

New Producers of Patriarchal Ideology: Matushki in Digital Media of Russian Orthodox Church

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Abstract: The recent research on patriarchal ideology has mainly considered it in relation to politics, society, economics and religion while the studies of actors in mediatization of patriarchal ideas remain fragmented. This study addresses the roles of *matushki*, the wives of Orthodox Christian priests, as (un)aware producers of extra-institutional forms of patriarchal ideology in social media. Matushki, highly respected women within Orthodox communities, increase the patriarchal power of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) through the promotion of Orthodox women's identity as a basis of social and ethnic identities in post-Soviet societies. The latter reveals in the standardization of views on Orthodox women's behavior, family life, upbringing children and ritual practices within the fixed patriarchal categories of 'man' and 'woman'.

Keywords: patriarchal ideology, religious blogger, religious identity, Russian Orthodox Church

Nouveaux producteurs d'idéologie patriarcale: Matushki dans les médias numériques de l'Église orthodoxe russe

Résumé: Des études récentes sur l'idéologie patriarcale l'ont principalement considérée dans les cadres la politique, la société, l'économie et la religion, tandis que les études sur les acteurs de la médiatisation des idées patriarcales restent fragmentaires. Cette étude de corpus analyse les rôles des matushki, des femmes de prêtres chrétiens orthodoxes, en tant que producteurs in/conscients des formes non institutionnelles d'idéologie patriarcale dans les réseaux sociaux. Les thèmes narratifs et les domaines sémantiques révélés dans les textes démontrent que les matushki renforcent l'influence patriarcale de l'Église orthodoxe russe en standardisant les points de vue sur la femme orthodoxe, son comportement, sa vie familiale, ses pratiques parentales et ses pratiques rituelles au sein des catégories patriarcales fixes 'homme' et 'femme'.

Mots-clés: idéologie patriarcale, blogueur religieux, identité religieuse, Église orthodoxe russe

Introduction

The rapid digitalization processes of the last decades have intensified the debates over ideology, religion and media (Suslov, Engström & Simons, 2015; Lovheim, 2013). Serving as an arena for social interaction between political, religious and public institutions, media produces an ideological impact by balancing between patterns of inclusion, restriction or exclusion of some ideas in public discourse (Croteau, Hoynes, & Milan, 2012), and as a result, media is shaping specific social norms, behaviors and views. When ideology is addressed as a “system of meaning that helps define and explain the world and that makes value judgments about that world,” (Croteau, Hoynes & Milan, 2012) media technologies increase the possibilities of religious organizations not only to mediate specific worldview and beliefs into public sphere but to become active actors in the battle for these meanings as well as creators of value judgements.

Recent research confirms that societies with strong Christian ideology have higher support of authoritarian views and patriarchal ideology (Whitehead & Perry, 2019). The Russian Orthodox Church positions itself as a guardian of family values, spirituality of Russia, and defender of historical and cultural heritage (Curanović & Leustean, 2015; Agadjanian, 2017; Zhuravlev, 2019). It has significantly increased its presence both in political and social spheres, specifically under the presidency of Vladimir Putin. Thus, the Church’s dominant role in transmitting Orthodox Christian values as well as patriarchal ideology might have even increased due to emergence of digital media. In this context, the study of digital media of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) that embodies a classic patriarchal institution in Russian Federation by its concept and structure may demonstrate what Orthodox Christian beliefs, norms and values are being incorporated into narratives of Russian identity. This research also resonates with the latest sociological studies of religiosity and national belonging in Central and Eastern Europe by the Pew Research Center. Through the demonstration of the interconnection between people and religion through the frame of “Believing. Behaving. Belonging”, the report states that Orthodox Christianity in Russia is “tightly bound up with national identity, feelings of pride and cultural superiority, support for linkages between national churches and governments, and views of Russia as a bulwark against the West.”¹ Regarding to historically grounded close cooperation of the ROC and state power (Hovorun, Moyse & Kirkland, 2018), Christian media help the Church legitimize authorities’ activities in public and religious discourses, maintain Kremlin ideology and justify the authoritarian regime in Russia, which echoes with the patriarchal ideology of the Church itself (Steenkamp, 2016).

¹ See Pew Research Center, “Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe”, <http://www.pewforum.org/2017/05/10/religious-belief-and-national-belonging-in-central-and-eastern-europe/>

The ROC has broadened its presence in digital media by incorporating itself into virtual spaces of blogging, vlogging and social networks. Due to diverse religious media, Orthodox Christian teaching, practicing and face-to-face communication have become more available for people in non-institutional surroundings. A number of recent studies demonstrate how the Russian Orthodox Church uses new technologies to mediate traditional views on gender (Cordoneanu, 2014), develop certain behavior patterns (Mitrofanova, 2018), empower religious authorities (Khroul, 2019; Staehle, 2018), promote family values (Staehle, 2015) and support Kremlin's ideology (Suslov, 2014). While the scholarship on religious media is generally defined through its relevance to authority, community and identity (Campbell, 2017; Evolvi, 2018), the role of actors, specifically religious women from post-Soviet countries, in transmitting Orthodox Christian beliefs remains understudied (Mitrofanova, 2016; Medvedeva, 2016; Kizenko, 2013; Tiurenkova, 2009).

Based on the premise that women in Russia demonstrate a higher level of religious belief (82%)² along with the decreasing religiosity of young adults³ who are the overwhelming majority in the social networks, the role of religious women in spreading the voice of the Church in society becomes even more significant. This sociological background prompts new inquiry into the current role of Orthodox women bloggers, specifically priests' wives (*matushki*), in shaping Orthodox Christian identity and reproducing the patterns of patriarchal ideology through institutionalized and non-institutionalized social media platforms. Relevant research questions emerge: *RQ1*: What patriarchal ideas do *matushki* produce in institutionalized and non-institutionalized religious discourses? *RQ2*: How do religious bloggers frame an Orthodox woman with the help of new media?

Accordingly, the thesis of this study concerns the themes in which blogging can facilitate the patriarchal ideology of the Russian Orthodox Church, as religious women bloggers disseminate their Christianity teachings and practicing via social platforms. Specifically in this research, I discuss what semantic domains and patriarchal clichés Orthodox women apply in their blogs on *pravoslavie.ru* and *vk.com/matyshkaonline*, for instance, lexical and semantic representation of patriarchal ideology (structure and ideas) in the women's discourse of the ROC, in order to understand the changing roles of Orthodox Christian women in public and religious spheres of post-Soviet areas. Examination of these patriarchal ideas on religious platforms is significant because digital media may both facilitate and challenge religious authorities, and, as a result, evoke changes in patriarchal patterns of woman-man roles. As I will demonstrate, *matushki*-bloggers are reproducing certain patriarchal clichés, as well as constructing a new identity of an Orthodox Christian woman.

² Ibid.

³ See Pew Research Center, June 13, 2018, "The Age Gap in Religion Around the World"

This study begins with a discussion of the concept of patriarchal ideology, and how it is addressed in this article, along with an overview of the Russian Orthodox Church's patriarchal structure. This theoretical background is followed by research on the role of Orthodox Christian bloggers in producing patriarchal patterns of behavior. Lexical and semantic analyses⁴ of two corpora from institutionalized and non-institutionalized religious media provide data for examination what patriarchal ideas religious women mediate into the public sphere, and what themes of Orthodox woman identity are dominant in the narratives of the Church.

1. Religious perspectives on patriarchal ideology

In gender studies, patriarchy is generally addressed as “male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general” (Lerner, 1986). This definition highlights social and individual dimensions of patriarchy that rests on two elements – patriarchy as a structure of society and patriarchy as a set of personal behavior patterns (Sultana, 2012). When patriarchy as a structure justifies men's dominance in the hierarchy of social relations, the patriarchal ideology helps shape opinions, values, norms and beliefs that would reinforce men's authority. Since patriarchy defines specific patterns on female employment, gender roles and child raising, patriarchal ideology is a measurable category (Davis & Greenstein, 2009). Moreover, studies on predictors of patriarchy show that besides the social and individual factors (such as gender, age, education, income, ethnicity, family composition, and religiosity), patriarchy endorsement links with an individual's neighborhood surrounding that may intensify patriarchal views (Crittenden & Wright, 2012).

Research has defined connections between religious beliefs and patriarchal ideas (Goldscheider, Goldscheider, & Rico-Gonzalez, 2014; Haj-Yahia, 2005; Perales & Bouma, 2019). In religious arguments, the traditionalist position of patriarchy presents a woman as a God's creation *for a man*, so female subordination is articulated as a divine idea. Further patriarchal generalizations typically refer to biological differences of men and women. While a woman is assigned with different biological functions that consequently define different social tasks, motherhood is addressed as the chief duty of women in many societies (Zaatut & Haj-Yahia, 2016). According to Lerner (1986), ideas on male dominance typically ground on men's greater physical strength, which was traditionally associated with men's responsibilities of hunting, bread winning and defending of home.

While religious fundamentalism links to patriarchal behavior, patriarchy patterns of attitudes are more common in societies where religion plays a significant role

⁴ See Lexical software WordSmith Tools (2013), <https://www.lexically.net/wordsmith/>; Learn how language works, <https://www.sketchengine.eu/>

(Crittenden & Wright, 2012). For example, Perales and Bouma (2018) compared levels of religiosity and gender beliefs in Australian society. They found that such variables as religious identification, importance of religion for an individual and frequency of attendance of services, significantly influence the level of individual's patriarchal ideology index (Perales & Bouma, 2018). Although conceptually the traditional religions interpret both woman and man as equal creations of God, the religious institutions continue to reproduce patriarchal rhetoric and practices associated with women's subordination to man as a way of serving to God. The reasons for religions to maintain traditional views on women's roles, norms of behavior, community's and family's expectations are rooted in sacred texts, rituals and traditions of all dominant religions (Tonsing & Tonsing, 2017).

The issue of men's dominance raises the question about religious authorities and their roles in holding patriarchal views. Campbell (2007), drawing on Weber's (1947) categories of authority – legal, traditional and charismatic – suggests to identify four levels of online authority in the studies of digital religion – hierarchy, structures, ideology, and texts. Since the most significant feature of religious authority is a divine source or supernatural power of legitimization, Campbell and Evolvi (2019) stress that religious authority may be embodied not only by religious leaders, but religious texts, practices, and religious institutions.

In the context of the Russian Orthodox Church, the men-women relations are complex and cannot fit the patriarchy frame in its traditional meaning of women's subordination to men. First of all, in religious discourse of the ROC, women (*babushkas*) are treated as guardians of Orthodoxy in Russia who could hold and protect religious practices in Soviet times of atheism.⁵ The women who were religious experts in Soviet societies helped to revive Orthodox traditions after the break-up of the Soviet Union (Kizenko, 2013). Secondly, the women in Russia demonstrate a higher level of religiosity and outnumber men in church,⁶ which leads to public participation of women in church activities and their support of ROC's traditional positions on abortion, marriage, family life, and education. Thirdly, Kizenko (2013) argues that in the last decades Orthodox women have more opportunities than ever to become religious "virtuosi" – professionals who can contribute to public understanding and perception of the Orthodox Christianity in society. Further, she defines three possible routes for women to become a religious virtuosi. They are: (1) activities of women who belong to the inner circle of the clergy – e.g., priests' wives (*matushki*), priests' daughters or daughters-in-law; (2) participation in the work of the church – choir directors or administrative staff; (3) contribution to development of religious media – bloggers, editors, writers.

⁵ See Patriarch Kirill's address to the participants of "V Forum of Orthodox women" <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5312706.html>

⁶ See Pew Research Center, May 10, 2017, "Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe", <http://www.pewforum.org/2017/05/10/religious-belief-and-national-belonging-in-central-and-eastern-europe/>

Although this division is nominal, as the women may belong to two or three groups at the same time, it shows diversity of women's ways to religious publicity in the voices of the ROC.

Studies have pointed out that religious women are more inclined to reproduce patriarchal ideas (Chong, 2006). The patriarchal ideology of the ROC is not only limited to domination of men over women. The structure itself presupposes the religious hierarchy in which older dominate younger, clergy authorities dominate believers and priests, female clergy (abbesses) dominate nuns or novices. In the system of patriarchy, the roles of oppressors and oppressed are vague to distinguish – an individual may belong to either group in respect to their age, clergy status and gender (Hunnicut, 2009). Thus, both men and women may maintain the ideas of patriarchal order and reproduce typical patriarchal roles.

The development of Orthodox digital media, specifically blogging, has become one of the main priorities of the Church. In 2019, the Synodal Information Department issued a document "Recommendations for diocese information divisions on their work in social media" that approach Orthodox blogging as the new way of spreading Christian prophecy.⁷ According to the document, the expected results "will increase the citations of *appropriate speakers*, will increase the loyalty of audience with further converting them in the real members of a congregation, as well as minimize the losses of the church's reputation in conflict situations".⁸ Moreover, since the Russian language is spoken in the greater part of the ROC's canonic territory, which also coincides with the areas of post-Soviet states, the Orthodox bloggers can easily reach the audience; building a community of ethnically diverse people who recognize the bloggers' belonging to Orthodox Christianity as the basic requirement for accepting their teaching.

In digital religion studies, religious blogs are interpreted through the notion of "hypermediated religious spaces" – digital venues where spaces of private and public, real and virtual, marginalized and mainstream intersect and blur (Evolvi, 2018). Due to religious blogs, individuals are able to share religious values, articulate their identity, express their belonging to community, create common religious meanings, reflect on private religious experiences and practice religious rituals.

In this context of blogging in social media, three main groups of bloggers can be recognized: institutionalized blogs, collective blogs open for wide public (e.g., platform *vk.com/matyshkaonline*) and private religious blogs with restricted possibilities of enrollment. The popular social platforms for Orthodox bloggers in

⁷ See "Рекомендации по работе в социальных сетях для епархиальных и приходских информационных служб", <http://sinfo-mp.ru/rekomendatsii-po-rabote-v-sotsialnyih-setyah-dlya-eparhialnyih-i-prihodskih-informatsionnyih-sluzhb.html>

⁸Ibid.

Russia are *Vkontakte* and *Instagram*. In contrast to the priests' blogging, focused mainly on religious education and Orthodox practices, matushki answer questions about Orthodox life – marriage, love, pregnancy, childbirth, bringing up children, and fashion. Such promotion of matushki-bloggers in social media helps the Church shape positive attitudes of society to the ROC as well as impose certain worldviews.

2. Methodology

This research targets religious discourse of matushki in relation to the key aspects of a person's connection to religion – believing, behaving and belonging. In this study, I apply corpus-based approach (WordSmith Tools 2013) to systematically analyze the discourse of matushki-bloggers at *vk.com/matyshkaonline* and *pravoslavie.ru* and define dominant forms, themes and semantic domains that are used to shape patriarchal views on women's identity. Based on the comparison of blogging content of two social platforms – institutionalized (<https://pravoslavie.ru/>) and non-institutionalized (*vk.com/matyshkaonline*), I may define divergent and deviant views on women's identity that might differ from the official interpretations of the ROC.

The corpus of institutionalized blogging contains 126 texts taken from rubrics 'Family', 'Family relations', and 'News', written by Orthodox women (e.g., priests wives, nuns, Orthodox women with large families, and Orthodox bloggers), or interviews with some of above mentioned orthodox women. To define the lexical representation, dominant themes and structure of patriarchal ideology in the orthodox women's narratives, I measured mutual information (MI) indexes of the most frequent collocations in the corpora. This stage in analysis allowed to approach the concept of patriarchal ideology within 5 semantic domains that illustrate Orthodox women's vision of their roles in a family and society within a paradigm of "man – woman" relations. They are: 1) *Orthodox wife – husband*, 2) *Orthodox woman – priest, spiritual father (dukhovnik)*, 3) *Orthodox mother – children*, 4) *Orthodox woman – God*, 5) *Orthodox woman – male authorities (secular)*.

The corpus of non-institutionalized blogging includes 1464 situations – questions from audience and answers of matushki on the site. In this case study, I focused on the patriarchal ideas which relate to traditional women's roles and duties in Orthodox family, wife's religiosity, decision making, motherhood, employment and money, daily work, education of children, and men's violence. As a result of lexical and semantic analyses (WordSmith Tools 2013), I defined seven dominant patriarchal clichés in the narratives of matushki-bloggers that maintain the idea of women's subordination to men as a natural form of man-woman and God-woman relations in Orthodox Christianity: 1) *spiritual dependency*; 2) *poslushanie (owing obedience)*; 3) *women's salvation in motherhood*; 4) *subordination to a husband*; 5) *women's attractiveness to please men*; 6) *sinful nature of women*; 7) *affirmation of religious authority*.

3. Women bloggers in the official media of the ROC

In this study, I analyzed official discourse of the ROC, represented by women's narratives at the site <https://pravoslavie.ru/>, one of the popular official internet resources of the ROC.

In the semantic domain *Orthodox wife – husband*, the Orthodox women bloggers raise the issue of wife's obedience to her husband as a sacrifice to God. A husband represents God on earth so the wife's conformity to man is interpreted as a responsibility to serve God. "When you obey your husband, think then that you obey as if working for God."⁹ Since a husband is viewed as God's envoy in woman's earth life, the narratives intensify an idea of destiny – an Orthodox woman should treat her husband as her own fate, her cross to carry till the end of life (in *Russ. krest* – endurance, fate). Obedience is a way to develop trusting relations in a family, demonstrate her truthful faith to God, reliance on God's will and readiness to accept any life as a chance of serving and salvation. The narratives emphasize the subordinate role of a woman in a family with the portraying a husband as a "head", "leader" or even a "tzar" and "monarch". Orthodox women bloggers encourage readers to avoid leadership in a family that leads to "masculinization" of a woman, on the one hand, and to conflicts with husbands, on the other.

Moreover, women's self-blaming or blaming other women for conflicts in families is a typical theme in the narratives. The responsibility for "family atmosphere" and conflicts mainly lies on women who are described as too emotional, sensitive and moody. One of the blogger, matushka Anna Romashko, uses a term "damskiy abuse"¹⁰ (women's abuse) towards husbands whom she depicts as silent victims of nagging and quarreling wives. According to the blogger, to heal relations in a family, a wife should develop humility and obedience to her husband, practice praying, and reflect on her own mistakes. In this context, recognition of husband's authority is presented as the sole way to avoid family conflicts.

At the lexical level, the patriarchal ideology reveals in the collocations that present a husband as a person to respect, obey and serve to. The significant feature of the official discourse of the ROC is the depiction of a man as a performer of God's will. The narratives demonstrate interrelations between a man and God with a vivid parallel between family, as a representation of a heavenly church on earth, and Kingdom of God.

⁹ See "Interpretation of sacred texts", John Chrysostom, <http://bible.optina.ru/new:ef:05:22>

¹⁰ Anna Romashko, For a family not to break up, March 2019, <https://pravoslavie.ru/120045.html>

Table 1. Mutual information indexes of keywords in the domain “Orthodox wife – husband”

Word 1	Freq.	Word 2	Freq.	MI	Z	MI3	Log L.	T Score
<i>serving</i>	27	<i>God</i>	210	8,7	17,6	14,7	83	2,8
<i>family</i>	397	<i>church</i>	104	5.4	3.8	10.6	33.5	2.4
<i>head</i>	35	<i>family</i>	504	7.5	13.3	14.4	96.4	3.3
<i>head</i>	35	<i>father</i>	340	6.9	7.1	11.6	38.9	2.2
<i>head</i>	35	<i>husband</i>	294	7.4	9.4	12.6	50.7	2.4
<i>tzar</i>	28	<i>father</i>	340	7.5	9.8	12.7	52	2.4
<i>husband</i>	294	<i>head</i>	35	7.6	11	13	61	2.6
<i>obey</i>	31	<i>husband</i>	188	7.2	6.2	10.3	24.4	1.7
<i>respect</i>	12	<i>husband</i>	188	8	6.9	10	18.6	1.4
<i>authority</i>	10	<i>husband</i>	188	7.2	3.7	7.3	8.2	1
<i>authority</i>	10	<i>man</i>	62	8.7	6.7	8.9	10.4	1
<i>role</i>	28	<i>husband</i>	188	5.8	1.9	5.8	6	1
<i>husband</i>	188	<i>God</i>	27	5.8	2	5.8	6.1	1
<i>tolerate</i>	9	<i>husband</i>	150	7.8	4.4	7.7	8.8	1
<i>resign yourself</i>	9	<i>fate</i>	34	10.2	10.9	10.2	12.4	1
<i>obedience</i>	5	<i>husband</i>	188	8.3	5.4	8.3	9.7	1

Another dimension of patriarchal ideology reveals in the semantic domain *Orthodox woman – a priest, spiritual father (duhovnik)*, in which Orthodox women demonstrate their spiritual dependency on parish priests, monks or personal spiritual fathers. Traditionally, Orthodox women take a priest’s blessing (*blagoslovenie*) before a new phase of life – a marriage, birth of a child, medical treatment, education, and travelling. However, along with the traditional blessing that is treated as receiving of God’s support, women believers may develop a religious cult of a *dukhovnik* when a need for spiritual consulting or approval takeovers women’s initiatives to make decisions on their own. Such an inclination to ask for priest’s blessing may show women’s unwillingness to take responsibility for own lives, as well as fear to face failures. Some priests of the ROC recognize the danger that an Orthodox meaning of a blessing has become an empty ritual that laymen feel need to perform:

“A lot of laity are so much afraid of taking responsibility that they may run to a priest for a blessing on various simplistic reasons: “Father, bless me to go home!”

As if without this blessing, something unpleasant would definitely happen to them on their way home. One should take blessing only for spiritual tasks. God's blessing is granted either for efforts or faith"¹¹

Table 2. Mutual information indexes of keywords in the domain “Orthodox woman – priest (dukhovnik)”

Word 1	Freq.	Word 2	Freq.	MI	Z	MI3	Log L.	T Score
<i>obedience</i>	34	<i>dukhovnik</i>	6	10.5	11.8	10.9	12.7	1
<i>obedience</i>	34	<i>father</i>	28	8.2	5.3	8.2	9.5	1
<i>dukhovnik</i>	35	<i>father</i>	34	6.6	5.6	10.6	29.2	2
<i>dukhovnik's</i>	21	<i>blessing</i>	23	10	17.8	13.2	36.6	1.7
<i>dukhovnik</i>		<i>right</i>	38	8.8	9	10.8	20.5	1.4
<i>my</i>	48	<i>dukhovnik</i>	21	8	5	8	9.4	1
<i>own</i>	154	<i>dukhovnik</i>	21	6.5	2.7	6.5	7	1
<i>advice</i>	18	<i>dukhovnik</i>	21	9.6	8.6	9.6	11.4	1
<i>ask</i>	16	<i>dukhovnik</i>	21	11.1	15	11.2	13.7	1
<i>priest</i>	110	<i>blessed</i>	23	7.8	6.5	9.8	17.9	1.4
<i>father</i>	340	<i>blessed</i>	23	7.8	11	13	54.6	2.4
<i>priest</i>	110	<i>obedience</i>	5	9	7	9	10.8	1
<i>father</i>	340	<i>teacher</i>	21	2.8	1	8.4	15.4	2.3
<i>blessing</i>	23	<i>take</i>	29	8.3	5.4	8.3	9.5	1
<i>blessing</i>	23	<i>priest</i>	22	9.7	12.6	11.7	23	1.4

In the semantic domain *Orthodox mother – children*, bloggers develop the themes of motherhood, Orthodox Christian education, and models of ideal mothers. Motherhood is presented as God's blessing and women's salvation through serving to God and upbringing children in true Christian traditions. The collocations below demonstrate how *matushki's* focus on upbringing girls with traditional Orthodox mindset of women's duties such as readiness to family life, motherhood, the ability to be a good housewife and supporting wife.

¹¹ See interview with Antoni Shuvakin, *Eight children and not a bit of glamour* (2019), <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/119328.html>

Table 3. Mutual information indexes of keywords in the domain “Orthodox mother – children”

Word 1	Freq.	Word 2	Freq.	MI	Z	MI3	Log L.	T Score
<i>salvation</i>	7	<i>birth</i>	6	15,5	183	21	163	2.7
<i>holy</i>	14	<i>motherhood</i>	69	12	70.7	19.3	212	3.6
<i>give</i>	31	<i>birth</i>	1317	5.8	5.5	11.8	51	2.8
<i>obey</i>	31	<i>father</i>	126	6.2	2.4	6.2	6.7	1
<i>authority</i>	10	<i>dad</i>	21	10.4	11.6	10.4	12.6	1
<i>serve</i>	27	<i>to family</i>	492	5.4	2.3	7.4	11.3	1.4
<i>daughter</i>	156	<i>duties</i>	37	6.9	3.2	6.9	7.6	1
<i>girls</i>	64	<i>education</i>	44	6.7	2.9	6.7	7.3	1
<i>girls</i>	64	<i>cook</i>	7	10.3	15.9	12.3	25.3	1.4
<i>girls</i>	64	<i>study</i>	33	8.1	5.1	8.1	9.4	1
<i>matushka</i>	189	<i>housewife</i>	5	8.3	5.3	8.3	9.7	1
<i>girl</i>	19	<i>strictness</i>	11	10.4	11.7	10.4	12.6	1
<i>girl</i>	19	<i>upbring</i>	60	8	4.8	8	9.1	1
<i>girls</i>	31	<i>have to</i>	16	12	28.2	14	29.9	1.4
<i>girls</i>	31	<i>shame</i>	5	12.6	25.3	12.6	15.7	1

In the semantic domain *Orthodox woman – God*, collocations define specific relations of Orthodox Christian women with God. These relations are: prayers of request and gratitude, fasting, serving in the monasteries (poslushanie), taking vows, confession and holy communion. As the lexical analysis has shown, serving to God and prayers of request are the most frequent signifiers of woman-God relations in the corpus.

Table 4. Mutual information indexes of keywords in the domain “Orthodox woman – God”

Word 1	Freq.	Word 2	Freq.	MI	Z	MI3	Log L.	T Score
<i>serving</i>	27	<i>God</i>	210	8.7	17.6	14.7	83	28
<i>serving</i>	27	<i>near</i>	5	11	14.5	11	13.6	1
<i>serving</i>	27	<i>fast</i>	45	8.9	9.5	10.9	26.9	1.4
<i>serving</i>	27	<i>village</i>	20	9	7.2	9	10.6	1
<i>ask</i>	29	<i>Father</i>	27	10	18	13.3	36.7	1.7

<i>ask</i>	29	<i>God</i>	132	7.2	5.1	9.2	16.3	1.4
<i>ask</i>	29	<i>for help</i>	79	9.6	21	14.7	69.3	2.4
<i>ask</i>	29	<i>forgiveness</i>	27	11.5	48.3	17.5	117	2.8
<i>prayer</i>	18	<i>children</i>	66	7.9	4.7	7.9	9	1
<i>prayer</i>	18	<i>God</i>	39	9.7	12.7	11.7	23.2	1.4
<i>prayer</i>	18	<i>say</i>	16	10	14	12	24	1.4
<i>prayers</i>	76	<i>saints</i>	54	6	2.3	6.1	6.6	1
<i>Christ</i>	34	<i>love</i>	89	6.6	2.8	6.6	7.2	1
<i>holy</i>	15	<i>spirit</i>	21	12.2	47.7	16.7	77.5	2.2
<i>holy</i>	15	<i>law</i>	15	10.3	11.2	10.3	12.5	1

In the semantic domain *Orthodox woman – male public authorities*, the narratives underline women's relations with authorities at the individual level (such as awards from local authorities to mothers with large families, petitions, requests, financial aid or housing assistance) and at the societal level which includes activity of Orthodox women in non-governmental organizations. A significant feature for both themes in the corpora is a clear opposition between local and state authorities. While the Orthodox women justify state power and president Putin's activities, they criticize local authorities as wholly responsible for ignorance of social projects, solely promoted by active Orthodox women. In this context, an anti-abortion activist and psychologist, Anna Pecheniova, shares her experiences about creation of crisis-center for women "Gift of Life" in Ural when president Putin's quote became her main weapon in fight with local authorities:

"To develop pro-life activities in my town, I spent much time on finding a slogan, well-turned and memorable, which would help me to knock at the doors of our local authorities. <...> And I found a phrase of Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin which has become our motto: 'Love, care about your loved ones, responsibilities for your children and your country – is all that fills everyone's life with sense.' I include this phrase in my letters of request; I always cite it when communicate with officials of different ranks. And it does help."

While state authorities put efforts to raise birth rates in Russia,¹² the Orthodox women activists seem to gain even more recognition and support of officials in their fight for traditional values. For example in 2016, Anna Kuznetsova, a wife of a Russian Orthodox priest, was appointed Presidential Commissioner for Children's

¹² See President plans to support traditional family values, (May, 2018), http://sm.cnsr.ru/ru/news/org/Prezident_nameren_podderzivat_traditsionnie_emejnie_tcennosti/

Rights.¹³ She promotes pro-life campaigns, social support for large families, and protection of teenagers in crisis. These are all issues of significant importance for the ROC.

Table 5. Mutual information indexes of keywords in the semantic domain “Orthodox woman – authorities”

Word 1	Freq.	Word 2	Freq.	MI	Z	MI3	Log L.	T Score
<i>authorities</i>	26	<i>town</i>	60	7.5	4	7.5	8.5	1
<i>authorities</i>	26	<i>family</i>	492	4.5	0.8	4.5	4.4	1
<i>holy</i>	15	<i>emperor</i>	11	10.8	13.1	10.8	13	1
<i>authorities</i>	26	<i>local</i>	12	9.9	9.5	9.9	11.8	1
<i>power</i>	26	<i>officials</i>	6	11.9	27	13.9	29.8	1.4
<i>tzar</i>	28	<i>father</i>	340	7.5	9.9	12.7	51.9	2.4
<i>tzar</i>	28	<i>God</i>	84	7.9	6.7	9.9	18.2	1.4
<i>tzar</i>	28	<i>monarchy</i>	14	9.5	8.5	9.5	11.3	1
<i>tzar</i>	28	<i>Nikolay</i>	67	8.9	11.5	12	31.3	1.7

According to data in this study, matushki-bloggers develop patriarchal themes through various semantic domains, but the dominant ones are woman’s relation with their children and husband. The table below illustrates the most frequent words used in the institutionalized blogging of the ROC.

Table 6. Structure of patriarchal ideology in the discourse of Christian women bloggers at <http://pravoslavie.ru/>

Semantic domain	Total frequency in a domain	Words (frequency in the corpora)
Orthodox mother – children	37.5% (n-8333)	<i>children</i> (2760), <i>child</i> (840), <i>childhood</i> (105), <i>motherhood</i> (128), <i>give birth</i> (113), <i>upbringing</i> (220), <i>birth</i> (120), <i>childish</i> (255), <i>orphans</i> (37), <i>kids</i> (24), <i>baby</i> (16), <i>toddler</i> (163), <i>newborn</i> (62), <i>pregnancy</i> (84), <i>teenagers</i> (79), <i>education</i> (119), <i>books</i> (152), <i>gymnasium</i> (41), <i>to upbringing</i> (316), <i>classes</i> (70), <i>development</i> (61), <i>teachers</i> (120), <i>pupils</i> (120), <i>play</i> (98), <i>school</i> (384), <i>daughter</i> (243), <i>sister</i> (119), <i>girl</i> (116), <i>mommy</i> (580), <i>sacrifice</i> (50), <i>shoulders</i> (Russian

		'responsibility' (52), abortion (87), mother (283), grandmother (98), son (260), boy (88)
Orthodox wife – husband	34.5% (n-7677)	Wife (363), get married (52), family (1670), with many children (430), familial (260), marriage (193), spouses (240), parents (690), near (63), divorce (52), situation (168), problem (240), crisis (40), conflict (65), labour (39), responsibility (96), duties (58), love (360), joy (237), mercy (28), attention (101), happiness (101) female (81), matushka (302), husband (620), man (182), brother (112), head (55), daddy (250), father (527)
Orthodox woman – priest, duhovnik	12% (n-2637)	church (750), monastery (206), convent (49), parish (44), church goers (48), novice (5), blessing (53), liturgy (216), sacrament (33), wedding (25), obedience (57), chross, fate (33), Orthodox Christianity (30), Orthodox Christian (198), confession (58), sin (51), guilt (76), father (160), priest (292), dukhovnik, spiritual father (74), senior (133), patriarch (30), pastor (18) гордыня (10)
Orthodox woman – God	13% (n-2824)	Woman (427), God (564), Father (270), Christ (27), saints (94), spirit (48), God's (180), Virgin Mary (39), abbess (34), nun (35), prayer (230), soul (183), spiritual (201), fast (42), wonder (64), faith, belief (7), pray (130), fear (59), humility (27), gift (51), salvation (35), will (33), fate (32), empress (12)
Orthodox woman – male authorities	3% (n-663)	Russia (185), Russian (110), monarchy (32), Russ (24), state (gosudarstvo) (131), authorities (55), Russian Federation (33) tzar (28), emperor (30), president (35)

4. Forms of patriarchal ideology in social media

In 2018, the Russian Orthodox Church launched a new online project for women, headed by wives of Orthodox priests, *Matushka online*, vk.com/matyshkaonline. The creation of a network for Orthodox women bloggers has become a continuation of another project *Batyushka Online*, a platform for online communication with Orthodox priests, launched in 2011. Although the purposes of both projects may look similar – raise feelings of religiosity in Russian society, encourage people to learn more about Orthodox norms and traditions, develop wider connections between church and society, improve the perception of the church in Russia – *Matushka online* targets specifically female audience and aims “to answer women’s questions of religious practice, those questions that they find too simplistic or awkward to ask a priest” (matushka Olga Kartavina).

All matuski-bloggers work to glorify God (*vo slavy bozhiiu*), which means they do not receive any financial support from the Church. In spite of diverse professional backgrounds, – teachers, musicians, choir conductors, psychologists, doctors, and journalists – matushki suggest a unified traditional vision of Orthodox women's roles, relations with men, religious practicing, and child raising based on their collective insider status of Orthodox clergy. On the site, questions are grouped into main categories such as: '*Relations between a husband and a wife*', '*How to take out a partner?*', '*Religious life of a woman*', '*Pregnancy and childbirth*', '*Virginity in secular world, life without family*', '*Daily life management*', '*Art*', '*Nuns*', and '*Widowed woman*'. The most discussed situations deal with man-woman relations and upbringing of children.

The platform grants various ways of communication with matushki in terms of individual privacy. For example, it is possible to write messages in the comments visible to all participants of the group, as well as in private messages. The bloggers also prefer to answer some questions in private (e.g., about sexual relations). In addition to written answers, a few matushki maintain online video question and answer sessions that address different themes from the audience.

Although the resource *Matushka online* has been produced by Orthodox women and for women, the men's authority has a significant role in matushki's narratives. First of all, the site of the project aims to provide basic religious education for women. Daily updates of the site provide information on fasting, religious holidays, Orthodox practices and traditional prayers. Secondly, the site presents stories, excerpts and quotations from religious literature by priests, monks, and honored men's clergy. They represent 'classic' Orthodox leaders and today's authoritative priests, archbishops and monks. The topics of the updates not only correlate with the dominant themes of the site, mentioned above, but demonstrate Orthodox Christian interpretations of life, death, sin, and salvation. Finally, men's presence serves matushki as an additional source of undenied and respected authority to defend their own opinion.

Although matushki stress that many of them have theological education and are aware of many religious issues, it is more typical of them to teach other women *how* to believe and behave in Orthodox Christianity. Doing so they delegate more complex questions of *what* to teach to their husbands or other religious authorities. For example, in online question and answer sessions matushki may be accompanied by their husbands who may either support or express quite opposite to their wives' opinion on a question. Matushki also recommend women religious literature, lectures and articles of popular priests. In this context, matushki are opinion leaders who do not only mediate knowledge about Orthodox Christianity into virtual community but reproduce Orthodox men's views on women's roles in modern society, framed in traditional gender roles of patriarchal ideology. As a result of lexical and semantic analyses of the corpus that contains 1464 situations, I defined seven dominant patriarchal clichés in the narratives of matushki-bloggers.

Spiritual dependency (Kizenko, 2013) is one of the most significant patriarchal ideas in the ideology of the ROC. Matushki-bloggers encourage women to find a dukhovnik – a spiritual mentor, or a priest who would become more close and sympathetic to their problems, concerns, and worries. A dukhovnik is expected to support his ‘spiritual children’ on their way to God, understand their personal background and give advice in times of need. Meetings with dukhovnik might have different forms – a private conversation, physical work at religious organizations (for instance, monasteries, churches), confession, or taking a blessing before an important life event. The notion “*with the blessing of*” has a deep religious meaning of God’s special support and approval for an Orthodox Christian. Since a priest or dukhovnik is a mediator of God’s favour to an individual, a ritual of blessing grants confidence in the righteousness of one’s plans. The situations below demonstrate how matushki reproduce patriarchal ideas of the Russian Orthodox Church in terms of spiritual dependency.

Situation 1

Elena: How many times should I read Akathist (prayer) for a recently deceased?

Matushka Olga: I’ve asked my husband, a priest. You have to take your dukhovnik’s blessing to read Akathist daily. You may also read the psalter. But again, don’t get in over your head. Read one katisma or three psalms daily. There’s a traditional prayer for the deceased – that’s what you really need to do and may read every day without a priest’s blessing (November, 2018)

Situation 2

Galina: I have fears about the possibility of my fourth pregnancy. I have had three C-sections before. I’m afraid of getting pregnant again as I won’t be able to give birth to the baby.

Matushka Tatiana: I think this is a question you’d better discuss with your dukhovnik. (January, 2018).

Besides, spiritual dependency can take a form of church obedience (*poslushanie*) – through women’s assistance in work of a religious institutions, which is also associated with a religious authority, such as an abbot of a monastery or a priest. *Poslushanie* is an act of obedience to an order from a dukhovnik aimed to restrain individual’s arrogance and pride. However, this idea of docility to a spiritual father is reproduced in the corpus by readers, those women who try to become true Orthodox Christians, but matushki-bloggers tend to recommend these women to treat their daily duties of mothers, wives, workers as an optional way of spiritual serving.

Situation 3

Inna: Could you advise on a monastery where I can live for a while, to work and to get closer to God?

Matushka Irina: <...>You need to think thoroughly before you decide to owe obedience. Don't escape your docility in your secular life. If your relatives need you at home, or if anyone would feel difficulties without you, it means that your obedience is at home. If you have a dukhovnik, it's better to take his blessing for monastery obedience (February, 2018)

Another patriarchal cliché in the matushki's narratives is *women's salvation in motherhood*. All matushki-bloggers of the project have large families, and as Orthodox Christians, matushki maintain the position of the Russian Orthodox Church on family relations, presented in the *Basis of Social Concept*.¹⁴ Thus, matushki demonstrate pro-life views, deny contraceptives and encourage women to have more children. Motherhood is interpreted as God's blessing, a gift, and deepest happiness for a woman, on the one hand, and destiny, duty, a way of salvation, on the other. In their answers about children issues, matushki-bloggers advise women to regularly say a mother's prayer (*materinskaya molitva*) that is addressed as a powerful weapon against illnesses, worries, and grief.

The narrative of motherhood is also intensified by example of Virgin Mary, the God's Mother, who had to suffer her son's crucifixion and death to become the happiest mother in the world after his resurrection. In this context, matushki recommend their audience to say prayers to Virgin Mary as the guardian of all mothers in time of trials, hardship and distress. Besides, Orthodox women bloggers present the concept of motherhood as a responsibility for their children's religious and academic education. The narratives display matushki's disapproval of state education while they encourage home schooling and studying in Orthodox private schools. The situations below demonstrate how matushki reproduce patriarchal clichés of the Russian Orthodox Church in terms of motherhood duties.

Situation 4

Marina: How do you manage to organize life with six children, house work, home schooling and a husband?

Matushka Olga: One needs to determine their priorities. I've decided that giving life to children is not enough for me, they need spiritual upbringing and academic education. That's why I took this responsibility. Nobody can provide better education to children than their mother! We, parents, will respond for our children before God, and this thought doesn't let me relax. How can I entrust upbringing of my children to a mere stranger? Even if they (teachers) are well educated (May, 2018)

Situation 5

¹⁴ See, The Basis of Social Concept, Russian Orthodox Church, <https://mospat.ru/en/documents/social-concepts/kh/>

Anastasiya: I have two daughters (2 years old and 2 months). <...>I got exhausted, I often shout at my older daughter <...> My husband suggested that our older daughter should go to a nursery to make my maternity leave easier, though we didn't plan to do it earlier. So, now I'm thinking if that's right, or it looks as if I'm dumping my daughter on strangers? <...>

Matushka Anastasiya: <...>You know, you'll feel easier, but not now. Such a mothers' fate is, but we are happy as we have a sense of life, our continuation, our family. I wouldn't advise you to take your 2 year old daughter to a nursery, absolutely not <...> Have your daughters nearby as long as possible, don't send them away, taking cover behind weariness. That's our salvation and destiny. In childbirth we find salvation! <...> We, women, are very patient, that's why God entrusted us with upbringing of children. You'll catch up with your career later. But your love and care will last a lifetime for your kids. That's a priceless mother's gift. God, grant us with humility and patience (April, 2019)

Matushki-bloggers maintain the patriarchal idea of *subordination to a husband* by discussing popular among the project's followers themes of women-men relations, in which men's roles are traditionally associated with leadership, financial responsibility for all family members, ability to take better decisions and women's – framed as those of men's assistants, support, source of inspiration and success. Matushki recommend women to cherish their husbands' sense of being a “man” and head of the family through modest acceptance of their mistakes and wrong decisions.

Situation 6

Tatiana: How should a wife treat her husband? What are the responsibilities of a wife?

Matushka Olga: I like this question very much (ironically)...Know what, they always say how women have to treat their husbands, but very rarely people ask about how a man should treat his wife. There is such a strong “wife must” attitude... Husband must love his wife above all. Based on the condition that there is husband's love and a wife feels that, she will do everything for her family, her husband and their wellbeing...<... > As for the responsibilities of a wife, a spouse should respect her husband and yield to him. If a husband has decided something, you of course can express your opinion, but the last word must belong to your husband as the head of a family, that's for the husband to feel that he is a man. Even if he had made a mistake, a wife should support and encourage him. It is often the wife who makes her husband either successful or not. Women shouldn't decide “global” issues. Her priorities are home, family, and children... (April, 2019)

One of the most vivid patriarchal ideas is *women's attractiveness to please men*. First of all, the project *Matushka online* aims to change a stereotype of Orthodox woman, portrayed in a long ugly skirt, with a headscarf and without make-up by

underlining beauty of Orthodox women. Thus, the daily updates of the project's webpage show a great number of pictures and photos of beautiful young women and girls, angel-like children with chubby cheeks, as well as images of respected saint women. This focus on women's appearance and attractiveness in religious surrounding raises many questions from the female audience. Secondly, despite the typical matushki's answers like *"To be an Orthodox woman doesn't mean to be outdated and ignore taking care for your appearance"* (matushka Anna), the narratives approach attractiveness in terms of femininity that is addressed as an important feature for a woman to please her husband or, if single, build family relation with a man.

What is even more interesting is that women's subordination reveals in matushki's compliance to their husbands' opinion on appearance as well as eagerness to undergo a certain level of "pigmalionization" by them. They underline that their husbands may decide how to look in church and what clothes to wear *"Each matushka has a batyushka (husband priest), let him decide how his wife should look in church"* (matushka Olga). A situation below demonstrates how matushka reproduces patriarchal clichés of attractiveness framed in femininity and pleasing men.

Situation 7

Elena: I'm 38, single, no children. My personal life isn't going so well. Could you advise me how to avoid a feeling of despair?

Matushka Irina: First of all, try to understand the reason for this situation. <...> Think of things you may work on: probably, that's appearance, which is rather important for a woman, as the first impression is very important; maybe you need to improve skills of presenting yourself to others, as well as language, inner dissonance <...> Just review yourself as a woman. Femininity, so much appreciated by men, consists of many components – beauty, health, kindness, compassion, coquetry, forgiveness, smile, hospitality, responsiveness, honesty, communication skills... <...> (November, 2018)

The lexical analysis shows that the narrative of sinfulness is central in the discourse of matushki who interpret sin as the main obstacle to becoming a true Orthodox Christian. Matushki-bloggers, in their answers, stress interrelation of sins and unhappy experiences that are referred as God's punishment for wrongdoings. Only through recognition of own "sinful nature" at the confession to a priest, people may overcome their sins and approach God. Moreover, the women-bloggers reproduce a patriarchal idea of sinful nature of women. For example, in the situation below, a matushka-blogger blames women for being raped.

Situation 8

Olga: How to find true love after being raped?

Matushka Ekaterina: There are many examples when women get married and have children after being raped. Then, it's important to analyze this situation. In

most cases, it happens so that a girl herself triggers violence. I have an example of my acquaintance. She drank alcohol, had make up, put a short skirt on and went for a walk to a park where she met a boy. <...> Everything finished sadly. She had an extreme psychological trauma, but with God's help and confession, she recognized her guilt, she could find the strength to forgive her abuser. With holy communion, assistance of good priest, and prayers she could escape from that hell. She started to help other people, became a true Orthodox Christian, started to wear modest clothes and long hair, stopped using make up, never drinks alcohol, sings in church choir and owes obedience to the senior. God sent her a husband, they had a wedding and live a happy life.<...> One has to forgive in this life to achieve happiness in the eternal (February, 2018)

Apart from the patriarchal cliché of women's sinfulness in the bloggers' answers, this idea of being guilty is also reproduced in the questions of the women-readers who relate their life tragedies to previously committed sins.

Situation 9

Anastasiya: My child got seriously ill. A relapse of illness that happened six months ago. And I do blame myself. It happened because of my sins. And now when he gets injections and cries, my heart breaks. How can I help him and my spiritual condition?

Matushka Anastasiya: Don't go beating yourself up, don't waste your energy, health and time for that. Your child needs your help now and mother's prayer will get from under the sea! Pray, ask Virgin Mary and Holy guardian of your child to help. <...>You should think about a reason for such a situation... What for this ordeal is? Analyze and confess your sins, frequently visit church, have holy communion with your child as often as possible, and everything will be fine, you'll see! <...> (February, 2019)

Patriarchal ideas also emerged in matushki's *affirmation of religious authority* through justification of priests' improper behavior. Since many questions from women refer to misunderstandings with clergy during religious practices, Orthodox bloggers defend the priests' deeds presenting it, first of all, as '*po ustavu*' – according to specific rules of each church that refer to additional requirements on behavior and appearance of visitors. Secondly, bloggers recommend women to reflect on unpleasant situations from religious point of view as a possibility from God to unroot one's selfishness, arrogance and pride.

Situation 10

Svetlana: My husband and I were on pilgrimage to holy places, and I came into a church wearing trousers. An old woman in the church started snapping at me, saying that I was neither man nor woman, though I was wearing a headscarf. <...> Moreover, when I joined a queue of people to kiss the cross during the liturgy, a priest pointedly ignored me and did not allow to kiss it!

Matushka Elena: <...>In many situations we lack love for the others. That's why I'd ask you to forgive them and don't get offended. Probably, such a situation was intended by God to define your sin of resentment and irritability. Try to correct that! (January, 2018)

Situation 11

Tatiana: A priest in the monastery made remarks on my sandals with open toes. I felt so offended as the majority of people were wearing similar shoes. What does it mean?

Matushka Olga: Probably that's because of their statute (ustav) in the monastery. Or it could be a personal attitude of the priest who doesn't like such appearance. As for me, I wear sandals to church and priest (husband) doesn't say anything (July, 2018)

The table below summarizes lexical representation of seven main patriarchal clichés in non-institutionalized religious discourse. According to data, patriarchal clichés of motherhood and subordination to husband prevail in this corpus.

Table 7. Lexical representation of patriarchal clichés in “Matushka online”project

Patriarchal cliché	Lexical signifiers of patriarchal cliches (frequency of the keywords)
Spiritual dependency	dukhovnik (61), father (batiushka) (181), priest (220), blessing (81), advice (180), priest's blessing, to find a dukhovnik, to ask a priest, a question to a priest, priest's permission, sound advice, priest has allowed, to go to a priest, to go for a blessing, priests bless, to consult a priest, to take a blessing from a priest
Women's salvation in motherhood	children (963), mother (36), motherhood (9), mother's prayer, responsibility, giving birth, salvation, nursery, raising children, for children, pray for children, care about children, have children, my / our kids, have children take communion, obedience, obedience to parents, to develop children's skills
Subordination to a husband	husband (530), man (67), head of a family, master, husband is right, head scarf – a sign of men's power, husband is the head, primacy of husband, respect a husband, God grants a husband, to pray for a husband, to be liked by your husband, obey husband, with husband's approval/permission, husband is against, husband insists, financial responsibilities of husband, to yield to a husband, to talk with a husband
Women's attractiveness to please men	appearance, make up, manicure, beauty treatment, femininity, beauty, hairdo

Sinful nature of women	sin (405), guilt, for my sins, punishment, because of me, it's me who has to be blamed for that, confess one's guilt, feeling of guilt
Spiritual obedience (poslushanie)	to owe obedience, blessing, humility, obey, perform
Affirmation to religious authority	by statute, law, punishment, monastery, order, monastery, pride, arrogance

5. Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore how women bloggers of the Russian Orthodox Church, namely priests' wives (*matushki*), reproduce patriarchal ideology through their blogs in the formal (institutionalized) and informal (social platform) Orthodox Christian media. This task was achieved by defining which themes, patriarchal ideas and structures are most commonly addressed by Orthodox women bloggers and how they narrate female and male roles in formal and informal discourses of the Church. With regard to RQ1, this study showed religious bloggers produced patriarchal ideas of women's duty of motherhood, spiritual subordination to a priest (*dukhovnik*), sinful nature of women, affirmation of religious authority and subordination to husband. As for RQ2, the data demonstrates that *matushki*-bloggers challenge traditional views on Orthodox woman associated with their appearance, employment, roles in family and society.

Patriarchal ideas are common both in formal and informal blogging, but they differ in dominance of themes, lexical presentation and structures. In formal blogging (*pravoslavie.ru*), content and structure of *matushki*'s narratives are restricted by general guidelines of the religious site, so to focus on patriarchal ideology, I studied blogs in the categories of "Family" and "Society". Although the texts of priests' wives evoke comments from readers, the bloggers neither respond nor discuss the questions with their audience. In this context, the formal Orthodox Christian blog represents public voice of the church whereas the site serves as a scene for the church to be heard, but not to be questioned. However, in social media (*vk.com/matyshkaonline*), on the contrary, the blogs have blurry structures and dynamic content, in which *matushki* demonstrate flexibility to switch between different themes and answer readers' questions.

Since digital religion refers to online religious practices as a part of offline religious community, the unity of both creates a cultural space in which religious traditions may alter (Campbell, 2017; Kim, 2015). While new media may challenge religious authority, there is a growing scholarship demonstrating how the role of religious media becomes even more powerful in patriarchal societies (Gunde, 2015). This study shows how Orthodox Christian bloggers strengthen the influence of the Russian Orthodox Church by bridging the communication between clergy and laity online. The data provide evidence that *matushki*-bloggers devote a significant part

of their discourse to affirmation of patriarchal clichés, rather than to teaching Orthodox Christianity.

First, *matushki* in both cases establish men's authority by references to different religious sources – sacred texts, lectures of priests, or works of spiritual fathers. For example, to maintain their arguments in question-answer session about relations between husband and wife, Orthodox women bloggers traditionally refer to Saint John Chrysostom, an Early Church Father, honored in Eastern Orthodoxy, who wrote about the role of women in marriage and family life. This study has showed that Orthodox bloggers do not challenge any sources of religious authorities – either sacred texts, or works of respected clergy – on the contrary, *matushki* tend to confirm to religious authority by justifying improper behavior of Orthodox priests. This finding suggests that *matushki*-bloggers, as representatives of the clergy, strengthen the influence of the ROC and use the platforms to increase the voice of the church in public spheres without challenging its authority, traditions and social influence. In this respect, the study echoes with work by Campbell (2010) on the religious authority and blogosphere. Similar to Campbell's study, this research found that religious bloggers affirm their views to traditional beliefs of the ROC.

Secondly, according to data in this study, *matushki*-bloggers develop the theme of motherhood as a women's duty and the best way of salvation. This finding correlates with previous works of Chong (2006) and Whitehead & Perry (2019). Through interpretation of child-planning as a sin, as well as violation against God's will (who knows what is the best for each individual), bloggers limit women's life options to marriage and motherhood. Moreover, bloggers encourage women to take responsibility for their children's education – many priests' wives popularize home schooling as another mother's duty of bringing true Orthodox Christian. The sources for such Orthodox elitism may root to tradition of home schooling in pre-revolutionary Russian Empire, as a sign of social status and wealth, as well as a way to restrict the influence of “decaying world” on children and defend traditional values. Since the family of Romanovs, the last Imperial family, killed in 1917 and canonized by the ROC in 2000, is an emerging theme in the official discourse of the Church, the study raised a question about the role of image of Empress Aleksandra in shaping an ideal model of motherhood and family relations in contemporary religious discourse.¹⁵ In addition, the findings demonstrate that in upbringing children, *matushki* frame femininity (*zhenstvinnost*) and masculinity (*muzhestvo*) as the most significant characteristics of a person to cherish in childhood.

Thirdly, *matushki* develop a patriarchal idea of subordination to a man through reflection on its multidimension nature – through obedience to God, dependency on priest (*dukhovnik*) and subordination to husband. Although the authority of God is central in Orthodox Christianity, it is delegated to priest and a man – one has to

¹⁵ See, Anna Saprykina, The renewal of monarchy starts in a family, (2017), http://www.pravoslavie.ru/107884.html#_ftn15

rebuild Heavenly kingdom in community whereas the other – in a family. Women's obedience to men is addressed in blogs as a natural pattern of Orthodox woman's behavior – in a role of man's assistant, supporter but never a leader or decision-maker. Furthermore, this patriarchal idea of subordination invokes another patriarchal cliché – sinful nature of women. Christian bloggers place responsibility for good relations in family on women. For example, in discussions of infantile husbands who financially rely on their wives, matushki advise women to pray God and help their husbands feel "a true man".

These findings echoes with the research of Kizenko (2013) and Knorre (2018) on a tendency of laity to seek spiritual dependency linking it to post-Soviet heritage of conformism, need for a leader and authority. Similar to Kizenko's study, data showed that idea of dependency on religious authority is very common in the religious narratives. Matushki strongly advise their readers to find a *dukhovnik* who would assist them in the process of decision-making. While obedience practice, as a form of spiritual subordination in the ROC's organizations, is a typical way to learn more about religion in supervised and labour disciplined manner (Medvedeva, 2016), matushki bloggers do not popularize these practices among their readers, stressing that performing one's duties in secular life is another kind of obedience.

Another interesting form of subordination in this study is subordination to the state authority, president Putin. Since the ROC addresses state in terms of God's will and purpose, matushki-bloggers maintain this patriarchal idea of subordination to state power. For example, in their narrative of authority, bloggers justify the state power and president Putin's activities but criticize local public servants as wholly responsible for ignorance of social issues in provinces of Russia. In this way, Christian women bloggers reproduce the naive monarchism myth in the good president and evil local authorities, supporting current order and state authority, on the one hand, and reconstructing subordination to men's power, on the other (Mamonova, 2016).

Overall, despite the fact that matushki reproduce numerous patriarchal clichés in the blogs concerning motherhood, subordination to men and spiritual dependency, they also share new ideas that contradict some patriarchal views traditionally associated with the Russian Orthodox Church. For example, priests' wives support women's employment and work, they are tolerant of women's appearance in church and they deny husband's abuse in families. Although while some matushki don't tolerate men's violence and recommend their readers to divorce or leave such relations, the others reproduce a patriarchal idea of blaming women for abuse. These findings resonates with research of Zaatut and Haj-Yahia (2016) on women's attitude to beating of wives. In this context, it is interesting to define that institutionalized bloggers at *pravoslavie.ru* show more support and justification of men's behavior while matushki at the platform *Matushka online*, who seem to have more freedom in their communication with audience, tend to support women. Such a striking difference may be explained by the level of matushki's affirmation to church authority in formal and informal contexts, as well as the format of the

platforms itself – women bloggers at *pravoslavie.ru* have less freedom of self-expression than those in the social media. This difference also reveals in attitudes to child-planning – while official bloggers have strict views on contraceptive methods, the unofficial religious bloggers more commonly approve non-abortifacients.

This study has defined certain themes religious bloggers apply to portray an Orthodox woman. First of all, Christian bloggers raise a theme of Orthodox woman's appearance that is addressed as a significant constituent of belief and religious self-identification. Although the Orthodox Christian traditions do not provide a defined code of appearance (Ryazanova, 2018), the bloggers define the norm of Orthodox women's appearance with a notion of "femininity". Thus, Orthodox dress code relies on traditional gender opinions about men's and women's clothes when a woman is expected to wear long skirts and headscarves. Ryazanova (2018) states the basic concepts of Orthodox looks have been shaped on the basis of certain extracts from sacred texts and works of holy fathers, which have lost their initial interpretations and have been "colored" with individual arguments, fantasies and myths. In their blogs, matushki blur the boundaries between religious and secular appearance of Orthodox women and emphasize attractiveness and femininity as a norm for a Christian woman aimed to position Christian Orthodoxy as a religion of beauty, modernity and Russianness. In this light, religious bloggers also continue to develop a new image of ortho-woman – one who is "well-educated, with excellent job, has well-groomed appearance, and she is happy" (Tiurenkova, 2009).

What is also notable is that ideas of Orthodox attractiveness reflect the appearance of women in pre-revolutionary Russian Empire and materialize it in a new category of clothes – Orthodox fashion.¹⁶ Designers reconstruct the dress of people who had different social status – royalty, aristocracy, tradesmen and peasants in Russian Empire at the beginning of the twentieth century. However, this intricate mixture of royal and rustic styles is aimed to meet Orthodox Christians' expectations, intensifying traditional views of femininity and masculinity. As one of the Orthodox fashion designers, *Korkina Hats* mentions: "We hope to be useful for people living in accordance with church year, those who adhere to color symbolism of festive or fasting days, those who increase masculinity in the appearance of their boys as well as underline femininity and modesty in the images of their girls."¹⁷

Secondly, in the official discourse at *pravoslavie.ru*, bloggers refer to Orthodox identity through reference to noble Orthodox women of the Russian past. For example, Empress Alexandra Romanova is depicted as an ideal model of women – a wife, devoted mother and Orthodox Christian.¹⁸ Besides, Christian bloggers raise

¹⁶ See social media page of Orthodox fashion shop, "A little lady: Outfit in Orthodox traditions", <https://vk.com/korkinahatsn>

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ See Kravtsova, M. (2016), Saint children: Upbringing in tzar's family, <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/90868.html>

the theme of the last royal family in the Russian Empire in relation to Orthodox Christianity, contemporary Russia, victimhood, patriotism and sacrifice. This narrative of the greatness of the last Orthodox Christian empire frames Russian identity as originally Orthodox and true Christian. Such a narrative of collective trauma evokes a post-empire nostalgia that helps transmit collective myths to younger generations, remember “important lessons” from Russian history, to support Orthodox values as well as current authorities (Blackburn, 2018). A cult of new martyrs enables the ROC to strengthen its influence and power in society (Burgess, 2014). In this context, religious bloggers approach Orthodox Christianity as a civil religion – a shared set of ideals, values, symbols, rituals, beliefs in society about the state (Weed & Heyking, 2010). Being activated by religious media, civil religion may reinforce the moral and political beliefs of a society, consolidating it around common values, on the one hand, and providing legitimization of state’s authority and ideology, on the other (Hovorun, 2017).

Thirdly, religious bloggers at *pravoslavie.ru* sacralize an image of Russian village (*derevnia*, *glubinka*) as a source of spirituality, authenticity and Russia’s future. The bloggers present life in the country as an ideal place for Orthodox Christians where peaceful nature and physical work help individuals maintain Orthodox values and bring up children in true Orthodox Christian traditions. Due to the theme of *Russian derevnia*, women-bloggers raise a distinct message of “coming back to own sacred roots” in the articles about Orthodox families who left urban life and moved to villages. With this theme, the authors glorify women villagers – mothers with many children, housewives, and matushki – who sacrifice comfortable life in cities for the sake of spiritual resurrection in the country and building stronger local communities in Russia’s provinces. In blogging content, *Russian derevnia* becomes a concept of spiritual transformation and Russia’s revival, where one has to come back to find God and true sense of life.

Finally, religious bloggers portray an Orthodox woman as a responsible Russian citizen, socially active individual, changemaker, representative of the church in society and defender of Orthodox Christian values. Beyond the traditional roles of mothers and wives, Orthodox women are expected to promote Orthodox Christian traditions, values and views. In this respect, “virtuoso women” (Kizenko, 2013), acting in concert with Orthodox clergy, reach public spheres of media, health care, education, and childcare. While church volunteerism in the ROC is also dominated by women (Knorre, 2018), a classic pattern of clergy-laity participation in non-liturgical activities emerge – lay people demonstrate greater engagement into social work (Zabaev, Mikhaylova & Oreshina, 2018). However, such “feminized patriarchy” does not signal that the formal structure of the Russian Orthodox Church is being changed (Kizenko, 2013) whereas women’s typical roles in the church deal with administrative, pastoral and educational duties (Kollontai, 2000).

To sum up, the studies of women’s discourses in formal and informal religious media have shown how the ROC increases its ideological presence in public sphere with the help of priests’ wives. However, religious bloggers have demonstrated

diversity of views and attitudes to women's role in modern society, family, and church. Although patriarchal ideas remain dominant in blogging of Orthodox Christian women, specifically at the institutionalized sites, the data demonstrate new shifts toward understanding Orthodox woman as an employed, successful and attractive woman who actively fights for traditional Christian values in Russian society.

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