

# “SPIRITUAL AND MORAL EDUCATION” IN RUSSIAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS: CONSTRUCTING A NEO-TRADITIONALIST IDENTITY

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## **Abstract**

The article examines the problems of teaching religion in post-Soviet Russia public schools which has become an important part of the national educational politics since the 2000s. Teaching religion is implemented in a number of compulsory and optional school subjects united under the name of spiritual and moral education and based on the so called national traditional values, such as patriotism, traditional religions, family and so on. I analyze spiritual and moral education as conducive to creating a very specific state ideology, which can be characterized as neotraditionalist, the main components of which are great-power ambitions, ethno-nationalism and Russian Orthodoxy. I draw special attention to the problem of patriarchy, family, and gender roles as important components of the ideology of neotraditionalism. The objective of the article is to show how the ideological principles of neotraditionalism are embodied in methodological materials and textbooks used in the religion-related courses and what types of identities – civic, religious, and gender – they construct.

**Keywords:** spiritual and moral education, teaching religion, identity politics, de-secularization, neotraditionalism, Russian Orthodox Church identity, Ontario

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## **Introduction**

In February 2018, I happened to take part in a round table discussion on the problems of teaching religion in Russian public schools. The event was organized by the Center for Prevention of Religious and Ethnic Extremism, which had been created a short time ago at the Moscow State Pedagogical University. Educators, religious scholars, psychologists, members of the Orthodox University and the Islamic Center discussed whether the existing school course on religion was effective in preventing religious extremism and what could be done to improve the curriculum. The speakers

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appealed to the statistics showing the steady increase in conflicts and crimes committed on the basis of ethnic and religious intolerance, as well as the decrease in the age of the perpetrators (up to 10-12 years) and agreed that "it was necessary to develop concrete and measurable ways to reduce the level of ethno-religious tensions and xenophobia".

My proposal to apply the international, primarily European, experience of teaching religion in public schools and the principles of multicultural education was declined by the round table participants: "The European model means that everything is allowed. What did it lead to? We don't see any Anglo-Saxons in the central streets of London today and not a single Frenchman, a white man, at Montmartre". It was also pointed out that according to the recommendations of the Council of Europe on multicultural education, homophobia was condemned along with xenophobia, while "homosexuality is absolutely impossible for our values, our religious traditions and our mentality". The Director of the Center, a retired Major-General and former official of the Interior Ministry's department for combating crimes in the sphere of high technology, stated in conclusion that to resolve the problem of youth extremism they were going to work in close cooperation with the security services: The Federal Security Service, the Ministry of the Interior, and the Public Prosecutor's Office.

The case suggests that teaching religion was associated by the speakers with particular expectations and qualifications. First, they consider the course in religion as a way to combat extremism and a matter of national security. Second, they reject the concept of human rights and refer to the concept of *traditional values* related to racial and cultural intolerance and homophobia. The speakers seemed to articulate the views expressed by the leaders of the educational and religious establishments in Russia who have often linked national security and teaching religion as a form of *spiritual security* (Danilyuk, Kondakov, & Tishkov, 2009:17; Metropolitan Hilarion, 2018; Patriarch Kirill, 2016). Lisovskaya (2016, 2017) has already noticed this close connection between security and teaching religion in the discourse of representatives of the Russian authorities.

## Objectives

I will analyze a new subject area in Russian school education - "spiritual and moral education" (the Russian version of teaching religion) - as a tool for constructing a post-Soviet Russian identity and as an important arena for identity politics. The program of spiritual and moral education includes compulsory ("Fundamentals of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics" or FRCSE) and elective (for example, "Moral Foundations of Family Life" or MFFL) courses.

The ideology of teaching religion in the post-Soviet Russian public schools have been already examined by a number of researchers (Mitrokhin, 2000, 2004, 2005; Glanzer, 2005; Halstead, 1994; Willems, 2007; Lisovskaya and Karpov, 2010; Shnirelman, 2011, 2012, 2017; Köllner, 2016; Lisovskaya, 2016; Lisovskaya, 2017). It was shown that the introduction of religion-related courses is considered a visible embodiment of church-state relations, when the attempt to implement a model of church-state separation ultimately failed and "the regime increasingly drew upon the country's traditional religion not only as a source of legitimacy, but also for political support" (Marsh 2013: 20).

I agree with the authors who suggested that teaching religion is conducive to creating a very specific state ideology, which can be characterized as neotraditionalist, the main components of which are great-power ambitions, ethno-nationalism and Russian Orthodoxy (Willems, 2007; Lisovskaya, 2016, 2017). My study is a continuation of this research tradition. Additionally, I want to draw attention to the problem of patriarchy, family, and gender roles as important components of the ideology of

neotraditionalism. My objectives are to put these assumptions to an empirical test and to show how the ideological principles of neotraditionalism are embodied in methodological materials and textbooks used in the religion-related courses and what types of identities – civic, religious, and gender – they construct.

Firstly, I will sketch out the brief history of religion teaching in the post-Soviet Russian public schools. In this article, I will deal with the role played by the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) in the introduction of spiritual and moral education and the contradictions caused the desire of the power elite to combine two different approaches, secular and religious. The next part of the paper will analyze three kinds of identities constructed in the textbooks “Fundamentals of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics” and “Moral Foundations of Family Life”: civic identity and *patriotism*, religious identity and *spiritual values*, and, finally, gender identity and *family values*.

### Theoretical Framework

In order to frame the introduction of *spiritual and moral education* into the system of Russian public schooling, I reference the concept of “identity politics”, which some scholars regard as rather controversial due to its ambiguity and inconsistency. Some critics fear that this concept “is prone to *essentialism*” (Heyes, 2016), while others argue that close attention to social subunits inherent in this approach prevents the understanding of national values (Howard, 2014: 149). It is worth noting, however, that some authors find the concept of “identity politics” useful and convenient with regard to the Russian context. They apply it almost exclusively in relation to the state and power elite, since there is the lack of discernible identity politics on the part of Russian civil society (Malinova, 2015; Morozov, 2009; Gudkov, 2002). The concept of identity politics allows us to analyze ways of constructing commonality among individuals within the state, as well as the ideological attitudes and practical steps undertaken by political actors.

Despite the fact that the Russian power elite has attached great importance to identity politics throughout the post-Soviet period (as can be inferred from the particular attention to school history courses and introduction of new subjects aimed at patriotic education), it has been largely unsuccessful (Gudkov & Dubin, 2007: 21; Drobizheva, 2008: 74; Morozov, 2009; Malinova, 2015). Malinova, a researcher in post-Soviet memory politics, notes that identity politics built on the ruins of the former Soviet identity has been extremely eclectic, combining elements of opposing semantic systems in the absence of their meaningful reinterpretation. It is noteworthy that a variety of terms have been used to refer to the Russian community, e.g. “multinational people of the Russian Federation”, “Russians”, “Russian people”, “citizens” and so on. Thus, more than 20 years since the collapse of the Soviet Union, there is still no certain answer to the key question, “What to call ourselves?” (Malinova, 2015: 6).

The issue of a new Russian identity should be considered in the context of a broad discussion about the changing role of religion in the modern world and the process of desecularization (Berger, 1999, 2002; Karpov, 2012), which manifests itself, in particular, in the return of religion to the public space and the erosion of religious and secular boundaries. The division between political and social desecularization, proposed by B. Turner (2010), is important for better understanding the situation in Russia, where Orthodoxy has become an influential public religion even while Russian society remains predominantly secular. As noted by many authors, Russian Orthodox Christians are characterized by a special *cultural-religious* identity: “Orthodox by culture” or “belonging without believing” (Agadjanian, 2000; Dubin, 2014: 187-188). Lisovskaya and Karpov described this specific process of religion’s return to the Russian society as “a case of inconsistent and contested desecularization from above” (Lisovskaya & Karpov, 2010; Lisovskaya, 2017: 312). The authors also referred to this type of identity

as *ethnodoxy*, which “rigidly links a group’s ethnic identity to its dominant religion and consequently tends to view other religions as potentially or actually harmful to the group’s unity and well-being and, therefore, seeks protected and privileged status for the group’s dominant faith”. In Russia, *ethnodoxy* manifests itself in the interplay between the Russian ethnic and Orthodox Christian identities and defines “the ways in which ethnicity and faith merge in the imagination of large masses of ordinary Russians” (Karpov, Lisovskaya & Barry, 2012: 652).

The introduction of *spiritual and moral education* “has heralded the supremacy of the neotraditionalist and neo-imperial paradigm” (Lisovskaya, 2017: 328). I understand neotraditionalism as the “deliberate revival and revamping of old culture, practices, and institutions for use in new political contexts and strategies”. Neotraditions can also serve as especially useful tools to consolidate group identity in circumstances of rapid and confusing social change and critique of “high modernity” (Encyclopedia of Governance, 2007: 599-600).

The concept “neotraditionalism” in the Russian context is often used to describe “the increasingly conservative primitivization of political life, the process of institutional disintegration and primitive mobilization” and is opposed to the phenomenon of “a *traditionalizing modernization* (*italics mine*) through which the mechanisms of innovation mimic the restoration of tradition, and the new acquires life only by “restoring” a lost past” (Gudkov, 1998: 61-62). According to Gudkov, Russian neotraditionalism includes the myth of the great heroic past and the “rebirth” of Russia, anti-Westernization, isolationism, and, accordingly, the revitalization of the enemy image. The latter refers to the simplification and conservation of reduced ideas about a person and their social reality (Gudkov, 2002: 129).

I suggest that a *neotraditionalist* paradigm has been revitalized and promoted through the textbooks of *spiritual and moral education*. I am going to analyze the course materials and the identity types through the prism of neotraditionalism. Previous research and content analyses of textbooks in history and religious cultures has already pointed to the values of nationalism, patriotism, and militarism (Willems, 2007; Lisovskaya; Shnirelman, 2011, 2012, 2017; Ozhiganova, 2016). I will wrap up my framework by briefly acknowledging that in existing research the values of nationalism and patriotism have been found and discussed. I hope to add new details to this discussion. However, I see my contribution in examining gender and family values as a manifestation of neotraditionalism in education.

### **Materials and method of analysis**

The article focuses on the textbooks of two school subjects: FRCSE (compulsory) and MFFL (optional). FRCSE is studied in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade (average pupils’ age is 9-10). This course includes six optional “modules:” Orthodox Culture, Islamic Culture, Buddhist Culture, Judaic Culture, Secular Ethics and the World Religious Cultures. Accordingly, there are sets of six textbooks for all modules. These textbooks are included on the Federal List of School Textbooks approved by the Ministry of Education. Most schools (83.5%) use the textbooks by the publishing house Prosveshchenie, while 9% of textbooks are published by Drofa, and about 6% are published by others, Russkoe Slovo being the largest among them. The new versions of the textbook *Fundamentals of Orthodox culture* by Alla Borodina (2012), which has received a sharply negative expert assessment (Mitrokhin, 2000, 2005; Shnirelman, 2011, 2012, 2017; Ozhiganova, 2016), are printed now by the publishing house Russkoe Slovo and included on the Federal List. The Publishing Project of Borodina (under the patronage of archpriest Alexander Shargunov, a well-known Moscow priest and

professor at the Moscow Theological Academy) edits a whole series of textbooks, methodological handbooks, and so on.

The textbooks for the subject MFFL are not included in the Federal List but have the approval of the Synodal Department of Religious Education and Catechesis of the Russian Orthodox Church. This subject is elective and introduced into the school program for the pupils in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades. The study materials include textbooks, reading books, teacher's books, and a set of CDs.

I also use the most important methodological materials on religions' teaching, such as *The Concept of Spiritual and moral development and education of personality of a Russian citizen* (2009), *Methodical recommendations for the executive authorities of the subjects of the Russian Federation on improving the process of implementing the Integrated Training Course, Fundamentals of religious cultures and secular ethics, and the subject area Fundamentals of the spiritual and moral culture of the peoples of Russia* (2018).

The concept of *traditional national values* has gained exceptional popularity in Russian politics in recent years. These values of *patriotism, citizenship, family, work*, and *traditional Russian religions* are listed in the document, "The concept of spiritual and moral development and education of personality of a Russian citizen", which is a methodological basis for the state educational standard. In my work, I analyze how these values are described in the textbooks of *spiritual and moral education*. I studied the full content of textbooks in order to find mention of these values and topics related to them: the image of the Motherland, the image of the state, examples of patriotic behavior, national identity, examples of religious practice, religious or moral behavior, manifestations of traditional values, gender roles, images of the family and role-playing family behavior.

### **A brief history and the main contradictions of teaching religion in the post-Soviet Russian public schools**

According to the Constitution, Russia is a secular state: "Religious associations are separated from the state and are equal before the law" (Constitution, Ch. 14, p. 2). Thus, public schools should not implement instruction in religion in the form of religious indoctrination. Nevertheless, with the initiative of the ROC, the Orthodox teaching (titled as "Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture") was introduced into public schools during the late 1980s and early 1990s. These classes were officially excluded from the school curriculum in 2009, due to the introduction of the new Federal Educational Standards in which the regional educational component was canceled. However, they continued to be taught in some regions, in particular, in Belgorod and Tambov regions (Pronina, 2017).

A new subject – FRCSE – was introduced in 2009 and was taught as experimental in some regions for two years. Then, in 2012, compulsory classes on FRCSE were introduced into school curricula throughout the country as a Federal educational component. This course includes six optional modules: Orthodox Culture, Islamic Culture, Buddhist Culture, Judaic Culture, Secular Ethics, and World Religious Cultures. According to the "Order of the module selection", worked out by the Ministry of Education, parents need to choose one of the modules for their children and schools must provide teaching of all selected modules even if some of them are selected only by one pupil. Pupils study FRCSE only in the fourth grade of primary school, one hour in a week. Grades in this subject are not revealed.

When considering teaching religion in Russia it is important to keep in mind that, firstly, its concept was predominantly developed by the ROC, and, secondly, that the ROC has an ambitious project to expand the religion-related courses to all school

grades and to all state educational institutions from kindergarten to high school (Glanser 2005; Lisovskaya & Karpov 2010).

The concept of reforming the system of education in secondary schools was outlined in 2007 by the Moscow Patriarchate Administrator, Metropolitan Kliment (Kapalin) of Kaluga and Borovsk, in his letter to A. Fursenko, then Minister of Education. The letter contained a proposal to create a new educational area "Spiritual and Moral Culture" with the mandate to study one of the so-called traditional religions of Russia (Orthodoxy, Islam, Buddhism and Judaism) and Secular Ethics as a "subject of non-religious ethical content, focused on the needs of the non-religious part of Russian society." It was assumed that pupils had to study the religious tradition of their families; thus, comparative religious studies were never intended:

The school is obliged to give pupils a systematic knowledge of religion in accordance with the creed that they adhere to in the family. If such a course represents all religions, it will be simply an encyclopedia of religions, it will not be able to solve the task of spiritual and moral education of schoolchildren. The consequence of such worldview 'unscrupulousness' will be the education of indifference to the issues of spiritual life and moral relativism (Metropolitan Kliment, 2007).

Thus, the course of FRCSE actually implemented the program that was developed and proposed by the ROC. The only deviation from the program, voiced by Metropolitan Kliment, was the addition of the sixth module "Fundamentals of the World Religious Cultures."

It should be noted that the elective nature of the module is just a fiction, and very often the choice is made not by the parents of pupils but by the school or regional administration. For example, in the Belgorod, Ryazan, Tambov, and Rostov regions, the number of students studying Orthodox Culture is close to 100%. At the same time, no one studies Orthodoxy or Islam in Tatarstan and Kabardino-Balkaria. In Moscow schools, as usual, two modules are available: Orthodoxy or Secular ethics (Ozhiganova 2016). Tobias Köllner in his article, written on the basis of field research in Vladimir region, offered similar examples: "Quite often the choices for parents are rather limited from the start and dependent on the school's resources and goals. As a result, it is common practice for the opinions of minorities not to be taken seriously and they end up having to join the module chosen by the majority or selected by the school" (Köllner 2016: 372).

At present, the Orthodox Church continues to lobby for the expansion of religious instruction to all school grades, from 1<sup>st</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup>. Patriarch Kirill once again declared this intention in 2015 during the XXIII Christmas Reading and sent an official letter to the Minister of Education to consider the matter. Soon after it, the Ministry of Education introduced a new school subject area "Fundamentals of the Spiritual and Moral Culture of Peoples of Russia" (FSMCPR). The final version of this program is still being developed, but it has already allowed schools to introduce different subjects related to the field of spiritual and moral education, except FRCSE. For example, the subject "Origins" ("Istoki") received the stamp of the Synodal Department of Religious Education and Catechesis and is taught in 62 regions. The authors define their project as "an educational system designed to form a personality on the basis of the spiritual, moral and socio-cultural Russian traditions, literally, as a program of nutrition from the origins of national civilization" (web-site Istoki).

The subject MFIL is introduced into the school program for the pupils of 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades in 60 regions (more than half). The textbooks were written by the Priest Dmitry Moiseyev from Ekaterinburg, PhD in Biology and the head of the Motherhood Protection Center "Cradle", and Nina Krygina, PhD in Psychology, the Orthodox psychologist and author of many popular articles and radio programs devoted to matters

of motherhood, family and parenting. Nun Nina is Mother Superior of the Sredneuralsk Monastery in honor of the Icon of the Mother of God "The Creator of Breads." Both authors as well as the reviewers of the textbook are members of the Scientific and Expert Council on Spiritual and Moral Security at the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies under the President of Russia (RISS). This not accidental coincidence once again indicates that in the understanding of the Russian power elite, the issues of teaching religion are directly related to national security.

There is no unequivocal understanding concerning whether the courses of spiritual and moral education should be considered the *learning of religion* (religious indoctrination) or *learning about religion* (based on the Religious Studies approach). The Ministry of Education declared that courses of religion are secular and represent a form of *learning about religion*. This approach is shared by most methodologists, professors of the teacher's training courses, and teachers themselves.

At the same time, the interests of the church are expressed quite clearly. In the document *The Basis of the Social Concept of ROC* (2000), the Church claims itself the main authority on moral issues in such spheres as family relationships, childhood, education and upbringing, public health, and bioethics. Chapter XIV, dedicated to the questions of secular science, culture and education, states: "The Church is called and seeks to help the school in its educational mission, for it is the spirituality and morality of a person that determines his eternal salvation, as well as the future of individual nations and the entire human race" (*The Basis of the Social Concept of ROC*, 2000). The ROC officials have suggested a rethink of the concept of secularism, conceiving it as cooperation or teamwork (*sorabotnichestvo*) between the Church and the state institutions for the benefit of society. Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev) of Volokolamsk stated, at a joint meeting of the Federation Council and the State Duma on November 2015: "It's time now to reject such an understanding of the separation of church from the state and school from the church which suggests that religion should not be present in secular educational space" (Metropolitan Hilarion, 2015).

The presence of the ROC in the sphere of school education is growing from year to year: Orthodox priests participate in school parental meetings and exert pressure on parents when choosing a module; teacher's training courses are opened at Orthodox monasteries; the Church participates in the elaboration of methodological recommendations and conducts the confessional examination of FRCSE textbooks; and the practice of accreditation of teachers and schools in ROC is being implemented officially, although at present it is not mandatory.

So, as Lisovskaya pointed, we are witnessing "a multi-stage 'social drama', propelled by the struggles among the top political and religious elites, whose educational orientations have oscillated between a secularist, a neo-traditionalist and, ultimately, a neo-imperial paradigm" (Lisovskaya, 2017: 328).

### **Findings: Civic identity and patriotism in spiritual and moral education textbooks**

In accordance with the FRCSE Concept, "the formation of Russian civic and cultural identity, education in patriotism, responsibility for the present and future of Fatherland" are the most important aims of the course (FRCSE Concept, 2012). Thus, FRCSE can be regarded as a kind of alternative social studies ("Obshchestvoznanie"), a school course on state and society mandatory for all school grades.

The "Concept of Spiritual and Moral Development and Education of the Personality of a Russian Citizen" states that "the school should pay more attention to spiritual and moral upbringing as the supreme goal of modern educational system" (Danilyuk et al, 2009: 18). This educational concept is based on so-called *national values*, which include *patriotism, citizenship, family, work, and traditional Russian religions*. These

national values are called upon to form the basis of national identity and serve to strengthen national security.

Spiritual and moral education also corresponds to the *national educational ideal*, which includes three components. First, it is the ideal of Holy Orthodox Russia ("Orthodoxy united the Russian people, which were considered all who accepted Orthodoxy, and not just ethnic Russians, into a single nation"). Secondly, it is the educational ideal of the Russian empire ("a state man, a servant of the tsar and Fatherland"). Thirdly, it is an ideal of the Soviet era, which gave "examples of mass patriotism and heroic service up to self-sacrifice in the name of the future of their country and their people, disregard of the material and in the name of the ideal." According to the authors, *alien foreign values* were introduced into Russia in the 1990s: "The ideal of a person who is free in his self-determination and development, free from values, national traditions and obligations to society" (Danilyuk et al, 2009: 12-13). The authors of the Concept declare that it is time now to return to traditional national values and ideals, which must also be seen as modern.

Traditional values are reflected in the thematic plan, common for all FRCSE textbooks: *Religion and Culture*, *Defense of the Fatherland*, *Sacred Books*, *Customs and Rites*, *Moral Values*, *Family*, and *Religious Holidays*. The first lesson ("Russia is our Fatherland") and the last one ("Love and Respect for the Fatherland") are the same in the textbooks of all modules: It was assumed that these lessons will be held jointly for all class members regardless of the selected module. Thus, in the textbooks of the publishing house "Prosvetsheniye," the first lesson begins with the words: "We live in a wonderful country. Say the word "Russia" out loud and you will feel light and spirituality come over you." In the last lesson, love for the Fatherland is explained with the help of a quotation from a letter of the nineteenth-century Russian writer Nikolai Gogol to his sister: "You complain that nobody loves you, but what do we care if anyone loves or does not love us? Our concern is: Do we love?" From this quote comes an unexpected conclusion: "This is how you need to love the Fatherland, not demanding anything in return."

There is a major focus on the Fatherland in all textbooks (for example: "Fatherland is the place where our "fathers" lived" (Saplina & Saplin, 2016: 10). The essentialist approach to ethnicity and culture is asserted: "A person does not choose his culture. He is born in it, breathes it, grows in it" (Kuraev, 2010: 6). The authors almost completely ignore actual problems of our days. For example, in the textbook *Fundamentals of Orthodox culture* ("Drofa"), characters of archaic Russia are offered: The shepherd Vanya and the old monk Vasiliy conduct a dialogue about the soul and the ways of its salvation.

The homeland is represented as a great and unconquerable empire, along with a heroic history of wars. Kuraev writes: "Almost half of the thousand years of our history passed in wars" and adds that all wars in which Russia participated were fair from a Christian point of view, because Russians "fought for altars and hearths, for their families, for the Fatherland and its holy places" (Kuraev, 2010: 88). All the textbooks tell about the heroes who fought for their homeland as a *national moral ideal*. Among them are the warrior heroes of Russian folk epics, such as Prince of Moscow Dmitry Donskoy, famous for his victory over the Tatar-Mongols on Kulikovo field; and Prince of Novgorod Alexander Nevsky, the hero of the battle on Lake Peipsi, canonized by the ROC as a saint. Textbooks on Islamic culture also tell about Muslims - heroes of the Patriotic Wars - and the contribution of Muslim peoples to the victory in the World War II. "The readiness to defend the homeland with weapons in hand" is the main manifestation of love for the homeland (Vinogradova et al. 2016: 55). The textbook *Moral foundations of family life* states that parents should educate their sons in the spirit of military valor and a readiness to fight, which are the main signs of masculinity,

literally, the vocation of a man. Such appeals to war and military valor should be considered in the context of the very recent militarization of the official rhetoric of the power elite, as well as the rhetoric of the ROC, which is forming a whole tradition of justifying war: It supports all sorts of military actions, demonstrating a craving for a specific militarized spirituality, a kind of "theology of war" (Knorre, 2015: 572).

Another form of patriotism, noted in the textbooks, is work for the benefit of the homeland: "The selfless labor of our compatriots is an example to follow. If a person cares only about his well-being and wealth, does not think about others, he cannot be called a worthy citizen" (Vinogradova et al, 2016). As follows from the examples, such as labor in the rear during the war and the labor of women raising their children, heroic labor is assigned for those who cannot fight.

The authors' desire to avoid acute topics is very noticeable in almost all textbooks. Thus, in the textbook *Fundamentals of Islamic culture*, "in the state of Golden Horde, which arose in the 13th century, Islam and Orthodoxy peacefully coexisted" (Latyshina, 2010: 52). The authors of another textbook on Islam warn against misunderstanding the word "jihad" and explain that in fact "jihad is the desire to do something good, useful and necessary for other people, for example, to help one's mother: Go to the store or look after the kids" (Shaposhnikova, Islam, 2012).

However, the authors of the textbook on Judaism admit some problems. For example, the boy Itzak asks the rabbi: "Which law is more important for a Jew – Jewish, or the country where he lives?" and receives the following answer: "The laws of the state are our laws. But if the law is unjust and unhuman, if it contradicts the Commandments, the Jews should not accept it" (Shaposhnikova, Judaism, 2012: 176). Also, the authors note that not everything was smooth in the history of Jews in Russia. For example, they mention the Pale of Settlement and the folk epic about the battles of the warrior heroes with Jews. However, more recent issues, such as Holocaust and anti-Semitism, are carefully avoided.

In general, the textbooks of FRCSE have not changed much in comparison with the first textbooks on Orthodox culture by Alla Borodina which were sharply criticized for the idea of the primordial and total domination by Russian Orthodox culture, xenophobia, migrant phobia and anti-Semitic views. The authors of the new textbooks also follow the framework of the colonial and statist paradigm, constantly reproducing the same historical myths.

As noted by a number of scholars, the key problem when constructing a new Russian identity is the lack of "historical narratives alternative to the imperial one" (Morozov, 2009: 580). "Cutting out" a national narrative from the "fabric" of the imperial past is a difficult task, and requires a reassessment of the past, which is fraught with a weakening of the "pillars" of collective identity (Malinova, 2015: 177).

### **Findings: Religious identity and spiritual values in spiritual and moral education textbooks**

In accordance with the *Concept of Spiritual and Moral Education*, only four traditional religions of Russia (Orthodoxy, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism) are studied within courses on religion, while other confessions, including Catholicism and Protestantism, are almost completely ignored (the single exception is the brief mention of "non-traditional" religions in the textbook *Fundamentals of the world religious cultures* ("Drofa")). In addition, Islam is presented exclusively in its Sunni version, while the only Buddhism presented is the so-called "northern" Buddhism. Only the textbook on Judaic culture ("Drofa") contains information about different sects in Judaism and, accordingly, mentions the possibility of various interpretations of religious teachings and regulations.

Most textbooks are nothing more than religious indoctrination. The content of the textbooks on Orthodox culture is determined by Christian teaching: biblical history, Christian commandments, and evangelical history. The textbook by the well-known Orthodox figure, deacon Andrei Kuraev ("Prosveshchenie"), is a sample of missionary literature written for children. Kuraev tells, first of all, about the importance of religious faith and gives many examples of religious prayer practice and the practice of honoring icons. The textbook *Moral foundations of family life* also offers religious indoctrination, in particular when it asserts that, according to the Bible, man is an image and likeness of God and he is responsible for his actions before God, people, and angels (Krygina, Moiseyev, 2011c: 75-77). The lessons "Faith in Allah" and "Five Pillars of Islam" in the textbook on Islamic culture introduces the pupils to the practice of prayer, the Muslim symbol of faith, and qualities of God: "He rules everything that happens in the world, everything is done according to His will. All His works are distinguished by mercy and justice. He owns all that is on earth and heaven. He is the Exalted and the Great, He creates all the best" (Latyshina, 2010: 26-27). In the textbook *Fundamentals of Buddhist culture*, much attention is paid to religious practices, in particular, to the Buddhist initiation ritual of Taking Refuge, and the basic Buddhist prayers. The textbook *Fundamentals of Judaic culture* emphasizes everyday religiosity, including the traditions of everyday life, kashrut, clothes, calendar, the Jewish house, and family.

The textbook *Fundamentals of the world religious cultures* also pays a lot of attention to religious practice, the moral impact of religion and the concepts of sin, repentance, and retribution: "In Jesus' teaching, everything we do, good and bad deeds, we address to God" (Beglov, Saplina et al., 2010: 72). The authors emphasize the dominant role of Orthodoxy when talking about the contribution of Orthodoxy to the development of the teaching of Holy Scripture and alphabetic prayers at schools (Vinogradova et al, 2016: 33). The rootedness of Russian culture in Orthodoxy is also proved by numerous proverbs about faith and God: "Faith saves, faith animates," "Start with God, end with Lord," and "Every tongue glorifies God" (Borodina, 2012).

High moral values, such as love of one's neighbor, tolerance, mercy and justice, are preserved in Russia, thanks to traditional religions (Vinogradova et al, 2016: 84). The characteristics of the ideal person leave no doubt that only a believer can be considered as such: "Man's zeal is determined by his attitude to spiritual practice. A believer must be energetic, considerate, make efforts to save all living beings" (Chimitdorzhiev, 2010: 46).

Thus, the supporters of spiritual and moral education believe that religion can become an effective instrument for shaping a new Russian identity as religious and predominantly Orthodox. This idea seems rather unexpected and doubtful given the fact that Russia is a multi-confessional state and most people are not believers at all. However, the concepts of *religiousculture* and *spirituality* were adopted to resolve this contradiction.

The notion of *religious culture* did not accidentally form the basis of the FRCSE concept. In the document *Fundamentals of the social concept of the ROC*, the etymology of the word "culture" is derived from the word "cult", thus proving the thesis about the religious nature of any culture. Furthermore, the so-called *cultural* approach is opposed to Religious Studies ("Religiovedenie" in Russian tradition). In particular, Alla Borodina declares that teaching *Religiovedenie* as "atheistic discipline" contradicts the law, insults the feelings of believers, and even hampers the successful socialization of pupils (Borodina, 2010: 5). Igor Metlik, another supporter of the concept of *religious and cultural education* argues that pupils "have to study a certain tradition as it is accepted and understood in the corresponding religious organization" (Metlik, 2014).

Religious and cultural education should be considered in the context of the state's heightened interest in culture, specifically understood as a "national tradition" or

"legacy of the past." As Russian cultural critic and publicist Ilya Kalinin pointed out, the culture as the "preserved and reproduced single historical mental matrix" turns into the main strategic resource of the state, the basis of its national idea (Kalinin, 2014: 88). So, I think that the appeal to *culture* in teaching religion as a frozen tradition that needs to be revived and which must be followed without any critical approach and which promotes the propagation of neotraditional ideology.

Similarly, the concept of *spirituality* also carries a great ideological burden. The French researcher of modern Orthodoxy, Kathy Rousselet, notes that "the frequent use of the concept *spirituality* by the secular and Church authorities, which is both close to religiosity and different from it, allows the state to overcome the main problem: the central place of the ROC in the country, proclaiming itself multinational and multi-confessional (Rousselet, 2017: 65). Referring to this concept indicates that power elites are trying to construct some kind of a new civil religion, which paradoxically reveals continuity with the Soviet era. Thus, it is called upon to satisfy the same demand: Produce obedient and engaged citizens.

Thus, the main idea behind the concept of *spiritual and moral education* is that *culture* is equal to Orthodoxy. This approach allows the Church to appeal, not only to the community of Orthodox believers but to the entire Russian people, namely, the idea that Russians are Orthodox "by culture." The second important aspect is the connection between the Orthodoxy and Russian statehood. Thus, Orthodoxy is called upon to reinforce the imperial nature of the Russian state and the Orthodox-imperial identity (Lisovskaya, 2015; 2017).

My findings provide additional support to the notions of *ethnodoxy* (Karpov et al., 2012) and ethno-nationalism (Mitrokhin, 2005), which I think, are key concepts for understanding the concept of teaching religion and formation of a new Russian identity.

### **Findings: Gender identity and family values in spiritual and moral education textbooks**

In accordance with the "Concept of Spiritual and Moral Education," family is one of the main national values. That is why in each FRCSE textbook there is a chapter dedicated to the family. There are a lot of statements about the rootedness of family in religious tradition: "The family in Orthodoxy is often called a small church," "Marriage is a sacrament," and "The Kingdom of God in the Gospels is compared with a marriage feast." Kuraev (2010) writes that marriage must begin with a church wedding and, to strengthen the family, husband and wife must together follow the religious regulations and participate in Orthodox holidays (Kuraev, 2010). The textbook on Judaism tells about the wives of Judaic patriarchs and the religious laws of family life.

In the narrative of family, emphasis is placed on patriarchy and traditional family roles: "The husband is the head of the family," "the wife is the husband's help," "for the sake of the family you need to forgive everything," and "the husband and the wife have to be faithful to each other till death, because the wedding crown, like the ring, has no end" (Kuraev, 2010). The "holy families" – patrons of family and marriage Saints Peter and Fevronia and the family of the last Russian Tsar Nicholas II – exemplify the ideal traditional Orthodox family.

The textbook on Islamic culture explains that Muslim families usually have many children and that gender roles are strictly prescribed by religious tradition: "Islam made the man a wife's mentor, responsible for the family well-being. Islam commands the woman to obey her husband" (Vinogradov et al., 2016: 74). Even in the textbook of ethics it is noted that "traditionally, man is the head of the family, he solves the most important issues" (Danilyuk, 2013: 39).

Educating children in the spirit of *traditional values* is another important function of the family. Thus, grandfather explains to his grandson Itzak what it means to be a

Jew (Shaposhnikova, Judaism, 2012) and grandmother Rabia acquaints her grandchildren with Muslim customs (Shaposhnikova, Islam, 2012). The description of the Russian peasant women's life is given as an example of work for the family benefit: "At all times woman have spent much time with her children. In addition, all the domestic work lay on her shoulders, as well as caring for the kitchen garden, cattle, hay making, picking berries and mushrooms. A lot of time women spend working at the spinning wheel. Only disease would release her from this work" (Vinogradov et al., 2016: 70-71).

However, the lessons of FRCSE seem to be insufficient for the formation of proper gender identity, and the inclusion of a subject that could provide a special introduction to family life is being actively discussed (Slobodchikov et al., 2016: 40). The course MFFL has been proposed in 2011. It is considered secular, although written by the nun (Nina Krygina) and the priest (Dmitry Moiseyev), and therefore suitable for teaching all schoolchildren, regardless of their religious affiliation. The course is fully devoted to the Orthodox family, while only two pages from the two-volume textbook are given over to family traditions in Islam and Judaism.

The authors pay great attention to the description of masculine and feminine qualities, which, they believe, are inherent in men and women and manifest themselves in early childhood. According to the text, boys have good spatial thinking, high level of aspirations, intellectual interests, emotional stability, and tendency to aggression, while girls rely on authorities and are characterized by perseverance, aesthetic responsiveness, and emotional instability. Men are concerned about the problems in their professional activities and women find themselves in the sphere of family relations. The authors claim that the need to be a mother lies in "the female nature." The idea of gender equality, under the influence of which young men become irresponsible and girls turn into careerists, is perceived as a significant threat to the welfare of the modern family (Krygina and Moiseyev, 2011b:35).

Premarital sex, unregistered marriages, adultery, abortion, as well as media and advertising, are also threats to the family (Krygina and Moiseyev, 2011c: 67). Moiseyev and Krygina strongly oppose contraceptive education programs, arguing that they all lead to an increase in early pregnancies and abortions (Krygina and Moiseyev, 2011b: 87). A separate chapter of the textbook is devoted to abortion, which is equated with murder and called "the greatest tragedy in the history of mankind" (Krygina and Moiseyev, 2011b:146).

On the whole, the course is intended to prepare pupils for the creation of a "strong, monogamous, large, economically independent, sober, socially active, culturally traditional, and faithful family" (Krygina and Moiseyev 2011a: 63). The authors see a direct link between strengthening the family and consolidating the State. Demography becomes a matter of national security, since "Russia is on the verge of a demographic catastrophe: There is a real danger of the loss of human resources to ensure the country's defense capability and the production of material goods" (Krygina and Moiseyev, 2011a: 3). The authors assert that the sharp decline of birth rates in Russia is caused by the fall in spirituality and morality and the destruction of family traditions. Consequently, only an appeal to tradition can save the country, in particular, through making church marriage compulsory: "In order to achieve the completeness and solidity of family relations, it is necessary to return to traditional church marriage" (Krygina and Moiseyev, 2011c: 98).

They represent the medieval way of life described in "Domostroy" (a 16th-century set of household rules, the name of which received a pejorative meaning and is used to refer to a traditionalist way of life associated with patriarchal tyranny) as an ideal, to which all Russian people need to return and build hierarchical family

relationships in which the wife submits to the husband, and the children ask for parental blessings (Krygina and Moiseyev, 2011c: 101).

Thus, the images of ideal family men and women are intended to complete the neotraditionalist ideal of patriot and religious believer. As Lynn Davies notes in *Gender, religion and education in a chaotic postmodern world*, religious narratives may become the most powerful way of communicating patriarchy: "Across nearly all religions, when narratives become gendered, the ideal woman is a loyal and obedient wife and the chief homemaker." She points out that the infrastructures of the patriarchal order can adapt to modern social conditions. Thus, this is how "neopatriarchalism develops, a modern patriarchy that is taking shape between traditionalism and modernity" (Davies, 2013: 367).

School programs in Western countries have encountered problems with implementing modernist approaches in religious education, in particular, the difficulty of avoiding gender essentialism, which underpins the patriarchal order. Russia, in its turn, has adopted the opposite strategy: It is trying to use the patriarchal potential of religious traditions to form a neotraditionalist identity.

### **Conclusion**

The authors of spiritual and moral education programs assert that they are neutral and secular, and that, by introducing them into the school curriculum, a multicultural approach is implemented and, ultimately, school education is being modernized. It should be noted that Russia refused to follow the concept that was set forth in *Toledo Guiding Principles on teaching about religions and beliefs in public schools* (2007). This document, as well as materials of other international projects on teaching religion at school, are not translated into Russian and remain little known to Russian audiences. Teaching religion in Russia is implemented in accordance with a so-called *cultural approach*, based on the certain religious tradition and characterized by rejection of criticality and comparative analysis.

The concept of *spiritual and moral education* is strikingly controversial and represents a curious attempt to combine moral and patriotic education with religious indoctrination. Lisovskaya points to a strange hybridity of this approach: "It may not be quite what it seems" (Lisovskaya, 2016: 118). Willems finds in it the attempt to accommodate varying educational aims: "On the one hand, there are aims such as those of traditional moral education (e.g. acceptance of traditional gender roles and sexual ethics in accordance with church teaching) and of the patriotic integration of state and society. On the other hand, explicit religious aims are included, such as "salvation of the soul" (Willems, 2007: 236).

This hybridity has arisen as a result of the desire to realize simultaneously different goals in the courses of spiritual and moral education. The activities of the ROC in promoting these courses show that the church considers the system of state education as one of the most important areas for increasing its influence and assume the role of a national moral arbiter, dictating the norms of behavior to the whole population of Russia. The state, in turn, views promoting spirituality and traditional values as a way to tackle all possible internal and external threats as well as to enhance national security.

I find in spiritual and moral education textbooks three main themes – patriotism, religiosity and family values – which are designed to form three main components of a new Russian identity: civic, religious, and gender. Civic identity is cultivated as ethno-nationalist and neo-imperialist. Religious identity is formed as neo-traditionalist, not allowing criticism or any development of the tradition, predominantly Orthodox and merged with ethnicity. So, my findings on the first two themes (patriotism and religiosity) confirm the ideas of other scholars about ethno-nationalism (Mitrokhin, 2004,

2005; Willems, 2007; Shnirelman, 2012, 2017) and ethnodoxy (Karpov et al., 2012) as the ideological base of the new Russian identity and teaching religion concept.

As for the theme of family values and gender identity, it has not yet become the subject of research in the context of teaching religion in Russian school. I discovered that this issue is widely reflected in the textbooks and plays a very important role in the concept of *spiritual and moral* education. Gender roles are strictly determined in accordance with tradition and religious precepts. On the one hand, these prescriptions and the lack of tolerance for deviations from the prescribed norm entails tight regulation of everyday life, behavior and life choices, and are nothing but disciplining practices aimed at bringing up obedient and dependent persons. On the other hand, according to the concept of spiritual and moral education, encouraging patriarchal families with many children will contribute to regulation of the population and the solution of demographic problems. This complements and reinforces the whole structure of the neotraditionalist identity, giving it the features of neopatriarchalism.

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## About the Author

Anna Ozhiganova, Ph.D., is a researcher at the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology Russian Academy of Sciences (Moscow). Her research interests concern the intersections of religion, health, gender, and alternative social movements. She is the author of a monograph and series of articles about New Religious Movements (NRMs) and New Age groups. Anna conducted extensive field research during the 1990s – early 2000s studying the forms that took classic NRMs in post-Soviet Russia and analyzing the characteristics of the specific Russian New Age groups. Her current research focuses on the issue of teaching religion in the post-secular societies. She studies how

knowledge about religion is taught in different countries and what ideological vectors determine the educational strategies and content of school courses of religion. These topics were discussed in the thematic issue of one of the leading peer-reviewed academic Russian journals – "State, Religion, and Church in Russia and Worldwide", in which Anna participated as a guest editor. Her studies of teaching religion in Russian school are aimed at deconstruction of the concept of so-called *spiritual and moral education* which was recently introduced into the school curriculum.