched community than the knowledge that could be established by an outsider researcher. The position of the researcher is more flexible than the insider-outsider dichotomy assumes: ethnographic fieldwork is constructed in a relationship with many others and in the interaction of individual biographies. Research relations are more often shaped by the researcher’s social location and positionality than the fact that one is ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ of a researched community.<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, Tomomi Yamaguchi highlights that her deep involvement and emotional engagement in the field has been more significant than her native identity and status;

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<sup>5</sup> Since the end of the 1960s, social scientists have debated the positions of researchers as insiders and/or outsiders: Robert K. Merton, “Insider and Outsider: A Chapter in the Sociology of Knowledge,” *American Journal of Sociology* 78, No. 1 (1972), 9–47; Joseph Styles, “Outsider/Insider: Researching Gay Baths,” *Urban Life* 8, No. 2 (1979), 135–152; Patricia Hill Collins, “Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought,” *Social Problems* 33, No. 6 (1983), 14–29; Joan F. Burke, “Becoming an ‘Inside-Outsider’,” *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford* 20, No. 3 (1989), 219–227.

<sup>6</sup> Alison I. Griffith, “Insider/Outsider: Epistemological Privilege and Mothering Work,” *Human Studies* 21, No. 4 (1998), 362.

although she does not deny the significant benefits which arise from her language skills and her nationality which she shares with the researched community.<sup>7</sup> I did not need to be Russian, an Old Believer or the descendant of a migrant family to bring with me a genuine interest in this community. Occasionally, I gained the trust of my interviewees because I was not involved in internal conflicts, family disputes, church politics and struggles about episcopal hierarchies. My Russian language skills, however, and my Christian upbringing were essential preconditions for approaching some of my interviewees and led to a deeper involvement with the community. During my research I also became a valuable source of information for some of my interviewees; they were keen to share their inside knowledge and publications in return for the archival documents and literature I had gathered in archives and libraries in Geneva, Russia and Hong Kong.

According to Jennifer Robertson every researcher has a unique personal history which is not reducible to one or several 'ready to wear' identities.<sup>8</sup> With some of my Old Believers I would become friends and they would invite me to their homes. Many of my interviewees became interested in my own migration to Australia, my German family background and my studies. Others I would meet only in church or for a brief interview in a busy café; in these cases I was more likely to remain the distant observer. The Old Believers' community life gave me the opportunity to talk to people outside and after church services. Church holidays were often celebrated with big events where I would help to prepare food; at fundraising events and barbecues I would sell lottery tickets, wash dishes – and talk about my research interests.

Many of my interviewees could connect with my religious upbringing which often encouraged them to differentiate their Orthodox Christian from my Roman Catholic tradition. Some even thought that I was searching for spiritual guidance rather than information. Father Paul, who served the Melbourne Old Believer parish, suggested on several occasions that he baptise me. Although I did not show any intention to seek his spiritual advice, he invited me to his church services, as well as celebrations and gatherings of the church community. Many of his comments and encouragements to convert me to the Old Belief were said jokingly.

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<sup>7</sup> Tomomi Yamaguchi, "Impartial Observation and Partial Participation: Feminist Ethnography in Politically Charged Japan," *Critical Asian Studies* 39, No. 4 (2007), 586.

<sup>8</sup> Jennifer Robertson, "Reflexivity Redux: A Pithy Polemic on 'Positionality'," *Anthropology Quarterly* 75, No. 4 (2002), 789.



However, in the Sydney Old Believer community I faced resentments and mistrust from Father Timofei and his wife who discouraged me from coming to their church again, if my intention was not to convert to the Old Belief. I continued to meet with Old Believers living in Sydney outside of the church environment, in their private homes or in public spaces like a café. At the time of my research, the atmosphere in the Sydney community was tense, which might explain why Father Timofei was wary of people who were not part of his church congregation. The Old Believers in Sydney were divided in two factions: a majority of people attended the Church of the Assumption of the Most Holy Godmother Mary in Lidcombe, which belongs to the Romanian Belokrinitsa hierarchy; and a minority who reconvened to congregate in the Orthodox Old-Rite Church consecrated under the Nativity of Christ in Auburn, which acknowledges the Metropolitan of Moscow and All Russia.<sup>9</sup>

Priest Kirill Ivonov held services in the Auburn church from the mid-1960s, whereas the Lidcombe community was served by priest Ioann Starosadchev. The divide between both congregations continued until the 1980s and led to several internal splits and factions amongst the Old Believers in Sydney. When priest Kirill Ivonov passed away in 1983, the Auburn church was left without a priest. As the community was not able to appoint a successor, many members of the Auburn congregation sought out the Lidcombe church and priest Timofei Ovchinnikov who had received his blessing in Braila, Romania, in 1976. Several attempts to unite the Auburn church with the Belokrinitsa hierarchy have failed. In 2010 discussion about their unification gained momentum when the Metropolitan of Moscow and All Russia Korniliy visited Sydney, and celebrated the Christmas Liturgy in Auburn.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Another Orthodox Old-Rite church exists in Auburn which is consecrated under the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul. Archpriest Ioann Kudrin prayed in this church from 1958 until he passed away in 1960. However, one of his sons did not allow Kudrin's successor, priest Kirill Ivanov, to pray in his father's church. A new church was built in 1970, consecrated under the Nativity of Christ. (V. V. Timofeev, "Staroobriadcheskie Obshchiny i Prikhody v Avstralii (1958–1983 gg.) [The Old Ritualist Communities and Parishes in Australia (1958–1983)]," in *Staroobriadchestvo: Istoriia i Sovremennost': Mestnye Traditsii, Russkie i Zarubezhnye Sviazi [Old Ritualism: In the Past and Present: Local Traditions, Russian and Overseas Relations]*, ed. A. P. Maiorov (Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'stvo Buriatskogo Gosuniversiteta, 2007), 205–206).

<sup>10</sup> Timofeev, "Staroobriadcheskie Obshchiny i Prikhody v Avstralii" (see note 9), 206–209; Natal'ia Sergeevna Skorobogatykh, "Russkie Staroobriadtsy v Avstralii [Russian Old Ritualists in Australia]," *Mezhdunarodnoi Nauchnoi Konferentsii: Rossiiskaia Diaspora v Stranakh Vostoka [International Academic Conference: The Russian Diaspora in the Countries of the East]*, 26–27

Many of my interviewees either did not speak about the divide or felt very uncomfortable talking about its causes and promoters. One of my interviewees hesitantly explained that rivalries within the church congregation and power trips of a few members had encouraged people to break away. When we later met away from the Lidcombe church, he handed me a brochure which celebrated the visit of Metropolitan Korniliy to Auburn in January 2010. He advised me not to show anyone the brochure because it could upset people in the Lidcombe congregation.

The brochure shows Korniliy, Metropolitan of Moscow and All Russia, dressed in his episcopal vestment: a white baptismal robe, a bulbous shaped mitre, golden stole and cuffs. He holds two sumptuous candelabras over the heads of the church choir who has come to celebrate the Orthodox Christmas service. Whereas the brochure claims that more than 150 people prayed with Metropolitan Kornilov, the pictures suggest that not more than 70 Old Believers attended the service. On one of the pictures I could recognise the man who had handed me the brochure. He was standing amongst other members of the church choir with the same serious expression on his face that I had seen a few days earlier, when he was singing in the Lidcombe church service.<sup>11</sup>

Kirin Narayan and Lelia Lomba De Andrade helped me to understand that instead of fixed distinctions such as native/non-native, outsider/insider, and observer/observed it is more profitable to focus on shifting identities in relationships between people. A researcher does not achieve at a certain point of his or her research the status of an insider; instead this position needs to undergo a constant process of evaluation. The multiple identities of the interviewer and of the interviewee are at all times imposed on the research process and might shift as the relation between the two is dynamic.<sup>12</sup> In

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May 2011, Moscow, <http://www.ivran.ru/component/content/article/16/380> (accessed 11 January 2013).

<sup>11</sup> Leontii Pimenov, "Vizit Vysokopreosviashchennishego Korniliia Mitropolita Moskovskogo i vseia Rusi v Avstraliu [Visit of the Most Reverend Korniliia Metropolitan of Moscow and all Russia in Australia], Sydney Australia 2010," Old Believers, [http://www.oldbeliever.yolasite.com/resources/Визит\\_митрополита\\_Корнилия\\_в\\_Австралию.pdf](http://www.oldbeliever.yolasite.com/resources/Визит_митрополита_Корнилия_в_Австралию.pdf) (accessed 11 January 2013), 15, 21.

<sup>12</sup> Kirin Narayan, "How Native is a "Native" Anthropologist," *American Anthropologist* 95, No. 3 (1993), 671; Lelia Lomba De Andrade, "Negotiating from the Inside: Constructing Racial and Ethnic Identity in Qualitative Research," *Journal for Contemporary Ethnography* 29, No. 3 (2000), 269, 283.

the course of my fieldwork, my position towards the three Old Believer communities and every individual interviewee changed constantly. I almost needed to position myself anew every time I arrived at church or for an interview. This position was guided by different factors, such as the relation I had established with my interviewees or the occasion where and how we met. My intention would have been to constantly nourish a relation of trust and rapport. However, occasionally I needed to distance myself from family gossip and disputes within the community, as well as attempts to convert me to the Old Orthodox faith.

It was not only my position in the field that was continuously shifting, the relation of my interviewees to their church congregation also changed over time. Sometimes families got very involved in community gatherings and fundraising events for the church; a few months later, however, it could be the case that they were disappointed by the outcomes of their efforts and had distanced themselves from the community. My position in the field was to establish a framework in which the Old Believers' negotiations and articulations of their history making and identity formations became accessible. The purpose of my research was to illuminate the interpretations and meaning making processes that concerned the Old Believers' past and present diasporic existence. In the widest sense I became a participant observer who had privileged, but still limited access to an under-researched and partly marginalised community.

### **Expectations Unfold**

At the end of my evening with Gadamer my friend proudly presents me with my Old Believer skirt; I seem prepared for my first Orthodox Old-Rite Church service and my visit to the Old Believer community in Hallam. I am still worried: Am I going to find my way? Will anyone be willing to talk to me? I feel overwhelmed by all the other questions that stand at the beginning of my fieldwork: research questions, interview questions, questions of analysis and interpretation. And I expect more questions to follow: questions which will probe the validity of my arguments and evaluate the qualities of my archival material; questions which will test the accuracy of my observations and challenge the Old Believers' representation in the secondary literature.

Gadamer provides again sage advice:

*Young lady, there is no such thing as a method of learning to ask questions, of learning to see what is questionable. The important thing is the knowledge that*

*one does not know. All questioning and desire to know presuppose a knowledge that one does not know; so much so, indeed, that a particular lack of knowledge leads to a particular question.*<sup>13</sup>

Gadamer reminds me that everything is understood as an answer to a question, that knowledge is intrinsically interwoven with the art and the process of questioning. During my research, questions are going to tear down old justifications, persuasions and interpretations; others will give insight, provide answers, open up unforeseen possibilities and provoke new inquiries. Questioning involves the initial concern that sparks interest, reasoning and curiosity. What is at stake with the development of knowledge is always the posing of questions, the establishment of a problem which opens the chance for a possible solution. However, one answer that Gadamer has not given yet is how to internalise this knowledge “that one does not know” and overcome assumptions about what “one believes to know”. I am curious to see how this process of questioning will evolve and save me from dwelling on hasty interpretations and misconceptions about the Old Believers in the Australian diaspora.

The little map I drew to help me find my way the Orthodox Old-Rite church blessed in the name of the Veil of the Most Holy Godmother Mary in Hallam only confuses me: a few black lines signify the roads and intersections which weave around a little black cross that marks my point of destination. I expect to see a church with a pitched roof and colourful onion domes, crowned with a big cross, enhanced by arches and a bell tower. I imagine that people will stand in front of the church waiting for the service to begin: the women all dressed in long skirts and colorful headscarves; the men with long bushy beards wearing long black kaftans. On my drive to Hallam I indulge in my expectations and presumptions that reflect the romanticised idea which I gained from reading a letter written by Aleksei Martos on his journey around the Baikal Lake near the Khamar-Daban Mountains. He describes his first impressions of a visit to an Old Believers church in Tarbagataj on New Year’s day 1824:

Despite the palpable severe cold people were standing around the [church] gate; the women dressed in real Russian national costumes, their head scarves studded with pearls, covered with veils; the men in elegant winter caftans, their

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<sup>13</sup> This is a paraphrase from Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (see note 1), 359.

hats sitting askew.<sup>14</sup>

It is not the severe cold winter day that Martos described, but a fresh morning breeze makes me shiver and pull down my jumper sleeves to cover my hands. The sun is about to rise behind the hills and factory chimneys of Hallam. As I arrive at my destination, I catch a glimpse of the spartan aesthetics of a simple brick prayer hall which fits into Hallam's industrial area: a plain flat-roofed building with high frosted glass windows. Insects are swirling around the neon lamp above the entrance door. There is none of the typical elements of traditional Russian church architecture which I imagined, no pitched roof or onion domes. Only the large cross on top of the roof meets my expectations.

I feel awkward shuffling slowly down the footpath in my new skirt which almost touches the ground. I am heading towards a woman wearing a long blue flowery dress and a big white headscarf. She is standing next to the entrance, and I nervously clear my throat before asking her: "*Zdravstvuite, eto zdes' staroobriadcheskaia tserkov'*?" [Good day, is this here the Old-Rite Church?]" She seems puzzled by my question and strong German accent, and answers in English that I had come to the right place. I explain that Father Paul invited me, and that I would like to attend the church service. She asks me if I am menstruating, and I quickly say "no". While her eyes scrutinise me she nods imperceptibly. I must have dressed appropriately as she suggests that I can enter the church together with her.

At the front door of the church building we stop. The woman crosses herself underneath a little icon hanging above the entrance door, murmurs a short prayer and bows several times. Then she opens the door and steps into the anteroom where a dozen sheets of paper are neatly pinned to the notice board: requirements, bans and rules. Men are supposed to dress in long trousers and a long sleeved shirt; women have to cover their hair and arms before entering the church, and they need to wear a long skirt. Nervously I adjust my headscarf before entering the nave. My companion tells me to join the 'women's side' of the church hall where a few elderly women are sitting on a bench and looking at me. As I make my way across the church hall I become acutely aware of my clumsiness.

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<sup>14</sup> Aleksei Martos, *Pis'ma o Vostochnoi Sibiri [Letters about Eastern Siberia]* (Moscow: Universitetskaia Tipografiia, 1827), 110–111 (translated by Stefanie Scherr).

The expectations and beliefs with which I arrived at the Orthodox Old-Rite Church of Hallam are an important part of the process that gives me an understanding of this church community and informs my fieldwork. According to Gadamer all meanings are culturally and historically contingent. My understanding and the expectations of my first encounter with the Old Believer community in Hallam are directed by a number of beliefs, expectations and judgments which Gadamer calls 'prejudices'. Whereas the connotation of prejudice is often negative Gadamer tries to establish a positive concept of prejudice. He argues that prejudices are simply attitudes which we think and act upon, attitudes that we might at the moment not be attributing to ourselves.<sup>15</sup>

A person who believes he is free of prejudices, relying on the objectivity of his procedures and denying that he is himself conditioned by historical circumstances, experiences the power of the prejudices that unconsciously dominate him as a vis a tergo. A person who does not admit that he is dominated by prejudices will fail to see what manifests itself by their light. It is like the relation between I and the Thou. A person who reflects himself out of the mutuality of such a relation changes this relationship and destroys its moral bond. [...] To be situated within a tradition does not limit the freedom of knowledge but makes it possible.<sup>16</sup>

Gadamer uses prejudices to explain the process and the structure of our understanding: prejudices constitute our orientation to the world; they give the context and universal condition of any kind of understanding. Gadamer asserts, "there is undoubtedly no understanding that is free of all prejudices, however much the will of our knowledge must be directed toward escaping their thrall."<sup>17</sup> Every interpretation is liable to the difficulties of what is to be understood and is limited by the historical situation in which we try to understand. What Gadamer is concerned with is that we cannot arrive at one single correct or final interpretation of a text – or of an interview or an image – because we always interpret from our present position within our own history. The interpreter cannot escape from her point of view; the familiar horizons of the interpreter's world are an integral part of the event of understanding. The interpreter

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<sup>15</sup> Bjørn T. Ramberg, "The Source of the Subjective," in *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn (Chicago: Open Court, 1997), 461.

<sup>16</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (see note 1), 354.

<sup>17</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (see note 1), 484.

is a product of a particular history and tradition just as much as his or her interpretation of other historical traditions.<sup>18</sup> No observations, insights or interview questions that emerge from my research can possibly deny the subjective nature of my inquiry. Abraham Kaplan describes this pre-conditioned and individual process of gaining knowledge:

After the moment of the observer's birth no observation can be undertaken in all innocence. We always know something already, and this knowledge is intimately involved in what we come to know next, whether by observation or in any other way. [...] In sum, in making an observation we are not passive but active; and we are doing something, not only with our eyes and our minds, but also with our lips, hand, feet – and guts.<sup>19</sup>

Gadamer's hermeneutic approach has been criticised for relapsing into a limitless relativism and establishing an open-ended process of constantly changing interpretation.<sup>20</sup> Instead of emphasising this devaluation of historical interpretations and their contingencies, I want to highlight Gadamer's argument for the historical and social situatedness of our understanding. The situatedness of understanding does not mean that all understanding is subjective or merely particular. The Old Believers in Australia constantly negotiate and (re)interpret the past of a religious migrant community and their present diasporic condition. Their community articulates a variety of identities and histories, and positions itself within Australian society and vis-à-vis other migrant groups. The Old Believers may put forward very different, and sometimes incompatible, interpretations and visions of their past, present and future. However, they are a community to the extent that they share certain interpretations of their communal past and meanings of their religious traditions. The fact that interpretations differ or change over time does not make them unintelligible per se nor does it make them all equally

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<sup>18</sup> David West, *An Introduction to Continental Philosophy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 116–117.

<sup>19</sup> Abraham Kaplan, *The Conduct of Inquiry: Methodology for Behavioral Science* (1964; repr., New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2004), 132–133, 136.

<sup>20</sup> Ramberg, "Source of the Subjective" (see note 15), 460–461; Tom Rockmore, "Gadamer, Rorty and Epistemology as Hermeneutics," *Laval Théologique et Philosophique* 53, No. 1 (1997): 125.

(in)valid.<sup>21</sup>

In order to gain an understanding of the Old Believers' diasporic condition and migrant past, I also cannot deny the historicity and situatedness of my own interpretations. I bring to the reading of a text or the interpretation of an interview the prejudices of my own historical period; but if I brought nothing at all, understanding could hardly even begin. Gadamer makes the point that we have to be interested in order to understand, we cannot really grasp a meaning without caring about it. Understanding involves acts of consciousness and grasping ahead on the basis of our prejudices – it is more than a mere passive registering of meanings. Preconditions and prejudices may undergo revision in the course of further readings and interpretations; but without them, we are not actively engaging at all.<sup>22</sup>

Gadamer's hermeneutics offers the possibility to recognise these interpretations in terms of my personal concerns and experiences. It allows me to reflect on the constant process of positioning myself in regards to my interviewees, instead of denying my previous understanding, my traditions and prejudices.

### **My First Interview and the Oral History Tradition**

Standing in the back of the Orthodox Old-Rite church in Hallam, I find comfort in the melodic chants of the choir and my senses ease in the solemn atmosphere of candle lights and incense smell. I notice a young woman singing in the church choir. She holds her baby boy on one arm while reaching out for the hand of a little girl who is dressed in various shades of pink and a little white headscarf. The woman's movements are energetic; she sings soundly in the choir while keeping an eye on her children who are constantly trying to run off. It is only after the church ceremony that I get the chance to ask her for an interview, and recognise the friendly but tired look in her eyes.

Anastasia is a young mother and second generation Old Believer who became one of my first interview partners. We meet at her house in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne. The lounge room where we sit is light and friendly. The big wooden table on which I put my papers and recorder offers space for dinner parties and family gatherings. The

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<sup>21</sup> Veronica Vasterling, "Postmodern Hermeneutics? Toward a Critical Hermeneutics," in *Feminist Interpretations of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, ed. Lorraine Code (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2003), 168–169, 172, 177.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Harland, *Literary Theory From Plato to Barthes: An Introductory History* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 208.



consent form which I hand over to Anastasia stipulates the conditions under which she is willing to be interviewed. To my surprise she wants to remain anonymous. Until now I presumed that all my interviewees want to have their names mentioned when telling the stories of their own or their family's migration experience or migrant history in my thesis. Anastasia does not explain why she does not want to be identified, but I can sense that she feels uncomfortable about her request to remain anonymous. I ask myself: Does she have second thoughts about being involved in my research? Have I explained clearly enough the intentions of my research and its outcome? In front of whom does she want to stay unidentified: her immediate family, the Old Believer community, or the wider public? Caught up in my doubts about her intentions I do not ask Anastasia about her reasons. This would have been the moment to suspend my own prejudices and judgements, and to follow Gadamer's advice and ask her a question.

Instead, I set up the device to record our interview. I begin the interview by asking Anastasia where and when her parents and grandparents are born. I tick off the two questions on the thematic interview schedule in front of me; it is meant to keep our interview structured. Anastasia gives a short answer. She recalls the years in which her parents were born, but is not sure about her grandparents. This is not the free flow of story-telling I intended, of being carried away by memories of the past and recapturing past times and places. As our interview continues, Anastasia struggles to answer more and more of the questions I had included in my questionnaire. I feel that she is getting uncomfortable with the interview situation, and I sense her distress that a power blackout in the house has caused, and her little children running wild and making noise.

I came to the interview assuming that Anastasia's parents were traumatised by their forced migration from China and intended to elicit some of these supposedly suppressed and tragic memories. Anastasia tells me that her family kept a few black and white photos taken in China, some forty or fifty years ago. Instead of asking more about the pictures, I want to know from Anastasia: "Would there be an occasion when they would show you these photos and tell you what life in China was like?" Anastasia seems puzzled by my question and says quietly: "No, not really – maybe if anyone wanted to sit down, go through the photo album and ask – but no, not really." I continue to question her about her parents' life in China: "Did you feel that there was anything that your parents wouldn't tell you about their time in China or their migration? Something they felt uncomfortable about telling you?" Anastasia replies briefly: "No, not really." I try to evade my intended question about her suppressed family memories: "Or

something that you thought you couldn't ask them?" Anastasia shakes her head and replies slightly puzzled again: "No, not really. If I had a question I asked them, and I got an answer. No, not really." Unsatisfied with her answer I persist: "How did you feel asking them these questions? Were you curious? Or did you prefer not to talk about it?"<sup>23</sup> Anastasia does not reply to my question as the door bell rings. She quickly gets up to open the door. When she comes back, she starts cooking lunch, busy mediating the fights between her children. Not long after she asks me in distress how many interviews I will need, and admits that it is hard for her to cope with this interview situation.

During my interview with Anastasia I took Gadamer's advice too far. Instead of opening myself up to a dialogue which had the potential to create a shared understanding, I remained entangled in my own assumptions and expectations. My questions did not respond to Anastasia's story and made us both feel uncomfortable. I ignored her discomfort, and did not offer that we continue another time. In this situation Gadamer's positive and authoritative evaluation of the past and of traditions is problematic. He asserts that our understanding is always prejudged by the horizon of meanings within which we act and think; that our being-in-the-world conditions us to certain anticipated meanings. And in this sense, there is undoubtedly no understanding that is free of all prejudices.<sup>24</sup> Gadamer does not offer ways to distinguish prejudices that enable us to come to a mutual understanding from the ones that blind us and make us unreceptive to the voice of the other.

My experience with Anastasia demonstrates that the questions I ask are potentially biased on account of assumptions and judgements that are based on my research agenda. Donald Ritchie points out that historians who work with oral sources have the possibility "to inject the interviews with their own opinions and to challenge the interviewees." Often researchers approach an interview with a hypothesis that needs to be proven; that might lead them to manipulate their interviewees and steer their response in a particular way. "Interviewees may see things entirely differently from the researcher, and although interviewees might be biased or just plain wrong, so might the researcher's thesis. The best information to emerge from an oral history is often

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<sup>23</sup> Anastasia (name changed), interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 2009, Melbourne.

<sup>24</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (see note 1) 484; West, *Introduction to Continental Philosophy* (see note 18), 123.

completely unexpected.”<sup>25</sup> My experience with Anastasia taught me that Ritchie’s advice is valuable. I needed to acknowledge the assumptions and preoccupations that I bring to an interview situation in more critical ways than just to take them as pre-given and determining my research outcome. I had to revise my reading of Gadamer which suggested that the reason for my inquiry was to solve the question and to gain an understanding in the form of an answer. Moving from a question to an answer is, however, not a linear process, but highly contingent and depends on the situational context.

Oral historian Alessandro Portelli shows that biases and pre-judgements are often part of an interview situation and sometimes even guide it. Portelli initially intended to interview an elderly seamstress about her reminiscences of the anti-Fascist underground in Italy, but she insisted on telling him about her personal love story. Portelli, who had tried to steer his interviewee in a certain direction, realised that in the end there was more valuable historical interpretation in the story she wanted to tell him.<sup>26</sup> Neither the interviewer nor the oral historian can come to an interview situation free of personal views and understandings, but they need to be open to unexpected interpretations and opinions. This openness facilitates a productive dialogue and an authentic exchange in which shared meanings and common experience can be identified, and new questions generated.<sup>27</sup>

A couple of months into my fieldwork I decided to discard my thematic interview schedule and trust in the open-endedness and unstructured ways in which life stories are told. By then I had built relationships of trust with some of my interviewees, including Matriona and her husband who would invite me to their house for dinner and take me to church. One afternoon Matriona and I were sitting at her kitchen table, with a cup of tea and cake, and talking about the many meanings Matriona made of her religious life, what significance church rituals had for her and what being an Old Believer meant to her. Matriona was not wearing a *shashmura*, the headdress of

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<sup>25</sup> Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 122.

<sup>26</sup> Alessandro Portelli, “Oral History as Genre,” in *Narrative and Genre*, ed. Mary Chamberlain and Paul Thompson (London: Routledge, 1998), 26, 29–30.

<sup>27</sup> Roxanne K. Vandermause, “The Poiesis of the Question in Philosophical Hermeneutics: Questioning Assessment Practices for Alcohol Use Disorders,” *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being* 3, No. 2 (2008), 71–72.

married Old Believer women. She was often joking that it would make her look old; the Old Believer dress code, wearing a headscarf and skirt, was rather unpractical in her daily life. Matrona was in her mid-60s and still working as a massage therapist or taking care of her grandchildren. Although she always seemed busy, as soon as Matrona sat down for an interview with me she took time to describe in much detail her childhood memories of living in China or explain the symbolic meanings and practices of her religious tradition. She would laugh a lot while we were talking, about herself and her church community, about the oddities of her migrant experience and the Old Believers' inclination to superstition and bigotry.

I wanted to know if Matrona was told any stories about miracles when she was a child living in China, about places which had a particular spiritual meaning, an epiphany or other wonderworking incidents. Matrona did not think for long and answered shortly: "no". She knew about my Roman Catholic upbringing and that my grandmother was very religious. So I tried to make my question a bit clearer: "Or maybe some legends? That would be something my grandmother would tell me. For example, she would tell me about a particular stone or landmark where the Holy Godmother Mary had appeared." Matrona interrupted me:

No nothing like that. What they used to say to us was this: when they put the vegetable garden in, as kids, we would go to the vegetable garden and pick things before it was ready [and ripe]. Then our father would use to invent this story that the *bugor* [hunchback] will catch you. [...] It is someone that you would fear, you wouldn't want the *bugor* to catch you. But what was this *bugor*? Nobody ever asked and we all just used to be scared. And I remember, even after I got married, when night time came I would be scared of the *bugor*. And then one day somebody asked me: "so who or what is this thing"?<sup>28</sup>

Matrona laughed and shrugged her shoulder: "I have no idea. You just get scared." I tried to find a connection between Matrona's story and her religious tradition, and asked: "[The *bugor*] that's not the devil, is it?" And Matrona answered: "no, it just a...", she paused and I suggested: "...kind of a ghost?" – "Yeah."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 24 July 2010, Melbourne.

<sup>29</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 24 July 2010, Melbourne.

I did not dwell on my curiosity for stories of miraculous visions of saints and marvels which formed part of my understanding of the Old Believers' religious tradition. However, later in my conversation with Matriona I asked again about a particular legend that was common reference in the literature about the Old Believers' migrant history: the legend of Belovodia.<sup>30</sup> As a sacred place in the highest mountain regions it holds the sources of supreme knowledge and the salvation of humankind. I asked Matriona if she had heard about Belovodia, and she said: "I don't know, have never heard of it". I explained:

I think Old Believers in Siberia, maybe also in China, thought that there is a land, maybe somewhere in the Altai or the Himalayan mountains, [called Belovodia]. And that you need to go to this particular place! It's really hard to get to this place, but people believed that many Old Believer priests would hide there.<sup>31</sup>

Matriona interrupted me: "Oh yeah?" She sounded interested, but could not relate her own life story to the legend of Belovodia. So I asked her about what she thought happened to the priesthood after many clergy men and bishops who adhered to the old rituals were killed in the first decades after the schism. Matriona explained that her parents believed that there were no priests left who were ordained according to the Old Orthodox-Rite: "According to them they [the priests] were all killed [...] when the

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<sup>30</sup> O. N. Bakhtina, "Problemy Izucheniia Migratsii Staroobriadtsev (Sibir' i Dal'nii Vostok) [Research Problems of the Old Ritualists' Migration (Siberia and the Far East)]," in *Rossiiia i Kitai na Dal'nevostochnykh Rubezhakh [Russia and China on the Far Eastern Borders]*, ed. D. P. Bolotin and A. P. Zabiako, Vol. 2, (Blagoveshchensk: AmGU, 2001), 8–14; V. V. Kobko, "K Voprosu o Bytovanii Legendy o Belovod'e u Primorskikh Staroobriadtsev (Po Materialam Polevykh Issledovaniu Primorskogo Gosudarstvennogo Muzeia im. V. K. Arsen'eva) [On the Question about the Present Legend of Belovodia amongst the Primorskii Old Ritualists (From Field Research Material of the Primorskii State Museum V. K. Arsen'ev)]," in *Staroobriadchestvo Sibiri i Dal'nego Vostoka: Istoriia i Sovremennost': Mestnye Traditsii. Russkie i Zarubezhnye Sviazi. [Old Ritualism in Siberia and the Far East: In the Past and Present: Local Traditions. Russian and Overseas Relations]*, ed. Iu. V. Argudiaeva (Vladivostok: Far Eastern University Press, 2000), 90–98; E. E. Dutchak, *Iz "Vavilona" v "Belovod'e": Adaptatsionnye Vozmozhnosti Tazhnykh Obshchin Staroverov-Strannikov (Vtoraia Polovina XIX – Nachalo XXI v.) [From "Babylon" to "Belovodia": The Adaptation Capability of the Taiga Community of Old Believer-Stanniki (Second Half of the 19<sup>th</sup> – Beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century)]* (Tomsk: Tomsk University Press, 2007).

<sup>31</sup> Matriona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 24 July 2010, Melbourne.

Communists came to Russia, they killed all of them.” She remembered that her father, who was born in 1906, would have seen Old Believer priests in Tsarist Russia:

My father was born in Russia, and he said that he saw priests [there]. [...] I remember when we brought Father Timofei from Sydney [over to Melbourne] he came as a priest dressed up in whatever they wear. My father said he remembers seeing people dressed like that in Russia. So, obviously when he was little he saw them. But that meant nothing to him. [...] you would think he would get excited, wouldn't you? But no [Matrona imitates her father's voice]: “Where did this one come from? They were all killed?”<sup>32</sup>

Matrona chuckles about her fathers' perplexity:

It might be hard for you to understand this, but my parents, my father, didn't go to school at all. He didn't get any education. So just the simple things – somebody would come and spin it to him. And he would go yeah, yeah, yeah, that's true. He would agree with him, because he didn't know. Educated people would ask questions, other people just follow. Parts of us [our community] – the young generation nowadays – if they ask a question and the question is answered the wrong way or with not enough information [they go:] hmm, well that doesn't make any sense. And they give it up.<sup>33</sup>

The short episode from my first interview with Anastasia highlights the pitfalls and difficulties in establishing a productive dialogue. It shows that the conversation between an interviewee and a researcher can easily neglect power relations and the intersubjective nature of an interview situation. With Matrona I could establish a more productive dialogue which did not rely on my pre-understanding and authoritative interpretation of Matrona's migrant experience and the meanings of her family's religious traditions. We would both acknowledge shared meanings like our Christian heritage and keep our conversation open for new questions and insights. Matrona challenged my assumptions about the Old Believers' mystical tradition and the significance of Belovodia, a legend she had never heard of. I came to understand that Matrona's family did not share the longing to revive the Old Believers' original

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<sup>32</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 24 July 2010, Melbourne.

<sup>33</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 24 July 2010, Melbourne.

priesthood which this legend suggested. More importantly, she explained to me that the present Old Believer diaspora in Australia was better educated than her parents' generation and less likely to believe in old wives' tales and miracles.

My conversation with Matrona provided me with a deeper understanding of my interview partners and of the Australian Old Believer diaspora. Gadamer emphasises that our individual horizons of meaning are always open to the possibility of critique and revision. Even though every effort to speak or understand already carries the baggage of our cultural and historical tradition, we do not necessarily remain trapped within our own subjective viewpoint. A productive dialogue between people is, in Gadamer's view, a mutual process that has the potential to create a shared understanding. This productive dialogue allows a non-patronising and true recognition of others and their views. At its centre stands the openness to the question and the independent right of the other to be heard. In conversation we do not merely reify, explicate and assert intended meanings; we also get the chance to expose ourselves to our prejudices, to modify and engage with them. For Gadamer, the desire to seek understanding involves a desire to be understood by the other and risk one's assumptions and prejudices.<sup>34</sup>

### **Capturing Migrant Lives: Oral History and its Dilemmas**

I was drawn to life story interviews and narrative inquiry<sup>35</sup> because I wanted to gain an account of my interviewees' lives in their own words. I expected my interviewees to talk about their migrant experiences while reflecting on their lives. My life story interviews were not solely to focus on this particular aspect of their lives. My interviewees could

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<sup>34</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (see note 1), 366–367, 385–387; West, *Introduction to Continental Philosophy* (see note 18), 123; Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 270; Silja Freudenberger, "The Hermeneutic Conversation as Epistemological Model," in *Feminist Interpretations of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, ed. Lorraine Code (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2003), 254.

<sup>35</sup> I use the term narrative inquiry here in the sense of Susan Chase's definition who writes that narrative is "meaning making through the shaping and ordering of experience". She provides an understanding of narrative inquiry which does not only focus on retrospective meaning making processes. Storytelling and the performance of narration are seen as a lived experience and practice with which people make sense of the world they live in. (Susan E. Chase, "Narrative Inquiry: Still a Field in the Making," in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonne S. Lincoln, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2011), 430; see also Susan E. Chase, "Narrative Inquiry: Multiple Lenses, Approaches, Voices," in *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2008), 57–94.

speak freely about their migration experience in the broader context of their family relations, the migrant history of their community, the Old Believers' cultural tradition and their present diaspora.<sup>36</sup> In regards to the migrant memories of my interviewees I followed the lead of Alistair Thomson who argues that life stories that migrants tell about their journey "have always been a central part of the migration experience: in the imagination of possible futures; during the physical process of passage; and as migrants have lived with and made sense of the consequences of their migration."<sup>37</sup> Thomson calls oral histories of migration "moving stories" which centre on the physical experience of movement between places. He concludes that these stories are a personal testimony that offer a unique glimpse into the lived experience of migration and reveals the complexity of factors and influences which contribute to migration processes.<sup>38</sup>

Life stories are constructed, selected, and shaped by memories. My interviewees remembered their migration to Australia decades after their resettlement; therefore the lived experience of their migration has been rendered by a constant process of remembering and forgetting, retelling and reinterpreting. Their accounts could be highly revisionist and biased; at the same time they offer interpretations of their present diasporic condition and comment on the variety of meanings that people make of their migration experience. As Caroline Brettell has shown, life stories can reveal aspects about the pattern, structure, culture and the role of the individual in the migration process. Life stories are an adequate method to teach us about the distinctiveness of a particular migration movement. Brettell suggests that the value of individual accounts of migrant journeys lies in revealing the particularities of a migrant population and enables us to compare and relate these individual migrant experiences to larger migrant movements or distinctly different migrant trajectories. However, one has to be careful not to generalise migrant movements on the basis of individual migrant accounts. The limited scope of micro-analytic perspectives and qualitative research does not give a

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<sup>36</sup> Dorthe Kirkegaard Thomsen and Dorthe Berntsen show how memories are included in an individual representation of a life story and are likely to be recalled as part of a life story. (Dorthe Kirkegaard Thomsen and Dorthe Berntsen, "The Cultural Life Script and Life Story Chapters Contribute to the Reminiscence Bump," *Memory* 16, No. 4 (2008), 420)

<sup>37</sup> Alistair Thomson, "Moving Stories: Oral History and Migration Studies," *Oral History* 27, No. 1 (1999), 35.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 26, 28, 36.



means to seek patterns and overarching structures in migrant movements.<sup>39</sup>

The stories and memories that my interviewees told me were personal accounts which suggested meanings and interpretations that people gave to their own life and the lives of others. The possible tensions, contradictions and fictions in these stories signified the relations and practices against which people talked about these lives.<sup>40</sup> “Therefore, there are no “false” oral sources”, Portelli wrote in his reflection on the history-making that occurred after the death of the Italian steel worker, Luigi Trastulli.<sup>41</sup> “Oral sources tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did.”<sup>42</sup> In this sense, we cannot assume that we will reach a final and definitive interpretation of the interviews we conduct. Interviews cannot be merely understood as a technique or a tool for getting true, clear and consistent statements.<sup>43</sup> We have to acknowledge their situatedness and constantly read the memories and stories that an interview might trigger, in its present context. Every life story emerges under the specific conditions of the situation and in the particular moment in which it is told.<sup>44</sup>

While my interviewees were talking they would reflect upon and interpret certain aspects of their lives to understand who they were in the present and where they came from. My questions might influence the narrative of their life story, through my

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<sup>39</sup> Caroline Brettell, *Anthropology and Migration: Essays on Transnationalism, Ethnicity, and Identity* (Walnut Creek: Alta Mira Press, 2003), 24, 43.

<sup>40</sup> Petra Munro, *Subject to Fiction: Women Teachers’ Life History Narratives and the Cultural Politics of Resistance* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1998), 5–6.

<sup>41</sup> Luigi Trastulli died during a strike in 1949 on the occasion of a rally against Italy joining the NATO. Later, many versions of the story dated Trastulli’s death in 1953, four years after the rally. At that time the community began to relate Trastulli’s death with the steel town’s struggle against mass lay-offs and the economic decline. (Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning of Oral History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 1–26)

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 50, 51.

<sup>43</sup> Mats Alvesson, *Postmodernism and Social Research* (Buckingham: Open University, 2002), 126; Ivor F. Goodson and Pat Sikes, *Life History Research in an Educational Setting: Learning from Lives* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2001), 41.

<sup>44</sup> Joanna Bornat, “Remembering and Reworking Emotions: The Reanalysis of Emotion in an Interview,” *Oral History* 38, No. 2 (2010), 45.

responses to what was said and my very presence.<sup>45</sup> The potential that lies in this situation – the conversation of two people about a lived experience and the memory of this experience – is beautifully described by Canadian novelist Margaret Atwood. She highlights the difference between the experiences we make in life and the stories we tell about them.

When you are in the middle of a story it isn't a story at all, but only a confusion; a dark roaring, a blindness, a wreckage of shattered glass and splintered wood; like a house in a whirlwind, or else a boat crushed by the icebergs or swept over the rapids, and all aboard powerless to stop it. It's only afterwards that it becomes a story at all. When you are telling it, to yourself or someone else.<sup>46</sup>

Conducting an interview is an interactive and mutual process between people; it usually begins with a question, continues to trigger memories, and builds on certain aspects and experiences of life that the interviewee is willing to talk about. The story that is told is shaped by memories of the past, by reviewing a life and making sense of it, and possibly by the desire to create a coherent sense of a life and perception of self. The composition of this story is also formed by the dialogical and intersubjective relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee.<sup>47</sup> It is this relationship that differentiates an oral history approach from document-based history.<sup>48</sup>

Especially historians who were working with archival sources criticised oral history for its lack of objective historical evidence and its subjective focus on the individual. Its reliance on memory made oral history a controversial historical method; it seemed to

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 45; Linn Egeberg Holmgren, "Performing Feminist Affinity: Interviewing Feminist Men in Sweden," *Revista Atenea* 28, No. 2 (2008), 107–120.

<sup>46</sup> Margaret Atwood, *Alias Grace* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996), 298.

<sup>47</sup> Alistair Thomson, "Remembering in Later Life: Some Lessons from Oral History," in *Oral History and Aging*, ed. Joanna Bornat and Josie Tetley (London: Centre for Policy on Aging, 2010), 26, 41.

<sup>48</sup> Michele Langfield and Pam Maclean, "'But Pineapple I'm still a Bit Wary of': Sensory Memories of Jewish Women who Migrated to Australia as Children, 1983–39," in *Speaking to Immigrants: Oral Testimony and the History of Australian Migration*, ed. A. James Hammerton and Eric Richards (Canberra: Australian National University, 2002), 92.

be subject to falsification, bias and inaccuracy.<sup>49</sup> Patrick O Farrell writes:

[T]he basic problem with oral testimony about the past is that its truth (when it *is* true) is not primarily about what happened or how things were, but about how the past has been recollected. [...] at one all the claims made for oral history – accuracy, immediacy, reality – come under most serious suspicion, and we move straight into the world of image, selective memory, later overlays and utter subjectivity.<sup>50</sup>

In their defence, oral historians claimed memory as a valuable and reliable historical source and advocated for the “*different credibility*”<sup>51</sup> of their oral sources. They looked at other disciplines such as sociology and anthropology to address methodological shortcomings and adopted methods such as grounded theory, ethnographic observation and triangulation which could offer greater internal consistency and reliability.<sup>52</sup> Feminist researchers established methodological principles which challenged the authority of the historian and the dominance of history making that silenced voices of “ordinary” people and marginalised groups.<sup>53</sup>

My research relates to the oral history tradition to the extent that it addresses questions

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<sup>49</sup> For critiques see: Eric Hobsbawm, *On History* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1997), 206–207; Henry Hodysk and Gordon McIntosh, “Problems of Objectivity in Oral History,” *Historical Studies in Education* 1, No. 1 (1989), 137–147; Alice Hoffman, “Reliability and Validity in Oral History,” in *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, ed. David K. Dunaway and Willa K. Baum, 87–93. Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 1996.

<sup>50</sup> Patrick O’Farrell, “Oral History: Facts and Fiction,” *Quadrant* 23, No. 11 (1979), 4.

<sup>51</sup> Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli* (see note 41), 51.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 51; Trevor Lummis, *Listening to History: The Authenticity of Oral Evidence* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), 71–114; Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 4–18; Patricia Leavy, *Oral History: Understanding Qualitative Research* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 149–150.

<sup>53</sup> Ronald J. Grele, “Oral History as Evidence,” in *Handbook of Oral History*, ed. Thomas L. Charlton, Lois E. Myers and Rebecca Sharpless (Lanham: Alta Mira Press, 2006), 43–101; Luisa Passerini, *Fascism in Popular Memory: The Cultural Experience of the Turin Working Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Susan Armitage and Sherna Berger Gluck, “Reflections on Women’s Oral History: An Exchange,” *Frontiers: Journal of Women’s Studies* 19, No. 3 (1998): 1–11; Alistair Thomson, “Four Paradigm Transformations in Oral History,” *Oral History Review* 34, No. 1 (2007), 49–70.

which are central and intrinsic to its field of research: memory and its subjective meaning making processes; storytelling and the centrality of narratives as a primary source; and the relation in which oral testimonies stand to other documentary sources. My interview work focuses on the individual who remembers a migrant life instead of giving generalised and objective claims about the Old Believers' journey to Australia. I acknowledge oral history as a methodology which is interested in the phenomenon of memory, narrative inquiry and subjectivity. In particular, the constant process and present situatedness of remembering the past are concepts that find reflection in my own research.

I discuss the history making and identification process of a small migrant community; and this discussion relies mainly on oral sources rather than written material. Oral history is particularly suited to recover the history of an under-researched and marginalised community that conventional sources find difficult to access.<sup>54</sup> As Michele Langfield and Pam Maclean argue, oral history has the capacity to explore private worlds. Oral sources are less sources of objective information than a way of seeing how individuals make sense of their past in a meaningful way. Langfield and Maclean also point out that memory mediates and constructs meaning; the process of remembering shapes what is remembered and how memories are understood by interviewee and historian alike.<sup>55</sup>

I am also drawing on a range of archival material to put the Old Believer migrant memories in a historical context. While recovering some of the marginalised voices of the Old Believer migrant community, I am attentive to the fact that the account of their migrant past is retrospective and that it is shaped by their diasporic condition in the present. To broaden the scope of my life story interviews and the validity of my interpretations I have drawn on archival material and other historical sources. This additional material offered ways to (re)interpret my interviewees' life stories and relate them to social, political and cultural contexts that were not featured in their interviews. In order to understand the meanings my interviewees made of their migrant experience and religious life I needed to reflect on the involvement of different political actors in refugee resettlement efforts after the Second World War or the church history of the

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<sup>54</sup> Celeste DeRoche, "I Learned Things Today That I Never Knew Before: Oral History At The Kitchen Table," *Oral History Review* 23, No. 2 (1996), 46.

<sup>55</sup> Langfield and Maclean, "But Pineapple I'm still a Bit Wary of" (see note 48), 91–92.

Orthodox Old-Rite Church.

Oral history proved too limited in its approach to offer a clear methodological framework that would allow me to integrate additional historical sources without silencing the multiple voices that talked about the Old Believers' migration to Australia. Oral history does not offer a clear guideline as to how historians should make use of oral testimonies and put them in relation to secondary written and documentary sources. Whereas oral historians appreciate oral sources as valuable sources for historical knowledge, they often leave them in subordinate and complimentary positions, "filling in gaps and weaknesses in the documents"<sup>56</sup>. Guiding principles for the analysis of interviews are often missing and borrowed from other disciplines. There is no consensus about the geographical and temporal scope or forms of representation in which oral histories are written. A broad collection of interviews with a range of interview partners or an in-depth life story with one individual – in Alessandro Portelli's view these options merely represent different genres of oral history instead of a methodological question that needs to be considered.<sup>57</sup> Blurred boundaries between similar forms of narrative inquiry which address historical memory (autobiography) or individual narrative forms (life stories) add to these methodological uncertainties.

### **Life History and Migrant Stories**

The life history approach helped me to overcome my concerns about how to present the voices of my interviewees and to put them in relation to written documents and other historical sources. Life history has a long tradition in disciplines such as sociology, education research and anthropology<sup>58</sup> and is often used as a form of oral history that describes the life stories of a group of people. Whereas life stories appear

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<sup>56</sup> Thompson, *Voice of the Past* (see note 52), 155.

<sup>57</sup> Portelli, "Oral History as Genre" (see note 26), 34.

<sup>58</sup> William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America: A Classic Work in Immigration History*, ed. Eli Zaretsky (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996); L. L. Langness, *The Life History in Anthropological Science* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965); Kenneth Plummer, *Documents of Life: An Introduction to the Problems and Literature of a Humanistic Method* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1983); Sue Middleton, "Educating Feminists: A Life-History Study," in *Teachers, Gender, and Careers*, ed. Sandra Acker (New York: Falmer Press, 1989); Lawrence C. Watson and Maria-Barbara Watson-Franke, *Interpreting Life Histories: An Anthropological Inquiry* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1985).

as the ‘story we tell about our life’, life history goes beyond this focus on the individual and locates life stories within their historical context. Life history research is concerned with honouring the individuality and complexity of individual experiences. At the same time it unravels the complexities of their broader historical condition.<sup>59</sup>

Many of my interviewees made their journey to Australia as young teenagers. Often the accounts and interpretations of their migration missed aspects of the political situation, historical background or social setting. This context was, however, crucial to understand the memories of their migrant journey and its significance for their present diaspora identity. Archival material helped to provide the historical context of political decisions, bureaucratic procedures and the involvement of international and volunteer organisations in the international refugee resettlement effort. Life history offers a methodological framework that has allowed me to point out the particularities of the Old Believers’ migration to Australia and the meaning they make of their diasporic existence. Whereas the Old Believers’ migration has been largely subsumed under a broader Russian migrant movement, my emphasis on historical context can make it a visible part of Australia’s immigration history. Life history also allowed me to reflect on my interviewees’ meaning making process, and to contrast, question and supplement the interpretation of their migrant memories with additional historical sources and documents.

Ivor Goodson and Pat Sikes argue that telling a lived experience and rendering it as a life story is one interpretive layer, and that the move to life history adds a second layer and further interpretation. Life history is a collaborative venture, with a range of interviews, supported by documentary material and including the scrutiny of texts and contexts. Goodson and Sikes are aware of this “dangerous move, for it offers the researcher considerable ‘colonizing’ power to ‘locate’ the life story with all its inevitable selections, shifts and silences.”<sup>60</sup> Nonetheless, they insist on the need to provide historical contexts. Contextual data can throw light upon the historical and cultural situatedness of the interpretation and testimony of life stories. A dialogue between oral

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<sup>59</sup> Ardra L. Cole and J. Gary Knowles, *Lives in Context: The Art of Life History Research* (Walnut Creek: Alta Mira Press, 2001), 20; Goodson and Sikes, *Life History Research in Educational Settings* (see note 43), 18; Munro, *Subject to Fiction* (see note 40), 9–11; Ivor F. Goodson, “Studying Teachers Lives: An Emergent Field of Inquiry,” in *Studying Teachers’ Lives*, ed. Ivor F. Goodson (London: Routledge, 1992), 6.

<sup>60</sup> Goodson and Sikes, *Life History Research in Educational Settings* (see note 43), 17.

and written testimonies can also illuminate the social histories and geographies in which life stories are embedded.<sup>61</sup>

Without contextual commentary the life stories of my interviewees would remain uncoupled from the conditions in which they emerged: the formations of an Old Believers diaspora identity, the social and cultural dimension of their memory process, the situation in which their life stories are told and the frameworks in which their history is made. Also, the context in which my interviewees' life stories are presented adds to a historical inquiry which acknowledges the multiplicity of interpretations and voices that speak for the Old Believers' migrant past and diasporic presence.

The historian has to be careful, however, when creating a montage of migrant histories which (re)arranges and juxtaposes, interprets and connects the voices of her interviewees with archival documents and other historical evidence. Life history can suggest ways of reading the multiple realities and interpretations presented by the life stories of my interviewees. But the historian also has to reflect on the selections and choices when (re)interpreting and commenting on these life stories. I need to address the partialities, biases and distortions in the historical accounts of my interviewees as well as the differences between their perspectives, and interpretations drawn from documentary sources. This is not to subordinate their interpretations under archival and documentary sources; rather, I have sought to reflect on the particularities of their migrant memories, and the situatedness of their present meaning and history making process. The fragmentation and recomposition of these testimonies needs to convey a dialogic experience of a history that is told by many different voices.<sup>62</sup>

### **The end of my first fieldtrip**

After my first visit to the Orthodox Old-Rite Church in Melbourne I got in touch with my first interviewees, Anastasia and Matrona, and in the following months my fieldwork with the Melbourne Old Believer community intensified. I also contacted the communities in Sydney and Gympie, and planned my travels to Moscow and Geneva to search for relevant archival material and secondary literature.

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<sup>61</sup> Goodson and Sikes, *Life History Research in Educational Settings* (see note 43), 17–18; Munro, *Subject to Fiction* (see note 40), 11.

<sup>62</sup> Karen Flick and Heather Goodall, "Angledool Stories: Aboriginal History in Hypermedia," in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (London: Routledge, 1998), 425; Portelli, "Oral History as Genre" (see note 26), 36.

My aim in this thesis is to explore how the Old Believers in Australia personally experienced and made sense of their migrant lives. I am drawing on life story interviews and on documentary sources which are (re)interpreting the processes of their history making and identity formation. This situates my research in the tradition of oral history and the methodological framework of life history. My research has unfolded around an interpretative process that relies on Gadamer's hermeneutics and highlights the situatedness of understanding, the plurality of meaning and the validity of contextual interpretation.



## Chapter 2

### Imagining Russia: The Old Believers' History Making

#### **Making Meaning, Making History**

Elisey's house was built when he and a couple of other Old Believer families moved to Gympie in 2009. His open-plan lounge room and kitchen provided a beautiful view over the lush green hills of Gympie. But his house felt too big for one person: the large kitchen bench and the heavy furniture, TV tables, sofas and seats filled the space but left it empty and lifeless at the same time.

Sitting down in one of the big armchairs, Elisey almost disappeared between the big blue cushions. Having worked for decades as a builder and share farmer in Queensland's pawpaw industry he looked haggard and his skin had aged prematurely. He seemed tired and talked slowly, often repeating his words. Elisey explained that the decline of Gladstone's pawpaw and mango industry heralded, maybe even caused, the dwindling of the Russian community. But suddenly, he became excited as he mentioned the Old Believers' community and the century-long Orthodox Christian tradition they sought to preserve.

Our [church] came from the line of the first, the old church – way back, probably two thousand years ago – at the time of Jesus Christ [...] Our religion is right because we follow what Jesus Christ taught in the Bible, how we should live our lives.<sup>1</sup>

Elisey sat up and described how the first Russian Orthodox Christians celebrated their church services: "they used to pray for much longer – I think they started from 12 o'clock [...] – and they used to pray for twelve hours." He marvelled at their mesmerising chants: "the beautiful singing, this magnificent, beautiful singing!" And suddenly Elisey began to sing himself in a deep, sonorous voice: "*Voskreseniia den'*,

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<sup>1</sup> Elisey, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 10 January 2011, Gympie.

*prosvetimsia liudie, Paskha* [This is the day of resurrection. Let us be illumined by the feast of Easter, O people!]<sup>2</sup> This chant is part of the Easter canon, one of Elisey's favourite church hymns, he explained later.

Elisey's singing made me think of a popular legend recounted in the Primary Chronicle in the early twelfth century.<sup>3</sup> In 987 Prince Vladimir of Kiev had sent his emissaries to Constantinople. Overwhelmed by the cadences of chants and the rich smell of incense they reported back to Vladimir:

[T]he Greeks led us to the edifices where they worship their God, and we knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth. For on earth there is no such splendor or such beauty, and we are at a loss how to describe it. We only know that God dwells there among men, and their service is fairer than the ceremonies of other nations. For we cannot forget that beauty.<sup>4</sup>

Carried away by my own imaginations of medieval chants and angelic hymns resounding throughout the cathedral of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople I thought that Elisey might have found solace in his imagination of ancient times and a distant Russian homeland. His admiration and longing for the prosperous medieval times of the Russian Orthodoxy and the solemnity of its church liturgy might have been sparked by the precarious situation in which Elisey saw his own church community.

In Gympie, there were only a few Old Believers who could continue the church services and rituals of his religion. Whereas Elisey's ancestors struggled to save their religion and often their lives from state and church persecution, the Old Believers of Gympie were diminished by the ageing and depopulation of their community. "When we had 20 Russian families [living around Yarwun] in the sixties or whatever, people used to read like that, we used to pray for six hours on Sundays!" Elisey stressed. "But now, we don't. We only do it for one hour and a half," he laughed bitterly, "a lot of people left, a

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<sup>2</sup> Elisey, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 10 January 2011, Gympie.

<sup>3</sup> The Primary Chronicle, often translated as the *Tale of the Bygone Years (Povest' Vremennykh Let)* or *Nestor Chronicle*, documents the history of the Kievan Rus' from the 9<sup>th</sup> until the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>4</sup> Samuel Hazzard Cross and Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor, trans. and eds., *The Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text* (Cambridge: Medieval Academy of America, 1953), 111.

lot of people left and less, less people could read or sing properly. You have to know how to read and sing these things! [...] But now, these days, the young people don't want to go to church anymore." Elisey shrugged his heavy shoulders: "to me it seems like it is out of fashion these days for people to go to church." Elisey looked down, shaking his head slightly, possibly in disbelief and despair: "in 20 years time nobody will be left"<sup>5</sup>. He anticipated that soon many of the elders in the church community would have passed away, and that the younger generation would become completely alienated from their religious tradition. Elisey was worried that in a few years time his religious community would disappear and that the Old Believers' century-old Russian Orthodox tradition would cease to exist.

Most Old Believers living in Australia imagine Russia as the place where their religious and cultural identity originated. Only few of my interviewees have visited Russia, but many have an intimate relation to the country where their parents or grandparents were born. *Homeland* has become a central term in diaspora studies. It suggests the construction of a distant 'there', a land which is imagined, remembered, and reproduced.<sup>6</sup> Revisiting one's homeland means for many return migrants to face the difference between a real and an imagined place of belonging. Often these migrants realise the discrepancies between the longing for their return and the lived experience of their homecoming. My analysis does not focus on the experience of return migration or transnational ties between the Old Believers' Australian diaspora and Russia. Instead, this chapter explores the Old Believers' imaginations of Russia, a homeland that is thought to be distant in time and space. I argue that the Australian Old Believers imagine a past Russian homeland that is closely entangled with their interpretations of the religious past and the church history of their diaspora community. The Old Believers' diaspora identity is formed and informed by the historical imagination of a shared Russian Orthodox tradition and a continuous legacy of their religious practice.

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<sup>5</sup> Elisey, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 10 January 2011, Gympie.

<sup>6</sup> Ien Ang argues with regards to the global and transnational Chinese diaspora that the desire and attachment to such a homeland, be it imaginative and symbolic or real, becomes a constitutive feature for diaspora communities. (Ien Ang, *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living Between Asia and the West* (London: Routledge, 2001), 25. See also: William Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1, No. 1 (1991), 83–84; Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (London: UCL Press, 1997), 21–25, 184–185.

This chapter focuses on two key questions: What meaning do the Old Believers make of their history as a religious migrant community? And how do the Old Believers imagine their community in the light of this distant past, its becoming and belonging? David Scheffel's anthropological study of an Old Believer community in the northeast of Canada only partly answers these questions. Scheffel writes about the priestless Old Believers of Berezovka:

They learn about their place in the world predominantly through history, and the past serves as the preferred method for reducing the burden of voluntary isolation. [...] the importance of history was reflected in almost every answer to my questions. Asked about the significance of his costume, a man would point out hand-painted icons as ancient models of proper appearance. Quizzed about the structure of dietary prohibitions, a woman would refer to "old books" as their resource. Interrogated about specific features of religious ritual, an elder automatically opens an ancient liturgical tome and searches for the appropriate answer.<sup>7</sup>

Scheffel's account highlights how the Old Believers make sense of their religious past, their Christian tradition and heritage. From there they draw patterns and templates to be used in their present realities and the formation of their diaspora community. Scheffel calls the Old Believers' dominant mode of knowing the past the 'iconic principle': all representations of Christian Orthodoxy are repeated rather than recreated copies of traditional and ancient models.<sup>8</sup> Although this principle deepens our understanding of the Old Believers' church rituals, their iconographic and manuscript tradition, it only allows a homogenised interpretation of their history making. The 'iconic principle' does not engage with conflicting and compelling meaning making processes and interpretations of the past. Scheffel's concept of seeing the present as an appendage of the past, does not hold for the interpretations that the Australian Old Believers make of their religious past and diasporic presence.<sup>9</sup>

Compared to their Canadian counterparts, the Australian Old Believers live less

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<sup>7</sup> David Scheffel, *In the Shadow of Antichrist: The Old Believers of Alberta* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1991), 3–4.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 224–227.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

isolated. Many of the *popovtsy* (priestist) Old Believers living in the suburbs of Melbourne and Sydney have been concerned with living in, rather than next to, their secularised and modern host-society. In the process of adapting their religious lives and practices to a modern, individualised and secular Australian lifestyle the Old Believers rarely recreate copies of traditional and ancient models of Christian Orthodoxy.

### **Perception, Memory and Imagination**

Many of my interviewees made sense of their present diasporic living by criticising Australian society and their own church community for embracing consumerism and adopting an individualised and modern lifestyle. Visions of their diaspora's future anticipate the extinction of the Old Believers' religious beliefs, ritual practice and cultural traditions, as well as the dissolution of their diaspora communities in Australia. This apprehension about their diaspora's future often included apocalyptic visions. Such references to the Last Judgement are not only central to the Old Belief's eschatological tradition and teaching, but also in the social imaginaries of my interviewees.

Matrona arrived in Australia in the early 1960s – she never gave me an exact date. She was maybe ten years old when her family settled in the Victorian country site. Only a few years later the family moved to the outer suburbs of Melbourne. Her parents wanted to be immersed in the wider Russian migrant community, Matrona explained. Many Old Believers who settled in Melbourne migrated from the western Chinese province of Xinjiang and, like Matrona's family, adhered to a priestless Old Believer denomination called Chasovennye<sup>10</sup>. For more than a decade after their arrival in Melbourne these Old Believer families did not have a consecrated church building and gathered in private homes to continue their religious practice. Soon the Melbourne Old Believers became more familiar with other concords and the larger priestist Old Believer community in Sydney which encouraged the priestless Old Believers to convert to the priestly concord of Belokrinitsa.<sup>11</sup> With support from the Sydney

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<sup>10</sup> Roy R. Robson, *Old Believers in Modern Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1995), 32–34; David Scheffel, "Chasovennye Old Believers," in *The Modern Encyclopedia of Religions in Russia and the Soviet Union*, Vol. 5, ed. Paul D. Steeves (Gulf Breeze: Academic International Press, 1993), 139–140.

<sup>11</sup> The priestly concord – in contrast to their priestless counterpart – assumed that Avvakuum and other leaders of the Old Believer movement had condoned the role of their priests. They re-

community the Melbourne Old Believers established their own parish and in 1982 the church of Pokrov Presviatoi Bogoroditsy (The Veil of the Most Holy Godmother Mary) was consecrated in Dandenong.<sup>12</sup>

Matrona remembered the time when the first Orthodox Old-Rite church in Melbourne was established. While we were sitting in her lounge room she showed me some pictures which had discoloured over the years. One picture showed the white-painted walls of the church building and its sumptuous golden icons; in another photo a group of young choir singers was assembled, with the boys dressed in colourful *rubashkas* and the girls wearing floral-printed headscarfs. Matrona smiled when she told me about the early beginnings of the church community. She seemed to get a bit nostalgic as she told me how she learnt to read and sing in Church Slavonic and remembered the dozens of people who came to the church services.

Even though the Old Believers had re-established and revived their church community in Melbourne, a few migrant families returned to their former settlements in China. There they sought to resume a more traditional and strictly religious lifestyle. These families believed that if they were to stay in Australia they would “get a big stamp on their forehead or their hand: the number 6-6-6.” Matrona gave me a conspiratorial look: “You know the little stampy things? Those numbers that they put everywhere?” Matrona referred to an apocalyptic vision that could be found in the Old Believers’ eschatological writings and paintings since the mid-seventeenth century.<sup>13</sup> The Book of

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established their priesthood and episcopate. Until today the largest priestist concord has been the Belokrinitsa hierarchy. The Bosnian bishop Amvrosii Popovich (1791–1863), a Greek Orthodox bishop removed from his see at Sarajevo, agreed to lead an Old Believers diocese at the monastery of Belaia Krinitsa in the Bukovina. In 1859 the Old Believers episcopate was established under the *Avstriiskoe soglasie* or Austrian hierarchy. (Petr Semonovich Smirnov, “Belokrinitsa Hierarchy,” in *The Modern Encyclopedia of Religions in Russia and the Soviet Union*, Vol. 4, ed. Paul D. Steeves (Gulf Breeze: Academic International Press, 1993), 43–46; Sergei A. Zen'kovskii, *Russkoe Staroobriadchestvo: Dukhovnye Dvizheniia Semnadsatogo Veka [The Russian Old Ritualists: Spiritual Movement of the Seventeenth Century]* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1970), 187–188, 433–438; Robson, *Old Believers in Modern Russia* (see note 10), 20–32).

<sup>12</sup> G. S. Gorin, “Vazhnoe Sobytie v Avstralii [Important Events in Australia],” *Tserkov' 11* (1982), 12–13.

<sup>13</sup> See Peter S. Smirnov, “Antichrist in Old Believer Teaching,” in *The Modern Encyclopedia of Religions in Russia and The Soviet Union*, Vol. 2, ed. Paul D. Steeves (Gulf Breeze: Academic International Press, 1990), 29, 31–32; Michael Cherniavsky, “The Old Believers and the New

Revelation (13:16–18) refers to the Mark of the Beast – the triple six – as a number which was to be *imprinted* on people’s right hand or *forehead*. At the end of all days *this* iconic stamp was to provide people with the greatest economic freedom of buying and selling; but this stamp would also mark them and impede their salvation.<sup>14</sup>

The families who returned to China “believe that if you get the triple six on your forehead, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven,” Matrona said hesitantly. “The only reason why they are going back to China is that it’s the only place where they are not going to get the six, six, six.”<sup>15</sup> Convenience goods were usually coded with numerical codes that could be deciphered as the diabolic triple six. A consumption orientated lifestyle could imprint this number, possibly in the form of a tattoo, a microchip, or a laser mark. Matrona seemed fascinated but not fully convinced by these apocalyptic interpretations; she chuckled quietly and condescendingly dismissed my subsequent questions.

Although a sense of unreality pervaded Matrona’s apocalyptic vision of the Last Judgement her imagination of the end of the world was informed by her reflections on the Old Believers’ present diasporic existence. Imaginations are pervaded by a kind of suspension of belief: the real world remains and becomes the default context within which we imagine.<sup>16</sup> Matrona used her imagination and her vision of the apocalypse to explain actions and decisions that people make in their religious lives, as well as their interpretations of their religious tradition.

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Religion,” in *The Structure of the Russian History: Interpretive Essays*, ed. Michael Cherniavsky (New York: Random House, 1970), 148–170.

<sup>14</sup> Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 80; Revelation 13:16–18 reads: “And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom: Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is six hundred threescore and six.” (Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett, eds., *The Bible: Authorized King James Version with Apocrypha* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 310–311).

<sup>15</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 12 July 2009, Melbourne.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 71–72.

Erine is a second generation Old Believer migrant; she grew up in the Yarwun Old Believer community but now lives in Brisbane. She also referred to the Mark of the Beast and the biblical prophecies of the apocalypse. When I met her in January 2011 large parts of Queensland were flooded. News programs featured not only natural disasters in Australia, but also large floods in Europe and the death of huge numbers of black birds that were falling from the sky across North America.<sup>17</sup> These reports prompted Erine to turn to visions of the apocalypse as she explained recent developments in the global economy, environmental changes and disasters. With a scornful smile on her face Erine said:

Let's see how long we last, hey! Or if a meteor is going to hit us! Or if we just die of starvation because we've got too many people on this planet and we can't sustain it. We are pulling out all our resources and Mother Nature is going to get back on us. She will cleanse us again! It's probably time for it anyway because we are just not listening and not helping. Like these black birds falling out of the sky. What? When birds are starting to fall, that's one of the signs! And all these plagues – you can actually go back to the locust and all that. That has been happening for years, but so subtly that people just think these are natural disasters. No, guys, these are signs! We have to pay a little bit more attention. What are we doing that is causing this? Can we change our destiny? It's more like a message: stop, think what's going on, and regroup!<sup>18</sup>

Although the Old Believers' apocalyptic prophecies date back several centuries Erine did not reject their imaginative power but used them to make sense of her present reality and future living in the Australian diaspora. Erine continued her interpretation and remembered that her parents were concerned every time their teenage children returned from the disco with a stamp on their hand. They recognised this stamp as the Mark of the Beast:

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<sup>17</sup> Emily Sohn, "Birds Falling from the Sky 'Not Unusual'," ABC Science, 10 January 2011, <http://www.abc.net.au/science/articles/2011/01/10/3109758.htm> (accessed 11 January 2013); "Birds Fall from US Sky Again," SBS World News, 5 January 2011, <http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/1458657/Birds-fall-from-US-sky-again> (accessed 11 January 2013); Vadim Glusker "Massovaia Gibel' Ptits Vyzvala Paniku [Mass Bird Death Caused Panic]," NTV, 9 January 2011, <http://www.ntv.ru/novosti/216238> (accessed 11 January 2013); "Evropa ukhodit Pod Vodu [Europe Drowns in Water]," NTV, 9 January 2011, <http://www.ntv.ru/novosti/216218> (accessed 11 January 2013).

<sup>18</sup> Erine, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 7 January 2011, Gympie.



When we went to nightclubs and used to get markers [a stamp on our hand], they [my parents] used to freak out because they thought that the 666-thing was happening. That could be the way how people get used to getting stamps. And I thought that they had a good point there. If people just go – yeah, bang! – and they don't even think and just allow it to happen? That could be a way how it could get to you! Grandma used to talk about the 666 – it's a tattoo – and what's going to happen [if you get it]. Just be careful when they start tattooing and implanting things!

That was also at a time when the [cash and ATM] machines came out with all these cards; that became part of it. [...] Actually, a big change has happened in mankind. People are getting cards and use them. [My parents back in China] they used cash or bartered. They didn't have these cards, so that was seen as devil's work. And in a way I can understand that: people are getting credits and they get caught up. I can see that as the work of the devil because people are getting into debt; they get frustrated and suicidal. [...] All this was predicted and prophesied; but people just didn't know the right words. And a lot of these things [described in the Book of Revelation] come to fruition now. It's just how you interpret them! A lot of people just think it's the end of the world, a lot of death and all that. But it's not the end of the world! Many of these things signify more the changes of what our society becomes.<sup>19</sup>

Erine spoke about apocalyptic visions which circulated in her family. These visions resembled Matrona's ideas of the last days of the world and had been part of the Old Believers' eschatological and apologetic tradition for centuries. Behind social and environmental changes Erine envisioned the work of an evil transcendental power that became visible in signs, images and numbers. Erine's parents imagined how the Antichrist in the guise of a security guard could imprint his mark on their children's bodies. As we were talking Erine visualised the mark on her hand as she was queuing to get into a night club. She could retrieve an image of the satanic stamp from her memory and her imagination, regardless of its context in space and time.

Visualisation is a central aspect of imagination, as Raymond Kenneth Elliot has shown. Visualising a person or an object can happen in two ways: either as an apparition

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<sup>19</sup> Erine, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 7 January 2011, Gympie.

summoned against an indeterminate background, or as an apparent shift in spatial and temporal position, whereby the imaginer enters into an imagined environment without traversing any intervening space and time limits.<sup>20</sup> This visualising effect of imagination speaks of the displacement of self in place and time: imagination allows us to think ourselves into the past, the present and the future. In memory we can also be in another place and time but these times and places are specific and past. In our imagination we are displaced into an imaginary world. An imaginary object or place might well be taken from our memory but it can also be projected into situations that did not occur.<sup>21</sup> Mary Warnock writes that a clear distinction between memory and imagination is hardly possible:

We could say that, in recalling something, we are employing imagination; and that, in imagining something, exploring it imaginatively, we use memory. There can be no sharp distinction. Imagination, like memory itself, may be thought of either in terms of a kind of imagery, or as a kind of knowledge and understanding.<sup>22</sup>

Elliot's theory about the visualising effect of the imagination helps us to understand the absent and the unreal we envision, as well as the distancing effect that occurs in imagination. The problem which emerges from Elliot's idea of imagination is that what we imagine is not an image, but the object itself: by visualising an object in our imagination it occurs to us as if this object was present in the form of a visual impression. Elliot wonders about the aspect of illusion that might occur while we visualise an object in our imagination. This aspect of illusion, "although it cannot be eliminated, does not normally deceive us. In normal visualising we are conscious not only of the object as if present in the image, but also of the image as such. If this were not the case all visualising would be hallucinatory."<sup>23</sup> Elliot solves the problem posed by this illusionary aspect of imagination by using analogies of imagination and magic. He argues that imagination is merely an apparent, not a real causal relation of the mind

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<sup>20</sup> R. K. Elliot, *Aesthetics, Imagination, and the Unity of Experience*, ed. Paul Crowther (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 21–22.

<sup>21</sup> Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (see note 16), 71.

<sup>22</sup> Mary Warnock, *Memory* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), 76.

<sup>23</sup> Elliot, *Aesthetics, Imagination, and the Unity of Experience* (see note 20), 25.

upon objects or the self of the imaginer.<sup>24</sup>

However, I suggest that Elliot confounds the role of imagination with that of perception and thus risks reducing imagination to a merely unrealistic, illusionary or arbitrary endeavour. If he considers the image that we summon in our imagination to be an exact representation of a real object, then this image is likely to fail to replicate the percept of the original. Therefore, it becomes an 'illusion'. According to Mary Warnock, the essential role of imagination lies in our perception of the world and its interpretation. Imagination enables us to recognise familiar things or features of the world, but it also affects our understanding of unfamiliar objects or symbols which our perception cannot fully capture.<sup>25</sup> To overcome empiricist views on the image, and claims of reliability and truth in imagination we have to ask: is an object the same in something imagined and something perceived? And how can we distinguish between these intentionalities?

As Matrona was explaining what she visualises, perceives and imagines during the church service and the reading of the Holy Liturgy the apparent confusion and difference that prevails between the different modes of imagination and perception became clearer. Reading from an English translation of the Divine Liturgy Matrona explained what I was supposed to see and imagine when we were standing in church:

*Let us who mystically represent the cherubim – cherubim means that they are angels with six wings – and who offer the thrice-holy hymn unto the life-giving Trinity, now cast aside all earthly cares. [...] As we receive the King of all, Who is invisibly borne as a gift by the ranks of angels. Alleluia.* In this part of the liturgy supposedly the angels, the cherubim and seraphim, all the holy angels are bringing Christ to the altar. There he is going to be more or less crucified again. They are getting some of his flesh and blood. This is what supposedly happens – in invisible form – while we are singing. We cannot see it but this is what is happening in the altar. [...] *lako tsaria vsekh pod"emliushche [As we receive the King of all]:* Just imagine a whole lot of angels carrying Christ, they are holding the King of Kings with their wings and hands. *Pod"emliushche* – that means that these are angels whom we cannot see. They are holding him with their wings. *Angel'skimi nevidimo daronosima chinmi. Allilouia. [Who is invisibly*

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>25</sup> Mary Warnock, *Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 10.

*borne as a gift by the ranks of angels. Alleluia].*<sup>26</sup>

During this part of the Holy Liturgy, Matrona explained, the highest ranks of angels were bringing Jesus Christ to the altar to give his flesh and blood as a gift to the faithful. While Matrona was singing she imagined the ranks of angels behind the iconostasis, the doors to the altar. This is not the same as if she saw and perceived the angels behind the doors of the altar; the angels were not actually there. In our perception an object is apprehended in its presence, whereas the object of imagination is apprehended in its absence. Richard Kearney makes clear that although one may perceive and imagine the same object – in this case the angels carrying Jesus Christ – the crucial difference is that perception understands them to be real, imagination understands them to be unreal. The object of perception can be recognised in its presence, whereas the object of imagination is recognised in its absence.<sup>27</sup>

Imagination is “capable of intending the unreal *as if* it were real, the absent *as if* it were present, the possible *as if* it were actual”<sup>28</sup>, writes Kearney. Imagination frees us from rationalist premises and empiricist doubts about its reliability. As an intentional and dynamic practice imagination offers us a means to reflect on distant and absent possibilities. The Old Believers’ imagination of their religious past and diasporic presence is characterised by two major premises: the displacement of the self that enables us to think of ourselves in the past, the present and the future; as well as the conditional presence and actuality of what is imagined. Imagination offers the Old Believers a means to relate to their distant religious past and attend to it as if it were present and real.

### **Imagining *Holy Russia***

For many of my interviewees their Australian diaspora was closely linked with the

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<sup>26</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 24 July 2010, Melbourne; Reading and Translation: German Ciuba et al., trans. and eds., *Drevnepравoslavnyi Molitvennik: Old Orthodox Prayer Book*, 2nd ed. (Erie: Russian Orthodox Church of the Nativity of Christ (Old Rite), 2001), 107–108.

<sup>27</sup> Richard Kearney, *Poetics of Imagination: from Husserl to Lyotard* (London: HarperCollinsAcademic, 1991), 17–18.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

ancient and Eastern Orthodox tradition of the Russian Orthodox Church<sup>29</sup>. For the 1000-year anniversary of the Christian conversion of the medieval Kievian Rus' the Sydney Old Believer community in Lidcombe published a brochure, which linked the origins of the Russian Orthodoxy with the Old Believers' religious tradition:

Saint Apostle Andrei Pervozvannyi already preached Christianity in Scythia on the rim of the Black Sea. He reached the mountains of present-day Kiev and erected a cross on top of one of them. At this place, he prophesied, Christianity will flourish in the future. And indeed, exactly there, on the riverside of the Dnepr, occurred the greatest event for all of the Russian people – the CHRISTIANISATION OF THE RUS'.<sup>30</sup>

As the ancient Kievian Rus' took on its religious heritage from Constantinople it became the Christian bastion against its Muslim neighbours and the pagan beliefs that still prevailed amongst the Russian people. The brochure proclaims medieval Russia as the self-reliant guardian of Eastern Orthodoxy: "In no other nation did Christianity arise to such a strong piety as in the Rus'. Faith and devotion, the strong foundations of the family, deep fidelity to their belief and motherland took root in the soul of the Russian people."<sup>31</sup> This ominous reference to the 'Russian soul' appealed to the cultural and religious tradition that the Old Believers inherited from the Russian Orthodoxy.

When the Orthodox Old-Rite Church in Dandenong was consecrated in 1982 the journal *Tserkov'*<sup>32</sup>, published by the Orthodox Old-Rite Church in Lidcombe, celebrated

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<sup>29</sup> The Russian Orthodox Church refers to the church institution which became autocephalous in 1589 and is administered by the Holy Governing Synod since 1721. (Roy R. Robson, "Liturgy and Community among Old Believers, 1905-1917," *Slavic Review* 52, No. 4 (1993), 713.

<sup>30</sup> *Sie Izdanie Posviashchaetsia Tysiacheletiiu Kreshcheniia Rusi 988–1988: Stranitsy k Istorii Starobriadcheskogo Rogozhskogo Kladbishcha v Moskve [This Publication is Dedicated to the 1000-year Christianisation of the Rus' 988–1988: Historical Pages of the Old Ritualists' Cemetery at Rogozhskoe in Moscow]* (Sydney: Tserkovnogo Ponechitel'stva Drevlepravoslavnoi Tserkvi, 1989), 1 (translated by Stefanie Scherr).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>32</sup> Since 1980 the journal *Tserkov'* (Church) has been published by the Lidcombe Orthodox Old-Rite Church under the direction of Illarion Basargin (later Episkop Josif). Lyudmila Kuz'mina describes the establishment of the journal as a reaction against anti-Old Believer propaganda

the Old Believers' ancient Christian heritage and ancestry:

The Russian Old Orthodox Church of Christ suffered many times under its century-long persecutions: not just once did infernal forces try to destroy Her and Her priesthood; they tried to extinguish the spirit of the true Orthodox faith amongst the Russian people that they had received in the year 988, during the times of the Holy Christianisation of the Rus'. But all attempts of these persecutors and slanderers were futile. Thanks to the great mercy and help of God another community of Christians arose in a country that is protected by God – Australia – which gave us refuge after our suppressions and our expulsion from other countries.<sup>33</sup>

Both excerpts show that the Old Believer communities in Melbourne and Sydney relate strongly to the past of the Russian Orthodox Church, its religious tradition and cultural heritage. Despite the Old Believers' displacement from the place where their religion originated, the impetus of its tradition, its devotion and ritual practice seem deeply engrained in their Russian soul. Although the Old Believers were expelled from their Russian homeland, they found refuge in a country blessed by God where they could revive their religious community and faith.

Pavel Shakhmatov, a self-styled historian of the Old Believer community in Sydney, highlights in more detail the ambivalent and contested meanings that the Australian Old Believers attached to later developments in the history of the Russian Orthodox Church. Shakhmatov has published *Krest Pravoslaviya* (The Cross of the Orthodoxy), a book in which he elaborates on his interpretations of the Old Believers' Christian heritage:

The history of the Orthodox Church and the history of the Russian lands show that the Orthodox faith reached indescribable dimensions in the Rus' until

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that has been encouraged by the Russian Orthodox Church, as well as secular and communist ideologies. (L. P. Kuz'mina, "Starobriadtsy v Sovremennom Mire (Obzor Zhurnala "Tserkov" za 1982–1988 gg.) [The Old Ritualists in the Contemporary World (Review of the Journal "Tserkov" from 1982–1988)]," in *Traditsionnaia Dukhovnaia i Material'naia Kul'tura Russkikh Starobriadcheskikh Poselenii v Stranakh Evropy, Azii i Ameriki [Traditional Spiritual and Material Culture of the Russian Old Ritualist Population in the Countries of Europe, Asia and America]*, ed. N. N. Pokrovskii and R. Morris (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1992), 79–85.

<sup>33</sup> Gorin, "Vazhnoe Sobytie v Avstralii" (see note 12), 13 (translated by Stefanie Scherr).

Nikon's reform and the final church schism in 1666–1667. At that time the Russian nation amazed with its devotion and piety foreign visitors who travelled to Russia and who left a great number of testimonies.<sup>34</sup>

Shakhmatov writes about the social and political organisation which the medieval Rus' based on its Orthodox Christian culture and tradition:

Until the *raskol* [*the schism in the Russian Orthodox Church*], the spirit of *sobornost'* [conciliarism] reigned in the Russian Orthodox Church. Everything that concerned the spiritual life of the nation was decided conciliatory between the clergy and the people. There were not any conflicts between the Church and the State, and between all branches of power prevailed complete harmony of a kind that did not even exist in the European countries at the time. The unity between the church and state authorities was not carried by one-sided dominance, but by mutuality: the Tsar for the Church, and the Church for the Tsar. At the beginning of the fifteenth century the Orthodox Church became the greatest supporter of Moscow's politics which intended to unify the Russian lands in its fight against the foreign yoke.<sup>35</sup>

Shakhmatov describes *sobornost'* as a unique principle that inspired and reigned over the social and political organisation of the medieval Rus'. Derived from the literal meaning of spiritual gathering or cathedral, *sobornost'* signifies the reconciliation of the individual with the community and the place of communal spirituality. This untranslatable Russian antithesis to Western concepts of individualism opposes

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<sup>34</sup> Pavel Shakhmatov, *Krest Pravoslaviia* [*The Cross of the Orthodoxy*] (Ulan-Ude: Zlatoust, 2008), 13 (translated by Stefanie Scherr). One of these testimonies is given by Samuel Collins, an English doctor in the service of the Tsar, who provides a rare glimpse of the medieval Rus': "The Russians are a people who differ from all other nations of the world in most of their actions. They wear shirts over their drawers, girded under the navel. None, neither male nor female, must go ungirt for fear of being unblest. [...] Because the Roman Catholics kneel at their devotion, the Russians stand, for they look upon kneeling as an ignoble and barbarous gesture. Because the Poles shave their beards, the Russian consider it sinful to cut them. Because the Tatars abhor swine flesh, the Russians eat it rather than any other flesh, although its food is the most *pogano*, or unclean of any beast." (Samuel Collins, "The Present State of Russia... (London: 1671)," in *Medieval Russia: A Source Book, 850-1700*, 3rd ed., ed. Basil Dmytryshyn (Fort Worth: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1991), 475)

<sup>35</sup> Shakhmatov, *Krest Pravoslaviia* (see note 34), 20 (translated by Stefanie Scherr).

authority as well as formal attributes of spirituality and power.<sup>36</sup> The principle of *sobornost'* was not just an abstract principle of harmony that once ruled over state and church affairs in the medieval Rus'. This idealised notion of communality still lingers in the Old Believers' identification with their Orthodox Christian traditions and has its most powerful expression in the imagination of their homeland *Holy Russia*.

I met Masha in a little street café in an outer suburb of Melbourne. Born in a small mountain village near Harbin, Masha left Manchuria in 1958 or 1959. She is very energetic and talkative. She has her own business, selling traditional Russian embroidery. Masha ordered coffee and muffins and told me of her travels across Australia. She had just come to Melbourne for the Craft and Quilt Fair at the exhibition centre. Masha was not dressed in a headscarf and skirt as I had expected, but wore a pair of jeans and a thick blue jumper. In fluent English, but with a strong Russian accent, she told me that the Old Believers who are living in the diaspora today are not persecuted or tortured anymore. Many had found refuge in western countries such as Australia, Canada, the U.S. or Brazil. Nonetheless, Masha wished to go back to the times when the Old Believers were united in one church and lived in the idyllic and harmonious society of the ancient Rus'. "Yes, all the time we wish Russia would have been left alone," unmolested by the repercussions of the schism, "and we could still live the same way, there in *Holy Russia!*"<sup>37</sup>

Masha spent a lot of time travelling for her embroidery business. She grew up in the priestless Old Believer community in Yarwun but no longer lived in a close-knit religious community. Apart from a small cross around her neck, Masha did not display anything that could reveal her religious affiliations. Occasionally she explained her religious practice to people outside of her faith community who would then laugh about her. "They are making fun of us, yes they still do," Masha said disappointedly, "and sometimes that hurts." She did not want to be mocked or looked down at for her beliefs

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<sup>36</sup> Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 87. The concept of *sobornost'* was further developed by the Slavophile writer Aleksei Stepanovich Khomiakov (1804–1860) as an antithesis to Western individualism and church authoritarianism. He writes: "*Sobor* expresses the idea of a gathering, not only in the sense of a manifest and apparent assembly of many at a certain place; but more generally the everlasting possibility of this assembly. With other words: it expresses the idea of unity in multitude." (A. S. Khomiakov, *Sochineniia Bogoslovskie [Theological Essays]*, Vol. 2 (Prague: Tipografiia F. Skreishovskogo, 1867), 281 (translated by Stefanie Scherr).

<sup>37</sup> Masha, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 18 July 2010, Melbourne.



and religious practice. “Once upon a time there was only one religion in the whole of *Holy Russia*. And one or two people decided to change. That doesn’t mean they became better people; or that we are worse people because we are still keeping the old traditions and old beliefs.”<sup>38</sup>

Masha imagined *Holy Russia* as an ideal medieval society where the religious devotion of its people prevailed. *Holy Russia* was to preserve the original ancient Christian traditions and beliefs under the guidance of a united Russian Orthodox Church. In the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries *Holy Russia* developed as an epithet which held the promise that Russia was chosen as the only Orthodox country to ensure the salvation of mankind. Masha referred to the “old traditions and beliefs” that reigned in medieval Russia, at a time when Moscow gained political strength and power within the Christian churches. Promoted by the Council of Florence in 1439 many Russian Orthodox Church leaders rejected the reunification of the Catholic Church with the Eastern Orthodox Churches.<sup>39</sup> Instead many Russian Orthodox Christians began to acclaim Moscow as the Third Rome after the Turks captured Constantinople in 1453 and after Tsar Ivan’s victories over the Tatar Khans a century later.<sup>40</sup> Early in the sixteenth century Monk Philotheos wrote in a letter to Grand Prince Basil III:

The church of ancient Rome fell under the impiety of the Apollinarian heresy. The second Rome, the Church of Constantinople, was hewn by the pole-axes of the Muslims to cleave its doors. But this is now the third new Rome, reigned by Your mighty tsardom, and the United Apostolic Church shines in its Orthodox Christian faith to the ends of this world more splendidly than the sun; [...] two Romes have fallen, the third one stands, and a fourth one there shall not be.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Masha, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 18 July 2010, Melbourne.

<sup>39</sup> For a history of the Council of Florence and the Union between the Byzantine and Latin Churches see: Deno J. Geanakoplos, *Byzantine East and Latin West: Two Worlds of Christendom in Middle Ages and Renaissance* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966), 84–111.

<sup>40</sup> Francis House, *Millennium of Faith: Christianity in Russia, AD 988–1988* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1988), 17.

<sup>41</sup> V. Malinin, *Starets Eleazarova Monastyria Filofei i ego Poslaniia: Istoriko-Literaturnoe Izsledovanie [Elder of the Eleazar Monastery Filofei and his Epistles: A Historical-Literary Investigation]* (1901; repr. Farnborough: Gregg International, 1971), Appendix 51, 55 (translated by Stefanie Scherr).

From this territorial concept of a united Russian land devoted to its Orthodox Christian principles the epithet of *Holy Russia* developed into a religious symbol which was given eschatological meaning. *Holy Russia* continued to symbolise the Russian land of true faith and salvation.<sup>42</sup> Michael Cherniavsky stylises the Old Believers as the guardians of this epithet. The Old Believers supposedly expressed and put into practice the traditional beliefs of the Russian people and the myth of *Holy Russia*. Cherniavsky argues that its idea transcended the territory of Russia; therefore, the Old Believers who fled the Russian territory would be able to remain in *Holy Russia* and continue its legacy in the diaspora.<sup>43</sup>

My interviewees' imagination of their religious past was sparked by the epithet of *Holy Russia* and its legacy that transcended territorial boundaries and the realms of their Australian diaspora. The Old Believers' imagination of *Holy Russia* did not manifest itself as an actual place in the world but became a projection of their present diasporic existence. It described social desires of living in a harmonious and close-knit Old Believer community, and of a communal and traditional lifestyle. It also reflected the anxieties that many of my interviewees shared in regards to the fragmentation of their diaspora community and the alienation of the younger generation from their religious beliefs and traditions.

When some of my interviewees occasionally travelled to the Soviet Union or post-socialist Russia they experienced their imagined Russian homeland quite differently from what they expected. Matrona remembered a few Russian Orthodox migrant families who considered returning to their ancestral homeland, and the imaginary land of *Holy Russia*. "There are a few families who went back to Russia," Matrona said, "but it's still not something they've [imagined]. They grew up believing this is how it should be like, and they go back and it has changed."<sup>44</sup> Matrona mentioned that some migrant families have strong and often unfulfilled nostalgic desires for their Russian homeland. This sense of longing and imagining a distant place of origin that Matrona described

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<sup>42</sup> Michael Cherniavsky, "'Holy Russia': A Study in the History of an Idea," *The American Historical Review* 63, No. 3 (1958), 619, 637; see also: M. O. Shakhov, *Starobriadchestvo, Obshchestvo, Gosudarstvo [Old Ritualism, Society, State]* (Moscow: M. O. Shakhov, 1998), 46–52.

<sup>43</sup> Michael Cherniavsky, *Tsar and People: Studies in Russian Myths* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), 116–118.

<sup>44</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 12 July 2009, Melbourne.

can increasingly diffuse the notion of homeland into a more abstract idea.<sup>45</sup>

Amber Lee Silva argues that the Old Believers cannot claim Russia as their homeland because of their initial segregation from Russian society after the church schism; also their diaspora has been diffused over several continents and for many centuries.

Old Believers' [sic] cannot call Russia "Home," for they have not been imagining the original homeland in the present, or as an expected goal of the future. To Old Believers, Russia, in terms of its sacred history, religion, and language is entirely a thing of the past.<sup>46</sup>

This understanding of the Old Believers' connection to their Russian homeland is based on present, material and transnational ties between their diaspora community and their country of origin. Silva refers to the migrants' desire and teleology of return to a country of origin. I argue for an understanding of the Old Believers' claims of a Russian homeland that does not devalue but takes account of its symbolic, historical and imaginative perspective. A desire to return to post-socialist Russia does not prevail in the Australian Old Believer diaspora. My interviewees did not articulate the origins of the Old Believers as an ethno-religious community in reference to present-day Russia. The Old Believers living in Australia referred to the myth of a past, an idealised and transcendent homeland that is present in their diasporic memory and cultural imaginary.

Homeland does not need to be articulated as a physical place, as a real or symbolic homeland. Decentred and lateral connections might be more important than the teleology of origin and return, argues Stanley Tambiah. A shared history of displacement and the adaptation to a diasporic setting may be as important as the

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<sup>45</sup> Zlatko Skrbiš' shows in his research of return-visits how Croatian migrants from Australia construct images of home in a distinctly nostalgic and romantic fashion. For some of these return migrants the Catholic pilgrimage site in Medjugorje became an imagined surrogate home. (Zlatko Skrbiš, "From Migrants to Pilgrim Tourists: Diasporic Imagining and Visits to Medjugorje," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 33, No. 2 (2007), 314–315.

<sup>46</sup> Amber Lee Silva, "Unsettling Diaspora: The Old Believers of Alaska," (Master Thesis, McGill University Montréal, 2009), 90.

projection of a specific origin. Homeland can as well become a virtual or rhetorical realm that conveys a feeling of home mediated through language and emotion.<sup>47</sup>

Matrona had told me about another group of Russian migrant families who left Australia and tried to revive their ideal of a simple peasant life back in China. “Maybe they thought that if they go back to China they would still have a simple life. They thought that they are going to build this *Holy Russia* in China.” These families believed that “China is the only place where they’re going to save their souls”, Matrona said. “They went back and maybe they still wanted the old Russian way of living. Maybe they were still thinking that if they are going back to China, build their life in China and live a simple life: that is *Holy Russia*.”<sup>48</sup> The myth of *Holy Russia* was for these migrant families no longer bound to the Russian territory but to their Orthodox Christian heritage and their religious practice.

When a person is deeply [religious] and really believes in a religion, the only way they are going to save their soul is by saving this particular religion. Living in a country like here [in Australia] now, they say, there is just too much temptation, too many different things. But you need a simple life instead where you work the land and things like that.<sup>49</sup>

The families who returned to China were afraid that a modern and affluent lifestyle would condemn them; they hoped that by choosing a traditional and simple way of life they could save their souls. Matrona described her ideal of a peasant life – working the land and living in devotion to God. This idea is based on the ideal of a unique Russian peasant commune, the *mir*, which is characterised by communality, social cohesion, anti-individualism and a communitarian spirit. Matrona referred to romanticised ideas of a collective life in a pre-industrial peasant commune.<sup>50</sup> The Old Believers might long for

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<sup>47</sup> Stanley J. Tambiah, “Transnational Movements, Diaspora and Multiple Modernities,” *Daedalus* 129, No. 1 (2000), 172; David Morley, *Home Territories: Media, Mobility and Identity* (London: Routledge, 2000), 16–18. James Clifford, “Diasporas,” in *The Ethnicity Reader: Nationalism, Multiculturalism & Migration*, 2nd ed, ed. Montserrat Guibernau and John Rex (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 323.

<sup>48</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 12 July 2009, Melbourne.

<sup>49</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 12 July 2009, Melbourne.

<sup>50</sup> Cathy A. Frierson, *Peasant Icons: Representations of Rural People in Late Nineteenth-Century Russia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 102–104; Boym, *Common Places* (see

this communal harmony, Matriona mused, and ways to connect with their Christian traditions, their ancestral and original belonging. “Maybe it’s because we still want the old Russia, our old ways of living.”<sup>51</sup> While Matriona was trying to explain these desires of returning to the old ways of living that were more community orientated and less individualistic, she did not imagine the land of *Holy Russia* anymore. She remembered the village community in which her family was living back in China:

It was a simple life – maybe the simplest life – that you live in a country town. People worked during the week and they would come [out] on the weekends. Probably the whole town would gather around a place, people would do sports and the kids would be playing hide and seek. And the women would just gather and do their knitting and crocheting or whatever. They would catch up with each other and everybody knew each other and all that! If somebody got sick everyone pitched in and helped out. But then all of a sudden that is all gone! Even though they are here [in Australia now] – its just not – they can’t seem to get back to what it used to be. And they always say: the good old days, remember the good old days!<sup>52</sup>

As Matriona remembered her family’s life back in China she described her longing for a simple life in a small and close-knit community. Mutual support, social cohesion and a family-orientated lifestyle stood at the centre of her reminiscent imagining of life back in China. This imagination carried notions of conformity, of traditional gender roles as well as a rural and community-orientated living. Against the backdrop of this idealised memory Matriona realised that some of these social desires and anxieties had emerged from her present reality and diasporic living. She contrasted her own family life and the present Old Believers’ diaspora with her ideals.

When my children were little we used to go to church on Sundays and after church we would go to the park. All the kids would play together and the parents would talk about things. And at the end of the day we would go home,

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note 36), 312–313, note 148; Elena Hellberg-Hirn, *Soil and Soul: The Symbolic World of Russianness* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 172; Steven A. Grant, “*Obshchina* and *Mir*,” *Slavic Review*, 35, No. 4 (1976), 644–645.

<sup>51</sup> Matriona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 12 July 2009, Melbourne.

<sup>52</sup> Matriona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 12 July 2009, Melbourne.

and the kids had a really good time. My children would remember that and say: that was really fun; we used to do a lot of good things! But they [my children] don't seem to do that with their children. The biggest outing they have on the weekend is to go shopping. [...]

About two months ago I got my children all together and I thought we could have a barbecue. We would all catch up with each other, sit down, and talk about who's doing what. I did put a lot of effort into gathering them. But when they came, they ate and then they went shopping. This one went here, that one went there. And I ended up with the grandchildren running around here. And then they came back, picked them up and went home. And I was thinking: well, that wasn't what it was supposed to be.<sup>53</sup>

Matrona pointed at the living room where her grandchildren's toys were still spread all over the floor; sometimes she looked after the kids when their parents were busy. Matrona's own children had moved away from the Old Believer community. She blamed her children's consumption-orientated and individualised lifestyle for the conflict within her family as well as their alienation from the Old Believers' church community and its religious beliefs.

When Matrona and I looked at the photos of the time when the Melbourne Old Believers community was established she smiled. She had spotted herself standing in the church choir, in a picture taken more than 30 years ago. The years have gone by and the church community looks a lot different today, she said. Now only a few and mostly elderly people sing in the choir. Later, when we spoke of her children moving away from the Old Believers' church community I could sense the grief that this had caused Matrona.

"Out of my five children – not one of them is really spiritual," Matrona said, "The oldest daughter, she is probably the most spiritual out of all of them, but she does go to a different church than ours." I asked Matrona: "to the New Believers Church?" and she answered: "No, no, no. She doesn't even do that, she is into – it's more like a Baptist one."<sup>54</sup> I made sure that I understood Matrona right: her daughter was originally

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<sup>53</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 12 July 2009, Melbourne.

<sup>54</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 24 July 2010, Melbourne.

baptised as an Old Believer, she was brought up in the Old Belief's faith; she was taught to read Church Slavonic and used to keep Lent. Matrona explained that her children gave up their religious practice and Old Orthodox traditions when they got older:

When they were small we used to go to the Dandenong church, and they were all there. And then when they started turning 18 [...] they started to go out and didn't want to go to church. They [the girls] used to invent stories: Oh, I am not allowed to go to church, I have got my period. And I would go: hold on a minute, you had that last week.

Matrona chuckled a bit, but her mood changed quickly. She suddenly looked very serious:

When the first one moved away from church, I was very, very sad. I was actually hysterical sometimes. I would start crying because she wasn't in church – I would get hysterical.<sup>55</sup>

I asked Matrona what she feared or felt hysterical about:

It is very hard to explain how I saw this. She [my oldest daughter] used to be in the choir. She sang really well, she read beautifully in church. And then when she stopped going, the way she went ... The way she left the church was that she snuck around and left. And then – we discovered that from someone else – she went and even got baptised in that [other] church. And we didn't even know anything about it! And I thought: surely I brought you up the right way and I always used to teach you. I would rather you tell me the truth, no matter how bad it is, than you cover it up and tell me lies. [...] I think that was the painful bit. I would rather she would have come to me and told me: this is what I choose to do; this is what I am going to do now. And maybe it would not have been as bad.<sup>56</sup>

Matrona felt betrayed and worried that she had lost her daughter to another religion.

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<sup>55</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 24 July 2010, Melbourne.

<sup>56</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 24 July 2010, Melbourne.

She tried to explain how the connection to her daughter changed after she converted. Matrona remembered that her daughter would sometimes visit her, “but I felt it wasn’t her visit.” I might have looked a bit perplexed because Matrona continued: “The body was hers, but the inside wasn’t, if that makes any sense?” I shook my head slightly and Matrona said: “It’s like a different person stepped into her body, if that makes sense?” Matrona described the visions she had of her daughter when she was dreaming: “I always used to see her when I would go to sleep. When I went to sleep I felt that my daughter – the little tiny one – was crying out to me: Mum?” Matrona’s voice sounded desperate as she imitated her daughter’s voice. “It’s only now – she has got three children – that we don’t talk about religion when we get together. She does her own thing and we do ours.” I could sense the tension in Matrona’s voice which spoke for the unsolved conflicts between her and her daughter. I asked if her family did not talk about religious beliefs anymore because they did not want to upset each other, and Matrona explained: “It’s probably because nothing is going to change if we are going to talk about it. Because she [her daughter] is gone, and there is nothing I can do about it.” Matrona cleared her throat one more time: “I accepted it: [...] they have got their own beliefs and choices of how they choose to live and where they are going to go.”<sup>57</sup>

It seemed as if Matrona had given up converting her daughter back to the Old Belief but that she still longed for a harmonious family life in which everyone shares the same religious beliefs, practices and traditions. The conflict with her children about their religious beliefs and her anxiety about the dissolution of her family ties might have enhanced Matrona’s imagined ideal of living in a close-knit and homogenous community. Her reflections were set in an imaginative distance. First Matrona referred to the almost transcendent and ancient territory of *Holy Russia* which was reigned by communitarian spirit and religious devotion. Then she remembered the Old Believers living in China, and her memories fitted into the ancient ideals of communal harmony and solidarity. For Matrona the imaginary world of *Holy Russia* did not only symbolise an escape from secular rationalities and modern lifestyle choices. It also shed light on the fragmentation and alienation of the Old Believer diaspora from its cultural origins and religious belonging. Her imagination offered Matrona means to make meaning of the distant past of her religious tradition and to position herself within the present Old Believer diaspora.

### **The *Raskol* in the Old Believers’ Church History**

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<sup>57</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 24 July 2010, Melbourne.



The Old Believers use imagination to make sense of their history as a religious community and to configure possible interpretations of their past in their present diasporic existence. In the following I focus on the most significant and defining moment in the Old Believers' church history: the *raskol*, the schism within the Russian Orthodox Church. For many of my interviewees the Old Believers' split from the established church was a recurring reference point as they made meaning of their church history and religious past of their diaspora community.

Dimitrii, an Old Believer who emigrated from China in the early 1960s, explained that by the mid-fifteenth century the harmonious and conciliatory principle *sobornost'* that once reigned within the Eastern Orthodox Churches had already vanished. At the Council of Florence the Greek Orthodox Church agreed to the union with the Roman Catholics in 1439, and supposedly diluted its Orthodox traditions. Many Russian Orthodox Church leaders, however, rejected the reunification with the Catholic Church.<sup>58</sup> According to Dimitrii, the Russian people, even more so than their church leaders, tried to defend their own religious traditions and ritual practices against influences from the West and the corrupted Greek Orthodox Church.

The Greeks decided to form a union with the Catholics, but the union [of Churches] didn't last. [...] There was, however, this tendency within the Greek clergy to find convergence with the Catholics. Before that, the people in Russia had taken their religion from the Greeks; but the Greeks who then came to Russia were already looked at as apostates. That is because they would already behave differently in church and dress in such a [Western] style. Therefore, they were not even allowed entry to the [Russian Orthodox] churches anymore. Nevertheless, in the cities – especially in St. Petersburg and Moscow – one could see many of these apparently advanced people who had

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<sup>58</sup> Geanakoplos, *Byzantine East and Latin West* (see note 39), 84–111. Up until the mid-fifteenth century the Muscovy Rus' received much impetus for its faith from Byzantium and Greek Orthodoxy. Whereas Constantinople gradually declined and finally fell to the Turks in 1453, the Muscovy Rus' expanded, gained political power and became a stronghold within the Eastern Orthodox Churches. In 1448 a council of Russian bishops elected the first independent Metropolitan of Moscow and all Rus' Jonas, who did not have the consent of the Patriarch of Constantinople. More than a century later, in 1589, the Russian Orthodox Church achieved full canonical independence (autocephaly) when Metropolitan Job was enthroned as the first Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia. (Dimitry Pospelovsky, *The Orthodox Church in the History of Russia* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998), 44–45, 66–67).

turned towards the West. And the [Russian] government began to invite intellectuals, mostly Greeks. That is because there were only few of their own scholars in Russian. These Greek scholars had all studied in Catholic seminars in Rome. They wanted to keep their own [religious traditions]. But since they had studied there they took on a lot [of Catholic traditions]. So when they arrived in Russia with their suitcase of knowledge, the Russian people – all strong believers – did not accept them.<sup>59</sup>

Whereas Greek scholars and other foreigners encouraged the Russian Orthodox Church and high ranking officials to change their ritual and liturgical practice, ordinary Russians did not favour these changes. Dimitrii argued that the reform plans which finally caused the schism were imposed on the truly faithful Russian people by Patriarch Nikon (1605–1681)<sup>60</sup>, Tsar Aleksis Mikhailovich (1629–1676), and Western foreigners. Dimitrii offered an individual interpretation of the Old Believers' religious past and the meanings he made from the schism and its repercussions for the Australian diaspora.

Dimitrii saw in the continuous and detrimental influence that the Greek Orthodox Church had on the Patriarch, the Russian Orthodox Church, the Tsar and his government a betrayal of the Russian people. Because the tsar and Patriarch Nikon listened to Greek scholars who preached foreign theological thoughts and introduced corrupted ritual practices, the Russian nation lost its communal and social harmony.

The [Tsarist] government and some of the surrounding higher ranks claimed: These people [the Greeks] are scholars! But our [Russian] people, who are they? So they started to adjust [to the Greek ritual practice]. Nikon understood falsely that we were isolated from the Greeks after the Union [of Churches in 1439]; and that meant that after these two hundred years we had changed, that we had started to pray differently. That meant that we needed to adjust our rituals

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<sup>59</sup> Dimitrii (name changed), interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 2010, Sydney.

<sup>60</sup> The Mordovian monk Nikon rose up through a group of clerics called the Zealots of Piety (*Kruzhok Revnitelei Blagochestiia*), who aimed to purge the Orthodox Church of its increased Catholic and Western influences. This group of parish priests, mainly from the Volga region, began to agitate their programme in the 1630s and became quickly very influential, both in the Patriarchate and at court. Nikon became Metropolitan of Novgorod and a trusted friend of Tsar Aleksis. In 1652, he was nominated for the vacant patriarchal seat. (Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire, 1552–1917* (London: HarperCollins, 1997), 65–66).

and traditions according to the Greeks. They just did not realise that the Greeks had changed! And because of these breaches the church schism happened.<sup>61</sup>

Dimitrii referred to the church reforms that Patriarch Nikon had introduced to remove discrepancies from liturgical texts and ritual practices, and to bring the Russian Orthodox Church closer to its Greek origins.<sup>62</sup> Nikon also sought to increase the influence of his patriarchal power in church and state affairs. These theocratic tendencies had grown under the influence of the Greek clergy who were often educated in Rome and invited to Moscow as translators and teachers.<sup>63</sup>

The controversy over Nikon's church reforms began during Lent 1653 when the patriarch sent out an epistle that reduced the number of prostrations during the Lenten prayer of St. Ephrem the Syrian. It also established the *troeperstie*, the three-fingered sign of the cross, whereas the Stoglav (Hundred-Chapters) Council of 1551 had proclaimed the correctness of the *dvoeperstie*, the two-fingered sign of the cross.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Dimitrii (name changed), interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 2010, Sydney.

<sup>62</sup> Serge A. Zenkovsky, "The Russian Church Schism: Its Background and Repercussions," *Russian Review* 16, No. 4 (1957), 40–41; Georg B. Michels, *At War with the Church: Religious Dissent in Seventeenth-Century Russia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 21

<sup>63</sup> Zenkovsky, "The Russian Church Schism" (see note 62), 40. The historical judgement of Nikon as chief protagonists of the schism is controversial: Lev Lebedev credits him for his efforts to reform and modernise the Russian Orthodox Church. Vasilii Kliuchevskii argues that Nikon was an outstanding character, moody and narcissistic; his greed for power led him to claim the church's ecclesiastical supremacy over state authority. Lev Lebedev, "Patriarkh Nikon: Ocherk Zhizni i Deiatel'nosti [Patriarch Nikon: An Outline of his Life and his Work]," *Bogoslovskie Trudy [Theological Papers]* 23, (1982), 174; V. O. Kliuchevskii, *Russkaia Istorii; Polnyi Kurs Lektsii v 2-kh Knigakh [Russian History: A Complete Course in Two Volumes]*, bk. 2, edited by A. F. Smirnov (Moscow: Olma-Press, 2002), 188, 193) For biographies see: Paul Meyendorff, *Russia, Ritual, and Reform: The Liturgical Reforms of Nikon in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century* (Crestwood: St Vladimir's Press, 1991), 81–93; S. V. Lobachev, *Patriarkh Nikon [Patriarch Nikon]* (St. Petersburg: Iskusstvo-SPB, 2003); M. V. Zzykin, *Patriarkh Nikon: Ego Gosudarstvennye i Kanonicheskie Idei [Patriarch Nikon: His State and Canonical Ideas]*, 3 Vols. (Warsaw: Sinodal'naia Tipografiia, 1931–1938); A.V. Kartashev, *Ocherki po Istorii Russkoi Tserkvi [Studies on the History of the Russian Church]*, Vol. 2 (Paris: YMCA Press, 1959), 133–165.

<sup>64</sup> In 1551 the Stoglav Council adopted a statute consisting of 100 articles. It sought to regulate the tsardom's ecclesiastical life and to control the church's accumulation of wealth and corruption. The Stoglav stipulated the correct way to paint icons and outlined the proper conduct

Several corrections of liturgical books followed, the most important of which was the *sluzhebnik*, the Russian Orthodox service book, published in 1655.<sup>65</sup> In a series of councils between 1654 and 1656 Patriarch Nikon enforced the acceptance of his reforms and condemned his priestly opponents who would not submit. The most prominent opponent of Nikon's reforms was archpriest Avvakum<sup>66</sup>, who was like other dissenters severely punished and exiled but continued to serve the movement as a spiritual leader. After the abdication of Patriarch Nikon in 1658 the apostate priests were allowed to return from their exile, but they continued to oppose the ritual and textual changes. Michael Cherniavsky argues that up to that point, the dispute was not a schismatic issue but an ecclesiastical controversy and a problem of several disobedient priests.<sup>67</sup>

A council of Russian Orthodox bishops held in Moscow from 1666 to 1667 offered the dissenters a compromise: it confirmed Nikon's reforms without condemning the earlier ritual practices and religious texts. In return, the council asked the opponents to refrain from insisting that the new practices and texts were heretical. However, Avvakum and some of his colleagues rejected the compromise and continued their opposition against the church reforms. Finally, the Patriarchal Council settled the issue: it declared the Stoglav Council of 1551 a forgery; it condemned the old Muscovy church books and proclaimed the old rituals and practices heretical. Those who refused to obey the council were anathematised. Avvakum and his companions, deacon Feodor, priest Lazar' and monk Epifanii, were imprisoned at Pustozersk and burnt at the stake in

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of liturgical services. Rejecting the Greek Orthodox practices and rituals, the council dogmatized instead their native Russian form and usage. (Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire* (see note 60), 63–66; Charles E. Ziegler, *The History of Russia*, 2nd ed. (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Press, 2009), 25–26; Meyendorff, *Russia, Ritual, and Reform* (see note 63), 33).

<sup>65</sup> Boris A. Uspensky, "Schism and Cultural Conflict in the Seventeenth Century," in *Seeking God: The Recovery of Religious Identity in Orthodox Russia, Ukraine, and Georgia*, ed. Stephen K. Batalden (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1993), 106.

<sup>66</sup> On Avvakum, the leading opponent of Nikon's reforms, see the classic work of Pierre Pascal, *Avvakum et les Débuts du Raskol [Avvakum and the Beginnings of the Church Schism]* (1938; repr., Paris: Mouton, 1963); and his autobiography Avvakum Petrovich Protopope, *Archpriest Avvakum, the Life written by Himself: with the Study of V. V. Vinogradov* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1979).

<sup>67</sup> Michael Cherniavsky, "The Old Believers and the New Religion," *Slavic Review* 25, No. 1 (1966), 7–8.

1682.<sup>68</sup> Attempting to escape persecution other leaders and opponents of the church reforms gathered their followers at isolated locations and regions on the periphery of the Russian empire. The first Old Believer settlements emerged along the Don, in the Starodub region north of Kiev, in the region between Novgorod and Pskov, and in the Pomorie region along the White Sea.<sup>69</sup>

The dispersal of these different Old Believer communities reflects the fragmentation of their movement a few decades after the initial church schism. The Old Believers had lost most of their high level clergy of the pre-reform era. As there were no bishops left who were blessed according to the old rituals and could ordain clergy, the question of the episcopal succession split the movement into two large fractions: the *popovtsy* (priestly) and the *bezpopovtsy* (priestless) Old Believers. Vlas, an elder of the priestless Old Believer community in Gympie, explained that the Old Believers and particularly their priests were severely persecuted by the Russian Orthodox Church after the schism.

The Nikonians killed all of our priests, they were all executed. They killed all our priests because they did not want to change [their ritual practice]. That is why we are without priests. That's why we are *bez papa* [without priests]. And we didn't take on any other [priests].<sup>70</sup>

Priestless Old Believer communities see the apostolic succession and episcopal hierarchy broken by the enforcement of Nikon's reforms. Therefore, they only maintain certain sacraments such as baptism or marriage which are celebrated by a lay priest.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Zen'kovskii, *Russkoe Staroobriadchestvo* (see note 11), 187–188, 259–260, 291–304; Zenkovsky, "Russian Church Schism" (see note 62), 42.

<sup>69</sup> Scheffel, *In the Shadow of Antichrist* (see note 7), 47–48.

<sup>70</sup> Vlas, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 6 January 2011, Gympie.

<sup>71</sup> The largest priestless concord, the Pomortsy ("Those along the Sea"), initially rejected marriage and prayers for the Tsar. Their most prominent community was located at the Vyg monastery between St. Petersburg and Arkhangel'sk and enjoyed large autonomy under the reign of Peter I. When in the 1730s a small majority adopted the custom of praying for the tsar, several splinter sects refused to go along and left the Vyg. The Fedoseevtsy, founded by Deacon Feodosii Vasil'ev (1661–1711), denied marriage and practiced cloister-style asceticism. A more radical faction of priestless Old Believers, the Filippovtsy left the Pomortsy concord

Vlas used the terms *popovtsy*, priestly Old Believers, almost interchangeable with the diluted ritual practice of the *Nikoniansy*, the reformed Russian Orthodox Church. “They still see themselves as orthodox Old Believers,” Vlas said, and I could hear a slight tone of indignation in his voice, “they say that they are not like Nikonians but that they have their own blessed priests. [...] They went to Romania and blessed their priests there, but they even blessed priests who could not read!” The priestly Old Believers assumed that the founding fathers of their religion had condoned the role of their priests. In 1859 the Belokrinitsa hierarchy re-established their priesthood and episcopate in Romania, whereas the *beglopopovtsy* (“fugitive-priestly”) invited fugitive priests, consecrated by the Russian Orthodox Church to preserve a sacramental life.<sup>72</sup> Vlas admitted that many *bezpopovtsy*, especially in Melbourne, have converted to priestly communities and follow the diluted Nikonian religious practice because “there is a lot more freestyle!” People would not observe Lent, dress codes and other church regulations; Vlas said: “Whatever you like to do, feel free to do it! Everything is possible!”<sup>73</sup>

Most historians agree that despite the fragmentation of the Old Believer movement after the schism, the revolt against Nikon’s reforms gained quickly adherents and spread rapidly.<sup>74</sup> The Russian designations of Old Belief did not appear in Old Believer texts until the 1720s. Only in the early eighteenth century did Old Believers begin to define their movement, to categorise themselves as *starovertsy* (Old Believers) or

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under the leadership of monk Filipp (1672–1742). (Scheffel, *In the Shadow of Antichrist* (see note 7), 47–49; Zen'kovsii, *Russkoe Staroobriadchestvo* (see note 11), 187–188, 424–466; Robson, *Old Believers in Modern Russia* (see note 10), 34–37).

<sup>72</sup> Zen'kovsky, *Russkoe Staroobriadchestvo* (see note 11), 433–438; Robson, *Old Believers in Modern Russia* (see note 10), 29–32.

<sup>73</sup> Vlas, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 6 January 2011, Gympie.

<sup>74</sup> See Zen'kovskii, *Russkoe Staroobriadchestvo* (see note 11), 276–292; Nickolas Lupinin, *Religious Revolt in the XVIIIth Century: The Schism of the Russian Church* (Princeton: Kingston Press, 1984), 106. Georg Michels, however, argues that the dissent was primarily a revolt of independent-minded individuals who did not identify themselves as part of a coordinated mass movement against the Russian Orthodox Church. Instead of one great schism one could speak of numerous small schisms. These micro-schisms occurred in particular monasteries and communities as a response to the growth of the ecclesiastical centre Moscow and its penetration into local and personal religious autonomies. (Michels, *At War with the Church* (see note 62), 218–219, 223)

staroobriadtsy (Old Ritualists) and to distinguish themselves from other dissenters.<sup>75</sup> Tsarist census statistics which could have revealed the geographic and numerical dimension of the schism in the Russian Orthodox Church did not truly document its extent. The state authorities were concerned to minimise its impact. At the turn of the nineteenth century it was estimated that between twelve per cent and a third of the population of the Tsarist Empire was alienated from the official state church.<sup>76</sup>

### **Historical Imagination and the Old Believers' Religious Past**

Dimitrii explained that for the Old Believers who emigrated from China to Australia it was extremely difficult to get to know about the history of the schism and the involvement of the Old Believer movement. In the village communities and rural townships where the Old Believers settled in China only few people were knowledgeable or able to read books about their church history.

[Back in China], when they were all living in villages, people didn't have any education. The older generation, the generation of my parents was only semi-literate. They built their church and they were searching for their priesthood which they did re-establish. But they didn't know about their history. My parents were taught this is how it is: don't break [the church] rules! And they didn't break them. They thought that they do not need to know more: this is what the church tells us and we fulfil [the rules]. What else do we need to know? But it seems that besides that we also need to be able to defend ourselves.

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<sup>75</sup> Until then, *raskol'niki* (schismatics) referred not only to those who wished to maintain the old rituals of their church, but included those who defied Church authority for any other reason. Only a small minority called themselves defenders of the Old Belief (*Staraia Vera*) or Old Orthodoxy (*Staroe Pravoslavie*), or adherents of Old Piety (*Staroe Blagochestie*). (Michels, *At War with the Church* (see note 62), 16–17).

<sup>76</sup> Robin Milner-Gulland, *The Russians* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 123; Robert O. Crummey, *The Old Believers & the World of Antichrist: The Vyg Community & the Russian State, 1694–1855* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970), xi–xii; Serge Zenkovsky refers to a total number of 10.3 million Old Believers by 1860 which has been estimated by the tsarist official P. I. Melnikov in 1896. (Zenkovsky, "Russian Church Schism" (see note 62), 51–52). Irina Pozdeeva gives a short overview of different statistical accounts and their problematic interpretation: I. Pozdeeva, "*Russkoe Staroobriadchestvo i Moskva v Nachale XX v. [The Russian Old Ritualism and Moscow at the Beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century]*," in *Moskva Staroobriadchestkaia [Old Ritualist Moscow]*, Mir Staroobriadchestva, Vyp. 2 [World of the Old Ritualists, No. 2], ed. I. V. Pozdeeva, N. N. Pokrovskii and Ia. N. Shchapov (Moscow: Rossiiskoe Universitetskoe Izdatel'stvo, 1995), 6–8.

What has happened in the contemporary world is that there has been only one truth, but now there are thousands of truths and thousands of different churches. And every one [of these churches] says: I am right, I am right, I am right. [...] This one is a bit right and that one is a bit right, and all of them taken together they are entirely right; that means they would have the whole truth. But these are really different people who have really different opinions about all of these matters – about religion, dogmas and rituals. How can they make up one whole [truth] if they have all such different understandings of one and the same thing?<sup>77</sup>

Dimitrii told me that sometimes friends and relatives who belong to the Old Believer community in Sydney approached him because they wanted to learn more about their church history. Often people asked him for literature that could help them to defend their religion against other beliefs and value systems. “These days our Old Believers know very little,” Dimitrii said. Recently his nephew asked him: “Uncle [Dimitrii], please give me literature! I want to study. When I talk with the New Believers, I can’t defend at all what I have to say. I know that our path is the right one, but I can’t defend it.”<sup>78</sup> Dimitrii had sympathy for his nephew’s dilemma. The legacy of the Old Belief’s cultural and religious tradition needs to continue; it has to be taught and transmitted to a younger generation of Old Believers who were born in Australia. Dimitrii suggested that he could give lectures in English which would be more accessible for young people who were often illiterate in Russian or Church Slavonic.

“We arrived here [in Sydney] and met with a lot of Russians,” Dimitrii said, “with a lot of New Believers. And they had church literature and journals; they could defend and explain themselves. My son said: we [the Old Believers] are on the right way! We think we are right but not one of us can defend this truth. That’s true! Where does it [our religion] come from? How did it evolve? What are the open questions? Where are the dogmatic and ritual breaches? We don’t know that.” Dimitrii gave me an apologetic

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<sup>77</sup> Dimitrii (name changed), interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 2010, Sydney.

<sup>78</sup> Dimitrii (name changed), interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 2010, Sydney.



look: “We didn’t learn the history of the *raskol*.”<sup>79</sup> Dimitrii emphasised that it was immensely important that the Old Believers in Australia got to know about their church history and their religious past. The community had to defend the Old Belief against beliefs, values and claims of spiritual revelation which were not intrinsic to the tradition and culture of their religion. Knowledge about their church history could inform, unify and strengthen their diaspora community, especially in opposition against other religious communities like the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad.

Dimitrii interpreted, and made sense of, the Old Believers’ church history. He approached the task of the historian much like Robin George Collingwood who called his methodology for historical inquiry ‘historical imagination’. According to Collingwood the historian has to identify, select and arrange validated historical sources and evidence. Therefore, the historian is able to re-think the thoughts of a historical actor involved in past events, actions and decisions.<sup>80</sup> The critical historian can discover and correct all kinds of falsifications by considering whether his or her evidence leads to a picture of the past that is coherent, reasonable and continuous.<sup>81</sup> Collingwood writes:

The web of imaginative construction is something far more solid and powerful than we have hitherto realized. So far from relying for its validity upon the support of given facts, it actually serves as the touchstone by which we decide whether alleged facts are genuine.<sup>82</sup>

To describe history as an imaginative construct is not to imply that it is unreal or to see the use of imagination as a merely fanciful and fictitious *modus operandi*. Historical imagination merely denies the sharp distinction between historical fact and fiction. As far as history involves an interpretive process it makes use of figurative language and a connective narrative thread to present a coherent historical text. The historian’s picture of the past appears as a web of imaginative construction. This web stretches out between the evidence given by historical sources and is constantly verified by appeal

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<sup>79</sup> Dimitrii (name changed), interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 2010, Sydney.

<sup>80</sup> Dale Jacquette, “Collingwood on Historical Authority and Historical Imagination,” *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 3, No. 1 (2009), 63–64.

<sup>81</sup> R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), 242–245.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.

to this data.<sup>83</sup>

Why is looking at the Old Believers' history making as a form of historical imagination valuable and important? Dimitrii and I are not objective observers. In the introductory chapter I have touched on the intersubjective and pre-conditioned situation in which every inquiry and search for knowledge is set. Gadamer's hermeneutic makes us aware that we cannot claim the objectivity of any historical account because it is always conditioned by the subjectivity of the person who interprets the past. It is the initial problem or question in mind which sparks the historian's interest and guides his or her looking for evidence. We have to acknowledge that every potential historian manipulates his or her evidence to some extent, by what is selected or omitted, by the chosen emphasis, language and structure. Recognising the meaning making process in which Dimitrii and many of my other interviewees were involved as imaginative acknowledges that the Old Believers position themselves towards the history of their community. Historical imagination recognises the subjectivity of my interviewees' interpretation as well as their interests in constructing an Old Believers' history in their Australian diaspora.

The Old Believers' interpretations of their church history and religious past are not necessarily true or false. These interpretations of the past are valuable because they often support claims, agendas and identifications that circulate in their diaspora community. Nikolai's interpretation of the *raskol* and the Old Believers' church history makes the workings of historical imagination and the character of its historical analysis clearer. I met Nikolai in a buzzing chic street café in the CBD of Sydney. I was irritated by the high volume of the music and the restless waiters who kept passing our table. Nikolai, however, sat quite comfortably opposite me sipping his coffee. He belongs to the second generation of Old Believer migrants. My first impression of him was that he had no strong inclination to follow the practices and traditions of his religious faith. I had recognised immediately his clean shaven and friendly face, and wondered why he did not grow the traditional long bushy beard that Old Believer men are supposed to wear. As we started our conversation Nikolai briefly talked about his new office job and that he had shaved because of the job interview he went to.

I suppose sometimes you know in your head what you've got to do when you've

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 242; Mark C. Taylor, *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 67–68.

got to do it. And, you know, God hopefully understands. That's always like that, you know! But then if I didn't feel comfortable shaving it [my beard] off, I wouldn't have shaved it off. I actually felt uncomfortable going for my interviews with it on because I know how people react sometimes in the offices. Some people are ok with it; some people are not ok with it. Some even say if you don't shave then you are a bum, you don't look after yourself. So I thought I would eliminate all the negatives, you know, just go like a normal 'Aussie' person would: put a suit on and put a tie on and clean shaven.<sup>84</sup>

Nikolai explained that it was not always possible to follow the traditional lifestyle and religious practices prescribed by the church books. He was leaning forward to rest his elbows on the little table between us; this posture seemed to put him into a more comfortable position as we were talking. Nikolai spoke quickly, often repeating a casual "you know". He explained that the Old Believers inherited their religious tradition from the Russian Orthodox Church and stressed their lineage within the Christian churches:

When you do get down to the final points of the *raskol*, when the persecution started and the split happened. Basically, from our point of view it's not right what they [the Russian Orthodox Church] implemented. I think it started off because some of the books had quite a different wording but we should actually get them all the same. So that [the copying of the books] was usually done by hand. So there were mistakes; that makes sense! But then, how do you go about saying: everybody has been praying along this since 899, whenever it was... 988 when Russia became Orthodox. And then all of a sudden it's the 1600s, and you know: oh, we don't do that anymore, we've got to change. You can't do that!<sup>85</sup>

Nikolai would not be able to actually perceive the changes in the handwritten transcriptions of liturgical text books in the medieval times of the Moscovy Rus'. He imagined how monks and priests would have copied the liturgical scripts and church books by hand. He concluded that the process of manually copying text books had to lead to textual differences and spelling mistakes. These changes would have encouraged church authorities to correct the ancient liturgies and prayer books. "That

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<sup>84</sup> Nikolai (name changed), interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 2010, Sydney.

<sup>85</sup> Nikolai (name changed), interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 2010, Sydney.

makes sense,” Nikolai said, emphasising the internal logic of his interpretation. This interpretation might have been based on historical evidence and his readings about the Old Believers’ church history, but basically he recreated the reasoning of historical agents in the past. His imagination of an event in the past – the schism in the Russian Orthodox church – allowed Nikolai to make personal meaning of the Old Believers’ religious past, as well as the legacy of the Old Belief’s Russian Orthodox tradition and Christian origin.

“We believe that we are right!” Nikolai said convincingly, “I believe that we are preserving the old correct ways.”<sup>86</sup> Nikolai emphasised the continuity and perseverance of the Old Belief’s religious practice and ritual form. Whereas the Russian Orthodox Church modernised, adjusted and found compromise with other denominations, the Old Believers kept their Christian traditions and religious practices by following the “old correct ways”.

If your child had been christened in the New Believer church, our priest would not give it the Holy Communion because it would not be fully christened – not to the level we expect it to be. It’s the same if someone in our church wants to marry somebody of the New Believer church. Some extra oil has to be put on them, and a few prayers are said to make sure that they are fully [blessed] Old Believers. We do actually rectify those differences according to our books. There are differences in the ways of christening, and we make sure that they are fully [baptised].<sup>87</sup>

The full baptism Nikolai referred to is the trinitarian immersion which is practiced in the Orthodox Old-Rite Church. The confessional divide in the Russian Orthodox Church is largely based on ritual and liturgical differences that Patriarch Nikon introduced in the Russian Orthodox Church.

The most disputed of these ritual changes was the configuration of the hand when the faithful made the sign of the cross, which was changed from the two-fingered to the three-fingered sign. Previously, the index and the middle fingers symbolised the dual

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<sup>86</sup> Nikolai (name changed), interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 2010, Sydney.

<sup>87</sup> Nikolai (name changed), interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 2010, Sydney.

nature of Jesus Christ. The first finger represented the divine nature of Jesus Christ and the bent second finger was a symbol of his descent to earth for the salvation of humankind. The idea of the Holy Trinity was expressed by bringing together the thumb, the little finger and the fourth finger.<sup>88</sup> Subsequently, the two-fingered sign of the cross became the symbol of adhering to the old rituals of the Russian Orthodoxy.<sup>89</sup>

### **Social Imaginaries and the Confessional Devide**

Many of my interviewees argued that their church was committed to continue its Russian Orthodox traditions. Some stated that the Old Belief was to preserve the origins of Christianity in its purest and most authentic ritual form and belief; others even asserted the Old Belief's moral superiority over other Christian religions, secularised value and belief systems. However, such claims had to hold up against critiques about the Old Believers' religious heritage and tradition as well as contested interpretations of their religious dogma and belief. In their Australian diaspora the Old Believers were exposed to secular, agnostic and atheist world views as well as the belief systems of other Christian and non-Christian religions. In the following I discuss Nina's struggle with the Old Belief's dogmatic claim to represent the only true religion and show how historical imagination results in a subjective meaning making processes.

Nina was born in Australia, as the daughter of Russian-Ukrainian immigrants. Nina did not inherit, or grew up with, the certainty that the Old Belief was the only true religion. She was brought up in the Russian Orthodox Church and converted in her early twenties as she married an Old Believer. Nina explained how her decision to convert to the Old Belief came about:

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<sup>88</sup> Ciuba et al., *Drevnepravoslavnyi Molitvennik* (see note 26), 335.

<sup>89</sup> Other ritual changes which were heavily disputed included the chanting of the Alleluia that was originally sung twice, for example to conclude the psalmody: "*Alliluiia, alleluiia, slava tebe Boshe [Alleluia, alleluia, glory to Thee, O God]*". (Ciuba et al., *Drevnepravoslavnyi Molitvennik* (see note 26), 42.) After Nikon's reforms, however, the Alleluia was repeated three times. The triple alleluia was used in contemporary Greek practice and prescribed by the Venetian Euchologion of 1602 which served Nikon as the model for his revised edition. The spelling of the name Jesus changed from *Isus* to *Isus*; and certain words and phrases in the Creed were modified. For example, the conjunction *a* (but) was excluded in the original wording *rozhdenna, a ne sotvorena* (born but not created). The new wording read as *rozhdenna, ne sotvorena* (born, not created). (Meyendorff, *Russia, Ritual, and Reform* (see note 63), 46, 74, 128–129, 138, 148–149, 177; Uspensky, "Schism and Cultural Conflict in the Seventeenth Century" (see note 65), 107–111 106–143; Zen'kovskii, *Russkoe Starobriadchestvo* (see note 11), 187–188, 223–225).

We were at my grandfather's house and he asked us what we [Nina and her husband] were doing about our wedding and how we are going to live our lives. Because he knew that Tim was Old Russian Orthodox and I was just Russian Orthodox. So he asked us what we are going to do and we explained what we were doing and he basically said you can't have two religions under one house. You need to be united, which I thought was a valid point. [...] The Russian tradition actually dictates – I don't know why or where it comes from – it's just an understanding that the woman always follows the man in terms of changing religion. That just meant I became Old Russian Orthodox.<sup>90</sup>

After her conversion Nina initially struggled to embrace her new religion. She realised that her upbringing was different compared to that of someone who was brought up in the Old Orthodox-Rite Church.

My life was just different. It's just a difference, I guess, between the people that raised me [in the Russian Orthodox tradition] in terms of what their background was and what their understanding was; as opposed to people who grow up in an Old Believers' community where they are perhaps a lot stricter in regards to religious practices, or their traditions.<sup>91</sup>

Nina struggled with the variations of religious practices and ritual forms, dogmatic beliefs and prayers that differentiated her new religion from that of the Russian Orthodox Church. Nina was initially looking for commonalities between the Old Belief and other Christian religions; she wanted to find a common ground or connection between her past and her present religious practice and belief.

At some point in time Christianity would have started as one thing and somewhere along the line it just broke up into these hundreds of different fragments. And everyone has their own slight variations. I was just looking for some sort of commonality that combines them or shows that there was initially a common thread, or something.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Nina Nikolaevich, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 11 July 2011, Melbourne.

<sup>91</sup> Nina Nikolaevich, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 11 July 2011, Melbourne.

<sup>92</sup> Nina Nikolaevich, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 11 July 2011, Melbourne.

Nina hoped that a better understanding of the Old Believers' church history and religious past would give meaning to her religious life, to the Old Belief's religious traditions, practices and dogmas. Nina was searching for a historical and theological justification of the Old Belief's dogmatic claim to be more authentic, more original than other Christian religions. And one day, Nina said, she had an epiphany when she looked at the picture of the first Catholic Pope who crossed himself with two fingers:

I don't know what book it was but it had a picture of the very first Catholic Pope – I think it was Pope Paul I – a picture of his statue. So he was a Catholic pope but he actually was holding his fingers in the same way the Old Believers do. And I thought: hold on, there is something in this. I don't know why it was particularly significant at that time but from that point on I was going to change the way I crossed myself, accepted more about this religion and was more participatory. [...] If the first Catholic Pope did that, then obviously there must be something to it or it must be right, something along these lines.<sup>93</sup>

Nina re-thought and imagined the past thoughts and actions of the first Catholic Pope; his gesture of crossing himself with two fingers proved to her that the Old Belief's ritual practice was closely related to the ancient origins of Christianity. Nina's religious life was affected by her individual interpretations of the Old Believers' religious past and church history.

Years after her conversion Nina became an active member in the Old Believer community in Melbourne: she was engaged in the ladies auxiliary, and organised fundraising events and other community gatherings. Together with her husband she also strongly encouraged their three teenage children to participate in these community activities. However, Nina admitted that her kids were less and less interested in going to church. Instead, they often questioned their parents' religious traditions and beliefs. Nina decided to send her children to a Catholic school, although she doubted that her religion would approve of that.

I wanted them to understand more about religion or Christianity in general and how it impacts on your life. I thought it was important for them to have a better understanding of the Bible; and of how that is basically the foundation of how

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<sup>93</sup> Nina Nikolaevich, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 11 July 2011, Melbourne.

our society evolved.<sup>94</sup>

Nina shrugged her shoulders and continued: “So how do you juggle the understanding and acceptance that – if the Old Belief is the true faith – well technically, I am a heretic by sending my kids to a Catholic school. My motivation to send them to a Catholic school is to understand and to know God. How does that work?”<sup>95</sup> Nina struggled with the Old Belief’s dogmatic claim to be the only true religion which does not accept truth claims from other religion or any foreign value or belief system.

Nina led me through an interpretive process in which she was aware of her personal reasoning and rationalities, such as the intimate experience of her epiphany. She also highlighted the conflict and contradictions that arose from her interpretations of the Old Belief’s religious dogma and church history, such as sending her children to a Catholic school. Imagining the past of her religious belief, Nina reflected on the effects it had for her present living in the Australian diaspora and her engagement with the Old Believer community. She envisioned a variety of possible interpretations that the Old Beliefs’ religious past had for her personal life, for her family and the Old Believers. Nina’s thinking of her own religious past and the past of the Old Believers’ church appears as an interpretive and imaginative practice rather than a finite representation of this past in the present. As an interpretive process, historical imagination reveals the social imaginaries that prevail in the Old Believers’ Australian diaspora. The imagination of the past as a religious community was in many of my interviews more revealing than historical facts and evidence. Historical imaginations highlighted in great detail the social desires and anxieties which emerged from the Old Believers’ present diasporic existence.

Collingwood’s historical imagination is most illuminating at this point, providing us with an understanding of how the Old Believers make sense of their distant past for their present diaspora community. Collingwood suggests that rethinking the past is an inferential or interpretative process in which we are not supposed to deny present rationalities and attitudes.<sup>96</sup> He writes: “The past belongs to the present, not the

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<sup>94</sup> Nina Nikolaevich, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 11 July 2011, Melbourne.

<sup>95</sup> Nina Nikolaevich, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 11 July 2011, Melbourne.

<sup>96</sup> Giuseppina D’Oro, “Re-Enactment and Radical Interpretation,” *History and Theory* 43, No. 2 (2004), 199.



present to the past. [...] To know oneself is simply to know one's past and vice versa."<sup>97</sup> A central critique of Collingwood's methodology has been its reliability and validity: how is it even possible to rethink and recreate past human thought and action?<sup>98</sup> Collingwood aimed to explain events of the human past by making the historian understand causes, actions and decisions in the light of particular historical circumstances.<sup>99</sup> However, his concept did not reflect the complexity of decision making or thinking processes. It also did not take account of the presumption that the historian who interprets the past and a person who lives and acts in the past would have to follow identical rationalities. Propositional attitudes such as beliefs and feelings, desires, hopes and fears of a historical figure played a marginal role in Collingwood's explanation of the reasoning and actions a historian needs to interpret.<sup>100</sup> This predicament of the historical imagination can be solved if we link our understanding of past actions to the ability to rethink thoughts of historical agents, independently of whether such thoughts are true or false. It is more important to provide an interpretation of the past that is appropriate to the subject matter in question.<sup>101</sup>

Alexander was born in China and migrated to Australia in 1962. "Back in China you learnt about things like the *raskol* by what you hear and learn from your parents or grandparents. It was not so much a formal process," Alexander said. He was ten or eleven years old when his family arrived in Australia. Alexander received most of his

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<sup>97</sup> R. G. Collingwood, *The Principles of History: and other Writings in Philosophy of History*, ed. W. H. Dray and W. J. van der Dussen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 220.

<sup>98</sup> Some historians have been critical of Collingwood's intuitivist, subjectivist and constructivist interpretations: Patrick L. Gardiner, *The Nature of Historical Explanation* (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), 46–51; W. H. Dray, "Historical Understanding as Re-Thinking," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 27, (1958) 200–215; Leroy B. Cebik, "Collingwood: Action, Re-Enactment and Evidence," *Philosophical Forum* 2, (1970), 68–90; W. H. Walsh, "R. G. Collingwood's Philosophy of History," *Philosophy* 22, No. 82 (1947), 153–160; Margit Hurup Nielsen, "Re-Enactment and Reconstruction in Collingwood's Philosophy of History," *History and Theory* 20, No. 1 (1981), 1–31.

<sup>99</sup> Collingwood, *Idea of History* (see note 81), 282–290.

<sup>100</sup> Jacqueline, "Collingwood on Historical Authority and Historical Imagination" (see note 80), 70–72; W. H. Dray and W. J. Dray, introduction to *The Principles of History and Other Writings in Philosophy of History*, by R. G. Collingwood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), lxvii–lxviii.

<sup>101</sup> D'Oro, "Re-Enactment and Radical Interpretation" (see note 96), 200.

education in Australia; he went to university and worked in a white collar job in the CBD of Sydney. Migration offered him and his family better access to education and information about the Old Believers' church and migration history. According to Alexander, the internet, history books, brochures and journals published by the Orthodox Old-Rite Church in Lidcombe could help to educate people. More importantly, this access to information could enable the Old Believer community to get a more objective understanding of their religious past. Alexander criticised people for putting forward polemic and uninformed interpretations of their church history and past events. "Often a certain view has been followed without looking at it in the light of what we know now."<sup>102</sup> Alexander advocated a more tolerant approach to the debate about denominational differences. He emphasised that in particular the younger generation did not care as much about the confessional divide and the ecclesiastical breach between the Russian Orthodox and the Orthodox Old-Rite Church.

The younger ones certainly become more tolerant. [...] That could have something to do with a certain assimilation of younger people within the wider society – and therefore, probably also the dilution of the strength of their convictions [...]. They are certainly a lot more tolerant and more accepting, and they certainly associate more with them [the New Believers]. Look at the older generation in terms of the relationship between the two branches of the Russian Orthodox Church! [In comparison] there is probably not as much open animosity towards each other in the newer generation. Although there are certain pockets, areas, or groups of people where there is quite a bit of animosity and distrust. But that is not based on any factual evidence. It's more hear-say and people making up things. That is quite unfortunate!<sup>103</sup>

A contested part of the Old Believers' history in the Australian diaspora is the accusation that the Russian Orthodox Church persecuted and killed Old Believers for their opposition against Nikon's church reforms. Whereas the younger generation seemed to come to terms with this part of the Old Believers' church history, the older generation still identifies strongly with the sufferings of their ancestors and founding fathers of their religion. Some of my interviewees remembered Archbishop Avvakum who was burnt at the stake in 1682. Others told me horror stories of Old Believers

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<sup>102</sup> Alexander, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 19 August 2010, Sydney.

<sup>103</sup> Alexander, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 19 August 2010, Sydney.

being poisoned, priests who were killed and preachers whose tongues were cut out. Congregations of Old Believers would have rather immolated themselves in their wooden churches than submit to the state authorities or follow the new church rituals.

Accounts of persecution and violence against their ancestors were deeply engrained in the collective memory of some priestless Old Believers I spoke to. Many of my interviewees explained that the priestless Old Believer denomination originated as a result of the killings and extinction of all clerics that were blessed according to the Old Belief. Some people showed a deeply emotional reaction to this part of their church history. Elisey became quite upset as he explained that his family, his ancestors and the priestless Old Believers have been persecuted for centuries. “People prayed like that [according to the old rituals] for a thousand or a thousand and five hundred years! But then Nikon wanted to change everything!”<sup>104</sup> Elisey shook his head slightly:

In 1666 Nikon killed all the [priests], he murdered them all – got rid of every single one of them! That is why we became *bezpopovtsy* [priestless Old Believers]. [...] My grandfathers didn’t want to change. Instead, they decided to go into the bush, straight into the dense Russian taiga. Otherwise, they would have been killed or tortured because they didn’t want to change and follow his [Nikon’s] ways.<sup>105</sup>

Masha got similarly upset and angry when she told me how the Old Believers were treated by the Russian Orthodox Church. She said that the New Believers “wanted to destroy the Old Belief’s religion” and that “they started to change the cross – the way we cross ourselves – they absolutely changed everything!”<sup>106</sup> I could sense that she took personal offence at the sufferings that her ancestors endured.

They started killing all [Old Orthodox] priests. And if you didn’t want to follow the New Believers, they used to poison you. If you came to eat with them they would give you poison. [...] What they have done to our people! The way they tortured them, that wasn’t the right thing to do! And they wanted to kill and to

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<sup>104</sup> Elisey, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 10 January 2011, Gympie.

<sup>105</sup> Elisey, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 10 January 2011, Gympie.

<sup>106</sup> Masha, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 18 July 2010, Melbourne.

destroy a whole lot of [Old Believers].<sup>107</sup>

Masha made it clear that she was not willing to forgive the atrocities done to the Old Believers under the pretext of the schism. She said with a tinge of resignation in her voice, “and we still get persecuted, rubbished and pushed around a lot by the New Believers”.<sup>108</sup> Masha’s and Elisey’s interpretations show that the older generation of Old Believers living in Australia are likely to recreate the violation and sufferings of past generations. These past sufferings and injustices are an absent reality for today’s Old Believers in Australia. An essential feature of imagination is that it enables us to think about things that no longer exist or do not yet exist. It is thus only through imagination, Mary Warnock argues, that we have a concept of ourselves as having a history which is not yet finished. Imagination fills the gaps in our experience with a fictitious idea of what we have not (yet) experienced.<sup>109</sup> The schism and its repercussion is an experience which the Old Believers imagine in order to make sense of their present diasporic condition.

There is a generational shift in the Old Believers’ identification as a diaspora community which has had to position itself within and vis-à-vis a larger Russian migrant community in Australia and the Russian Orthodox Church. Nikolai agreed that the older generation has not forgotten the persecutions and killings which Old Believers had suffered since their split from the Russian Orthodox Church. Nikolai tried to reconcile the accusations and the divide between the older and the new generation of Old Believers and their relation to the Russian Orthodox Church.

People actually even now take strong offence of some of the New Believers and what they did. Some of the older people are saying: you guys killed so many Old Believers and burnt them on the stake. How much blood was shed by you guys! But the fact is: they have got nothing to do with it. The decision was made back then and people of that time have done the persecutions.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Masha, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 18 July 2010, Melbourne.

<sup>108</sup> Masha, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 18 July 2010, Melbourne.

<sup>109</sup> Mary Warnock, *Imagination and Time* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 2.

<sup>110</sup> Nikolai (name changed), interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 2010, Sydney.

Nikolai explained that there was no longer much animosity between the Old and the New Believers in the Russian community in Sydney. “It’s just when it comes down to the Holy Communion and confession that we go to the Old Believers’ [Church] and they go to the other one. [...] It doesn’t really matter if you are an Old Believer or New Believer; we still go to church and pray, we still do the same things.”<sup>111</sup> Especially in the younger generation, Nikolai explained, the confessional divide was of minor importance. Intermarriages between different confessions and conversions opened ways to include new members and to find coexistence within a wider Russian migrant community.

Charles Taylor’s concept of the “social imaginary” raises useful questions about the Old Believers’ normative, moral and dogmatic dispositions: How does this community position itself next to other religions and how does it relate itself to a globally dispersed diaspora? It also allows us to ask where the Old Believers stand in relation to their church history and how that informs the narrative of their becoming.<sup>112</sup> Including a shared understanding of common practice the social imaginary is not just a set of ideas or intellectual schemes.<sup>113</sup> Taylor writes:

I am thinking rather of the ways in which people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations.<sup>114</sup>

Dilip Parameshwar Goankar, who calls Taylor’s theory a “hermeneutics of everyday life”<sup>115</sup>, emphasises that the social imaginary is shared by large groups of people. The widespread adherence to a particular social imaginary can confer legitimacy on a set of common practices, forms and pursuits.<sup>116</sup> Taylor’s concept has been criticised for being

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<sup>111</sup> Nikolai (name changed), interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 2010, Sydney.

<sup>112</sup> Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 27.

<sup>113</sup> Charles Taylor, “Modern Social Imaginaries,” *Public Culture* 14, No. 1 (2002), 91–124, 106.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>115</sup> Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, “Toward New Imaginaries: An Introduction,” *Public Culture* 14, No. 1 (2002), 10.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 10–11.

merely suggestive, as well as for its emphasis on unity and coherence. Taylor, however, acknowledges that the social imaginary is complex and necessarily involves a sense of unity, expectation and common understandings because that enables us to carry out collective practices.<sup>117</sup> Taylor's social imaginary is a useful concept because it does not reduce imaginations to single and subjective representations. As a generative matrix it includes the various stories, meanings and images that my interviewees presented as they made meaning of their religious past and diasporic presence. The social imaginary that the Australian Old Believers present is not coherent. Taylor's concept of the social imaginary is not to smooth over communal fragmentations, ambiguous identities and contested religious claims.

"Certainly there are a lot more intermarriages," Alexander said, "and in terms of how we can coexist – from that perspective we tolerate each other more these days than what they used to in the past." Alexander did not think that the two churches would ever be united again or follow one common practice: "It's more a theological issue than social. It's difficult to solve."<sup>118</sup> Alexander told me that there had been attempts to re-unite the New and the Old Believer church, but that it would not solve their divide.

You can't change history! [...] As far as we would be able to worship in one church – either in the New Believer or the Old Believer church – that will never happen because the practices are different. Certainly the Old Believers are very staunch; they will never accept the new ways of doing those [practices differently] [...] Some of the words have been changed and how you cross yourself, that's been changed too. Those sorts of things can basically never be resolved. Again, there is too much history behind it. People won't reconcile. So for all intents and purposes, those two branches will stay forever. The only way how we will find out which is right or wrong or if they are both right or both wrong is: we have to go into the next world.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Bernard Yack, "Charles Taylor: Modern Social Imaginaries," *Ethics* 115, No. 3 (2005), 632; David Sneath, Martin Holbraad and Morten Axel Pedersen, "Technologies of the Imagination: An Introduction," *Ethnos* 74, No. 1 (2009), 7–8; Taylor, "Modern Social Imaginaries" (see note 113), 106.

<sup>118</sup> Alexander, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 19 August 2010, Sydney.

<sup>119</sup> Alexander, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 19 August 2010, Sydney.

Alexander briefly mentioned the *edinovertsy* (Unified Believers), an Old Believer movement which established itself in the early eighteenth century. The *edinovertsy* celebrate the old rituals in ecumenical union with the Russian Orthodox Church and stand under the jurisdiction of the Holy Synod. The interpretations about the *edinovertsy* movement has always been controversial: whereas the Russian Orthodox clergy saw the movement as an opportunity for religious autonomy and reconciliation, the Old Believers looked at it as an instrument of conversion.<sup>120</sup>

Alexander oscillated between interpretations of the past and comments on present developments in the Australian Old Believer diaspora. He envisioned that “we will never be able to bring the two together, be the same or become a single religion. We keep evolving and there will be more and more [splits].”<sup>121</sup> Alexander imagined the future of how the Old Believer diaspora is going to evolve. He took into account the historical past, the present religious practice and the future development of his diaspora community.

### **The Old Believers’ Diasporic Imagination**

Entangled in our perception of the world and our memories, we have to be careful not to equate imagination with fantasy or see it as a form of representation or an image. Imagination is an interpretive practice and not mere idealisation, contemplation or escape. This chapter has focused on imagination as a practice, an act of consciousness that allows us to relate to our past, interpret our present and envisage our future. Often diaspora communities draw on imaginaries of other places and maintain the ideals of a distant, lost or idealised homeland. But this diasporic imaginary is more complex: the Old Believers’ historical and social imagination has emerged from a process of making meaning of their religious past; in this process my interviewees also negotiate the future of their present religious community and diaspora identity.

The Old Believers’ historical and social imaginary reveals aspects of cultural displacement, of social desires and anxieties that my interviewees expressed in regards to their diasporic living. Whereas the Sydney Old Believer community continue to preach the historic legacy of their religious tradition, many Old Believers in Gympie

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<sup>120</sup> Robson, *Old Believers in Modern Russia* (see note 10), 29–30; Irina Paert, *Old Believers: Religious Dissent and Gender in Russia, 1760–1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), xi, 61.

<sup>121</sup> Alexander, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 19 August 2010, Sydney.

anticipate the extinction of their religion as their community has been shrinking dramatically. Some families in Melbourne draw on visions of an imaginary ancestral homeland to act upon recent developments within their community and Australian society. Imagining the religious past and future of the Australian Old Believers is a highly individual meaning making process. It results in multiple, contested and ambiguous interpretations of a shared history and diaspora identity. However, many of my interviewees share concerns about the continuity of their religious belief and the revision of certain social practices, cultural traditions and religious forms.



## Chapter 3

### The Migrant Journey Begins: The Old Believers' Memory of Place and Displacement

#### My Imaginations of Harbin

In this chapter, I do not represent my interviewees' memories and visions of Harbin in the same imaginative distance as their yearnings for an idyllic Russian homeland, which I have discussed previously. Some stories about the Old Believers' lives and settlement in China referred in similar ways to distant places and past times. However, rather than focusing on my interviewees' imaginations, this chapter looks at their memories of living in China. It highlights the historical context in which the Old Believers' migrant movement from China was set, and reflects on the meaning that my interviewees made from their migration experience.

My visions of Harbin featured a city in winter: the Sanguri River turning into a field of ice and reflecting the dazzling sunlight, children throwing snowballs along the riverbank, and Russian ladies in fine fur coats and Cossack soldiers strolling along the esplanade. I envisioned onion-domed cupolas shining splendidly over the baroque and empire-style façades of Harbin's central boulevard, and horse-drawn carriages rattling over cobblestone and through the piles of snow along the road. But when I visited Harbin in July 2011, I did not experience the wintry Russian metropolis I had imagined. I arrived at Harbin's train station – one of the largest railway hubs in north-eastern China in a city of more than 4.4 million people – on a hot and humid summer day. As I entered the railway station and admired its grand central archway, I was bewildered and overwhelmed by the masses of laughing, crying and shouting people. Caught up in the hustle and bustle of people, I made my way out onto the station square where hundreds of people were squatting, standing and waiting for their trains to arrive.

When I strolled down Zhongyang Street<sup>1</sup> in Harbin's central business district, suddenly the red-brick spires and green domes of St. Sophia Church rose up over the buzzing

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<sup>1</sup> Zhongyang Dajie (Chinese: 中央大街) is the central pedestrian street of the Daolin district.

city streets. Several of Harbin's former Russian Orthodox churches have been restored; some of the sumptuous merchant houses were refurbished and their art-deco facades shined in new splendour.<sup>2</sup> Walking eastwards I stopped at the corner of Liaoyang and Huayuan Street,<sup>3</sup> where I found myself surrounded by building blocks, scaffolded and wrapped in safety nets. My interviewees had told me that further down the street the Old Believers of Harbin had once built a church, consecrated to the Apostles Peter and Paul, and I hoped to catch a glimpse of its onion-domed cupolas.<sup>4</sup>

But I only found a pastel-coloured seven-story apartment block. Instead of icons and crosses, there were advertising signs and washing lines. Some of my interviewees had told me that it was likely that the Orthodox Old-Rite church of Harbin had been demolished – but they had not witnessed its destruction nor seen the redevelopment of the area. Although I should have realised that I was unlikely to find remnants of the church, I was disappointed. Many of Harbin's historical buildings carried commemorative plaques that draw attention to their Russian heritage, but there was no official reminder of the church I had been looking for. Had I been tricked by my visions of Harbin and my hopes to find a sign of the Old Believers' former existence in the city only to realise that they were, at the end, just illusions?

Some of my interviewees had described similar feelings of sorrow and grief when they

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<sup>2</sup> The Church of St. Sophia was restored and reopened as Harbin's Architectural Museum in 1997. The Russian heritage of Harbin has been officially commemorated by local Chinese authorities since the mid-1990s, after decades of neglect and attempts to distance today's Harbin from its Russian and multicultural past. According to James Carter, the renovation of St. Sophia may herald a resurgence of regionalism, and could be seen as Harbin's attempt to develop as a domestic and international tourist centre in northeast China. (James Carter, "A Tale of Two Temples: Nation, Region, and Religious Architecture in Harbin, 1928–1998," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 99, No. 1 (2000), 98, 112).

<sup>3</sup> The corner of Liaoyang (辽阳) and Huayuan (花园) Street is located in Harbin's Nangang district.

<sup>4</sup> The church was consecrated in 1925. Archpriest Ioann Kudrin and priest Artemii Solov'ev served the Old Believer community in Harbin under the direction of the Bishop for the Irkusk-Amur Region and the Far East, Iosif (Antipina). In 1929 a second Old Believer church was consecrated under the Assumption of the Most Holy Godmother Mary, where priest Ioann Shadrin and priest Ioann Starosadchev did their service. (M. B. Serdiuk, "Staroobriadcheskoe Dukhovenstvo v Kharbine [The Old Ritualists' Priesthood in Harbin]," in *Gody, Liudi, Sud'by: Istoriia Rossiiskoi Emigratsii v Kitae [Years, People, Fate: The History of the Russian Emigration in China]*, ed. V. I. Ivanov, E. P. Kirillova and G. V. Melikhov (Moscow: IRI RAN, 1998), 67–68).

visited the places in China, where they had once lived. Often they were disappointed, sometimes angry, that places had changed dramatically after their emigration to Australia. My travels to the Old Believers former settlement in China were to reveal a similar relation of distance and displacement: I visited Harbin decades after the majority of Russian settlers had left China, and the city did not represent itself as the “Russian” Harbin I had imagined and longed for. I had been dwelling in my interviewees’ imaginations in which they romanticised their childhood memories, and I was disappointed not to find any tangible remnant of their former settlement in Harbin. When my interviewees returned to Harbin they felt similarly disappointed, because they did not remember Harbin as a Chinese tourist destination that had undergone a rapid change during decades of population growth and industrialisation.

Comparing my travels and romanticised imagination of Harbin with the migrant memories of my interviewees, I could relate to the Old Believers’ attachment to the places of their former settlement in China and their experience of displacement. I argue that migration is a constitutive element of the Old Believers’ diaspora identity, but it is not an incommensurable or traumatic experience to which I could not relate. By putting the Old Believers’ migration experience from China in relation to other forms of movement and travel, I do not intend to essentialise migration as the ‘modern condition’<sup>5</sup>. This would turn refugees, migrants and travellers into romantic figures of the modern and postmodern world, and promote views of individual lives as being highly mobile, creolised and hybrid.<sup>6</sup> Instead, I highlight the particularities and the historical context in which the Old Believers were forced to emigrate from China, and distinguish the Old Believers’ experience of displacement and forced migration from other experiences of mobility and travel.

Memories of place have been crucial in the life stories of my interviewees. These memories provided insights into how migrants sense, perceive, experience, and remember their attachments to places and their displacement from them. In the following, I discuss how my interviewees remembered the places of their former

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<sup>5</sup> Nikos Papastergiadis, *Modernity As Exile: The Stranger in John Berger's Writing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 1; Iain Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* (London: Routledge, 1994), 27–28.

<sup>6</sup> Andrew Dawson and Mark Johnson, “Migration, Exile and Landscapes of the Imagination,” in *Contested Landscapes: Movement, Exile and Place*, ed. Barbara Bender and Margot Winer (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 320.

settlement in China, and explain how their attachment to these places relates to their experience of displacement and forced migration. What narratives and strategies shaped these memories and what frameworks did the Old Believers use to remember their lives and their emigration from China? What choices did they make when remembering their displacement and which memories were selected or omitted? And how did subsequent generations of Old Believer migrants in Australia reflect on these memories of place and displacement?

Memories of place are constituted through movement and attachment. In exploring the tension between these experiences of place – moving through and dwelling in place – I want to capture what the memory of place and displacement can tell us about the Old Believers' diaspora in Australia. I establish an understanding of memory of place which is mobile, variable and referential. As we perceive, sense and experience places in multiple ways our interpretations and memories of them are not fixed and stable. As our perception and experience of places is characterised by movement, our attachment to and memory of places is shifting and connected with various other places, times and contexts.

### **Memories of a Russian Harbin**

In the following, I reflect on the intensity and the emotions with which the Old Believers perceived, experienced, sensed and remembered their settlement and their displacement from different regions in northern China. Initially I focus on the Russian colonisation of northern China and the Old Believers' settlement in Manchuria<sup>7</sup>. Later, I include memories of Old Believers who had settled in Xinjiang<sup>8</sup>, and highlight the

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<sup>7</sup> Manchuria refers here to the historical region of northeast China (Chinese: Dongbei, 东北) which includes today's Heilongjiang, Jilin and Liaoning Provinces. My use of the term Manchuria refers to the Russian perception of the region in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>8</sup> In the early 1880s the three regions of Uighuristan, Altishahr, and Zungharia were amalgamated to form the Chinese province of Xinjiang (Chinese 新疆), today's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. Since the mid-nineteenth century Russian settlers and herders migrated to Xinjiang; many merchants settled in the Ili valley and Kulja. The October Revolution, civil war and the Soviet collectivisation plans later drove a total of 30–40,000 Russian refugees and White Russian soldiers to the region. These migrations contributed to the instabilities and ethnic tensions in the region where the Muslim nationalities revolted several times from 1932 until the Chinese Communists came to power in 1949. (James A. Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 152, 185; Bruce F. Adams, "Reemigration from Western China to the USSR, 1954–1962," in *Migration, Homeland, and Belonging in Eurasia*, ed. Cynthia J. Buckley, Blair A. Ruble and Erin Trough Hofmann

political changes and social transformations after the Communist takeover in 1949. Most Russians who had settled in Xinjiang were farmers and more likely to have suffered from the Communists' expropriation and collectivisation plans, consequently interviewees who had lived in Xinjiang remembered the deterioration of their living conditions particularly intensely. However, I do not intend to make generalising observations about a difference of settlement and living conditions in the two provinces, or to highlight a more or less severe experience of persecution, state terror and forced migration.

Many of my interviewees remembered the Russian presence in northern China as a result of Tsarist railway schemes, and the development of Harbin as a Russian stronghold in China. Pavel emphasised that this unique Russian city in northern China impressed many foreigners and visitors with its multicultural atmosphere and its variety of architectural styles.

Harbin was a very special city in the sense that it was built by the Russians around 1900. All the architecture was in an old Russian style, but it also had some Italian influences. The houses were built in a baroque style or in a style that was characteristic for Western Europe. And all the small houses looked like in Russia, very pretty and made from wood. At the time the city was meticulously planned by Russian architects, the roads all went perpendicular. There were several centres of the city: one was called *Novyi Gorod* [New Town]; the richer part was called *Pristan'* [Quay] because it was located near the river Sungari. These were the two main districts but there were also other little suburbs. And if we take them all together they formed the big city of Harbin.<sup>9</sup>

Pavel clearly established the foundation of Harbin as a Russian enterprise which dates back to the year 1898. Many historians have established that the city was founded in 1898 as a Russian outpost in China. Designated as the site for the Russian headquarters of the Trans-Manchurian railway construction project, the land was

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(Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 184–187).

<sup>9</sup> Pavel, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 28 August 2010, Sydney.

leased to the Chinese-Eastern Railway Company (CER).<sup>10</sup> The beginning of Harbin's golden years coincided with the beginning of the construction for the Trans-Siberian Railway line in Vladivostok in 1891. Engineers were searching for alternative routes because technical difficulties were expected along the originally planned line north of the Amur River.<sup>11</sup> The Chinese defeat in the Sino-Japanese War 1894/5 gave Russia the opportunity to force a railway concession through Manchuria in return for its favourable negotiations in the Treaty of Shimonoseki of 1895. A contract was signed between the Chinese government and a non-governmental subsidiary company of the Russo-Chinese Bank which stipulated the construction of a railway line through Manchuria, which was completed in 1903.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> This genesis of the city as a Russian foundation has been challenged by many Chinese historians who emphasise Harbin's pre-1898 Chinese heritage. Recently, historians have arrived at a more balanced account which includes the Chinese heritage of the city, as well as the influence of its multi-ethnic population. (Søren Clausen and Stig Thøgersen, *The Making of a Chinese City: History and Historiography in Harbin* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), 3–4; Carter, "A Tale of Two Temples" (see note 2) 110; Mark Gamsa, "Harbin in Comparative Perspective," *Urban History* 37, No. 1 (2010), 136–149).

<sup>11</sup> B. L. Putnam Weale described in 1904 how Harbin came to be the centre for the CER construction work: "Hardly six years ago, two railway engineers, mounted on Siberian ponies, ambled down to the solitary Chinese distillery on the banks of the Sungari and pitched their tents. To the west of them the Hsing-an Mountains offered such formidable engineering difficulties that railway construction and movement of materials were impossible without a base nearer than the far-away Siberian frontier. [...] So the site near the broad Sungari was chosen from whence to begin operations, for the Sungari flows calmly into the Amur a few hundred miles away to the north. Stern-wheelers could thus tug barges laden with materials from the Siberian sea-board right into the heart of Manchuria, and so lighten the construction work enormously. (B.L. Putnam Weale, *Manchu and Muscovite: Being Letters from Manchuria Written during the Autumn of 1903* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1904), 137; see also Wolff for an account of the discovery of Harbin: David Wolff, *To the Harbin Station: The Liberal Alternative in Russian Manchuria, 1898–1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 16–18.

<sup>12</sup> This contract was to circumvent Chinese objections of the railway operation to a Russian state enterprise, but the controlling shares nevertheless rested in the vaults of the Russian Finance Ministry. The contract also did not provide clear limits to the company's land acquisitions: the CER company occupied large tracts of land along the railway route over and above of what was needed for construction work. In this setup, problems emerged relating to military control, jurisdiction, and civil administration. (Wolff, *To the Harbin Station* (see note 10), 6; Clausen and Thøgersen, *Making of a Chinese City* (see note 10), 24, 26). David Wolff argues that the Russian colonisation plans directly connected with their railway construction project in northern China. He points out that the Tsarist colonisation plan was either associated with the army's calls for a "traditional Russian" colonisation by Cossacks and soldiers, or with the

In 1903 the Minister of Finance, Sergei Julevich Witte, drafted a proclamation that would liberate Russian settlers in northern China from persecution on religious grounds:

Now, in consideration of services in settling the State's borders performed by Old Believers and the followers of several other faiths, as well as their steadfastness in preserving their Russian nationality in foreign surroundings, We, ever-graciously (*vsemilostiveishe*) [translation Wolff], grant the same rights, both civil and religious, enjoyed by Our Orthodox subjects to those [sectarians, comment Wolff] migrating in accordance with the rules for land along the CER [...].<sup>13</sup>

This declaration allowed Old Believers to build chapels, churches and monasteries distinctive of their religious creed. The public wearing of clerical vestments was permitted throughout Manchuria, and children could be educated in schools established by their religious community.<sup>14</sup> The Tsarist colonisation and settlement policy places the Old Believers' early migration to northern China within the context of the CER railway construction. Taking into account this historical context, the migrant memories of my interviewees show how the Old Believers perceived and remembered the Russian settlement and colonisation of Manchuria, the economic growth and the Russian influence in the region.

Many of my interviewees remembered Harbin with romanticising undertones, as a refuge for many Russian exiles and expatriates, as a tolerant and cosmopolitan city with a diverse community of cultures and ethnicities.<sup>15</sup> They remembered Harbin as

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government's aim to attract settlers and religious minorities with promises of religious tolerance and land ownership. (Wolff, *To the Harbin Station* (see note 10), 78–114).

<sup>13</sup> RGIA (Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskii Arkhiv), fond 560, opis' 28, delo 164, ll. 194–204, quoted in Wolff, *To the Harbin Station*, 88.

<sup>14</sup> Wolff, *To the Harbin Station* (see note 10), 88.

<sup>15</sup> Several memoirs and autobiographies of former Russian residents of Harbin have been published since the 1980s which often describe the city in a similar idealising and romanticising tone; see: G. V. Melikhov, *Man'chzhuriia Dalekaia i Blizkaia [Manchuria Far Away and Near By]* (Moscow: Nauka, 1991); Viktor Petrov, *Gorod na Sungari [The Town on the Sungari]* (Washington: Izdanie Russko-Amerikanskogo Istoricheskogo Obshchestva, 1984); O. Sofonova, *Puti Nevedomye: Rossiia (Sibir', Zabaikal'e), Kitai, Filippiny: 1916–1949 [Unknown Tracks:*

providing a welcoming environment for reputable intellectuals and talented artists, and a favourable terrain for engineers, merchants and all kinds of venturers.<sup>16</sup> Pavel told me with pride that he was born in Harbin, and described the city's unique multicultural atmosphere.

The city was cosmopolitan and international. There was everything, eighteen different embassies and consulates from every country: of course, all the major European countries, but also from Asia, from all around the world! And all the consulates had beautiful mansions where their citizens could get visas and information.<sup>17</sup>

Pavel had left China in 1961 when he was a young man, but he still remembered vividly the "Russian" origins of his birthplace. "We lived in Harbin," he said smilingly, "and there were good years, and some years which were not so good. But when there were good years, no one wanted to leave China, because it was a good [living]. Not far from Russia, one would say, our roots weren't too far." Although Pavel stressed Harbin's multicultural and cosmopolitan atmosphere, he acknowledged the efforts of his Russian compatriots who built a distinctly Russian city in northern China.

[The Russians in Harbin] were useful for China thanks to the Harbin Polytechnic Institute. There was also a music school, a medical and veterinary school. These [institutions] were already established in the nineteen hundreds. Their development continued, and the country could benefit from [the Russian] settlers. They built big factories: a sugar factory and several factories that processed soybeans – they require a special method of processing. The

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*Russia (Siberia, Zabaikal), China, the Philippines]* (Homebush West: O. Sofonova, 1980); Elena Taskina, *Neizvestnyi Harbin [Unknown Harbin]* (Moscow: Prometei, 1994).

<sup>16</sup> The Russian population of Harbin (Chinese: *Ha'erbin* 哈尔滨) refers to the *Rossiiane* (Russians) in a territorial sense and not as an ethno-cultural nationality. Therefore it includes subjects of the former Russian Empire, be they ethnic Russians (*Russkie*) or members of other ethnicities. I will not use the Russian designation of the Harbin residents as *Kharbintsy* which might imply a nationalist exclusion of the city's Chinese population or other nationalities. (Olga Bakich, "Émigré Identity: The Case of Harbin," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 99, No. 1 (2000), 51–73, 51; Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 142).

<sup>17</sup> Pavel, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 28 August 2010, Sydney.



Russians gained the respect of the Chinese people. Of course, they saw that their country would profit from these [Russian] people. [...]

At that time China was still a bit backwards. But there were a lot of Russian doctors and Russian academics, because they all arrived after the [October] revolution in China. They came to China and quickly built a university, and a medical and dental school, different music schools. They actually appealed to the Chinese who saw that they could gain knowledge from the Russian people. At that time the population of Harbin was very highly educated!<sup>18</sup>

Pavel emphasised that the Russians in Harbin and Manchuria contributed significantly to the positive development of the region: the economic growth of China, Harbin's international reputation as a railway hub, its vibrant arts scene and high education standard. Pavel also (re)constructed a certain representation of Harbin as a distinctly Russian city. This representation gives insight into historical claims that the Old Believers made about the ethnic origins of their diaspora in China.

Many of my interviewees remembered Harbin as a refuge, for the White Russian Army, the Old Believers and other ethnic, religious and political groups which often had a troubled past marked by state persecution and violence. Harbin's population in the early twentieth century is hard to estimate as the number of its inhabitants constantly changed under the influence of large migrant flows. The census of 1913 recorded that the city's population of more than 68,000 people was comprised of numerous ethnicities, languages, and creeds,<sup>19</sup> which included Russians (34,000), Chinese (23,000), and Poles (2,500). Later, while Russia was plunged into the October Revolution, civil war and the First World War, Harbin was flooded with hundreds of thousands of refugees, including officers and soldiers of the different White Russian Armies.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Pavel, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 28 August 2012, Sydney.

<sup>19</sup> Elena Chernolutskaia describes some of these religious and ethnic communities, but does not mention the Old Believers or the Russian Orthodox Community in Harbin in particular. (Elena Chernolutskaia, "Religious Communities in Harbin and Ethnic Identity of Russian Emigrés," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 99, No. 1 (2000), 79–96).

<sup>20</sup> Bakich, "Émigré Identity" (see note 16), 53, 56. Scholars disagree about the size of Harbin's (Russian) population: Olga Bakich's and David Wolff's numbers both refer to the census of 1913

### Places of Departure and Origin

Characterising the Russian community in Manchuria as a group of industrious and diligent settlers was a common thread in the memories and stories I was told about Harbin. My interviewees described the Russian settlers as persistent and sturdy in their effort to develop the backward territories of northern China. Because of this, the Russian people were respected by the local Chinese population, their neighbours and friends. I was also told that the Old Believers integrated well into the multicultural society of Harbin and other Russian settlements in northern China. Many of my interviewees learnt to speak Chinese and had business partners, work mates and neighbours of non-Russian descent. Vlas highlighted the friendly relations between the local Chinese people and the Russian settlers:

The Chinese are very amicable if you treat them well. When they promise something, they do it. They never offend a person, if you don't offend them. Although, if you harm someone [a Chinese person] and he can't put you to shame for it, his grandchild and great-grandchild will [take revenge] instead. They never forget! But if you treat them well, then you live comfortably next to them. When you go to visit them they ask you straight away: *Che fan ma?* It's always: *Che fan ma?* They ask if you have eaten yet.<sup>21</sup>

Vlas remembered the harmonious relationship between the Russian settlers and the local Chinese population which was based on mutual support and respect. Fyodor also remembered that: "The Chinese were really good, they treated everybody really nicely". The Chinese and the Russians would help each other in times of hardship. Fyodor's father was a hunter who would barter with the Chinese in times of food shortages. "When times were extremely hard – we never had any rice, no wheat – we knew the

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but vary slightly (Wolff, *To the Harbin Station* (see note 10), 92). John J. Stephan estimated that the Russian population of Harbin grew from 34,200 in 1916 to 120,000 in 1922, and dropped again to 55,000 in 1932. John Hope Simpson estimated the size of the Russian refugee population in Xinjiang, Manchuria and China proper. He concluded that the total number of Russian refugees in the Far East in 1934 was between 130,000 and 160,000. (John J. Stephan, *The Russian Fascists: Tragedy and Farce in Exile, 1925–1945* (London: H. Hamilton, 1978), 37; John Hope Simpson, *The Refugee Problem: Report of a Survey* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), 80, 496–499).

<sup>21</sup> Vlas, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 6 January 2011, Gympie.

Chinese would provide that for us. We gave them meat and exchanged that for other products. [...] We were bartering, and everybody was happy.”<sup>22</sup> Vlas and Fyodor emphasised the warm welcome the newcomers received, and the mutual support which existed between the different ethnicities and nationalities living in northern China.

Dimitrii, however, described the Russians’ relation with the local Chinese population in terms of economic and cultural dominance and superiority. He remembered:

With the Chinese it wasn’t hard. The Russians felt like their masters because the Chinese worked for them. They even learnt the Russian language, so we didn’t need to learn Chinese. In the villages they just did business in their little shops. [...] we didn’t have a bad relationship with them at all. And we didn’t feel any kind of repression.<sup>23</sup>

Many of my interviewees stressed the “Russianness” of Harbin and other settlements in northern China. They emphasised the dominant Russian influence on the culture, social institutions and economic system in Manchuria. Historical events that might have threatened their claim of a shared Russian origin and belonging were not mentioned in my interviewees’ stories of their life in northern China. Tensions between revolutionary and counterrevolutionary Russian forces in Harbin did not feature in my interviewees’ narratives of a harmonious Russian émigré community. However, the joint Sino-Soviet management of the CER led to a strong Soviet presence in Harbin and to deteriorating living conditions for many White Russian settlers in China.<sup>24</sup> The difficult situation of many Russian refugees who became stateless after the establishment of the Soviet Union was unmentioned. Political conflicts fought between Russia, China and Japan over the control in northern China before the Second World War also played a marginal role in the Old Believers’ memories, as did the rivalry between the different warlords of northern Manchuria.

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<sup>22</sup> Fyodor, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 3 January 2011, Brisbane.

<sup>23</sup> Dimitii (name changed), interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 2010, Sydney.

<sup>24</sup> In September 1920 the Chinese Republic announced that it no longer recognised the Russian Diplomatic Mission in China and ceased its relations with representatives of the Tsarist Empire. The Sino-Soviet agreements, signed in 1924, marked the takeover of the CER by joint Sino-Soviet management, and stipulated that only Soviet and Chinese citizens could be employed by the CER. (Bakich, “Émigré Identity” (see note 16), 56–57).

These social conflicts and political changes might not have been remembered because they did not affect the Old Believers' daily lives. Most of my interviewees had left China when they were children or teenagers. Their memories often conveyed idealised notions of living in a harmonious Russian dominated society and did not relate to complex causes and effects of imperial struggle and political conflict. Some memories were selected and retold because they were more significant than others. The Old Believers' memories of a distinctly Russian Harbin established a thread of continuity and belonging which linked the Old Believers to the Russian origins of their settlement in China. These memories supported claims about the Old Believers' shared history and identity as members of a Russian migrant community. Storylines which would elaborate on a 'Chinese Harbin' or the divide between the Soviet and the White Russian settlers would have weakened these claims about a common Russian culture and heritage.

Aleksey had recently moved from Yarwun to Gympie. He still had to fix things around his new house. Some books, kitchenware and clothes were still stored in his shed. As I walked up the driveway Aleksey greeted me from his courtyard and smiled. It was a hot and humid day; and Aleksey was barefoot, wearing shorts and a checked green shirt. "You can see I am not dressed in a long shirt: it's just too hot! In Bolivia people still wear that [a traditional Russian long sleeve shirt]. We dress like that in church, then we wear the *rubashka*, but the rest of the time we try to dress as comfortable as possible."<sup>25</sup> Aleksey looked down at his clothes, and chuckled as we walked into the kitchen where a little golden icon hung on the freshly painted wall above the microwave.

Aleksey would have liked to show me some of the pictures and articles he had found online about the Old Believers migration from Siberia to China. His computer and documents were, however, still packed away in some boxes. Aleksey told me that he had researched his family history and found out that his great-great-grandfather had lived in the Volga region in the 1800s. He did not remember how his family ended up in Siberia, but assumed that the Old Believer communities just scattered: "people started moving to the border, away from the main church in Moscow." Aleksey explained that since the Old Believers split from the Russian Orthodox Church they were forced to migrate to the peripheries of the Tsarist Empire.

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<sup>25</sup> Aleksey, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 10 January 2011, Gympie.

There was a bunch that moved down to Turkey, a few families. [...] We call them *Turchany*, because they came from Turkey. We came from near Harbin, so we call ourselves *Kharbintsy*. And there are others, they came from the Altai area, they we call *Tsintsiantsy*.<sup>26</sup>

Aleksey said that he was himself surprised about the many different migration movements the Old Believers underwent.

I didn't know there were so many different types of starovery [Old Believers]. When we came to Australia we thought there were just us. Then suddenly we found some Tsintsiantsy here. [...] The thing with the Turchany was that they spoke a little bit differently. They probably came from the southern part of Russia, whereas we sort of came from the Eastern part. We went that way, another bunch went southeast. Some went west, but we don't know them. The ones who went west – the ones in Poland, we don't even know anything about them and probably have nothing to do with them. There is a bunch that went up to Estonia, but we also don't know anything about them.<sup>27</sup>

Aleksey laughed about himself not knowing about the many different migration movements that formed the Old Believers' global diaspora. Aleksey joked that the Old Believers are "like gypsies! They want to move, don't want to stay! They've got itchy feet!"<sup>28</sup>

Aleksey's joke about the Old Believers' "itchy feet" was likely to refer to their history as colonisers and settlers in the remote areas and peripheries of the Tsarist Empire during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Some historians have also put emphasis on this aspect of the Old Believer movement after the schism. With such a view, the Old Believers are admired as steadfast colonisers in the remote areas of Siberia and central Asia; they are also seen as keepers of an original Russian culture on the borders of the Russian Empire. Their religion was stylised to a manifestation of

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<sup>26</sup> Aleksey, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 10 January 2011, Gympie.

<sup>27</sup> Aleksey, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 10 January 2011, Gympie.

<sup>28</sup> Aleksey, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 10 January 2011, Gympie.

traditional Russian Christianity.<sup>29</sup>

Some newspaper articles and political reports have discussed the Old Believers' emigration from China in similar terms: their migratory movement was seen as a cultural trait of their religious community rather than as the result of displacement and forced migration. In 1965 the *China Mail* describes the Old Believers as a religious sect that showed a general tendency to leave their settlements as soon as state forces begin to interfere with their religious practices and traditional lifestyle. With the Old Believers' strong opposition against communist collectivisation plans, their community reacted swiftly with emigration and flight. Therefore, the Old Believers had fled the Soviet Union:

Stubbornly clinging on to their belief, they packed up and left, moving into nearby Sinkiang, then under the Nationalist Chinese rule. In Sinkiang they bought land around Yi-ning<sup>30</sup>, transplanting intact the way of life they had been forced to abandon in their native land. When China began its "Great Leap Forward" in 1958, it was already an old familiar act for the little community. The Old Believers snorted at Government attempt to herd them into the people's communes. They surrendered their land, packed up again, and together moved into the Yi-ning township to await a long transcontinental journey in search of the freedom to be different.<sup>31</sup>

The article described their migrant movement as "an old familiar act for the little community". The Old Believers were characterised as a religious community that sought religious freedom by means of migration and flight, disregarding any attachments to territory or a nation state. Aleksey reiterated this understanding of a globally dispersed Old Believer diaspora as not entirely due to displacement and forced migration. Many communities showed a recurring internal dynamic which prompted their migration. Aleksey mentioned the multiple split-ups and migrations that had scattered Old Believer communities across North and South America in the second half

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<sup>29</sup> Elena Hellberg-Hirn, *Soil and Soul: The Symbolic World of Russianness* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 92; Robin Milner-Gulland, *The Russians* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 122–123, 125–126.

<sup>30</sup> Yin-ning (Chinese: 伊宁) refers to the city of Kulja in the western Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region.

<sup>31</sup> Edward Wu, "Compromise found for Russian Refugees," *China Mail*, 20 March 1965.

of the twentieth century.

A lot of families that had left [China] to go overseas, they just should have gone back to Russia, really. [...] We thought we are trying to keep the religion. As we moved over to stay in South America or North America or Australia or wherever, you suddenly know that has been a big mistake. Originally everyone was supposed to go to South America. That was the plan, to live in communities there. But that sort of didn't work out. Some families just don't mix with other families. [...] Then some families moved over to Oregon, from there they started scattering again, to Alaska, Canada, Alberta, Montana and Minnesota, there are a few families there.<sup>32</sup>

Aleksey interpreted the most recent migratory movements and split-ups of Old Believer communities across the Americas less as the result of forced migration than of internal disputes and rivalries in these communities, as well as the prospect of more beneficial settlement options. He distinguished between the various migrations that the Old Believers underwent during the twentieth century. Forcefully displaced from the Tsarist Empire, the Soviet Union and Communist China, the Old Believers' motivation was to keep their religion and to re-establish their community. Later, migratory movements were not anymore a result of persecution but, instead, caused by a process of fragmentation within some communities. In Alaska an Old Believer settlement recently split up because parts of the community converted to the Belokrinitsa hierarchy.<sup>33</sup>

The Old Believers' claims of origin, of ethnic and national belonging, have to be read against the backdrop of a series of migrations and exiles which could potentially question the cultural and religious origins of their community. While the Old Believers claimed and emphasised the continuity and authenticity of their Russian Orthodox tradition and cultural heritage, contested views about their original place of belonging (their imaginary Russian homeland) and the reasons for leaving their homeland could threaten these claims. The experience of exile can call into question cultural authenticity, destabilise fixed notions of a shared history and disrupt linear narratives of

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<sup>32</sup> Aleksey, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 10 January 2011, Gympie.

<sup>33</sup> For a recent study on the schism of the Nikolaevsk Old Believer community in Alaska, and the tensions between the North American Old Believer communities see: Amber Lee Silva, "Unsettling Diaspora: the Old Believers of Alaska," (Master Thesis, McGill University, 2009).

place and time.<sup>34</sup> The genesis of an Old Believer diaspora might become precarious after centuries of recurring displacements, escapes and migrations. References to an ancestral Russian origin may appear irrelevant for those Old Believers who were already born in China or Australia. In the context of global dispersal and multiple migrations, the shared history of displacement might become even more important for the Old Believer diaspora in Australia than their memory and imagination of a specific territorial origin. Identity formations in the Old Believer diaspora rely on memories that create and stabilise the Old Believers' cultural ties and religious traditions. These memories guarantee the continuity of their 'Russian' community across time and place.

Shared memories become a key factor in the identity formation of migrant communities which do not relate directly to an ancestral homeland or a place from where their community was originally expelled. Anne-Marie Fortier writes: "Indeed, memory becomes a primary ground of identity formation in the context of migration, where 'territory' is decentred and exploded into multiple settings."<sup>35</sup> Fortier argues that a migrant community creates a sense of "we" from a number of claims that do not necessarily stand in a straightforward and harmonious relation to each other. She emphasises that claims of belonging are not to create a finalised and uniform migrant identity or convey a sense of coherence.<sup>36</sup> The shared memory of a diaspora community spins a "thread of continuity"<sup>37</sup> that might not have any connection with origins bound to territory and place.

Fortier's idea is illuminating for the formation of an Old Believers' diaspora identity because it highlights the social practice of memory, its continuous process of remembering and forgetting. In this process my interviewees continuously articulated and shaped the history of their multiple migrant movements that constitute their diaspora. Fortier's argument is problematic however in that she focuses largely on institutional practices such as political debates and commemorative ceremonies. She disregards the accounts of individual migrant experiences which perform the enduring presence of a shared migrant memory and form cultural and historical belongings.

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<sup>34</sup> Dawson and Johnson, "Migration, Exile and Landscapes of the Imagination" (see note 6), 319.

<sup>35</sup> Anne-Marie Fortier, *Migrant Belongings: Memory, Space, Identity* (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 157.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.



Fortier's ambiguous notion of memory might also work as an alternative "ground" of identity which still echoes the territorial logic that she was criticising. The thread of continuity cannot be understood as a solid and retraceable connection with the past or a lost origin. Its continuity is performative and consists of a chain of memory acts which constantly rework and reinvent the content of what is to be remembered and forgotten.<sup>38</sup>

### **Spatial Stories – a Walk through Harbin**

The memories of a Russian Harbin were often nostalgic and idealised. Many of my interviewees indulged in happy childhood memories and cherished the tolerance and harmony of the cosmopolitan metropolis. Their memories of Harbin were filled with interpretations of what dwelling in this place meant and what significance it had for its inhabitants.

John was singing in the choir of the Orthodox Old-Rite church in Lidcombe. Every time I stepped out of church after a long service, he greeted me with a friendly "*c prasnikom*" – happy holiday – after which he would often offer me a lift back to the city centre. On our way John spoke about his family, about some Russian movies he wanted to see and sometimes he joked about the Russian community in Sydney. Although John put me in touch with some of my interviewees in Sydney, he was reluctant to give me an interview himself. He thought that he could not remember much about Harbin or his family living in China. John had migrated to Australia in 1957, when he was about 10 years old. One day John invited me to see a Russian movie – Pavel Lungin's film *Tsar* about Ivan IV. As we were waiting in a little café for the movie to start, John finally talked to me about his life back in Harbin. He remembered that his family lived next to the Church of the Apostles Peter and Paul where his grandfather Ioann Koudrin served as a priest.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Marie-Aude Baronian, Stephan Besser and Yolande Jansen, introduction to *Diaspora and Memory: Figures of Displacement in Contemporary Literature, Arts and Politics*, ed. Marie-Aude Baronian, Stephan Besser and Yolande Jansen (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 12, 15.

<sup>39</sup> There were two Old Believer churches in Harbin: the church of the Assumption of the Most Holy Godmother Mary (built in 1929) and the church of the Holy Supreme Apostles Peter and Paul (built in 1924). The latter was served by archpriest Ioann Gavriilovich Kudrin who had left Russia together with the White Army after the outbreak of the civil war, and migrated to China in 1922. In Harbin he served the Old Believer parish, until he left China in 1957 and moved to Australia in 1958. (I. G. Kudrin, *Zhizneopisanie Sviashchennika i Ottsa Semeistva*, [*The Biography of a Priest and Family Father*] (Barnaul: Fonda podderzhki stroitel'stva khrama

We lived in a part of town where people could keep cows. We had six or eight cows, two horses, geese and ducks. [...] To be self-sufficient we had cows for milk, chicken and geese for eggs. I remember that I was terrified of our big wild turkey which was always chasing the kids around the place. It was possibly protecting its property, I guess. When we were little kids it looked very big, like an awesome big dragon.<sup>40</sup>

John remembered his childhood days playing with his friends: “We used to climb up on a roof. Of course, our parents didn’t approve of that, because we could have fallen off or done something horrible.” John furrowed his brow wondering why they would have climbed onto this roof. “Now it’s all coming back,” he said, “we used to climb up there because people used to hang up salted meat which was supposed to dry there. That used to be very tasty and we got into trouble for nibbling at it.”<sup>41</sup> John drifted further into the memories of his childhood, of playing with his friends and running through the streets of Harbin.

We used to make up some sort of war games and pretended there was a fighter plane up on the roof and attacking the dam. That was probably because we used to read these kinds of books after World War II. That had an impression on us as kids. [...] I remember that we had lots of fruit trees and we used to climb up there and pinch fruit. [...] We used to have cherries and *cheremukha* [birch cherries] – I forgot the name in English – it’s a tree and it’s got black berries. Very tasty! Your tongue gets all black and if you eat too much of them you get very sick. We had raspberries, and I remember my grandmother used to grow big tomatoes. We were not supposed to be there [in my grandmother’s garden], but sometimes we sneaked in. [...]

We did help and were organised to water the plants and the vegetables, we used to carry water in watering cans. There were no such things like watering hoses, so even the little kids – seven, eight, nine – were carrying water. We

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Pokrova Presvlatyia Bogoroditsy Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Staroobriadcheskoi Tserkvi, 2006) 9, 152, 220, 232–235, 257–262).

<sup>40</sup> John, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 28 August 2010, Sydney.

<sup>41</sup> John, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 28 August 2010, Sydney.

were encouraged to have our own little part of the vegetable patch which was allocated to the kids. We had to grow cucumbers and I remember helping to plant them. Grandmother was in charge, she showed us how to soak the seed and plant it the right way up.<sup>42</sup>

It seemed that John's memory of Harbin was triggered by his grandmother's garden and other places he used to explore with his friends. During our interview his memories became more vivid; he made new connections and re-discovered previously lost tracks. John remembered more and more of the smells and tastes, the streets and buildings of Harbin while we were talking. I felt as if he had taken me by the hand and we were walking – in our imagination – through the roads of the city, peering over the garden fence to look out for his grandmother. John's memories of Harbin did not just describe a surrounding environment, the trees and the garden. Instead, by walking and exploring these places in time and space, John's stories explained how these places related to his life, his friends and family. This practice of walking the streets of Harbin, as well as remembering and telling stories about it, revealed how my interviewees perceived, experienced and remembered places in movement.

John's description of Harbin was not mere designation; it also defined, distributed and performed meaning. Michel de Certeau writes that stories "traverse and organise places; they select and link them together; they make sentences and itineraries out of them. They are spatial trajectories."<sup>43</sup> A story about Harbin might explore the city itself and at the same time create a new one. Such spatial stories even have the potential to transcend certain limits, to add features of past events and include future visions.<sup>44</sup> De Certeau has made a useful distinction between place as location and space as relational. This distinction clarifies our idea of a spatial story which connects in multiple ways with the perception, experience and memory of a place. De Certeau's definition is also helpful for discussing the contrasting notions of stability and movement that shape discourses about migrant memories and identities. That is not to say, however, that space as interaction and place as enclosure are incompatible. Places are like space formed by social processes and interrelations; the meanings and identities we attach to

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<sup>42</sup> John, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 28 August 2010, Sydney.

<sup>43</sup> Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 115.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 115, 123.

a certain place are in the same ways unfixed and changing. Whereas social space represents a construct of social processes and interactions, a place is best thought of as a particular part and moment in the network of those social relations.<sup>45</sup>

De Certeau defines place as an instantaneous configuration of positions which implies stability. A certain place, for example a street, is transformed into space by people walking it. Space involves action, practice and movement; it exists “when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities and time variables. Thus space is composed of intersections of mobile elements.”<sup>46</sup> Space is actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. People can reorganise spatial possibilities as they are walking the streets of a city, wandering, crossing and taking detours. De Certeau argues for a concept of spatiality that is not confined to the inert and fixed, but contains vectors and velocities: “*space is a practised place.*”<sup>47</sup>

With De Certeau’s concept of space in mind, Harbin serves as a symbolic anchor for my exploration of how the Old Believers’ memories related to notions of movement, displacement and attachment to place. A journey through the city of Harbin can be seen as a walk through a labyrinth that continuously creates itself anew: “Memory and the city both constitute labyrinthine figures, without beginning or end,” writes Graham Gilloch. “The dense networks of streets and alley-ways are like the knotted, intertwined threads of memory. The open spaces of the urban environment are like the voids and blanks of forgotten things. Lost times are like overlooked places.”<sup>48</sup>

As my conversation with John about the weather in Harbin continued, I realised that he did not just describe the city out of time and context. “Summer wasn’t that hot in Harbin, you might have a few hot days but the rest of the time it was pretty cool.” John’s memories of summer in Harbin suddenly made him think: “Winter was fantastic! We even had skis!” John smiled whimsically, “and we did stupid things. You know what

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<sup>45</sup> Doreen Massey, “Double Articulation: A Place in the World,” in *Displacements: Cultural Identities in Question*, ed. Angelika Bammer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 114–115.

<sup>46</sup> De Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life* (see note 43), 117.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>48</sup> Graeme Gilloch, *Myth and Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), 67–68.

happens when you touch a steel object with your tongue when it's very cold outside?" Your tongue freezes to the object, I guessed. "We did that once or twice," John said nodding. Occasionally your tongue would "become very sore and you take off a large part of your skin. And if your parents found out, you were in trouble. That was fun, I suppose." John's father had a leather business, producing coats, shoes and fur hats. In winter the kids would walk to school, John remembered, "in the country snow. Because Dad was into leather we used to have leather *sapogi*<sup>49</sup>, long boots and you had to put a special cover underneath. So, when you walked along the ground your feet didn't get cold."<sup>50</sup>

John's memories of winter in Harbin suddenly related to another space and time, to his arrival in Australia where he did not experience such severe winter conditions anymore. "When we came to Australia it was like a permanent summer,"<sup>51</sup> said John who lives in Sydney where the temperature never drops below zero. When John's family came to Australia they bought a refrigerator straight away. Back in China, however, food was preserved and stored in a *pogreb*, a basic cellar underneath the house, or a shed, which was often built from wood logs.

In wintertime they used to buy ice. People used to bring ice blocks of half a square meter. They used to cut it from the river and deliver it and put some ramps down and just slide it down into a hole in the ground. That made a very good refrigerator! Eventually all the ice would melt in summer, but it would stay cool for a few weeks. In wintertime, of course, you don't have to do that, you just put it [your food] outside. When you put milk outside you got instant ice cream, it became solid very quickly. No, actually not outside, you put it in [an anteroom] which is called a *chulan*. It's not like in Australia where you open the door and you walk straight outside. There you went outside into an anteroom which worked like an airlock. So when you opened the door you opened the door into this room, and then you closed the door [of the anteroom] and went outside. Otherwise you would get minus twenty degrees inside the house very quickly.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> *Sapogi* are traditional winter felt boots with a special covering for the shins.

<sup>50</sup> John, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 28 August 2010, Sydney.

<sup>51</sup> John, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 28 August 2010, Sydney.

<sup>52</sup> John, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 28 August 2010, Sydney.

John's memories of his life back in China were not necessarily told in chronological order, or fixed to a certain outline or place. Instead his memories related to different people, various places, multiple times and contexts. John's memories were placed, but they also connected with other places, times and subjects. These memories of place created a network of connections, or what Gille Deleuze and Félix Guattari have called a rhizome. Derived from biology the concept of rhizome describes a network of roots in which any point may be connected to any other point. Whereas trees or roots establish fixed points and orders, a rhizome ceaselessly expands and constantly changes, establishing new connections and breaking old ones. Deleuze and Guattari describe the rhizome – in opposition to centred systems – as an open-ended network that is non-hierarchical and defined by movement and circulation.<sup>53</sup>

Whereas Deluze and Guattari reject the idea of fixed points and origins in the constitution of territory, they argue for movement and change as the guiding principles for our understanding of place. The Old Believers' memory and attachment to the places of their former settlement in China can also be described as such a network of nodes and connections. Harbin appeared in John's memory as a changing and entangled network of (dis-)connections and layers that expanded over the local Russian community in China and related to his present settlement in Australia. His memories of Harbin did not build an independent or separate network of memories; these memories of place were connected with various times and places in China, in Australia and Russia. Therefore, movement is not only characteristic for the experience of displacement and migration, but also constitutive of every form of memory: individual memories, trans-generational memories that circulate within a family, and the cultural and religious memory that is shared by a diaspora community.<sup>54</sup>

David Atkinson has pointed out that social memory is never fixed or bounded exclusively within particular sites; it is constantly reconstructed and changing. Atkinson argues that we have to acknowledge a more dynamic approach and a continuously productive process of memory that is concerned with space and place. He points out

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<sup>53</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism & Schizophrenia* (1988; repr., London: Continuum, 2004), 5–7, 21.

<sup>54</sup> Baronian, Besser, and Jansen, introduction to *Diaspora and Memory* (see note 38), 12.

that memory of place is characterised by discontinuities, overlaps, and simultaneity.<sup>55</sup> There is, however, a pitfall in this theorisation of memory and human interaction with place as it focuses merely on movement, change and fluidity. People's engagement and perception of place is not purely unattached and mobile. Thus, our memory of place is often guided by movement through certain places; but at the same time it is guided by our emotional attachment to these places, by the sensual perception and bodily experience of our dwellings and settlements. In the following I seek to integrate and interpret the multiple, contested and dispersed relations that my interviewees have with the places of their former settlements in China. In this way we might overcome the dichotomy of either pluralising the migrant experience by concentrating on its different forms of movement and travel; or essentialising the migrant experience to 'the modern condition' of our present world. At the same time we have to challenge concepts of migrant memories which are marked either by fluidity and movement or by attachment and fixed sites of memory.

### **Memories of the Old Believers' Diaspora in China**

My interviewees sensed, perceived, remembered and bonded differently with certain places of their former settlement in China. Some remembered the central market place of the village where they lived or the wooden houses of their families and friends. Churches were often remembered as the centre of the Old Believers' religious lives and daily practices. Victor Petrov, a former resident of Harbin, describes in his memoirs the city as a place where people still lived and worshipped "in the old Russian way".

As in old Russia, the deep solemn tones of the cathedral bell called the congregation to early morning service, and in the evening people crossed themselves as once more its measured tolling summoned them to Mass. And Easter, when the cathedral bells rang out disordered peals all day, was a time of legitimate delight for the boys – the one day in the year when they could climb into the bell-tower and ring the bells to their heart's delight.<sup>56</sup>

The solemn time of the Easter celebrations was also what Pavel remembered most vividly, especially because this was a very exciting time for him as a child. "People

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<sup>55</sup> David Atkinson, "Kitsch Geographies and the Everyday Spaces of Social Memory," *Environment and Planning A* 39, (2007), 523.

<sup>56</sup> Viktor Petrov, "The Town on the Sungari," in *The Other Russia*, ed. Norman Stone and Michael Glenny (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), 208.

made eggs out of wood for the kids and painted them. And when it was Easter time, every boy and girl wanted to have something called *gorka*," a little slide from which the kids would roll the painted wooden eggs. Pavel hinted at the height of the little slide and pointed with his hand above his knee:

You put the egg on top [of the slide] and it rolls down, and then you paint a line and look which one rolled the furthest. This was of course a present that was then packed away until next year. [...] You already knew if you got it for Easter, you had to be very careful with these things, especially because they were better than the usual presents.<sup>57</sup>

Pavel and I were sitting on a wooden bench at the back of the Orthodox Old-Rite Church in Lidcombe, protected from a strong August winter wind. He pointed to the copulas and showed me where the church bells were hanging. Pavel remembered that as a child he used to climb up the belltowers of the many Orthodox churches in Harbin. It was only during Easter that the children were allowed to watch the bellringer and listen to his play.

Normally there are three, or seven, or thirteen bells, small and big ones. When you went and climbed up the belltower, there was one person playing the bells. Actually, he operates them, with his hands and feet, all at the same time. He gets them to play music and they sound very beautiful. We would just sit there and listen. [...] Our church didn't have a belltower, but the other Orthodox Churches [and parishes] were rich. They had built big, nice churches. We would go to one church and listen; another one would sound different, maybe it had fewer or other bells. All these bells were made of iron and had a special size, so they would sound very clear and beautiful, not at all harsh and loud.<sup>58</sup>

The bells would ring through the whole Easter week, Pavel remembered: "you could stand or sit there and listen for a whole hour". Since Pavel migrated to Australia he could no longer take such delight in listening to the Easter bells. Compared to the western suburbs of Sydney, Harbin had many more Russian Orthodox churches built

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<sup>57</sup> Pavel, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 28 August 2010, Sydney.

<sup>58</sup> Pavel, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 28 August 2010, Sydney.



during the first half of the twentieth century. Although the Lidcombe church has three bells, their sound is not heard very often. The bells ring quietly and only for brief periods during the Easter service. “Australia is a free country,” Pavel said, implying that the Old Believer community would be allowed to ring the bells. “But if the neighbours would hear them, they might say that is noise pollution. Therefore we ring them very rarely. We are supposed to ring them [more often], but we don’t want to upset the neighbours.”<sup>59</sup>

Pavel stressed that despite these constraints, the preparations that precede the Orthodox Easter celebrations have not changed. Whether living in Australia or in China, the Old Believers prepare themselves for the Holy Week through an extensive period of fasting.

Before the holiday there are seven weeks of Lent. During that time we are supposed to hold a bit back. For example, we have to eat a bit less – no meat, no fish, no milk – so we would feel a bit smaller. We want a lot more, but we aren’t allowed to have more because the church laws don’t allow us. And time passes slowly – very slowly – until the Easter week comes up. It’s this tremendous feeling that arises – it is the anticipation that there will be Easter soon. During this period of time, of course, people go to church and listen to the singing of chants all the time. Their world becomes very emotional. Especially for the little kids and young people it’s a tremendous time of waiting for something great to happen.<sup>60</sup>

The preparations for Easter have stayed pretty much the same after Pavel migrated from China to Australia, he said. People would still colour eggs and bake the traditional Russian Easter cake *kulich*. Many Old Believers in Australia would still keep these traditions and practices surrounding the time of Easter, which Pavel called “a big holiday for the soul”<sup>61</sup>.

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<sup>59</sup> Pavel, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 28 August 2010, Sydney.

<sup>60</sup> Pavel, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 28 August 2010. Sydney.

<sup>61</sup> Pavel, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 28 August 2010. Sydney.

The delight of Easter hasn't changed, it has still the same meaning and we still keep Lent. But it is not the same kind of enjoyment as it was in China because there we didn't have enough. Therefore, the time of Easter was such bliss! We still feel that, but now we already have everything in excess. Here [in Australia] we have plenty! We are not allowed to eat fish and meat, but here we have a lot of bread. We have everything here, all in excess. That wasn't the case in China! There was not so much surplus. So before Easter you had to reduce your food intake – also the simple food. You also had to eat a little bit less bread. And you would feel that you were not allowed to eat a lot. But now we don't restrain ourselves anymore and overeat – maybe not with meat – but with something else.<sup>62</sup>

Even though Pavel would still be fasting before Easter, this religious practice felt different since he had migrated to Australia. He compared the Old Believers' Easter celebration in China with the lifestyle people took on after they arrived in Australia, where plenty of food was available. "When there is plenty [of food], a person could say: I don't eat today, but I will eat tomorrow. Nevertheless he eats because he is a weak person. A constant shortage [of food] – as in China – is better for the people. Excess doesn't do them any good because they don't get stronger."<sup>63</sup> Pavel thought that in Australia fasting was seen as a less severe and arduous practice that did not require much discipline. In China the majority of the church community endured the hardships of Lent and the general shortage of food; and people bonded over this experience.

Masha said that Lent used to be easier when she lived back in China because there she could share her experience with other Old Believers who were living in the same close-knit community where everyone followed the same religious practice. "In China I lived in a village," Masha said, and fasting was "easier when the whole village follows the same thing. [...] You would feel good doing it because everyone is doing it together." Back in China Masha did not need to worry about these restrictions when she visited people: "when you come into your brother's and sister's house, you know you get served the same thing. We would all talk about it, and sometimes we would say

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<sup>62</sup> Pavel, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 28 August 2010, Sydney.

<sup>63</sup> Pavel, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 28 August 2010, Sydney.

that this Lent is a bit hard this time.”<sup>64</sup>

Masha and I were sitting in a buzzing Melbourne café, drinking tea and eating muffins. I wondered how Masha followed the severe dietary restrictions during Lent while she was travelling around Australia for her embroidery business. Masha said that she still kept Lent: “I just follow my parents – and it’s a tradition as well. It’s part of our religion. [...] We are keeping Wednesday clear from meat and milk because that is when Jesus had his – what you call – a judgment, and Friday when he was crucified and his blood was spilt.”<sup>65</sup> Masha did not see any problems in fasting while she was travelling, but she had difficulties to follow the priestless Old Believers’ rules of ritual purity and cleanliness. These rules demanded that she avoid drinking tea or coffee, smoking, eating the meat of unclean animals, wearing modern dress, sharing dishes with non-Old Believers or eating food prepared by *pogany*, that is, “dirty” or unbaptised people.<sup>66</sup>

In China we never mixed with Chinese people, we never ate together with them. We are not supposed to eat with them because they are not christened, not baptised. You don’t eat with people who have not been baptised! [...] If we went, let’s say, to a Chinese house, we weren’t even allowed to accept their bread, or their food. We would have to bring our own food. [...] Plus the Chinese people eat other animals. We are only allowed to eat certain animals. [...] We are not allowed to eat animals that have got paws, like a cat or a dog and other animals. We are only allowed to eat cows because they’ve got split [hooves], and goats and sheep.<sup>67</sup>

I was looking at the disposable cups on the table in front of us, and she said immediately: “We are allowed to drink from this because they are brand new and have

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<sup>64</sup> Masha, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 18 July 2010, Melbourne.

<sup>65</sup> Masha, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 18 July 2010, Melbourne.

<sup>66</sup> In the late nineteenth century the priestly Old Believers lifted many purity precautions that had moved from the church to the home environment. David Scheffel argues that priestless Old Believers are preoccupied with purity maintenance as it represents an alternative for their lack of sacramental cleansing methods. (David Scheffel, *In the Shadow of Antichrist: The Old Believers of Alberta* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1991), 204–205; see also: Richard Artells Morris, “Three Russian Groups in Oregon: A Comparison of Boundaries in a Pluralistic Environment” (PhD diss., University of Oregon, 1981), 97–130.

<sup>67</sup> Masha, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 18 July 2010, Melbourne.

never been used.” Masha said that she does not follow the Old Belief “100 per cent”, because she did not observe the purity precautions which proved to be unpractical in her current living situation: “I am never home and I can’t carry my own dishes with me – can’t eat here and can’t eat there – I eat everywhere!”<sup>68</sup> Masha disregarded the purity laws her religion prescribed as she felt them to be less important than other religious practices, such as fasting.

When Masha moved away from the Old Believer community in Yarwun, she also left behind an enclave of Old Believers who followed the same cultural traditions and had a common understanding of their religious practices. “Here [in Australia] I am by myself,” Masha said. She told me that sometimes people would make fun of her religion and fasting practice: “Somebody would say: Oh yeah, eat some meat and you are going to hell straight away! Oh, the devils come and do something to you because you had some meat!” She sounded angry: “You get all sorts of people who want to hurt you or want to laugh about you. You just have to ignore that [...] they are just idiots!”<sup>69</sup> Masha’s face got quite tense, she looked upset.

Masha and Pavel contrasted and compared the past and present diasporic condition in which the Old Believer communities in China and in Australia lived. They described how their religious experience of Easter and Lent has changed since they moved to Australia. Both were concerned that the loss of rigidity and discipline in their religious practice could defy the depth of their spiritual experience and devotion. Daily practices of praying and fasting were seen as a means to strengthen not only the Old Believers’ bodies, but also their minds and beliefs. Back in China self-restriction and discipline were virtues that were valued by the individual and encouraged by the community. The shared experience of celebrating Easter created an emotional and geographical attachment to the places of their settlement in China; they produced a distinctive sense of place. Pavel’s and Masha’s memories were attached to particular places such as the church building, the belltower, or a small mountain village in China. At the same time these memories spoke of their displacement from their former diaspora community: some religious practices and traditions did not find ‘a place’ in Pavel’s and Masha’s Australian way of living.

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<sup>68</sup> Masha, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 18 July 2010, Melbourne.

<sup>69</sup> Masha, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 18 July 2010, Melbourne.

The Old Believers' sense of place emphasise not only the physical and material aspects of their settlement in China, but also took into account personal feelings and social relations within their community.<sup>70</sup> John Agnew argues that living in a place can engender an emotional attachment. Common experiences and identities create emotional attachments and self-definitions; these attachments are projected onto places and produce distinctive geographical identities or a sense of place. According to Agnew, place can be seen as a "community of fate"; a person's material life chances and emotional well-being are caught up with the condition and prospects of a local area.<sup>71</sup> Places are represented and remembered as being closely related to political and material conditions of the time when they are inhabited. Instead of focusing on the material conditions and economic prospects of my interviewees' living in China, I highlight the social environment and spiritual "community of fate", which are significant components for establishing a sense of place.

Nikolai, a second generation migrant, shared and identified strongly with memories of China that circulated within his family and the Australian Old Believer diaspora. Nikolai's longing for a stronger religious community made the memories of the Old Believers' settlement in China part of his present diaspora community in Australia. He emphasised that the social cohesion in the Old Believers' community in China was a lot stronger, as were their religious beliefs.

I wasn't there – I can only tell you what I've heard – and how their [his parents'] church life was incorporated into their normal life. If there was a big *prasnik* [holiday] in the middle of the week, you couldn't say: Oh, I've got to go to work because my boss is going to get upset or I've got to take leave. You owned your own life! You worked when you had to work, but when there was a *prasnik* you went to church and prayed. And everybody else did it too. So if you didn't [go to church] that was probably frowned upon. Everybody sort of thought the

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<sup>70</sup> For an overview of concepts which define people's bonds with places such as place attachment, place identity, place dependency see: Bradley S. Jorgensen and Richard C. Stedman, "Sense of Place as an Attitude: Lakeshore Owners Attitudes toward their Properties," *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 21, No. 3 (2001), 237; Gerard Kyle et al., "Effects of Place Attachment on Users' Perceptions of Social and Environmental Conditions in a Natural Setting," *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 24, No. 2 (2004), 213–215.

<sup>71</sup> John A. Agnew, *Place and Politics in Modern Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 20, 22.

same and had the same morals. That's the thing: over there [in China] everybody had the same ideas!<sup>72</sup>

The comments of Anastasia, another second generation Old Believer migrant in Australia, echo Nikolai's views:

In China there was a much more structured way of life, and most people abided by that. [...] Just that fact that you work by the seasons! You do things by the seasons and by the day there is no time to muck around. If it's time for harvesting, you have to harvest, otherwise you will go hungry or starve in winter. [Life was] just really structured in that kind of way.

And I suppose with church and big celebrations, it was a big part of it [this structured way of life]. Relying on God was a big part of it! For example, when there were bushfires they would go to church, pray and walk out with their icons. Then they would walk up to the fire front and the fire would turn around. It would go the other way and not come onto them, whereas in all reality it should. But no, it would turn and go around. Or if there was a drought they used to pray to God to bring them rain and he would. They only had God to rely on.<sup>73</sup>

Anastasia highlighted that the Russian settlers and farmers in the northern China had to be very disciplined and strong in order to survive. The church calendar, with its fasting and praying rituals and routines, structured the Old Believers' daily lives and taught people to be disciplined. The harsh environment and arduous living conditions that they endured seemed to nourish the Old Believers' religious selves.<sup>74</sup> Anastasia got the sense that the Old Believers in China were a lot more connected with their religious beliefs when compared with people in the Australian community. "Whereas

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<sup>72</sup> Nikolai (name changed), interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 2010, Sydney.

<sup>73</sup> Anastasia (name changed), interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 2009, Melbourne.

<sup>74</sup> Shampa Mazumdar and Sanjoy Mazumdar have explored the interconnection between religion and space; they examined the creation or sacrealisation of space, its content and meaning. (Shampa Mazumdar and Sanjoy Mazumdar, "Sacred Space and Place Attachment," *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 13, No. 3 (1993), 231–242)

here in Australia people don't really believe in God – I mean they do, but they don't. They rather try to go by their own resources than leave it up to nature."<sup>75</sup>

Through the practice of remembering place, my interviewees articulated, denied, shaped and negotiated the Old Believers' attachment to places. This happened not just in relation to the physical and material characteristics of places but also includes social relations, community bonds and a shared history. Keith Basso argues that the relationships we have to places are most often lived in the company of other people, rather than in contemplative moments of social isolation.<sup>76</sup> The experience of remembering and sensing a place is reciprocal and dynamic, Basso argues: "Place-based thoughts about the self lead commonly to thoughts of other things – other places, other people, other times, whole networks of associations that ramify unaccountably within the expanding spheres of awareness that they themselves engender."<sup>77</sup> The experience of sensing a place is reciprocal and dynamic: as places animate the ideas and feelings of a person who attends to them, these same ideas and feelings animate the places. Therefore, we cannot focus on physical movements and representations of spatiality – either in memory or in migration – and leave aside practices of constructing, experiencing, perceiving and sensing places and the displacement from them. The Old Believers' memories of place and displacement reveal a complex meaning making process, on a personal and a community level, related to the past and the present. These multiple meanings that the Old Believers attach to places open up a broader discussion that is not confined to competing notions of fixity and movement in the memories of migrants and their attachment to place.

### **A Visit to Trekhrech'e: Its Past and Present**

Trekhrech'e was once a Russian settlement of more than a dozen villages and townships north of Hailar, in today's northern Chinese province of Inner Mongolia. The dark chestnut soils at the confluence of the rivers Gan, Derbul and Khaul attracted Russian settlers from the early 1900s to the mid-twentieth century. Their wooden log houses and settlements scattered around the foothills of the Khingan Mountains which

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<sup>75</sup> Anastasia (name changed), interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 2009, Melbourne.

<sup>76</sup> Keith H. Basso, "Wisdom Sits in Places: Notes on a Western Apache Landscape," in *Senses of Place*, ed. Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1996), 56–57.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

divides the eastern Manchurian plain from the Mongolian Plateau to the west.<sup>78</sup>

Before Dimitrii migrated to Australia he was living in the area of Trekhrech'e. As he remembered his life back in China his glance turned into the distance, alluding to the distant mountain landscape that surrounded the Russian settlement.

The foothills of the Khingan Mountains – that is what they were called – and these small hills slowly turned into the great Khingan mountain range – the highest in that region. But where we lived [north of Hailar] the highest mountain was actually not very high, maybe 500 meters. And then they slowly rise towards the northwest; there they already formed large, huge mountain ranges<sup>79</sup>

Dimitrii and I were sitting in his study where dozens of Russian history books, dictionaries and encyclopaedias were sitting on bookshelves. Various journal articles, newspaper clippings and photos were piled up next to his computer. Dimitrii proudly showed me some rare black and white photos of the Russian settlements in the north-east of China that were taken in the 1930s or 1940s. A group of people, wrapped in thick coats and felt boots, was standing on the porch of a Russian log house; a tiny church building stuck out against an overexposed white background. Dimitrii had collected and copied these pictures and articles from books about the Russian settler history in China. Dimitrii's descriptions of what life was like for the settlers were very detailed and often set in the historical context of political change and social transformation in the area. At times I found it difficult to distinguish between Dimitrii's memories of his life in China and the information he had gained from his readings.

Dimitrii remembered that the little village where he was living was called Pokrovka,

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<sup>78</sup> Trekhrech'e (Chinese: sanhe (三河): Three Rivers) is located between the three rivers Gan (Chinese: Gen or Ken Ho (根河)), Derbul (Chinese: Deerbuer (得耳布尔河)) and Khaul (Chinese Hawuer (哈乌尔河)). These rivers are tributaries of the Argun' (Chinese: E'erguna He (额尔古纳河)) which marks the border between Russia and China. The Argun flows from the Western slope of the Khingan Range (Chinese: Xingan Ling (兴安岭)). (Theodore Shabad, *China's Changing Map: National and Regional Development, 1949–71*, rev. ed. (London: Methuen, 1972), 5, 276–277; Iuliia Viktorovna Argudiaeva, "Russkoe Naselenie v Trekhrech'e [The Russian Population in Trekhrech'e]," *Rossiiia i ATR [Russia and ATR]*, Nr. 4 (2006), 121).

<sup>79</sup> Dimitrii (name changed), interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 2010, Sydney.



named after the small wooden church which was devoted to the Protecting Veil of Godmother Mary.<sup>80</sup> Like other villages in the area, Pokrovka was founded in the early 1920s. Most of its inhabitants were peasants, many of them Old Believers who moved to the Khingan Mountains in the 1930s.<sup>81</sup> With a nostalgic glance in his eyes Dimitrii told me about the beautiful nature that surrounded Pokrovka:

Our village stood on the bank of the river Ilgachi. On both sides of the Ilgachi grew trees – birch cherry and apple trees – and some small bushes. As soon as spring came and they began to bloom, the entire river bank – to the right and the left – was white! The birch, cherry and apple trees bloomed with white blossoms. These dense bushes of flowers looked very pretty from the other side of the river. [...] And och, the smell! You could sense it standing fifty – no, more – a hundred meters away. It was such a pleasant smell!<sup>82</sup>

Leaning back in his armchair Dimitrii reminisced about the beautiful landscape of the Khingan Mountains and the untouched wilderness of northern China. In spring creeks and rivers flowed with water that was crystal clear, and the air was so clean that one could smell the fragrance of wild flowers and trees. Dimitrii remembered some of the native animals that populated the idyllic scene he described:

There were a lot of fish in these [mountain] rivers. Fishing wasn't our

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<sup>80</sup> Pokrov, also known as the Intercession of the Theotokos or the Protecting Veil of Godmother Mary, is a Marian feast which is celebrated across the Eastern Orthodox Churches on 1 October according to the Orthodox Church Calendar. From 1932 Father Ioann Starosadchev held regular services in the Orthodox Old-Rite Church which was blessed under the Intercession of the Most Holy Mother of God (Pokrova Presviatoi Bogoroditsy). (Vera Shevzov, "Protecting Veil," in *The Encyclopedia of Eastern Orthodox Christianity*, Vol. 2, ed. John Anthony McGuckin (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 459; P. Shakhmatov, "Pokrovka," in *Russkoe Starobriadchestvo [Russian Old Ritualism]*, Vol. 2, ed. S. A. Zen'kovskii (Moscow: Kvadriga, 2009), 670–671).

<sup>81</sup> In 1944 about 280 inhabitants lived in the village of Pokrovka, whereas Trekhrech'e had more than 9,000 inhabitants. After the Second World War many of Pokrovka's former residents who did not return to the Soviet Union emigrated to Paraguay and Uruguay, and later to Alaska. Many Russian settlers left Pokrovka in 1955 and 1956, a few families stayed until 1962. (Argudiaeva, "Russkoe Naselenie v Trekhrech'e" (see note 78), 124, 126–127).

<sup>82</sup> Dimitrii (name changed), interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 2010, Sydney.

occupation; it was just for the people who liked doing it. Especially when we were young we went fishing for pikeperch. [...] There were also pikes, crucian carps – they are called carps here, we called them *sazan* – lenoks<sup>83</sup>, taimens<sup>84</sup>, trouts, graylings. Graylings are not a very big [fish], but so beautiful. They have four or five colours, like a rainbow!<sup>85</sup>

I sensed that Dimitrii missed the wilderness and scenery that surrounded Pokrovka. Dimitrii spoke, like many of my interviewees, in an idealising and nostalgic tone about the beautiful nature and mountain landscape of northern China. Some of them had taken the chance to travel back to China and to visit the places of their former settlements. Their return to these places often challenged my interviewees because the impressions and sensations of some remote mountain villages like Pokrovka have drastically changed.

A few dogs patrolled a crooked wooden fence line as I walked through Verch-Kuli<sup>86</sup>, one of the former Russian villages of Trekhrech'e. I had travelled to Verch-Kuli in search of hallmarks of its former Russian inhabitants: a house or a street name that would resonate with the memories of my interviewees. As I walked down the street I passed a few little gardens where onions and sunflowers grew. A few barns and haysheds leaned close to the muddy road I was walking down. Many houses were built in the style of Russian farmhouses. Some of their small windows were decorated with carved wooden frames. As I reached the end of the road I looked over a large valley which spread out in front of me. The view opened onto miles of electric cables hanging between pylons and piles of rubbish that were dumped behind the village. Was this the landscape of untouched wilderness, of vast meadows and mountain ranges that my

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<sup>83</sup> Asiatic or Manchurian trout.

<sup>84</sup> Siberian taiman or Siberian salmon.

<sup>85</sup> Dimitrii (name changed), interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 2010, Sydney.

<sup>86</sup> Verkh-Kuli (Chinese: Shangkuli, 上库力) was founded as part of the Russian settlement Trekhrech'e in the 1890s. In 1911/12 an Old Orthodox Church was built, a few years later also a Russian Orthodox Church. Most Russians produced dairy products or *valenki* (deerskin boots). In 1944 about 1,100 people lived in the village. The mass emigration of Russian settlers from Verkh-Kuli began in 1955. (Argudiaeva, "Russkoe Naselenie v Trekhrech'e" (see note 78), 125, 127). For a history of Old Believer communities in Manchuria see: David Scheffel, "Russische Altgläubige in der Mandschurei," *Kirche im Osten* 32, (1989), 109–119.

interviewees often remembered when talking about their life in China?

Back in the village, scooters, trucks and cars dominated the central square. Verch-Kuli had changed since the Russian settlers left the village: some roads were paved with concrete, street lights illuminated the footpaths, and satellite dishes and electric cables adorned many houses. I was looking for a tangible sign of the Old Believers' former existence in this village, a sign that was not just built on memory and imagination. I expected to find a church building, an old wooden house or a street name which would make a (re-)attachment to the former Russian presence in this place possible. Places carry traces of memories which belong to the different people who have lived in or passed through them. Places like Verch-Kuli are transformed into sites of memory through monuments, inscriptions on walls or architectural styles. Reminders and leftovers from previous inhabitants may influence the way in which this village is remembered. These reminders may either convey historical information, or arouse the curiosity of a visitor like me to discover the place's forgotten past.<sup>87</sup>

I talked to an old woman who was sitting on the porch of a little eatery, leaning against the wall with her arms resting on a walking stick. She was curious about my visit to the village and did not mind my questions about its Russian past. She recalled that some foreigners, mostly Russian tourists, had also looked for remnants of its Russian heritage. She did not remember the Russian name of the village. All its former Russian inhabitants had left more than a hundred years ago, she explained, using the word *Éguó rén* (俄国人) – the Russians of the former Tsarist Empire. The woman turned around to the owner of the restaurant and together they discussed whether there were any Russian houses left in the village. Both women came to the conclusion that all wooden houses and churches built by Russian settlers had been demolished during the Cultural Revolution, or pulled down and replaced with houses built by the local Chinese.

I felt a sense of discomfort as I realised to what extent the Russian village of Verkh-Kuli had been redeveloped and had become a place of contested memories. Whereas my interviewees remembered its Russian past, many of the local Chinese had forgotten its

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<sup>87</sup> John Urry, "The Place of Emotion within Place," in *Emotional Geographies*, ed. Joyce Davidson, Liz Bondi and Mick Smith (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 80; Maria Lewicka, "Place Attachment, Place Identity, and Place Memory: Restoring the Forgotten City Past," *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 28, No. 3 (2008), 214.

former Russian settlers and origins. Did I then perceive other qualities of the village Verch-Kuli, maybe a place that was completely different from the one my interviewees remembered? Did it smell, look and sound different from the place Dimitrii described?

Dimitrii also told me that all of Trekhrech'e's former Russian settlers had emigrated. After they had left, the Chinese who moved into the region began to exploit its natural resources. The headstreams could not feed the lower rivers anymore which slowly dried up. Trees were logged, used for firewood or building material. The houses of the Russian settlers had been destroyed and the Old Believer church torn down. "It's a very sinister picture now," Dimitrii said. The river Argun, where he went fishing as a child, "was 70 or 80 meter wide and its water was all blue". Recently, however, the Argun's water level sank of the dramatically, "it's maybe only 20 meters now, that's all,"<sup>88</sup> Dimitrii thought.

The place looks orphaned, there is just sand. Before that the water was maybe four or five meters deep and everything was covered [with water]. But now there's only one and a half meters left. A very terrible picture! The bank of the river lies bare, not even one tree – not one tree!<sup>89</sup>

I could sense Dimitrii's distress as he told me how Trekhrech'e had changed: the place where he grew up had been stripped of its natural resources and the past of its former Russian settlers erased. Dimitrii could no longer identify with this landscape, because the beauty of its untouched wilderness was gone. It seemed to me as if he remembered and perceived two distinctly different places, and that this mismatch upset him.

Whereas I could only perceive the present condition of the Old Believers' settlements in China, Dimitrii remembered these places in many different layers. He remembered their past and present condition. It seemed impossible to integrate these different memories into one single or dominant memory of place. Places are more than geographic and physical settings. Places are experienced and remembered in changing sensual and emotional encounters, in different contexts and times. Memories

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<sup>88</sup> Dimitrii (name changed), interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 2010, Sydney.

<sup>89</sup> Dimitrii (name changed), interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 2010, Sydney.

reflect on the historical, political and social change that occurs in a certain place. Even the continuous process of remembering and forgetting which forms our memories is highly dynamic and fluent. Kevin Hetherington has used the notion of movement to argue for a dynamic perception of place.

Imagine *places* as being like a ship. It is not something that stays in one location but moves about within networks of agents, human and non-human. Places [...] can be seen as an ordering effect of those agents. To begin with, then, *place* is about relationships, it is about placing [...].<sup>90</sup>

Hetherington sees places as relational, generated by practices of placing, arranging and naming a spatial order of materials. In this sense places are dynamic and contingent. They are located in relation to objects and moving around within networks of agents rather than being fixed by human interpretations or our memories of place.<sup>91</sup> Hetherington's interpretation of place challenges the approach of many geographers, anthropologists and philosophers who advocate an understanding of place that is fixed and attached with meaning.<sup>92</sup> The non-representational understanding of place which underlies Hetherington's concept relates to my interviewees' heterogeneous and at times fragmentary memories of place. His idea of a dynamic perception of place also connects with the Old Believers' attachment and disconnection from the places of their former settlement in China. As much as my interviewees' attachment to these places was shifting and changing, so were their memories subject to the fluent process of remembering, triggered by my questions about their settlement in China. These multiple and shifting memories of place were far from representing a condensed and collective 'master-memory' of the places my interviewees once inhabited. Places circulate in our memory, our experience, our naming of them; they do not merely narrate identities and are not fixed by their meaning.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Kevin Hetherington, "In Place of Geometry: The Materiality of Place," in *Ideas of Difference: Social Spaces and the Labour of Division*, ed. Kevin Hetherington and Rolland Munro (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 185.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 184, 187.

<sup>92</sup> E. Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, 2nd rev. ed. (London: Pion Limited, 1976), 42–43; Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 156, 179.

<sup>93</sup> Hetherington, "In Place of Geometry" (see note 90), 187.

### **Disrupted Geographies and Shifting Memories**

The Old Believers' perception of and attachment to places in China shifted as a result of political upheavals and social transformations. Ruptures and temporal shifts in their memory of place became especially evident as my interviewees remembered the end of the Japanese occupation of Manchuria in 1945. The presence of the Soviet Red Army in northern China at the end of the Second World War and the Communist takeover in 1949 were remembered very intensely.

Some of my interviewees told me that the Russian settlers in China remained largely unaffected by the political change and establishment of the Japanese puppet-state Manchukuo in 1932.<sup>94</sup> Vlas remembered that life was good and continued as usual under the new regime. The Japanese “didn’t touch us”<sup>95</sup>, he said and highlighted that life for the Russians under Japanese rule was free and economically stable.

Under the Japanese regime you could buy anything – anything you wanted! It was a very free life and it was a really free country! People would build close to the [Russian] villages and didn’t need to buy any kind of permission. You could build and live wherever you went, nobody would chase you away. Just go into the woods and choose a place you like. If you want to build a house there, just build one! Nobody is going to chase you away.<sup>96</sup>

Whereas Vlas remembered that his family was unaffected by the political changes in northern China, historical records indicate that the situation for many White Russian settlers became more difficult under the Japanese occupation. In 1935 the Soviet

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<sup>94</sup> On 18 September 1931, officers of the Japanese Guandong Army engineered the Mukden incident by blowing up the South Manchurian railway line north of Mukden (Shenyang), blaming the Chinese for the explosion. Under this pretext the Guandong Army moved into South Manchuria. Changchun was renamed Xinjing and became capital of the puppet-state Manchukuo which was formally headed by the dethroned last emperor of the Chinese Qing dynasty, Pu Yi. (Clausen and Thøgersen, *Making of a Chinese City* (see note 10), 109–111); see also Gavan McCormack, “Manchukuo: Constructing the Past,” *East Asian History*, No. 2 (1991), 105–124.

<sup>95</sup> Vlas, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 6 January 2011, Gympie.

<sup>96</sup> Vlas, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 6 January 2011, Gympie.

Union had sold its share in the CER to Manchukuo and pulled out of the area.<sup>97</sup> At that time the living conditions for the Russian settlers “deteriorated very markedly,” as John Hope Simpson writes in 1939:

The sale of the Chinese Eastern Railway, once the mainstay of the extensive refugee population of north Manchuria, has not only thrown out of employment thousands of Russians who have been replaced to a large extent by Japanese, but has also affected Russian businesses in Harbin.<sup>98</sup>

By the mid-1930s, the Russian population of Harbin had dropped from more than 150,000 to 56,000.<sup>99</sup> Dimitrii’s family moved from Harbin to the north Manchurian countryside to be more self-sufficient and make a living, because it had become harder for his family to find employment in the city.

There was no work! There was just nothing to do. [...] And there were just so many people because the whole [White Russian] army had fled over [the Chinese border]. Officers with their metal decorations worked on the streets. They worked as porters and carried luggage at the train station. My father said there was even one officer who made dolls and sold them.”<sup>100</sup>

Whereas Dimitrii and Vlas could relate some aspects of their living situation to political changes, in general, the Old Believers’ memories of Japanese rule in Manchuria were scarce and sporadic. The daily lives of my interviewees might not have been directly affected by these political changes and the Japanese presence in the region.<sup>101</sup> The

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<sup>97</sup> Bakich, “Émigré Identity” (see note 16), 60, Clausen and Thøgersen, *Making of a Chinese City* (see note 10), 45.

<sup>98</sup> Simpson, *The Refugee Problem* (see note 20), 501.

<sup>99</sup> N. Lidin estimates that Harbin’s Russian population dropped to about 60,000 with the Japanese occupation of Manchuria in 1931. According to a census by the Harbin Commercial Museum in 1935 the Soviet population of the city was about 23,600 and another 32,300 ‘denationalised’ Russians. (N. Lidin, “Russkaia Emigratsiia na D. V. [Russian Emigration to the Far East],” *Russkie Zapiski [Russian Notes]* 2, (1937), 319; “The White Russians in Manchukuo,” *Contemporary Manchuria* 1, No. 3 (1937), 19–20).

<sup>100</sup> Dimitrii (name changed), interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 2010, Sydney.

<sup>101</sup> During the Manchukuo era (1932–1945) the Japanese population in Manchuria rose from

scarcity of memories about Japanese rule contrasted with the abundance of stories told about the presence of the Soviet Red Army, and later of the Chinese Communists in Manchuria.

Many of my interviewees remembered that the tolerant and harmonious atmosphere that prevailed in the Russian settlements in northern China before the Second World War changed with the invasion of the Red Army. “The Soviets came in 1945, [that was] when they were driving the Japanese out,” said John. On 8 August 1945 the Soviet Union declared war on Japan. “It was the 15 August when they [the Red Army] stormed the Japanese occupied part of China and they drove them out.”<sup>102</sup> In the following weeks the Red Army moved into Manchuria and on 18 August took control of Harbin.<sup>103</sup> John was a schoolboy at the time when the Red Army took control of Manchuria and he remembered that the Russian schools were quickly taken over by Soviet officials.

When the Red Army arrived in Manchuria, “they put in their own system,” John said. “I still remember the principal of the school saying: ‘we know that tomorrow is *Svetova Nikolaia* [Saint Nikolai], but you still all have to come to school!’” The principal would probably have gone to church himself, John mused, but he was instructed by the Soviet authorities to discourage his students from attending church services for this religious holiday. “That’s what he had to say. He said it and we stood there and listened. [...] We all stood in a row and didn’t say a word. But the next day we didn’t go to school, we went to church.”<sup>104</sup>

During the Soviet presence in China an atmosphere of anxiety and fear prevailed amongst the Old Believers in Harbin and the White Russian settlers in China. John

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less than 1 per cent of the estimated 30 million people, to 1.5 million at the end of the Japanese empire in 1945. (Mariko Asano Tamanoi, introduction to *Crossed Histories: Manchuria in the Age of Empire*, ed. Mariko Asano Tamanoi (Honolulu: Association for Asian Studies and University of Hawai’i Press 2005), 8–10) Yoshihisa Tak Matsusaka analyses the Sino-Japanese rivalry on railway concession and Japan’s imperialist ambitions in the region (Yoshihisa Tak Matsusaka, *The Making of Japanese Manchuria, 1904–1932* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), 349–387; see also Louise Young, *Japan’s Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>102</sup> John, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 28 August 2010, Sydney.

<sup>103</sup> Clausen and Thøgersen, *Making of a Chinese City* (see note 10), 150.

<sup>104</sup> John, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 28 August 2010, Sydney.



began to live with the “blank rule: you are not allowed to repeat anything you hear at home in school, just in case someone was listening. They would dob you in!” People were afraid of denunciations, of being transported to the Soviet Union and imprisoned. Many men feared to be sentenced for collaborating with the Japanese during the occupation. John explained that many young men needed to find an income and jobs during the Japanese regime in Manchuria.

But if the Soviets decided that these jobs were backed by the Japanese, these workers were deported to Russia because they had been working for the enemy. [...] After the war quite a number of Russian people and at least one of my cousins was deported to Russia [the Soviet Union].”<sup>105</sup>

John remembered that his cousin was convicted of treason and spent several years in a Soviet labour camp. John described the Soviet occupation of Manchuria as a turning point of his life in China: the peaceful and unmolested living came to an end for the Russian settlers. Communist rule brought oppression, violence and persecution for the Old Believers in northern China. From this point on, John’s emotional attachment to the place of his former settlement changed.

After the Soviet Army had retreated from Manchuria in April 1946 the Chinese Communist Party commander-in-chief Zhu De ordered his troops into the region. This move into the northeast eventually became a decisive element in the civil war and the Communists’ victory over the Guomindang.<sup>106</sup> After the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 the economic and political conditions worsened for the Russian population and all foreign settlers in China. Communist rule was quickly established in Harbin, but did not extend immediately to the remote mountain villages of Xinjiang.

In February 1950 the ownership of the CER, which was by then known as the Chinese Changchun Railway, was transferred to the PRC.<sup>107</sup> Several thousand Russian officials, engineers and workers were dismissed from their positions. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that by 1953 there were

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<sup>105</sup> John, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 28 August 2010, Sydney.

<sup>106</sup> Clausen and Thøgersen, *Making of a Chinese City* (see note 10), 150.

<sup>107</sup> Bakich, “Émigré Identity” (see note 16), 66.

6–7,000 refugees in Manchuria who were former railway employees and who by then were deprived of any means of earning a living.<sup>108</sup> The High Commissioner reported that many Russians who were still living in China

have resorted to begging in the streets, that others have sought employment as servants in Chinese households and are forced to accept degrading and humiliating jobs. Some are said to be living in conditions described as “defying the imagination”. A number of those who were reduced to complete destitution have died as a result of the bitter cold, hunger and sickness – others have committed suicide. To object, or to express dissatisfaction is considered a crime against the Government and may lead to punishment and imprisonment, or even to forced labour.<sup>109</sup>

Many of my interviewees associated the establishment of the Communist regime in China with stories of social upheaval, dispossession and violence. Their land and livestock were taken away by the local Communist authorities. For most Russian settlers in the region the use of land was, however, crucial and many farmers opposed the agricultural communes and collectivisation plans. As people lost any means to earn their living many Old Believer families were starving and struggled to survive the cold harsh winters. Anastasia explained that political and social change led to the deterioration of the once prosperous living conditions for the Russian settlers in northern China.

It was getting harder because the Chinese government took on the Soviet system. They ended up having not so much freedom. They used to have to ration food, and at the end they used to get tickets for food. They only could get x amount of sugar or flour per month. [...] When the Communists came in they took everything away and gave everyone maybe one cow, one sheep and one horse and you had to live with that.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Memorandum on the Situation of the Refugees of European Origin in China, February 1953; Hong Kong Public Records Office (hereafter HKPRO): CO 1023/118, HKMS157-1-11.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Anastasia (name changed), interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 2009, Melbourne.

Apart from the rationing of food and the collectivisation of farmland and livestock, Anastasia also remembered the violent and aggressive behaviour of the Communist authorities towards the Russian population. She told the story of her father's favourite horse being tortured by a local Chinese soldier or police officer.

It was this really huge and strong horse. It was his favourite and really stubborn. Dad would be the only one who was allowed to sit on its back. They really had a bond! And when the Communists came into the village they literally rounded up what they wanted to take and they took this horse away. But it would keep breaking free and running back to Dad. And people would come back and get it. And again it would break free and run back. [...] So they ended up with a hot poker bone burning its eyes and blinding it so it wouldn't run back. They did that in front of my Dad. These are the horror stories that you do hear! It was to the degree that they [the Communists] were just so aggressive, they would just do anything – burn and kill anything along their way to do what they needed to do.<sup>111</sup>

Anastasia's story recreated an atmosphere in which her parents and other Russian settlers feared the aggressive behaviour and cruelty of the Chinese Communist authorities. China was not remembered anymore as an idyllic place which people felt attached to or identified with. The memories of Anastasia's parents about their life in China shifted and concentrated now on an atmosphere of oppression and violence. To understand these (dis-) continuities of memories of place we have to ask: how does the perception and experience of a place trigger affective relations, and how do these relations in turn affect our memories?

Matrona described a different atmosphere of anxiety and horror which had built up in the little village near Kuldja, where she lived after the Chinese Communists had established their rule. She remembered that people were afraid to practice their religion; they would hide religious books and cover up other devotional objects. Being a young girl of about seven years Matrona did not know at the time why people lived such secret lives. "There were certain things the grown-ups would do if somebody came along. They would just quickly put things away and make sure that nobody saw them. For example, people would stand and pray, but as soon as somebody came in they quickly packed everything away." Matrona's parents and other Old Believer

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<sup>111</sup> Anastasia (name changed), interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 2009, Melbourne.

families prayed in the seclusion of their homes. “We certainly wouldn’t go and pray in open public or anything like that. We always used to do it in a house where we covered ourselves up. People would gather around in someone’s house and pray, but make sure that nobody saw us doing it.” Praying was always done at night time, and even when Matrona’s family came to Australia this habit did not change: “even then we were used to praying as a family at night. Then we found out that nobody cares whether we do it at day-time or night-time. But we still were used to do it that way.” Matrona turned her head and looked around the lounge room where we were sitting. “No-one is coming around,” she whispered, “so we can pray now”<sup>112</sup>.

Matrona’s father internalised this feeling of suspicious anxiety so deeply that his migration to Australia could not restore his sense of trust. Matrona remembered that her father was still anxious of praying in public when they moved to Australia: “When we started to pray in peoples’ houses again, even then my father used to say: ‘What if people are going to see us doing it?’” Even when the Old Believer community established their church in Melbourne, Matrona’s father was cautious: “even then he walked to church and would make sure that nobody saw him walking and going to pray.”<sup>113</sup> The anxiety that Matrona’s father had developed while he was living in the Chinese countryside, enduring the Communist regime, had sedimented in his body and followed him to Australia. His body was prepared for a quick look over the shoulder, always suspicious that someone could see him walking to church. As Matrona’s father became displaced and settled in another country and environment, his sense of place seemed to be haunted by the memories and experiences of other places. The sense of place he gained from his settlement in Australia had been superimposed by his memories and experience of the places he inhabited in the past.<sup>114</sup>

The emotional relations to places of their former settlement, as well as their displacement from them often overlapped in the memories of my interviewees. Places

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<sup>112</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 12 July 2009, Melbourne.

<sup>113</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 12 July 2009, Melbourne.

<sup>114</sup> Ana Teresa Jardim Reynaud explores the relation between memory and space when she discusses the memories of Italian and French immigrants who live in Rio de Janeiro. She shows that past and present experiences of various spaces eventually superimpose and form a complex arrangement that conveys the idea of displacement. (Ana Teresa Jardim Reynaud, “Migrants’ Accounts of Rio: The Contribution of Affect to Remembering Place,” *Space and Culture* 7, No. 1 (2004), 9–19).

that were remembered with pleasure and desire could at the same time and in the course of an interview trigger memories of fear and despair. The emotional attachments that my interviewees had to these places – and their memories of them – were “amorphous, multifarious, or inchoate”<sup>115</sup>. Graham D. Rowles argues that a single setting or place may evoke a wide spectrum of emotions. This multiplicity of our feelings of place reflects on situational contexts and temporal variability. Rowles’s idea about the temporal changes of how we feel about place helps us to understand that our emotional relations to a certain place can either shift over time or develop a dominant feeling for a particular place. Feelings about places can be immediate, and only relevant for a short time. These feelings are often highly specific to a situation, for example, the dread and repulsion that Anastasia’s father must have felt when he watched his favourite horse being blinded. Such immediate feelings could add to a more permanent feeling, such as a deeply ingrained and intimate emotional bond with a place that has been established over years.<sup>116</sup> A biased and ambiguous memory of places emerges from this simultaneity in which immediate and situative feelings of place overlap with more permanent emotional attachments to place.

Certain emotions that my interviewees expressed in relation to the places of their former settlement in China could only make sense in the context of their displacement; and their displacement could only make sense if we look at the feelings it evoked. The connection of emotion and displacement can be understood in a similar hermeneutic circle. As Joyce Davidson and Christine Milligan describe it, “emotions are understandable – ‘sensible’ – only in the context of particular places. Likewise, place must be *felt* to make sense.”<sup>117</sup> I want to use this emotion-spatial hermeneutics for the Old Believers’ experience of displacement because it gives an understanding of how my interviewees connected with places that they were no longer able to feel, sense and experience.

### **Final Migrations from China**

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<sup>115</sup> Graham D. Rowles, *Prisoners of Space? Exploring the Geographical Experiences of Older People* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1978), 174.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>117</sup> Joyce Davidson and Christine Milligan, “Editorial: Embodying Emotion Sensing Space: Introducing Emotional Geographies,” *Social and Cultural Geography* 5, No. 4 (2004), 524.

Masha told me about her family's final decision to leave China. "Stalin just wanted the Russian people back," she said, so he "made an agreement with Mao Zedong that he would try to deport all the Russians back to Russia." Masha lived near a country town called Haolianghe, north-east of Harbin.<sup>118</sup> She remembered that "some Russian officers would come [to her village] and walk from house to house asking who wants to go back to Russia."<sup>119</sup> Their promises were tempting:

They promised people who went back [to the Soviet Union] that they could live there the same way they did before [the revolution]. About sixty or seventy per cent went back to Russia, believing Stalin that he would give them their land back and that he would not oppress them or forbid them to preach and pray.<sup>120</sup>

In 1954 the Soviet consulate in Harbin announced that the Russian settlers were granted permission to leave China. They would be repatriated to remote and peripheral regions of the Soviet Union such as Kazakhstan and the Altai mountains in Siberia.<sup>121</sup> The Soviet government showed no desire to urge the return of expatriate Russian nationals in China. However, the Chinese government wanted the Russian settlers to leave the country and pressured them to return to the Soviet Union rather than seeking resettlement in third countries. With support from the Chinese authorities, Soviet consular offices in the north-east of China began to enforce their repatriation plans. More than 5–6,000 Russians returned to the Soviet Union between 1955 and 1965.<sup>122</sup>

Masha remembered that the Chinese authorities would help the Russians who signed up to return to the Soviet Union to leave their settlement. "They bought their trucks and

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<sup>118</sup> The city of Haolianghe (Chinese: 浩良河) in today's province of Heilongjiang is located about 250 kilometres northeast of Harbin.

<sup>119</sup> Masha, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 18 July 2010, Melbourne.

<sup>120</sup> Masha, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 18 July 2010, Melbourne.

<sup>121</sup> Bakich, "Émigré Identity" (see note 16), 66.

<sup>122</sup> Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration, Report of the 12<sup>th</sup> Session of the Subcommittee on Budget and Finance, 28 July 1965; HKPRO: CO 1030/1688, HKMS158-1-333; A. A. Khisamutdinov, *Po Stranam Rasseianiia: Russkie v Kitae [Among the Countries of Dispersion]* (Vladivostok: VGUES, 2000), 354; Glen Peterson, "'To Be or Not to Be a Refugee': The International Politics of the Hong Kong Refugee Crisis, 1949–55," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 36, Nr. 2 (2008), 181.

everything else". Of originally thirty or forty houses in the village where Masha's family lived only ten or fifteen remained occupied by Russian families. Many houses were abandoned. "Chinese people moved into some of these houses and lived there, but others stayed empty forever. If nobody lived there, they started to rot. We used to go there, run around and play hide-and-seek in these empty houses."<sup>123</sup> One could imagine the carcasses of wooden houses decaying in the damp of melting snow and the dusty summer heat; just a few children playing behind their broken windows and loose gates.

Matrona also remembered the abandoned and deserted village of her childhood after many of its former inhabitants had emigrated. "A lot of people left; and they left their dogs behind. It was like an empty place. And all these dogs were howling at night time, they were missing their owners. It became like –", she groaned before she finished her sentence, "it didn't feel the same, half of the people gone." Matrona was only five or six years old when the Russian exodus from China began. She remembered that "by the time I turned seven, the whole school fell apart: all the teachers were gone. I had no idea why or what was the reason for them leaving." Matrona shrugged her shoulders, "a lot of people, half of the village, packed up and left. But I didn't understand where they were going."<sup>124</sup>

Matrona and Masha remembered the ghostly insubstantiality of the places where they lived, the abandoned houses and the empty streets, the sound of howling dogs and the smell of rotting wood. Matrona and Masha described the sensation of a place that was marked by emigration and displacement. Memories seemed to cling to these deserted houses and places like omens of their previous occupants, their migration and displacement. The emptiness of the Russian settlement symbolised the demise of their village and the urgency with which their own families needed to decide about their emigration. Matrona's and Masha's families had the option to either wait for a change of their living situation in China, to consider their repatriation to the Soviet Union, or to hope for their resettlement in a third country.

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<sup>123</sup> Masha, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 18 July 2010, Melbourne.

<sup>124</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 12 July 2009, Melbourne.

Vlas remembered that no fewer than thirty Old Believer families who lived in the Russian village of Romanovka<sup>125</sup>, not far from Harbin, went back to the Soviet Union. They wanted to settle in the Siberian town Komsomolsk na Amure, Vlas explained, “because there they could work and pray. It’s just forest there and it’s further away from the Communists.” As the Russian settlers of Romanovka started their journey back to the Soviet Union, it turned out that their plans were not going to work out. Vlas described these families as pretty wealthy: “they wanted to take many of their chattels with them. But when they went to the train station – [...] guess what kind of train there was? – a train that transports cattle! They looked at it and just started to cry. Everyone understood straight away where they were going. And then people were loaded onto the train.”<sup>126</sup>

Later, Vlas and others who had stayed in Romanovka received letters from their friends and relatives who had settled in Komsomolsk na Amure. “They wrote letters back to China,” Vlas said, but because of the Soviet censorship “they couldn’t write anymore that all their belongings had been taken away from them. They wrote that when they went on the train the floor sagged and all their stuff fell out of the train.” Vlas laughed sarcastically: “that meant that they had taken everything away from them!” With resignation he continued, “that is how they ended up: they went to the virgin lands of Russia. [...] There was nothing, no houses, just forest. Only a valley and barren land which they first needed to cultivate.”<sup>127</sup> Vlas made clear that the Old Believers wanted to leave China, but that people made different choices about where to go and rebuild their community, where to find new attachments to other places and dwellings.

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<sup>125</sup> Founded as an Old Believer settlement in 1936, Romanovka had more than 200 inhabitants by 1945. In the same year many Russian settlers decided to return to the Soviet Union; the remaining population of Romanovka emigrated between the mid-1950s and the early 1960s to the West. (E. Nakamura, "Romanovka: Poselok Staroverov v Man'chzhurii (1936–1945 gg.) [Romanovka: An Old Believer Settlement in Manchuria (between 1936–1945)]," in *Traditsionnaia Dukhovnaia i Material'naia Kultura Russkikh Starobriadcheskikh Poselenii v Stranakh Evropy, Azii i Ameriki [Traditional Spiritual and Material Culture of the Russian Old Ritualists Population in the Countries of Europe, Asia and America]*, ed. N. N. Pokrovskii and Richard A. Morris (Novosibirsk: Nauka, Sibirskoe otdelenie, 1992), 249, 252.

<sup>126</sup> Vlas, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 6 January 2011, Gympie.

<sup>127</sup> Vlas, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 6 January 2011, Gympie.



Many of my interviewees said that their families did not consider repatriation to the Soviet Union; they suspected that the Communists would deceive them. Nina's grandparents did not want to return to Soviet Russia: "They knew that some people went back to Russia and they didn't have a welcome back party," Nina said. "They had really a bad, hard life back in Russia. [...] And a lot of them were put in jail and charged as traitors to the country."<sup>128</sup> Nina described the desperate situation for the Russian settlers who remained in China and refused to return to the Soviet Union. "During these years, between 1955 and when we left in 1964, China was a very, very poor country. There was not enough food for everyone."<sup>129</sup> Nina remembered that China's economic situation worsened in the late 1950s; in the early 1960s the Great Leap Forward and the collectivisation led to widespread starvation.

When China became Communist you weren't allowed to do anything you wanted, there was no freedom. You were not allowed to pray. In the house you were not allowed to have icons on the walls. There was no freedom at all. [...] In those days my parents had a house, they took it away from them. I remember one morning, we woke up and they were taking the stock away from our backyard and my mum came out and said: What's going on? What are you doing? They said: Go back into the house. Don't ask any questions. They just took it away, there was no warning, no excuse, no reason, nothing.<sup>130</sup>

Nina remembered the deteriorating living situation of the Russian population and the Communists' violent oppression against them. Nina's memories show how people became more and more detached from the places of their settlement in China. Emotional bonds weakened under the continuous threat of violence and state aggression. And this detachment gained momentum as memories of dispossession and state persecution encompassed tragedies of illness, starvation, and death. Masha remembered that during this time of widespread food shortages and poverty her little baby brother became very sick. Her parents took him on a train to Harbin where they wanted to see a doctor who could help him.

Mum and my father went [to Harbin] – maybe they could get a doctor to help

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<sup>128</sup> Nina, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 8 July 2009, Melbourne.

<sup>129</sup> Nina, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 8 July 2009, Melbourne.

<sup>130</sup> Nina, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 8 July 2009, Melbourne.

him. He was crying and crying. Mum was trying to feed him, but she had no milk. It was so cold in the train and he died. When he stopped crying, Mum pretended he was sleeping. And all the Chinese people said: Your baby is dead. But if he's dead they would throw his dead body on the trail. They would not allow my mum to carry a dead child in her arms on the train. Mum and Dad had such a hard time pretending that he was sleeping [...] they just wanted to bury him in Harbin. Mum said that was the hardest thing: to have to carry him in her arms when he was already dead, and pretending to feed him for another ten hours or so on the train.<sup>131</sup>

Masha's and Nina's memories of this time, shortly before their families emigrated from China, sounded like horror stories. These memories were told in such a tension that Nina banged her hand on the table as she remembered how her family was treated by the local Chinese authorities. Masha occasionally shook her head in disbelief, recounting the tragedy and loss her family had to cope with. In these bodily reactions, which might go unnoticed during an interview, affective tensions became apparent, which were triggered by memories of events that lead up to my interviewees' displacement and forced migration from China.

Although many of my interviewees described the changing living conditions under Communist rule in China, few spoke about the personal feelings that these changes and events evoked. I could sense Masha's sadness about the death of her baby brother, but she did not speak of it, or describe her mother's grief. Nina did not describe the anxious and desperate feeling that the expropriation of her family must have invoked. It seemed as if the intensity of these experiences was not yet set in a fixed narrative, as if they still needed to acquire meaning and sense. Some of these stories were told as if my interviewees had to reassure themselves that these events – family tragedies, acts of state terror and famine – had really happened.

The description of an atmosphere that evokes feelings of dread and horror does not necessarily define personal emotional states. It can also highlight the affective intensity and the continuous presence of an experience that people associate with this atmosphere or a certain place. Brian Massumi's concept of affect – which needs to be distinguished from emotion – acknowledges the limits of our cognitive thinking about feelings and attends to the bodily reactions such as Nina's banging of her fist against

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<sup>131</sup> Masha, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 18 July 2010, Melbourne.

the table. Massumi suggests that emotion can be defined as a qualified intensity which is fixed semantically and semiotically. Emotions give us a way to name, narrate and define the quality of an experience, or in Massumi's words: "It is intensity owned and recognised."<sup>132</sup> Emotions are already attached with meaning and categorised in relation to the felt intensity of an experience. For Massumi however, affect does not qualify the intensity of an experience. It is the sensible body that opens up to the actuality of this experience. Affect does not limit the interpretation of an experience by identifying discursive categories or defining a personal emotional state. Affect remains attentive to sensibilities that play out before our reflective thinking.<sup>133</sup> Affect is not reducible to affection or personal feelings, argues Massumi, it is "a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state to another"<sup>134</sup>.

In Masha's village, ten to fifteen families were left who did not want to go 'back'. They knew that some Russians had already left China for destinations other than the Soviet Union. Masha remembered that her father, who acted in the name of the whole village, had made contact with different embassies and consulates in Harbin. One day – Masha could not remember the exact year or date – two Chinese police officers came to the village looking for him because he was suspected of wanting to leave China for a Western country.

We lived much further away from the big city. Our village was along the river, and there was a big valley and big mountains. [...] So every time somebody came into our village, the whole village was watching. If someone strange would come into the village, who didn't belong to the Russian community, we would be already prepared. Father was prepared: Mum gave him a little bag with some bread and other stuff. And my father just ran to the mountains and stayed there.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 28.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>134</sup> Brian Massumi, foreword in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism & Schizophrenia*, by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1988; repr., London: Continuum, 2004), xvii.

<sup>135</sup> Masha, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 18 July 2010, Melbourne.

The police was searching for Masha's father. "Everyone was scared that they would catch him, of course! And the whole village was under arrest."<sup>136</sup> At the end the police could not find Masha's father and left the village. A few days later the police came back to look for him again; this time three or four Chinese police officers stayed in Masha's house for a couple of days, waiting for her father to return. Masha said that she was absolutely scared.

We had no food. But mum had to cook and feed them. [...] And if I wanted to go to the toilet which was outside, I had to go there at gunpoint. They made sure we wouldn't run away. If one of us wanted to go to the toilet, a soldier or officer would follow us with the shotgun – and they had big guns – [...] they just could shoot you like a rabbit!<sup>137</sup>

After they could not find Masha's father for the second time, "they never came back and left us alone." Whereas Masha's father never went to jail, many other men in the Russian settler communities did. Everybody knew of a father, brother or cousin who was imprisoned and sentenced as traitors to their country. These men had shown intentions to leave Communist China for western countries which did not recognise the People's Republic of China diplomatically.

Nina's father was imprisoned for several years because he wanted to leave China to go to Australia. The parents of Nina's mother had already migrated to Australia in 1955 and they wrote letters back saying: "come to Australia! Australia is a good country"<sup>138</sup>. Nina's parents decided to leave China and join her grandparents in Australia. However, when Nina's father went to the Chinese authorities to ask for permission to go to Australia, he was arrested and charged with treason.

They arrested him very early in the morning even before dawn and made him walk through the town on the main street, so people could see him. They made him walk with chains on his feet and hands. And when they saw my father has been arrested, everybody started running to my mum. What did he do? He's such a nice man, such a quiet man! What did he do wrong to deserve such a

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<sup>136</sup> Masha, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 18 July 2010, Melbourne.

<sup>137</sup> Masha, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 18 July 2010, Melbourne.

<sup>138</sup> Nina, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 8 July 2009, Melbourne.

treatment? Obviously the reason was to show the others and to scare them: Better stay, don't go to Australia. That's what's going to happen to you! And my mum explained that we wanted to go to Australia and they asked: What is Australia? Where is Australia? Nobody knew about Australia. So my mum told them and gave them the letters from my grandparents to read. And then all of them wanted to go to Australia. So every head of the family, the whole town was arrested; everybody wanted to go to Australia. And news spread all over to the other towns and villages. Nobody wanted to go back to Russia [the Soviet Union].<sup>139</sup>

Meanwhile, many other Russians and almost everyone from Nina's village had already left: "Lots of people and families just packed up and fled China. They ended up in Hong Kong and from Hong Kong a lot of them went to Brazil or Argentina; many went to America, New Zealand and Australia."<sup>140</sup>

As the collectivisation of farmland progressed and private property was almost completely abolished, it became nearly impossible for the Russian settlers in China to survive economically without becoming fully integrated into the new socialist economic structures. For many Russian exiles and the White Army soldiers who once had sought refuge from Bolshevik collectivisation plans and the civil war, their settlement in China had turned into a nightmare. My interviewees spoke of an atmosphere of anxiety and fear which prevailed in their village communities and settlements in China and prompted many families to finally decide to leave China and search for settlement options other than the Soviet Union.

Between 1955 and 1956, China's policy towards the remaining Russian population underwent a significant shift. Instead of compelling the refugees' integration into the new socialist order, the Chinese authorities opted to fast-track their departure. Particularly the foreign settlers in the border regions, such as Xinjiang were regarded as potential security risks. As the Sino-Soviet relations deteriorated in the mid-1950s the Chinese government renounced its previously preferred repatriation policy which many White Russians continued to resist. The authorities did not resort to forcible deportations; instead they issued the necessary exit permits for destinations other than

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<sup>139</sup> Nina, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 8 July 2009, Melbourne.

<sup>140</sup> Nina, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 8 July 2009, Melbourne.

the Soviet Union and allowed the Russian refugees to leave for Hong Kong.<sup>141</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The Old Believers' memories of their life in China evidence a multitude of attachments and disconnections to the places of their former settlement. My interviewees remembered the wild beautiful nature of northern Manchuria. They recalled the strength of their religious community which endured harsh living conditions in their remote mountain villages. Many spoke with pride about the former glory of a 'Russian' Harbin and the efforts of the Russian settlers to develop China's backward northern regions. The Old Believers' memories of their settlement in China also conveyed a sense of continuity with their Russian cultural heritage and origin. My interviewees' memories of place were embedded in a fluid process during which the Old Believers' former dwelling and living in China was remembered in context with other places, times and objects. Often my interviewees would contrast and compare an idealised image of a homogenous Old Believer community in China with their present diaspora in Australia. However, these idealised attachments to their settlement in China were challenged by the experience of their forced migration and displacement.

My interviewees did not draw on an integrated memory of places but shared often contradictory, biased and ambivalent memories of their living in China and their displacement. In particular, emotional dynamics in the memory of place – of longing and desire, of fear and despair – were more complex than what is suggested by concepts of migration and memory that concentrate either on movement or attachment, on fixed sites of memory or its fluidity. Whereas this chapter has focused largely on spatial aspects of the Old Believers' migration experience, in the following I discuss the temporal trajectories of their migrant journey to Australia. The next chapter also highlights individual hopes, personal actions and decisions taken during the migrant journey of my interviewees.

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<sup>141</sup> Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration, Report of the 12<sup>th</sup> Session of the Subcommittee on Budget and Finance, 28 July 1965; HKPRO: CO 1030/1688, HKMS158-1-333; Glen Peterson, "The Uneven Development of the International Refugee Regime in Postwar Asia: Evidence from China, Hong Kong and Indonesia," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 25, No. 3 (2012), 331.

## Chapter 4

### The Temporalities of Migration: The Old Believers' Transit through Hong Kong

Hardship, hunger, cold – that's what first came to Nina's mind when she told me about her life in China, after the Communists had taken control in 1949:

China was in a very poor state, people struggled to survive. People were starving – not just Russian people – all of China was starving. There was nothing to eat and we've seen horrible things. There was even cannibalism at that time! It was horrible, horrible! We've seen horrible things!"<sup>1</sup>

At first Nina hesitated to tell me about the "horrible things" she had seen, but after a while she explained that people would kidnap little children from market places to eat them. She remembered that one day when she and her mother were walking along the street,

we found a little girl's head on the side of the road [...] There was nothing else to eat – they would kill children and eat their bodies. And my mum and I, we were walking and we saw this little girl's head, a little Chinese girl with the black plaits. I would tell this [to] my children or anyone else who is born in Australia and has never seen a hard day of work – they think that I am dreaming or making this up.<sup>2</sup>

Nina shook her head in disbelief – maybe because people in Australia, her own children, friends or relatives doubted her horror story. Maybe she herself found the upsetting and tragic memories of her life in China unbelievable. Again, Nina spoke of her father's arrest, which she remembered to have been a turning point of her life in China:

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<sup>1</sup> Nina, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 8 July 2009, Melbourne.

<sup>2</sup> Nina, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 8 July 2009, Melbourne.

Before my father was arrested life was alright there [in China]; it was good. [...] We used to live in a village. We used to have everything and grew our own vegetables. We used to have stock, cows and horses and sheep, whatever. But when my father was arrested, they took everything from us. They took all the stock from us! They took our house away and they even took our money, whatever my parents had saved. [...] My mum had four children at the time. I had three brothers – no, two brothers and a sister – it was four of us. And my mother was struggling to bring us up. Then the two youngest, the boy and the girl, they died because they got sick. And my mum didn't have money to take them to the doctor. The doctor wouldn't see them, unless you pay money. And they died in my mum's arms.<sup>3</sup>

Nina sighed: "They died, but my brother and I, we survived."<sup>4</sup> Her family survived on proceeds from odd jobs that her mother took on, working as a maid or gardener. Nina's memories concentrated on her family's struggle to survive, the deteriorating living situation and economic decline of the People's Republic of China from the mid-1950s.

In the following I explore the decisions the Old Believers made to leave Communist China, and their hopes and expectations. I also reflect on the different trajectories of my interviewees' migration. Some families spent weeks on the road and on trains. They travelled through China until they reached Hong Kong, which in the early 1950s had become the transit point for international efforts to organise the exodus of European refugees from China. About two thousand Old Believers passed through the crown colony on their way to the United States, Canada, Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay, Bolivia, Australia and New Zealand.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Nina, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 8 July 2009, Melbourne.

<sup>4</sup> Nina, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 8 July 2009, Melbourne.

<sup>5</sup> It is difficult to establish the exact number of Old Believers who emigrated from China between the mid-1950s and the late 1960s. Whereas the UNHCR estimated that in 1964 the largest part of 1,500 Old Believers was already resettled, the Australian Council of Aid to Refugees suggested that close to 1,500 Old Believers still remained in Hong Kong and China in 1965. (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Report on The Problem of the Old Believers from China, 21 October 1965; Hong Kong Public Records Office (hereafter HKPRO): CO 1030/1687, HKMS158-1-332; A.C. Prior, "A Survey of the Current Refugee Situation," in *Addresses to Refugee and Migrant Service Conference, Canberra, February 22-23, 1966*, ed. Australian Council for Overseas Aid, Refugee and Migrant Service Commission. ([Sydney?]: Australian Council for Overseas Aid, n.d.), 156).



The time that the Old Believers spent in Hong Kong is crucial for our understanding of their migration process because it determined the conditions of their resettlement. Many families had to wait for weeks or months to arrange their onward journey to a country of resettlement. As their migrant journeys came to a temporary standstill, the Old Believers experienced a period of time that needed to be endured and waited out. This focus on the experience of time and on the temporalities of migration also offers insights into the political decisions and actions that sought to administer, and to prolong or accelerate the Old Believers' migratory movement.

I identify the political decisions and actions that were taken to resettle the Old Believers as a distinct group of refugees by drawing on archival documents which highlight the complexity of institutional and political procedures that guided the migration and resettlement of the European refugees from China. Their migratory movement also points to the dynamics, shifts and consolidations of refugee resettlement and immigration policies which evolved after the Second World War. Several governments and various resettlement countries shared the responsibility for this international resettlement project, which also involved the International Refugee Organization (IRO), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Committee for European Migration (ICEM).

Institutional and political discourses offer, however, only a largely homogenised view on the Old Believers' migrant journey. They describe the refugees' movement as a linear process between a country of departure and resettlement. The life stories of my interviewees reveal meanings and interpretations attached to their migration experience that are overlooked by the focus on political decisions, institutional procedures and immigration policies. Individual memories give an understanding of the decisions and motivations, as well as the various migrant paths and resettlement options that shaped the Old Believers' migration to Australia.

The Old Believers' migration experience and diaspora identity is not exclusively signified by dispersal and trauma. My interviewees did not remember their emigration from China merely as a result of acts of war and torture. They did not discuss their migration experience in terms of a medical condition or trauma – something that is

often associated with experiences of displacement and forced migration.<sup>6</sup> Many Old Believers mentioned acts of violence, dispossession and persecution carried out by the Chinese Communist regime. But as they talked about these injustices and their suffering, they also emphasised that the deteriorating living situation and political changes did affect the Russian settlers as much as the local Chinese population.

The Old Believers saw their emigration from China as their chance to escape the hardships and deterioration of their living conditions rather than as a traumatic experience. I have therefore sought to release my interviewees from what Nikos Papastergiadis called “the burdened privilege of victimage”<sup>7</sup>. Papastergiadis has called on us to examine the multiple levels of displacement:

Migration is not a problem that is confined to the traumas of departure, the imbalances in social injustice, the mistakes between languages, the dreams of release, and the nostalgia for return, rather migration with all its asymmetrical contours and uneven times is a metaphor for the modern condition.<sup>8</sup>

The Old Believers’ migration experience is not fully revealed in a narrative that treats them as helpless and vulnerable refugees who rely on the compassion of state agencies, relief organisations and countries of resettlement. My interviewees were, to a significant degree, involved in the decisions and actions taken during their migration

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<sup>6</sup> Barbara Ferguson and Eileen Pittaway, eds., *Nobody Wants to Talk About It – Refugee Women’s Mental Health* (Parramatta: Transcultural Mental Health Centre, 1999); John P. Wilson and Boris Droždek, eds., *Broken Spirits: The Treatment of Traumatized Asylum Seekers, Refugees, War and Torture Victims* (New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2004); Anthony J. Marsella et al., eds., *Amidst Peril and Pain: The Mental Health and Wellbeing of the World’s Refugees* (Washington: American Psychiatric Association 1994). Liisa Malkki, as well as Didier Fassin and Estelle D’Halluin, have acknowledged that dominant discourses about refugees and asylum seekers have shifted from political to medicalised ones. These discourses reduce refugees to passive victims of their migration experience, its physical sequels and psychic traumas. (Liisa H. Malkki, “Refugees and Exile: From “Refugee Studies” to the National Order of Things,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24, No. 1 (1995), 495–523; Didier Fassin and Estelle D’ Halluin, “The Truth from the Body: Medical Certificates as Ultimate Evidence for Asylum Seekers,” *American Anthropologist* 107, No. 4 (2005), 597–608).

<sup>7</sup> Nikos Papastergiadis, *Modernity As Exile: The Stranger in John Berger’s Writing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 1.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

and resettlement in Australia. Diaspora communities can see in their displacement an impulse to (re)produce and (re)create the experience of loss; however, their displacement also offers the means to discover new territories, and to produce, and reinvest in, new identities and attachments to place.<sup>9</sup>

### **The Hopes and Expectations of Migration**

The international resettlement efforts for European refugees in Communist China began in the early 1950s. In 1953, the UNHCR estimated that there were still between 10,000 and 15,000 European refugees in China, mainly in the areas of Shanghai, Tientsin and Harbin.<sup>10</sup> Most of them were White Russians; there were also smaller numbers of refugees from Eastern and Southern Europe.<sup>11</sup> Many of them were living in the Shanghai area, and between three to six thousand refugees had registered at the Shanghai office of the IRO<sup>12</sup> after the Second World War. However, many European refugees and Russian settlers living in China never registered with the IRO. Some considered that the new regime would be short-lived, and others did not require assistance in the early days after the communist takeover. Some could not register because they lived a long way from the nearest IRO office.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Marie-Aude Baronian, Stephan Besser, and Yolande Jansen argue that these multiple interpretations of displacement and migration became possible as soon as the studies of diasporas ceased to overestimate its psychopathological connotation. (Marie-Aude Baronian, Stephan Besser and Yolande Jansen, introduction to *Diaspora and Memory: Figures of Displacement in Contemporary Literature, Arts and Politics*, ed. Marie-Aude Baronian, Stephan Besser and Yolande Jansen (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 15).

<sup>10</sup> James M. Read, Report to the High Commissioner on Trip to South East Asia, n. d.; HKPRO: CO 1023/117, HKMS157-1-10.

<sup>11</sup> Glen Peterson, "'To Be or Not to Be a Refugee': The International Politics of the Hong Kong Refugee Crisis, 1949–55," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 36, No. 2 (2008), 181, 192, Note 63.

<sup>12</sup> Between 1946 and 1952, the IRO had been significantly involved with worldwide refugee issues. Its primary orientation was towards resettlement and not, as in the case of its predecessor organisation, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency (UNRRA), towards relief, rehabilitation and repatriation. (Iain Guest, *The UNHCR at 40: Refugee Protection at the Crossroads. A Report of the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights* (New York: The Committee, 1991), 22–23; Dennis Gallagher, "The Evolution of the International Refugee System," *International Migration Review* 23, No. 3 (1989), 579).

<sup>13</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Memorandum on the Situation of the Refugees of European Origin in China, February 1953; HKPRO: CO 1023/118, HKMS157-1-11.

The great distance between the IRO office in Shanghai and the little mountain village in Xinjiang Province would have also kept Nina's family from seeking assistance with the IRO or other international relief organisations. The living situation of Nina's family had deteriorated significantly after the Communist take-over, and her father's imprisonment (see chapter 3). Nina described the time before her family could resume their plan to leave China as a time spent waiting for her father to be released from jail.

We used to go and visit him in jail, my mum, me and my brother. [...] It was always the plan not to give up. My mum used to tell my father news like: The Russians are still fleeing. They are all going to Australia! It was still the plan: as soon as he would be released, we would be going there.<sup>14</sup>

Nina's family hoped for something better, "a better life in Australia"<sup>15</sup>. This hope for a better life in Australia guided their decisions and actions while they remained in China. Nina remembered that for more than seven years she used to visit her father in jail:

I had to walk for maybe three, four hours towards the mountains where they used to keep the prisoners. I used to bring something, maybe a bit of bread or biscuits, but they [the guards] took it from me, and said: "You can't see your father because he's working underground." I had to walk back without seeing him. I used to cry all the way back home because they didn't allow me to see him. They took from me what I brought and I didn't even know if they would give it to him or if they would maybe eat it themselves.<sup>16</sup>

I could sense despair and anger in Nina's voice. Although she was only a little girl of seven when her father was convicted, the memories of his imprisonment and suffering still upset her. Nina would have been in her early sixties when we sat in her lounge room, sipping a cup of tea. I could hardly imagine the hardships she and her family went through, as the low winter sun was shining into Nina's huge open-plan kitchen. Fresh flowers stood on the dinner table next to me. I felt a sense of cosy homeliness as I was putting my tea cup back on its saucer.

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<sup>14</sup> Nina, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 8 July 2009, Melbourne.

<sup>15</sup> Nina, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 8 July 2009, Melbourne.

<sup>16</sup> Nina, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 8 July 2009, Melbourne.

Was this the living she had hoped for back in China, waiting for her father to be released from jail? Nina's account of her migration was infused with the confidence that Australia could offer her a better future. She explained that her family migrated to Australia because they were searching for religious freedom and a life lived in peace.

Freedom, that was what we were looking forward to, and to have our own house. My grandparents and my auntie had already written letters to my mum that they had a house and jobs. And they were not afraid of anything, which was what we've been looking forward to come to. [...] Freedom, that you can work and that you can go to school! You can do anything you want in Australia. No one will say 'no' to you.<sup>17</sup>

Nina's hope for a better life in Australia related to her present and lived reality. She expressed it in terms of religious freedom and financial and material security – the Australian dream of owning your own home. Nina hoped for freedom: "The freedom that you don't have to be frightened to say anything; that you don't have to be frightened of having icons in the house or even wearing a cross." She showed me the little silver cross hanging around her neck.

What is the nature of Nina's hope is in this retrospective account of her migration? Is it an emotion or an affective state, does it have a cognitive or an embodied dimension? Hope is associated with a range of bodily feelings such as desire and fear, as well as rationales and cognitive processes during which we envision our future. Phillip Mar characterises hope as a sustained and fluctuating emotional process. Hope may encompass individual intensities of affect, such as Nina's desire to be reunited with her father. Hope also includes feelings that are shared within a group towards a certain object or outcome, such as the wish of Nina's family to leave China. Mar acknowledges that hope does not only bear an intimate relation to our immediate desires and wishes, but also involves elements of constraint and resignation, the sublimation and postponement of our desires.<sup>18</sup> He writes:

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<sup>17</sup> Nina, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 8 July 2009, Melbourne.

<sup>18</sup> Phillip Mar, "Unsettling Potentialities: Topographies of Hope in Transnational Migration," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 26, No. 4 (2005), 364.

Perhaps this element of realism [...] is what makes hope a useful means of grasping what motivates and sustains migrant practices, over other possible categories such as desire or fantasy. The social analysis of hope must encompass the time of waiting, spatial and social movement, expectation and achievement, all of which are fundamental to the emotional experience of migration.<sup>19</sup>

The limits and restraints imposed on hope cannot be dealt with as merely utopian thought or optimism. Hope does not describe the conviction that something will turn out well, or the vision of an ideal future. Subjective hope creates a state of mind in which people endure uncertainty, and continue living in the certainty that something could change about their current situation, regardless of how it turns out.<sup>20</sup> Ernst Bloch upheld the principle of hope against the feeling of anxiety, and called it “the most important expectant emotion, the most authentic emotion of longing and thus of self”<sup>21</sup>. Hope is a transformative and creative force. In a social context, hope drives humans to dream of a better life, anticipate what is in the process of becoming, and then strive to attain it.<sup>22</sup>

Half a year before the end of his sentence, Nina’s father was released from jail, and the family could finally revive their plan to migrate to Australia. There was “no use to keep him in jail,” Nina said.

So after seven and a half years they released him and said: Alright, go! [...] At the end the Chinese government decided that they can’t do anything; [the Russians] they’re just going, they are just fleeing. And they gave up. At the end they said: alright, you’re all free, go!<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 365.

<sup>20</sup> Václav Havel, *Disturbing the Peace: A Conversation with Karel Hvižd’ala* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 181; Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, Vol. 1 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 12.

<sup>21</sup> Bloch, *Principle of Hope*, (see note 20), 75.

<sup>22</sup> Jaklin Elliott, “What Have We Done with Hope? A Brief History,” in *Interdisciplinary Perspectives On Hope*, ed. Jaklin A. Elliott (New York: Nova Science, 2005), 9; Bloch, *Principle of Hope*, (see note 20), 3–4, 13.

<sup>23</sup> Nina, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 8 July 2009, Melbourne.

Nina sighed and with a tinge of disappointment in her voice she said: “everyone was gone and had fled. And we were last, we left there last. We had stood up and would have been the first ones to be going to Australia, but we left last! Everyone by that time was gone, only two families were left.”<sup>24</sup> In Nina’s retrospective account of her migration experience, she remembered the hopes and expectations she had attached to her emigration from China.

While we were talking she did not wait or long for the fulfilment or actualisation of these hopes and wishes; instead she reflected on their actual and present fulfilment. Nina stressed that her family was “just happy to leave China and to come to Australia”. They settled in Tasmania where they found work and quickly gained material, social and financial security. Nina remembered that her parents “bought a house – their own house! And a car! And they were happy, they were so happy to leave China to come to Australia.”<sup>25</sup> As I looked around Nina’s lounge room, I noticed pictures that depicted her travels to Asia and Europe. Nina mentioned her future travel plans and talked about her new car and investment properties; she tried to convey the impression that she was living a prosperous life.

Tim’s parents also had to wait for several years until they were granted permission to leave China and move to Hong Kong. “Our family actually started applying to come to Australia in 1960,” Tim remembered, but his family could not leave the country because the Communist government suddenly closed the borders. The irregular and inconsistent flow of refugees from mainland China to Hong Kong was a result of China’s changing border policies, and the varying conditions and procedures under which the European refugees could obtain exit permits.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Nina, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 8 July 2009, Melbourne.

<sup>25</sup> Nina, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 8 July 2009, Melbourne.

<sup>26</sup> The influx of European refugees from mainland China to Hong Kong peaked in 1953 after the establishment of the UNHCR/ICEM’s Far Eastern Operation; but numbers dropped again from 3,275 in 1953 to 590 in 1955. Before 1956 only a few Old Believer families could obtain exit permits to leave China. The number of Old Believers who migrated to Hong Kong increased between 1957 and 1958 to up to 1,500 people. Whereas this migration movement came to a halt in 1960, the number of Old Believers who arrived in the Colony increased again in mid-1962 as exit permits were issued for refugees remaining in Xinjiang Province. (Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration, Report of the 12<sup>th</sup> Session of the Subcommittee on Budget and Finance, 28 July 1965; HKPRO: CO 1030/1688, HKMS158-1-333;

My brother actually came [to Australia] with a friend of his a few days earlier. And when my parents were sold up and ready to go, they shut the border. [...] So my brother came to Australia without my parents. He was sixteen. So he was basically applying [for us to come to Australia], I suppose, through the Council of Churches which was helping refugees in Hong Kong to settle and move to different countries. So he was applying for us to come from here [Australia], and we were applying from over there [China]. Then we got a temporary visa and every three or six months you would go there [to the Chinese authorities] and they stamped it. And that just went on until 1972. So twelve years we were just living there [in China] waiting in the queue, I suppose.<sup>27</sup>

By the time Tim's parents received their permit to leave China, their older son in Melbourne was married and had two children. He sent letters with photos of his own house. Tim remembered:

He used to always write about the jobs that he had done. When he got a job in a factory he wrote in one of the letters that he was now a boss, he was a leading person. But we thought: what is this terminology 'boss'? We don't have that in Russian. I think, when he wrote he just took it for granted and assumed that people knew what it meant. But my mum went: What is 'boss'? I mean [in Russian] *bosoi* [barefoot], that's when you have no shoes on, that's boss. What is this all about?<sup>28</sup>

Tim laughed about what his family might have expected upon their departure from their hometown of Kulja in Xinjiang. Tim remembered: "It was early May and we just finished putting the garden in. We were selling up all our equipment and belongings and everything else. Everyone was excited. We knew we were going to leave, and Australia was this – Shangri-La!"<sup>29</sup> Tim's voice had a mysterious undertone. Shangri-La – that

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Louise W. Holborn, *Refugees: A Problem of Our Time: The Work of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 1951–1972*, Vol. 1 (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1975), 673).

<sup>27</sup> Tim, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 10 July 2010, Melbourne.

<sup>28</sup> Tim, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 10 July 2010, Melbourne.

<sup>29</sup> Tim, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 10 July 2010, Melbourne.



was the mysterious land of eternal peace hidden behind the snow-capped mountains of the Himalayas. Some of my interviewees had also mentioned this place of idyllic peace and tranquillity, calling it Belovodia or Kitezsh. The legend of Belovodia often symbolised the spiritual motives and religious reasons for the Old Believers migratory movements, especially between the Russian Far East and China. The Old Believers were searching for a “sacred place” where their religious salvation would be guaranteed and where they could re-established their priesthood and a Christian community devoted to God.<sup>30</sup>

This legend informed Tim’s memories of his migration. Shangri-La symbolised the hopes and wishes that his family associated with their migration to Australia. Tim’s memories of his departure from China revealed a state of anticipation and hope that his migration encompassed. Retrospectively, however, Tim’s memories were not told in a time of waiting for his family’s emigration and resettlement. Tim remembered the outcomes of his migration – the actualisation of his hopes and expectations, rather than their anticipation.

Hope and expectation within the temporal structure of waiting share the same direction towards the future. Hope, however, penetrates further into the future: “it is more ample, more full of promise“, according to Vincent Capranzano.<sup>31</sup> Hope can make us imagine possible futures while avoiding engagement with undesirable aspects of the present. Tim’s family kept thinking of a future in Australia while they continued their daily routines, endured the pressures of the Communist regime and waited for their exit permit. Hope gave Tim’s family a temporalised sense of potential, of having a future. Hope also created the capacity to wait, defer, and even transform oneself in anticipation.<sup>32</sup>

Expectations, as well as the moment of waiting, are always filled with anticipation. It would be wrong to assume, as Giovanni Gasparini did, that the waiter’s attitude in waiting varies. He argues that someone can merely wait for something to happen, and

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<sup>30</sup> O. N. Bakhtina, “Problemy Izucheniia Migratsii Starobriadtsev (Sibir’ i Dal’nii Vostok) [Research Problems of the Old Ritualists’ Migration (Siberia and the Far East)],” in *Rossiiia i Kitai na Dal’nevostochnykh Rubezhakh [Russia and China on the Far Eastern Borders]*, ed. D. P. Bolotin et al., Vol. 2 (Blagoveshchensk: AmGU, 2001), 12–13).

<sup>31</sup> Vincent Crapanzano, *Imaginative Horizons: An Essay in Literary-Philosophical Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 104.

<sup>32</sup> Mar, “Unsettling Potentialities” (see note 18), 365.

someone can also consciously expect that an event will take place at a given time. However, the waiter always waits for the actualisation of what he or she is waiting for, in hope and expectation. The idea of a better life somewhere else might be more abstract and reaches deeper into the future than Tim's immediate expectation for an exit permit. The difference between hope and expectation lies in the state of anticipation that gives the waiter, to a certain extent, control over the situation.<sup>33</sup>

For many of my interviewees, the decisions and actions taken during their migrant journey were marked and guided by their hope for a better life in Australia. In regards to this state of anticipation, my interviewees' memories of their migration relate to Martin Heidegger's concept of expectation. He argues that to expect something possible is always to understand it with regard to whether and when and how it will be actually present at hand. "Expecting is not just an occasional looking-away from the possible to its possible actualization, but is essentially a *waiting for that actualization* [ein *Warten auf diese*]." <sup>34</sup> Heidegger offers a less utopian and more immediate and tangible understanding of the hopes and expectations implicit in the life stories of my interviewees. The actualisation of the possible – the Old Believers' being granted permission to leave China – annihilates its mere possibility as soon as it is made attainable. What Heidegger's analysis makes clear is that our waiting for something comports itself towards the possible: We do not consider the possible as a possibility as such; rather we look *away* from the possible, and to its actualisation.<sup>35</sup> As my interviewees talked about their emigration from China, their migrant memories did not only reflect on the mere possibility, but the actualisation of their migration movement, and the lived reality of their migrant lives.

### **The Old Believers' Emigration and Arrival in Hong Kong**

The beginning of the resettlement of thousands of European refugees from China was fraught with difficulties. The international efforts emerged slowly, and finally opened possibilities and ways for the Old Believers to emigrate from China. In January 1952, the IRO office in Shanghai closed.<sup>36</sup> Its remaining funds of US\$ 235,000 were allocated

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<sup>33</sup> Giovanni Gasparini, "On Waiting," *Time & Society* 4, No. 1 (1995), 30–31.

<sup>34</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 306.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 305.

<sup>36</sup> The IRO office in Shanghai was allowed to function semi-officially between 1952 and 1956.

to the UNHCR, which was to provide continuous emergency assistance to the European refugees remaining in China. The fact that these funds were exhausted by the end of the year delayed further resettlement efforts.<sup>37</sup> The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Gerrit Jan van Heuven Goedhart, appealed to the General Assembly to grant him authority to launch an appeal to governments and non-governmental organisations to raise US\$ 3,000,000 in emergency funds. The funds were to provide immediate relief for the neediest refugees who had been left behind by the IRO, including the European refugees in China. At the time, not much international attention was paid to their particular precarious situation.<sup>38</sup>

Like all Russian settlers in China, the Old Believers fell unequivocally within the UNHCR mandate, because they met two conditions: first, they had fled their country of citizenship owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, and were unable or unwilling to return to their country of citizenship owing to such fear; and second, they were unable or unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of their government because of a well-founded fear of persecution by that government.<sup>39</sup> But the Old Believers' refugee status and the UNHCR mandate did not play a significant

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(Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration, Report of the 12<sup>th</sup> Session of the Subcommittee on Budget and Finance, 28 July 1965; HKPRO: CO 1030/1688, HKMS158-1-333).

<sup>37</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Memorandum on the Situation of the Refugees of European Origin in China, February 1953; HKPRO: CO 1023/118, HKMS157-1-11; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Report of the High Commissioner on Emergency Aid to Refugees with Special Reference to Problems of Co-ordination and the Situation of Refugees in China, 28 July 1952; HKPRO: CO 1023/118, HKMS157-1-11.

<sup>38</sup> In the early years after its inception in 1950, the status of the UNHCR was doubtful. The High Commissioner was provided with just a temporary authority of three years. He was only allocated a small administrative budget (US\$ 300,000), and he was not allowed to raise additional funds. (Glen Peterson, "The Uneven Development of the International Refugee Regime in Postwar Asia: Evidence from China, Hong Kong and Indonesia," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 25, No. 3 (2012), 329–330; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Statue of the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees: General Assembly Resolution 428 (V), 14 December 1950, <http://www.unhcr.org/3b66c39e1.html> (accessed 11 January 2013), par. 5, 10; Guest, *The UNHCR at 40* (see note 12), 26–27).

<sup>39</sup> Gallagher, "Evolution of the International Refugee System" (see note 12), 580–581; Peterson "To Be or Not to Be a Refugee" (see note 11), 174; Alex Cunliffe, "The Refugee Crisis: A Study of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees," *Political Studies* XLIII (1995), 281–284.

role in my interviewees' memories. Their 'refugeeness' was not a crucial point of identification for their migrant community. The conditions of their designation as refugees seemed unclear and the institutional responsibilities for their resettlement were unknown.

I asked Vlas if he arrived as a refugee in Australia. He frowned and wondered: "I think they called us refugees, but how do I have to understand 'refugee'? Refugees flee secretly, don't they? We didn't leave secretly, we just left." Vlas got involved in a short argument with his wife about the determining characteristics of a refugee and finally concluded: "We were kind of refugees because they [the Chinese authorities] took everything from us, we couldn't take anything."<sup>40</sup> When Vlas's family crossed the border from China to Hong Kong, the Chinese border control confiscated all their valuables and money.

We came here [to Australia] without a penny. We had some money but it was all taken from us in Hong Kong – when we came from China to Hong Kong. You know, we were fools! We didn't know that we could have put our money into a bank account in China. Put it in the bank, come over here and then go [again to a bank] and withdraw it. But we didn't know that, we gave all that money away at the border. [...] There [in Hong Kong] the government gave us food, and everything. They sent us over here and we started to work again, earning all this money.<sup>41</sup>

At the time of Vlas's border crossing in the mid-1960s minimal rights for refugees had been established by the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees of 1951.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Vlas, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 6 January 2011, Gympie.

<sup>41</sup> Vlas, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 11 January 2011, Gympie.

<sup>42</sup> Although the convention made provision to refugees' right to be protected against forcible return, or refoulement, it reflected a general hesitancy of nation states to extend efforts on their behalf. Whereas the 1951 Convention was limited to protecting European refugees in the aftermath of the Second World War, the 1967 Protocol expanded its scope to address global refugee problems. Pamela Ballinger argues that the definition of the refugee employed by the 1951 Convention proved highly particularistic even as it claimed normativity in its status as international law. Its definition omitted the eligibility of non-European refugees for protection, such as the thousands of Chinese who fled from Communist China to Hong Kong after 1949. It

Vlas did not use any of the Convention's legal and theoretical terms. For him, a refugee was poor or dispossessed, and left his or her home country secretly. Even more than four decades after his arrival in Australia, Vlas did not pay much attention to the conditions, privileges and predicaments of being a refugee. In Vlas's migration memories his refugee status, and the institutional responsibilities for his resettlement, seemed unclear and obscure.

Masha, however, defined herself as a refugee. Her family had suffered from persecution and expropriation by the Communist authorities. She associated her refugeehood with the care of different international relief organisations such as the WCC or the Red Cross.<sup>43</sup> She remembered that on the way to their resettlement countries the Old Believers were lodged in several hotels across Hong Kong, where food and accommodation were provided for them.

There were three: the Prince Hotel, Kowloon and Manzing Hotel where we [all the Old Believers] from Kulja and from Harbin stayed together. [...] We [Masha's family] were all living in one big hotel. We were all staying together in one bedroom, but we had bunks to sleep on. We went to the canteen where all meals – breakfast, lunch, dinner – were cooked for us.<sup>44</sup>

Masha mentioned that during the days of Lent, the Chinese cook even adapted the meals to meet the Old Believers' dietary requirements.

During Lent he cooked vegetables, maybe rice and potatoes, no meat and no milk. [...] They had to give him [the Chinese cook] every month [notice] what we

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was only during the World Refugee Year (1959–1960) that Hong Kong's Chinese refugees first obtained financial help from the United Nations with contributions to various social welfare projects. (Pamela Ballinger, "Entangled or 'Extruded' Histories? Displacement, National Refugees, and Repatriation after the Second World War," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 25, No. 3 (2012), 369; Edvard Hambro, *The Problem of Chinese Refugees in Hong Kong: Report Submitted to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees* (Leyden: Sijthoff, 1955), 33, 38; Gallagher, "Evolution of the International Refugee System" (see note 12), 579–580).

<sup>43</sup> Other welfare organisation like the National Catholic Welfare Conference, the Lutheran World Refugee Service and the Jewish Council also did commendable relief work for Hong Kong's refugees; see Hu Yueh, "The Problem of the Hong Kong Refugees," *Asian Survey* 2, No. 1 (1962), 32–35.

<sup>44</sup> Masha, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 18 July 2010, Melbourne.

can and what we can't eat. At the beginning some tried to help him as well – [...] help a little in the way the meals should be prepared so that we could eat them. They still did a lot of stir-frys, vegetable stir-fry with rice or some other stuff. Yeah they did that. If they served us with meat on Friday or Wednesday – no – we just wouldn't eat at all.<sup>45</sup>

Masha could not say for sure who administered and organised the transit of thousands of European refugees through Hong Kong and their resettlement. Her individual migrant experience was shaped by the support of welfare organisations, which often had a direct and tangible impact on the refugees' daily lives and wellbeing. Masha recalled that her mother was very grateful to the charity of St. Vincent, where she picked up clothes for the family, including Masha's first non-traditional dress.

Not that we were supposed to wear [other than] Russian traditional clothes, but we still ended up wearing them because we wanted to. Mum picked up such beautiful dresses for us. I remember one pink dress. It was so beautiful, short puffy sleeves, all tight up bodice, my first non-traditional dress. I wore that in Hong Kong. It was like heaven!<sup>46</sup>

Masha did not focus on the historical or political context of her resettlement. She did not remember details about the decisions of political actors or the involvement of international organisations or governments in the effort to resettle the Old Believers. Individual migrants, as well as the mass of European refugees from China, would have been excluded from official negotiations and political decisions about their resettlement. Masha's and Vlas's individual migrant experiences were determined by decisions and motivations that were not fully revealed by the timelines and bureaucratic procedures of the political actors involved. Their memories featured decisions and eventualities that were absent from the institutionalised and official discourse about the Old Believers' resettlement in the West.

In the early 1950s, the precarious situation of the European refugees remaining in China gradually gained international attention. Since 1952, the UNHCR and the ICEM shared the responsibility for their resettlement. The High Commissioner provided funds

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<sup>45</sup> Masha, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 18 July 2010, Melbourne.

<sup>46</sup> Masha, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 18 July 2010, Melbourne.

for emergency aid to the refugees remaining in China and met the costs of care and maintenance during their transit through Hong Kong. He also gave grants to voluntary agencies to assist the integration of refugees after their arrival in their resettlement countries. The ICEM was responsible for organising and funding the refugees' travel arrangements.<sup>47</sup> Additional funding for transportation and welfare was provided by voluntary organisations such as the WCC and the Red Cross.

In July 1952 Thomas Jamieson, UNHCR's Director of Operations, went to the British Foreign Office in London to discuss future resettlement options for the European refugees from China. Jamieson explained to the British government officials the problem of getting these refugees out of Communist China: the PRC would grant exit permits to European refugees only once they were in possession of entry visas for their respective countries of resettlement. However, most of these countries did not have diplomatic relations with the PRC but instead recognised the Republic of China, which had retreated to the island of Taiwan after being militarily defeated in 1949. Because of the absence of consular offices in the PRC, most refugees could only receive visas in Hong Kong. However, the Hong Kong authorities allowed refugees to enter the crown colony only if they were in possession of valid entry visas for their resettlement countries.<sup>48</sup>

Jamieson suggested a quick and comprehensive resettlement of the European refugees as their living situation in China continuously deteriorated. However, the number of refugees who were then able to leave China was very small. In 1952, only about 880 refugees could be resettled, and it was estimated that at this rate it would take another seven to ten years to move all refugees of European origin out of China.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration, Report of the 12<sup>th</sup> Session of the Subcommittee on Budget and Finance, 28 July 1965; HKPRO: CO 1030/1688, HKMS158-1-333; G. W. von Arnim, "ICEM's Role in Refugee And Migrant Settlement in Australia," in *Addresses to Refugee and Migrant Service Conference, Canberra, February 22-23, 1966*, ed. Australian Council for Overseas Aid, Refugee and Migrant Service Commission. ([Sydney?]: Australian Council for Overseas Aid, n.d.), 79–80.

<sup>48</sup> Notes of a Meeting at the Foreign Office, 23 July 1952; HKPRO CO 1023/118, HKMS157-1-11; see also Peterson, "To Be or Not to Be a Refugee" (see note 11), 192, note 64.

<sup>49</sup> Notes of a Meeting at the Foreign Office, 23 July 1952; HKPRO CO 1023/118, HKMS157-1-11; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Memorandum on the Situation of the Refugees of European Origin in China, February 1953; HKPRO: CO 1023/118, HKMS157-1-11.

In fact, the resettlement of these refugees took much longer than those estimated years. This is because the IRO and the UNHCR had difficulties to establish their exact number. Instead of the estimated 10–15,000 people, it was more likely that 20,000 refugees of European origin were to make their way out of China.<sup>50</sup>

Jamieson suggested that in order to solve this problem, Hong Kong should allow an initial entry of two hundred European refugees from China who would be accommodated in hotels and looked after by his office. “They would do nothing in Hong Kong except act as tourists and go about seeing the sights,” Jamieson confirmed. He also stated that he “would see to it that sick and undesirable characters were not sent and the first 200 would all be specially selected as being likely to be allowed into the United States.”<sup>51</sup>

Jamieson tried to dispel the concerns of the Hong Kong and British authorities that the colony would be saddled with a significant remnant of refugees, and that a continuous influx of European refugees would burden the crown colony with responsibilities for maintenance or social welfare assistance.<sup>52</sup> Since the establishment of the PRC, hundreds of thousands of Chinese and European refugees had fled mainland China for Hong Kong.<sup>53</sup> The British government found this influx highly unwelcome, as it was anxious not to provoke the PRC, or damage Britain’s relations with the Republic of China. The British government also wanted to preserve its colonial authority, and not

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<sup>50</sup> Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration, Report of the 12<sup>th</sup> Session of the Subcommittee on Budget and Finance, 28 July 1965; HKPRO: CO 1030/1688, HKMS158-1-333.

<sup>51</sup> Notes of a Meeting at the Foreign Office, 23 July 1952; HKPRO CO 1023/118, HKMS157-1-11.

<sup>52</sup> L. J. Evans, Letter to T. Oates, 1 May 1954; HKPRO: CO 1030/380, HKMS158-1-28.

<sup>53</sup> During the Japanese occupation in the Second World War, the Colony’s population had decreased from 1.6 million in 1941 to 650,000 in 1945. Following the end of the war, residents of the colony returned to Hong Kong at the rate of around 100,000 every month. Refugee flows began in earnest with the outbreak of the civil war between the Chinese Communist Party and the rival Nationalist Guomindang government in 1947. By 1954, Hong Kong’s population officially stood at 2.25 million, a fourfold increase in the space of nine years which was largely due to the influx of refugees. (Christopher A. Airriess, “Governmentality and Power in Politically Contested Space: Refugee Farming in Hong Kong’s New Territories, 1945–1970,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 31, (2005), 767; Hong Kong, *A Problem of People* (Hong Kong: W. F. C. Jenner, 1960), 3; Edvard Hambro, “Chinese Refugees in Hong Kong,” *The Phylon Quarterly* 18, No. 1 (1957), 69–73.



allow other foreign actors such as the UNHCR to get involved in British affairs.<sup>54</sup>

Selwyn Lloyd, from the British Foreign Office, also sought to accelerate the migratory movement and resettlement of the European Refugees from China. His concern was that the processing time for the refugees in Hong Kong was too long: “The important thing is to get these refugees moving, both on humanitarian grounds and in order not to waste our money. We cannot afford either to support them indefinitely or to risk their arrival en masse in Hong Kong.”<sup>55</sup> Lloyd was worried about a mass expulsion of European refugees from mainland China. He tried to find a compromise between Hong Kong’s reluctance to admit the refugees without final resettlement visas and the insistence of resettlement countries, such as the United States, on careful processing. Security checks and medical tests could only take place in Hong Kong and had taken by then more than six months.<sup>56</sup> Alarmed about the immigration of supposedly Communist, sick or undesirable refugees, the US government was generally hesitant to get involved in the resettlement of thousands of Russian refugees.<sup>57</sup>

The efforts to speed up the emigration of European refugees from China began to be successful in 1953, when Australia, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland agreed to issue fifty “alternate” visas. They would permit refugees entry into Hong Kong for processing to a country of immigration, such as the United States or Canada. As soon as a refugee was accepted by an admitting country, the alternate visa became available for another refugee in China.<sup>58</sup> This system of “alternate” visas accelerated

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<sup>54</sup> Notes of a Meeting at the Foreign Office, 23 July 1952; HKPRO CO 1023/118, HKMS157-1-11; Peterson, “To Be or Not to Be a Refugee” (see note 11), 175–176.

<sup>55</sup> Selwyn Lloyd, Letter to the Earl of Munster, 3 September 1952; HKPRO: CO 1023/118, HKMS157-1-11.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> In the early 1950s the United States hesitated to offer resettlement options for Russian refugees from China. They had been saddled with many tubercular and otherwise undesirable Russian refugees from China who became stranded in the Philippines after their escape from China in 1949. (Notes of a Meeting at the Foreign Office, 23 July 1952; HKPRO CO 1023/118, HKMS157-1-11; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Memorandum on the Situation of the Refugees of European Origin in China, February 1953; HKPRO: CO 1023/118, HKMS157-1-11.

<sup>58</sup> “Scheme to Aid Refugees from China – Alternate Visas for Hong Kong,” *South China Morning Post*, 20 June 1953; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Memorandum on the

the migratory movement of European refugees out of China, and soon opened resettlement options for the Old Believers in South America and the Antipodes.

In 1953 J. Geoffrey Littler from the Colonial Office reports that the number of refugees moved through Hong Kong had already increased to 3,266.

The average stay in the Colony per refugee had been about 16 days, so that at any one time there are usually some 150 to 250 in the Colony in transit. Of the total moved during the year only some half-dozen caused any difficulty due to cancellation of visa or medical unfitness [...]. It would appear that, if movement on the above lines can be maintained, no embarrassment is likely to be caused to the Hong Kong authorities.<sup>59</sup>

The political and institutional discourse about the Old Believers' exodus from China and their transit through Hong Kong portray their migration as a phenomenon of bureaucratic and administrative procedures. Their migrant journey was determined by immigration policies, the results of medical tests and security checks, visa applications or the answer from sponsors from overseas. The governments of Hong Kong and Great Britain, international organisations and various resettlement countries fought about timelines and institutional responsibilities. However, the Old Believers' emigration from China does not simply represent a planned and linear movement between a country of departure and resettlement. Individual migrant journeys did not necessarily follow political agendas and institutional timelines. Many refugee families were inconsistent in their decisions and motivations to emigrate. The Old Believers did not plan in every detail the journey to their country of resettlement, and the outcome of their migration was often unpredictable.

### **Time in Waiting**

Although migrant movements from China slowly got under way, in 1953 the World Council of Churches cautioned against any false hopes for a quick solution to the refugee problem. Many refugee families, and especially the Old Believers, were likely to fall into the category of "hard-core" refugees and would be difficult to resettle:

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Situation of the Refugees of European Origin in China, February 1953; HKPRO: CO 1023/118, HKMS157-1-11.

<sup>59</sup> J. G. Littler, Letter to Harris, 27 January 1954; HKPRO CO 1030/380, HKMS158-1-28.

[Many people] are over 50 years of age, a sad fact for a refugee. These “aged” have little hope of resettlement unless they have a friend or relative abroad. The WCC office are endeavoured to resettle many of these hard-core cases, including the over-aged and the sick, [...] there are 3,000 women with children whose fathers have been deported to Russia. TB and hunger are rampant [...] It’s a slow, difficult and at times heart-rending process. There are refugees too sick or undernourished to travel. There are older ones whom nobody seems to want. There are some social misfits. But there are also signs of hope. Things are beginning to move. Refugees are beginning to leave China regularly.<sup>60</sup>

Nina Bieger worked for the WCC which cooperated with the UNHCR in the effort to resettle the Old Believers from China. She remembered that many hard-core refugees were stranded in Hong Kong because no resettlement country would take them in.

Some [Russian Old Believers] came here and then we found out that they had tuberculosis or something like that. So then they were stuck here. And if they wanted to go to America the minimum processing period was three months, whether you were eighty or ninety or eight! They were the strictest of the countries. But we just had to move them fast. [...] We had a lot of tragic cases, of course. And a lot of them, you know, they just had nowhere to go. And the older they were the more difficult it was.<sup>61</sup>

Bieger’s account of the time that the Old Believers spent in Hong Kong makes clear that the length of their stay, and the waiting time during their transit, was often not under their control. Bureaucratic procedures like visa applications and security checks determined how long many families had to stay in the Colony before resettlement options opened up. The Hong Kong and British governments, international organisations like the UNHCR and various resettlement countries struggled about a timeline for their migration, their processing and waiting time.

Vlas transited quickly through Hong Kong, staying for only a few days or couple of

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<sup>60</sup> Department of Interchurch Aid and Service to Refugees, Report “Hope in Hong Kong”, 21 May 1953; World Council of Churches Archives: Wcc General Office; 301.51.1.

<sup>61</sup> Nina Bieger, interviewed by Amelia Allsop, 17 August 2009, Hong Kong. Transcript and video recording, The Hong Kong Heritage Project – Nina Bieger Oral History Interview, Hong Kong.

weeks. His family arrived with two visas, one for Australia and one for Brazil. Vlas suggested that “if we had gone to Brazil, it would have been even faster.” Vlas’s family did not want to leave for South America because the living conditions in the Old Believer colonies that had been established in Santa Cruz and Ponta Grossa seemed arduous.<sup>62</sup> “They gave them land and tractors, they gave them everything for free. And people started to work straight away, but having said this, they still haven’t made anything for themselves, they are still poor. Some are alright, but the others live in poverty and didn’t succeed.” Instead of moving to Brazil, Vlas’s family opted for Australia. They did not spend much time in the Colony because their documents and travel arrangements were already prepared. “With us everything went very quickly. We just went right through, that’s all. We waited for the ship to be ready. The ship arrived and we left.”<sup>63</sup> When asked how long had they stayed in Hong Kong, many of my interviewees said that they had to wait for several weeks, a few months or a couple of years. People remembered their stop-over in the Colony as a blurry timeframe that encompassed time in waiting for decisions and documents, for plans to work out and visas to arrive.

Matrona, whose family stayed in Hong Kong for almost two years, explained that: “a lot of people, like my husband’s family, came and stayed in Hong Kong two months or two weeks or whatever. But my family was trying to decide where they will go. That’s why we ended up staying a bit longer.”<sup>64</sup> The ‘months and weeks or whatever’ sounded nonchalant, as if she and her family had been indifferent about the time they spent in Hong Kong. Matrona mentioned multiple units of time – days, weeks, months and

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<sup>62</sup> The first group of Old Believers to leave China and settle in Brazil arrived in 1958. Several more colonies were established in the early 1960s, for example, in Pau Furado. However, several hundred Old Believers wished to leave the country again. In 1963 and 1964 the Tolstoy Foundation began to support families who wished to leave Brazil and move to Oregon and Alaska in the U.S.; several families also migrated to Australia. (I.V. Dynnikova, “Traditsii Bogosluzhebnogo Peniia Starobriadtsev-Chasovenykh Brazili na Primere Obshchiny Primavera do Leste Shtata Mato Grosso [The Traditions of Liturgical Singing amongst the Old Ritualist-Chasovennye of Brazil: the case of a Community in Primavera do Leste, State Mato Grosso],” in *Starobriadchestvo: Istorii, Kul'tura, Sovremennost'* [Old Ritualism: History, Culture, Modernity], ed. V. I. Osipov, Muzei Istorii i Kul'tury Starobriadtsev, Vol. 2 (Moscow: n. p., 2007), 314–315.

<sup>63</sup> Vlas, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 11 January 2011, Gympie.

<sup>64</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 12 July 2009, Melbourne.

years – which suggests that these measured periods of time were unimportant and irrelevant. Time in the life stories of my interviewees was often described as a sequence, with a trajectory and cumulative tendency. Their time spent in Hong Kong was told somewhat differently. The clarity and stability that characterised the historical and timely context in which my interviewees used to tell their life stories were replaced by discontinuity and vagueness. This shift attests to a different sense of temporality, which my interviewees experienced during this particular episode of their migration.<sup>65</sup>

When Masha remembered her departure from China, I could sense how upsetting this experience must have been for her family. She remembered that her mother felt very sad and almost guilty to leave. “It was very hard for Mum to leave China because she had lived there for thirty odd years and a few of her children were buried there.” To pack everything up “was very, very hard for my Mum,” Masha said. “My sisters were packing all the stuff we could take and she was bitter sitting in tears. [...] She had to leave the graves of her young children behind – buried there [in China] – to go to the Western countries.” Not only her grief, but also the physical condition of Masha’s mother made her departure difficult: “Before we got to Hong Kong we travelled from the village where we lived in China to Harbin. In the [train] station you had to walk so many steps up and down. Mum couldn’t walk! My [oldest] brother had to carry her in his arms. She was that weak!”<sup>66</sup> Masha shook her head, and said: “Mum was just skin and bones!”

However, the time Masha’s family spent in transit – from their departure in north-western China until their arrival in the country of their resettlement – was not only remembered in terms of loss and agony. Masha also remembered the excitement of her move to Hong Kong, leaving the remote mountain village where she used to live behind:

The whole thing of living in the city instead of a village! Running after buses [and driving] everywhere instead of walking! Wearing different non-traditional clothes! Going to the canteen to eat where we would be served at the table! It was like heaven, everything was different! Not that we appreciated the food at the start

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<sup>65</sup> Tyrus Miller, introduction in *Given World and Time: Temporalities in Context*, ed. Tyrus Miller, (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2008), 8.

<sup>66</sup> Masha, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 18 July 2010, Melbourne.

because it was different, not traditional Russian. [...] It was a different way of cooking and it tasted foul. There was a Chinese cook and he used different spices and ways of cooking. It tasted completely different.<sup>67</sup>

Masha described her experience of Hong Kong as significantly different from that of her life before her departure from China. She highlighted the intensity with which she experienced the time she spent in Hong Kong where “everything was different”, for example, the sensory experiences of food, ways of dressing and her movement through the buzzing city streets. Masha’s life story makes clear that she did not necessarily remember, and define her time in Hong Kong, in measurable terms. More significant than abstract and quantifiable time – the weeks, months and years spent in the Colony – was the lived experience of this time.

According to Henri-Louis Bergson, there is more than one temporality. The concrete reality of duration, of time-as-experienced, is not captured by our abstract and mathematical thinking.<sup>68</sup> Bergson writes that the distinction between duration as opposed to measured time becomes obvious when we dissolve a lump of sugar in a glass of water:

If I want to mix a glass of sugar and water, I must, willy nilly, wait until the sugar melts. This little fact is big with meaning. For here the time I have to wait is not that mathematical time which would apply equally well to the entire history of the material world, even if that history were spread out instantaneously in space. It coincides with my impatience, that is to say, with a certain portion of my own duration, which I cannot protract or contract as I like. It is no longer something *thought*, it is something *lived*.<sup>69</sup>

Waiting means remaining attentive to what happens with the sugar in the glass of water and experiencing various temporalities. The impatience we perceive while waiting for the sugar to dissolve reveals something about the duration of the piece of sugar, its specific temporality unfolding over time. The observer’s impatience retains the sense of

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<sup>67</sup> Masha, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 18 July 2010, Melbourne.

<sup>68</sup> Henri-Louis Bergson, *Key Writings*, ed. Keith Ansell Pearson and John Mullarkey (London: Continuum, 2002), 63.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

a different time progressing. The observer waits, and experiences in discomfort, the difference and the disharmony between both of these temporalities, time and duration.<sup>70</sup> Depending on his desire, the waiter would like to lengthen or shorten the duration. It is precisely in the thwarting of this desire that the waiter becomes conscious of duration. “The time that is felt and consciously endured seems slow, thick, opaque, unlike the transparent, inconspicuous time in which we accomplish our tasks and meet our appointments,”<sup>71</sup> writes Harald Schweizer. He argues that waiting time cannot be solely understood as length, nor is it solely experienced as length. To reduce waiting to purely quantifiable terms means to suppress its qualitative temporal consciousness, and to reduce waiting to nothing but a certain *amount* of time.<sup>72</sup>

The experience of migration and the time spent in waiting both seem to evoke a feeling of discomfort, of not being in the right place and right relation to time. For those who do not wait, time thought and time lived co-exist harmoniously. But someone who waits experiences a different temporality, outside of the community of those whose time is productive and synchronised. Waiting is in the same way as migration experienced as a time in which people feel out of step and not-belonging or not being ‘in-time’ with others.<sup>73</sup>

With Bergson’s and Schweizer’s arguments in mind we can look at the temporalities of migration as time that is experienced and endured. This subjective description of time concentrates on an empathetic understanding of the experience of time. It describes the passing of weeks and months, waiting for documents and decisions, for medical tests and resettlement visas. This focus on lived temporalities, and the experience of time in migration, is different from a focus on time that is measured, scheduled and administered. Especially policy makers, governments and international organisations

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<sup>70</sup> Julia Mahler uses Bergson’s example of a dissolving piece of sugar to explain his concept of intuition, which she describes as a form of affective perception. She uses waiting as an experience of time closely related to Bergson’s concept of duration in her exploration of lived temporalities in Guatemala. (Julia Mahler, *Lived Temporalities: Exploring Duration in Guatemala: Empirical and Theoretical Studies* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2008), 46–47; Harald Schweizer, “On Waiting,” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 74, No. 3 (2005), 781.

<sup>71</sup> Harald Schweizer, *On Waiting* (London: Routledge, 2008), 16.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 22; Schweizer, “On Waiting” (see note 70), 781.

<sup>73</sup> Schweizer, *On Waiting* (see note 71), 8; Maree Pardy, “The Shame of Waiting,” in *Waiting*, ed. Ghassan Hage (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2009), 206–207.

have used such 'objective' descriptions of time. My interviewees did not necessarily remember or measure the weeks and months they spent in Hong Kong. They sensed, experienced and felt their time in waiting until they finally arrived in the country of their resettlement.

It took Tim's family several weeks to depart from their little village near Kulja and make their way to Hong Kong. They needed to sell their house and livestock. Some new clothes were made for the family and they were fitted with new shoes. Tim's family did not take many more valuables on their journey than a few gold rings, some jewellery and icons. Tim remembered his first impression of Hong Kong and laughed: "To me it felt overcrowded, compared to where we came from." He explained that "the wealthier Chinese obviously lived in houses. But all the poor ones stayed in their junks, the boats on the harbour."<sup>74</sup> Together with other refugees Tim's family stayed in a hotel with expenses covered by the UNHCR, and other welfare organisations.

It wasn't a [refugee] camp. It was simply a four story building, and they would throw you on the floor. But we had meals provided for us. There were small rooms – not air conditioned or whatever so that was a little bit uncomfortable. There were small rooms and some of them didn't have windows. But you were free to come and go. And then you had three meals a day provided to you, so we were all happy with the food.<sup>75</sup>

The most intense memories Tim had of his stay in Hong Kong were the pleasures of tasting new foods:

For the first time we had soft white bread! [...] In China we had bread, but rations were given out: an allocated amount of fifty per cent corn, fifty per cent wheat. Sometimes if you ran out of wheat you would have to make bread out of corn. That's probably nice once in a while. But wheat and corn mixed makes a very heavy sort of bread, like a rock, and the bleat spread on this. [The white bread] was obviously a very big treat.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Tim, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 10 July 2010, Melbourne.

<sup>75</sup> Tim, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 10 July 2010, Melbourne.

<sup>76</sup> Tim, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 10 July 2010, Melbourne.



Tim was about 10 years old when he came to Hong Kong, and he clearly remembered having his first soft ice cream: vanilla flavour and served in a waffle cone. He was not sure if the cone was edible. Tim also remembered some of the fruit he tasted for the first time, “oranges – that was something we never had,” mandarins and bananas. A recurrent reference in Tim’s memories of Hong Kong was the different sensations and the excitement about food he ate “for the first time”. His memories conveyed a sense of intensity and immediacy expressed in the sensory impression of smells, tastes and sounds.

Many of my interviewees were struck by the appearance of their first non-traditional dress, Hong Kong’s traffic noise or the smell of an authentic Chinese meal. These sensory experiences formed the memories of their migration. Particularly in the case of those who emigrated as children, the retrieval of memories was evoked through the senses. However, personal recollections of early childhood experiences are often limited and affected by a child’s age and intellectual development. Memories of events that happened in their childhood were informed and confused with what my interviewees were told by others or came to understand later.<sup>77</sup>

Some of Tim’s sensory memories give an account of the lived and immediate migration experience of an eleven year old. Retrospectively, Tim reflected also on bureaucratic rationalities and administrative procedures that were part of his migration experience. When I asked Tim which organisation or government had organised his family’s transit through Hong Kong he said: “I don’t know exactly but I remember that my brother had always written letters to Hong Kong. And then they would have organised all our travels and everything else, our accommodation in Hong Kong.” Tim explained that his family stayed in Hong Kong for a couple of months to prepare their onwards journey to Australia. “It was a matter of formality that we had to spend so much time in Hong Kong, for medical checks and other reasons.” Tim went to school for a couple of weeks and started to learn English, but he remembered his “Hong Kong experience of nothing much to do.”<sup>78</sup> In this retrospective account of his stay in Hong Kong, Tim did not only

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<sup>77</sup> Michele Langfield and Pam Maclean, “‘But Pineapple I’m still a Bit Wary of’: Sensory Memories of Jewish Women who Migrated to Australia as Children, 1938–39,” in *Speaking to Immigrants: Oral Testimony and the History of Australian Migration*, ed. Eric Richards and A. James Hammerton (Canberra: History Program and Centre for Immigration and Multicultural Studies, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University, 2002), 84–85, 91.

<sup>78</sup> Tim, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 10 July 2010, Melbourne.

refer to the immediate sensory impressions of his migration experience. He also looked at the amount of time his family spent in the Colony, and described it as a period of waiting during which time was wasted and suspended.

### **Waiting in Transit**

For the Old Believers who passed through Hong Kong, the time of waiting often meant a time marked by anxiety and precariousness. Anastasia remembered that her grandmother was really afraid when she left China with a group of Russian refugee families: “They went through Hong Kong because a few families had to get their paperwork done. They changed their papers there [in Hong Kong] and ended up coming to Australia.”<sup>79</sup> Anastasia assumed that her grandmother’s departure from China was a frightening and upsetting experience.

My grandmother would have felt very scared. She was thirty-five when she was widowed and she had five young kids. [You would feel scared] to leave with a few bags to a country that you don’t know! You don’t know the language and you don’t have any family that would help you. She had one sister and brother in law, but they had their own young family. She was really scared. But I think they would have all found comfort in the fact that they weren’t by themselves. They still had family and friends who they were travelling with. So, they would still have someone in that distant country.<sup>80</sup>

Anastasia suggested that her grandmother’s thoughts were filled with uncertainty and angst about the prospect of beginning a new life in a distant and unknown country. When Anastasia told me the story of her family’s emigration from China, she was about the same age as her grandmother; who then also had young children and had just established her own family. The account of her grandmother’s migrant experience reflected some of Anastasia’s concerns about Australia.

As a female – especially back then when [female gender roles were] still very traditional – you needed to get married and have a family. A male can just go out and start working and do what they need to do. But with the females it’s very different! You have to get out and start working as well I suppose in

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<sup>79</sup> Anastasia (name changed), interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 2009, Melbourne.

<sup>80</sup> Anastasia (name changed), interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 2009, Melbourne.

Australia – but the expectations [were different then]: you are not going to be working for the rest of your life because you have to have a family. And you have kids for the rest of your life and you run a household; whereas a man just needs to go out and work. [...] A male just ... they can fend for themselves.<sup>81</sup>

The challenges of establishing a family and a household were central to Anastasia's account of her mother's and grandmother's migrant experience. She spoke of the expectations that traditional gender roles imposed on female migrants, especially in the post-war era, and put women into more vulnerable and dependent positions than their male counterparts. These roles did not apply to Anastasia as a second generation migrant in Australia. She could, however, relate to the expectations that women are supposed to fulfil in today's society, integrating and managing the two domains of work and family; a few years ago, she stopped working full-time because of her children.

The Communist regime, and the almost complete exodus of Russian settlers from China, would have supported the decision of Anastasia's parents to emigrate: "Most of the people in the villages were leaving – almost everyone would have left. So it was a whole community movement – actually the majority – not just family groups." Anastasia was not quite sure how decisions were made for destinations and routes when the Old Believers departed from China: "Things didn't work out with visas, or somebody said: Oh no, it's better if you go to Australia. And things ended up changing; I can't remember the specifics."<sup>82</sup> The time that Anastasia's family spent on the move, including the transit through Hong Kong, seemed to be filled with uncertainty about the journey's path. Destinations and resettlement options changed, while some refugee families seemed to constantly make up their minds about where to go.

A few people went to Canada and the U.S. A lot of people went back to Russia – not a lot – but a number of people went back to Russia. A few people were meant to go to Chile – so, quite a few places around the world. Mostly, the people who ended up coming out to Australia were not meant to come here. Actually, they were destined to go somewhere else. But things turned around and they ended up coming to Australia.

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<sup>81</sup> Anastasia (name changed), interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 2009, Melbourne.

<sup>82</sup> Anastasia (name changed), interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 2009, Melbourne.

And they are very happy that it ended up being that way. They generously still say Australia is the luckiest – the lucky country – because of the opportunities they actually ended up having. And now a lot of families are actually living quite comfortably and well off. They came here having pretty much just the shirts on their backs and head lice. They came here as real nobodies and ended up being able to do a lot for themselves – not just for themselves, but also for their community and the charities. They were able to have a good life, really!<sup>83</sup>

The migration of Anastasia's family could have taken different trajectories as there were many possible destinations and decisions taken during their migration from China. Anastasia did not mention that her family chose their resettlement options. The 'things that didn't work out' were remembered as a coincidence – and maybe as good fortune.

Whereas some refugee families waited until a preferred resettlement option became available, others had to split up because not all members were allowed entry to a particular resettlement country. Nina was only six years old when her grandparents left China, in 1955. Her grandparents departed without a certain destination or plan where their journey would end. Nina said that it would have been harder for a whole family to leave: "It was just the two of them. At that time nobody was sure where my grandparents would end up." For many migrant families the decisions and actions taken during their migratory movement were not consistent or reliable, they often would change their mind while on their way.<sup>84</sup> Nina's grandparents had packed up and left China: "They were searching for a better life. That was what they decided: we'll search, we'll go and then we'll bring the children. Where we organise and establish our life we're going to bring our children." Nina remembered the time when her family was split up as a time of hope and despair. "We were just waiting where my grandparents would end up."<sup>85</sup> When Nina's grandparents arrived in Hong Kong their initial plan was to leave for America.

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<sup>83</sup> Anastasia (name changed), interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 2009, Melbourne.

<sup>84</sup> Saulo Cwerner makes this argument about migrants who find themselves in the liminal times of migration in which their actions and decisions might not show any temporal consistency. (Saulo B. Cwerner, "The Times of Migration," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 27, No. 1 (2001), 27).

<sup>85</sup> Nina, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 8 July 2009, Melbourne.

They only heard about America, and that it's a good country. So they ended up in Hong Kong – they were just travelling and didn't know [where to go]. In Hong Kong they went to the authorities asking: can we have a permission to go to America? And there was another Russian couple who said to them: why do you want to go to America? Go to Australia, Australia is a better place than America. So they took their advice and they asked for permission to come to Australia. The English government paid their air fare; so they came to Australia. And soon after that my mum's sister came, and after that the rest of the brothers and sisters.<sup>86</sup>

Nina remembered that she did not understand the circumstances of her grandparents' migration and their change of mind: "I was young when I separated from my grandparents [...] I was only about six years old when my mum's parents sort of ran away to Australia."<sup>87</sup> Nina's family did not talk much about her grandparents' emigration from China, and Nina was still not sure about the actions and decisions they had taken during their journey to Australia.

The Old Believers lived in limbo while on their way to a country of resettlement. The liminal period that the Old Believers experienced was accompanied by mental states of indecision and uncertainty. Their stay in Hong Kong often resembled the experience one has in a waiting room, a place where one can exhibit very little agency. The uncertainty about how long one has to wait for the results of one's case adds to the lack of certainty about its actual outcome. Laura Tanner argues that a waiting room functions as a place we pass through on our way to somewhere else, a temporary stop rather than a destination. Time spent in a waiting room represents time wasted; the shorter the wait, the more successful our stay. Waiting rooms have an iconic significance in our cultural imaginary as places suffused with anxiety, places of desperation and impotence.<sup>88</sup> In Nina's case, the Colony did not only represent a

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<sup>86</sup> Nina, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 8 July 2009, Melbourne.

<sup>87</sup> Nina, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 8 July 2009, Melbourne.

<sup>88</sup> Laura E. Tanner, "Bodies in Waiting: Representations of Medical Waiting Rooms in Contemporary American Fiction," *American Literary History* 14, No. 1 (2002), 116; Cynthia Miki Strathmann and M. Cameron Hay, "Working the Waiting Room: Managing Fear, Hope, and Rage at the Clinic Gate," *Medical Anthropology* 28, No. 3 (2009), 215; Jan-Paul Brekke, "Life on Hold: The Impact of Time on Young Asylum Seekers Waiting for a Decision," *Diskurs Kindheits-*

metaphoric waiting room. As her brother got sick on the way to Hong Kong, Nina's family needed to prolong their stay in Hong Kong, and they literally had to spend time in the waiting room of a hospital.

When we left China, the four of us, we travelled about three days and three nights on a train. My brother got really sick, he got pneumonia. When we came to Hong Kong he was in a hospital for a whole month. We were supposed to be in Hong Kong for maybe two weeks, but we stayed about six or eight weeks because he was in the hospital.<sup>89</sup>

Matrona's family also experienced their first arrival in Hong Kong as a prolonged time of waiting which was even more infused with feelings of desperation and fear.

Matrona's mother was scared by the unfamiliar new environment: "My mum was scared when we got to Hong Kong: different food, different people. The first few days she wouldn't allow us to leave, get out of the room that we stayed in."<sup>90</sup> During their prolonged stay in the waiting room of Hong Kong, the feelings of anxiety that troubled Matrona's mother and her family changed.

Then, about two weeks later, we started to go out, playing on the street. I remember going to the markets and picking up chewing gum and lollies off the foot paths. [...] I wouldn't say we were scared. We've got a lot. When we got to Hong Kong somebody bought us a lot of clothes. There was a room full of things we could pick from, and we picked dresses and shirts, shoes and things like that. That was really exciting, we loved that part.<sup>91</sup>

After her mother got over the initial shock of her arrival in Hong Kong, Matrona's family

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*und Jugendforschung* 5, No. 2 (2010), 162–163. Scholars writing about European Jews in Shanghai during World War II also refer to their experience of Shanghai as a waiting room. (Suzanne D. Rutland, "“Waiting Room Shanghai”: Australian Reactions to the Plight of the Jews in Shanghai after the Second World War," *Yearbook Leo Baeck Institute* 32, No. 1 (1987), 407–433; Amnon Barzel and Jüdisches Museum Berlin, eds., *Leben im Wartesaal: Exil in Shanghai 1938–1947 [Life in the Waiting Room: Exile in Shanghai, 1938–1947]* (Berlin: Jüdisches Museum im Stadtmuseum Berlin, 1997)).

<sup>89</sup> Nina, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 8 July 2009, Melbourne.

<sup>90</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 12 July 2009, Melbourne.

<sup>91</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 12 July 2009, Melbourne.

got used to their life in Hong Kong. “I would say we were scared the first few weeks, but we were in Hong Kong for almost two years.” She recalled the pleasure and excitement of starting school: “We probably just started school when we would pack up and come to Australia.” Matrona tried to remember, “I think we were supposed to learn Chinese, but have I learnt Chinese in those two months I was there?” She laughed, and continued: “No, no. I remember we used to go to school and do a lot of exercises – the Chinese gym thing – but I don’t actually remember writing or reading, just more exercise.”<sup>92</sup>

Matrona described an ambivalent feeling: she was overwhelmed and excited about the new impressions Hong Kong’s city life had on her, but at the same time her family was scared by this unfamiliar environment and frightened by the question of where their migrant journey might take them. Jean-François Lyotard associates waiting with such contradictory feelings. He explains that the possibility of nothing happening is often associated with a feeling of anxiety which gives to waiting a predominantly negative value. Vincent Crapanzano writes that: “Waiting can be understood as a holding action which “produces in us feelings of powerlessness, helplessness, and vulnerability—infantile feelings—and all the rage that these feelings evoke”<sup>93</sup>. However, the suspense in times of waiting could also be accompanied by pleasure, for instance the pleasure of anticipating and welcoming the new and unknown.<sup>94</sup> The negative connotations of waiting need to be challenged because they only repeat the common notion of wasted time, of suspense and passivity. A partial view on the negative effects and emotions of waiting neglects the positive choices and decisions that individual migrants make during the process of their migration, and their life in limbo. In the following, I discuss the Old Believers’ transit through Hong Kong as a time that offered the chance to wait, to decide and act, and to defer, choose and resist.

### **The Decision to Wait**

When the Old Believers applied for visas many refugees did not know whether their applications would be successful, or if they needed to stay in Hong Kong for much

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<sup>92</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 12 July 2009, Melbourne.

<sup>93</sup> Vincent Crapanzano, *Waiting: The Whites of South Africa* (New York: Random House, 1985), 44.

<sup>94</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 92.

longer. I asked Vlas how the Russian refugees passed their time while waiting and he replied: “They just lived, that’s all. They didn’t work; they just passed their time and waited for their visas to arrive. When their visas arrived, they went there.”<sup>95</sup> Some Old Believer families stayed in the crown colony for longer than just a few weeks and over time they slowly adjusted to Hong Kong’s daily life. Although the refugees were not granted work permits, some did work.<sup>96</sup> In July 1965, the *South China Morning Post* reported:

To the refugees, Hongkong proves to be a strange and baffling place compared to their simple life in Sinkiang Province in northwest China. As one of the old refugees put it: “There are more cars in Hongkong than flies where we came from.” Whilst waiting for repatriation, the white Russians have adjusted themselves to the Hongkong way of life. Many of them have found full-time or part time jobs to supplement their allowances from the United Nations. Employed mainly by Indians, some of these refugees work as delivery boys and messengers while others take up jobs as children’s nannies and wash amahs. Still others have found jobs at construction sites earning about \$14 per day.<sup>97</sup>

My interviewees had few recollections of their time in Hong Kong beyond those concerned with their initial arrival and first impressions. Masha remembered that her older sister started working “for a bit of cash money – we were allowed to get a little bit of work – but not my Mum and Dad.” She also recalled going to the park, “playing and doing nothing”, and that she started her first English class in Hong Kong. She was proud to know already a lot of English words when she came to Australia: “words like ‘a pen’, ‘a man’, ‘go’, ‘she’, ‘he’. I just started; it was a class for beginners.” A welfare organisation provided English classes for Masha and other refugee children. “And they got us a book, so you could go home and you could learn something. I really enjoyed going to school.”<sup>98</sup> Masha remembered that her stay in Hong Kong prepared her for her onward journey and she found it a lot easier to pick up English once she arrived in

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<sup>95</sup> Vlas, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 11 January 2011, Gympie.

<sup>96</sup> E. Schlatter, Note on Meeting in Mr Grean’s Office, 19 August 1966; Archives of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: Fond 11, Series 1, 15/HK/CHI.

<sup>97</sup> “White Russians Await Repatriation in HongKong,” *South China Morning Post*, 17 July 1965.

<sup>98</sup> Masha, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 18 July 2010, Melbourne.



Australia.

Masha embraced the opportunity to go to school and to learn a foreign language. She was keen to learn, to make friends with other refugee children at school, and to prepare herself for her onward journey. The time Masha spent in Hong Kong cannot be seen as a time of passive waiting, of sluggish inaction and lethargy. Waiting time does not necessarily imply a repression of will and the postponement of gratification. Waiting also comprises a use of time in which we consider interests, deliberate over decisions and calculate outcomes. While we are waiting, we might also recognise social constraints that obstruct our immediate action.<sup>99</sup>

Matrona's family used their time in Hong Kong to deliberate about the question of their final destination. Matrona's father had relatives in the United States but his family was not granted permission to settle. "We were not allowed entry [to the United States] because there were nine of us in the family. [My father's] brother couldn't become a guarantor for all of us. How would he feed nine people? So we were not accepted in America."<sup>100</sup> After their first choice of resettlement was refused, Matrona's family had to decide where to go.

There was also New Zealand, and there was Australia. But then somebody told my mum there were a lot of erupting volcanoes [in New Zealand]. We didn't even have any relatives in Australia. It was either the choice of going to Australia or maybe back to Russia – I think Australia was the only choice.<sup>101</sup>

The decision Matrona's family made about the final destination of their resettlement might present itself as uninformed or the result of limited options. It was, however, important for Matrona to highlight that her family pondered different resettlement options and chose the final path of their migrant journey. Matrona's family stayed in Hong Kong longer than they were supposed to, even after they had decided that they were leaving for Australia. Matrona's mother was pregnant; she refused to go on either a plane or a boat.

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<sup>99</sup> Paul E. Corcoran, "Godot Is Waiting Too: Endings in Thought and History," *Theory & Society* 18, No. 4 (1989), 517.

<sup>100</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 12 July 2009, Melbourne.

<sup>101</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 12 July 2009, Melbourne.

She didn't want to go either way because she didn't want to be pregnant and dying somewhere on the way. So we had to wait. The first year they were trying to decide where to go. And then the second year she was pregnant, so we had to wait until she had the baby.<sup>102</sup>

Matrona did not reflect on the constraints of administrative and bureaucratic procedures as she described her family's decision to migrate to Australia. Their prolonged stay in Hong Kong gave her family time to reassess their options. While Matrona's family was waiting they could postpone their final decision. Their time in waiting cannot simply be understood in terms of passivity and a suppression of action. Their migrant journey comprised a time during which they could consider individual interests and deliberate over possible outcomes of their migration. These considerations, however, might not have been in accordance with plans made by the political actors involved in this international resettlement project. The following episode about a group of Old Believers who refused to be resettled in Australia challenges assumptions that these refugees merely responded to constraints and decisions imposed upon them.<sup>103</sup>

In 1964 a group of Old Believers from Xinjiang disrupted the UNHCR's Far Eastern Operation. Upon their arrival in Hong Kong this group of about 360 people stated their determination to settle in a single colony in Canada or Argentina. While the UNHCR made clear that it was impossible to make such arrangements, the group deliberately deferred, refused and resisted their resettlement in Australia or anywhere else for that matter.<sup>104</sup> In 1965 the *China Mail* covered their story:

The others have migrated to Australia and other lands of promise months ago, but the Old Believers have a special trait that makes them a problem: togetherness. [...] The group is an old Russian religious sect, the most orthodox of the Russian

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<sup>102</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 12 July 2009, Melbourne.

<sup>103</sup> Neither my interviewees, who were children or teenagers at the time of their migration, nor my archival sources were able to provide information about the contact and conflicts between the various Old Believer migrant groups during their sojourn in Hong Kong.

<sup>104</sup> Holborn, *Refugees: A Problem of Our Time* (see note 26), 673; T.A.K. Elliott, Letter to W. Sean Carter, 16 December 1965; HKPRO: CO 1023/119, HKMS157-1-12.

Orthodox Church. Their ancient tradition as a cohesive communal group has been their strength and their burden.<sup>105</sup>

The article reports that the refugees were determined to settle as a group in Canada, where other Russian religious dissidents had already found a sanctuary from Soviet communism. However, the Canadian government was loath to take them on because it did not agree to resettle “a sect so clearly unabsorbable for the Old Believers traditionally insulate themselves from the secular modern world”<sup>106</sup>. The *China Mail* comments that Canada may have also refused the Old Believers entry because of troubles it had with other Russian religious migrant groups in the past. About three thousand Doukabours, Sons of Freedom, had caused considerable trouble when some of its members blew up bridges and railway lines and burnt down houses.<sup>107</sup> As Canada’s immigration laws did not allow group immigration the Old Believers were told that individual visa applications would be accepted instead. The group of Old Believers from Xinjiang, however, refused this offer.<sup>108</sup>

This group of refugees stayed for more than a year in Hong Kong, refusing any alternative settlement options. The *Sydney Sun* reported that the Old Believers were stranded in Hong Kong because they did not want to be resettled in Australia, and they believed Sydney to be a city of sin. “One member of the religious sect said they were particularly put off Sydney by the fulsome photos and by glowing accounts of bikini-clad bathing belles on Bondi Beach.”<sup>109</sup> This group of Old Believer refugees put the UN High Commissioner in a difficult situation. Their care and maintenance cost the UNHCR US\$ 171,300 per month. The British Foreign Office was concerned:

[T]he care card and maintenance fund for this group is well “in the red”; the normal period of stay in transit in Hong Kong is six to eight weeks, and as result

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<sup>105</sup> Edward Wu, “Compromise found for Russian Refugees,” *China Mail*, 20 March 1965.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> “Hopes for a New Home in Canada Dashed – Nearly 200 White Russians Stranded Here,” *China Mail*, 11 March 1965.

<sup>108</sup> Wu, “Compromise found for Russian Refugees” (see note 105). For an account of the Old Believers’ emigration to Canada see: David Scheffel, “Russian Old Believers and Canada: A Historical Sketch,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 21, No. 1 (1989), 1–18.

<sup>109</sup> “Stranded – By Sydney’s ‘Sin’,” *The Sun*, 27 May 1966.

this group of refugees has so far cost the equivalent of about 1,000 normal resettlement cases.<sup>110</sup>

A commission composed of UNHCR and WCC representatives tried to break the deadlock. It was decided to spare no effort counselling the group of Old Believers to make them agree to be resettled in Australia, Brazil or New Zealand.<sup>111</sup> The political and institutional discourse about the resettlement of the stranded refugees in Hong Kong had shifted. They were no longer portrayed as a group of “hard core” refugees who were in urgent need of protection and assistance; rather, as UNHCR representative John Woodward wrote in February 1965 in a report to the High Commissioner:

They were an isolated community in Sinkiang and Manchuria characterized by stubborn attachments to their particular sectarian deviation from Russian Orthodoxy. They are known for their qualities of stubbornness, primitiveness and suspicion which are combined in a strange compound with these of a Godfearing, industrious and diligent people.<sup>112</sup>

Subsequently, character traits such as stubbornness and irrationality were associated with the Old Believers more generally. The ICEM's Operations Officer Peter Jarrell commented in a report to the UNHCR that this sectarian group was extremely difficult to resettle and integrate in any country.

[I]t is most unfortunate that there is now a general tendency in many quarters to consider them [the Old Believers] as unreasonable, stubborn, ungrateful and undeserving of assistance. Although I would certainly be the last to understate the problems in handling the group [...] it is essential to remember the background of the circumstances in which these people have lived for the past

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<sup>110</sup> J. Doyle, Letter to W.S. Carter, 23 February 1965; HKPRO: CO 1030/1687, HKMS158-1-332.

<sup>111</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Report on The Problem of the Old Believers from China, 21 October 1965; HKPRO: CO 1030/1687, HKMS158-1-332; T.A.K. Elliott, Letter to W. Sean Carter, 16 December 1965; HKPRO: CO 1023/119, HKMS157-1-12; Wu, “Compromise found for Russian Refugees” (see note 105).

<sup>112</sup> J. B. Woodward, Report on Mission to Hong Kong – Old Believers, 24 February 1965; HKPRO: CO 1030/1687, HKMS158-1-332.

6-8 years. This record of resistance to repatriation to USSR has obviously had considerable impact on and shaped the present psychology of the Old Believers.<sup>113</sup>

The institutional and political discourse no longer focused on the entitlements and rights of the Old Believers; their resettlement options diminished and their visa applications were more likely to be rejected. The Australian Department of Immigration was reluctant to resettle many of the stranded Old Believers because most of these refugee families were only interested in rural settlement and in joining the community in Yarwun. However, the Immigration Department opposed further settlement of Russian families in Yarwun as the existing Old Believer community had “formed an extremely cohesive group strongly resisting integration”. The migration of more Russian refugee families into the area was also likely to aggravate the decline of the local pawpaw production and to cause resentment amongst the Australian farmers.<sup>114</sup>

The case of the ‘stranded’ Old Believers attracted much public attention when the UNHCR increased its pressure. The joint commission of UNHCR and WCC representatives informed the refugees that all means had been exhausted and that international funds could no longer be spent on their continued stay in Hong Kong. In March 1965, the UNHCR stopped its payment for hotel charges. While some Old Believer families continued to live in the hotels without paying for their accommodation, others were evicted with the help of the police.<sup>115</sup>

In October 1965, the remaining group of about 300 Old Believers agreed to be split up and resettled in Australia, New Zealand and South America.<sup>116</sup> Eventually, a dozen

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<sup>113</sup> P. Jarrell, Report to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 14 July 1965; National Archives of Australia (hereafter NAA): A446, 1967/71361.

<sup>114</sup> P. R. Heydon, Letter to Migration Officer in Hong Kong, 6 April 1965; NAA: A446, 1967/71361.

<sup>115</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Report on The Problem of the Old Believers from China, 21 October 1965; HKPRO: CO 1030/1687, HKMS158-1-332; Robert M. Gray, Telegram to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 23 March 1965; HKPRO: CO 1030/1687, HKMS158-1-332.

<sup>116</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Report on The Problem of the Old Believers from China, 21 October 1965; HKPRO: CO 1030/1687, HKMS158-1-332; Wu, “Compromise found for Russian Refugees” (see note 105). Argentina and Australia took on

families from Xinjiang settled in rural Tasmania and Queensland.<sup>117</sup> According to the UNHCR representative John Woodward, the refugees had to be moved quickly because any backing down would mean a loss of face for the commission and further maintenance expenses for the UNHCR. He wrote: "I can only repeat that we are dealing with a group of refugees who will not hesitate to exploit any further lack of firmness."<sup>118</sup>

This episode describes an unusual case of resistance. In the early days of the international resettlement effort, the Old Believers had few if any options to choose their resettlement country. In the mid-1960s, however, when the resettlement program was already well established, some families were less willing to accept whatever opportunity was offered to them. Their decisions were not only informed by the urgent need to leave China, but by existing networks of migrant families and the living conditions in the countries of resettlement.

The Old Believers' migration experience is not fully revealed in terms of bureaucratic procedures or the decisions made by international governments and organisations for their own and the refugees' best interest. We have to be careful not to overestimate the degree to which the Old Believers were free in their decision and actions taken during their migrant movement. However, the time the Old Believers spent in Hong Kong was not only experienced as passive waiting for resettlement options. The Old Believers also used their time in transit and migration to consider, imagine and decide about possible trajectories of their onward journey.

### **The End of Waiting**

By 1964 most Old Believers from China had been resettled by the joint UNHCR/ICEM operation, including 1,075 in Brazil and Argentina, and 357 in Australia.<sup>119</sup> In 1967, the

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about 110 Old Believers each. 88 people went to New Zealand and the remainder were resettled in Brazil and the U.S. (Ron O'Grady, *Old Believers: A New Zealand Refugee Programme* (Christchurch: National Council of Churches in New Zealand, 1972), 18.

<sup>117</sup> Wu, "Compromise found for Russian Refugees" (see note 105); G. C. Watson, Note for File, 28 January 1965 and 30 December 1964; NAA: A446, 1967/71361.

<sup>118</sup> J. B. Woodward, Report on Mission to Hong Kong – Old Believers, 24 February 1965; HKPRO: CO 1030/1687, HKMS158-1-332.

<sup>119</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Report on the Problem of the Old Believers from China, 21 October 1965; HKPRO: CO 1030/1687, HKMS158-1-332.

UNHCR announced the successful end of the Old Believers' resettlement:

One of the most colourful refugee problems to face UNHCR since its inception – that of the Old Believers – has now been virtually solved. In all, over the past fifteen years, 1,865 Old Believers have made the 3,500 mile trek from remote Sinkiang or from Harbin in North-East China down to Hong Kong, and from there they have fanned out across the seas to lands where they could resume their strict and industrious way of life in peace.<sup>120</sup>

How did the Old Believers endure the time spent in transit through Hong Kong? Their uncertainty about their onward journey and the suspension of time they experienced while waiting led to ambivalent feelings of anxiety, hope, fear and desire. The time that the refugees spent waiting en route to their final destination cannot be solely understood as submissive inaction or a waste of time. The Old Believers' migration process comprised an active engagement and consideration of temporal possibilities and choices that their migration and resettlement in the West could offer. Waiting is filled with suspense, writes Vincent Crapanzano, "It is an anticipation of something to come – something that is not on hand but will, perhaps, be on hand in the future."<sup>121</sup>

Records of the work done by governments and international organisations provide a largely homogenised view of the Old Believers' migration and resettlement from an administrative point of view. With the aim to move thousands of European refugees out of China, resettlement options were to be organised and administered, medical tests were performed and visa applications needed to be checked. The destinations and dynamics of this migratory movement, its timeline and outcome seemed to be planned and predictable. The Old Believers' migration appeared as a linear process, prolonged and accelerated by bureaucratic procedures, political decisions and administrative constraints.

However, the political and institutional discourses about resettlement options and immigration policies did not reveal the variety of individual migrant journeys, or the personal decisions and motivations involved. The life stories of my interviewees

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<sup>120</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "The Old Believers: A Story of Faith and Perseverance," *UNHCR Reports, Monthly Newsletter* 45 (1967), 1.

<sup>121</sup> Crapanzano, *Waiting* (see note 93), 44.

highlight that their migrant journey was comprised of contingencies which were not under the control of institutions or political actors involved. These life stories offer a view on the Old Believers' migratory movement which includes individual agency and showed that the refugees could reflect, decide and act upon the possible trajectories of their migrant journey. Despite the shared political, historical and geographical background of their migratory movement, the experiences of the Old Believers' migration journey varied. My interviewees' life stories revealed the particularities of these migrant paths which were by no means homogenous, predictable or linear.

The actions taken and choices made by the Old Believers on their way from China to Hong Kong and Australia shaped their present settlement and diaspora identity. In the next chapter, I continue to focus on the expectations and possibilities that my interviewees attached to their migrant journey. On the one hand, the temporality of their arrival in Australia was different from the liminal times they experienced during their migrant movement through Hong Kong. In Australia, most Old Believer families began to build new homes, learn a new language and re-establish their church community. On the other hand, the Old Believers' time of waiting extended beyond their arrival in Australia, when they faced the challenges of assimilation and integration.



## Chapter 5

### Making Home in the Diaspora: The Old Believers' Arrival in Australia

#### The Voyage

Matrona left China when she was a young girl in the early 1960s – she never gave me an exact date. After spending almost two years in Hong Kong, she arrived in Australia. Matrona wondered how her journey from Hong Kong began: “Did somebody come at night-time and pack us up? I remember being sick on the boat, but I don’t remember getting on it.” She laughed and told me about her family’s travel from Hong Kong to Melbourne. “For the first three days we could not move out of bed, we were that sick!” Matrona imitated the high voice of her mother: “My mum was running around: Kids, wake up, we’re going to die!”<sup>1</sup> Matrona remembered that her mother was absolutely terrified:

[She] was convinced that we’re going to drown. She had never been on a [boat]. There were big waves which went up against the boat. The ship was going from side to side. And she was convinced that we were going to die. She woke us up to pray, but we could not get out of bed: we were that sick every time we moved. And on the fourth day or so, a waitress went into the kitchen and she gave us some soup. We were about to spoon out the soup, but the bowls were moving. After we had eaten the soup we felt better. Finally, we were able to move!<sup>2</sup>

Matrona laughed about her mother’s reaction. Like many of my interviewees, she did not remember details of her journey from Hong Kong to Australia. Most Old Believers arrived by boat, others by plane. Those who arrived by boat often shared memories about being seasick – the feeling of nausea was deeply ingrained in their migrant memory.

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<sup>1</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 12 July 2009, Melbourne.

<sup>2</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 12 July 2009, Melbourne.

Vlas also remembered his sea voyage to Australia, and that “eating wasn’t a pleasure, because the boat was rolling and pitching.” Vlas arrived in Sydney by boat when he was eighteen, in 1962. “It was a big ship! And it had some sort of funny name, *Adshelshiwache* or *Ashenikishi*. I don’t know how long we were on the boat, a month? Maybe less.” The ship took many Russian migrants to Australia, he remembered. “There were a lot of people. But who were they and what did they do? I was just a young man back then, and that didn’t matter to me.” Vlas smiled whimsically: “I simply looked where there was a larger group of girls, and that is where I went.” Vlas laughed as he recalled chasing girls on board of the ship that took him to Australia. I asked Vlas how he remembered his arrival in Australia, and he shrugged his shoulders. “I didn’t expect anything, I couldn’t think of anything. How could you imagine? The country was different, the people were different, and the rules were different”<sup>3</sup>. Back in China, Vlas had read letters from other migrants who had made their way to Australia. They described the country as free compared to their life back in Communist China. With hindsight, Vlas said, he could not have imagined what Australia turned out to be like.

In China when you bought something, for example a house, there is [the money], that is it! Well, you’ve got it in your hands, so that is your contract. The Chinese never betrayed you. But here [in Australia] you need all this paper; everything needs to be on paper. How difficult is that! There [in China] you went and sold something, you got the money and you put it in your pocket. You put it away and just went off! But here you don’t, you need to write it down [and get a receipt]. [...] You need to abide the laws [of your host-country] – that goes without saying. When you get used to it, when you already know and understand everything, life gets easier. But if you don’t know [the rules], everything is new, and you think: What a life? What a life?<sup>4</sup>

Vlas remembered that it took him a while to understand that the freedom he experienced in his host-country was different from the freedom he expected. His imagination of a free country did not meet his first impression of Australia: “when we arrived [in Australia] there were fences everywhere”. His fellow migrants told Vlas that he was not allowed to cross these fences or other boundaries as freely as he had in

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<sup>3</sup> Vlas, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 11 January 2011, Gympie.

<sup>4</sup> Vlas, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 11 January 2011, Gympie.

China. “And when you work, you have to keep all the cheques and documents, because you have to pay taxes at the end of the year!” Vlas commented ironically: “Free country?! For every kind of business you need a solicitor. You can’t trust the people, they are not honest. If you buy something, you need to make a contract with the solicitor, so they don’t betray you. You don’t get anywhere without paper.”<sup>5</sup> Vlas thought that the Australian legal and administrative system was a lot more elaborate than in China, and symbolised for him a lack of freedom. In his opinion, Australians had a tendency for overregulation and bureaucratic eagerness. He mentioned the recent troubles he had with building his new house in Gympie. From his point of view, construction plans were too expensive and building regulations unnecessarily restrictive.

In the previous chapter I discussed some of the expectations, the hopes and wishes that many Old Believer migrants had before they arrived in Australia. Their journey to the West promised material security and a life free from religious and political persecution. In this chapter I will move from the imagined and open possibilities of this migratory movement to the lived experience of their arrival in Australia. The memories my interviewees had about their settlement in Australia point at the hopes that their migration fulfilled, as well as the disappointments they had to cope with. At their arrival in Australia, many of my interviewees had moved from villages and rural townships to the metropolitan suburbs of Melbourne and Sydney, from China to Australia, from Asia to the Antipodes. The trajectories of their journey were manifold and their memories were infused with feelings of excitement and anxiety, desire and fear. In the following, I explain how the Old Believers’ arrival, their settlement and living in Australia acquired meaning. Their settlement experience represents a liminal stage that did not reach a final end point. Instead, many of my interviewees continuously moved between the *here* and *there* – between their host-country, their imagination of a Russian homeland and their former settlement in China. This chapter also highlights the historical and political context in which the Old Believers arrived in Australia, and discusses the establishment of their religious communities in Melbourne, Sydney and Yarwun. I look at the identity formation of a transnational diaspora, and argue that the Old Believers’ past settlement experience in Australia determines their present diasporic existence.

### **First Arrivals and the Old Believer Community in Yarwun**

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<sup>5</sup> Vlas, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 11 January 2011, Gympie.

Decades before the Old Believers' exodus from China began in the mid-the 1950s, a small Russian community was already established in Yarwun, a rural country town in coastal Queensland. In the following, I set the historical and political context in which the Old Believers' immigration to Australia evolved, and identify some of the political, economic and social factors that led to the establishment of an Old Believer community in Yarwun.

When the mining of the Stuart oil shale deposits began in 1999, the days of the remaining Old Believer community in Yarwun were counted. Elisey had moved to Gympie in 2009, with less than a dozen Old Believer families. We were sitting next to the kitchen window from where we could look over the lush green hills that surrounded his new house. Elisey explained that the shale oil mining made life in the Yarwun-Targinnie district almost impossible.

They tried [to dig for] shale oil. They built a factory for shale oil there, like a project. They tried it, but then they saw problems with the pollution. The smell was really awful, a horrible smell from the oil! And people started to complain. People who lived in that area complained about the horrible smell, you know really horrible – ugh really! You had to close windows and the door, so the smell wouldn't go inside the house. People complained and complained. We had meetings, and the government decided to buy everyone in a 44,000 acres area out, so there would be no one living in that area anymore. That's what happened, they bought everyone out! So Targinnie, it's like a ghost town now.

"It used to be like ...," before Elisey finished his sentence, he got up and took a small book from the shelf. The book was titled "Targinnie: The History of a Central Queensland Rural Community"<sup>6</sup>, and Elisey explained: "The whole book is about Targinnie – what it used to be! They used to grow so many vegetables and pawpaws [in the area]. It used to be a place that was alive!" Elisey used to work as sharefarmer growing pawpaws in the area of Gladstone where his family lived for over forty years. Elisey seemed glad to have found a new home in Gympie, but missed his work as a pawpaw farmer and what Targinnie used to be like.

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<sup>6</sup> Thom Blake, *Targinnie: The History of a Central Queensland Rural Community* (Brisbane: Queensland Government, 2005).

Elisey could barely remember how the Old Believer community in Yarwun came into existence. His family arrived in 1960, decades after the first Russian settlement in the region had been established. Elisey remembered vaguely a man who used to sponsor Russian families from China to come to Gladstone: he “used to live here before we lived here, and I think he was an Old Believer”<sup>7</sup>. Elisey pointed again at the book about Targinnie’s history, which mentioned the Russian immigrant David Guerassimoff. David and Lucy Guerassimoff migrated from Japan to Australia in 1940. They were not the first Russians to settle in coastal Queensland – a few Russian families were already living in the area around Targinnie in the 1930s. Blake’s history of the Targinnie district, however, credits David Guerassimoff to have planned and initialised the large-scale migration of Old Believers from China to Yarwun. The Guerassimoff’s made their way to the Targinnie area because David planned to obtain farmland and grow small crops there.<sup>8</sup>

No doubt he dreamt about developing a farm for his family and parents and about the possibility of finding a place where he and his family could be content and free from political turmoil. [...] After leaving Russia and fleeing to Canada, working in Japan, he could not have imagined that Targinnie would become their home for the rest of their lives. But more remarkably, as a result of [...] purchasing a block of land at Targinnie, the lives of hundreds of other Russians would be changed and they too would make Targinnie or Yarwun their home. Some would remain there for the rest of their lives, some would later move to different parts of Australia, including Gladstone, Sydney and Tasmania, while yet others would move on to the United States or New Zealand.<sup>9</sup>

After the Guerassimoffs had settled in Targinnie another Old Believer family, who had been living in Australia since 1911, joined them. David’s plan was to establish a larger Old Believer community. He hoped that some of his relatives who had settled in Manchuria, particularly in and around Harbin, would make their way to Australia. However, David’s plan to organise and sponsor the immigration of his relatives, and

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<sup>7</sup> Elisey, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 10 January 2010, Gympie.

<sup>8</sup> Blake, *Targinnie: The History of a Central Queensland Rural Community* (see note 6), 61.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 62–63.

other Old Believer families from China, only became feasible at the end of the Second World War.<sup>10</sup>

Chances for a large-scale migration of Russian refugees from northern China to Australia seemed unlikely before the outbreak of the war. The Department of the Interior largely refused their entry. The Department rejected applications from White Russian settlers in Manchuria for landing permits<sup>11</sup>, and was advised to give careful consideration to admit these apparently unsuitable and undesirable immigrants.<sup>12</sup> The Department considered their integration unlikely from a social, political and economic point of view. As people of low social status the Russians from China “would eventually enter the ranks of the unemployed and compete unfavourably with our own people,”<sup>13</sup> warned New Zealand’s Government Agent in Northern China, C. G. Davis. Australian authorities regarded visa applications from Russian nationals in the Far East as problematic, posing two potential threats to the national security. One threat concerned the Japanese in Manchuria, who might employ potential immigrants as agents and collaborators. Another threat was the admission of Communist agents and Russian nationals who were in possession of Soviet passports.<sup>14</sup>

Only after more than a decade, in the early 1950s, Australia’s immigration policy shifted in favour for a large-scale immigration movement of Russian settlers from China.<sup>15</sup> The

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>11</sup> Since amendments were made to the Immigration Act in 1932, Australian visas were contingent upon the possession of landing permits that were issued by the Department of the Interior. (*Immigration Act 1932* (Cth) s 3(b); see also David Dutton, *By One of Us? A Century of Australian Citizenship* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2002), 53).

<sup>12</sup> J. B. Affleck, Letter to Australian Trade Commissioner, 23 June 1938; National Archives of Australia (hereafter NAA): A433, 1940/2/2995.

<sup>13</sup> C. G. Davis, Letter to J. B. Affleck, 27 June 1938; NAA: A433, 1940/2/2995.

<sup>14</sup> Antonia Finnane, *Far from Where? Jewish Journeys from Shanghai to Australia* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1999), 221–222.

<sup>15</sup> The first group of Russian refugees from Communist China to arrive in Australia had fled from Shanghai in 1949. 5,500 evacuees were taken under the auspices of the IRO to the island of Tubabao off Samar. The Philippines offered to serve as country of first asylum, but only temporary. Under international pressure Australia accepted nearly 1,400 of these evacuees. (Finnane, *Far from Where?* (see note 14), 222).

post-war years were not only marked by a considerable shift of political powers, but also by large migratory movements of Displaced Persons from Europe and refugees from Asia. In the years between 1945 and 1950, the UNHCR was founded, a legal framework for international protection of refugees was established (see chapter 4), and Australia introduced a comprehensive refugee resettlement policy.

Before World War II Australia had no refugee policy, refugees were admitted if they met the ordinary migrant requirements. Voluntary and private organisations could help the eligible immigrants with passage costs and settlement expenses, but the Australian government rarely assisted.<sup>16</sup> Australia's first Minister of Immigration, Arthur A. Calwell, developed a new immigration programme in 1945.<sup>17</sup> Calwell proposed to increase Australia's population through immigration by one per cent per year. His large-scale post-war immigration programme was designed to strengthen Australia's national security and economic development by significantly increasing its population.<sup>18</sup> Calwell spoke about the lessons that Australia had learnt from the Pacific War:

A third world war is not impossible, and after a period of fitful peace, humanity may be face to face again with the horrors of another period of total war. [...] We may have only those next 25 years in which to make the best possible use of our second chance to survive. Our first requirement is additional population. We need it for reasons of defence and for the fullest expansion of our economy.<sup>19</sup>

Calwell intended to increase the population by a policy of planned immigration which was meant to alleviate post-war labour shortages and fill gaps in the age structure of

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<sup>16</sup> Charles Price, "Immigration Policies and Refugees in Australia," *International Migration Review* 15, No. 1/2 (1981), 99.

<sup>17</sup> Eric Richards, *Destination Australia: Migration to Australia since 1901* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2008), 175–183.

<sup>18</sup> Freda Hawkins, *Critical Years in Immigration: Canada and Australia Compared* (Kensington: New South Wales University Press, 1989), 32–33.

<sup>19</sup> Arthur A. Calwell, "Ministerial Statement on Immigration (1945): Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates, 2 August 1945," in *Sources of Australian Immigration History, 1901–1945*, ed. John Lack and Jacqueline Templeton, Vol. 1 (Parkville: History Department, University of Melbourne Press, 1988), 256.

the existing population.<sup>20</sup> Calwell planned to admit mainly British migrants, but to diversify Australia's migrant sources. Despite the introduction of the United Kingdom-Australia Assisted Passage Migration Agreement in 1947, British migration was slow to start and unlikely to meet Calwell's immigrant targets. The urgent needs of Europe's Displaced Persons after the Second World War and the shortage of shipping from Britain led to a major change in Australia's immigration policy.<sup>21</sup> This shift in migrant intakes allowed the entry of some 170,000 Displaced Persons from Europe between 1947 and 1952.<sup>22</sup>

In August 1948, the White Russians from China became eligible for Australia's new Mass Migration Scheme, although the selection criteria for health and age remained high until the mid-1950s. From 1952 onwards, Australia provided that European refugees from China could be nominated by persons in Australia or by religious bodies, without limits on numbers. During the World Year of Refugees Australia also increased the number of refugees that did not meet its selection criteria, such as the sick, the handicapped and the old aged.<sup>23</sup> Up to the mid-1960, Australia accepted 7–10,000 European refugees from China under the UNHCR/ICEM Far East Programme.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> H. B. M. Murphy, "The Assimilation of Refugee Immigrants in Australia," *Population Studies* 5, No.3 (1952), 180.

<sup>21</sup> In 1947 Calwell contacted the Preparatory Commission for the International Refugee Organisation (PCIRO) and agreed to take 12,000 DPs; provision was given to increase this number to 20,000 by 1950 if the necessary transport arrangements could be found. By 1948 Calwell accepted that Australia would never achieve the ten to one ratio between British and foreign migrants he promoted in earlier years, and settled instead on a ratio of two to one. (A. James Hammerton and Alistair Thomson, *Ten Pound Poms: Australia's Invisible Migrants* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 31; Reginald Thomas Appleyard, Alison Ray and Allan Segal, *The Ten Pound Immigrants* (London: Boxtree, 1988), 15–26.

<sup>22</sup> Hawkins, *Critical Years in Immigration* (see note 18), 32–33.

<sup>23</sup> Peter Gatrell, *Free World? The Campaign to Save the World's Refugees, 1956–1963* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 101.

<sup>24</sup> Egon F. Kunz, *Displaced Persons: Calwell's New Australians* (Sydney: Australian National University Press, 1988), 43; B. C. Hill, "Australia and ICEM," *Migration News* 15, No. 6 (1966), 11; Australian Population and Immigration Council, *Immigration Policies and Australia's Population: A Green Paper* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1977), 26; Charles A. Price, "Overseas Migration to Australia: 1947–1970," in *Australian Immigration: A Bibliography and Digest, No. 2: 1970*, ed. Charles A. Price (Canberra: Australian National University, 1971), A5.



***“We went to Yarwun because there were Old Believers living there”:***

**Settlement Choices and Prospects**

Australia’s post-war refugee resettlement policy promised new grounds for the large-scale immigration of Russian refugees from China. In the early 1950s, David Guerassimoff resumed his plans to help his relatives and fellow Old Believers to leave China and find resettlement options in Australia. The new migration scheme required Australian sponsors who had to guarantee employment for intending migrants. David Guerassimoff identified labour shortages in Queensland’s pawpaw and mango industry and enlisted the assistance of framers in Targinnie and Yarwun. These Australian farmers agreed to provide work for the newly arrived Russian migrants, and usually offered a share-farming agreement: the sharefarmer would pay one-half or one-third of the proceeds from the sale to the owner. After some Russian families had settled in Yarwun, the emergence of a larger Russian community in the district was later a consequence of one migrant sponsoring another. Until the early 1960s this chain migration relied on the availability of work in the district.<sup>25</sup>

From 1965, however, the Department of Immigration restricted the immigration of more Russians who sought to join the 26 migrant families in Yarwun. As the pawpaw and mango industry declined, the number of newly arrived migrants had already caused resentment amongst the Australian fruit farmers.<sup>26</sup> Thomas Blake, however, describes the Old Believers’ arrival in Targinnie as a story of success and fortune.

This period was reasonably prosperous for farmers in the Yarwun-Targinnie district with good prices for papaws and tomatoes. Labour was in demand and some farmers were more than willing to take on Russian families on a share farming arrangement. The ready supply of work in the district enabled people like David Guerassimoff to sponsor the arrival of a significant number of families to the district.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Blake, *Targinnie: The History of a Central Queensland Rural Community* (see note 6), 64–66.

<sup>26</sup> P. R. Heydon, Letter to Migration Officer in Hong Kong, 6 April 1965; NAA: A446, 1967/71361; R. Marbach, Letter to Commonwealth Migration Officer, 16 January 1965; NAA: A446, 1967/71361.

<sup>27</sup> Blake, *Targinnie: The History of a Central Queensland Rural Community* (see note 6), 71.

The need for labour and a receptive immigration policy coincided with the initiative of a migrant family, who sought to re-establish their religious community and help their fellow Russian refugees in need. According to Blake, the Old Believers' migration to the Targinnie-Yarwun district was guided by two rationales: finding a prosperous living in a rural settlement, and re-establishing their religious community. Both of these rationales were also central to the life stories of my interviewees.

Vlas explained that the Commonwealth government helped migrants who wished to come to Australia: "They didn't just take us [the Russian refugees from China] but also others. They needed *narod* [people] here [in Australia]. Their population was very small. So, every year they needed to take people from different countries: they just selected and took them in." Vlas's interpretation of Australia's post-war immigration policy as a selection process during which the most suitable immigrants were chosen in order to increase the population. He remembered his family's motivation to settle in Australia. Their settlement in Yarwun was not only guided by economic reasons, but also by his family's wish to be immersed in a larger priestless community of Old Believers.

First, we arrived in Sydney. We stayed there for maybe two days, and then we came here to Yarwun. People invited us to stay there, in Sydney. [...] There were already Russians living there, and they said: "Stay in Sydney! We can organise for you to live and work here." [...] In Sydney maybe I would have managed to find work somewhere straight away, maybe it would have been easier for us. But I started to work in the pawpaw [production in Yarwun] – I worked for five years and didn't earn anything, absolutely nothing!"<sup>28</sup>

"Maybe it would have been better," if his family had stayed in Sydney, Vlas mused, "but we went to Yarwun because there were Old Believers living there." Vlas suggested that the first years of his settlement in Australia could have been easier, if his family had not moved to the countryside but stayed in the city. His family seemed to have favoured the revival of their religious community over the prospect of economic success and material security.

Efforts to establish a new life and to make a living in Australia were also prominent in Elisey's life story. He explained, however, that settling in Queensland's countryside and

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<sup>28</sup> Vlas, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 11 January 2011, Gympie.

working in the fruit industry combined the Old Believers' ambitions to achieve economic success, as well as their hope to continue a religious and traditional lifestyle. Elisey remembered that work supply for Russian sharefarmers was sufficient in western Queensland; pawpaw and mango prices were good until the mid-1960. "In the 1960s, Targinnie was the biggest pawpaw industry in Australia. There were about forty full ground farmers back then, plus part time farmers."<sup>29</sup> Elisey explained that his family decided to settle in Yarwun because they were used to farm work and living a seasonal life-style.

It's hard work when there are a lot of pawpaws. Especially, before Easter there are so many pawpaws. You have usually two crops a year: before Easter and later around September, October, November there is another crop. [...] The good thing about it was that you were free. You could go to church whenever you wanted. If there was a Russian holiday, you stopped and went to church in the morning. If you were working in a factory or wherever, you couldn't just take days off because you had to go to work. But on a pawpaw farm you could work whenever you wanted. That was a good thing! You could go to church and still work on the farm. If there was a lot of work you would go to church, and then you picked or packed pawpaws after church. But if there was not much work, you would go to church and you have the rest of the day off, just have a holiday.

<sup>30</sup>

Aleksey, Elisey's brother, also stressed that the Old Believers' settlement in the rural area of Yarwun initially preserved the social cohesion and homogeneity of their community. An isolated farm life in Queensland's countryside promised to keep the Old Believers' community together, and the possibility to preserve their religious tradition. Aleksey generalised this rural settlement pattern that priestless Old Believers have followed since their flight from the Tsarist Empire and the Soviet Union:

When they [the Old Believers] left Russia, first thing they wanted to know was: Where is this [our] community, so they could go there. And all of them would bring their old books – *knigii* – and icons or whatever they took with them. If they hadn't done that? Well, then they would have gone to a town and that was

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<sup>29</sup> Elisey, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 10 January 2010, Gympie.

<sup>30</sup> Elisey, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 10 January 2010, Gympie.

it! [...] People [in the cities] eventually stopped being religious. As long as the community or a group of families stayed in the villages, they tried to keep the religion alive, I suppose. That is what happened in Russia, in China, happened in South America and happened near Gladstone.

Aleksey explained that this preference of rural settlements choices marked the movement and journeys for generations of Old Believer migrants. He remembered that his family was originally granted a visa to follow earlier Old Believer migrants to South America, where they had settled in large rural farmer colonies. By 1960, many Old Believers had left China, Aleksey said, “most of them went to Uruguay, Paraguay, Brazil and Bolivia.” Some families were, however, disappointed by the living conditions and opportunities that their settlement in South America had offered them. “When my uncles got there they did not like what they saw. They used to go hunting, but there you can’t do that because there is nothing to hunt for.” Aleksey’s father changed his mind and resettlement plans to go to Brazil or Bolivia: “eventually my Dad asked his brother and he said it’s not worth going [to South America]”<sup>31</sup>.

Labour hardships and severe weather conditions appeared to be great obstacles for the Old Believer colonies in South America. Some Old Believer who initially settled in Brazil joined later the Australian communities, especially in Yarwun and Sydney.<sup>32</sup> From hearsay, Elisey remembered:

Most of the Russian Old Believers from China went to Brazil because they thought their life would be better there. Most of the people who lived in China couldn’t even read. They were just guessing and hoping that Brazil would be better than Australia. [...] They thought it would be easy there, but actually it was pretty bad. The first five years it was hard to make a living. The government gave just one tractor which was used by maybe five families. And there weren’t very good prices on wheat and whatever they grew. It was very, very hard those years.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Aleksey, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 10 January 2011, Gympie.

<sup>32</sup> Of the interviewees I presented in my thesis only Masha and her family had initially migrated from China to Brazil in 1959 or 1960, before they come to Australia after 1964.

<sup>33</sup> Elisey, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 10 January 2010, Gympie.

Considerations about better living conditions and material security meant for some Old Believer migrants that they would postpone their final arrival and settlement. Several families who initially settled in South America began a new journey, either to Australia, the United States or Canada.

Elisey explained that this continuous stream of new immigrants, who arrived in Yarwun from China and South America during the mid-1960s, affected the settlement conditions and economic success of his family. Prices for pawpaws and mangos went down, and the business became more competitive. “When I left school I thought I would probably be a pawpaw farmer for the rest of my life,” Elisey said disappointedly, “but things went worse”.<sup>34</sup> In the late 1960s weather conditions changed, floods and cyclones ruined entire harvests. Many farming families could not make a living anymore. Pawpaws were then grown in Innisfail near Cairns, today Australia’s biggest pawpaw growing industry.

Now there are no pawpaw farmers anymore [around Targinnie]. [...] As far as I know last year the last pawpaw farmer quit. There were too many diseases in the pawpaws in the last twenty years. They always had lice and yellow dieback – then the pawpaws would go yellow and just die.<sup>35</sup>

As the farming industry declined in the area, some Old Believer families found work in factories and moved to the cities, to Brisbane or Sydney. Others even went to Tasmania, New Zealand, the U.S. and Canada. Elisey remembered that of the twenty Russian families that originally settled in Yarwun, only about seven were left.

Elisey’s and Aleksey’s story revealed the complexities of the global migrant movement that the Old Believers underwent in the second half of the twentieth century, which often included more than a single migrant journey from China to their country of resettlement. Some Old Believer families moved between different diaspora communities in Australia and the Americas, across countries and continents. Their global diaspora is characterised by many migrant journeys to different parts of the globe, each with its own history and particularities. However, this globally dispersed Old Believer diaspora shares a sense of belonging and identity which emerged from

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<sup>34</sup> Elisey, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 10 January 2010, Gympie.

<sup>35</sup> Elisey, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 10 January 2010, Gympie.

their migration experience, memories of their displacement and their imaginations of a Russian homeland.

James Clifford writes that diasporas emerge from “the lived tension, experiences of separation and entanglement, of living here and remembering/desiring another place”<sup>36</sup>. Clifford’s concept of diaspora is illuminating in regards to the Old Believers’ diasporic existence because he acknowledges the multiplicity of the *here* and *there* that migrants remember, desire and identify with. According to Clifford, diasporas are supposedly centred around an axis of origin and return. This perspective, however, overrides the specific local interactions that maintain diasporic identities and social forms. Dwelling *here* assumes solidarity and connection *there* which is not necessarily a single place or nation. The Old Believers recurrent experience of exile, migration and displacement suggest that we cannot reduce their solidarity, belonging and identification to one single nation or place.<sup>37</sup>

Clifford is careful not to overestimate the diasporic association with a nation, culture, ethnicity or historical roots of origin. Nonetheless, his apt phrase that diaspora communities are “not-here to stay”, poses the question to what degree he might de-emphasise or diminish the importance of living *here*?<sup>38</sup> Clifford can be criticised for reproducing concepts of the homeward-looking that prevails in many diaspora studies, and the migrant’s strong attachment to the place of their origin.<sup>39</sup> In the following, I focus on the multiplicity of identity formations that circulate in the Australian Old Believer diaspora, which relate to their host-society, as well as their former settlement in China and their Russian cultural and religious heritage.

### **Stories of Success: Post-War Arrivals and Immigration Policies**

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<sup>36</sup> James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997) 255.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 255; Ien Ang, *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living Between Asia and the West* (London: Routledge, 2001), 13, 45.

<sup>39</sup> See also: William Safran, “Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return,” *Diaspora* 1, No. 1 (1991), 83–99; Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (London: UCL Press, 1997); Khachig Tölölyan, “Rethinking Diaspora(s): Stateless Power in the Transitional Moment,” *Diaspora* 5, No. 1 (1996), 3–36.

The meanings my interviewees attached to their arrival in Australia varied and reflected on shifting settlement and immigration policies, as well as social transformation and cultural change. I have chosen two narratives which highlight these shifts and changes, and point at different factors that shaped the Old Believers' settlement in Australia. Whereas Fyodor's memories of his arrival in Australia highlighted economic rationales and the diversification of his host-society, Alexander's narrative reflected on the difficulties that assimilation and integration policies imposed onto the newly arrived migrants.

Fyodor's and Alexander's stories are not representative for every arriving Old Believer migrant. The story of the Old Believers' settlement in Australia encompasses many different and disparate narratives; stories about multiple journeys and continuous travelling across generations, geographies, identities and policies. We may configure the multiple journeys that constitute a diaspora by merging the narratives in which these journeys are lived and re-lived, produced and reproduced, transformed and remembered. Diaspora identities are constituted within the crucible of everyday stories, told individually and collectively. If we read Fyodor's and Alexander's accounts of their settlement experience together, they will echo the stories that many of my interviewees told about their initial arrival in Australia.<sup>40</sup>

Fyodor arrived in Australia in 1956, earlier than most of my other interviewees. He remembered that at the time it was easy for his parents to find work in their new host-country. "When we came to Brisbane there was a lot of work," he said. His father became a sharefarmer in Yarwun, and Fyodor resumed, "We went to our farm, we settled there and my father started working."<sup>41</sup> This was not an exceptional situation for Fyodor's family. Finding employment was not difficult for any of the newly arrived migrants, he explained:

The economic situation here was quite good – any immigrant who arrived in Australia would have a job the next day. There was no such thing as unemployment benefits. People would find jobs straight away, factories would

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<sup>40</sup>Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London: Routledge, 1996), 183. See also: Nicholas Demaria Harney and Loretta Baldassar, "Tracking Transnationalism: Migrancy and its Futures," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 33, No. 2 (2007), 189, 192.

<sup>41</sup> Fyodor, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 3 January 2011, Brisbane.

take them in or they go [and work on the] farms, and the farmers would pay them.<sup>42</sup>

Fyodor highlighted that the Old Believers' settlement in Australia did not just have an impact on the newly arrived migrants, but also on their host-society. Fyodor described Australia in those days as a growing country, which promoted immigration and the increase of its extremely small population.

The positive change that the European migrants brought to Australia proved, in Fyodor's opinion, the success of Australia's post-war immigration policies. "The government realised that people from all different countries, they are hard workers. They are providing and building and creating things." Fyodor emphasised that the European migrant intake changed Australia's society significantly: "It's the Europeans that actually built it up. Australia became modernised thanks to the immigrants from all different nationalities." Fyodor recognised that Australia's increase of migrant intakes in the post-war era contributed to the country's cultural and ethnic diversity. Fyodor gave an example of how the number of Russian and European migrants developed and modernised the Australian society: "When we came out here, there was hardly any variety in food. We only had hot dogs and hamburgers. That was it, it was ridiculous!"<sup>43</sup> Fyodor said and laughed ironically.

There were a lot of things we couldn't get here before. They had a lot of meat and bread, but that was about it. There was no choice. We [the European migrants] brought the culture in. Now, if you want to have sour cucumbers, you can have them. Prior to that there was no such thing, they only had such little gherkins and they were not to our taste. They only had one kind of sausage, there was no variety. Today I go to the butcher shop and I have variety. In the big shopping centres – no matter what you like, it is there.<sup>44</sup>

Fyodor remembered Australia as a backward country at the time of his arrival in the mid-1950s. He spoke of the transformation that his host-society underwent in the

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<sup>42</sup> Fyodor, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 3 January 2011, Brisbane.

<sup>43</sup> Fyodor, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 3 January 2011, Brisbane.

<sup>44</sup> Fyodor, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 3 January 2011, Brisbane.



following years, as Australia's immigration policies opted for a greater diversity of migrant intakes.

Fyodor's memories of his arrival and settlement in Australia needs to be read in the context of Australia's immigration policy in the late 1950s, a time when its mass migration scheme was consolidated and migrant intakes became more diverse. This period was marked by Australia's reduced immigration targets, and a high rate of immigrants arriving from southern Europe, in particular, from Italy and Greece. Australia was no longer as attractive to some western European immigrants, such as the Dutch or the West Germans, because their own economies had recovered sufficiently after the end of the Second World War.<sup>45</sup> Political and economic crises in Communist Europe led Australia to increase its intake of Eastern European migrants,<sup>46</sup> and paved the way for a much broader recruitment since the mid-1950s. This included all European nationalities, and some limited intakes from the Middle East.<sup>47</sup>

In 1958 the Migration Act replaced the Immigration Restriction Act from 1901, but left the basis of the White Australia Policy unchanged. The White Australia Policy emerged from measures which were to restrict the inflow of mainly Chinese and other Asian labour immigrants since the second half of the nineteenth century, and sought to preserve a homogenous British-Australian nation.<sup>48</sup> Whereas the White Australia Policy remained a guiding principle of Australia's immigration policy throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the 1961 census reflected major changes in the population: 8 per cent of Australia's population of 10.5 million was now European-born. The largest groups were

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<sup>45</sup> Australia signed formal agreements involving the provision of assisted passages with Malta (1949), the Netherlands (1951) and West Germany (1952) to ensure the continued availability of immigrants. (Australian Population and Immigration Council, *Immigration Policies and Australia's Population* (see note 24), 26–27).

<sup>46</sup> In 1956, the Soviet Union crushed a national revolt in Hungary. Subsequently, about 14,000 Hungarian refugees were resettled in Australia. A similar wave of migrants, about 6,000 Czech refugees, arrived in Australia after the occupation of Czechoslovakia by the forces of the Warsaw Pact in 1968. (Egon F. Kunz, *The Hungarians in Australia* (Melbourne: AE Press, 1985), 83; Michael Cigler, *The Czechs in Australia* (Melbourne: AE Press, 1983), 111–112).

<sup>47</sup> Hawkins, *Critical Years in Immigration* (see note 18), 33; Geoffrey Sherington, *Australia's Immigrants, 1788–1988* (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1990), 149–152.

<sup>48</sup> Myra Willard, *History of the White Australia Policy to 1920*, 2nd ed. (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1967), 17, 134, 189.

Italians (228,000), Germans (109,000) Greeks (77,000) with smaller groups of Poles, Yugoslavs, Hungarians and Russians.<sup>49</sup>

Fyodor was proud of the achievements and the success that his fellow migrants had in Australia. He was glad to live in Australia and praised the multicultural society his host-country represents today. Fyodor explained that the difference between his own migration experience and recent migrant intakes was that his family worked hard to be respected and welcomed in Australia. New generations of immigrants were provided with migrant services, government support and benefited from the achievements of earlier migrant generations.

The migrants that come from Asia now, and especially from Africa, they don't want to work at all. Many of them have a lot of kids and the government provides everything for the kids. They give a lot of money for the kids! If someone can't find a job, they give money to the people who are not working. And the Africans love that! I was speaking to one of them, and he said: "Over there [in Africa], we had to get up early. We had to go out into the forest and kill a bird for our food. Here we are provided with [everything]. That's the reason why I don't want to go back to Africa!"<sup>50</sup>

Fyodor laughed amused, and contrasted these recent migrant intakes with his own arrival in Australia. He emphasised that his family arrived in Australia without relying on government support or welfare benefits.

[The Australian] government didn't help us. It was only the Union of Churches that provided us with tickets. When we came out here, some people were exempt from it, especially the old aged people. But the younger ones, like my Dad, he had to pay off the loan that he had with the Churches. He paid the

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<sup>49</sup> Cautious amendments to the Immigration Act resulted in the admission of a few thousand non-Europeans and persons of mixed descent, increasing to approximately 10,000 in the early 1970s. While people from Asian countries represented only 2.5 per cent of total migrant arrivals between 1959 and 1966, they represented 4 per cent of all migrants in the period 1966 to 1970. (Hawkins, *Critical Years in Immigration* (see note 18), 32–33; Australian Population and Immigration Council, *Immigration Policies and Australia's Population* (see note 24), 28).

<sup>50</sup> Fyodor, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 3 January 2011, Brisbane.

tickets out from them, up to the last cent. He was quite happy about that: 'I paid them out, I owe no one!'<sup>51</sup>

Fyodor was thankful for the opportunities, such as education, social security and financial prospects that Australia offered his family upon their arrival. His gratitude was not diminished by the fact that his father could not resume his previous occupation when he came to Australia. Back in China he was a highly educated interpreter, fluent in English, Chinese and Russian. Fyodor's father faced work restrictions and the non-recognition of his previous qualification and skills, like many refugees who arrived from Europe and Asia in the mid-1950s. Most newly arrived migrants in the post-war era were employed as unskilled labourers.<sup>52</sup> Whereas the Old Believers who settled in Yarwun and Tasmania sought for agricultural settlement options, many migrant families in the suburbs of Melbourne and Sydney went into factories or worked on construction sites.

Fyodor suggested that when his father arrived in Australia, he was prepared not to work in his previous occupation but readily taking on work for which he was overqualified. "When he first came [to Australia] he knew that he wouldn't work as an interpreter, because there weren't many Chinese people living here." Fyodor explained: "Only later, about ten years ago, they started allowing doctors and people in that got their education overseas. Previously, one had to do everything from scratch again." The non-recognition of his father's professional skills and work experience were not an issue of complaint for Fyodor. His father did not mind working on a farm, and "starting from scratch". Rather than blaming his host-country for any missed chances or professional discrimination, Fyodor emphasised his gratitude to Australia. Any hardships that his family, and other European migrants, would have faced upon their

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<sup>51</sup> Fyodor, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 3 January 2011, Brisbane.

<sup>52</sup> For a discussion on the effects of Australia's non-recognition of qualifications and the occupational down-grading of post-war migrants see: H. B. M. Murphy, "Assimilation of Refugee Immigrants in Australia" (see note 20); Ronald Taft and A. Gedeon Doczy, *The Assimilation of Intellectual Refugees in Western Australia, with Special Reference to Hungarians* (The Hague: Research Group for European Migration Problems, 1962); Egon F. Kunz, "The Engineering Profession and the Displaced Person Migrant in Australia," *International Migration* 7, No. 1–2 (1969), 22–30.

arrival in Australia were evened out by their present living standards. “All the migrants are well off today,”<sup>53</sup> said Fyodor smilingly.

Fyodor told the story of the Old Believers’ migration to Australia as a story of success, of positive development and beneficial exchange between the newly arrived migrants and their host-society. Fyodor did not mention that his family might have been negatively affected by the uncertainties of establishing a new home, work conditions and the language barrier. Instead, he emphasised his present prosperity and the well established social status of his family. He stressed the high level of education and material security that his children achieved. Especially in the 1980s, some Australian academics commented in similar ways on the rapid integration and economic success of the post-war migrants from Europe.<sup>54</sup> These ‘success stories’ highlight that many European migrants took out Australian citizenship and accepted the country as their permanent home. They were economically well established, bilingual and made significant contributions to various fields of Australia’s society like sports, arts and the sciences.

### **The Struggle to Fit in: Assimilation and Settlement Policies**

Compared to Fyodor, Alexander gave a less idealised account of his family’s arrival in Australia; but he also pointed at the support of a pre-existing Russian migrant community. Like Fyodor, Alexander also compared his own migration experience to recent migrant intakes and policies. Alexander arrived in Australia in 1963, almost a decade after Fyodor, and moved to the Western suburbs of Sydney, where already many Russian migrants from China had settled.

The country of his resettlement did not instantly strike Alexander as the ‘lucky country’ which promised economic success and social security. Remembering Australia in the early 1960s, he thought of a society which failed to show understanding of how the newly arrived immigrants coped with their migration experience. Many Old Believers would have experienced enormous economic, social and cultural changes brought by their migration, Alexander explained. They had left their “rural existence” in some northern Chinese villages: “No running water, no electricity, nothing like that. Coming

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<sup>53</sup> Fyodor, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 3 January 2011, Brisbane.

<sup>54</sup> Marian Kaluski, *The Poles in Australia* (Melbourne, AE Press, 1985); Nino Randazzo and Michael Cigler, *The Italians in Australia* (Melbourne : AE Press, 1987); B. & A. Birškys et al., *The Baltic Peoples in Australia: Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians* (Melbourne: AE Press, 1986).

out of that environment into Australia was a big transformation – literally coming from the eighteenth or nineteenth century into the twentieth century over night. That was a big change for us!”<sup>55</sup> Alexander’s family settled in Sydney; his parents began to work in factories and Alexander started school. As a young migrant boy he was mostly troubled by the language barrier.

When I went to school I was just nodding and shaking my head, but I didn’t really know what it had to do with it. There were times when I was put out on the corridor during classes, the only thing I could do was arithmetic mathematics. So they would put me in the corridor and give me a few exercises to work on, until they had a teacher who basically helped to explain various words for common things.<sup>56</sup>

In Alexander’s opinion his family would have needed help and support, to gain an “understanding [of] how Australia’s society operates”. Alexander thought of “the simple things like shopping. If you don’t know the English word for bread or cucumber or milk, it is very difficult”<sup>57</sup>. Alexander and his family felt estranged and excluded from their new environment, the foreign language and Australia’s mainstream society. Instead of approaching their new host-society, they relied on the support of their ethnic community and migrant friends.

When we came out here, there was a new wave of immigrants coming to Australia. Unlike what it is now, there was a fairly low tolerance for new arrivals coming to Australia. You tended to mix within your own community with its support network. [...] Having such a community and living close together – that is where the support comes in. When I started high school there were a couple of children from the same community that were in the same class. So we could basically stick together [...] That gave you the opportunity to get on with the rest of the people as well.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Alexander, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 19 August 2010, Sydney.

<sup>56</sup> Alexander, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 19 August 2010, Sydney.

<sup>57</sup> Alexander, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 19 August 2010, Sydney.

<sup>58</sup> Alexander, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 19 August 2010, Sydney.

Alexander stressed that the lack of migrant services and the low tolerance that Australians showed for the newly arrived migrants made the support of a pre-existing Russian migrant community very important. He also emphasised the difficulties that the initial settlement of his family brought about, and related his own migration experience with present immigration policies. He said: "In these days it [Australia] is much more tolerant, a truly multicultural society. It is a lot easier for new immigrants! And there is also a good government support network. This is certainly very different from what it was in 1962, 1963 when we came out here."<sup>59</sup>

Alexander arrived into a host-society which followed until the late 1960s the principle of assimilation: Australia required its newly arrived immigrants to blend in with its Anglo-Australian population. Immigration programmes were designed to achieve ethnic homogeneity and were guided by an understanding that immigrants could be culturally and socially absorbed. During the 1950s and 1960s the government supported assimilation measures, including basic English courses, initial accommodation and help to find work, as well as the quick naturalisation of newly arrived immigrants after five years of settlement. The government subsidised voluntary efforts to assist cultural assimilation, for example, the Good Neighbour Councils. The education and school system was to turn migrant children into Australians but usually did not offer special language classes. Migrants were to work and live among Australians to avoid the formation of ethnic enclaves. Immigrant cultures were devalued and ignored, immigrants were dispersed both geographically and throughout their community.<sup>60</sup>

Under the conditions of this assimilationist agenda the Old Believers established scattered communities not only across Australia, but also within the suburbs of Sydney and Melbourne. The government discouraged the settlement of immigrants in pockets or ethnic enclaves, and Alexander highlighted the effect that this settlement policy had on the present Old Believer diaspora in Australia.

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<sup>59</sup> Alexander, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 19 August 2010, Sydney.

<sup>60</sup> Stephen S. Castles, "Australian Multiculturalism: Social Policy and Identity in a Changing Society," in *Nations of Immigrants: Australia, the United States, and International Migration*, ed. Gary P. Freeman and James Jupp (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1992), 184–185; Stephen Castles, "Italians in Australia: Building a Multicultural Society on the Pacific Rim," *Diaspora* 1, No. 1 (1991), 54; James Walter and Margaret MacLeod, *Citizens' Bargain: A Documentary History of Australian Views since 1890* (Sydney: University of New South Wales, 2002), 175–176.

Back in China the Russians *did* live in a community, in a close-knit community. Their way of life was very different. It was easier because they were living much closer together. [To all] intents and purposes, it was as if they had lived in Russia because there were so many of them, whole villages. [...] It was very easy for them [the Old Believers] to practice their religion and observe their customs. Whereas when you live in the city of Sydney, where everybody is just dispersed, it becomes a bit more challenging and difficult.<sup>61</sup>

Alexander compared the Old Believers' settlement in Sydney with a Muslim community that had settled in the south-western suburb of Lakemba. Most likely the Muslim families, which Alexander referred to, were Lebanese and arrived not long after the Old Believers.<sup>62</sup>

There is an area with a very strong and large Muslim community. They all tend to congregate and live in the same area. They actually wear their own traditional dresses, and so on. They are not tending towards the multicultural Australian community, but they are very much a Muslim community. The Old Believers – or generally the Russian population in Sydney – we could do exactly what the Muslim community does. We strike a particular area and everybody moves into that area, and then we are wearing our own dresses and so on.

Alexander pointed out that the Russian migrant community might be numerically large enough to form an ethnic enclave in the outer suburbs of Sydney. He wondered why the Russians in Sydney did not form such a close-knit community when they came to Australia. Concentrations of Russian migrants, most of which were Jewish, could have been found in the Melbourne suburbs of St Kilda and Caulfield. Alexander explained that many Russians who arrived from China quickly sought assimilation in their

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<sup>61</sup> Alexander, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 19 August 2010, Sydney.

<sup>62</sup> Following the 1967 Arab-Israeli war and the civil war in the 1970s, the Lebanese population in Australia increased rapidly: from 10,600 people in 1966 to 24,200 in 1971. The first Lebanese Muslim Association was founded in 1956. A converted house, a de facto mosque, was established in Lakemba in the early 1960s. (Michael Humphrey, "Lebanese since 1970," in *The Australian People: Encyclopedia of the Nation, its People and their Origins*, ed. James Jupp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 561, 564.

Australian host-society, and that the number of Old Believers was too small to establish their own ethnic enclave.

I don't think we could follow the Muslim community. We are just not big enough. And that is the cultural difference between ourselves and the Muslims: we are a lot more similar to the European or Anglo-Saxon society. We tend to relate more to them and mix much easier than the Muslim communities. In time, we will get even more assimilated. [...] Our challenge is now how we position ourselves so that we can still live within a multicultural society, are able to conduct our services in English, and practice our [Russian] ways and traditions.<sup>63</sup>

Alexander spoke of a twofold orientation that marked the Old Believers' settlement experience in Australia: They sought to fit into a host-society which had been shaped by assimilationist immigration policies; at the same time they tried to distance themselves in order to preserve and maintain their religious traditions, their cultural heritage and ethnic identity. More than fifty years after Alexander's arrival in Australia, the Old Believers' movement between the *here* of their host-country and the *there* of their former life in China and Russia seemed to continue. Alexander spoke of the current challenges that his diaspora community faces: while trying to preserve its traditional religious practice, it has to adapt to its present diasporic setting in Australia and might allow the conduct of church services in English.

Alexander's story about his settlement in Australia oscillates, like the stories of many of my interviewees, between at least two directions: toward a home that has been lost, and a place that was not (yet) home. The migrant memories of my interviewees talked about multiple beginnings, departures, and returns that result from what Sara Ahmed calls the "migrant orientation"<sup>64</sup>, a disorientation of the sense of home. She explains that this loss of orientation and being out of place is an effect of unsettling arrivals.<sup>65</sup> Ahmed's understanding of migrant arrivals invokes a tension of different directions towards home and belonging. It challenges the perspective of the Old Believers' arrival

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<sup>63</sup> Alexander, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 19 August 2010, Sydney.

<sup>64</sup> Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 10.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 10, 155.



in Australia as a single event or an end point at which migrants finally belong and identify with their country of resettlement. Ahmed acknowledges the initial confusions and upheavals, the loss of direction and means of identification which occur at the arrival and settlement in their host-country. This initial disorientation at their arrival points at negotiation and identification processes that lead to new orientations or a dwelling in the in-between spaces of settlement and migration. The Old Believer diaspora in Australia is comprised of various individual migrant paths that cannot be subsumed in a homogenous and coherent pattern of community movement. The Old Believers attached multiple meanings to their settlement in Australia and took account of the multiple ways in which migrants get directed and placed as a condition of their arrival. In the following, I highlight the multiple positionings that the Old Believers negotiated between their host-society and their diaspora, as well as between their imagination of a Russian homeland, their former settlement in China and the country of their resettlement.

### **Making a Home: The Material Worlds of Migration**

Many Old Believers came to Australia with not much luggage. Many families were poor or their few valuables had been taken from them as they crossed the Chinese border to Hong Kong. Some arrived with little more than the shirts on their backs. Nina remembered that her family “brought some religious books and icons, but that’s all. We didn’t have much to wear, nothing much at all, maybe one suitcase for the whole family”<sup>66</sup>. Nina said that after her arrival in Australia “the Salvation Army took us to a shop, and gave us anything we wanted. So for the first couple of days we picked some clothes and shoes. And I thought: I am living in heaven now! I’ve got a few dresses!”<sup>67</sup> Many Old Believer families did not possess much to take with them to Australia, some cutlery and clothes, a couple of religious books and a few precious icons. Nina’s suitcase could be seen as an ambiguous and multilayered symbol of diasporic migration, which spoke of her migrant journey as well as the conditions of her settlement in Australia.

The emptiness of Nina’s suitcase signified for me a moment of rupture and destitution, her loss of belonging(s) and connectedness. It might stand for her family’s arrival in Australia with ‘empty hands’, without any material resources or social capital to draw

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<sup>66</sup> Nina, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 8 July 2009, Melbourne.

<sup>67</sup> Nina, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 8 July 2009, Melbourne.

upon. Nina's suitcase might also symbolise, in Irit Rogoff's words, the "indisputable frisson of unease, of displacement and dislocation or, at the other extreme, of excited speculation and expectations"<sup>68</sup>. Nina remembered the support and generosity of voluntary organisations that helped the newly arrived migrants to start a new life. In this sense Nina's suitcase could stand for the provisionality, the unprepared and anxious uncertainty that encompassed her initial arrival in Australia. However, her empty suitcase does not only symbolise loss and displacement, but also stands for a vessel that could be filled with new attachments and identities.<sup>69</sup>

I asked Matrona what her family took on their journey to Australia, and she said that her mother brought some blankets and warm winter jackets from China. "Obviously, it would have cost them money to bring all these things, but after they had brought them, she [Matrona's mother] looked at it and thought: we are never going to need any of these!" Sometimes Matrona's mother joked about the things they brought from China:

Like an old aluminium tea pot, things like that. That could have been thrown out! But [she thought]: oh, what if we don't have one like that in Australia? When she came here and went shopping, and she saw all these sauce pans, and frying pans.... she remembered that she bought herself a cast-iron frying pan!<sup>70</sup>

Some of the objects Matrona's family brought to Australia lost their need and value, their old tea pot and their warm winter jackets were no longer of use. Other migrant families brought a few tools with them from China, which were now rusting in the garage. Or they remembered a heavy wooden suitcase that has been lying on top of a cupboard for years, covered in dust and darkness. How did the material objects which accompanied my interviewees' migrant journey to Australia shape their arrival in Australia? Could some of these objects produce a sense of self, of their past and present? Objects that migrants take along on their journey often symbolise, refract, and

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<sup>68</sup> Irit Rogoff, *Terra Infirma: Geography's Visual Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 37.

<sup>69</sup> Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 261–262; Kathy Burrell, "Materialising the Border: Spaces of Mobility and Material Culture in Migration from Post-Socialist Poland," *Mobilities* 3, No. 3 (2008), 362.

<sup>70</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, Melbourne, 12 July 2009.

resonate with their migration and their diasporic identity.<sup>71</sup> Some of these objects might still trigger my interviewees' memories and imaginations of past times and distant places, of their life back in China or of their Russian homeland.

Matrona was a young girl when she arrived in Australia. She remembered that her family hoped to establish a new home in the country of their resettlement, and wished for a life in material security and freedom from religious or political persecution. Matrona mentioned some of the material changes that her arrival in Australia brought, and made a deep impression on her as a girl of eight or ten years: "we've got a house – it wasn't a big house – but for us it was really big. [...] We lived on a farm, and we got to go to school. And we had all this food and we have all got our own beds. We have got bikes and more or less everything we wanted"<sup>72</sup>. Establishing their own home was a crucial reference for many of my interviewees. This new home often signified the end of their migrant journey and the establishment of a new life. For Matrona settling in her new home marked the beginning of a 'normal' life and the daily routine of going to school, playing with her friends and sleeping in her own bed.

*Home* does not necessarily constitute an antipode to movement, or marked the end of Matrona's migrant journey. Nigel Rapport and Andrew Dawson argue that home is constructed "in a routine set of practices, in repetition of habitual social interactions"<sup>73</sup>. They assert that the concept of home, like migrants themselves, is mobile. Rapport and Dawson emphasises the multi-locatedness, mutability and fluidity of the concept of home. They leave aside idealised notions of home as origin or a bounded place. These notions often refer to migrant homes in the temporal and spatial distance to their former dwellings and settlements. Migrant stories can reach beyond these associations of home with an attachment to physical settings, and give an understanding of the tensions between 'home' and 'dispersion'. In context of my interviewees' migrant experience, home does not appear as a fixed place, but constitutes an enacted space in which one can probe different relation of movement and dwelling, of belonging and

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<sup>71</sup> Divya Tolia-Kelly, "Locating Processes of Identification: Studying the Precipitates of Re-Memory through Artefacts in the British Asian Home," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 29, No. 3 (2004), 317.

<sup>72</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 12 July 2009 Melbourne.

<sup>73</sup> Nigel Rapport and Andrew Dawson, "The Topic and the Book," in *Migrants of Identity: Perceptions of Home in a World of Movement*, ed. Nigel Rapport and Andrew Dawson (Oxford: Berg, 1998), 27.

foreignness.<sup>74</sup> Focusing on their practice of building and inhabiting a home in their Australian diaspora, I point at the Old Believers' settlement experience as a long-term process of making a home and adjusting to a new life in a foreign country, society and culture.

Matrona's settlement in Melbourne was not the result of a single or fixed arrival but of various movements, detours and returns. Matrona explained that the Australian government had the intention to settle migrants in rural areas: "they brought migrants in and wanted them to settle in the countryside rather than the city."<sup>75</sup> Matrona's family initially settled on a farm in the Victorian countryside, but her parents did not want to stay there for very long because they were dissatisfied with their living conditions.

When we lived on the farm, we lived in an old house. The thing that we probably couldn't work out was that back in China water was free. You had rivers and creeks, so there was a lot of water. The first thing we noticed when we moved to the farm was that there was a tank of water, and we used water like there was tons of it. Wow, you just turned the tap on and there was water flowing out of it! Then we ran out of water because there was just this tank. And when Mum looked into the tank, she discovered that there were dead birds and things in the tank; and the bottom of it was just like mud. She said: Ugh, and we drank from that! That's probably what made her move away from the farm.<sup>76</sup>

Matrona mused that her family's initial settlement option "didn't work for us because my parents wanted to be immersed". Three years after their initial settlement in the Victorian countryside Matrona's family moved to the Melbourne suburb of Dandenong, where already many Russian migrant families had settled. Whereas the Immigration Department might have initially supported the rural settlement of Matrona's family, it did not object her parents' plan to move to the city. With help of the Immigration

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<sup>74</sup> David Parkin, "Mementoes as Transitional Objects in Human Displacement," *Journal of Material Culture* 4, No. 3, (1999), 309; Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London: Routledge, 1996), 193, 197; Angelika Bammer, "Editorial: The Question of 'Home'," *New Formations*, No. 17 (1992), ix.

<sup>75</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 12 July 2009, Melbourne.

<sup>76</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 12 July 2009, Melbourne.

Department Matrona's family got a home loan and purchased "a brand new house, which was a bit bigger than the one on the farm"<sup>77</sup>.

The memories of Matrona's past arrival in Australia and the process of her settlement explained the circumstances and conditions of her present dwelling. I did not meet her on a farm in rural Victoria where her family initially settled. After her family had moved to the Eastern suburbs of Melbourne, Matrona purchased a house in the same area close to her family and the Orthodox Old-Rite church. As Matrona remembered her settlement in Australia, it became clear that her family's adjustments to their initial arrival included further movement. Establishing a new life and a home meant for her family a delay and the postponement of their final settlement. This process of continuous arrival only became evident in Matrona's retrospective account of her settlement experience. When her parents first arrived and settled in the Victorian countryside, they might have thought that they had arrived at their final destination. However, Matrona's memories carried notions of a continuous settlement process, which challenge any assumptions about a stable and fixed trajectory of migrant journeys. Her story also questions our common perspective of migration as an interval between fixed points of departure and arrival.

Making a home in a new country was often marked by a slow process of adjustment, and overshadowed by idealising memories of the Old Believers' life back in China. Many of my interviewees mentioned that they tried to make sense of their Australian host-country by comparing it with their life back in China. Comparing their life back in China with the Old Believers' present living situation in Australia became an important means to make sense of their diaspora community; not only for the first but also the second generation of Old Believer migrants. Nikolai belongs to the second generation of Old Believers living in Australia. He rhapsodised about the Russian settlement of Trekhrech'e, which he had never visited but knew from the memories his family and other Old Believers shared. Nikolai imagined how the Russian settlers lived in northern China more than sixty years ago, and compared their life with his own living in the western suburbs of Sydney. Nikolai mentioned the beautiful landscape that surrounded Trekhrech'e, the rural way of life his parents embraced and the close-knit Russian community he longed for. "It was a good life [for my parents], the best life they have ever had!" he said smilingly. Nikolai described the life of the Old Believers in China as peaceful and free: people worked hard, went to church and enjoyed their spare time in

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<sup>77</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 12 July 2009, Melbourne.

the wilderness of northern China. “In China, when the sun went down in the evenings,”<sup>78</sup> as soon as the men and some of the kids had “finished their jobs, they would go fishing.”

After the people from Trekhrech'e arrived in Australia they did no longer spend their spare time fishing or hunting, Nikolai said, with a tone of disappointment in his voice. Most Russian migrants moved to the cities; they started to work in factories and in the building industry. “You can't just grab a rifle and go hunting. You can't go fishing in the evenings. Living by the coast maybe you could, but when you are living out in the western suburbs [of Sydney] there is nothing close; just houses, roads, trains, noise.” He remembered that the men who once went fishing in the rivers of the Khingan mountains would just sit in front of their houses after they finished work and watched the sunset. “They would be sitting on the porch, drinking beer and crying. The sun would set. So what are we doing now? Sitting on the porch and drinking beer? That's like being in jail! But over there [in China] they would go out and get ready to go fishing.” Nikolai shrugged his shoulders, and explained that when the Old Believers arrived in Australia they completely lost their way of living:

Here [in Australia], you've got to go to work tomorrow, you can't just go fishing! I think it was just total shock: [not] being in control of their lives, and doing what they wanted to do when they wanted to it, or when the seasons allowed it. Here they had to go to work and when they were finished they could do whatever they wanted to do. But what could they do except sitting down and drinking?<sup>79</sup>

Nikolai described the initial shock his parents, relatives and friends experienced when they arrived in Australia and their struggle to settle in. This shock was born out of their 'in-between' movement, between the *here* of their new dwellings in Australia, and the *there* of their former settlement in China or Russia. The in-betweenness that marks migrants' journeys and settlement experiences is often referred to as a liminal stage, a particular and temporary state in which the belonging and identities of migrants are tossed and turned. This concept of liminality has been developed by Victor Turner, who

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<sup>78</sup> Nikolai (name changed), interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 2010, Sydney.

<sup>79</sup> Nikolai (name changed), interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 2010, Sydney.

has analysed the liminal period of in-betweenness as a transitional condition in which people are out of the usual structure of their lives.<sup>80</sup>

According to Ralph Grillo, the representation of migrants who move between countries, societies and cultures as liminal ('in between'), hybrid and creolised is problematic. Grillo argues that this representation overlooks the extent to which migrants remain bound to nation, culture, ethnicity, and class. He supports the view that migration is not a singular phenomenon or static, but can be seen as a transitional state and a long-term process which includes as a multitude of potential trajectories.<sup>81</sup> I agree with Grillo that we cannot deny the connection that migrants keep with their cultural heritage, with countries of their former settlement and ethnic belonging. However, the dynamics that Grillo describes might be different for forced migrants who are not left with the option of return or the choice of a different migrant journey.

I acknowledge Grillo's point that the settlement process for my interviewees was a long-term process. This constant process of negotiation, of remembering, imagining and identifying with the *here* and *there* of their diasporic living is crucial for our understanding of the Old Believers' identity formation. However, in case of their migrant journey, referring to their home-society as one end of the continuum between the *here* and *there* proves to be ambiguous: do we speak of an emotional and geographic attachment to the Old Believers' settlement in China or do we focus on cultural and religious ties which bind them to their Russian homeland? Andrew Dawson and Mark Johnson have shown that the view of liminality is often used to merely affirm the fixity of 'in between' states, rather than acknowledging the continually fluid and mutable nature of migrant belongings and identities. They suggest that one should see liminality not as what lies between these states but as "the awareness or realization of the betwixt and between"<sup>82</sup>. Moving away from Turner's transitional and static concept of

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<sup>80</sup> Victor Turner borrowed the term from Dutch anthropologist Arnold van Gennep who writes about the transitional period in a rite of passage as marked by a margin or limen ('threshold'). (Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (1966; repr.; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977); Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffé (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1960).

<sup>81</sup> Ralph Grillo, "Betwixt and Between: Trajectories and Projects of Transmigration," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 33, 2 (2007), 200–201, 212–213.

<sup>82</sup> Andrew Dawson and Mark Johnson, "Migration, Exile and Landscape of the Imagination," in *Contested Landscapes: Movement, Exile and Place*, edited by Barbara Bender and Margot Winer (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 330.

liminality, I argue for a fluent concept of the liminal times, spaces and identities that the Old Believers in Australia experience and belong to. In the following, I answer the question about the multiple connections that my interviewees have to their different host- and home-countries, and focus on the Old Believers' continuous process of negotiating their belonging and identification with the *here* and *there*.

### **Like a Complete Stranger: In Between the *Here* and *There***

Vlas trudged with his gumboots through the wet grass of his garden. Vlas was all smiles when he talked about his little farm; he adored the lush green hills that spread out to the west and the mysterious forest of cedar, vines and ferns to the east. The soil was still soaked with rainwater as we strolled along the rows of tree seedlings he had planted not long ago. Vlas pointed a few trees and bushes out to me, for example, the little birch cherry tree. From his childhood days he remembered that these trees were blooming all in white, and that their berries would make your tongue all blue. He had also planted some mango and pawpaw trees. Working as a sharefarmer in Yarwun, he knew that they would soon grow succulent sweet fruit, but were also prone to pests and illnesses. When Vlas talked about his newly planted trees, it seemed as if he had transplanted the history of his migration into the soil of his farm in Gympie. The row of trees along his house carried memories of his life back in China, and related to his former settlement in Yarwun.

Vlas did not like thinking back to the time when he first arrived in Queensland, where he was to join the Old Believer community of Yarwun. He slightly shook his head, and said: "It was really not easy when we first arrived in Yarwun."<sup>83</sup> Vlas told me about the disappointment he felt when he first saw the place where he was supposed to settle with his family.

As we were driving on the train [through Queensland] we thought there would be forest, like in China. When we arrived in Yarwun, I stepped out of the train and I knew straight away: this here is not our way of living – I didn't like it at all. I didn't like anything, the nature, the lifestyle. It was totally different from how we

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<sup>83</sup> Vlas, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 11 January 2011, Gympie.



used to live. [...] I understood that it would be hard for us to live there. We arrived like on virgin soil, and we had to start from scratch.<sup>84</sup>

Vlas remembered feeling estranged and alienated from the living conditions that his host-country offered him. As soon as he arrived in Australia, Vlas realised that life was different, the climate, the language, the people and the nature. “You think it is absolutely not possible to live here. How could you? You don’t understand anything. [...] It was hard. And you simply didn’t lay your heart on anything, because everything was so different. You felt completely lost.”<sup>85</sup> Like many other migrants he experienced a tension that arose from settling in a different country, an unknown society and a foreign culture. Vlas faced a range of adversities when he arrived in Australia, such as economic hardship and discrimination. He also struggled with the language barrier, cultural differences and social alienation. Vlas’s settlement experience in Yarwun can be described as a shock of arrival. This shock, writes Meena Alexander, includes an overwhelming set of events:

The shock of arrival is multifold – what was borne in the mind is jarred, tossed into new shapes, an exciting exfoliation of sense. What we were in that other life, is shattered open. But the worlds we now inhabit still speak of the need for invention, of ancestors, of faith. [...] The shock of arrival forces us to new knowledge. What the immigrant must work with is what she must invent in order to live.<sup>86</sup>

Such a shock of arrival can force migrants to reinvent their belonging to a nation, a community or an ethnic group in order to make a new living possible. Alexander’s perception of reinventing new identities and casting oneself anew might be too idealising; she neglects the traumatising, uprooting and upsetting experience that marks many migrant journeys.

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<sup>84</sup> Vlas, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 11 January 2011, Gympie.

<sup>85</sup> Vlas, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 11 January 2011, Gympie.

<sup>86</sup> Meena Alexander, *The Shock of Arrival: Reflections on Postcolonial Experience* (Boston: South End Press, 1996), 1.

Although my interviewees did not cast afresh new identities or discard completely their migrant heritage, they were often searching and negotiating old belongings and familiar identifications. When Vlas arrived in Australia he felt lost, he was still strongly attached to the little village where he was born. Many years after his arrival in Australia he was still dreaming of Romanovka, his former settlement in China.

I always wished to go back. I thought about it for probably five, maybe even ten years. It was very hard for me to go away from there, from my village. I was born there, so it was hard to leave. I would have liked to cry, it was such a pity! And for a long time I saw China in my dreams and thought of it.<sup>87</sup>

After living in Australia for a few years, Vlas remembered, he did not long to go back to China anymore. He thought that was “because there were no Russians living there anymore; anyway, it’s not my home anymore”. While Vlas felt an intimate relationship to his birthplace in China, he thought of himself as Russian: “my father and my mother, they are Russian, and their parents were all Russians. [...] Why should I be Chinese? Just because I was born there?” Vlas’s rhetoric question became more troublesome as he travelled back to Soviet Russia in the 1970s to visit some of his relatives. During his travels Vlas began to understand that he also did not belong to what he had imagined as his ancestral homeland: “You go there and everyone speaks Russian, you understand everything and everything is good,” he said smilingly. “But I am not born in Russia and didn’t grow up there. It is not my home. I just spent my holidays there; I felt that I was there just temporarily.” At the end Vlas shrugged his shoulders and said somewhat indifferently: “we have already lost ourselves, we belong to nobody”<sup>88</sup>. Vlas’s memories of his visit to the Soviet Union showed that he still negotiated his national, ethnic and cultural belongings, years after his initial shock of arrival. His Chinese birthplace, his Russian ethnic and cultural background, as well as his present dwelling in Australia were significant nodes of identification, which continuously formed and informed the negotiation process of his belonging.

Tim and I were sitting on bar stools leaning over the kitchen bench, while his wife prepared dinner. It was not clear whose interview I was to record first, Tim’s or his

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<sup>87</sup> Vlas, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 11 January 2011, Gympie.

<sup>88</sup> Vlas, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 11 January 2011, Gympie.

wife's. Busy setting up cutlery and snibbing vegetables, Tim's wife promptly said: "Obviously, you are the migrant!" I started interviewing Tim, who talked about his migration from the north-western Chinese province of Xinjiang to Australia in 1972. His family had waited for twelve years for an exit permit to leave Communist China and come to Melbourne (see chapter 4). Tim remembered that when he arrived in Australia he was troubled with a feeling of estrangement, of being the odd one out and not fitting in. Tim explained that in China he felt 'normal', but after he arrived in Australia he felt like a "complete stranger." As a migrant child Tim often felt isolated and discriminated being "well behind everyone else in school and not knowing how to do anything." He did not want to talk about the racism he encountered upon his arrival but said that "in those days you were still a wog. That was a term that defined anyone who came to Australia. And you got picked on"<sup>89</sup>. Tim's idea of Australia's immigrant population did not include the large numbers of Britain who had arrived in the post-war era.<sup>90</sup> He might not have related his own migrant experience with that of British immigrants who integrated more easily into Australia's predominant Anglo-Saxon society. Untroubled by the language barrier or discriminated on ethnic or racial grounds, the newly arrived British settlers soon become 'invisible'<sup>91</sup>. Tim, however, became a stranger in the country of his resettlement where he felt at times welcomed and accepted, but occasionally refused and excluded.

At the dinner table Tim joked about his 'Chineseness', saying: "Is a pig a horse just because it is born in a horse-barn?" His birthplace did not define his identity. However, Tim was trouble with negotiating his sense of belonging, between the country of his origin and his settlement, between his present dwellings and cultural traditions. "My blood nationality is obviously Russian; my birth nationality is Chinese, and my citizenship nationality is Australian. So, I probably lack a sense of where do I belong", Tim said with a frozen smile. He conflated different self-identifications: being an immigrant, a resident, a citizen; being Australian, Chinese or Russian. Tim was in a

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<sup>89</sup> Tim, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 10 July 2010, Melbourne.

<sup>90</sup> Between 1949 and 1970 more than a million assisted and unassisted British migrants arrived in Australia. (Appleyard, Ray and Segal, *Ten Pound Immigrants* (see note 21), 160).

<sup>91</sup> James Hammerton and Alistair Thomson argue that most of the British immigrants who arrived in Australia after the Second World War became invisible. It was assumed that they would assimilate easily into a society in which the English language predominated and the British culture and political system was very influential. (Hammerton and Thomson, *Ten Pound Poms* (see note 21), 9).

liminal stage between the *here* and *there*; one part of him missed China, but “the other part is probably already here in Australia”<sup>92</sup>. Like many other migrants from the rural part of China, Tim mentioned how strongly he still remembered the wilderness and landscape that surrounded his former settlement in China.

[In China] there were no fences. No one owns land, so the land was not barricaded off. You can go from one place to another, you don't have to cross fences, you don't have to go and see somebody and ask: Can I walk onto your property? This is a kind of freedom that doesn't even exist here in Australia because there are everywhere fences and barricades now.<sup>93</sup>

Tim's memories of living in China and feeling free were not connected to abstract notions of political freedom or the absence of persecution. Freedom was a feeling of vast and open space in the wild nature of northern China, the absence of bureaucratic regulations and an oppressive rule of state. Tim related his perception of freedom which he experienced back in China which his present settlement in Australia. Tim stressed that in Australia the Old Believers were free to practice their religion: “Here, I think we are very much free to choose if we want to go to church or not. No one says you shouldn't go to church, there is no discouragement.”<sup>94</sup> After centuries of persecution and forced migration, the Old Believers arrived in Australia, where they were free to practice their religion. However, the better living conditions they embraced in their host-country, and their freedom of choice, might have had a detrimental effect on their religious community, Tim mused.

People tend to flock to religious beliefs when they are more in hardship. Or when they are dying they need to be saved, or whatever they believe in. If you are comfortable with this and that you don't need anybody. It's only when you are in trouble that you need somebody, friends or family or religion or God. I think when you are comfortable and well off; you sort of tend to not need as many things.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Tim, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 10 July 2010, Melbourne.

<sup>93</sup> Tim, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 10 July 2010, Melbourne.

<sup>94</sup> Tim, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 10 July 2010, Melbourne.

<sup>95</sup> Tim, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 10 July 2010, Melbourne.

Tim paused for a moment. He suggested that in Australia people were free to practice their religion, but often chose not to pray or got to church. He said: “Maybe people are too content, too well off. We don’t have many needs, we are not suffering.”<sup>96</sup> Tim’s reflection on his experience of freedom related to both countries, to his former settlement in China and his present diaspora in Australia. He suggested that he felt as if he belonged to both of these places and, yet, in the end maybe not belonging to either of them.

One could conceive this in-betweenness which the experience of migration and life in the diaspora entails as an identity or feeling of non-belonging.<sup>97</sup> In her study about the Alaskan Old Believers in Nikolaevsk Amber Lee Silva has looked at their community from a perspective of non-belonging, and the contested affiliation they have to their host- and home-country. She argues that their orientation of belonging is non-territorial and unsettled. Silva criticises concepts of ethno-nationalistic and territory-bound foundations of diaspora identities. Instead of the ‘myth of return’<sup>98</sup>, the diaspora’s orientation towards a homeland, she suggests that the Old Believers have established a ‘myth of migration’. The Old Believers do not show any solidarity with a single place, nation or territory. Silva suggests that the act of migration signifies a defining aspect of their identity; movement has become a means of preservation for their religion and a survival tactic for their communities.<sup>99</sup>

Movement, whether due to persecution or search for the ideal location to freely and prosperously preserve their faith, has become an integral part of Old Believer identity. The diaspora is not searching for *the homeland*, but a land to call *home*. [...] Those that grew up on stories of their elders who had lived in three or more countries have learnt the tenaciousness of governmental security. Consequentially ingrained in children’s socialization as members of a closed

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<sup>96</sup> Tim, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 10 July 2010, Melbourne.

<sup>97</sup> Angelika Dietz, *Dimensions of Belonging and Migrants by Choice: Contemporary Movements between Italy and Northern Ireland* (Münster: Waxmann, 2011), 73.

<sup>98</sup> Safran, “Diasporas in Modern Societies” (see note 39), 83–99.

<sup>99</sup> Amber Lee Silva, “Unsettling Diaspora: The Old Believers of Alaska” (Master Thesis, McGill University Montréal, 2009), 15, 30.

religious community with a vast history of factionalism is the fluctuation of community belonging.<sup>100</sup>

I argue that Silva's account denies the complexity that marks the Old Believers' migration experience and identity formation. Whereas Silva recognises a shared history of migration that links the global Old Believer diaspora, she does not explore the lived experience and shared meaning this diaspora makes of its migrant past and diasporic existence. My interviewees retain strong symbolic ties to their Russian homeland, which cannot be reduced to an ideological connection or nostalgic memory of the land of their faith's origin. Their memories of place describe a deeply emotional and continuous relation to their former settlement countries. The Old Believers' identity as a religious migrant community in Australia is shaped by a constant process of negotiation and adaptation; central to this process are references to their ethnicity, their cultural heritage and their religious practice in different countries, such as China or Russia. I agree with Silva, however, that my interviewees' orientation of belonging is unsettled if that means that the negotiation process about their identity is unfinished.

Feelings of belonging are neither necessarily coterminous nor mutually exclusive.<sup>101</sup> As Stuart Hall suggested we might better conceive such feelings of belonging and identification as a meeting point rather than as an essential temporal stability and fixed continuity. "Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a *positioning*."<sup>102</sup> Recognising identities as fluid and changing gives us an understanding of the contexts and positionings in which the Old Believers identify with their diasporic existence. For my interviewees, identity is a matter of becoming and relates to the future development of their Australian diaspora, as well as belonging to the past of their migration experience. Stuart Hall helps us realising that the identity formations that circulate within the Old Believers' diaspora cannot be understood in essentialist terms or purity. The production of such an identity is never complete but a

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>101</sup> Floya Anthias, "Belongings in a Globalising and Unequal World: Rethinking Translocations," in *The Situated Politics of Belonging*, ed. Nira Yuval-Davis, Kalpana Kannabiran, and Ulrike M. Vieten (London: Sage, 2006), 19–20.

<sup>102</sup> Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 226.

continuous process. The Old Believers' identity as a Russian migrant community and as a religious diaspora does not already exist and transcend place, time, history and culture. These identities undergo constant transformation, and often they speak of the positions that my interviewees have chosen for their narratives of the past.<sup>103</sup>

### **Conflict and Concord in the Old Believers' Diaspora**

For many of my interviewees a central reference point of defining their diaspora community was, obviously, their religious tradition. Being Russian Orthodox defined their diaspora, disregarding the fractions and alienations which occurred in their various communities over the last two or three decades. Their religious community offered a strong means of identification in the continuously shifting orientation between *here* and *there*, approaching an Australian host-society, imagining a Russian homeland and remembering their former settlement in China.

The lounge room of Anastasia's house was tidied up; a rocket horse and other toys were stacked and neatly packed away. Her children were unsettled and whinging while Anastasia prepared their lunch. As she set up some cutlery, her little son walked up to her and pulled on the ends of her T-shirt. Anastasia bent down to the shy boy who whispered a few words in Russian. Anastasia told him that he was allowed to play games on her old phone for a bit, and the little boy smiled brightly as he walked back into his room. It seemed that Anastasia followed strong rules around her household and raising her children: prayers were obligatory before every meal; TV was not allowed during Lent, when she would only cook lenten food; and she encouraged her children to speak Russian and to learn how to read in Church Slavonic.

I asked Anastasia what being an Old Believer meant for her, and her answer made me understand that her everyday religious practice was a strong means to identify with her religious community. Anastasia, like many other migrant families tried to preserve their cultural and religious heritage for their children and future generations:

I suppose being Orthodox means that your day pretty much starts and finishes in prayer – and also in between. Officially, there are prayers before and after every meal. First thing in the morning, last thing at night. I suppose if you go by the books, it's everything. But at particular times in your life, especially when

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 222, 225.

there is lots of stress, you are going to turn to God and ask for his help and guidance. [...]

For example, we take icons when we go travelling – not everybody does it, but we do in our family. We've got an icon in our car, just a little one. Or if we are travelling and going to stay somewhere we take one with us and we leave it somewhere, like in the kitchen area. Religion is a big part. It sort of runs in your life, you can't really separate it. It's interwoven.<sup>104</sup>

Although Anastasia clearly anchored herself in the Old Belief's Russian Orthodox tradition, she acknowledged the 'in-betweenness' of her diasporic identity, the tensions that emerged from her diasporic living in Australia: preserving her ethnic, cultural and religious heritage, but also trying to fit into the Australian mainstream society. She compared and contrasted her life in Australia with living in a large and close-knit Old Believer community. Anastasia said that compared to her parents' life in China, it was a lot harder for her to grow up and live as a Russian Old Believer in Australia.

It is a lot easier to do things as a community as opposed to just a family or two. It's a lot easier in a community because everybody is the same. That was the way they [Anastasia's parents] were brought up and that is the way they were going to bring their kids up. It's just normal! For example, I might still go to English school, still have Australian friends. But at the end of the day I consider myself Russian. So I try to do things, I suppose, the Russian way. It actually runs into your life.

When I was growing up I wasn't allowed to go to parties on a Saturday night, because that's church time – we have to go to church on Sunday morning – so you can't go out on Saturday night! Or when it was Lent, we were not allowed to go out to the movies even if it was school holidays. We were not allowed to watch TV because that is the time to clean your mind and your body which brings you sort of closer to God. So you have to stay away from all these distractions. And it's a lot easier, obviously, if your friends are doing the same – otherwise you will be looked upon as an outcast or weird.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Anastasia (name changed), interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 2009, Melbourne.

<sup>105</sup> Anastasia (name changed), interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 2009, Melbourne.



Anastasia saw the Old Believer community overshadowed by the loss of its religious and cultural traditions. She made an effort to speak Russian to her own children so they were able to continue this cultural heritage. She brought them up in the Old Beliefs' Orthodox faith and Russian cultural tradition which entailed the celebration of certain religious holidays, literacy in Church Slavonic, cooking *postnyi* – lenten –food and dressing in a traditional Russian style for church.

The Old Believers' identification as a diaspora community – in Australia and in China – put particular emphasis on the continuity of their cultural tradition. However, their diaspora in China was not simply transplanted into a new, diasporic setting in Australia. The Old Believers' identity formations showed generational shifts, ruptures and variations. The distinct 'Russianness' of their diaspora in China was established and represented by a dominant Russian culture, by the majority of inhabitants of Russian descent and the geographic proximity to their Russian homeland. Several historians have argued that the Russian settlers in northern China showed strong tendencies to keep to themselves, to remain segregated and unassimilated. The large size of a Russian migrant population, as well as the great difference between the Chinese and the Russian culture lead, to the establishment of a distinctively Russian colony in China.<sup>106</sup>

Most of my interviewees who were born in China identified themselves as Russian. These identifications were, however, less clear in the second generation of Old Believers born in Australia. The younger generation thought of themselves as Australian, or Australian with a Russian migrant background. Since the Old Believers have settled in their Australian diaspora they base their identification as a Russian migrant community more strongly on cultural and symbolic practices, “doing things the Russian way” as Anastasia said. Many of my interviewees identified with their cultural heritage by cooking Russian food, speaking Russian and socialising within the broader Russian migrant community. Celebrating Russian Orthodox religious holidays,

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<sup>106</sup> A. V. Ivanov and V. V. Ivanov, “K Voprosu ob Etnokul'turnoi Identichnosti Russkikh Avstraliitsev [About the Question of the Ethno-cultural Identity of Russian Australians],” in *Rossiiane v Aziatsko-Tikhookeanskom Regione: Sotrudnichestvo na Rubezhe Bekov [The Russians in the Asia-Pacific Region: Cooperation at the Turn of the Century]*, ed. G. I. Kanevskaia and E. N. Chernolutskaia, Vol. 2 (Vladivostok: Dal'nevostochnogo Universiteta, 1999), 64–65; R. F. Piotrovsky, “Russians from China,” in *Russian Canadians: Their Past and Present*, ed. T. F. Jeletzky et al. (Ottawa: Borealis Press, 1983), 103.

decorating the house with icons and following fasting periods were practices that positioned them with the Old Belief's cultural tradition.

The dilution of these practices concerned many Old Believers in Australia, as their community ties had weakened and many young people felt alienated from their religious tradition. Alexander explained that once the Old Believers started to live in a society which was different from their Russian origins, "whether it was in China or here [in Australia], we started losing our own identity"<sup>107</sup>. He referred to church regulations and religious practices which his grandparents still followed; they had kept Lent and observed fasting periods a lot stricter than his own generation and the generation of his children.

What our grandparents had when they lived in Russia has changed. I am different to my parents, and I find my children are quite different from me, in terms of how I see or practice religion. [...] Their views on life or religion are quite different. That's quite difficult, and probably one of the risks and issues that the community has to face. The younger people move away [from the Old Believer community] and become more assimilated in Australia. We are losing their identity and interest in our religion as it was practised back in Russia. Certainly, that is one of the risks we have to face here, and we are not doing a very good job of addressing it. Everybody is too interested in chasing their material wealth, rather than being concerned about their spiritual or cultural heritage.<sup>108</sup>

In Alexander's opinion the Old Believers' arrival in Australia promised material security and economic integration, but diminished means to identify as a close-knit religious community of Russian descent. He pointed out that these changes challenged the Old Believer diaspora and attributed them to the conditions of their settlement in Australia. The Old Believers' dispersed settlement across the suburbs of Sydney and Melbourne contributed to the fragmentation of their communities. In addition, internal disputes about religious regulations, church hierarchies and ways to approach the need of assimilating and integrating into Australia's society contributed to the diversification of their communities.

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<sup>107</sup> Alexander, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 19 August 2010, Sydney.

<sup>108</sup> Alexander, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 19 August 2010, Sydney.

When it came to questions of adapting religious practices and regulations to an Australian way of life, many of my interviewees chose to negotiate these conflicts individually, and did not seek the approval of their church community. A contested religious practice in the Australian Old Believers was their dress codes. The Old Believers are, for example, supposed to leave their beards untrimmed because their religious doctrine prescribes that a person's physical appearance, made in the image of God, must not be changed.<sup>109</sup> Elisey told me that he has never shaved, working for years in Yarwun's pawpaw and mango industry. He explained that no Old Believer was supposed to shave his beard, "but a lot of Russians want to shave. They are simply scared of having a beard on their face [...] they feel ashamed of having a beard. Most Australians, they all shave now; and the one who has a beard feels like the odd one out"<sup>110</sup>.

Alexander, however, began to shave when he was a young man. "Because you go to work," he said, "you look at people around and you still have to try to fit in. You want people to accept you"<sup>111</sup>. Alexander worked in a white collar job in Sydney's central business district; he wished to find acceptance in a society which had its own ideas about the integration and assimilation of its immigrant population. He decided to make an individual adaptation to the dogmas and church regulations his religion imposed, and to the conflict of loyalties that arouse between his diaspora community and his host-society.

I don't shave but I trim my beard, what is also too much. If you do it you just need to make it an individual thing. [...] I trim my beard to make it look tidy and neat. When I do it, do I feel completely comfortable? Probably not; but how do I justify it? I justify it on the basis that people have to make a living. I still go to church and try to weigh out the good deeds against the bad deeds and to find some acceptance.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Leviticus 19:27 commands: "Ye shall not round the corners of your heads, neither shalt thou mar the corners of thy beard." (Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett, eds., *The Bible: Authorized King James Version with Apocrypha* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 146).

<sup>110</sup> Elisey, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 10 January 2010, Gympie.

<sup>111</sup> Alexander, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 19 August 2010, Sydney.

<sup>112</sup> Alexander, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 19 August 2010, Sydney.

For some of my interviewees, it seemed that their religious practices and dogmas were not appropriate or did not fit into their modern and secularised host-society. However, conflict and friction arose not only from a constant negotiation and adaptation process between the Old Believers' diaspora and their host-society, but also in between the different communities and concords. After their settlement in Australia, parts of the formerly priestless Old Believers have merged with priestist communities, and some people have moved and married across these different communities. It was likely that the Old Believers imagined their diaspora in Australia as a unity, defined by a shared history of migration and religious persecution, by ritual practices and dogmatic claims. However, their diaspora has evolved from different trajectories and departures. The ruptures within this imagined unity become clear in a discussion about the ritual variations and episcopal hierarchies that evolved between the different Old Believer concords.

Matrona and her parents arrived from the western Chinese province of Xinjiang where many Old Believers belonged to the Chasovennye concord. This priestless group of Old Believers did not celebrate all church sacraments after they had lost access to priests or bishops who were consecrated according to the old rituals.<sup>113</sup> When Matrona's grandparents fled from the Soviet Union they brought several church books and icons to China and continued their religious practice without a consecrated priest.

In a church where there is a priest you have the [eucharistic] bread during the church service, but we didn't have that. We just had a bottle of water which we held onto. That was the Holy Water that they brought from Russia. And after years and years we still had this Holy Water which we claimed was still the same – I mean, after how many generations?<sup>114</sup>

Matrona shrugged her shoulders and smiled ironically. Her smile implied that she did not believe in the blessings, the protecting or cleansing function this Holy Water was supposed to have. She thought that the Holy Water, sanctified by a consecrated priest

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<sup>113</sup> Roy R. Robson, *Old Believers in Modern Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1995), 32–34; David Scheffel, "Chasovennye Old Believers," in *The Modern Encyclopedia of Religions in Russia and the Soviet Union*, Vol. 5, ed. Paul D. Steeves (Gulf Breeze: Academic International Press, 1993), 139–140 139–142).

<sup>114</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 12 July 2009, Melbourne.

centuries ago, was diluted by the practice of simply adding water. Masha, on the contrary, was particularly intrigued by the spiritual power of the Holy Water. She thought of the water as a substitute for the Eucharist, which priestless Old Believer concords do not practice.

We don't have the *prichastie* [the eucharistic bread], that can only be done by a qualified [blessed] priest, but we still have sacraments. We still have the Holy Water which we have been carrying on for hundreds and hundreds of years, from the time before the split [from the Russian Orthodox Church] – from Russia, to China, to Brazil to Australia. At a special day, twelve days after Christmas when Jesus Christ was baptised in river, we add water to it. [...]

I know someone, her father was a *bezpopovtsy* and he had that [Holy] water for nearly 60 years. They never added water to it, but still it never dried out. The bottle of water never broke. It was still the same like they would have put it in [the bottle] yesterday. [...] It is the Holy Water that has been carried on from the time when we still had priests! That person's father passed away, and the whole family went to a different religion, but they still kept the Holy Water from the Old Believers. 60 years later it had not dried out. Little tricks like that – what is it? – make me believe! Something is proven here!<sup>115</sup>

Masha did not explain what was proven by the Holy Water and its mysterious nature; she just said that phenomena like these fascinated her: “This has strongly to do with belief, with religion,” she said with a firm voice, “it's unbelievable”<sup>116</sup>. It was unbelievable for Masha that the Holy Water did not dry out, but it made her believe in the spiritual power and the religious meaning of this same water.

Matrona and Masha made sense of the religious doctrine that was characteristic for their denomination, of the specific symbolic meanings, religious practices and theological interpretations of their church communities. This meaning making process often entailed stories of their everyday life, for example, an undried bottle of Holy Water, and sought to distinguish different denominations from each other. The personal

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<sup>115</sup> Masha, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 18 July 2010, Melbourne.

<sup>116</sup> Masha, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 18 July 2010, Melbourne.

meanings my interviewees made of their belief, their religious community, and certain dogmatic claims also referred to theological justifications and biblical exegesis.

Matrona explained that her parents originally believed that after the church schism the Old Believers' episcopal succession was broken and that all of their priests had died: "All the priests were dead, they killed all of them," Matrona said, and instantly frowned: "Surely, there should have been some of them saved but that is what they more or less believed." Matrona and a large part of the initially priestless Chasovennye Old Believers in Melbourne converted to the priestly concord of the Belokrinitsa hierarchy after they arrived in Australia (see chapter 2). A larger priestly community was already established in Sydney, Matrona explained: "The people in Sydney are from a different part of China, they are from Harbin or Trekhrech'e. They had a priest and a church even back in China. So when they came to Australia they bought a church building, the priest came over and they continued on."<sup>117</sup>

Since Matrona converted to the priestly Old Believer concord and followed its ritual practice, some theological claims and religious practices of the priestless concord did not make sense to her anymore. "If you believe in lineage then it all went on from the apostles: [...] And if we read the books, it says: it will continue, it's not going to end." She reckoned that her family had followed the wrong theological interpretations about the Old Belief's episcopal succession, and that some of the priestless rituals they practiced in China were "pointless" and "had no meaning". Priestless Old Believer communities, for example, confess without the service of a consecrated priest. Matrona remembered this religious practice from her time in China, and said: "All the people used to gather, we all went to church and we all bowed down. And then he [the *nastavnik*] would read a special prayer: God forgive all those sins. That is how we confessed." Matrona's understanding of this priestless confession has changed since she converted: "that means nothing; it's pointless because I can't forgive you your sins and you can't forgive me my sins. So what would be the point of my confession to you? I just would make me feel better."<sup>118</sup> Ritual practices which were guided and blessed by a consecrated priest made now more sense to Matrona:

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<sup>117</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 24 July 2010, Melbourne.

<sup>118</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 24 July 2010, Melbourne.

The reason why we are supposed to confess to a priest is that Jesus said to Apostle Peter: whoever you forgive on earth will also be forgiven [in heaven]. So for us to be accepted into heaven we have to be forgiven for all the wrong things we have done here [on earth]. And the only person who can forgive you your sins is the priest.<sup>119</sup>

Matrona gave me a theological reasoning for her conversion to the priestly Old Believer concord. Her new ritual practice was more meaningful to her than the priestless dogmatic claim that their episcopal succession was broken and could not be restored. Although Matrona made sense of her individual religious life in the diaspora, these negotiations about beliefs, meanings and practices of her religion were also embedded in discourses which circulated within the different Old Believer communities.

Similar to other religious migrant communities, the religious practice and social structure of the priestless Old Believers changed after they adopted a (new) congregational and organisational form.<sup>120</sup> After their arrival in Australia, many Old Believers from north-western China came for the first time in contact with the Belokrinitsa hierarchy in Sydney. Their community had developed differently and their church hierarchy had re-established a full sacramental life after the schism. The church in Lidcombe actively sought to convert the Chasovennye Old Believers in Melbourne and Yarwun, and encouraged the recovery of their priesthood.<sup>121</sup> The Lidcombe community offered the faithful a religious practice that included all sacraments of the Russian Orthodoxy; it also gave broader access to religious education, historical and theological information, and supported the establishment of their own parish. The conversion of the Melbourne Old Believers did not only bring change of their community's religious practice, but also conflict and power struggles between the church hierarchies of their newly adopted denomination and some of the community elders. Heated disputes were concerned with ritual modifications and sacramental blessings, hierarchical authority and episcopal politics. Competing interpretations about doctrinal norms, ritual conduct and authority especially concerned the exclusive use of

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<sup>119</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 24 July 2010, Melbourne.

<sup>120</sup> Fenggang Yang and Helen Rose Ebaugh, "Transformations in New Immigrant Religions and their Global Implications," *American Sociological Review* 66, No. 2 (2001), 278–281.

<sup>121</sup> P. V., "Preosviashchennyi Episkop Iosif [The Right Reverend Episcopo Iosif]," *Tserkov' [Church]*, No. 18 (1984), 5–6.

Church Slavonic as their ritual language, dress codes, dietary restrictions and purity laws.

Fenggang Yang and Helen Rose Ebaugh argue that institutional changes in religious migrant communities require theological justification and often result from a return to the theological foundations of their religious belief. Matriona gave me a theological justification for her conversion to the priestly Old Believers concord, explaining that the episcopal succession of the Orthodox Old-Rite church remained unbroken. However, many of my interviewees did not seek to identify with the theological foundations and essentials of their religious tradition, as Yang and Ebaugh suggest.<sup>122</sup> Many (formerly) priestless Old Believers focused on changes in the social structure of their diaspora community. The depopulation of their community and a young generation of Old Believers that felt alienated from their religious beliefs called some priestless Old Believers in Gympie to reconsider their conversion to the Belokrinitsa hierarchy.

The situation for the priestless concord which initially had settled around Yarwun was precarious after many families had moved to Gympie. I met Erine for the Christmas celebrations of the Old Believer community in Gympie, which basically consists of a handful of families she is related to. Erine, who works and lives in Brisbane, talked about the future of this little group of not more than twenty people. Erine said that her parents had to witness over the years how their community was shrinking, and that they worried that it soon might be extinct. She did not want to feel guilty about her move to Brisbane and away from the Old Believer community but sounded regretful, saying:

Dad told us what they went through to come here [to Australia]. First, there was a big community, people were praying and everyone went [to church]. [...] My grandfather even said: we thought we came to a safe place and yet we are losing everything. That is exactly what he must have felt. There was a huge community in Melbourne, Sydney and in Yarwun – they even called it 'little Russia' because it was such a big community. But then people moved away. In China they mainly lived off the land; and then they were forced into here [Australia] with no money, nothing. The cities were too enticing. [...] A lot of them went to the cities and people started to fragment and to go off looking for

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 278–282.



easier options. When they started to fragment people got different opinions and interpretations. And that's when it really started to get lost and to break away.<sup>123</sup>

Erine explained that some people moved away from their religious origins when they arrived in Australia; they moved away from the stricter priestless rituals and towards the "tainted"<sup>124</sup> priestist concord. In her opinion it was easier for priestly Old Believer communities to continue their religious practice because they were less strict and more accepting of secular and foreign influences.

Unlike the larger priestly communities in Melbourne and Sydney, the priestless community in Gympie was reduced to a small core. With the passing away of many elders the ritual knowledge of how to conduct funerals or wedding ceremonies was about to get lost. "Our faith and the word of mouth – that's what gets us through", Erine said and instantly asked herself: "can we continue that on?" She worried that her religion might become extinct one day: "So is it time to change?" she wondered aloud, "is it because we are too strict? Or is it just that people don't get it, or they don't want to get it, or just don't want any rules?" Erine had sympathy for people who converted to the priestist concord; she thought that their theological and ritual teaching was possibly more effective. She assumed that "people wanted a little bit more flexibility and lenience"<sup>125</sup> and were not particularly attracted to the strict religious discipline of the priestless Old Believer concord.

Erine's and Matrona's comments on the development of their respective religious communities made clear that the Australian Old Believer diaspora did not form a single or unified entity. Affected by their migration experience and displacement, various Old Believer concords came in contact with each other. They started to negotiate certain denominational differences and ritual variations. The multiple trajectories and developments within these different communities, as well as the individual interpretations that my interviewees make of their religious lives have painted a more complex picture. The Old Believers still identify as a religious migrant community which shares a common ethnic, cultural and historical background. Their diaspora in Australia has found ways to identify as a distinct religious community that distinguishes itself

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<sup>123</sup> Erine, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 7 January 2011, Gympie.

<sup>124</sup> Erine, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 7 January 2011, Gympie.

<sup>125</sup> Erine, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 7 January 2011, Gympie.

from other Russian (Orthodox) migrant communities, the Australian society and the different fractions within their religious tradition.

### **Final Arrivals**

The Old Believers' arrival in Australia was interwoven with the multiple journeys and different immigrant waves that brought Russian migrants to the country. The Old Believers' initial arrival in Australia resonates with the idea of a liminal time of migration, a process that is not completed or finalised by their disembarkment. In Australia most Old Believers found jobs and bought houses; they learnt English and made friends with fellow migrants, their Australian neighbours and work mates. Many families finally settled in the country of their resettlement, and took out Australian citizenship. Nonetheless, the Old Believers' final arrival in their host-society seemed to be always postponed. Their settlement in Australia often did not appear as an end point of their migratory movement or a simple, single event. It has occurred in a constant process of movement, of delayed and deferred arrivals.

My interviewees prepared a permanent living and dwelling in Australia, they constantly approached their host-society and adapted to their new diasporic condition. At the same time they distanced themselves from assimilationist paradigms and efforts to completely disguise or abandon their religious and cultural heritage. The Old Believers constructed, engaged with and challenged the connections they had with their ancestral homeland, their former settlement in China and their host-country.

The conditions of my interviewees' arrival in their host-country were entangled with Australia's changing immigration and settlement policies. The life stories of my interviewees revealed the complexities of the Old Believers' settlement in Australia, and showed how their diaspora was involved and compared with other migratory movements, such as the Old Believers who settled in the Americas. This multitude of trajectories that their migrant journeys took, as well as the constant 'in-between' movement between the *here* and *there* of host- and home-countries questions the construction or imagination of a coherent or homogeneous Old Believer diaspora. The following chapter focuses on a particular aspect of the Old Believers' migrant identity: the embodiment of their rituals and the practice of their religious traditions. In the context of their settlement in Australia, I highlight how the Old Believers adapted to, negotiated and challenged their religious practice in their new diasporic setting.

## Chapter 6

### Ritual Bodies and Religious Practice in the Diaspora

#### Easter Memories

It had been a cool Saturday evening. The sun had set a few hours ago, and yellow neon was lighting up the platforms and footbridges of the train station. A group of policemen patrolled along the exit of the station where a few men stood around, surrounded by the tangy smell of alcohol and urine. The glow of cigarettes shed light on their delirious faces which were hidden behind baseball caps and hoodies. As I was waving for a taxi the cool night breeze over Dandenong station seeped into my bones and made me shiver. I was about to attend the church service in the Orthodox Old-Rite Church in Hallam for the second time. According to the Old Believers' church calendar we were to celebrate Easter, Holy Saturday on 5 April 7517.<sup>1</sup> The taxi dropped me in front of the church gate and I walked towards the dim shine of light over the church porch. I fixed my headscarf nervously worried that I would not be able to stand through the whole church service which was supposed to take all night. I could hear my heartbeat throbbing in my ears as I opened the door of the anteroom. A few elderly women sat on a wooden bench in the back of the church and recognised me entering the vestibule. In the Old Believers' church architecture this little anteroom marks the passage from secular to sacred space and time; entrance prayers are to cleanse the worshippers after contact with the outside world and to begin the liturgical services.<sup>2</sup> Every person who is about to enter the nave is supposed to bow three times before stepping into the nave.

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<sup>1</sup> Holy Saturday in the Russian Orthodox Church was celebrated on the 18/19 April 2009. The Orthodox Old-Rite Church still uses the Byzantine Calendar which began with the supposed date of creation on 1 September 5509 BC. The Orthodox liturgical year begins on 1 September and ends on 31 August. (Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Staroobriadcheskaia Tserkov', *Pravoslavnyi Staroobriadcheskii Tserkovnyi Kalendar' 7518/2010 [Orthodox Old-Rite Church Calendar 7518/2010]* (Moscow: Krasnaia Zvezda 2009), 2; Roscoe Lamont, "The Reform of the Julian Calendar," *Popular Astronomy* XXVIII (1920), 23.

<sup>2</sup> Roy R. Robson, "An Architecture of Change: Old Believer Liturgical Spaces in Late Imperial Russia," in *Seeking God: The Recovery of Religious Identity in Orthodox Russia, Ukraine, and Georgia*, ed. Stephen K. Batalden (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1993), 177.

When a monk or layman arrives at the church, he says the *Introductory Bows* as instructed [...] *Guarding yourself with the sign of the Cross and bowing, say with compunction the Prayer of the Publican: God be merciful to me a sinner. Bow. Thou hast created me; Lord, have mercy on me. Bow. I have sinned immeasurably; Lord, have mercy and forgive me, a sinner. Bow.*<sup>3</sup>

I did not know how to exercise these bows, what prayer to speak or how to cross myself. I felt that the women's eyes focused on me. I needed to get over to the opposite side of the church building where all the women were supposed to stand. The church service had already started. When was I allowed to move through the nave and through the rows of people without disturbing them? Did I have to face the iconostasis when walking, or greet the church congregation? I got nervous but recognised a young woman who had stepped into the vestibule behind me. She was about to walk over to the 'women's side', so I quickly ducked my head and followed her. On the other side of the nave I turned to the iconostasis and the side altars which were decorated in red and white, with flowers and draped fabric. The light of a dozen candles glistened on the golden faces of Godmother Mary and other icons. The melodic singing of the church choir mingled with the fragrant smoke of incense and bee wax. In this mystical atmosphere the Old Believers were about to celebrate the most important Orthodox Church holiday. While I was standing in the back of the nave with arms crossed over my chest, my heartbeat and breath slowly calmed down.

My fieldwork gave me the opportunity to take part in some of the rituals and religious ceremonies that the Australian Old Believer communities practised. The questions that my participant observations and my interviews were to answer are: What makes these rituals significant for the religious and the diasporic lives of my interviewees? What are the challenges of their continuous ritual practice? How did this practice reflect on traditional forms and dogmatic rules of their belief system? Every time I was standing in a church service I was most fascinated by the quick and simultaneous movements of a dozen hands when the whole church community crossing itself. Whereas many scholars agree on the significance of the Old Beliefs' ritual form and religious practice

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<sup>3</sup> German Ciuba et al., trans. and eds., *Drevnepravoslavnyi Molitvennik: Old Orthodox Prayer Book*, 2nd ed. (Erie: Russian Orthodox Church of the Nativity of Christ (Old Rite), 2001), 340, 338.

in the diaspora<sup>4</sup>, they show little understanding of how these practices affect the bodies of the faithful. Rather than asking how rituals are discussed and negotiated in different texts and symbolic representations, I am interested in finding out how the Old Believers' ritual practice is *experienced* in the Australian diaspora. Matriona sparked my interest with her account of the powerful effects and dynamics that ritual practices hold for its participants. She told me about one of the deepest spiritual experiences in her religious life: there was one moment when she felt for the first and only time worthy of receiving the Holy Communion.

One time I was very, very sick and I got to the point where I had enough. At the time Father Paul was deacon and he came down [to Melbourne] and said: Look, why don't you just go to church and say to God: either heal me or let me go. And I remember that I said to my children: I am going to ask God to let me get better or to let me die. And two of my children came to church and three of them did not go, because they thought that was a stupid thing to do. But that is what I did when I went to church: we had a special service that particular day and I sat down – I was too weak to stand – and I said to God: Let me either get better or let me go. And I wouldn't have minded if I was to go because I was ready.<sup>5</sup>

Matriona remembered that during the service the priest held a book over her head, the Four Gospels, and spoke a prayer. He took her confession and forgave Matriona all the sins she had committed until this day. She remembered this moment quite vividly, her eyes were wide open and there was a look of amazement and awe on her face. Matriona raised her arms above her head and said: "It was like a torch – a nice warm torch – [shining] from the top of my head. And then it went through my head into the whole body and out of my feet. It was like a nice warm, hot feeling that went through

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<sup>4</sup> Michael James Smithson, "Of Icons and Motorcycles: A Sociological Study of Acculturation Among Russian Old Believers in Central Oregon and Alaska," (PhD diss., University of Oregon, 1976), 168–188, 217; Richard A. Morris, "The Dispersion of Old Believers in Russia and Beyond," in *"Silent as Waters We Live:" Old Believers in Russia and Abroad: Cultural Encounter With the Finno-Ugrians*, Studia Fennica, Folkloristica 6, ed. Juha Pentikäinen (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 1999), 116–118.; Alexander B. Dolitsky and Lyudmila P. Kuz'mina, "Cultural Change vs. Persistence: A Case from Old Believer Settlements," *Arctic* 39, No. 3 (1986), 227–230.

<sup>5</sup> Matriona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 24 July 2010, Melbourne.

my whole body. And I remember feeling –”<sup>6</sup> Matrona took a deep breath as a sign of relief and alleviation:

Before that I felt like I had been carrying this horrible wet blanket over me – just this heavy feeling that I could not shake off. And then it was such a relief when this blanket came off. To me it felt like all my sins had been forgiven. So the next day I got the communion [...] and that was the only time I felt worthy to receive it. And when I took it, it just felt so warm and comforting.<sup>7</sup>

Matrona shook her head slightly, maybe still amazed by this experience or wondering why she had never felt this way before. “There was only one time when I felt that I was actually worthy to receive it [the communion]. The rest of the time it felt like something wasn’t quite right. I had confessed everything I could but it just didn’t feel right for me to get it.”<sup>8</sup> Matrona gave a very personal account of her ritual experience and highlighted that the Old Believers’ ritual practice involves the body, the mind and the spirit. Despite the diasporic context in which Matrona practised her religion ritual ceremonies and prayers have been performed within the shared liturgical context of the church community and passed on from one generation to the next. The Old Believers’ religious tradition emphasises invariant repetition and stability, but does the continuous enactment of these practices restructure and change elements of their ritual form, their religious culture and practice?

This chapter focuses on ritual practices as a centre point of my interviewees’ religious lives. It shows how the Old Believers’ perform and embody ritual and religious practices in order to guarantee their continuity. My interviewees perform the old Belief’s rituals in a shared ritual and liturgical context from which certain religious and moral dispositions emerge. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, I ask how this set of dispositions is sedimented in the bodies of the Old Believers. I show how ritual practices are structured by existing patterns of the Old Believers’ religious lives and are yet able to (re)structure, in turn, these very same patterns. This continuous practice is, however, not to be understood as the repetition of unaltered ritual forms or patters but allows for ritual change and variation. I analyse the Old Believers’ ritual practice as a

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<sup>6</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 24 July 2010, Melbourne.

<sup>7</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 24 July 2010, Melbourne.

<sup>8</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 24 July 2010, Melbourne.

responsive process which ensures continuity but also takes into account the changed cultural, environmental and social setting of their Australian diaspora. I show that variations of ritual and religious practices open up an arena of multiple – often contradictory and contestable – perspectives and interpretations.

### **Translations**

During the Easter service I could barely understand or translate any of the hymns sung in Church Slavonic. Many of the younger people standing next to me in church would also have a cryptic knowledge of these prayers and liturgical texts read in Church Slavonic. The alienation of the younger generation from their religious traditions and ritual practices was the most difficult challenge that the Old Believer diaspora faced since their resettlement in Australia, especially in the last two or three decades. Over the years the Melbourne church congregation had aged and was significantly diminished. Most second generation Old Believer migrants grew up in an English speaking environment and education system. Many young people were semi-literate in Russian and therefore had difficulties to read and understand Church Slavonic.

Nina was born in 1966 after her parents migrated to Australia. She grew up in a Russian speaking family in the south-eastern Melbourne suburb of Bentleigh. She remembered that until the age of four she would not have spoken a word of English. Although she still speaks fluent Russian. English is now the predominant language in her life. Nina was raised in the Russian Orthodox Church with a ritual tradition different from the Old Believers'. When she got married to her husband in her early twenties she converted to the Old Belief. Her three teenage children feel already a lot more comfortable speaking English than Russian. Their lack of literacy in Church Slavonic made it harder for them to embrace the beliefs, dogmas and traditions of their religion. Nina explained that even the sermons at the end of the service, which are mostly read in Russian, were hard to understand for her children. Much of Nina's criticism of 'outdated' ritual forms concentrated on the use of Church Slavonic as the Old Believers' dominant ritual language in daily prayers, church services and ritual ceremonies. She criticised the Orthodox Old-Rite Church for its rigid adherence to certain ritual forms: "The Old Orthodox Church isn't very accommodating when trying to include young people or being receptive to modify certain practices as opposed to changing them. Unfortunately, for that they lose a lot of younger people."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Nina Nikolaevich, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 11 July 2010, Melbourne.

Nina showed me a little, time-worn Russian Orthodox prayer book. “That would be the first one I’ve got when I was about twelve years old; it’s actually written by the other [the Russian Orthodox] church.”<sup>10</sup> Nina’s understanding of the Orthodox Church liturgy and rituals was informed by her reading of prayer books in their English translation.

The [Russian] Orthodox Church had publications in English as well. So that would really help in terms of understanding Slavonic. Basically you have the translation of one prayer from one language to the other, so your understanding of this prayer would improve.<sup>11</sup>

The Russian Orthodox Church Abroad is less inclined to use Church Slavonic in their sacred texts and rituals. Whereas the Russian Orthodox Church tradition provided Nina with translations of liturgical texts and prayers, the Orthodox Old-Rite Church opposes the use of translated religious texts in their religious practice more rigorously.<sup>12</sup>

According to Boris Uspensky, the Old Believers’ attitude towards language and translation contributed significantly to their separation from the Russian Orthodox Church. The schism was to a significant degree provoked by the correction of church books. These corrections were either of textual character to bring them in line with Greek texts or of formal linguistic character and irrelevant to the content. In some cases the spelling and accentuation of certain phrases were altered, and the

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<sup>10</sup> Nina Nikolaevich, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 11 July 2010, Melbourne.

<sup>11</sup> Nina Nikolaevich, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 11 July 2010, Melbourne.

<sup>12</sup> The Australian and New Zealand Russian Orthodox Church Abroad discussed the translation of church books into English at the First Russian Orthodox Diocesan Conference in 1951. Archbishop Paul Pavlov who served the dioceses of Australia and New Zealand from 1980 until 1992 supported the usage of Slavonic in church services, but permitted English as a liturgical language where it was necessary. Michael Alex Protopopov writes in his seminal work on the Russian Orthodox Church in Australia: “English, the language of the nation, would eventually replace Slavonic and Russian, as these languages would have little, if any, relevance to the worshippers. Perhaps Slavonic will be used in much the same way as Greek is used in the Russian Church today: as a token reminder of the fact that the Russians took their faith from the Great Byzantine Church.”(Michael Alex Protopopov, “The Russian Orthodox Presence in Australia: The History of a Church Told from Recently Opened Archives and Previously Unpublished Source,” (PhD diss., Australian Catholic University, 2005), 122, 301, 359)



construction of possessive adjectives was changed to the equivalent genitive case.<sup>13</sup> The Old Believers, however, did not just see content but also form as a possible vehicle of heresy. It was not only a concrete text that could contain heresy in its definite meaning, but also language itself as a device for expressing various meanings. Church Slavonic was understood not simply as a means of communication and a possible vehicle for transmitting information. As *lingua sacra* it represented the Orthodox faith: Church Slavonic became the first and foremost means to express divinely revealed truth. Therefore, the linguistic form was important and indistinguishable from the content.<sup>14</sup> Uspensky writes:

[T]he Gospels and all of Holy Scripture were God's revealed text, and as such constituted truth, in and of itself. In principle, this did not depend upon a grasp of the subject. Sacred form and sacred content could not, in essence, be divided. One implied the other. From this point of view, truth was connected not with proper interpretation but with the right reproduction of the text.<sup>15</sup>

Some of my interviewees would agree with Uspensky and defend the exclusive status that Church Slavonic has in the Old Believers' ritual practice and Divine Liturgy. Nikolai was convinced that the practice of reading, praying and singing in Church Slavonic guaranteed the continuity of the original ritual form of the Russian Orthodoxy. He explained that misinterpretations and mistakes in the Slavonic transcriptions of certain church books caused the church schism. The reformed Russian Orthodox Church implemented unacceptable changes to the liturgy. "When they [the New Believers] make [...] the Holy Communion, the wording is different. But you can't change words! You can't say different prayers when you make a Holy Communion. It's just wrong!"<sup>16</sup> Nikolai emphasised that it is important to preserve the correct wording of the Divine Liturgy and the primordial ritual forms of the Russian Orthodoxy. Whereas the Russian

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<sup>13</sup> Boris A. Uspensky, "The Schism and Cultural Conflict in the Seventeenth Century," in Batalden, *Seeking God*, 108.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 111–118.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>16</sup> Nikolai (name changed), interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, Sydney.

Orthodox Church modernised and evolved, the Old Believers “are preserving the old correct ways. And we’re just going to hold onto it, as simple as that!”<sup>17</sup>

However, not all of my interviewees would agree on a shared understanding of the meaning, the importance and the exclusive status of Church Slavonic as their ritual language. Vlas shrugged his shoulders when he explained to me that after Nikon’s reforms the Russian Orthodox Church changed the spelling of the name of Jesus Christ: “With us it is written *Isus*, but they write *lisus*. They put two ‘l’s, and that was what caused the whole problem. So what?! They added one letter and that’s when the problem started.” Vlas smiled whimsically, “*Isus* and *lisus*: that’s the same, isn’t it?”<sup>18</sup> For Vlas the semiotic and philological conflict upon which the Old Believers split from the Russian Orthodox Church did not hold any theological or dogmatic significance.

There are not many people left who pray [in our church] and yet we really need to pray. It is about preserving our tradition! [...] My understanding is that everyone can come to church. It’s a church, isn’t it? Every person can go and pray – it does not matter if a person does not understand. He just has to stand and pray like everyone else, and he will receive the same delight as the others. Some people say that there is one God but different prayers. Nonetheless, it’s a prayer – everyone can pray to God – and he takes them all. It does not seem to be such an [offence].

For Vlas the linguistic form of a prayer is not important, even if a person does not understand or pray in Church Slavonic he or she could take part in the church service. Church Slavonic appeared in Vlas’s religious practice rather as a form of cultural tradition than a dogmatic necessity.

People in all three Old Believer communities expressed concern and worry about the continuity of their ritual practices. Whereas the first migrant generation had aged and was soon to pass away only few younger people seemed interested, willing or able to gain their ritual knowledge and to practice their religion and traditional beliefs. Several families in Melbourne with young children supported the appointment of Father Paul:

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<sup>17</sup> Nikolai (name changed), interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, Sydney.

<sup>18</sup> Vlas, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, interview conducted in Russian, 6 January 2011, Gympie.

he was fluent in Russian and English; and many members of the parish hoped that he would be able to revive the church community and connect with its younger people. Alexander, who belongs to the Old Believer community in Lidcombe said:

I wouldn't say there is anything preventing us from being good practicing Old Believers. It's a free country; you can practice your religion. There is a lot more information! I don't think there is anything that would or could prevent us. There is just one exception: the language barrier. That the service can't be conducted in English; therefore people cannot understand and relate to it. That is our biggest barrier!<sup>19</sup>

The future of the Old Believer diaspora in Australia depended strongly on the question if Church Slavonic was to be used as the only and exclusive ritual language. Most of the older generation saw in the use of English translations for their sacred texts a devaluation of their ethno-religious language and cultural traditions; the use of Russian translations meant a breach with their religious dogma and a dilution of their ritual forms and practices. The use of Church Slavonic as *lingua sacra* refers to an understanding of sacred signs and texts which stems from medieval theology: the reproduction of the sacred text is important, regardless of how well this text is understood by the faithful. The church service addresses God, not the church congregation, and consequently its real importance lies in the unaltered reproduction of this text, as distinct from its subjective understanding and perception.<sup>20</sup> Church Slavonic is therefore an intrinsic part of the Old Believers' religious practice and a means to preserve their faith and religious culture from modern and Western influences.

Many younger Old Believers in Australia understood Church Slavonic differently: as a ritual language which serves as a means of communication. Church Slavonic becomes irrelevant as a ritual language as soon as it remains incomprehensible for the majority of the church community. Ritual language has to translate the meaning of divine texts, the liturgy and prayers to the faithful. It has to offer interpretations for ritual actions and symbolic meanings which are inscribed in the ritual text. The younger generation is mostly illiterate in Church Slavonic, and therefore, cannot understand the Divine Liturgy, prayers and other religious texts. The younger generation of Old Believers struggles

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<sup>19</sup> Alexander, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 19 August 2010, Sydney.

<sup>20</sup> Uspensky, "Schism and Cultural Conflict in the Seventeenth Century" (see note 13), 125.

with a particular characteristic of ritual languages that Stanley Tambiah describes: “In ritual, language appears to be used in ways that violate the communication function”<sup>21</sup>. Whether the congregation understands the words of a particular ritual language or not, Tambiah argues, neither affects the efficacy of the ritual nor change the moral condition of the worshipper.<sup>22</sup>

The Old Believers’ ritual practice did not necessarily involve a cognitive understanding of words to convey the meaning of a ritual performance. In most religious and non-religious settings ritual language appears rather as a pattern of utterances, repeatedly associated with the standardised and often familiar context of a ritual. Ritual language is not to give the most lucid possible explanation to an untutored audience because rituals often assume detailed prior knowledge about their meaning.<sup>23</sup> According to David Parkin rituals gain their legitimacy through performance not speech: rituals are “fundamentally made up of physical action, with words often only optional or arbitrarily replaceable, that it can be regarded as having a distinctive potential for performative imagination that is not reducible to verbal assertion.”<sup>24</sup> Ritual privileges physical action and bodily movement, argues Parkin, rather than verbal assertions.<sup>25</sup>

Church Slavonic cannot be understood solely as a communicative device because liturgical texts often remained incomprehensible to my interviewees and the ritual participants. Church Slavonic forms, however, an integral part of their ritual performances and is therefore not easily replaceable. Ritual language is intrinsically entangled with the repeated and often spiritual experience of a religious practice and

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<sup>21</sup> S. J. Tambiah, “The Magical Power of Words,” *Man* 3, No. 2 (1968), 179.

<sup>22</sup> Tambiah mentioned rituals which are conducted by Buddhist monks in which the sacred words are chanted aloud. These words are sung in the sacred Pali language which the majority of the congregation and some of the monks themselves did not understand. In this case the words of the ritual are broadcasted (Tambiah, “The Magical Power of Words” (see note 21), 179–180).

<sup>23</sup> Wade T. Wheelock, “The Problem of Ritual Language: From Information to Situation,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 50, No. 1 (1982), 56; Roy A. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999), 50–52.

<sup>24</sup> David Parkin, “Ritual as Spatial Direction and Bodily Division,” in *Rituals*, ed. Daniel de Coppet (London: Routledge, 1992), 11–12.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

ritual performance; it also gives means for interpreting the meanings of sacred texts and symbols. Church Slavonic is used in the ritual context of singing and reading and is accompanied by movement and gestures; it cannot be reduced to the information content of its ritual message.

The ritual practice of the Old Believers is different from other religious or non-religious rituals as it is supposed to educate people in certain moral values and behaviours which are intrinsic to the Old Beliefs' religious culture. Ritual practices are not to be understood either merely as a statement and utterance of thoughts nor as speechless action and enactment of tradition or belief.<sup>26</sup> During a ritual performance the Old Believers engage in an intertwined sensual, emotional, imaginative, physical and rational experience. The dynamic and complexity of this engagement in a ritual does, however, also limit the ways in which the Old Believers respond and identify with its form and practice.

### **Tradition and Ritual Practice**

Nina emphasised that the Old Believers form of worship lays particularly strong significance on communality. Many devotional practices such as prostrations and the sign of the cross, are performed by the whole church community at particular points of the service. Nina explained that compared to rituals in the Russian Orthodox Church, the Old Believers' ritual practice is much more focused on the whole community simultaneously moving, praying and gesturing.

In the Russian Orthodox Church – with the exception of a couple of particular prayers when everyone crossed themselves or did something in particular – there was a lot of variation, not so much of a structure. You might just find a handful of people doing something simultaneously.<sup>27</sup>

This communal form of worship has been an essential part of the Old Believers' ritual practice in Australia and has been handed down from generation to generation. During the performance of a ritual ceremony particular emphasis lays on faultless repetition and rigid structure. This formalism of ritual conduct is characterised by the Old Belief's understanding of its rituals practice: rituals are undistinguishable from religious dogmas

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 49–50; Parkin, "Ritual as Spatial Direction" (see note 24), 18.

<sup>27</sup> Nina Nikolaevich, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 11 July 2010, Melbourne.

and reflect them. The slightest ritual change means that the dogma can no longer convey its religious truth and meaning.<sup>28</sup> David Scheffel argues that the Old Believers' ritual practice has a communicative function, which involves not only their present community, but also past generations of Old Believers. The repeated and unaltered performance of ritual forms a thread of continuity, an important link between the past and the present of their religious practice.<sup>29</sup>

[I]n the book it would say: this is when you [prostrate] or cross yourself, or you do this or that three times. We follow their [the choir's] lead. So everyone is doing the same thing at the same time," Nina said and emphasised that many of these ritual practices are performed as a sequence. "You learn the prayers and parts of the services eventually having crossed yourself so many times at that particular point in time or after this particular prayer that you almost automatically know that this is what you do"<sup>30</sup>. Rituals are memories as a sequence; its structure is learnt by repetition and routine, less by liturgical and teleological teaching. Repeatedly and habitually performing a particular gesture, prayer or movement made it easier for Nina to follow the ceremony and other ritual expressions. The order of the Old Believers' church service is strictly regulated and the behaviour and bodily movements of the faithful prescribed by the church books. For example the Old Orthodox Prayer Book instructs on the bows at the Liturgy:

Other bows than these prescribed bows we dare not do, lest we cause scandal to people; rather, we stand with fear and trembling and with the Prayer of Jesus during the holy chanting. We do not converse with one another at all, nor do we move about from place to place; but as we would think to stand in heaven, so do we stand in church during the holy chanting. Some people make bows and prostrations other than those ordered by the Typicon<sup>31</sup> during the Holy Liturgy

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<sup>28</sup> *Istoriia Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Starobriadcheskoi Tserkvi: Kratkii Ocherk [The History of the Orthodox Old-Rite Church: A Short Essay]* (Moscow: Krasnaia Zvezda, 2003), 4.

<sup>29</sup> D. Sheffel, "Staraiia Vera i Russkii Tserkovnyi Obriad [The Old Belief and the Russian Church Rituals]," in *Traditsionnaia Dukhovnaia i Material'naia Kul'tura Russkikh Starobriadcheskikh Poselenii v Stranakh Evropy, Azii i Ameriki [Traditional Spiritual and Material Culture of the Russian Old Ritualist Population in the Countries of Europe, Asia and America]*, ed. N. N. Pokrovskii and R. Morris (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1992), 25–26.

<sup>30</sup> Nina Nikolaevich, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 11 July 2010, Melbourne.

<sup>31</sup> Liturgical book that contains the order of the liturgical celebration.

and other services, but they do not according to the tradition of the holy fathers and not unto their salvation, but rather unto sin.<sup>32</sup>

According to theologians and teachers associated with the Old Believers' religion their ritual practice requires repetition, sequence and discipline in order to shape the church community. The faithful are instructed that the ritual itself provides the only method and path to truth and salvation. Physically rigorous worship and uniformity in ritual activity are supposed to unify the community and to create an atmosphere that promotes communal worship and prayer. Bound by their communal form of worship the faithful could be saved from foreign and individualistic philosophies. Roy R. Robson argues that their ritual practice was to mould the Old Believers into the preferred social organisation of an Orthodox Christian community characterised by social and political conservatism, religious tradition and communality.<sup>33</sup>

As Nina converted to the Old Belief she underwent a ceremony called *miropomasanie*<sup>34</sup> or chrismation, the anointment with blessed oil. "That sort of converted me technically from being Russian Orthodox to Old Russian Orthodox," she said. Nina's baptismal ceremony did not immediately change her perceptions, religious practices or beliefs which she had grown up with and inherited from the Russian Orthodox Church. Nina said she was "initially quite resistant to change or (to) embrace the Old Orthodox faith". She found it difficult to relate to this new ritual practice and did not feel particularly

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<sup>32</sup> Ciuba et al., *Drevnepravoslavnyi Molitvennik* (see note 3), 348.

<sup>33</sup> Roy R. Robson, "Liturgy and Community Among Old Believers, 1905–1917," *Slavic Review* 52, No. 4 (1993), 713, 717, 721.

<sup>34</sup> In the Orthodox Church the sacrament of *miropomasanie* or chrismation is part of the initiation (baptismal) mysteries. Through this sacrament one is anointed with specially consecrated oil of myrrh which normally takes place immediately after the baptism of water. If a convert to Orthodoxy has received trinitarian baptism in another Christian communion, then chrismation can be celebrated on its own as a completion of the baptismal mystery. In order to convert to the priestly Old Believer concord there are three slightly different baptismal rituals: baptism (*kreshchenie*) – if someone has never been baptised a Christian; rebaptism (*perekreshchenie*) – if a person has been baptised into the Russian Orthodox Church or another Christian denomination; and "finishing" a baptism (*dokreshchenie*) – if someone has been baptised as priestless Old Believers. (Sergey Trostyanskiy, "Chrismation," in *The Encyclopedia of Eastern Orthodox Christianity*, Vol. 1, ed. John Anthony McGuckin (Malden: Blackwell, 2011), 115–116; Douglas Rogers, *The Old Faith and the Russian Land: A Historical Ethnography of Ethics in the Urals* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 282).

comfortable in this new church environment. Nina was unfamiliar with the Old Orthodox rituals and practices and her husband could not answer all of Nina's questions: "he didn't know either because he wasn't raised with the theoretical background, as opposed to the practice." At the time of Nina's conversion the Melbourne community also did not have a parish priest who could have explained the Old Belief's ritual particularities and variations. Nina continued trying to find out "why we did some things in a particular way."<sup>35</sup> In the Russian Orthodox Churches it was more likely that the faithful would walk about freely, venerating icons, lighting candles and changing places. Rarely would the whole congregation cross itself simultaneously or follow a strict sequence of ritual gestures and movements.<sup>36</sup>

Nina thought about her present ritual practice and explained that she now followed the Old Orthodox practice of crossing herself with two instead of three fingers: "that is the habit now." Even when she occasionally visits the Russian Orthodox Church for funerals or memorial services for relatives and friends she realised: "I actually cross myself as if I would be in an Old Believer church"<sup>37</sup>. At particular times of the service Nina crossed herself with two fingers, with the same routine as in an Old Believers' church service. Nina's life story revealed to what extent the Old Believers' traditional form of worship built on a memorising and leaning process based on repetition; ritual gestures and movements were to be incorporated.

Some of my interviewees even insisted on the standardisation of some ritual forms and sought pure representation in their correct reproduction. The practice of the Old Belief's rituals was not just significant for the individual believer, but also fundamental for the continuous religious practice of the whole community. Since the Old Believers' split from the Russian Orthodox Church, the severe code of moral and ritual regulations was under communal control. It was to preserve the forms of Russian Christianity precisely as they had been practiced before the church schism.<sup>38</sup> The continuous practice of

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<sup>35</sup> Nina Nikolaevich, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 11 July 2010, Melbourne.

<sup>36</sup> Robson, "Liturgy and Community Among Old Believers" (see note 33), 724.

<sup>37</sup> Nina Nikolaevich, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 11 July 2010, Melbourne.

<sup>38</sup> Juha Pentikäinen, "What is Old Belief? Who are the Starovery? An Introduction," in *'Silent as Water we Live': Old Believers in Russia and Abroad: Cultural Encounter with the Finno-Ugrians*, ed. Juha Pentikäinen (Helsinki: Finish Literature Society, 1999), 14; Kliuchevskii, V. O.



ritual ceremonies and traditional forms of worship such as the use of Church Slavonic might stand for the stability and robustness of the Old Believers' ritual practice. This practice persists despite the Old Believers' recurrent experience of migration and displacement, as well as the tendency to negotiate and adapt their religious practices according to their current diasporic existence.

The tendencies of an individualised, modernised and adapted religious practice seem stronger in the Old Believers' Australian diaspora compared to their life back in China. There people often lived in close-knit religious communities and remote areas where the influence of competing religious and secular belief systems was minimal. When the Old Believers were living in China, they remembered and identified strongly with the religious persecution of their ancestors and their own communities; many people saw in these hostilities against the Old Believers a motivation to preserve the legacy and heritage of their religious tradition and practice. Since the Old Believers' settlement in Australia religion plays, however, a less dominant role in the identity formation of individual migrants, as moral compass and orientation of decisions and actions takes in their daily lives.

As a condition of their settlement imposed by Australian immigration policies the Old Believers spread across the country and established three different church communities. These communities belonged to various denominations and often merged within ritual subtraditions and doctrinal variations. In the last four or five decades the social conditions in which the Old Believer diaspora performed its ritual and religious practice has changed significantly. Especially the Old Believers in Melbourne who originally belonged to the priestless denomination called Chasovennye have changed their sacramental and ritual practice. After their initial settlement in Australia a few families started to gather in their private homes to pray, to celebrate the liturgy and practice their worship. For some years Father Timofei travelled between Sydney and Melbourne to do service in the community and many people were encouraged to convert to the priestly concord of the Belokrinitsa Hierarchy.

Similar attempts to convert the priestless community which settled in Yarwun failed; but the Melbourne community began to establish their own parish, people raised money and bought a church building in Dandenong. The environment in which their ritual was

practiced has changed, from a family home to a consecrated church building. Some ritual ceremonies changed because they were then lead by a blessed priest and not exclusively by elders or the *nastavnik*. The newly converted experienced new ritual forms that concerned sacraments like their baptism, the Holy Communion or their confession in front of the priest. The recovery of their priesthood gave the Melbourne Old Believer community hope that it could expand on religious education and to revive their liturgical and theological religious practice.<sup>39</sup> Matriona remembered that a man from the Sydney church community came to Melbourne to teach people in their liturgical singing and reading Church Slavonic

Before he came down from Sydney, I have to admit, no one of us knew. Maybe my husband knew the alphabet when he was going to Russian school back in China and they learnt a little bit of Slavonic, but the rest of us – nothing. So what he [our teacher] used to do was that he allocated us and he would give us workloads: You are reading! You go and learn the alphabet today! And tomorrow... We had church choir three times a week and in between we had to do a lot of practice, reading and singing. That is how it started then.<sup>40</sup>

As Matriona was talking about the times when the Melbourne community established its choir she sounded surprised. “Actually we learnt quite fast. Just imagine that many people! I mean not all of them were in the choir, but we all worked for the same thing. And amazingly enough – you have no idea how fast we caught it on and moved on.” She missed this initial drive and the engagement that people invested in their church community. Thinking of the Old Believer community today Matriona said disappointedly “we still could get together and continue study, but no one wants to do it. I have tried saying to people, would you like to gather a group and maybe one day or once a week we meet and discuss together a particular psalm – what it means. [...] Nobody wants to do it: oh I don’t have time for that.”<sup>41</sup> For a while Matriona was so disappointed by her church community, its internal quarrels, the gossip and rumours that preoccupied many people that she stayed away from church.

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<sup>39</sup> Roy R. Robson, “Recovering Priesthood and the Émigré Experience Among Contemporary American *Bespopovtsy* Old Believers,” in *Skupiska Staroobrzędowców w Europie, Azji i Ameryce: Ich Miejsce i Tradycje we Współczesnym Świecie*, ed. Iryda Grek-Pabisowa, Irena Maryniakowa and Richard A. Morris (Warsaw: Polska Akademia Nauk 1994), 132.

<sup>40</sup> Matriona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 24 July 2010, Melbourne.

<sup>41</sup> Matriona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 24 July 2010, Melbourne.

I just sometimes get discouraged, just like the rest of them. I think what is all this about? And then I start thinking: I could go out and have some fun and maybe go to the cinemas more, maybe watch films or see a show. I think I had enough of this church business, and I can't be bothered with it anymore. And I tried that, I did not go to church for three months. And when I did go back it was – I actually walked into the church and I was so nervous I couldn't even put the candle up. [...] I wasn't scared that I wasn't going to be able to read [in the choir] because I had been reading at home. But it was just this – coming back. I should have been really happy being back but it was a set back for me rather than moving forward. It felt like a step back.

When I was home by myself reading the psalms I was looking into what they mean: anyone in the church that hurts [me], I forgive him, everybody! I didn't have anything towards anybody, ill feelings or so. And then I went back and felt nothing has changed in three months, everyone was still the same. Everyone is still squabbling over the simplest, silliest things. [...] Father Paul said to me: come to church and don't worry about anyone else: who says what and who does what. You come for yourself! I thought yes, it is I am coming here for myself. But it is very hard to concentrate what you are there for when you have got these [distractions].<sup>42</sup>

Matrona explained not only how the ritual performance of the Melbourne Old Believers changed after her conversion, as the church choir grew with more and more young choir singers. She also spoke of the transformation that her church community underwent. People seemed to lack the enthusiasm that they initially showed, establishing their own parish church and learning about the priestly ritual practice. Matrona also spoke of her personal religious life and that her ritual practice at times left her unsatisfied and disappointed.

What if internal and external dynamics challenge the safeguards of a supposedly static and unchanged ritual practice? Despite the apparently fixed rules of the Old Belief's ritual forms each performance of a rite or ceremony is unique: no ritual is ever

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<sup>42</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 24 July 2010, Melbourne.

performed in the exact same way.<sup>43</sup> Even within a relatively stable ritual tradition, Theodore Jennings argues, ritual activities change over time and to a certain degree open to novelty. This change is inscribed in the liminal states of every ritual and the exploratory quest for its appropriate performance.<sup>44</sup> Even within the Old Belief's relatively stable ritual tradition certain aspects of religious practices and general ritual behaviour are to a significant degree improvised, elaborated or eliminated. Modifications are inherent in the Old Believers' ritual practice and need to be considered in the light of their diasporic condition and their cultural displacement from the origins of their religious tradition. Whereas the Old Believers' religious dogma conveys notions of unaltered repetition and timelessness, ritual forms and practices responded to changing social, cultural and environmental contexts. Instead of a static notion of repetition the Old Believers' ritual practice conveys a sense of continuity that responds to their diasporic situation, ritual change and variation. The limitations of this responsiveness become clearer as we look at aspects of the Old Believers' ritual practice that challenge this continuity.

### **My Experience of the Easter Service**

After several hours of standing, bowing and kneeling during the Easter service I could not ignore anymore the pain that was stabbing in my knees. My body felt weak, infused with fatigue and numbness. The tired faces of people around me suggested that others had a similar experience. One could hear exhausted sighs after people stood up again after a series of prostrations. What was the effect and purpose of this ritual, I wondered?

Functionalist approaches assume that rituals create, express and reinforce social cohesion. Ritual practices unite members of a community, generate collective beliefs and create shared social and moral values.<sup>45</sup> My participation in the Old Believers' Easter service clearly made me for a short period of time part of their community. During the ceremony I shared with other participants the experience of simultaneous movements and synchronised gestures, and also the pain and tiredness of this

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<sup>43</sup> Parkin, "Ritual as Spatial Direction" (see note 24), 19.

<sup>44</sup> Theodore W. Jennings, "On Ritual Knowledge," *The Journal of Religion* 62, No. 2 (1982), 115.

<sup>45</sup> Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. and intro. Karen E. Fields (New York: Free Press, 1995), 214–220); Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (see note 23), 27.

exercise. Yet I was not part of this group, not an Old Believer. As a visitor I observed and tried to make meaning of their ritual practice. I identified different movements, parts of certain prayers and the interplay of different symbols and objects. For visitors, religious performances can only be presentations of a particular religious perspective. Clifford Geertz writes that through the eyes of an observer ritual practices are “aesthetically appreciated or scientifically dissected, for participants they are in addition enactments, materializations, realizations of it – not only models of what they believe, but also models *for* the believing of it.”<sup>46</sup> Whereas I merely participated in the ritual, people around me enacted their performance, and their acts were infused with religious meanings and ideas.<sup>47</sup>

The Easter ritual had a particularly powerful effect on many of my interviewees. Some adored the intimate atmosphere in the dark church building which was illuminated by hundreds of candles. Others described how the beautiful singing of the liturgy gave them goose bumps. Easter was Natasha’s favourite church holiday because “the singing sounds really, really beautiful. It makes you feel really good.” The singing of the choir made Natasha feel really “happy on the inside.” The meaning of these liturgical hymns was also important: “So it’s about both, the feeling and the reason”. The meaning behind Natasha’s liturgical singing was to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ, “that he died on the cross and then rose. I guess your singing – the bit when he went up to heaven and saved us, when all our sins were dying on the cross pretty much – that makes you feel happy.”<sup>48</sup> Natasha did not mention shared collective ideals and moral values that identified her with the Old Believer community; she emphasised her individual participation and experience of the ritual. She also explained the symbolic meaning of her ritual singing and the interactional character of its performance within the church community.

Clifford Geertz is often seen as the representative of such a symbolist approach to religion that focuses on rituals as a means by which ideas and meanings are symbolically expressed, transmitted, and reinforced. Ritual practices are rather seen as symbolic activities which give meaning to certain values, beliefs and behaviour than

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<sup>46</sup> Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, ed. Clifford Geertz (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 113–114.

<sup>47</sup> Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 28.

<sup>48</sup> Natasha, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 23 May 2010, Melbourne.

supporting certain social structures.<sup>49</sup> As I was taking part in the same Easter service like many of my interviewees I wondered: why did this ritual not convey its meaning to me? Standing in church all I could focus on was the pain in my body and its sensation. I tried to concentrate on the melodies and words of the Slavonic hymns but almost dozed off. I focused my sight on the icons of the altar, but after a while I caught myself counting them. Was I left out from the energetic and meditative experience of this ritual because I was not a member of this faith community? I was not socialised in these rituals practices, unfamiliar with its forms and meanings and still a stranger to many of the participants surrounding me.

Suddenly some words of the Easter liturgy reached me: *Alleluia! Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed!* Father Paul had stepped in front the iconostasis and stood in a bright embroidered vestment before of his congregation. As he began singing with a deep, sonorous voice – not in Church Slavonic but in English – a strange dynamic started in the community: some people raised their heads in curiosity; others turned around and began to whisper. A few women looked at each other in confusion and distress, many of the elderly people might not have heard this Easter hymn in English. This ritual action had obviously a disruptive and disintegrative effect on the church community. The ritual variation of reading a Church Slavonic liturgy in English did not speak meaningfully to the whole community or resonate with the understanding and ritual experience of all participants. Many people would have understood English because of their settlement in Australia and their interaction with an English speaking society. However, this dynamic of this ritual variation rather reflected on the Old Believers' cultural displacement caused by their migration. English was not an element intrinsic to the Old Believers' ritual tradition. Their church service was, however, practiced under the condition of the Old Believers' diasporic existence which encouraged the use of English as a ritual language.

By analysing the frictions and variations of the Old Believers' ritual practice I did not need to merely concentrate on the function or meaning of these practices, on their use, effects and outcomes. I could focus on the individual and lived experiences of ritual practices, as well as their potential for variation, contested perspectives and

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<sup>49</sup> Clifford Geertz, "Ritual and Social Change: A Javanese Example," in Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 89, 143.

uncertainties.<sup>50</sup> Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw remark that “[i]f you abandon the assumption of perfect order and perfect repetition, imperfection and variation become illuminating, rather than being noise that a well-honed interpretation dampens down and edits out”<sup>51</sup>. Even though a ritual performance might follow a certain script or prescription it is not violated by a slightly different sequence of acts or everyday variability. Rituals cannot to be presented either as effective because they follow a certain prescribed structure and rule; or subsequently as failed and as evidence of social erosion because of ritual change and variation.<sup>52</sup> The imperfections and ruptures in ritual practices merely question the rigidity that the Old Believers’ ritual tradition prescribed.

### **Ritual Failure**

The ‘success’ of a ritual practice– the reading and singing of divine texts and prayers – depends on the performance of the church choir, Matrona explained. Prayers are supposed to be read “*tikho i razumno* [calmly and reasonably], that means slowly, and put thought into what you are reading! *So vnimaniem* [with attention]: pay attention!” The reader has to make a slight pause after every comma, Matrona said, but in the choir people would often read like parrots: “sometimes people just read through – *blublublu* – and then it loses its meaning”<sup>53</sup>. Matrona has been singing and reading for many years in the church choir of the Melbourne Orthodox Old-Rite Church. She had learnt the alphabet, the melodies and intonations when the first church congregation was established. Matrona was aware of the many mistakes that could crop up in a ritual performance, especially during the unengaged reading of the church choir.

Church Slavonic has fine differences to the Russian pronunciation, Matrona explained, but “a lot of people in church still do it wrongly”. For example, the pronunciation of the letter ‘g’ should be very soft.<sup>54</sup> “We say *Bog’roditsa* [Mother of God] – means she gave

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<sup>50</sup> Matt Tomlinson and Matthew Engelke, “Meaning, Anthropology, Christianity,” in *The Limits of Meaning: Case Studies in the Anthropology of Christianity*, ed. Matthew Engelke and Matt Tomlinson (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 1–2.

<sup>51</sup> Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw, *The Archetypal Actions of Ritual: A Theory of Ritual Illustrated by the Jain Rite of Worship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 130.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 112–13, 130.

<sup>53</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 24 July 2010, Melbourne.

<sup>54</sup> The unvoiced letter g in ‘Богъ’ (God) lenites to [x] and is pronounced [bokh]. For the sound

birth to Christ,” Matrona emphasised the soft g, “but a lot of people in church go *Bogoroditsa*”, with a hard g. She explained that it does not change the meaning, but it sounds differently and in some cases a wrong pronunciation might even cause misunderstanding: “we say ‘*bokh*’ [God]; but a lot of people say ‘*bog*’, and it comes out like ‘*bok*’, your side.” The correct recitation of a sacred text included the right emphasis and melody of words and tunes, as well as the posture and intonation of the reciter. If any of these aspects of the ritual performance and procedures were exercised wrongly, it could be misunderstood and lose its spiritual power. As a result, Matrona said, it could not “translate to the people [standing] in the back”<sup>55</sup>.

Clifford Geertz recounts the case “of a ritual which failed to function properly”<sup>56</sup>. He analyses a funeral service in a small Javanese town which heightened tension and distress for the community instead of creating communal harmony, integration and consolation. The conflict which surfaced in the ritual was the result of social change in the local community. Rapid population growth, urbanisation, and monetisation had weakened the traditional ties of the peasant social structure and disturbed the uniformity of religious beliefs and practices. The community’s cultural framework and religious beliefs no longer matched the actual patterns of their social interaction.<sup>57</sup> This analysis of ritual failure was Geertz’s critique of a functionalism that seemed to be unable to account for social change in ritual action. His critique raised questions about how to assess the effectiveness, the potential diversity of and mishaps in ritual traditions. What happens when the performance of a ceremony goes wrong and ritual rules are broken, when people get distracted or bored? How much variation and error can a certain ritual performance accommodate?

For Matrona the slightest deviance and minor errors such as spelling mistakes or inattentive reading meant that the ritual was performed incorrectly and could possibly lose its power to convey meaning. Misspellings or the wrong pronunciations of a particular word would do not generally put a ritual performance at risk. It became,

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shape of Old Church Slavonic and its historical background see Boris Gasparov, *Old Church Slavonic* (München: Lincom Europa, 2001), 26–73 and T. A. Ivanova, *Staroslavianskii lazyk [Old Slavonic Language]* (Moscow: Vysshiaia Shkola, 1977), 50–94.

<sup>55</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 24 July 2010, Melbourne.

<sup>56</sup> Geertz, “Ritual and Social Change” (see note 49), 146.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 142–153, 164–169.



however, more difficult to translate and convey its spiritual power to the participants in the ritual ceremony. Variations in the performance of a ritual may devalue its effect, impact and outcome. This phenomenon has been discussed in the ‘wrong note paradox’<sup>58</sup>. The recitation of a piece of music does not present the performance of a given score if it differs from the original version by just one note. The difference of one note may be sufficient to make two performances instances of different works. Carl Seaquist argues that several performances of a ritual can be recognised as instances of the same ritual despite certain variations. For this to happen certain features which are constitutive for the ritual’s identity have to occur in all ritual performances. Thus any feature that is not constitutive or contingent may vary between performances, and would merely present apparent and not real change in the performance.<sup>59</sup>

The majority of participants in the Old Believers’ church services could recognise these constitutive ritual features. Whereas the ritual practice of the Australian Old Believers has the potential for mishaps and variations, this did not undermine or question the identity and stability inscribed in its performance. Some of my interviewees testified that their personal expectations in the outcome and effect of a certain ritual practice occasionally remained unfulfilled. However, nobody questioned its integrity and general functionality. According to Nikolai, the church atmosphere creates a space for meditation and praying; it reenergises him and calms him down.

When you first get there you just slowly shut up your day to day life and you sort of look into a different world. You just feel like touching base with *Bozhe* [God]. You feel like you are talking a little bit to God in your thoughts – maybe don’t really talk – you just sort of feel freer there.<sup>60</sup>

When religious practices don’t ‘feel right’, however, when they do not create a spiritual experience or respond to individual expectations, the ritual performance could be seen as failed. “I’ve got seven children and to go to church with all of them, getting them

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<sup>58</sup> Initially presented in the philosophical study of art by Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 185–188.

<sup>59</sup> Carl Seaquist, “Ritual Individuation and Ritual Change,” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 21, No. 3 (2009), 357–359; Humphrey and Laidlaw, *The Archetypal Actions of Ritual* (see note 51), 116.

<sup>60</sup> Nikolai (name changed), interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 17 August 2010.

ready in the morning, that is a lot of stress. Usually we get there a little bit late and it's like you go to church but you are looking after them or you are worrying about them rather than praying." Nikolai explained that he gets distracted, especially when he does not go to church regularly. Then he "can't get into it again," Nikolai said describing a meditative and concentrated state of mind: "it is harder to get where you sort of switch over".<sup>61</sup>

If you don't go regularly [to church], you go in there and you don't want to be there. This is annoying, and you look out of the window or you do whatever. If you don't go to the church services, you tend to probably start going to part of the service, and then a smaller part of the service.<sup>62</sup>

Although Nikolai might be distracted by his children or interrupted by other people in church, the ritual would be carried out, regardless of procedural failures and personal expectations. Whereas Nikolai might be distracted and therefore not listening to the prayers and chants, the ritual could still have the expected results for other members of the church congregation. The outcome and desired effects of rituals vary; every participant in a ritual has his or her personal experiences and expectations. Whereas there might be a 'correct' way how a ritual should be performed and what it is supposed to achieve, there is no correct way to experience it.<sup>63</sup> The evaluation of ritual failure therefore depends on the participants' explanations of why and how certain ritual actions were perceived as mistaken. This cannot be limited to the actual performance and its procedure, but has also to consider other external effects.<sup>64</sup>

Matrona explained that not just procedural errors caused undesired effects in performing a ritual action. She sometimes gets "lost in the whole humdrum" around the church community; she gets "scattered". She also gets easily distracted by the everyday stories and dramas which people share in church. "When we stand in the choir, everyone is standing there quietly and you start to think what it was you wanted

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<sup>61</sup> Nikolai (name changed), interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 17 August 2010.

<sup>62</sup> Nikolai (name changed), interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 17 August 2010.

<sup>63</sup> Tomas Gerholm, "On Ritual: A Postmodernist View," *Ethnos* 53, No. 3–4 (1988), 195.

<sup>64</sup> Jan Weinhold, "Failure and Mistakes in Rituals of the European Santo Daime Church: Experiences and Subjective Theories of the Participants," in *When Rituals Go Wrong: Mistakes, Failure and the Dynamics of Ritual*, ed. Ute Hüsken (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 69, 71.

[to pray for]. Then you get people whispering in the back of you and next to you. They take the tension away, it just goes.” In Matrona’s opinion a ritual performance fails if people do not pay attention or are not able to gain any kind of spiritual or ritual understanding: “half the people are not listening who is reading what, they are busy getting stories. I get sometimes really upset thinking what was the purpose of that? We’ve done a service, it went for an hour and a half and nobody [...] got anything out of it. Which is quite sad!” Matrona did not speak of symbolic or referential meaning that the ritual should convey and translate to its participants. In her understanding people could gain a spiritual experience of the ritual through concentrated meditation in which “the soul understands what has been read”.<sup>65</sup> Matrona reassured me that the spiritual meaning of the Slavonic liturgy and the Old Orthodox ritual would eventually translate and become meaningful to me. I just needed to stay perceptive, continue to listen and practice this ritual meditation regularly.

Matrona’s concentrated meditation could easily be interrupted by external factors. For example, people who were talking during the service caused Matrona great disappointment and frustration. However, internal processes such as the lapse of concentration and distraction could also harm a deep and spiritual ritual experience. Whereas the Old Belief’s doctrines and church books may rigidly prescribe the performance of church rituals, they cannot solely be treated as an edifice of punctiliousness, standardisation and conventionality. Matrona stressed that people brought their own reasons and viewpoints, personal motivations and intentions to their participation in the church service. Matrona was searching for causes as to why the expectations in her own ritual practice were left unfulfilled. The performance of rituals gives an arena of multiple – often contradictory and contestable – perspectives, perceptions, experiences and interpretations. This might change our focus from procedural errors and misconceptions of ritual outcomes to the individual involvement in these practices.<sup>66</sup> In the following I show that the learning processes involved in ritual action and the incorporation of certain gestures and movements follows dynamics other than official discourses about their conduct and rule.

### **Incorporated Knowledge**

I met Natasha in the Melbourne Orthodox Old-Rite Church for the holiday of Pentecost

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<sup>65</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 24 July 2010, Melbourne

<sup>66</sup> Gerholm, “On Ritual” (see note 63), 194, 198.

when she was singing in the choir. She is a second generation Old Believer, born in the 1970s. She grew up in a Russian Orthodox family, her mother belonging to the Orthodox Old-Rite Church and her father to the Russian Orthodox Church. People were gathering after church for a barbeque while Natasha and I were sitting in the shade behind the church building where we could talk a bit more quietly. Recently she had started attending the church services again, to get involved in the Old Believer community and to follow some of the Old Belief's religious practices. In the past she had moved away from church because she found many of the regulations and the traditional lifestyle her religion prescribed too restrictive and challenging. She said that she came back to church to live a more religious lifestyle again:

I guess I just felt that I was missing something, peace. I have just done everything wrong – well not wrong – but I became a wild person, just partying too much. Something was missing and just when I came back [to church] that's when I felt that maybe [peace] – this is what is missing.<sup>67</sup>

Natasha did not wear a headscarf because she was not married, and she did not usually wear a skirt for work or in her daily life because she found it unpractical. Natasha's skin was tanned; she worked in a nursery plants. Natasha often smiled and laughed, but her body seemed tired with her arms and shoulders hanging down.

Natasha remembered that she was taught by her mother to read liturgical prayers and texts: "when I was younger, mum used to push me to read. [...] I haven't been to church for a long, long time. But when I came back I started to read and I was veery slow. But just practice – practice, practice, practice. It is like with any language: the more you practice, the easier it is." I asked Natasha if she had a general understanding of the Slavonic chants, and she answered, "I am reading it, and no, I don't understand all of it, only bits and pieces." She had difficulties to explain the meaning of the liturgical prayers and ritual practice which she had just performed. She said a bit puzzled: "Even today I was standing there and thinking: Alright I don't really understand what this holiday is about. It's pretty big and it's important, I know that much. But why are we on our knees, and bowing down for so long? Why, I questioned myself, why do we have to do this?"<sup>68</sup> Natasha had an embodied knowledge of the Old Beliefs' religious practice.

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<sup>67</sup> Natasha, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 23 May 2010, Melbourne.

<sup>68</sup> Natasha, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 23 May 2010, Melbourne.

She knew how to bow and cross herself, when to kneel and stand up, but she could not explain why she acted the way she did.

My interviewees often had difficulties in explaining the symbolic meaning of ritual practices while they habitually enacted ritual movements and gestures during church services. This phenomenon tempted Frits Staal to speak of rituals as meaningless; he defined ritual as “pure activity, without meaning or goal”<sup>69</sup>. Ritual ceremonies do not refer to or communicate meaning; their participants are merely interested in matters of performing and the faultless execution of the ritual. Staal’s critique questioned representational ideas of a “shared meaning” and a common understanding of ritual practices between all of its participants. I agree that ritual performance does not simply rely on cognitive knowledge about rationales, doctrinal norms or symbolic meanings that dictate ritual behaviour. Their performance is, however, not pure activity but filled with religious meaning and belief; and many of my interviewees took part in ritual practices because they expected to gain a sensual and spiritual experience.

Ritual experience involves more than theological claims, cognitive thought and intention: meaning is not simply generated on a cognitive level; the body internalises ritual knowledge, modes of behaviour and social norms inscribed in the ritual. Nina explained: “There are things I learnt as a kid – how you cross yourself – it is something your mother taught you. She never told you why; you did it and that was just the way that you did it. That’s what you grew up doing.”<sup>70</sup> Also Alexander said that his children learnt from an early age about the Old Believers’ religious practices by “word of mouth from their parents. You taught them how to cross yourself, to do your prayers in the evening and morning, you taught them fasting periods.”<sup>71</sup> This unconscious, historically and culturally patterned behaviour which Nina and Alexander described was acquired through their socialisation within an Old Believer family and the interaction with their religious community.

Jacob Belzen argues that participants in rituals often have no knowledge of the

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<sup>69</sup> Frits Staal, “The Meaninglessness of Ritual,” *Numen* XXVI, (1979), 9. (For a critique of Staal’s argument see: E. Thomas Lawson and Robert N. McCauley, *Rethinking Religion: Connecting Cognition and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 56–59).

<sup>70</sup> Nina Nikolaevich, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 11 July 2010, Melbourne.

<sup>71</sup> Alexander, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 19 August 2010, Sydney.

specifics of the doctrine and official rationales for certain conduct. Yet people perform perfectly in accordance with the expectations of their religious culture. This was not a matter of self-conscious knowledge of any explicit rules. According to Belzen, people's conduct in ritual practices is mostly regulated, generated and structured according to a scheme of structure that is not consciously known.<sup>72</sup> Pierre Bourdieu proposes the concept of habitus to explain the workings of our practices; he describes habitus as "a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a *matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions*"<sup>73</sup>. Bourdieu explains with this theoretical concept how the structural and class positions of individuals become embodied dispositions, generally through unconscious processes. In Bourdieu's definition habitus is "the basis of perception and appreciation of all subsequent experiences"<sup>74</sup>. Habitus is an embodied set of durable yet flexible dispositions that serve to generate practices. These practices are structured by existing patterns of social life yet able to (re)structure, in turn, these very same patterns.<sup>75</sup>

As embodied social knowledge, habitus shapes the ways an individual perceives and acts: the way a person speaks, eats or walks; how someone participates in rituals or rides a bicycle. In this sense the habitus associated with the Old Belief can be understood as the values and dispositions that people embody and gain from their cultural and religious tradition. Habitus regulates the Old Believers' conduct in religious practices because a group of people undergoes similar formative experiences during these practices. For example, Erine and Matrona have undergone a similar wedding ceremony that shows how their bodies are trained and their ritual behaviour is formed within a shared ritual context.

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<sup>72</sup> Jacob A. Belzen, "Religion as Embodiment: Cultural-Psychological Concepts and Methods in the Study of Conversation among "Bevindelijken"," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 38, No. 2 (1999), 247–248.

<sup>73</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 82–83.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 72; Saba Mahmood and Daniel Winchester both use Bourdieu's habitus to show how the Islamic religious tradition becomes embodied in ritual practices and a constructive element of the moral self: Saba Mahmood, "Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival," *Cultural Anthropology* 16, No. 2 (2001), 215; Daniel Winchester, "Embodying the Faith: Religious Practice and the Making of a Muslim Moral Habitus," *Social Forces* 86, No. 4 (2008), 1758.

Erine has been married for more than ten years and she remembered the traditional wedding ceremony that was celebrated in the Yarwun Old Believer community. “We did that out of respect for my parents,” Erine said. Her wedding day began with a church service which was followed by a wedding ceremony. Two bridesmaids guided Erine through the ceremony, and she explained “the reason you had the two lady guardians is that after you go to church – and you do your ceremony, and you exchange rings and blessings – they will then take you into a separate room”.<sup>76</sup> After the wedding ceremony the bridesmaids prepare the headdress for the newly-married woman.

The one plait symbolises being single. Then they un-plaited my single plait and part it. They put a little line right through the back of your head, and then they have two parts and put it into two plaits – signifying two people – and then they plait it.<sup>77</sup>

After the hair is plaited into two plaits and bound together with a little rope, the bridesmaids helped doing “your hair up and put the *shashmura*<sup>78</sup> on, and then a *platok* [*headscarf*]”. Erine explained “that this is the officially married bride’s headpiece.” Every married woman is supposed to wear the *shashmura* as a symbol of her status as a married woman. For Erine it also signified the commitment to her partner and it represented her bond to the Old Believer community and their religious tradition: “It’s

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<sup>76</sup> Erine, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 7 January 2011, Gympie.

<sup>77</sup> Erine, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 7 January 2011, Gympie.

<sup>78</sup> The *shashmura* is a close-fitted cap with which married women in the Old Believer community are supposed to cover their hair. The women wear a headscarf over this cap which is tied in the back during their daily routine, and pinned together under their chin during ritual practices. The cap is also called *kichka* or *kokoshnik*, depending on differences in outlook, shape and size. Most of my interviewees called their headpiece *shashmura* which is a common term amongst the Old Believers from the Altai region. (N. I. Shitova, “Simbolika Kresta i Molitvy v Odezhde Uimonskikh Staroobriadtsev [Symbolism of Cross and Prayer in the Clothing of the Uimonsky Old Believers],” *Izvestiia Altaiskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta* 64, No. 4–3 (2009), 272; K. V. Maerova, “Lingvokul'turologicheskoe Opisaniye Zhenskikh Golovnykh Uborov Staroobriadtsev Altaia [Linguistic and Cultural Description of the Female Headdress amongst the Old Ritualist in the Altai],” in *Staroobriadchestvo: Istorii, Kul'tura, Sovremennost'* [*Old Ritualism: History, Culture, Modernity*], ed. V. I. Osipov and Muzei Istorii i Kul'tury Staroobriadchestva, Vol. 2 (Moscow: n.p., 2005), 307–309.

traditional as well, something that has been handed down from mother to daughter, or grandmother to daughter to granddaughter.”<sup>79</sup>

When Matrona got married in 1965 she also put on the *shashmura*. She was supposed to wear the headpiece as a “symbol, so other people would know you are a married woman now”. Matrona explained that the headdress also meant that the woman was “now obeying the husband: he is the head of the wife, and she is totally obedient to him.” Matrona remembered that she had to change the way she used to plait her hair. “Before women get married we are supposed to plait only one plat and you do it that way”. She showed me how the different strings of hair were put on top of each other and braided into a plat. “When you get married, then you separate it in two, and you have to do two plats. Then you have to plait them the other way.” This time the different strings of hair were put in reverse, one underneath the other. “It is all symbolism,” Matrona said, “it means that you were one person, now there are two of you.”<sup>80</sup>

Matrona and Erine underwent a similar wedding ceremony during which the *shashmura* was put on their plaited hair. Both women shared a common understanding about the symbolic meaning of this practice. They both carried the ritual experience of covering their hair from the sacred space-time of their wedding ceremony into their daily lives. Erine remembered that she had to learn how to put on the *shashmura* by herself. Her body slowly memorised the movement of her hands and shoulders, she learnt how to bend her neck and to adjust her plaited hair.

[It’s] really weird because you are not used to having it [the *shashmura*]. And then you’ve got to do your hair as well. Thank God for Mum! She said that is how you do it and she had to show me a good couple of days. It was pretty intense, I thought: Gosh, I am married now! Oh my God, oh my God! [It was hard] to learn how to put it on properly. It has to be perfectly made to your head shape. So Mum made mine, thank goodness! They had to measure it perfectly because it has to sit so it doesn’t show any hair and gives enough room for your hair to grow. You have to tie it [the *shashmura*] around and then you have got the *platok* on top of it. First you are not used to the hand movement, but then

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<sup>79</sup> Erine, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 7 January 2011, Gympie.

<sup>80</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 24 July 2010, Melbourne.



you adjust quickly.<sup>81</sup>

Erine became excited as she remembered how she got used to the daily routine of putting on the headpiece which symbolised her new status as a married woman. She then shared with her mother the intimate bodily knowledge of plaiting and covering her hair. Together with Matrona all three women were socialised in the Old Beliefs' habitus and religious tradition of wearing a headscarf.

The wedding ceremony produced what Catherine Bell calls "ritualised bodies" which were invested with a sense of ritual practices that involves meaning, gestures and objects.<sup>82</sup> Ritualisation produces ritualised bodies through the interaction of the body with a structuring and structured environment – especially in a liturgical and ritual context shared by a whole church community. This ritualisation of the body is shaped by Bourdieu's habitus rather than a self-conscious knowledge of any explicit ritual rules. It is an implicit cultivated disposition. The ritualised body structures an environment, and this environment in turn impresses its highly nuanced structure on the bodies involved in a ritual.<sup>83</sup> However, the conduct and behaviour of people in ritual practices is not solely regulated by unconscious routine and structure. The embodiment of religious practices is not merely a constant, homogeneous or retrievable set of body skills. According to Bell, ritualisation does not simply act to bring the individual and the community into some reassuring configuration of coherent continuity. More fundamentally, it appropriates this coherence in terms of the interests of certain people and groups.<sup>84</sup>

Religious practices can be challenged and contested. Erine's experience of wearing the *shashmura* reveals to what degree conscious deliberation is part of the Old Believers' religious practice in the diaspora. Erine stopped wearing her headpiece about a year after she got married. "I don't wear a *shashmura* for work," she said, "I only wear the *shashmura* when I come to church here [in Gympie]."<sup>85</sup> Erine mentioned

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<sup>81</sup> Erine, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 7 January 2011, Gympie.

<sup>82</sup> Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (see note 47), 98.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 98, 116.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>85</sup> Erine, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 7 January 2011, Gympie.

that people at her workplace did not accept her new headdress after she got married and started to verbally abuse her for covering her hair.

I went to work for one year and the people I worked with – they were the worst ones – they started name calling. And I worked with them for about ten or fifteen years! Before I got married there wasn't a problem. Then I got the *shaschmura*, wore it for a year, and I started getting problems with people I worked with very closely. [...] They all knew I was Old Russian Orthodox, they all knew! They knew I lented and that my Christmas and Easter was different; and they all got it. But when I started wearing the headdress, they freaked out because it gave me a different look. And I said: you knew me before, what is your problem? And they came to my wedding, they saw it all happen. [...] They put me into the same category [like Muslim women] because of my headdress, even though we wore it a bit differently [...] It's just a shame that people are still so ignorant in the 20<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup> century, they don't understand. They don't see that it is a different headdress and colouring. I think it is their fear. I know people calling others towel-heads. That is just really not appropriate and politically incorrect! But even I started to get a few little names, and I couldn't believe it: so these are the people I work with on a daily basis?<sup>86</sup>

Erine was pretty upset telling me about the religious intolerance she experienced at her workplace. "It is a shame," she said. She put off her *shashmura* which symbolised for her another level of respect being a married woman. At the same time she acknowledged that the Old Believers needed to become more flexible in their religious practice "because people are still nasty; even now that we live in a multicultural society – people just can't understand. I don't know why – it is not for me to judge them – but they just don't have the tolerance."<sup>87</sup>

### **Prostrations**

Towards the end of the Easter Service I felt dizzy from the stabbing pain in my neck. This pain spread out through my shoulders, tore down my back and tightened around the waist. My feet were heavy and ached from standing on the same spot of velvet carpet for several hours. My body swayed slightly. I was staring into the flame of the

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<sup>86</sup> Erine, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 7 January 2011, Gympie.

<sup>87</sup> Erine, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 7 January 2011, Gympie.

little beeswax candle in my hand. It had been alight through the night and left stains on the carpet and my skirt. My head was nodding deliriously with the rhythm of the choir chants that became a constant murmur in my ears.

Suddenly there was a movement in my body: a twist around my back, a grasp for the little cloth on the bench behind me, and a turn back to the iconostasis. My hand dropped the little cushion gently onto the floor in front of me. My knees bent until they reached the ground and knelt on the carpet. My waist bent and the weight of my shoulders drew me forward. My right arm reached out until my hand touched the floor, and for a second my forehead touched the cushion on the ground. The *sluzhebnik*, the Old Orthodox service book, described these prostrations as particularly significant for the Old Believers' ritual practice<sup>88</sup>, as "one of the most distinguishing aspects of Orthodox worship":

To make a *bow to the ground*, the standing worshipper makes the Sign of the Cross over his body. When it is completed, he falls on both knees simultaneously to the ground, placing the palms of his hands upon a *podruchnik* (a small decorated square of cloth used to maintain cleanliness of the hands during prayers) on the floor before him; touching his head to the floor, he immediately rises simultaneously from both knees to his original upright position.<sup>89</sup>

I had risen quickly from the floor and my heart was beating faster. I stood upright again and smoothed a wisp of hair back underneath my headscarf. While my mind was delirious and half asleep my body had moved in perfect accordance with the Old Believers' ritual practice. I had done these sequences of prostrations earlier, and in other church services, often self-consciously and aware of my movements and gestures. During this Easter service, however, my body had incorporated the knowledge about this practice which I was not aware of.

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<sup>88</sup> The prostrations during the Lenten prayer for Ephaim of Syria were one of the disputed changes introduced by Patriarch Nikon. Prior to Lent of 1653, an epistle of the patriarch had reduced the prostrations during the reading of the Lenten prayers from seventeen to four. (Uspensky, "The Schism and Cultural Conflict in the Seventeenth Century" (see note 13), 106; Peter Hauptmann, *Rußlands Altgläubige [Russia's Old Ritualists]* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005), 53)

<sup>89</sup> Ciuba et al., *Drevnepravoslavnyi Molitvennik* (see note 3), 337.

Cathrine Bell describes this as the “logic of ritual, a logic embodied in the physical movements of the body and thereby lodged beyond the grasp of consciousness and articulation.”<sup>90</sup> Bodily practices in rituals are not necessarily the result of obedience to rules or conscious intentions. Often they are a consequence of the ways in which bodies are informed by habits and a shared environment. Although I had performed the prostration at the particular point of the liturgy I had not crossed myself before I bent to the floor. It seemed that I had decided not to participate in the Easter Ceremony to that degree. Whereas embodied social knowledge controlled the actions of my body, could I still act and react in my own right and agency?

Bourdieu’s concept of habitus has been criticised for its deterministic emphasis and shortcomings in explaining social change, individual agency and consciousness. Richard Jenkins, for example, criticises Bourdieu for referring over and over again to the unconscious character of practical logic and the existence of bodily dispositions. That made it difficult to know where to place conscious deliberation and awareness in his understanding of practice and habitus.<sup>91</sup> Bourdieu’s own account is that habitus does not simply reproduce practices from social structures, but that it is also a generative principle: habitus is “creative, inventive, but within the limits of its structures”<sup>92</sup>. According to Bourdieu, habitus means that people have a tendency to act in a certain way; it does not ultimately dictate a certain conduct but allows creativity and inspiration. The individual can act in creative ways, whereas the basis of action is

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<sup>90</sup> Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (see note 47), 99.

<sup>91</sup> Richard Jenkins, *Pierre Bourdieu* (London: Routledge, 1992), 77; Also Madeleine Arnot argues that Bourdieu “offers no account of social change in the cultural arena. The cultural reproduction of class and sexual identities appears to be a ‘deep’ unconscious process which, although materially determined, is unlikely to be broken. He seems to discount the possibility of change through recognising one’s own habits of thought, perception and action”. (Madeleine Arnot, *Reproducing Gender? Essays on Educational Theory and Feminist Politics* (London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2002), 49; see also Anthony King, “Thinking with Bourdieu against Bourdieu: A ‘Practical’ Critique of the Habitus,” *Sociological Theory* 18, No. 3 (2000), 417–433; Julie McLeod, “Feminists Re-reading Bourdieu: Old Debates and New Questions about Gender Habitus and Gender Change,” *Theory and Research in Education* 3, No. 1 (2005), 11–30)

<sup>92</sup> Loïc J. D. Wacquant, “Toward a Social Praxeology: The Structure and Logic of Bourdieu’s Sociology,” in *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, ed. Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J. D. Wacquant (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), 19.

rooted in education, cultural memory and social circumstances.<sup>93</sup> Instead of discussing the relation between structural determinism and individual agency in the concept of habitus, I focus on Bourdieu's insistence on the embodiment of social knowledge. I also reflect on the role that the diasporic body plays in the Old Believers' religious practices. How do corporeal dispositions affect and transform these practices and vice versa?

### **The Diasporic Body**

In the Old Believers' diaspora the meaning, form and conduct of certain religious practices were transformed, negotiated and adapted as a result of their migration and settlement in Australia. Regulations such as dress codes and the observance of the church calendar were adjusted to a mostly urban, modern life-style. Religious practices like praying and fasting, however, continued to play a key formative and disciplinary role in the religious lives of my interviewees and their moral orientation.<sup>94</sup> The Australian Old Believers train themselves and more often their bodies in certain codes of behaviour which was to strengthen their moral vigilance, for example, regarding the avoidance of alcohol and drugs.<sup>95</sup> This training scheme affected the bodies of the Old Believers not only by disciplining and cleansing it; it also inculcated certain routines like daily praying schemes or certain eating habits.

Natasha had been struggling with living in two different worlds: one world in which every aspect of her daily life is strictly regulated; and in the other world where she feels free to do whatever she likes. "It's a different lifestyle: going to church or a lifestyle outside of church." I asked Natasha what makes the difference, and she said laughingly: "Drinking and party, that's that lifestyle! And then church, living under God's laws and all that! It's two different lifestyles. For me they are, and I can't seem to find a balance between the two. But I always come back [to church] because that is where

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<sup>93</sup>Jonathan Sterne, "Bourdieu, Technique and Technology," *Cultural Studies* 17, No. 3–4 (2003), 375–376.

<sup>94</sup> Daniel Winchester also highlighted the central role that religious discipline and embodied religious practices play in the Islamic tradition and the making of moral selves. (Winchester, "Embodying the Faith" (see note 75).

<sup>95</sup> Joe Devine and Séverine Deneulin, "Negotiating Religion in Everyday Life: A Critical Exploration of the Relationship between Religion, Choices and Behaviour," *Culture and Religion* 12, No. 1 (2011), 72–73. (see also Michael E. McCullough and Brian L. B. Willoughby, "Religion, Self-Regulation, and Self-Control: Associations, Explanations, and Implications," *Psychological Bulletin* 135, No. 1 (2009), 69–93).

my peace of mind is.” Natasha has been a smoker for many years and she tried to give up her smoking addiction several times, “to do the right thing” as she said. “In my religion I don’t think you can even make it to heaven if you are a smoker, because it’s an empty mission. There is no place for smokers in heaven.” The Old Belief strictly prohibits the use of recreational drugs and smoking is considered even worse than the consumption of alcohol. “Not the smoking is sinful but the addiction. Your body and your soul are addicted to something else, other than God [...] because you are putting that number one in your life whereas God should be number one.” Natasha talked about feeling guilty, anxious and alienated from the church community because she has been a smoker. “It’s been part of my life for a long time, and yes I know I need to let it go, and I can’t seem to do it. There are some times when I would go: yeah, I reckon I can do it, it’s easy but I am struggling with it.”<sup>96</sup> In church Natasha found a way to discipline herself, praying and listening to the Holy Liturgy calmed her down. In church she did not think about having a cigarette.

Religious and ritual practices such as praying, fasting and attending church services do not just form a moral code for the Old Believer community. These practices form and transform the body, they offer ways to discipline oneself and become a “good practicing” and devout Old Believer. Moral and religious dispositions do not only regulate the behaviour of the faithful during ritual performances but also in their everyday lives. Nina said that at funerals it was tradition that the family of the deceased would give some valuables, little gifts or money to the people who attended the memorial service. With these little presents the church community was asked to pray for the deceased. “It might be a mug, a pair of socks, a tea towel, an apron, a *platok*, hankies, all sorts of things. I don’t know where it came from and what you give, but it is actually a common practice.” Nina did not have to be in a church environment to perform the daily practice of praying. Often she would stand in the kitchen and doing the dishes: “I would pull out a tea towel, and I would think: I got that from such and such’s funeral. Actually I would quickly in my head say a small prayer to remember that person.”<sup>97</sup> The common practice of praying for the deceased shows the transposable character and flexibility of the Old Belief’s dispositions: they had sedimented in Nina’s body and could be deployed in a variety of social settings. Her everyday routine trained Nina’s body in religious and moral virtues. It was not so much an objectified discourse

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<sup>96</sup> Natasha, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 23 May 2010, Melbourne.

<sup>97</sup> Nina Nikolaevich, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 11 July 2010, Melbourne.

about the Old Belief's ritual doctrine that transformed the bodies of the faithful in a certain religious practice; daily routines inculcated bodily techniques and habits such as fasting and praying.

Before Matrona would start her reading in the church choir she attuned herself to this liturgical and devotional practice. Matrona explained what to do before attending the church service: "Once you are there, forget about what is going on outside! You have to put all your feelings, your five senses into it!" She emphasised that "before you even start reading, you are supposed to calm down. Take a deep breath, get your thoughts together, and then pay attention to what you are reading"<sup>98</sup>. Before she started her prayers Matrona prepared her body.

We have the five senses, the seeing, the hearing, the touch, smell, all these feelings; we have to calm it all down. And don't rush through the [prayer of] *Bozhe milosti*, do it *smireniem*, means with humility, *sokrushennym serdtsem*, with a clean heart.<sup>99</sup>

Reading and listening to prayers requires attention; it is a performance which involves the mind and the body. Matrona described practices – her breathing and standing – which trained her body to perform according to her religious culture, in devotional reading and listening. These practices constitute a process of embodiment in which she could gain spiritual knowledge and experience. This knowledge and this experience were gained not just by having a body, but through an active embodiment of the ritual and by making oneself receptive to it.<sup>100</sup> This incorporated ritual knowledge had trained Matrona's body according to her religious culture and formed her sensory reception for certain ritual practices. Matrona explained that over time certain words developed a greater spiritual power in her reading of liturgical texts:

I was reading these psalms, and I used to get this absolutely amazing feeling. It would start from [the heart] and then go down through the whole body. It is this very calm, peaceful feeling. That's just so nice, that would do me for the rest of

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<sup>98</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 24 July 2010, Melbourne.

<sup>99</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 24 July 2010, Melbourne.

<sup>100</sup> Julian Holloway, "Make-believe: Spiritual Practice, Embodiment, and Sacred Space," *Environment and Planning A* 35, No.11 (2003), 1966.

the day. Sometimes in certain services, when they would say or read something, I would get that. [...] Maybe it's the sound or a particular word that resonates in the soul.<sup>101</sup>

Matrona described her experience of spiritual listening which involved her body and even more her senses. Matrona's bodily techniques and her ritual practice honed her body's capacities to sensually perceive and spiritually experience the Old Believers' religious practices. These sensory capacities of hearing, seeing or smelling during ritual ceremonies are shaped within a communal worship, a shared liturgical and devotional context.

Matrona mentioned a special prayer in the Holy Liturgy which addresses the ability to truly listen, to see and understand the Word of God. Before anyone might be able to gain a deep and spiritual understanding of these words, one needs to cleanse his or her five senses and become receptive. Matrona referred to a special prayer called the Tenth Prayer after the Holy Communion:

Living Lord, with trembling I give thanks unto Thee, for though Thou art as fire by nature, Thou does not burn but nourishest. Travel, then, throughout all my members effectively, into all my joints, into my heart and inmost parts. Purge and wash away every impurity, and cleanse my five senses.<sup>102</sup>

Matrona explained how the faithful are supposed to sense and feel the meaning of this ritual prayer instead of just focusing on words or other means of communication:

When we get the Holy Communion we have to read this particular prayer. [After the communion] we still have to stand for five or ten minutes and read this particular prayer to thank God. [...] Seeing, hearing, taste, smell and touch, these are the five senses – we also have to engage those five senses when we are standing in church. [...] Some people look at things; some people pick it up better when they hear things. And some people have to actually touch it before they sense it. And the smell is also important. I think that is the reason why we use the *kadilo* [censer]. If they use the right incense [you breathe it in] and he

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<sup>101</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 24 July 2010, Melbourne.

<sup>102</sup> Ciuba et al., *Drevnepravoslavnyi Molitvennik* (see note 3), 325.



[the priest] actually says: May the Holy Spirit be upon you. So he is saying there is supposedly the Holy Spirit in the smoke. So when [the incense] smells good you are actually absorbing – you are taking in the Holy Spirit! [...] How would you put the touch and the taste? I don't know. I haven't worked that out yet. There are different ways of touching. Maybe touch with the heart not so much as the physical touch? [...] To touch with the heart means that you are engaging your heart, not so much the physical touch with your hands.<sup>103</sup>

Matrona's senses were trained to attend to a range of sensory experiences during prayers, rituals and religious practices. Her sensory responses were similar to the responses of other members of the church community, such as Erine's. Erine spoke about the calming effect that traditional church music had on her: "it's the best thing for me because I am auditory, I like to hear." She explained that the combination of tunes, voices, melodies gets to her. "It just does something to me, it just goes straight through me and the energy just starts to fill me up; the vibration and the sound does it for me. And I can come out and lie down, and feel just renewed and recharged."<sup>104</sup> Besides this sonic experience of church music other sensual stimulants had a similar effect. The church ambience was created and enhanced by visual or olfactory stimulants such as icons and the smell of burning incense.

So it has all to do with religion, it all comes back to the basic stuff: the sounds, the smells etc. I love the smell of burning candles. Just their smell brings me back to my childhood, of the good times and the good days. I'm in that nice – I shouldn't say innocent – stage but in that safety capsule. It just brings back good memories, of my childhood and feeling safe.<sup>105</sup>

Erine had incorporated the knowledge of ritual practices since her early childhood. This process was entwined with sensual stimulants like the smell of incense, the kinaesthetic experience of bowing to the ground or the warming light of burning candles. Again, it is the habitus which ensures the active presence of past experiences, of Erine's ritual performances in her childhood.

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<sup>103</sup> Matrona, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 24 July 2010, Melbourne.

<sup>104</sup> Erine, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 7 January 2011, Gympie.

<sup>105</sup> Erine, interviewed by Stefanie Scherr, 7 January 2011, Gympie.

Present ritual practices emerge from past readings of a particular prayer or the lighting of a candle to venerate an icon. Such practices were deposited in Erine's body as schemes of perception, thought and action. Bourdieu calls this system of dispositions – “a present past that tends to perpetuate itself into the future by reactivation in similarly structured practices”.<sup>106</sup> Past experiences tend to reproduce the correct ways of performing a ritual and to ensure its constancy over time. More importantly these experiences allow the continuous sensual perception of religious practices in a changed social and historical setting. The church ritual targets the sensorium of the participants with certain smells, sounds and images. Sensual stimulants enforce the process of internalising and reproducing ritual knowledge. The repeated performance of religiously meaningful postures and gestures also produce a religious sense of awe and solemnity.

The repeated performance of religious practices hones the perceptual capacities and senses of the Old Believers' diasporic bodies; they experience these practices in a meditative, transformative and spiritual dimension. Charles Hirschkind argues that certain religious traditions hone such a set of sensory skills. He describes how emotions, aesthetic appreciation, and states of moral attunement come to structure sensory experiences. He analyses the practice of listening to tape-recorded sermons among Muslims in Egypt as an exercise of ethical self-discipline. The religious practice of sermon listening hones the visceral capacities and the senses of the faithful in a particular form of Muslim piety and enables them to perceive and participate in their religious practice.<sup>107</sup> Hirschkind's argument is not only applicable to the Islamic religious tradition, but also to the Old Believers' diasporic experience. Whereas meaning, form and conduct of ritual practices were likely to be modified and appropriated in the diaspora context, the Old Believers' religious practices continued to be internalised in the bodies of the faithful. A process of repeated enactment trains the bodily techniques and sensory capacities of the faithful in a shared ritual and liturgical context. Whereas ritual forms and religious practice have been adapted to a changed diasporic setting, their culturally honed senses are still able to respond, perceive and experience this practice.

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<sup>106</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 54.

<sup>107</sup> Charles Hirschkind, “The Ethics of Listening: Cassette-Sermon Audition in Contemporary Egypt,” *American Ethnologist* 28, No. 3 (2001), 623–624.

### **The Easter Service Ends**

At the end of the Easter service my understanding, practice and experience of this ritual ceremony had changed. Ronald L. Grimes writes that one “walks away from the ritual having experienced something different. Whatever the ritual is officially said to “do” or “mean”, it will have been a specific personal experience for each of the participants or observers.”<sup>108</sup> I experienced the ritual differently from most of my interviewees, as an observer of its procedure and an interpreter of its meaning. My subjective perception of certain ritual meanings and symbols might have impeded my understanding of them: I was brought up in a Roman Catholic family and my senses were honed in a Christian tradition. Some smells, sounds and movements triggered memories of services and rituals I had attended as a child. These memories were deeply inscribed in my body and often opened ways to participate rather than just observe the Old Believers’ ritual practices. I could recognise qualities of these practices which were shared widely across the different Christian traditions. Most of these rituals were performed and embodied, formalised and repetitive, symbolic and standardised.<sup>109</sup>

I engaged in the Old Believers’ religious and ritual practices only sporadically and for a short time. During two years of participant observation, interview research and fieldwork I did not participate in these practices with the intention of converting to the Old Belief. Over time my continuous participation in ritual performances enhanced my habitual knowledge and embodiment of certain gestures and movements. These rituals affected my body as much as they had an impact on the bodies of others in the church community. We all used our bodies in similar ways, in the same environment and ritual context. Dispositions associated with the Old Belief’s religious and cultural tradition sedimented in our bodies and inculcated particular ways of sensually perceiving and experiencing its ritual ceremonies.

Rather than presenting the Old Believers’ religious practice as a dogmatic discourse or a cognitive endeavour, in this chapter, I have focused on the sensuousness, perception and embodiment of its ritual practice. We cannot divide the body, the mind and the spirit in our thinking about religious practices. Paying attention to internalised ritual

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<sup>108</sup> Gerholm, “On Ritual” (see note 63), 195.

<sup>109</sup> Ronald L. Grimes, *Ritual Criticism: Case Studies in Its Practice, Essays on Its Theory* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1990), 13–15.

knowledge and bodily dispositions, however, deepens our understanding of religious lives in the diaspora. These lives reveal the contingency of dispositions and bodily adaptations; they put into question the inculcation of invariant religious knowledge, practices and dogmatic norms into the objectified mind. The body has significance as an active agent in ritual practices as the individual and ritualised body memorises, performs, experiences and perceives. Traditional ritual practices produce a particular set of sensory and perceptive skills on which the actions, objects, and knowledge that constitute these traditions depend. Ritual participants attempt to sustain and activate these sensory and bodily conditions because they allow them to experience and perceive the spiritual dimension of their practices. In this way, traditional ritual practices stay viable within changed historical, social and diasporic contexts without denying representational qualities of traditional forms such as stability and conventionality.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Hirschkind, "Ethics of Listening" (see note 107), 624.

## Conclusion

The Old Believers' migration to Australia has so far been subsumed into larger migratory movements, such as the Russian refugees from Europe who were resettled in Australia after the Second World War. Other accounts mentioned the Old Believers as part of the White Russian migrants from Communist China, who arrived in Australia during the 1950s and 1960s. These generalising views on large-scale migrant movements present the Old Believers as a small and homogenous religious sect, which is part of a larger Russian migrant community. Highly descriptive accounts of Russian immigration to Australia draw a picture of the Old Believer diaspora in terms of migration and settlement patterns, as well as the success of integration and assimilation policies. These accounts neglect two aspects: the motivations, acts, decisions, processes and trajectories that constitute individual migrant journeys; as well as the establishment of an Australian Old Believer diaspora that differs significantly from the Russian migrant community. Such generalised views deny us a closer look at the migrant journeys of a religious group which shares a century-long history of displacement and expulsion.

One key question left unanswered by the research literature is: to what extent does the Australian Old Believer diaspora identify with or contest the inscribed meanings and histories of their migration. The settlement experience of most post-war immigrants in Australia, like the Old Believers, is generally described as a story of success. Australia is presented as the 'lucky country' which offered its newly arrived immigrants religious freedom, social security and financial prosperity. Whereas many of my interviewees acknowledged the prosperous living conditions Australia offered them, they challenged assumptions of an easy transition or assimilation into their host-society. Many pointed out that the Old Believers' settlement in Australia had a very detrimental effect on their diaspora community. A free, modern and consumption orientated Australian way of life supposedly caused alienation, especially of the younger generation of Old Believers, from their religion and the shrinking of their communities.

My thesis views the Australian Old Believers as a small religious migrant community that is part of a globally dispersed diaspora. It focuses on their migratory movement during the second half of the twentieth century, which leads them from Communist

China to their resettlement country. Although the Australian diaspora conveys a sense of shared religious tradition, cultural heritage and migration experience, each individual migrant journey is characterised by its own particularities and histories. Central to this study are the individual meanings that the Old Believers attach to their migrant paths and religious lives, as well as the interpretations, memories and identity formations which are collectively shared within their diaspora. My thesis also takes into account the political, social and historical context in which my interviewees' interpretations of their migrant past and diasporic presence are set. The meanings that the Old Believers make of their migration and their diasporic living are highly contested and ambivalent. For some of my interviewees their settlement in Australia signifies the end of the Old Believers' century-long pilgrimage and displacement from other countries. They describe Australia as a refuge from political and religious persecution, as the lucky country which offers new possibilities for a prosperous living, better education and the revival of their church communities. For other Old Believers their settlement in Australia precipitated the demise of their Russian cultural traditions, as well as the dissolution and decay of their religious community. They spoke about losing their traditional lifestyle to an individualised, urban and consumption orientated Australian way of life, and struggling with the alienation of the younger generation from their religious community, its beliefs and cultural heritage.

Imaginations of an ancestral Russian homeland form and inform my interviewees' interpretations of their century-long church history. These imaginaries establish a sense of shared religious traditions and a collective memory of the Old Believers' religious and migrant past. In the imagination of their religious past many of my interviewees position themselves in a spatial and temporal distance from their ideals of a Russian homeland and the origins of their religious and cultural traditions. Historical imaginations, such as the Old Believers' schism from the Russian Orthodox Church, constitute a meaning making process which refers to the past; but these imaginations also perpetuate into their diasporic present and future. Social imaginations claim the continuity of a Russian Orthodox heritage and cultural tradition in the Old Believers' present life in Australia. Some of the meanings that my interviewees attach to their present diasporic living in Australia are imaginations of a united Russian Orthodox Church, of a harmonious and close-knit diaspora community and a traditional and deeply religious lifestyle. At the same time my interviewees anticipate the continuous fragmentation and possible extinction of their religious community in the near future. Imagined ideals of a homogenous Old Believer community, in which everyone shares the same religious beliefs, practices and lifestyle, are often projected on their present

diaspora community. These projections point at my interviewees' social desires and anxieties, as well as the social and cultural changes that their diaspora undergoes.

The Old Believers' memories of their former settlement and their emigration from China build on experiences which are widely shared by the first migrant generation and transmitted to following and future generations. These memories of place are very ambivalent and contested. They convey a sense of emplacement and a deep emotional attachment to their former settlements in China. At the same time these memories speak of the Old Believers' geographic and cultural displacement, as well as their detachment from place and disconnection from any political and geographic territory. My interviewees remember their life and settlement in China in various contexts, in which their memories of places in China overlap with memories of other places and times, such as their present diaspora community in Australia. Happy childhood memories of their former living in the Chinese countryside could for many of my interviewees easily shift to memories of state persecution, expropriation and violence. The perception and experience, the belonging to and disconnection from places of their former settlement in China are crucial to the Old Believers' diasporic memory, and their identity formation. Memories of place and displacement guide the Old Believers' continuous negotiation of dis- and emplacement in their Australian diaspora.

The Old Believers' migration to Australia was largely the result of international refugee resettlement efforts which sought to solve the temporary problem of a large group of European refugees, escaping Communist China. It is important to acknowledge the bureaucratic procedures and administrative constraints that were imposed on the Old Believers' migratory movement to the West. Changing immigration and resettlement policies determined their migratory movement, as well as the involvement of several governments, international and non-governmental organisations. However, the Old Believers' migrant journey to Australia has also been shaped by the agency, decisions and choices that my interviewees took. Many migrant families considered various options of repatriation and resettlement. They took deliberate action and tried to optimise the possibilities that their emigration from China had to offer. My interviewees made sense of the decisions and actions taken during their migration, pondering over the expected outcomes of their migrant journey, the fulfilled hopes and disappointments brought by it. Individual migrant choices, the public discourse and the different political actors involved in this international resettlement project contributed different meanings to the trajectories of my interviewees' migration. These contested

and ambiguous interpretations show that the Old Believers' migratory movement cannot be conceptualised as a linear process; it does not follow a predetermined trajectory or anticipated outcome and destination.

The migration of thousands of European refugees from Communist China has not received much academic research attention, although it constitutes a significant part of worldwide migratory movements after the Second World War and of Australia's post-war immigration history. Australia's post-war immigration history has put emphasis on the assisted passage and non-refugee immigration from Britain and continental Europe. Accounts of Australia's refugee resettlement efforts in the post-war era have largely portrayed the intake of refugees from war-torn Europe which was to fill labour shortages and increase the country's population. Thousands of refugees from Soviet satellite states, fleeing anti-communist uprisings in their home countries, also found recognition in Australia's post-war immigration history. Largely ignored by academic research, the Old Believers represent a comparatively small refugee group. Nonetheless, they constitute a particularly interesting part of Australia's post-war refugee settlement scheme and immigration history. The UNHCR considered many Old Believer families to fall under the "hard core" refugee category, which was difficult to resettle. These families often were very poor, comprised of elderly and sick people. The Old Believers became the first large group of refugees that Australia admitted for resettlement, although they did not meet the strict selection criteria for age and health. This development in Australia's refugee resettlement policies, during the 1950s and 1960s, affected following refugee intakes and resettlement projects. Australia's response to the plea of thousands of European refugees from China must be read in the context of a growing national and international interest in responding to refugee problems that emerged after the Second World War. A comparison between different resettlement efforts that the international community made for refugee groups from Europe and Asia can reveal in more detail the factors, motivations and decisions that guided and formed Australia's immigration policy and history in the post-war era.

The actions and decisions that my interviewees took during their migrant journey contributed to a variety of individual migrant paths and to the unique settlement pattern of the Australian Old Believer diaspora. Whereas Old Believer communities, which have also emigrated from China in the 1950s and 1960s, formed large farmer colonies in South and North America, most Australian Old Believers settled in the suburbs of Melbourne and Sydney. There they lived together with a growing number of other immigrants from different cultural backgrounds and nationalities. Australia's



assimilation and integration policies contributed to their exposure to a modern and individualised Australian way-of-life. It encouraged the scattered settlement pattern of their diaspora. The Australian Old Believers established three different church communities which vary in their size, denomination and ritual practice. The fact that the Australian Old Believers are not all closely related to a central church hierarchy contributes to the fragmentation of their diaspora. The Old Believers' identification as a homogenous and unified religious community in Australia is also challenged by their adaptation to a changed cultural and social setting. Negotiations concerning the use of English as a liturgical language, dress codes and other religious practices become a central point of contestation within the different Old Believer communities and between generations. My analysis of diasporic identity formations suggests that the Old Believers in Australia continuously approach and distance themselves from their host society, from other migrant groups and their own religious community. My thesis has particularly emphasised the contested identity formations, negotiations and adaptations that my interviewees made in regards to their religious practice.

The Old Believers' religious lives have been challenged, changed and affected by their migration experience. Tensions emerge from the discrepancies between the Old Belief's often restrictive religious dogma and ritual practice, and individual choices that my interviewees make in favour of an urban, modern and Australian way of living. Many of the Old Belief's ritual practices and religious traditions have survived in the changed social and cultural setting of the Australian diaspora. The dispositions which are attached to the Old Believers' religious and cultural traditions have been incorporated during the continuous performance of church rituals and the routine of their daily prayers. However, the habituated practice of rituals and church ceremonies also shows that the religious lives of my interviewees are also prone to individual adaptations and ritual variation. My focus on the embodiment of ritual and religious practices points at the contestation and adjustments that the Old Believers make in regards to their religious lives without denying the continuity and legacy of their religious tradition. Instead of conceptualising the Old Believers' religious beliefs and practices as unaltered and invariable, I focus on the lived experience and individual meanings that my interviewees attach to their religious lives.

By focusing on religion as a dominant factor that shapes and affects migrant journeys and identities, my thesis draws attention to an overlooked aspect of migration and diaspora studies. My thesis points out that the Old Believers identify with their Russian Orthodox tradition, and share a core of ritual practices and dogmatic beliefs. At the

same time certain interpretations and meanings about their ritual traditions and religious culture are contested within their Australian diaspora. Variations of and negotiations about ritual forms and religious beliefs stand in conflict with the Old Believers' religious dogma, which is supposed to be preserved in its traditional form, to remain unaltered and unchanged. My analysis adds to an understanding of religiously motivated migratory movements, and points at religion as a decisive factor for actions and decision taken during these migrant journeys. The Old Believers' religious belief is not only part of their migrant past in regards to the political persecution and oppression they suffered as a religious minority. The Old Believers' belief system and religious practice also affected decisions about their migrant journey and acted as a moral compass during their settlement process. Their religion has also informed and supported the identity formation of a distinct Old Believer diaspora community in Australia.

My thesis challenges assumptions about migration that describe a linear process, whereby migrants move between a country of origin and a country of resettlement. Diaspora studies have largely concentrated on the 'homeward looking' of immigrant communities, the symbolic, economic and political ties which connect migrants with their country of origin. Research on the Old Believer diaspora, like on many other religious migrant communities, has largely focused on models of acculturation and assimilation. These studies often give generalised views of the approach migrant communities take towards their host-countries. They describe the demise as well as the attempts to preserve a certain religious culture and tradition. My analysis challenges such generalised views that merely focus on the homeland or the host-country as a reference point for contested belongings and identity formations. Instead, it takes into account the multiple meanings and interpretations that migrants make of their migrant past, their religious history and cultural traditions, their settlement experience and their diaspora identity.

I suggest a view of individual migrant lives which speaks of contested meaning making processes and shifting identity formations. The Old Believers continue to imagine their religious past, an idealised Russian homeland, their present diasporic living and visions for a future Old Believer diaspora in Australia. The Old Believers' migrant memories are multilayered and unfixed; they relate to various spatial and temporal contexts. My interviewees' migration experience constitutes a continuous negotiation, identification and adaptation process which refers to the cultural and religious traditions, as well as the Old Believers' diasporic past and present. This complex process of negotiation,

remembering and identification does not support a conceptualisation of the Old Believers' migration as a linear process which either focuses on the host- or the home-country.

It is important to see the identity formations and interpretations that relate to the Old Believers' migration experience in their historical context. Most research on transnational migrant communities concentrates on present cultural ties, international migrant networks and social settings. This focus leaves aside the historical context in which diaspora communities are established, as well as the sense that these communities make of their migrant past, their cultural heritage and religious traditions. My thesis does not focus solely on the present diasporic living and settlement of a migrant community in a host country where its religious tradition and culture is marginalised. It broadens the analysis of an immigrant religion to questions about the historical context of the Old Believers' migratory movement, the trajectory of individual migrant paths, and the approach that religiously motivated migrants take towards their host-society.

Family ties, a shared migrant experience and religious tradition connect the Old Believers in Australia with a larger transnational migrant movement, and a global diaspora community that spreads out across North and South America, to the Antipodes and Eurasia. Communication channels, travel, inter-marriages, and common church hierarchies connect these various Old Believer communities. My analysis has fleshed out how religious lives are lived in the Australian diaspora; how diasporic religious practices are negotiated, incorporated and adapted across generations, geographies, immigration policies and migrant communities. However, my thesis has focused on a small part of the Old Believers' global diaspora; it offers only a selective and partial view on their transnational migration movements, ties and networks. My research concentrates largely on the religious lives of my interviewees, and provides only a glimpse of other factors and structures that shape their diasporic lives. The formation of the Old Believers' globally dispersed diaspora is, however, more complex. Economic motivations have shaped the Old Believers' decision to emigrate and their settlement options as much as social relations and family ties. Further studies into return migration, from the Old Believers' diaspora back to the Soviet Union or post-socialist Russia, could also answer questions about the extent to which symbolic ties, ethnic identities and cultural traditions inform these migratory movements and diaspora identities.

Most research on the globally dispersed Old Believer diaspora describes the migratory movement and settlement of one particular migrant community in their respective host-country. A comparison of several diaspora communities would extend my limited views on the particularities of the Australian Old Believers diaspora. It could point to the similarities and discrepancies between various settlement options, identity formations and migrant paths. A comparative study could also show how Old Believer communities in the diaspora developed in the light of different immigration policies, as well as the local, cultural and social settings of their respective host-countries. This focus on a transnational Old Believer diaspora could broaden our views on singular and isolated religious migrant communities. We could also gain a better understanding of the role that religion plays in the migrant movements and identity formation of a global diaspora community. This move from an in-depth case study to a comparative perspective of different migrant communities and global migrant movements would add complexity and a higher degree of generalisation. A key question that needs to be answered is: how do the Old Believers practice their religion locally, as well as in various globally dispersed communities, while sharing a common religious tradition and history of migration. In my thesis I have taken a first step in addressing this question, and contributed to our understanding of the Old Believers' lived experience of migration and their religious practice in the Australian diaspora. More importantly, I have analysed the contested, shared and ambiguous meanings that my interviewees have attached to their migration and settlement experience, as well as the identity formations of their diaspora community.

## Glossary

<i>beglopopovtsy</i>	fugitive-priestly
Belokrinitsa	Church hierarchy established by the Bosnian bishop Amvrosii Popovich (1791–1863), at the monastery of Belaia Krinitza in 1859.
<i>bezpopovtsy</i>	priestless
<i>braga</i>	home-made wine
Chasovennye	Derived from <i>chasovnia</i> (chapel); designation for de-facto priestless group of Old Believers
<i>cheremukha</i>	birch cherry
<i>chulan</i>	pantry, lumber room
<i>dvoeperstie</i>	two-fingered (sign of the cross)
<i>edinovertsy</i>	Unified Believers
<i>gorka</i>	slide
Kharbintsy	residents of Harbin; Old Believers who have settled in Harbin
<i>knigii</i>	(religious) books
<i>Kruzhok Revnitelei Blagochestiia</i>	Zealots of Piety
<i>kulich</i>	traditional Russian Easter cake
<i>marshrutka</i>	share taxi
<i>mir</i>	world; village community; peace
<i>miropomasanie</i>	chrismation, anointment with blessed oil
<i>narod</i>	people; nation
<i>nastavnik</i>	preceptor of priestless Old Believer community
<i>otchestvo</i>	a person's middle name that is derived from his or her father's first name
<i>platok</i>	headscarf
Pokrov	Marian feast that celebrates the Intercession of the Theotokos or the Protecting Veil of Godmother Mary
<i>podruchnik</i>	square of cloth used to maintain cleanliness of the hands during prayers
<i>pogany</i>	unclean, foul; pagan

<i>pogreb</i>	cellar
<i>popovtsy</i>	priestly
<i>postnyi</i>	lenten
<i>prasnik</i>	(church) holiday
<i>prichastie</i>	eucharistic bread
<i>raskol</i>	schism in the Russian Orthodox Church
<i>raskol'niki</i>	schismatics
<i>rubashka</i>	long-sleeve shirt with high collar
<i>sapogi</i>	winter felt boot with covering for the shins
<i>sarafan</i>	sleeve-less tunic women's dress
<i>shashmura</i>	close-fitted cap which covers hair of married Old Believer women; also known as <i>kichka</i> or <i>kokoshnik</i>
<i>sluzhebnyk</i>	Russian Orthodox service book
<i>sobornost'</i>	conciliarism
Starobriadtsy	Old Ritualists
Starovery, Starovertsy	Old Believers
Stoglav	Hundred-Chapters (Council)
<i>troeperstie</i>	three-fingered (sign of the cross)
Tsintsianty	Old Believers who have settled in Xinjiang
Turchany	Old Believers who have settled in Turkey
<i>valenki</i>	felt boot

**List of Interviewees**

Aleksey Kalugin, Gympie.

Nina Tasev, Melbourne.

Alexander Polorotoff, Sydney.

Pavel Chern'shev, Sydney.

A. Shashkoff, Melbourne.

P. Krasnoff, Melbourne.

Elisey Kalugin, Gympie.

Tim Kraskov, Melbourne.

Erine Ward, Gympie.

V. Kalugin, Sydney.

Fyodor Belonogoff, Brisbane.

Vlas Seletkov, Gympie.

G. Galenkov, Melbourne.

G. Polorotov, Sydney.

Aksenia (name changed), Melbourne.

J. Krasnoff, Melbourne.

Anastasia (name changed), Melbourne.

John Koudrin, Sydney.

Dimitrii (name changed), Sydney.

Masha Krasnoff, Melbourne.

Nikolai (name changed), Sydney.

Matrona Chernishov, Melbourne.

Pologia (name changed), Gympie.

Natasha Morozoff, Melbourne.

Sergei (name changed), Gympie.

Nina (Nikolaevich) Kraskov, Melbourne.

Vladim (name changed), Melbourne.

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## Appendix

### Ethics Clearance and Statement of Compliance

To: Prof Klaus Neumann ISR/ Ms Stefanie Scherr

Dear Prof Neumann,

**Re: SUHREC 2009/065: Transgenerational Transmission of Migration Experiences in Russian Migrant Families**

Proposed Duration FROM: 01/05/2009

Proposed Duration TO 31/12/2012

Ethical review of the above project protocol was undertaken on behalf of Swinburne's Human Research Ethics Committee (SUHREC) by SUHREC Subcommittee (SHESC4) at its meeting held on 17 April 2009, the outcome of which is as follows.

**Approved** subject to the following addressed to Chair (or delegate's) satisfaction:

1. A8: Add Dr Vivienne Waller's name to Section A;
  2. A9 Future Use of Date: states "No" however elsewhere in protocol (D3) the intention is to publish;
  3. B(c):
    - (i) explanation given is not satisfactory,
    - (ii) participants should be invited to have their photo taken;
  4. C3: Need to clarify what is meant by "medical conditions" also not reflected in Consent Information Statement;
  5. C9: Issue of interviews being conducted in private domains – Researcher need to advise CI prior to commencement of interview and at conclusion for safety purposes.
  6. D2: No mention is made of the photographs;
  7. D3(b): Can the participant have their identity removed? Please clarify this.
  8. Thematic Interview Schedule: please proofread, e.g. "marital status", "ect."
  9. Consent Information Statement: needs to be more precise.
  10. Russian Personal Information Sheet and Consent Form: need editing.
- Subcommittee is happy to provide corrections.

[...]

Yours sincerely  
 Kaye Goldenberg  
 Administrative Officer (Research Ethics),  
 Swinburne Research, Swinburne University of Technology

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All conditions pertaining to the ethics clearance have been satisfied.

Sincerely

Stefanie Scherr