

**The Old Faith and the Russian Land: A Historical Ethnography of Ethics in the Urals by Douglas Rogers. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009. 338 pp. Bibliography. Index. Maps. Figures. Paper.**

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In this historical ethnography, Douglas Rogers takes us along a three-century journey of the development, embodiment, and transformation of ethical subjectivities in a small community of priestless Old Believers in the village of Sepych in the Urals. The study draws on extensive ethnographic fieldwork and archival research to provide a thorough analysis that shows the intersection of labor and exchange practices, religious and consumptive rituals, and gender and generational relations with a wide range of social, political, and ideological shifts spanning Imperial Russia to the postsocialist period. The ethnographic investigation constitutes an ambitious attempt to show the continuity, transformation, and resilience of a moral community's ethical forms of organizing and understanding their environment amidst changing social, political, and economic contexts. The study joins other works in postsocialist anthropology that attempt to analyze the Soviet and post-Soviet experience writ large through a careful ethnographic snapshot of how a community interprets and adapts to the events and things around them. While this study is thematically focused on ethics in Sepych, the methodology and analysis is relevant to social sciences more broadly and a welcome contribution to the growing knowledge base on the anthropology of Eurasia. Rogers' focus on ethical regimes illustrates the gradual sedimentation of shared interpretations and practices over time that helps us to see how a community formulates their reality and relationships in a dynamic socio-historical context. The book is divided into three overarching parts that correspond with the pre-Soviet, Soviet, and post-Soviet eras. Despite the timeframe, Rogers' coherent thematic and analytical approach across the sections shows how personhood and community is negotiated and renegotiated in historical and contemporary Sepych.

The introduction serves as the theoretical backbone of the study with a discussion of the nuanced terminology used throughout the rest of the ethnographic work: moralizing discourses, ethical regimes, and moral communities. He posits ethics as "a field of socially located and culturally informed practices that are undertaken with at least somewhat conscious orientation toward conceptions of what is good, proper, or virtuous" (11). He reminds us that an ethnography of ethics is more than a discursive exercise, but an analysis of how ethical subjectivities are enacted through practice and narrative.

Part I begins with a historic sketch of the growth of an Old Believer community on the periphery of the S. G. Stroganov estate in central Russia. He shows that by the early eighteenth century local practices connected to salvation were already salient elements in the lives of individuals in and around Sepych. Notions of the appropriate arrangement and separation of

gender, sexuality, ritual, and generation were already identifiable as an ethical repertoire governing and shaping a moral community in the Urals. We begin to see that the categories of gender and generation are central to the formation of different kinds of ethics and subjectivities (46). Rogers is careful not to portray a passive community reacting to external pressures, but one of resilience and continuity in terms of the regulation and maintenance of appropriate personhood. In the second half of Part I, Rogers explores a schism between two religious factions dating back to the post-emancipation period. Described in detail and at times with levity, Rogers recounts the schism as another layer to the definition and maintenance of ethical subjects. Subsequently, the schism accounts are situated in the changing economic context of the post-emancipation period, where communities in the Urals begin to experience strong challenges to dominant power structures, particularly in terms of gender roles. Part I, thus, begins to assemble the historical platform on which socialism will be set.

Part II focuses on the maintenance of personhood and moral community amidst ideological changes in the early and middle Soviet period. We see how the Soviet system of proper arrangements of labor, ritual, gender, and generation aligned and sometimes misaligned with local social norms and expectations. In the first half of this part, we are introduced to an analysis of cash and in-kind incentives used by various state and non-state actors to compensate and reward work and how these were key material inputs in the development of ethical relationships—particularly amongst young people. The second half of Part II focuses on how elders, religious practice, and community organization weathered socialist anti-religious campaigns. The Old Believer practice of deferred religious practice into old age and the strict separation of worlds allowed continued adherence to Old Believer identities during this time. However, at the same time, we begin to see slight shifts taking place across priestless Old Believer communities including an ever wider intergenerational gap, the feminization and “geriatricization” of Old Belief, and transformations in textual and ritual authority. In Part II, we see how important an understanding of the pre-Soviet past is in explaining the nuanced transformations and continuities experienced in the Soviet period.

Corresponding to the early post-Soviet period, Part III begins to show how shifting economic processes intersect with religious practice thus impacting the ethical and moral organization of priestless Old Believers. Shifting from the more or less stable late Soviet period we begin to see how changes in drinking rituals, gender relations, and forms of consolidating power and influence have begun eroding the continuity and the strict separation of worlds analyzed throughout this ethnography. Rogers describes how individuals and the community grapple with and account for changes in ritual practice and expectations related to baptism, funerals, priests, and church attendance. Despite the continuities described throughout this study, Part III begins to pose questions of change, discontinuity, and conversion.

Rogers combines two different approaches to the question of ethics—historical and ethnographic. The historical vignettes couple the ethnographic account of Sepych to show how ethical practices over time remain because of their relevance to particular constructions of reality. We see the process of participating, withdrawing, and reentering social realms as an important historically informed factor in how groups in Sepych formulate and interpret their

reality. The strength of this approach, allows us to see a glimpse of how a community might negotiate the uncertainty of the future. If at first the layering of historical accounts from imperial Russia and the Soviet period with contemporary postsocialist realities seems bewildering it ultimately has a grounding effect on the arguments he posits throughout the work. By doing so, Rogers balances, if at time tenuously, abstract concepts related to ethical subjectivities with the ethnographic narratives he collects.

In the concluding segments, Rogers revisits some of the central themes of the study and leaves the reader with an evocative snapshot of contemporary Sepych. *The Old Faith and the Russian Land* provides an in depth and unique historical analysis of societal expectations and practices that create ethical subjectivities amidst ideological and economic contexts that have helped shape notions of a moral self and community. The ethnography closes with Sepych looking toward the future with its dynamic background of three centuries worth of ethical and material practices that have shaped a moral community. Moving forward in the post-Soviet period, Sepych finds itself a yet another moment of change and transition with an unknown future jumpstarted by a dramatic post-Soviet period.