CORA Cork Open Research Archive
Cartlann Taighde Oscailte Chorcaí

Title	Women and Orthodox dissent: The case of the Archangelist underground movement in Soviet Moldavia
Authors	Kapaló, James A.
Publication date	2021-11-02
Original Citation	Kapaló, J. A. (2021) 'Women and Orthodox Dissent: The Case of the Archangelist Underground Movement in Soviet Moldavia', in Merdjanova, I. (ed.), Women and Religiosity in Orthodox Christianity, Fordham University Press. isbn: 9780823298617
Type of publication	Book chapter
Link to publisher's version	https://www.fordhampress.com/9780823298617/women-and-religiosity-in-orthodox-christianity/
Rights	© Fordham University Press 2021
Download date	2026-11-07 14:14:40
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/11378

UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

Women and Orthodox Dissent: The Case of the Archangelist Underground Movement in Soviet Moldavia[1]

James A Kapaló, University College Cork, Ireland

Biography

James Kapaló is Senior Lecturer in the Study of Religions at University College Cork, Ireland, co-Director of the Marginalised and Endangered Worldviews Study Centre and Principal Investigator of the European Research Council project Creative Agency and Religious Minorities: 'Hidden Galleries' in the Secret Police Archives in Central and Eastern Europe (project no. 677355). He is author of two monographs, Text, Context and Performance: Gagauz Folk Religion in Discourse and Practice (Leiden: Brill, 2011) and Inochentism and Orthodox Christianity: Religious Dissent in the Russian and Romanian Borderlans (Routledge: London, 2019).

Abstract

This chapter addresses the transformation of the religious landscape in Soviet Moldavia from the perspective of gender dynamics. Based on the testimonies of a group of women from the Turkish-speaking Gagauz Orthodox Christian minority, I explore their responses to the Khrushchev-era anti-religious campaigns of the 1950s and 1960s which resulted in membership of an underground Orthodox dissent movement commonly referred to as Archangelism. The term domestication has been used by a number of scholars of religion to describe the relocation of religion to the domestic sphere during communism and the enhanced role played in ritual and practice by women during this period. In Moldova, however, an Orthodox religious underground with strong female figures had already emerged during the right-wing dictatorship that preceded Soviet rule. In this chapter, I suggest that our understanding of domestic religion during communism should be expanded to include an awareness of earlier forms of Orthodox dissent in which the domestic sphere had become an important characteristic of the religious field. In so doing, I highlight some of the diverse ways

[1] Some elements of this chapter appear in my monogrpah *Inochentism and Orthodox Christianity: Religious Dissent in the Russian and Romanian Borderlands* (London: Routledge, 2019). I would like to thank Catherine Wanner for the opportunity to participate in the conference Public Religion, Ambient Faith: Religion and Socio-Political Change in the Black Sea Region in Kiev in 2016 and for her insightful comments which helped shape some of the points I make here. The research for this chapter has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme No. 677355.

in which the agency of Orthodox women shaped the religious field in Moldova in the twentieth century.

Introduction

Soviet rule in Moldova, which lasted from 1944 until 1991, transformed the religious landscape impacting deeply on gender dynamics within Orthodox Christianity. This chapter explores these changes based on the testimonies of a group of women from the Gagauz minority, Turkish-speaking Orthodox Christians, from villages in the south of today's Republic of Moldova. The rapid Sovietisation of society, the mass deportation of class enemies and religious minorities and the closure of Orthodox places of worship brought massive disruption and uncertainty to the lives of ordinary Moldovans. This took place against a backdrop of widespread famine and starvation amongst the rural Moldovan population in 1946-47. Women responded in a variety of ways to these harsh circumstances, including exploring the potential of their Orthodox faith to provide purpose and a sense of certainty and security. The term domestication has been used by a number of scholars of religion to describe the relocation of religion to the domestic sphere during communism when women played a greater role in ritual and practice. In Moldova, however, an Orthodox religious underground with strong female figures had already emerged during the right-wing dictatorship that preceded Soviet rule. In this chapter, I point to the ways that our understanding of domestic religion during communism should be expanded to include an awareness of the significance of earlier forms of Orthodox dissent in which the domestic sphere had become an important dimension of what is known commonly as the religious underground. In so doing, I highlight some of the diverse ways in which the agency of Orthodox women shaped the religious field in Moldova in the twentieth century.

Historical Context

The territory we know of today as the Republic of Moldova has an extremely complex history of occupation and re-occupation and of shifting borders. This history not only brought about changes in political but also in religious jurisdiction. Bessarabia, which constituted the eastern part of the medieval Principality of Moldavia (one of the two Romanian principalities that later, in the 1860s, formed the fledgling Romanian state, the other being Wallachia) had been a vassal of the Ottoman Empire since the sixteenth century before it was integrated into the Russian Empire following the Russo-Turkish War of 1806-12. From this point on, the population was gradually incorporated culturally and religiously into the Russian empire and its Church. The

distinctive character of Moldavian Orthodox culture was eroded through the imposition of Russian hierarchs and ritual practice, but not entirely eradicated. These lands, populated by a majority of Romanian-speaking ethnic Moldovans, maintained close cultural affinities with the Moldavian lands to the west of the river Prut that went on to form part of the new Romanian nation state. The southern part of the newly occupied Russian lands, referred to as the Bugeac, had been sparsely populated by semi-nomadic Tartars. They were expelled by Russia to Crimea and Dobrudja, and the land was settled with Orthodox Christians from the Eastern Balkans, mainly Bulgarians and Gagauzes. The 1897 Russian Imperial census, which was conducted on the basis of native language, reported that Moldovans constituted 47.6% of the Bessarabian population, with the remainder comprising Ukrainians (19.6%), Jews (11.8%) and Russians (8%) plus a number of other smaller groups such as Germans, Gagauzes and Bulgarians especially in the south.[2]

In this ethnically diverse context, between 1812 and 1918 the Russian Orthodox Church, following its assimilation of the local Moldavian Orthodox community, intermittently and sometimes vigorously pursued a policy of Russification of the local Moldavian Church. Starting with the Russian annexation of Bessarabia 1812 until the present day, the territory became a "battleground between Orthodox Churches"[3] with Russia and Romania competing to define Orthodox Christian culture. Russian Orthodox Church set up its own Eparchy in Bessarabia in 1813 and following a period of relative autonomy under the local-born Bishop Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni, exercised control of the Church through a succession of bishops appointed to the new diocese of Kishinev-Khotinsk (Chișinău and Hotin in Romanian) from the imperial centre. Gradually, under Bănulescu-Bodoni's successors, the Moldovan character of the church was eroded as Romanian language liturgical books were removed, ethnic Russian, Ukrainian and Belorussian took over positions of authority and monastic institutions were headed by abbots brought in from outside the territory. In 1856, when Russia lost three southern districts of Bessarabia at the Treaty of Paris following her defeat in the Crimean War, the policy of Russification of the remaining territory was accelerated. When Russia won back the southern districts in 1878, they too were subjected to rapid measures to ensure the Russian character of the church life there.[4]

---

[2] G. Murgoci, *La Population de la Bessarabie: Étude Démographique avec cartes et tableaux statistiques* (Paris, 1920)

[3] Nicholas Dima, "Politics and Religion in Moldova: A Case Study," *The Mankind Quarterly* 34/3 (1994): 175-194.

[4] Clay, J. Eugene, "Apocalypticism in the Russian Borderlands: Inochentie Levizor and his Moldovan Followers," *Religion, State and Society* 26/3-4 (1998): 251-63.

Following the First World War, Bessarabia was united with Greater Romania and was subject to an intense nation-building process largely intended to undo the previous century of Russification. The Romanian interwar period is characterised by policies aimed at the centralisation of the state and the nationalisation of culture driven by the desire to transform all of the newly acquired multi-ethnic and religiously diverse territories of Bessarabia, Bukovina and Transylvania into integral parts of a unified nation state. The new provinces and their populations, including Moldovans, were viewed through cultural imperialist lenses. What is more, Romania was a society made up of an overwhelmingly agrarian population that her political and intellectual elites were fixated on transforming into citizens of a modern state, even as they considered those they labelled "peasants" to be "the cultural and social backbone of the nation."[5] Of all the new territories, Bessarabia was considered the most problematic not only due to its diverse ethnic, linguistic and religious make up: only 56% of the population was ethnic Romanian in 1930, but also because it was the most rural, with only 13% living in urban centres.[6]

Following the defeat of the Axis in World War Two, Romania was compelled to cede Bessarabia to the Soviet Union, with the territory hence-forth named the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR). Mainstream Romanian Church historiography up to this point tends to frame the history of the territory up to 1944 almost exclusively in terms of the national struggle of the Romanian-speaking majority for control of the local church dominated by Russian hierarchs.[7]

The Repression of Religion in Soviet Moldavia

The period following the re-occupation of Moldova by Soviet forces in August 1944 (Romania had been forced to cede Bessarabia and Northern Bucovina to the Soviet Union in June 1940 before joining the Axis invasion and recapturing the lost territory in the following year) up to

[5] Sorin Radu and Oliver Jens Schmitt, "Introduction," in *Politics and Peasants in Interwar Romania: Perceptions, Mentalities, Propaganda*, eds. Sorin Radu and Oliver Jens Schmitt, (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), 1.

[6] Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), 9-10.

[7] See for example Nicolae Popovschi 1931, *The History of the Church of Bessarabia in the Nineteenth Century under the Russians* [*Istoria Bisericii din Bassarabia în veacul al XiX-lea sub Ruși*] (Chișinău: Museum, 1931); Ion Nistor, *The History of Bessarabia* [*Istoria Basarabiei*] (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1991); Mircea Păcurariu, *Bessarabia: Aspects of the History of the Church and the Romanian Nation* [*Basarabia: Aspecte din Istoria Bisericii și a Neamului Românesc*] (Iași: Trinitas, 1993) and Nicholas Dima, "Politics and Religion in Moldova: A Case Study," *The Mankind Quarterly* 34/3 (1994): 175-194.

Stalin's death in March 1953 were perhaps the harshest and most brutal of the twentieth century for the Moldovan population. The rapid Sovietisation of society, the mass deportation of class enemies and religious minorities[8] and the closure of Orthodox places of worship brought massive disruption and uncertainty to the lives of ordinary Moldovans. This took place against a backdrop of widespread famine and starvation amongst the rural Moldovan population in 1946-47 with estimated deaths of between 123-200,000.[9]

With the advent of the Second World War, Stalin had been forced to reconsider his attitude towards the Russian Orthodox Church as he needed to galvanise and strengthen the solidarity of the Soviet population. The new attitude culminated in the famous meeting between Stalin and the Bishops of the Orthodox Church that took place on 4 September 1943 at which a concordat was reached that normalised church-state relations and allowed the Church to conduct its normal activities with worshippers freely attending church, performing services and taking part in religious processions.[10] In parts of the Soviet Union that had experienced the anti-religious campaigns of the 1920s and 30s, an underground movement had taken shape comprised of dissenting groups of Orthodox believers and members of other religious communities that refused to register in protest at state interference in church life. The so-called underground or catacomb churches included groups such as the True Orthodox Church of

[8] On 6 April 1949, the Council of Ministers of the USSR took the decision to begin Operation South, the mass deportation of a wide spectrum of anti-Soviet elements but especially the *kulaks*, from Moldova. Mass deportation was a tried and tested method by 1949 deployed to remove troublesome populations from sensitive border regions, to eliminate resistance to collectivization and to remove economic and political elites (see Emily Baran, *Dissent on the Margins: How Soviet Jehovah's Witnesses Defied Communism and Lived to Preach About It* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press), 60). Between 6 and 9 July, 35,796 people were deported to Siberia, constituting the largest deportation in the history of Bessarabia. Of these, 7,625 families were classified as *kulaks*, the remainder were accused of being collaborators with the "German-fascist occupation" (Caşu 2014, 234). This second category included 345 families of sectarians, mainly Jehovah's Witnesses. Jehovah's Witnesses were subject to a further mass deportation from Moldova in April 1951, when they were exclusively targeted in Operation North. The total number of Jehovah's Witnesses deported in this operation was 2,724 (Igor Caşu, *Class Enemy: Political Repression, Violence and Resistance in the SSR of Moldova, 1924-56* [*Duşmanul de Clasă: Represiune politice, violenţă şi resistenţă în R(A)SS Moldovenească, 1924-56*] (Chişinău: Cartier, 2014), 298.

[9] Igor Caşu, *Class Enemy: Political Repression, Violence and Resistance in the SSR of Moldova, 1924-56* [*Duşmanul de Clasă: Represiune politice, violenţă şi resistenţă în R(A)SS Moldovenească, 1924-56*] (Chişinău: Cartier, 2014), 189-190.

[10] Tatiana. A. Chumachenko, *Church and State in Soviet Russia* (Armonk, New York, London: M. E. Sharpe), 190.

Russia and the Ionnites, followers of father John of Kronstadt who operated clandestinely outside of official Orthodox structures.[11]

The Orthodox religious underground in Soviet Moldavia, however, had been shaped by the policies of the Romanian state in the interwar period and especially by the right-wing dictatorship of Marshal Antonescu, who had attempted to suppress various Orthodox dissenting movements that were considered both heretical and anti-national in sentiment. These included the Old Calendarists and the Inochentists, both movements characterised by the important role that women played in mobilising religious opinion and defending their communities from state interference.[12] The Romanian Orthodox Church's introduction of the revised Julian Calendar in 1924[13] provoked a religious crisis, especially in the western part of Moldavia (which had been part of the Romanian state since unification in the 1860s) and the newly acquired territory of Bessarabia, both of which had influential monastic institutions with a strong traditionalist outlook. Resistance to the new calendar resulted in violent confrontations in the 1930s between the Romanian Gendarmerie and the *Stilişti*, or Stylists, the term used to refer to those who continued to adhere to the old-style calendar. For the Romanian Church and state, the calendar was a question related to the social, moral, and religious order of the new nation state[14] but for large portions of the Orthodox population it represented a cataclysmic break with tradition, with liturgical time itself, and marked a sign of the impending End of Days. The Inochentists, also resisted the introduction of the new calendar. Inochentism had emerged in the last decade of the Russian Empire in the western provinces populated by ethnic Moldovans, especially Bessarabia. Initially the movement centred around a pilgrimage and the charismatic preaching of a Moldovan Orthodox monk, Inochentie of Balta, however, once the movement attracted the negative attention of the Orthodox Church and state authorities, it was

[11] William Fletcher, "Underground Orthodoxy: A Problem of Political Control," Canadian Slavonic Papers 12/4 (1970): 363-94.

[12] On the role of women in Inochentism see James A. Kapaló, "Wise Virgins and Mothers of God" Women, Possession and Sexuality in the Early Inochentist Movement," in *Marginalised and Endangered Worldviews: Comparative Studies on Contemporary Eurasia, India and South America*, eds. Lidia Guzy & James A. Kapaló (Lit Verlag: Berlin, 2017), 137-161; on women in the Old Calendarist movement see Iuliana Cindrea-Nagy, "Femeile stiliste in arhivele politiei secrete," [Stilist Women in the Archives of the Secret Police] *Magazin Istoric* 1 (2019): 66-70.

[13] The Revised Julian Calendar was adopted by the Orthodox Churches of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Greece, Cyprus, Romania, Poland, and Bulgaria at a congress in Constantinople in May 1923. Russia along with Ukraine, Georgia, and Jerusalem rejected its introduction.

[14] See D. Croitoru, "The danger of Stilism and Inochentism in Bessarabia" ['Pericolul stilismului şi inochentismului din Basarabia']. *Misionarul* 8/1–2 (1936): 120–21.

transformed into a dissent movement that critiqued the hierarchy of the Church and preached the impending End of Days.[15] These two groups, the Old Calendarists and the Inochentists, had formed clandestine networks in Bessarabia prior to the Soviet occupations of 1941 and 1944 and therefore had twenty years of experience of operating underground.

Unregistered and unrecognised religious groups were, by their nature, difficult to keep track of and to control. The Inochentists, who occupied a liminal space between Orthodoxy and open schism with the Church, were especially elusive. In the MSSR, the secret police was able to draw on the information and records of the previous regime, which had been meticulous in collecting data on the Inochentists and others in preparation for their eventual internment and deportation, thus facilitating swift intervention and arrests in 1945-46. Alexandru Culiac, one of the main leaders of the Archangelist branch of the movement was arrested for the first time by the Soviet Authorities in 1945 and sentenced by a Special Session of the NKVD to five years exile in Kazakhstan for anti-Soviet sectarian activity (ASISRM-KGB 022997, vol 2, 209-210). Several other leaders of the movement were arrested and deported between 1946 and 1948 accused of "anti-Soviet agitation amongst the population" aimed against participation in the kolkhoz, Komsomol and the Communist Party.[16]

Following the death of Stalin, with the exception of a brief Hundred Days antireligious campaign in 1954, there was a general liberalisation of policy towards religions and most mainstream churches and registered communities could function without too much state interference. Although the state still worked actively to ensure that they should not thrive, religion began to gradually regain some ground and many religious leaders were released from the Gulag.[17] This period of relative calm, however, came to an end when, at the height of the Cold War between 1958 and 1964, Khrushchev initiated an antireligious campaign that replaced the mass repression of the past in favour of a return to the policies of the 1930s. He sought to revive aspects of early Soviet culture, in part to mark a clear break with the Stalinist era, and was a passionate believer in the importance of "scientific atheism" in the construction

[15] On Inochentism see James A. Kapaló, *Inochentism and Orthodox Christianity: Religious Dissent in the Russian and Romanian Borderlands* (Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 2019).
[16] Pavel Moraru, *Follower of Felix Dzerzhinsky: Organs of the State Security in the Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldova* [*Urmașul lui Felix Dzerjinski: Organele Securității Statului în Republica Sovietica Socialistă Moldovenească*] (Bucharest: Institutul Național pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, 2008), 109.
[17] Emily Baran, *Dissent on the Margins: How Soviet Jehovah's Witnesses Defied Communism and Lived to Preach About It* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 71.

of a modern communist future.[18] A Central Committee report of 13 September 1958, in response to a perceived rise in the activity of religious groups, proposed a campaign that would focus of education led by trained cadres, the media, and the production of specialist anti-religious literature effective for a modern socialist society; shortly after, on 4 October, the Central Committee launched an extensive anti-religious campaign.[19] Khrushchev's new religious policy was based on the revival of two principals as devised in the 1920s; the first, which emphasized the principal of Soviet legality,[20] saw the creation of a clear distinction between registered congregations, which would be offered concessions, whilst dealing extremely harshly with unregistered and underground groups; and the second, encouraged prioritising repression of clergy and preachers in an attempt to isolate them from society, whilst persuading believers through education and agitation to embrace atheism.[21]

This dramatic shift in policy carried a number of implications for both the official Orthodox Church and the underground dissenting communities. Firstly, responding to a call by the party to tailor propaganda to local needs,[22] there was a marked increase in the number of anti-sect, and specifically anti-Inochentist, publications in Moldova from the spring of 1958 onwards; these included a volume dedicated to Inochentism, Jehovah Witnesses and Murashkovites entitled 'Preachers of Obscurantism' by Aleksandrov (1958) and a sourcebook for teachers of atheism entitled 'Materials to Assist Teachers of Atheism' which included testimonials from ex-Archangelists, followers of Alexandru Culeac (*Materiale* 1959).[23] Both of these were published in Romanian in order to reach the majority Moldovan population. There were also as a series of articles in both Russian and Romanian language newspapers and magazines such as *Sovetskaya Moldavia* (Soviet Moldavia) *Sovetskaya Kultura* (Soviet Culture), *Femeia Moldovei* (Women of Moldavia) and *Tinerea Moldovei* (Youth of Moldavia). The large number of articles in women's and youth magazines reflect the Soviet authorities

[18] Catriona Kelly, *Socialist Churches: Radical Secularizatioon and the Preservation of the Past in Petrograd and Leningrad, 1918-1988* (DeKalb: NIU Press, 2016), 190.
[19] Catriona Kelly, *Socialist Churches: Radical Secularizatioon and the Preservation of the Past in Petrograd and Leningrad, 1918-1988* (DeKalb: NIU Press, 2016), 191.
[20] Sonja Luehrmann, *Secularism Soviet Style: Teaching Atheism and Religion in a Volga Republic* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2011), 98.
[21] Emily Baran, *Dissent on the Margins: How Soviet Jehovah's Witnesses Defied Communism and Lived to Preach About It* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 70-71.
[22] Emily Baran, *Dissent on the Margins: How Soviet Jehovah's Witnesses Defied Communism and Lived to Preach About It* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press), 72.
[23] *Material for the support of Teachers of Atheism* [*Materiale în Ajutorul Lectorului-Ateist*] (Chișinău: Societatea pentru răspîndirea conoștințelor politice și științifice a R.S.S. Moldovenești, 1959).

view that women and young people were especially vulnerable to the pernicious influence of the superstitious Orthodox underground. And finally, to ensure that the message about the dangers of Inochentism reached the widest possible audience, a documentary film was also produced in 1959 by Moldova Film entitled "Apostles Unmasked."

The rapid closure of many Orthodox churches and nearly all monasteries in Soviet Moldavia in this period impacted directly on Orthodox believers, whether members of the Inochentist dissent movement or not, in unintended ways. Between 1954 and 1958, the number of Orthodox Churches in operation had remained more or less stable but in 1958 closures began to gradually increase. According to the official figures of the Council of Orthodox Church Affairs, in 1960 alone, 138 Orthodox Churches were deregistered in Moldova.[24] The Orthodox Church had already lost a significant number of priests in 1944 when several hundred fled as refugees to Romania when Soviet forces re-entered the country[25] and many of Churches these priests had served, around 350, were dropped from the registration roll.[26] The sudden closure of Orthodox places of worship left whole regions with no easy access to priests. The number of functioning Orthodox churches fell dramatically from over 1100 to just over 200 by 1988[27] with most former religious buildings being transformed into cinemas, storehouses, hospitals or museums. Of the 25 functioning monasteries in Bessarabia in 1945, 15 remained open in 1956 but by 1964 all but one had been closed.[28] Although the removal of priests and the destruction of buildings visibly demonstrated the end of the old social order, "superstition," as religious belief and practice was routinely referred, proved extremely tenacious.[29]

Domestic Religion and Dissent

The forced retreat of religious actors, institutions and communities in the face of state repression, which took various forms from propaganda campaigns to mass deportations

[24] Nathaniel Davis, "The Number of Orthodox Churches before and after the Khrushchev Antireligious Drive," *Slavic Review* 50/3 (1991): 613.
[25] Romeo Cemîrtan, "The situation and evolution of the life of the Church in the MSSR in the period 1945-62" ['Situația și evoluție vieții bisericești din RSSM în periodă 1945-1962'], in *Destine individuale și collective în comunism*, eds. Cosmin Budeancă & Florentin Olteanu. (Iași: Polirom, 2013).
[26] Nathaniel Davis, "The Number of Orthodox Churches before and after the Khrushchev Antireligious Drive," *Slavic Review* 50/3 (1991): 612.
[27] Nicholas Dima, "Politics and Religion in Moldova: A Case Study," *The Mankind Quarterly* 34/3 (1994): 184.
[28] Babii, Iurie et al (eds.), *Holy Places* [*Locașuri Sfinte*] (Chișinău: Alfa și Omega, 2001),
[29] Catriona Kelly, *Socialist Churches: Radical Secularizatioon and the Preservation of the Past in Petrograd and Leningrad, 1918-1988* (DeKalb: NIU Press, 2016), 3.

described above, achieved varied results depending on the specific context. There was an appearance of success as "the transmission of religion was confined to the domestic sphere."[30] In the Soviet Union, however, the authorities were aware that despite church closures the religious population, "left to its own devices," congregated at informal worship services and numerous house churches.[31] In a previous article[32] where I discuss the phenomenon of domestic religion, I outline some of the consequences of Orthodox Church closures such as the redistribution of religious materials, publications, icons, bibles and ritual objects rescued from churches into homes and the daily lives of believers. This dispersion of material religious *charisma* into homes following the closure of Churches was accompanied by profound fear amongst individuals and communities for their spiritual and physical well-being as ritual protection, obligations, and taboos were compromised. This, as Kononenko points out, in turn prompted "substitute religious activity during the Soviet period."[33] In this sense, the destruction of religious institutions gave new impetus to practices that could substitute them.

Gender was of course highly significant in this process; as Viola discusses, older women in village society, who were "seen as outside Soviet control" and freer from many of the pressures to conform to Soviet ideals,[34] took on the role of keepers of Orthodox tradition and knowledge. Because of their age, these women were also considered "not fully feminine" in vernacular Orthodox belief. Consequently, this "combination of political reality and folk belief" led to the feminization, and also the geriatricization, of religious activity.[35] Similar tendencies can be observed not only amonst mainstream Orthodox but also amongst certain religious minorities or Orthodox dissenting groups. In his anthropology of Russian Old

---

[30] Chris Hann, "Introduction: Broken Chains and Moral Lazarets: the politicization, juridification and commodification of religion after socialism," in (ed.) Chris Hann, *Religion, Identity, Postsocialism: The Halle Focus Group 2003-2010* (Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, 2010), 1-23 (12).

[31] William Fletcher, "Underground Orthodoxy: A Problem of Political Control," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 12/4 (1970): 383.

[32] See James A. Kapaló, "Domestic Religion in the Soviet and Post-Soviet Moldova," in (eds.) Annette Schnabel, Melanie Reddig and Heidemarie Winkel, *Religion im Kontext/Religion in Context: Handbuch für Wissenschaft und Studium* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2018), 305-321.

[33] Natalie Kononenko, "Folk Orthodoxy: Popular Religion in Contemporary Ukraine," in (ed.) John Paul Himka and Andriy Zayarnyuk, *Letters from Heaven: Popular Religion in Russia and Ukraine* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 47.

[34] Lynne Viola, "баби бунты and Peasant Women Protest during Collectivization," *The Russian Review* 45/1 (1986): 23-24.

[35] N. Kononenko, "Folk Orthodoxy: Popular Religion in Contemporary Ukraine," in (ed.) John Paul Himka and Andriy Zayarnyuk, *Letters from Heaven: Popular Religion in Russia and Ukraine* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 48-49.

Believers, Douglas Rogers recounts that in the Soviet-era "their pastors were nearly universally spiritual mothers rather than fathers, and services took place in domestic spaces that had themselves become more closely associated with women than with men."[36] As Rogers goes on to explain, this process came to characterise all societies in the Soviet bloc, with "the disassociation of men from religious life as they identified more closely with public party positions, waged labor in the state farm, and the pervasive networks of socialist society."[37]

Earlier waves of religious dissent and repression in the Russian Orthodox world from the seventeenth century onwards had resulted in a similar phenomenon of domestic religious ritual replacing or supplementing public worship amongst groups such as the Old Believers,[38] the Skoptsy,[39] and the Stundists.[40] In the Soviet era, these groups were joined by a new underground catacomb churches mentioned above that mirrored earlier patterns of domestic practice and hidden worship. Many of these groups transformed domestic space into sacred safe-havens, where liturgical life could continue in seclusion. In addition, with the closure and the forced laicization of tens of thousands of monks and nuns across the Soviet Union and communist Eastern Europe, former members of religious orders set up households in towns and villages and continued to pursue a private religious life in the midst of socialist society.[41]

These expressions of domestic religion should be understood therefore as the product not only of communist repression but also of centuries of dissenter tradition from within the Russian Orthodox Church. In the context of Soviet Moldavia, domestic forms of religion drew on or grew out of earlier traditions of Inochentist and Old Calendarist Romanian Orthodox dissent established in the interwar period. These two groups, rather than relying on the agency

---

[36] Douglas Rogers, *The Old Faith and the Russian Land: A Historical Ethnography of Ethics in the Urals* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2009), 174. See also James Kapaló, "'She read me a prayer and I read it back to her': Gagauz Women, Miraculous Literacy and the Dreaming of Charms," *Religion and Gender*, 4/1 (2014): 3–20.

[37] Douglas Rogers, *The Old Faith and the Russian Land: A Historical Ethnography of Ethics in the Urals* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2009), 175.

[38] See Irina Paert, *Old Believers, Religious Dissent and Gender in Russia, 1760-1850,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003) and Douglas Rogers, *The Old Faith and the Russian Land: A Historical Ethnography of Ethics in the Urals* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2009).

[39] See Laura Engelstein, *Castration and the Heavenly Kingdom: A Russian Folk Tale* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999).

[40] See S. I. Zhuk, S. I. *Russia's Lost Reformation: Peasants, Millenialism, and Radical Sects in Southern Russia and Ukraine 1830-1917* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 2004).

[41] J. J. Wynot, *Keeping the Faith: Russian Orthodox Monasticism in the Soviet Union, 1917-1939* (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 2004).

and commitment of older women, drew their strength from devout younger women who pledged their lives to the salvation of their souls and disappeared into the religious underground.

Women in Inochentism

Women and young girls played a central role in the emergence and spread of Inochentism in a number of ways. Pilgrims to Balta, the home monastery of the mon Inochenite, participated in mass confession in a similar way to that practiced by John of Kronstadt,[42] which frequently resulted in the ecstatic possession of large numbers of believers. The many young women and girls who experienced possession became known as "young martyrs," who were seen as taking on the sins and suffering of others, and were also considered to be prophetesses.[43] The possession cult that emerges from the contemporary accounts bears one of the key hallmarks of Lewis's category of "peripheral possession,"[44] which identifies certain forms of possession, those that are most often found amongst women and that are initially considered as an illness, as "thinly disguised protest movements," a kind of "clandestine ecstasy" that can be targeted against the dominant sex.

Inochentie, as a monk of the Russian Orthodox Church, also extolled the virtues of leading a life according to monastic rules. In Orthodox Christianity, monastic life was regarded as coming closest to the ideal spiritual life free from the temptation of original sin, which brought with it sexuality. Inochentie, like John of Kronstadt before him, in preaching the renunciation of marriage and sexual relations, wished to unburden his followers of material concerns and obligations to family to allow them to prepare through prayer and repentance for the End of Days. For women, the rejection of the model of bride, mother and housewife was especially transformative as this not only relieved them of all the duties and the associated inferior social status, it also served as a marker of their spiritual equality with men.[45]

---

[42] Nadieszda Kizenko, *A Prodigal Saint: Father John of Kronstadt and the Russian People* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 60.
[43] J. Eugene Clay, "Apocalypticism in the Russian Borderlands: Inochentie Levizor and his Moldovan Followers," *Religion, State and Society* 26 (1998): 251-263.
[44] I. M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 26.
[45] See James A. Kapaló, "Wise Virgins and Mothers of God: Woman, possession and Sexuality in the Early Inochentist Movement," in (eds.) Lidia Guzy and James A. Kapaló, *Marginalised and Endangered Worldviews: Comparative Studies in Contemporary Eurasia, India and South America* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2017), 137-164.

Free from the traditional roles of wives and mothers, women gained an opportunity to take on leading roles within the new community that Inochentie had gathered around him. Women took on the administration, served as missionaries and took charge of the collection of charitable offerings on behalf of the community. According to early reports, women wandered the villages spreading news of the movement and seeking new adherents.

> …women appeared to be leading the whole movement: collecting money, gathering people together for prayer at night, helping to dig 'miraculous' wells, intervening with the local parish to conduct communal memorial liturgies.[46]

The "wise virgins" that flocked to Inochentie had the important task of gathering offerings as this practice allowed the movement to grow and amass considerable wealth.[47] Romanian theologian Botoșăneanu claimed that it was due to "the preaching of women, so-called sisters, that the movement spread over the river Prut" into the rest of Romania.[48] Amongst these women followers were also Orthodox nuns from some of the monasteries in Bessarabia.

A special place was also reserved within the movement for Inochentie's mother who is said to have been recognized by his followers as having "superiority in religious questions and as having their deep respect: they kissed the ground near her house, received blessings from her and kissed her hand" she was referred to by his followers as *măiculița Domnului*, "dear little mother of God" or *născătoare de Dumnezeu*, "Mother of God".[49] The use of this honorific title for important women, which was also a feature of other Orthodox dissent movements,[50] continued in later Inochentist communities.

The important role of women, and especially young women, in the early Inochentist movement gave a distinctive character to Orthodox dissent that emerged in interwar

---

[46] Nicolae Popovschi, *The Balta Movement or Inochentism* [*Mişcarea de la Balta său inochentismul în Basarabia*] (Chişinău: Tipografia Eparhială – "Cartea Românească", 1926), 110.
[47] Petre Cazacu, Petre, *To the monastery, to the father* [*La mănăstore, la părințelul*] (Chișinău: Noua Galilee, 2001 [1938]), 33.
[48] Grigore Leu Botoşăneanu, *Confessions and Sects* [*Confesiune şi Secte*] (Bucureşti: Tipografia Cărţilor Bisericeşti, 1929), 53.
[49] Nicolae Popovschi, *The Balta Movement or Inochentism* [*Mişcarea de la Balta său inochentismul în Basarabia*] (Chişinău: Tipografia Eparhială – "Cartea Românească", 1926), 110.
[50] See Sergei I. Zhuk, *Russia's Lost Reformation: Peasants, Millenialism, and Radical Sects in Southern Russia and Ukraine 1830-1917* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 2004), 130.

Bessarabia. In some branches of the movement, especially amongst the so-called Archangelists, women took on some priestly functions and young women were especially important as missionaries. From bulletins issued by the Romanian police it is evident that a large proportion of those wanted by the authorities for religious crimes were young women. They were all reported to be dressed in black like nuns, which is one of reasons given for why Inochentist women were sometimes hard to detect. Following a series of raids on Inochentist groups in Soroca in September and October 1941, the gendarme commander described the appearance of the Inochentists to help others identify them by sight, "The men wear long beards, and the women 'experienced women proselytisers' wear on their heads large black headscarves which cover the front [of their heads] and back (uniformly)."[51] The fact that the women were described as "experienced proselytisers" demonstrates the important role that these mainly young women were playing in these communities. The archival record gives the impression of a cat and mouse game in which these young women played with the authorities as they travelled from village to village in Bessarabia, even crossing the Dniester into Soviet territory. The vital role that women had played in promoting the pilgrimage to Balta in the 1910s and continued in the 1920s, 30s and 40s under Romanian rule.

[51] *Archiva Naționale Istorice Centrale* – fond. *Inspectoratul General al Jandarmeriei* (Romania) [Central National Historical Archive – General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie], dosar. 22/1941, 209.



Figure 1. Three Inochentist women, including Maria Sârbu from Sireţi, county Lăpuşna, who was sentenced to three months imprisonment on 22 September 1938 for conducting Inochentist propaganda. She confessed to having lived a "vagabond" life travelling from village to village preacher Inochentie's message of repentance. *Archiva Națională a Republicii Moldova* fond. *Tribunalul militar al Corpului III armată, Chişinău* [National Archive of the Republic of Moldova – Military Tribunal of the 3rd Army Corps, Chişinău], dosarr. 738-1-6846, 21 © National Archive of the Republic of Moldova.

The harsh policies of the Antonescu regime towards religious dissenters, which included internment in labour camps, imprisonment and the threat of deportation to concentration camps alongside Jews and Roma, drove Inochentism underground and the movement became increasingly secretive and elusive. Inochentist communities began to construct for themselves alternative religious spaces, secret hideouts dug under their homes and gardens, thus transforming the material conditions of their Orthodox religious practice decades before the advent of Soviet communist rule in Moldavia. Women's agency and leadership within the religious underground was both an important resource and source of strength as well as being one of the principal factors that the authorities could use to attack the movement. The domestic forms of religion and the religious underground in Soviet Moldavia, therefore, were shaped by this earlier period of Orthodox dissent and set the context for Orthodox dissent during the Soviet-era.[52]

[52] For a fuller account of the role of women in Inochentism see James A. Kapaló, "Wise Virgins and Mothers of God: Woman, possession and Sexuality in the Early Inochentist Movement,"

Orthodoxy and the Archangelist Underground in Soviet Moldavia

The Soviet antireligious campaigns of the 1950s and 60s are gradually passing from living memory but they have left a lasting stamp in the Moldovan religious psyche. Between 2005 and 2014, I conducted a series of interviews with women members of the Archangelist branch of Inochentism[53] in the village of "Hadjiovca" (I have changed the name of the village and have given the women pseudonyms to protect the identity of my informants) and neighbouring villages. These villages are mainly populated by members of the Gagauz minority, Turkish-speaking Orthodox Christians who migrated to the region at the beginning of the nineteenth century. [54] Both Inochentism and its later iteration Archangelism were and still are predominantly ethnically Moldovan (and Romanian-speaking) in character with members of the Gagauz minority only having joined from the 1950s onwards during the Soviet anti-religious campaigns for the reasons discussed below.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and Moldovan independence, the Archangelist community has gradually moved above ground, both metaphorically and literally, although they are still not a registered religious community and do not have official places of worship. They hold their Sunday meetings in the homes of members of the community, which they do on a rotating basis. The movement, however, remains very secretive and they are wary of outsiders. I first encountered members of the Archangelist movement by chance when I was living in Comrat, the capital of the Gagauz Autonomous Region, in the Republic of Moldova researching Orthodox religion amongst the Gagauz minority there. Whilst speaking to a group of village women a friend of mine had gathered together with the purpose of talking about their religious writing practices, one of the women suddenly outed her neighbour by declaring "she doesn't eat meat at all, she's an Inochentist!" The woman took her neighbour's comment in

---

in (eds.) Lidia Guzy and James A. Kapaló, *Marginalised and Endangered Worldviews: Comparative Studies in Contemporary Eurasia, India and South America* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2017), 137-164 and James A. Kapaló, *Inochentism and Orthodox Christianity: Religious Dissent in the Russian and Romanian Borderlands* (London: Routledge, 2019).

[53] The Archangelist movement grew out of the earlier Inochentist movement in 1920s Bessarabia (present day Republic of Moldova) under Romanian rule and is one of the main surviving branches of the movement. Formed around a family of brothers, most prominent of whom was Alexandru Culiac (b. 1891), the movement venerated its leaders as various heavenly or saintly persons returned to earth to battle Satan at the End of Days. Alexandru Culiac was venerated as the Archangel Michael on earth, which is how the name of this branch of the Inochentist movement originates.

[54] On Gagauz history, identity and religion see James A. Kapaló, *Text, Context and Performance: Gagauz Folk Religion in Discourse and Practice* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

good humour, smiled and just said something to the effect that she follows the monastic rules, like a true Christian. Over the following weeks and months, little by little, more and more bits of information filtered through about this group and I gradually came to realize that their story was more than some curious local anomaly but a widespread and neglected aspect of religious diversity in that part of the Orthodox Christian world.

I met most of my interviewees in their homes or chatted to them on the benches arranged on the porch or veranda. In "Hadjiovca," locals estimate that there are around 40 members of the community with perhaps 20 more in the neighbouring villages. The overwhelming majority of Gagauz are Orthodox Christian with small but significant numbers of Baptists and Adventists. As Archangelists do not feature in any official statistics, it is difficult to estimate their numbers but a conservative estimate for Archangelists in the whole of Moldova may be in the region of 2-4,000 members, some more active than others, the vast majority of whom belong to the Moldovan majority.

The Archangelists in "Hadjiovca" trace the origins of their community back to the 1960s as Maria explained:

> I was six years old when we started, I am 54 years old now. My father used to eat meat, he would give it to us secretly! He started later than us, two years later; honey, fish, eggs are what we eat. When I was six we became stronger [in our faith]. People came from the monasteries from that place, first they taught in the Moldovan villages and after they came here [to the Gagauz villages], they came to my grandmother, then my mother, and after other people came and they liked it, they saw that there is nothing new here, it is Orthodoxy like in an monastery. (Maria, 13 August, 2011)

Like Maria, Ana also linked the arrival of Archangelism with the closure of Orthodox institutions.

> Here, in "Hadjiovca," it started in the 1960s when all the churches and monasteries were destroyed. All the monks and priests were made homeless. There were people that used to travel further afield to monasteries, some to Russia and to other places, wherever they could find. So, when the churches were closed people began to gather together to pray. The people that came from the monasteries said that we have to be stricter, you need to keep all four fasts, Wednesday, Friday, Sunday, if you want good health, and on feast days. Keep

> Sundays, do not do any major jobs, there should only be religious service, you can feed animals but you shouldn't do anything else. […] My grandmother was very involved with the Orthodox Church, she sang in the choir, she was in the Church committee, so when in 1959 they closed the Church, she had always been there. When the Church was closed, she wanted to go somewhere, to find a way to save her soul, so she went to Kiev to the Lavra, at that time it was open, and told them there that in our village there are people, monks, who came from monasteries that had been closed, and they say you have to do like this, how to observe the fast, Sundays, feast days, Wednesdays, and so on. We have to do it this way to save our souls, and they [the monks in Kiev in the Lavra] said don't look for something more correct than this, the way they tell you to observe it, keep it, follow them because maybe the Churches will open again one day but they will not be open soon, if you want to save your soul they are not teaching you incorrectly, stick to it! (Ana, 8 July 2013).

The central factor in these accounts of the beginning of the community is the closure of the monasteries and churches, which in turn is intimately related to the need to maintain Orthodox traditions, the most basic and important element of which was the keeping of fasts. As Ana went on to describe.

> I don't keep them all, but at least I am afraid and I feel bad about it if I don't keep them all. With my friends who are Orthodox and are good Christians, if someone invites them to eat something that is not allowed, they will find an excuse and eat it anyway. For example, if it is Wednesday or Friday and someone invites you to eat they will eat, but we won't. That is the way this system works, that's the way it was established and we want to follow it. We decided to make the rules of our life like this and that's the way we want to follow them (Ana, 8 July 2013).

Fasting became not only a question of personal commitment and penance but also a boundary marker between the faithful and those "in the world." A woman from the neighbouring village of "Cavarlâc" reinforced this same theme; adherence to the rules of Orthodoxy that were threatened by the way of life that communism and the closure of the churches had brought.

> I was a child and we went to the fields during the summer, we heard that in the neighbouring village there were people that never went to work when there was a holy day, I was attracted to this, I liked it, and then I finished school and went to study and I came here to do my work experience, I am from another village. I came here when I got married, and later I met these people here, my husband's brother…. I started to read, I liked it a lot, my parents fasted but when they came from Church on Sunday they prepared food and lit the fire, but here when I came…. we don't do any such thing (Evghenia, 10 July 2013)

Strict fasting, the keeping of the Sundays and of the complex calendar of holidays and feasts, regardless of obligations to the state, became a marker of Archangelist identity vis-à-vis the lapsed Orthodox community; the preservation of the authentic, monastic route to salvation in the midst of an atheist world. The closure of the churches in "Hadjiovca" and the neighbouring villages also left people with a sense of anxiety, for their wellbeing and their souls.

As Kononenko describes, all across the Soviet Union similar processes had been unfolding since the 1930s, the people that were particularly active in preserving local religious culture, whom she refers to as "culture keepers," became custodians of both intangible and material elements of their traditions. As ritual protection, obligations, and taboos were compromised by the disappearance of churches and the liturgical calendar, "fear of the consequences of violation prompted substitute religious activity."[55] In this way, the unintended consequence of the Orthodox Church closures of the late 1950s and 60s was the appearance of a new layer to the religious underground in Moldova and its expansion of Inochentist ideas to communities and areas of the country that had not been reached in the interwar or wartime period, largely because of ethnic and linguistic differences. Douglas Rogers describes the domestication of religion that happened in the Soviet Union in the following terms:

> First, religious practice often slipped from public view into the spaces of the home; and second, believers began to domesticate religion, to claim for

[55] N. Kononenko, "Folk Orthodoxy: Popular Religion in Contemporary Ukraine," in (ed.) John Paul Himka and Andriy Zayarnyuk, *Letters from Heaven: Popular Religion in Russia and Ukraine* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 47.

> themselves some of the ritual and even theological competencies formerly arrogated to specialist clerics.[56]

Religious materials, publications, icons, bibles and ritual objects were hidden or rescued from churches condemned to closure and were thus dispersed into communities. These materials found their way into the homes and daily lives of believers. Sometimes large collections of items were hidden to prevent confiscation, other less conspicuous items were used in the domestic setting, where they were used in healing practices, added to the icon corner, or read on Sunday's in place of attending the liturgy. In the homes of Arhangelists, numerous rare and valuable liturgical books, icons and pieces of church furnishings now adorn domestic ritual spaces. Echoing an earlier chapter of Russian Orthodox dissent, the Archangelists, like the priestless Old Believers centuries before them, took over the "transmission of spiritual power, sacrament and knowledge" from a fallen church.[57]

When Maria's family joined the community she was still at school and remembers vividly how she was treated because of her family's refusal to conform to Soviet norms.

> At that time the leaders of the *kolkhoz* were very much against us. The *kolkhoz* chief here in "Hadjiovca" was against us because we were not going… we were keeping our faith strictly, and this was his character, he was a very bad man, he was a very cruel man, he behaved very badly towards us, cruel, but after he died things changed, people were not so, you know… Our parents did not put the [pioneer] tie on us, we were not wearing the star either, they pulled my hair, they beat me very much, but I didn't put it on, neither the badge nor the tie, I didn't put them on; they pulled my hair, I cried, they beat me up, also slapped my cheeks, but it was like that and that's all. The teacher beat us, others too, the pupils beat me up, they were hitting me, so many things happened, but all for the sake of God (Maria, 13 August 2011).

---

[56] Douglas Rogers, "Old Belief between 'Society' and 'Culture': Remaking Moral Communities and Inequalities on a Former State Farm," in M. D. Steinberg and C. Wanner (eds.) *Religion, Morality, and Community in Post-Soviet Societies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 124.

[57] Irina Paert, *Old Believers, Religious Dissent and Gender in Russia, 1760-1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 39.

For Maria, her suffering in school was for her faith. Those older than Maria, like her relative Domnica, who became one of the "sisters" living in the underground, recalled how their houses were kept under constant surveillance.

> Everyone was against us, the *Kolkhoz*… they knew which houses were Inochentist and they posted people to watch the gates to check that no one went to visit them during the night (Domnica, 15 June 2014).

But this kind of treatment, according to Domnica, was part of their path to salvation, "When we were persecuted, it made our faith even stronger, it was a sign of the truth of our faith." Some of the sisters were arrested multiple times; Domnica told me the story of Vasilisa who faced a Comrades Court in the 1960s and was sentenced to three years in what was described to me as a relatively "open" prison farm. She escaped from there several times and when she appeared back in the village yet again, the other members of the group asked her why she had escaped as it would only bring the authorities attention back on the community and they would pick her up and return her. Her reply, which Domnica relayed to me with a smile, was "Because I can." Domnica, too, had been arrested several times. "I was even in the newspaper with my photograph, but usually we managed to disappear again before our trial dates came round." The young women often operated far from their home villages, passing through the capital Chișinău where they could be relatively anonymous. Although on this occasion they were unlucky enough to be spotted by someone from "Hadjiovca" who handed them over to the authorities. But as Domnica explained, the sisters were experienced at dealing with their captors and used their wits to evade trial and prison.

> Because we were very well behaved when we were arrested, very meek and compliant, we could earn the trust of their prison guards and they gave us chores in the prison, such as cleaning and making food. We were innocent young girls. But we knew that on the 20th day after our arrests we would have to be officially charged and stand trial, so we worked out which day to give the guards the slip and disappear back into the crowds in Chișinău (Domnica, 15 June 2014).

Domnica and the other women who were present one Sunday afternoon in June 2014 remembered with some humour the lives they used to live avoiding detection and defying the best efforts of the authorities to stop their preaching. These Archangelist women had

challenged Soviet society and had also overturned traditional gender roles. The Archangelist women I spoke to in "Hadjiovca" were unmarried, following the tradition laid down by Inochentie one hundred years earlier, mostly living with their unmarried siblings or sometimes alone. As young women, they had rejected marriage to become "sisters" of the Archangel Michael and had entered a new spiritually purposeful religious life. The underground community, as they described it to me, relied on the faith, commitment and strength of purpose of the young, especially young women.

Today, the Archangelist community in "Hadjiovca" is ageing but still active. Unlike some other groups that originated from the teachings of Inochentie, the sisters in "Hadjiovca" embrace the term that others have used to classify them, "We like it, we like it… He [Alexandru Culiac, the founder of Archangelism] endured for us, to teach us about God." As well as embracing the term "Archangelist", Domnica also openly displays images of the Alexandru Culeac, the Archangel Michael, in her home, something that would have warranted arrest during Romanian and Soviet rule.

With the end of the Soviet Union came the return of the Orthodox Church to "Hadjiovca", Archangelists, however, have not returned to the fold. The priest of the village is scornful of the Archangelists and condemns their practices, especially the role that women play in the community; the most common accusations levelled at them no longer relate to orgies or human sacrifice but instead refer to their practice of allowing women to serve at communion. The community in "Hadjiovca" is similarly scornful of the Orthodox Church and its hierarchy which they consider to be hopelessly compromised by a lack of truth faith.

> When the Romanians came with the *novy stil* [referring to the Calendar reform of 1924) they were the first, when the Communists came, they were first, and when the Church opened again they were first again. You want to know why we don't go to Church? The foundation of the Church is there, it is belief, there is belief. The Church doesn't sin, but who is inside the Church? If the shepherd is good the flock will be fine, but if the shepherd isn't concerned with them they will scatter and become the food of wolves (Domnica, 15th June 2014)

As Domnica went on to explain, "the Church doesn't like us because we follow God's law more strongly than they can. They cannot accept us back because we will show them up for what they are." Domnica draws a strong distinction between Christians who follow God's word and the Orthodox who, despite having the right credentials in terms of ritual and belief, have

become corrupted, fickle, opportunistic, hypocritical and proud. She refers to herself as a Christian first, "I am a Christian, and Orthodox yes, this is necessary. But being Orthodox is not enough to make you a Christian." But both Maria and Domnica, were quick to draw a distinction between themselves and sectarians, such as local the Baptists or Adventists.

> We don't teach anything new, everything we do is from the monastic tradition, we just maintain things the way they should be and we follow the words of father Inochentie, we follow what he taught us (Maria, 13 August 2011).

The community in "Hadjiovca" relies on their own ritual specialists, "our own people" as Maria describes them, from Chișinău, the capital.

> There are men and women, who never got married and they only serve for this purpose. Of course they don't just sit around, they have normal jobs, but on Sundays and feast days they don't work, for example now it is six o'clock and from now on we don't work, we don't light fires, nothing. After Saturday evening nothing, there is only evening prayer (Maria, 13 August 2011).

The boundaries between the Orthodox and members of the Archangelist community are both ritual and somatic. Their critique, although sometimes verbalised, is enacted through their bodies, which they are able to master more successfully than are the custodians of the Orthodox Church and through ritual separation.

Moldova, which was catastrophically effected both politically and economically by the breakup of the Soviet Union, is often cited as the 'poorest nation in Europe' and the Gagauz minority is further marginalized linguistically, economically and socially within Moldovan society. Gagauz women and men, since the 1990s, have engaged in labour migration on a large scale to Russia, Turkey, Greece and Western Europe. Leyla Keogh, in her study of Gagauz women's practices of labour migration has highlighted the "economic resourcefulness" of Gagauz women in post-socialism and how they have contested the "gendered social order" in a context in which "motherhood" is central to women's identities.[58] Archangelist women also

[58] Leyla J. Keogh, "Globalizing 'Postsocialism:' Mobile Mothers and Neoliberalism on the Margins of Europe", *Anthropological Quarterly* 79:3 (2006), 455.

travel to find work outside of Moldova like their Orthodox neighbours; Maria worked for many years in Greece as a housekeepr, and this has similarly provided them with more autonomy and economic security. Unlike the often younger Orthodox women migrants described by Keogh, however, for whom being a "better mother" by securing an income for the family is the way to expand "their imaginations and desires, and even help them construct new lifestyles" (Keogh 2006: 455),[59] for the older generation of Archangelist women, the traditional domestic social role as carers and mothers had long been overthrown when they were young women in the religious underground.

Conclusion

Is there a correlation between high risk, strategic compromise, and a remaking of traditional patterns of authority?
p. 4 Wasn't its borderland location also a factor contributing to the province's "problematic" character? Its rural "unreadable" character? This description of the region reminded me of Kate Brown's book, A Biography of No Place. Such ethic mosaics had to be especially targeted in order to be successfully remade into the "Soviet heartland.

The changing names of the borderland known as Bessarabia, Soviet Moldavia and Moldova, reflect the every-shifting political and religious realities that shaped Inochentism in the region. It was this borderland status that also ensured that religious dissenters, under both Romanian and Soviet rule, became important targets in both states' aim of transforming the social order. Following the radical monastic tradition first advocated by the Orthodox monk Inochentie of Balta in the first two decades of the twentieth century and then continued in the underground communities in Antonescu's Romania, young Orthodox women in Soviet Moldavia were attracted by life in a religious underground that received new impetus as an unanticipated consequence of the Khrushchev anti-religious campaigns and Orthodox Church closures of the late 1950s and 60s. Domestic forms of Orthodox religious practice in Soviet Moldavia were shaped not only by older women, as was common in many parts of the Soviet Union, but also by the young, who broke the commonly understood pattern of the feminization of religion during communism described by Rogers, Kononenko, Viola and others. These young women engaged in high risk clandestine religious activities that contributed to a re-casting of aspects of traditional religious authority structures that had started in earlier decades.

The ideal of celibacy in Inochentism had helped establish a symbolic parity between men and women, which in turn empowered women to take on important new roles in religious life as priests and living saints, some honoured as Mothers of God. Inochentism, especially in

[59] ibid., 455.

its more radical Archangelist form, required social disobedience from young women, they were expected to act differently and to reject the civic duty of giving birth and of offering the state future citizens, workers and soldiers. The Romanian state, the Orthodox Church and the Soviet Union all shared one idea about womanhood; women should be marshalled for the good of the state and the nation. The centrality of young women in the Inochentist movement, who took identities that challenged Orthodox Christian tradition, peasant societal norms and the reproductive expectations of the state, fueled the extreme accusations of sexual and moral degeneracy that appeared in the Romanian press in the interwar period and in Soviet anti-religious propaganda materials. As the testimonies of Domnica, Ana and Maria demonstrate, opting to join the Inochentist underground in the Khrushchev years was in part driven by anxiety at the loss of Orthodox institutions, rituals and ritual specialists. The radical beliefs of Inochentist dissenters, however, had been shaped earlier by the upheavals that befell the Tsarist state and the modernising and nationalizing projects of Romania. Women in Moldova were important actors in reshaping Orthodoxy as practiced at home and in the community in the face of the state attempts to reshape religious, social and political realities.

Archival Sources

Archiva Naționale Istorice Centrale – fond. *Inspectoratul General al Jandarmeriei* (Romania) [Central National Historical Archive – General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie], dosar. 22/1941, 209.

Bibilography

Babii, Iurie et al (eds.), *Holy Places* [*Locașuri Sfinte*] (Chișinău: Alfa și Omega, 2001).

Baran, Emily, *Dissent on the Margins: How Soviet Jehovah's Witnesses Defied Communism and Lived to Preach About It* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press).

Botoşăneanu, Grigore Leu, *Confessions and Sects* [*Confesiune şi Secte*] (Bucureşti: Tipografia Cărţilor Bisericeşti, 1929), 53.

Cașu, Igor, *Class Enemy: Political Repression, Violence and Resistance in the SSR of Moldova, 1924-56* [*Dușmanul de Clasă: Represiune politice, violență și resistență în R(A)SS Moldovenească, 1924-56*] (Chișinău: Cartier, 2014).

Tatiana. A. Chumachenko, *Church and State in Soviet Russia* (Armonk, New York, London: M. E. Sharpe).

Romeo Cemîrtan, "The situation and evolution of the life of the Church in the MSSR in the period 1945-62" ['Situația și evoluție vieții bisericești din RSSM în periodă 1945-1962'], in *Destine individuale și collective în comunism*, eds. Cosmin Budeancă & Florentin Olteanu. (Iași: Polirom, 2013).

Cazacu, Petre, *To the monastery, to the father* [*La mănăstore, la părințelul*] (Chișinău: Noua Galilee, 2001 [1938]).

Cindrea-Nagy, Iuliana, "Femeile stiliste in arhivele politiei secrete," [Stilist Women in the Archives of the Secret Police] *Magazin Istoric* 1 (2019): 66-70.

Clay, J. Eugene, "Apocalypticism in the Russian Borderlands: Inochentie Levizor and his Moldovan Followers," *Religion, State and Society* 26/3-4 (1998): 251-63.

Croitoru, D., “The danger of Stilism and Inochentism in Bessarabia” [‘Pericolul stilismului şi inochentismului din Basarabia’]. *Misionarul* 8/1–2 (1936): 120–21.
Davis, Nathaniel, “The Number of Orthodox Churches before and after the Khrushchev Antireligious Drive,” *Slavic Review* 50/3: 613.
Delaney Grossman, Joan, “Khrushchev’s Anti-Religious Policy and the Campaign of 1954,” *Soviet Studies* 24/3 (1973): 374-386.
Dima, Nicholas, “Politics and Religion in Moldova: A Case Study,” *The Mankind Quarterly* 34/3 (1994): 175-194.
Engelstein, Laura, *Castration and the Heavenly Kingdom: A Russian Folk Tale* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999).
Fletcher, Fletcher, “Underground Orthodoxy: A Problem of Political Control,” Canadian Slavonic Papers 12/4 (1970): 363-94.
Hann, Chris, “Introduction: Broken Chains and Moral Lazarets: the politicization, juridification and commodification of religion after socialism,” in (ed.) Chris Hann, *Religion, Identity, Postsocialism: The Halle Focus Group 2003-2010* (Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, 2010), 1-23 (12).
Kapaló, James A., *Text, Context and Performance: Gagauz Folk Religion in Discourse and Practice* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).
Kapaló, James A., “’She read me a prayer and I read it back to her’: Gagauz Women, Miraculous Literacy and the Dreaming of Charms,” *Religion and Gender*, 4/1 (2014): 3–20.
Kapaló, James A., “Wise Virgins and Mothers of God” Women, Possession and Sexuality in the Early Inochentist Movement,” in *Marginalised and Endangered Worldviews: Comparative Studies on Contemporary Eurasia, India and South America*, eds. Lidia Guzy & James A. Kapaló (Lit Verlag: Berlin, 2017), 137-161.
Kapaló, James A., “Domestic Religion in the Soviet and Post-Soviet Moldova,” in (eds.) Annette Schnabel, Melanie Reddig and Heidemarie Winkel, *Religion im Kontext/Religion in Context: Handbuch für Wissenschaft und Studium* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2018), 305-321.
Kapaló, James A., *Inochentism and Orthodox Christianity: Religious Dissent in the Russian and Romanian Borderlands* (Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 2019).
Kelly, Catriona, *Socialist Churches: Radical Secularizatioon and the Preservation of the Past in Petrograd and Leningrad, 1918-1988* (DeKalb: NIU Press, 2016), 190.
Keogh, Leyla J. “Globalizing ‘Postsocialism:’ Mobile Mothers and Neoliberalism on the Margins of Europe”, *Anthropological Quarterly* 79:3 (2006), 431–461.
Kizenko, Nadieszda, *A Prodigal Saint: Father John of Kronstadt and the Russian People* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003)
Kononenko, Natalie, “Folk Orthodoxy: Popular Religion in Contemporary Ukraine,” in (ed.) John Paul Himka and Andriy Zayarnyuk, *Letters from Heaven: Popular Religion in Russia and Ukraine* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 47.
Lewis, I. M., *Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 26.
Livezeanu, Irina, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995).
Luehrmann, Sonja, Teaching Atheism and Religion in a Volga Republic (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2011).
Material for the support of Teachers of Atheism [*Materiale în Ajutorul Lectorului-Ateist*] (Chișinău: Societatea pentru răspîndirea conoștințelor politice și științifice a R.S.S. Moldovenești, 1959).

Moraru, Pavel, *Follower of Felix Dzerzhinsky: Organs of the State Security in the Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldova* [*Urmaşul lui Felix Dzerjinski: Organele Securităţii Statului în Republica Sovietica Socialistă Moldovenească*] (Bucharest: Institutul Naţional pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, 2008).

Murgoci, G, *La Population de la Bessarabie: Étude Démographique avec cartes et tableaux statistiques* (Paris, 1920).

Nistor, Ion, *The History of Bessarabia* [*Istoria Basarabiei*] (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1991).

Păcarariu, Mircea, *Bessarabia: Aspects of the History of the Church and the Romanian Nation* [*Basarabia: Aspecte din Istoria Bisericii şi a Neamului Românesc*] (Iaşi: Trinitas, 1993).

Paert, Irina, *Old Believers, Religious Dissent and Gender in Russia, 1760-1850,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).

Popovschi, Nicolai, *The Balta Movement or Inochentism* [*Mişcarea de la Balta său inochentismul în Basarabia*] (Chişinău: Tipografia Eparhială – "Cartea Românească", 1926), 110.

Popovschi, Nicolai, *The History of the Church of Bessarabia in the Nineteenth Century under the Russians* [*Istoria Bisericii din Bassarabia în veacul al XiX-lea sub Ruşi*] (Chișinău: Museum, 1931)

Radu, Sorin and Oliver Jens Schmitt, "Introduction," in *Politics and Peasants in Interwar Romania: Perceptions, Mentalities, Propaganda*, eds. Sorin Radu and Oliver Jens Schmitt, (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), 1-23.

Rogers, Douglas, "Old Belief between 'Society' and 'Culture': Remaking Moral Communities and Inequalities on a Former State Farm," in M. D. Steinberg and C. Wanner (eds.) *Religion, Morality, and Community in Post-Soviet Societies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 115-147.

Rogers, Douglas, *The Old Faith and the Russian Land: A Historical Ethnography of Ethics in the Urals* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2009).

Viola, Lynne, "баби бунты and Peasant Women Protest during Collectivization," *The Russian Review* 45/1 (1986): 23-42.

Wynot, J. J., *Keeping the Faith: Russian Orthodox Monasticism in the Soviet Union, 1917-1939* (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 2004).

Zhuk, S. I. *Russia's Lost Reformation: Peasants, Millenialism, and Radical Sects in Southern Russia and Ukraine 1830-1917* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 2004).