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MATERIALISING SOVIET RELIGIONS

Liquidation Commissions, Sacred Buildings and Religious Communities in 1920's Moldavia

Thesis presented by

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for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University College Cork

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Dumitru Lisnic

Abstract
This thesis explores the interaction of religious groups with state agencies in the Soviet Union during the 1920s. The PhD project examines the activity of the Liquidation Commissions of Soviet Ukraine and looks into how these agencies used religious buildings and objects in order to study and manipulate religious communities. The Liquidation Commissions were responsible for making the religious landscape legible for the Soviet policymakers and institutions involved in anti-religious campaigns, including for the secret police. The thesis focuses on cases of religious objects and buildings belonging to Inochentist, Evangelical, Jewish, and Eastern Orthodox communities from the Moldavian autonomous region of Soviet Ukraine.

The PhD research project draws on rich archival material from Kiev, Chisinau and Odessa, namely the archives of the NKVD of Soviet Ukraine, of party organization of Moldavian autonomous region and of Odessa region, and the secret police archives of Soviet Ukraine and Moldavia. The research takes a material approach to the archives drawing on a range of theories dealing with questions of agency and materiality.

Through an exploration of the interaction of minority religious groups with the Soviet regime from a material perspective, my thesis a) contributes to a better understanding of the dialogical nature of the relations between authoritarian regimes and religious groups, b) examines the role of materiality in those relations, and c) analyses the mechanisms deployed by Soviet regime in order to control and examine religious communities. The core argument of this thesis is that the materiality and relationality of material religion and of the bureaucratic artefacts introduced by Liquidation Commissions into the religious landscape shaped the perceptions and actions of religious believers and Soviet officials during their struggle over the role and status of religion in Soviet society.

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Others whom I wish to thank are, Dr. Igor Casu who, in 2013, guided my first steps in archival research and has been always very generous in sharing with me his expertise. Dr. Anca Sincan, whose insights into the history of religions under Communism proved extremely helpful. The support of the academic community at University College Cork (UCC) helped me to enrich my research both theoretically and empirically. The generous financial support of the European Research Council, provided within the framework of the Hidden Galleries Project, enabled me to spend significant periods of time in UCC where I had the opportunity to learn from other project members and to contribute to the projects' outputs. In the last months of my research, I benefited from the academic mentorship and financial support at the New Europe College in Bucharest. Finally, I would like to thank my professors from the University of Iasi, and especially Dr. Dorin Dobrincu and Dr. Ovidiu-Stefan Buruiana, for the support and advice that they have provided since my undergraduate studies.

Iuliana Cindrea, my colleague and classmate, has supported and encouraged my work on this thesis, being especially generous with her time in helping me to improve my English on joining the Study of Religions Department in UCC in 2016. My family, especially my father, have always encouraged me to continue my research, even when my interest in Soviet History seemed an unusual career choice. There are many other professors, colleagues and friends, too numerous to mention, who enabled the completion of my studies. I wish to express my gratitude to each and every one of them for their collegiality and support.

Abbreviation and glossary

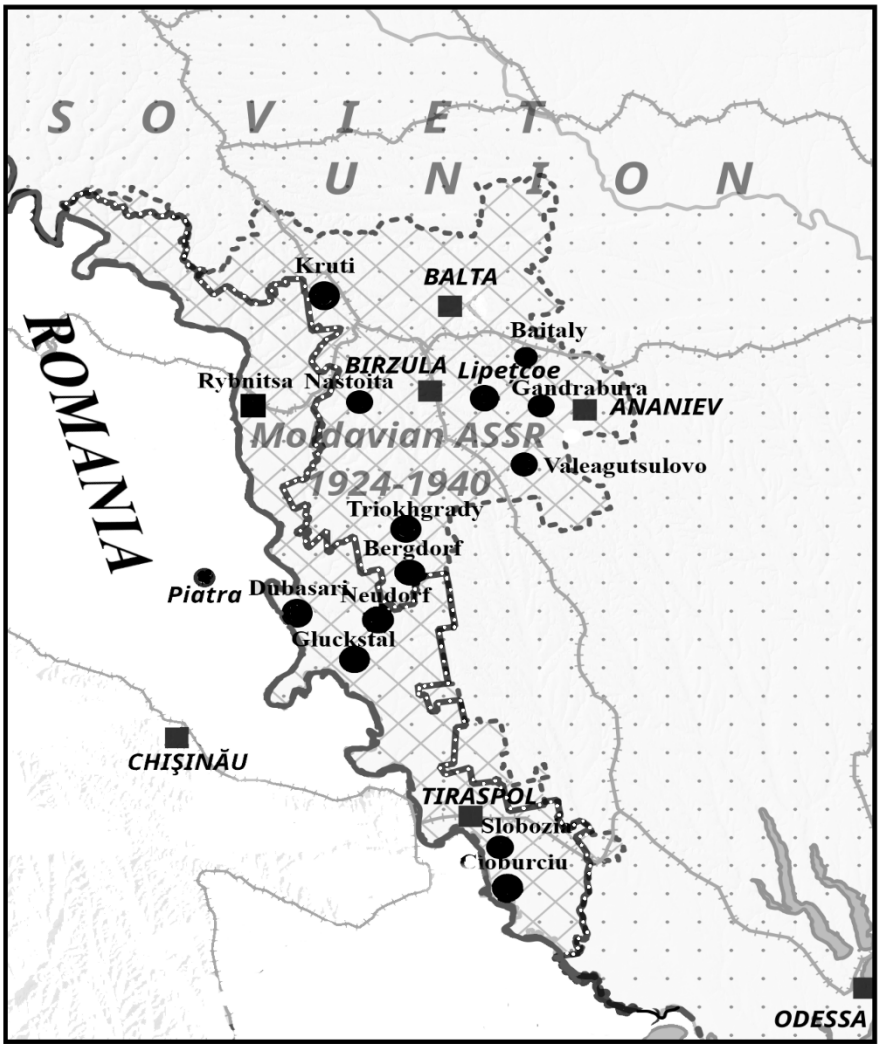
Cheka	The all-Russian Extraordinary Commission (secret police)
kolkhoz	Soviet collective farm
kulak	Wealthy peasants
Liquidation Commissions	The Commissions for the Separation of the Church from the State were subordinated firstly to the Justice Commissariat and from 1922 to the Commissariat of Internal Affairs. These agencies were responsible for mapping religious landscapes and making them legible to other state and party institutions, including the secret police.
MASSR	Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. This national region existed as part of Soviet Ukraine between 1924-1940, and included territories of contemporary Republic of Moldova and of Odesa Region of Ukraine.
MEKOSO	Interinstitutional Commission for Communities and Societies.
Moldavian SSR	Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic was established in 1940 and included territories of the former MASSR and the central parts of the province of Bessarabia.
NKVD	People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs
RCP(b)	Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks)
RSFSR	Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic
sovkhoz	State collective farm
Ukrainian SSR	Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic

Language note

All translations from Russian, Ukrainian, and Romanian are my own. I have used the Library of Congress transliteration system to transliterate from Russian and Ukrainian. For transliterations from Romanian, I used modern standard Romanian script omitting diacritics.

The names of the settlements from MASSR are given in standard Romanian for Moldavian villages, in transliterated Ukrainian for Ukrainian villages, in German for German colonies, and in Russian for the, predominantly, Russian-speaking cities and for the settlements populated by Russians. All four languages had an official status in MASSR, and each settlement had its name officially registered in several languages.

The Map of MASSR



The Territory of MASSR

Legend

- *State border (1924-1940)*
- *Border of MSSR / Republic of Moldova after 1940*
- *Moldavian ASSR in USSR (1924-1940)*
- *Cities*
- *Vilages*
- *Railways*

Used with kind permission of James A. Kapalo and Dorin Lozovanu

Introduction

Scholarly studies examining the early Soviet encounter with religions are limited in number and scope. At the same time, the newest theoretical contributions in the field of the study of religions and the emergence of new theoretical frameworks concerning the social role of material artefacts, offer the opportunity to reassess some aspects of the early Soviet antireligious policies and of the responses of religious groups to them. This thesis explores the early interaction between the Soviet regime and religious communities with a special emphasis on two of factors – the part played by the Commissions for the Separation of the Church from the State (Liquidation Commissions) and the significance of non-human actors in relations between the Soviet state and religious communities. As I will demonstrate in the following chapters, non-human social actors, such as icons, sacred buildings, and official documents themselves, had a central place in the interaction between religious communities and the Soviet state. These actors and their relationality shaped the intentions, actions, and expectations of human actors, and manifested their contingency by shifting in unforeseen ways the strategies, actions and perceptions of believers and officials. Despite being important state agencies involved in the implementation of early Soviet antireligious policy, Liquidation Commissions have received insufficient attention from scholars. Significantly, these institutions leveraged religious artefacts and buildings in order to control religious believers. Both liquidation officers, who performed important policing duties, and the agencies of non-human social actors, were important participants in the relations between Soviet regime and religions in the 1920s.

From an early stage, Bolsheviks declared openly their hostility towards religion. The principal sources of this hostility were the works of Karl Marx, who states:

> To abolish religion as the *illusory* happiness of the people is to demand their *real* happiness. The demand to give up illusions about the existing state of affairs is the *demand to give up a state of affairs which needs illusions*. The criticism of religion is therefore *in embryo the criticism of the vale of tears*, the *halo* of which is religion (Marx 1975, 167).

For Marx, religion was not just a futile consolation of those experiencing hardship and exploitation (i.e. workers), religion was used to enforce the existing capitalist order. Therefore, for Marxists the elimination of religion was not just a liberation of the mind from "illusions", but a significant step towards the liberation of the working masses from oppression (Smolkin 2018, 11).

As Daniel Peris observes, Karl Marx and Fredrich Engels "offered critiques of religion, not a plan to combat religion in the postrevolutionary order" (Peris 1998, 21). Marxists expected that religion would disappear along the way towards revolution and would not be a "problem" they would have to tackle after they gained political power. The Party understood religion as a phenomenon consisting of three elements. The first element was the political component rooted in religious institutions and clerical hierarchies, which were to be subjected to repressive means. The second was the ideological dimension of religion that consisted of the religious worldview of believers that the party aimed to eliminate with the help of propaganda. The third element was the spiritual component, which included the everyday customs and traditions of the people, with the Bolshevik means of eliminating these being the Cultural Revolution – the formation and spread of a Communist way of life (Smolkin 2018, 15). The Soviet policy on religion was multilateral, involving repressive measures against believers, antireligious propaganda campaigns, and the promotion of a new way of life deemed progressive and innovative.

All these elements of antireligious policy had a material dimension. Repressive policies against religious actors frequently included the destruction of religious buildings and artefacts, propaganda campaigns struggled against belief by examining and interpreting religious objects, while the new Soviet way of life involved a wide array of objects, such as buildings, factories, documents, and clothing. The objective of the present thesis is to examine the role of these materialities in the confrontation between belief and unbelief, religion and atheism, religious communities and the Soviet state. The key argument of this thesis can be summarized to one statement: there can be no complete understanding of the multifaceted relationships between Soviet atheist regime and religions without an examination of the role of non-human agencies which participated in them.

Research on the materiality and agency of the confiscated religious objects and on textual and non-textual documents produced by state agencies and stored in the archives is in its infancy and represents a new approach to religion in Soviet archives. This approach was central to the European Research Council project *Creative Agency and Religious Minorities: 'Hidden Galleries' in the Secret Police Archives in 20th Century Central and Eastern Europe*. The *Hidden Galleries* project team examined the role of the agencies of confiscated religious objects that were stored in the archives, however, its focus was primarily on the secret police archives, including those of the Soviet KGB. The present thesis has similar objectives but primarily explores the archival fonds of the Liquidation Commissions. In the 1920s, the Liquidation Commissions were the main institutions implementing Soviet legislation on

religions and they used a set of procedures that aimed at leveraging religious artefacts and buildings in order to control religious believers. The legalisation on the use of a sacred building was conditioned by the involvement of lay parishioners in a number of official procedures and various forms of registration were designed by the Liquidation Commissions in order to control and examine congregations. These procedures played a central role in the emergence of the Soviet religious underground and in the definition of the features based on which religious congregations were declared illegal. Forced to lead their life clandestinely, such illegal religious groups consequently fell under the sphere of authority of the repressive apparatus in the form of the civil and secret police. For the communities lacking religious buildings, liquidation officers created a number of bureaucratic devices designed to police sectarian communities and itinerant preachers, including a police catalogue of clerics and preachers.

Apart from religious buildings and bureaucratic instruments, Soviet policymakers and antireligious officials dealt with religion through sacred artefacts, and leveraged them in order to manipulate religious believers. For example, the opening of the coffins containing the relics of Orthodox saints was an early campaign implemented by liquidation officers and intended to demonstrate that contrary to religious beliefs about the incorruptibility of saintly remains, the opened coffins contained rotten bodies used by the clergy to manipulate believers (Greene 2004, 104; 142). Similar investigations were conducted into the religious miracles related to Orthodox icons. As in the case of the opening of the coffins, liquidation officials formed special commissions, which included experts and scientists, in order to examine and deconstruct the miracles (DAOO, P-3- 1-584, pp. 19-20). Hence, an exploration of the archives of the Liquidations Commissions is vital for advancing our understanding of the role of the non-human actors in the interaction between the Soviet regime and religions in the 1920s Soviet Union when the Soviet religious underground emerged.

The role of the bureaucratic artefacts produced by liquidation officials with the participation of religious believers remains underexplored. Sonja Leurhmann regards the Soviet archives as a place of the confrontation between religious actors and institutionalised atheism over the role and place of religions in Soviet society, a repository where documents produced by religious and political actors acquire "reality effect". (Luehrmann 2015, 3-4; 22-23). Luehrmann states:

> One way to look at atheist sources as permitted by regimes of truth and power, but also connected to a reality outside of themselves, is to understand practicing of studying, documenting, and explaining religious life as actions in ongoing struggle about the place of religion in society. This struggle did not take place

> only at the level of interpretation. Rather, it affected possible forms of religious practice for Soviet citizens. Official documentation played a key role in this struggle, because the files were places where the voices of different sides – religious adherents as well as atheist critics – where collected, preserved, categorised, and made available for further study and administrative decisions (Luehrmann 2015, 22-23).

According to Luehrmann, Soviet archives were one of the places were the confrontation of institutionalised atheism and of other actors promoting a secularist agenda with religious believers occurred. Based on the voices of various actors involved in this strife, Soviet authorities elaborated their strategies for eliminating religion, and in this way documents collected and stored in the archives acquired a reality effect. Leurhmann's work does not explore the role played by the documents produced with the participation of religious believers before they reached the offices of Soviet bureaucrats and were stored in the archives. The Society and Technology Studies (STS) and Actor-Network-Theory school (ANT) provide useful conceptual and methodological tools for examining bureaucratic practices and artefacts that shaped and constitute the archival record. By drawing on the STS and ANT repertoires, the reality effect of the bureaucratic devices created with the participation of Soviet bureaucrats and religious believers can be explained from multiple perspectives. These include approaching them as documents whose production was an act of performativity (Law 2017, 37) that shaped the perceptions and self-definition of religious actors who participated in their compilation, as artefacts that participated in the organisation of religious actors (Goodwin & Goodwin 1996, 2) and that enhanced the organised forms of resistance against antireligious policies, as well as devices that organised the perceptual field (Ueno 2011) of the Soviet bureaucrats and religious leaders by defining the focal points of the confrontation between them. The research of Soviet archives from the perspective of ANT and STS theoretical frameworks allows researchers to regard the production of the examined documents and their circulation as processes occurring within networks composed of human and non-human actors shaped by their relationalities (Law 2008, 145). The key ANT principle of generalised symmetry provides the theoretical basis for exploring the relations between humans and non-humans as a relationality in which neither humans nor objects have a privileged status (Farías, Blok & Roberts 2020, xxi).

The theoretical repertoires of STS and ANT schools are presented in detail in the first chapter of this thesis, as well as how their methodological frameworks will be used to explore the cases examined in the rest of the chapters. By examining through STS and ANT theoretical

frameworks the role played by the forms and documents produced by Liquidation Commissions with the participation of religious believers and the role of the religious buildings and artefacts, this thesis contributes to a better understanding of the interaction between Soviet regime and religious communities in the 1920s.

Policing Material Religion in the Early Soviet Period

Building on Gregory L. Freeze's contribution (1995; 2012; 2015; 2017; 2020) in relation to the parochialisation of power in the Russian Orthodox Church and the religious revival of the 1920s, in this thesis I examine the bureaucratic techniques introduced into religious landscape by Liquidation Commissions and their role in the emergence of these phenomena. In the power vacuum of the inter-revolutionary years, the Orthodox lay parishioners attained the long-desired control over their churches, parish finances, and on the appointment of parish priests. The Bolsheviks, who seized power in November 1917, legalised through a series of Decrees (discussed in chapter 3) this new status of the laity in the Russian Orthodox Church (Freeze 2015, 9). The flip side of the decreasing status and role of the clergy and of the parochialisation of power in Orthodox Church was a religious revival of proportions that puzzled the Soviet leaders who struggled to eliminate religions by systematically disestablishing the ecclesiastic institutions and denigrated the clerics (Freeze 2012 A, 98). The parish councils, empowered by Soviet law as the sole representatives of the religious communities, were increasingly perceived by the Bolshevik leaders as counterrevolutionary elements. For example, the support of the laity, who controlled the parish churches, for the Tikhonian clerics resulted in a complete failure of the state-sponsored Renovationist attempt to seize the control over the parishes (Freeze 1995, 332). Concerned with the religious revival of the 1920s, which manifested through numerous miracles and active involvement of the believers in the parish life, the officials implemented a series of formal procedures meant to identify its sources (Freeze 2012 A, 98). Apart from these forms and documents due to be filled in by the parishioners, liquidation officials introduced into the religious landscape a number of bureaucratic procedures meant to regularise the exercise of power by parish councils, and to be used by the authorities as a mechanism of control of believers. These official procedures were imposed on all religious communities regardless of their denomination. One of the main objectives of this thesis is to analyse the function of the official procedures and bureaucratic artefacts introduced by the liquidation officers into religious landscape in the relations between Soviet regime and

religious communities as reflected in the parochialisation of power in the Russian Orthodox Church and in the religious revival of the 1920s.

The abovementioned bureaucratic practices and artefacts were among the main means through which the Soviet project of secularisation (including the disestablishment of the Orthodox Church and the empowerment of lay believers) was implemented by Liquidation Commissions. The files produced by the liquidation officers discussed in this thesis created a distorted understanding of religious communities among Soviet officials, presented the activity of the examined congregations as criminal acts, and constituted one of the sources of hostility towards religions. The standardized content of these documents, their placement in archival files, their positioning against each other, encouraged official readers of the files to interpret the regime's failures as the result of the activity of a hidden enemy exploiting religious beliefs in order to foster anti-Soviet sentiments. One of the key arguments of this thesis is that the explanatory lines between religious activity and the failure of Soviet policies at a local level were frequently constructed by provincial and central bureaucrats with the participation of official documents and through the materiality of the archives in which they were stored. At the same time, the bureaucratic practices and artefacts effected important changes in the way congregations interacted with state officials. They reshaped the relations between parishioners, parish councils, secretaries and chairs of religious communities, and these documents and procedures organised the resistance of the congregations against Soviet antireligious project.

The list of studies examining the role of materiality in the relations between Soviet atheism and religious communities is not long. Amongst the works that address questions directly relevant to this thesis is Robert Greene's book *Bodies Like Bright Stars: Saints and Relics in Orthodox Russia, 1860s-1920s*. Green's book examines the role of the holy relics in Russian Orthodoxy, including during the Soviet campaign of opening their coffins, based on three methodological principles:

> First […] religious practice is meaningful; second, the corollary principle that religious practice and rituals are imbedded in theological knowledge; and third, the acknowledgement that religion is a dynamic and developing process (Greene 2004, 6).

In Robert Greene's exploration of Russian Orthodoxy, theological knowledge has a privileged position vis-à-vis materiality. Although Greene does justice to Russian lay believers challenging "the long-dominated paradigm posing Russian lay faithful as semiliterate ritualists barely conversant with even the most rudimentary doctrines of the faith" (Greene 2004, 6), he

nevertheless reproduces the traditional dichotomy between material objects and human subjects. But this thesis instead, aims to do justice to non-human actors and to the agency of their relationality, by drawing on the STS and ANT repertoires in analysing the role of religious artefacts in the investigations conducted by liquidation officials into the religious miracles.

Whilst contributions such as James Kapalo's work on the Inochentist underground religious life in which the author examines the role of material religion in the spread and development of the Inochentist movement under constant repression by the Tsarist, Soviet, and Romanian regimes (Kapalo 2019), this thesis goes further by addressing the agentive role of material religion in the confrontation between Soviet atheism and religions in the 1920s. Through my examination of the liquidation officials use of religious artefacts in their investigation into religious miracles, I demonstrate that the materiality and relationality of the examined miracle-working artefacts shaped the perceptions, actions, and discursive strategies of the Soviet officials and religious believers in their confrontation over the role and status of these artefacts.

By examining the role and activity of liquidation officials, my thesis also aims to contribute to a better understanding of the policing techniques employed by Soviet officials in their struggle against religions. The genesis and evolution of the Soviet policing system in the interwar period has been researched by a number of scholars, with important contributions by Paul Hagenloh (2009) and David R. Shearer (2009). However, they do not directly explore the subject in relation to the regime's approach toward religion, and particularly marginal religious groups that were a target of the secret police's extrajudicial mass operations and of public show trials.

Russian and Ukrainian scholars have paid more attention to this subject than scholars in western Europe and the United States? In the introduction to a volume of collected documents, Odincov (2017) presents a succinct history of the state and party agencies involved in antireligious policy, while Oleksandr Tryhub (2009) examines the role of the secret police and liquidation officials in the emergence of the schism of the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine. Nevertheless, these studies do not examine the policing mechanisms utilized by liquidation officials, the documents they produced, and the role of objects and buildings in the interaction of these institutions with religious communities. Among the objectives of my project is to study the evolution of the Soviet policing techniques and ideas of social danger in relation to religious groups, and to take a close look at the activity of the agencies specialized in policing religious believers, such as the Liquidation Commissions and Antireligious Commissions, and on their role in the formation of Soviet religious underground.

My approach is comparative, involving the analysis of multiple and diverse cases of persecuted religious communities. This approach facilitates the identification of the variations in the implementation of the Soviet antireligious policy and of the mechanisms through which Soviet bureaucrats produced distorted representations of religious communities. Scholars who have examined certain aspects of this interaction have focused primarily on the case of the Russian Orthodox Church, such as Edward E. Roslof's (2002), and Oleksandr Tryhub (2009), both of whom explore the state policies of exploiting Orthodox Church schisms in order to control religious institutions. The life of numerically smaller Soviet Religious Communities has been the subject of a number of recent studies, beginning with Heather Coleman's (2005) research on Russian Baptists, which examines the evolution of Soviet policy towards Evangelicals and the spread of Baptist faith despite state persecutions. Anna Shternshis' (2006) book analyses the culture of Soviet Jews and contains an examination of the religious life of Judaic communities in the USSR and their encounter with the atheist state whilst Catherine Wanner (2007) focuses on the case of Ukrainian Evangelicals examining the spread of Evangelism in Ukraine and the interaction of these communities with state authorities, as well as the post-Soviet revival of the religious life of these denominations. In one of the chapters of her book, Elissa Bemporad (2013) looks at the interaction between Soviet regime and Jewish religion in Minsk. Aleksandr Etkind (2013) analyses the early experimentation of Bolshevik leaders with sectarian groups and the relations between these religious communities and revolutionary ideas, based on the case of Khlysts. The focus of these works, however, has been on particular cases of religious groups with only a general analysis of the regime's policies and repressive mechanisms. My research instead aims to present a systematic exploration of the various aspects of repression in 1920's Soviet Union and seeks to explain why, under diverse circumstances, different religious groups were targeted by repressive campaigns in varied ways and how these campaigns influenced the overall processes occurring in the religious landscape.

Although some other researchers have examined the role of religious artefacts and sacred buildings in the encounter between believers and Soviet authorities, the role of the materiality remains underexplored in many ways. Firstly, although religious artefacts and sacred buildings are undoubtedly important (see chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7) they were not the only non-human agencies participating in the relations between religious communities and Soviet regime. Secondly, a systematic examination of the influence of these agencies on the antireligious policies and on the responses of religious communities is still awaited. The present thesis identifies and examines the main categories of religious and non-religious artefacts participating in the interaction between the Soviet regime and believers based on an exploration

of the archives of Liquidation Commissions, which played a central role in Soviet policy on religion in the 1920s. Additionally, by analysing the activity of liquidation officials, this thesis contributes to a better understanding of the Soviet policing system, because liquidation apparatus performed important policing duties but have received insufficient attention from scholars. Finally, because this thesis deals with the early Soviet period during which the Soviet regime produced its perceptions of religious communities and during which the Soviet religious underground emerged, the conclusions I draw here are important for understanding later antireligious campaigns as well as the evolution of the Soviet religious landscape in later periods.

The case of Soviet Moldavia and the available archival sources

This study is centred on the case of Moldavian ASSR, a national autonomous region of Soviet Ukraine, which existed between 1924 and 1940 and included the Eastern territory of the contemporary Republic of Moldova (the secessionist region of Transnistria) and the western part of Odessa region of Ukraine. For the early 1920s, the thesis draws on sources from the archives of the counties of Tiraspol, Balta, and Ananiev, which were included in the territory of MASSR in 1924. The research is based on archival work between 2017 and 2022 in Kiev, Chisinau and Odessa. The Central State Archives of the Supreme Authorities and Governments of Ukraine in Kiev holds the archival fonds of the provincial and central liquidation apparatus of Soviet Ukraine, including reports and documents related to the activity of the Liquidation Commissions in the territory of MASSR. The archive of the Liquidation Commission of Soviet Moldavia is preserved by the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Moldova, which does not provide researchers free access to its archival fonds. Because of this restriction, when the documents produced by liquidation officers in MASSR and currently preserved in Kiev do not provide enough evidence, I bring examples from other provinces of Soviet Ukraine. Another important archive in Kiev is the Central State Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine which preserves the fonds of the secret police of Soviet Ukraine that include documents produced by police officers in MASSR. A significant part of the files produced by the police agencies of MASSR are preserved in the Archive of the Ukraine's SBU Office in Odessa Oblast and in the National Archive of the Republic of Moldova in Chisinau. After the occupation of Bessarabia by the Soviet Union in 1940, the territory of MASSR was divided between Odessa Oblast of Soviet Ukraine and the newly established Moldavian SSR (a Soviet republic separate from Ukraine), which included the western parts of the former Moldavian autonomous region and the central part of the province of Bessarabia. In 1940, the files

produced in the western territories of the autonomous region were moved to Chisinau (the new capital of Moldavia), and those related to the activity of police agencies in the rest of the autonomous region were stored in Odessa archives. The State Archive of Odessa Oblast contains the archival fonds produced by the local party and state agencies in Ananiev, Balta, and Tiraspol between 1920-1924. The archives of the Party Organisations of the Moldavian autonomous region are preserved in the Archive of Social-Political Organizations of the Republic of Moldova in Chisinau.

I have chosen to focus on MASSR in this thesis for a number of reasons. Firstly, previous studies on religion under the Soviet regime have focused primarily on the case of one religious community. The examination of the case of a region, as opposed to a single religion or denomination, provides the possibility of conducting the analysis based on the multiple variations of Soviet policies and of the responses to them that impacted the religious landscape. MASSR had a highly diverse ethno-religious landscape and constitutes a perfect ground for such an analysis. Secondly, important decisions regarding the formulation of state policies towards religious communities were taken at a provincial or local level, and the explorations of the archival documents produced by liquidation officials of the Moldavian region provides the possibility of tracking these local dynamics. Thirdly, MASSR bordered Romania, and many of the policies formulated by the Soviet regime, including those that dealt with religions, concerned the security of its frontiers. The cross-border religious movements were perceived by the Soviet state as a constant threat to the security of its frontiers and as a milieu in which foreign spies could infiltrate. Fourthly, although the territory of MASSR was geographically small, it represented a thin strip of land stretching from north to south along the Romanian border encompassing territories which traditionally were not part of the same territorial-administrative unit. MASSR encompassed territories which before 1924 had been part of Vinnytsia Oblast whose population was heavily Ukrainian as well as territories of the former Kherson Governorate whose population was ethnically diverse and used predominantly Russian. Hence, MASSR was a territorial unit whose populations presented features characteristic to both northern and southern parts of Soviet Ukraine.

This thesis also facilitates a deeper understanding of the present religious landscape in the Republic of Moldova. Currently, the western half of the former territory of the MASSR is governed by the unrecognised breakaway-state of Transnistria, created in the 1990s by Russia after its army occupied this territory from the Republic of Moldova. The separatist regime is accused of persecuting religious minorities, which are in many ways similar to the policies promoted by the antireligious officials in Soviet Moldavia. Baptists, Jehovah Witnesses,

Muslims, and Pentecostals are harassed in schools, denigrated by the state-controlled mass-media, and their religious activities are targeted by numerous administrative restrictions. The perceptions of the separatist regime regarding religious minorities are informed by the narratives of Soviet antireligious propaganda. Likewise, the Russian Orthodox Church in Moldova seized control of the parish churches reopened by the lay parishioners in the early 1990s. Like a century ago, the image of the Orthodox priest is associated with self-enrichment through extortions from parishioners, and the clerics carry out the liturgical service in half-empty churches while the level of religiosity in Moldova is one of the highest in Europe. Likewise, the examination in this thesis of the relationship between materiality and Soviet antireligious propaganda narratives contributes to our understanding of the use of anti-sect narratives in the current wave of persecutions of religious minorities by the unrecognised authorities in Transnistria. This thesis, therefore, also contributes to a better understanding of the current role played by religion in the politics of Transnistria and the relations between lay believers and Orthodox clergy in Moldova, which in many ways carry the stamp of those that emerged in the early 1920s in MASSR.

As discussed above, this thesis employs the theoretical framework of the ANT and STS in an exploration of the archives of the Liquidation Commissions aiming to examine the role of the bureaucratic practices introduced into the religious landscape by liquidation officers and the role of religious artefacts and buildings in the relations between Soviet atheism and religions. In the next chapter, I introduce the theoretical coordinates of ANT and STS schools, and describe how these theoretical frameworks are applied to the case studies presented in the chapters that follow.

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Chapter 1: Methodology

In this chapter I present the main research question and the theoretical frameworks used to approach them. The first section presents the theoretical coordinates of Society and Technology Studies (STS), some of which are applied in this thesis to examen the bureaucratic techniques employed by Liquidation Commissions in order to police and control religious communities. The second section presents the methodological repertoire of the Actor-Network school (ANT), which will be used to examine the role of bureaucratic artefacts in the confrontation between religious communities and Soviet regime. In the third section, I present Bruno Latour's book *We Have Never Been Modern*, which explains how and why material objects and networks played a key role in modernisation but their role was nevertheless concealed. The last section presents how I will address the subject of my research from the perspective of the theoretical frameworks of these schools.

ANT and STS examine the role of materiality and its influence on us. STS emerged as a field examining the social dimension of technoscience and the making of scientific knowledge. STS scholars challenge the special status of scientific knowledge and analyse the social setup in which they are produced with the participation of human and non-humans (Law 2017, 33). ANT emerged as a subfield of STS, which later evolved into a separate school preoccupied not only with technoscience, but also with the social in general, examining the social life of people and artefacts from the perspective of their relations to other actors (Sismondo 2009, 81). The theoretical frameworks developed in these fields provide useful tools for examining the role of bureaucratic artefacts and sacred objects preserved in the archives. The objective of this thesis is to examine the role of these artefacts in the religious revival of the 1920s and in the relations between Soviet regime and religious believers in this period. In order to facilitate the accomplishment of these goals, a detailed presentation of the research repertoires developed within STS and ANT is needed.

ANT and STS are not the only lines of thought providing theoretical repertoires for examining the social role of materiality. The scholars associated with new materialism have developed a rich set of conceptual tools for examining the role and agency of materiality in the social. As Ariane Francoise Conty observes, the common ground for ANT and New Materialism are their attempts to avoid the subject-object, nature-culture, matter-mind, human-nonhuman divide (2018, 74). Despite common goals, ANT explains agency, even in cases of humans, as the result of relationalities. For example, human thoughts and feelings indeed are

located in bodies, but they would not occur without the external events and objects we encounter (Conty 2018, 77). New Materialism, on the other hand, is a very diverse field which associates agency with interiority, regardless of whether it speaks about people, animals, forests, or minerals (Contry 2018). This thesis draws on ANT and STS for two main reasons. Firstly, ANT and STS repertoires are more attentive to relationalities and provide more tools for exploring the encounter between religious communities and the Soviet regime as a dialogical process. Secondly, ANT and STS offer more analytical leverage in relation to the circulation of the bureaucratic artefacts within their networks. ANT and STS repertoires helped me in particular to conduct a more nuanced examination of the circulation within bureaucratic networks of the documents co-produced by the liquidation officials with the participation of religious believers.

STS

The scientific and industrial revolution effected profound changes on the social landscape, enriching our realities with numerous artefacts and devices, it changed the ideas people think and the worlds they create and inhabit. These changes could not pass unnoticed for sociologists, philosophers, anthropologists, and scholars belonging to other fields, because of the implications of these changes on the social and on the human condition. As Wenda K. Bauchspies, Jennifer Croissant, and Sal Restivo observe, "[w]e and our ideas and our artifacts are in the most fundamental way social through and through because all of these things exist in a web of social relationships" (2005, 2). This perspective on the relations between, artefacts, humans, and their ideas is representative of the field which came to be known as Society and Technology Studies (STS). Ulrike Felt, Rayvon Fouché, Clark A. Miller, and Laurel Smith-Doerr define STS as "…an interdisciplinary field that investigates the institutions, practices, meanings, and outcomes of science and technology and their multiple entanglements with the worlds people inhabit, their lives, and their values" (2017, 1).

The STS emerged in the mid-1960s, and the scholars associated with its early stages came from different fields, including history, philosophy, anthropology, sociology and economics (Edge 2001, 4). David Edge identifies three factors which in the 1960s drew the attention of scholars to science and technology. The first one was the interest in academic and political milieu to producing a theoretical basis for a policy of science, a set of concepts and parameters which would allow the policymakers to calculate the optimal amounts of investments in scientific development. The second factor related to the interest regarding how

the education system should be improved so that it would facilitate the technoscientific and social development through preparing better trained young engineers and scientists. The third source of the interest for the study into science and technology was the democratic impulse produced by the Vietnam war, civil rights, environmentalist and feminist movements. The role and power of expert elites and the democratisation of science and technology were among the interests of the explorations driven by these last factors (2001, 7-8; 10-11). In the 1970s, STS scholars engaged in a series of fieldwork inquiries into the work of scientific laboratories, applying methods from humanities in order to examine the process of making of scientific knowledge and some tried to demonstrate that scientific knowledge is symmetrical with other beliefs (Kleinman & Kelly Moore 2014, 3). STS research repertoires were inspired by anthropological methodological toolkit, and vice versa (Winthereik 2020, 25).

Five decades ago, scholars reflecting on science considered that scientific knowledge has a special status because of its capacity to collect accurate data, examine it through scientific method, and produce generalisations. The character of scientific knowledge was debated only by philosophers, who asserted that prejudice undermines scientist's capacity to conduct objective inquiries based on scientific method (Law 2017, 32-33; Kleinman & Moore 2014, 4). STS emerged as a criticism of this mainstream perspective on scientific knowledge. There were two ways in which the early STS scholars addressed the issue, with some of them arguing that in a class society (Soviet) or in a gendered society, scientific practice is ideological because it is conducted under the influence of social power. Another way in which the early STS scholars questioned the objectivity of science was to argue that scientists conduct their research in disciplinary (and hence social) settings and that their examinations are shaped by the world and by society (Law 2017, 33). More recently, STS scholars have addressed the issue of social embeddedness of scientific knowledge and practice and reject the idea that science and society can be separated. In addressing the nature of objectivity, for example, contemporary scholars consider that the researcher should acknowledge their social position and they need to make its examination part of their scientific inquiry (Law 2017, 35-36). According to STS scholars, the meaning of the objects researched by scientists are characterised by instability and their research questions are influenced by the prejudices with which they take for granted the ideas about the objects they research and are shaped by the relationships between people working in laboratories. Scientific knowledge is influenced by technology and language, and the researched objects are constructed and have multiple meanings (Kleinman & Moore 2014, 4-5). Over the following decades, STS developed as a diverse field, with tensions among the

scholars associated with it, who promoted contrasting approaches and perspectives on the social, technoscience, and on how to study them (Edge 2001, 12).

Felt, Fouché, Miller, and Smith-Doerr, observe that "STS scholarship emphasizes that in the process of making science and technology, people also make and remake themselves, their bodies and identities, their societies, and their material surroundings" (2017, 1). Hence, the scholars associated with the STS examine the way technoscience invaded the social, how it changed society and how in turn it was influenced by society and how humans position themselves in relation to it. Formulating a clear understanding of these phenomena has the potential to provide scientists with a greater ability to understand their social role, to promote with dexterity their agendas on vital issues such as global warming, and to pursue their activity within the framework of better-defined ethics. Additionally, STS has produced important accounts of technoscience as a social phenomenon, and how it shapes us and our worlds. Finally, the STS scholarship helps to "demystify" science, because as Bauchspies, Croissant, and Restivo put it, "if there is anything to fear, it is the unexamined exercise of any form of authority" (2005, 3). One of the main contributions of STS was to demonstrate that scientific facts are not discovered but produced by scientists (Kleinman & Moore 2014, 3).

Daniel Lee Kleinman and Kelly Moore mention in their 2014 STS handbook that if at its early stages STS dealt primarily with science and scientific practice, now it explores a wide variety of phenomena related to technoscience from the experiences of the workers in nuclear industry to the hydrological construction of state borders (2014, 1). From the 1990s the STS scholars exhibited interest to researching not only the institution of science, but also other institutions including the state, its influence on science through funding patterns, and state's close relations with scientific knowledge. STS also has showed interest regarding such questions as why certain groups benefit more from technoscientific innovations than others, how these innovations affect groups of people and the environment, and the role of corporate interests in producing inequalities (Kleinman & Moore 2014, 5-6).

In the 2017 edition of the STS series of handbooks, Felt, Fouché, Miller, and Smith-Doerr, describe the role of their handbook in a similar manner to the way STS scholars describe and examine the role of a device. According to them:

> [f]rom an STS perspective, a handbook—commonly understood as a reference book in a particular field—does not merely reference or reflect "a reality"; rather, in purporting to describe a field, it also helps to call it into being, to shape

> its relations with both neighbouring disciplines and society more broadly, to make it real for its readers (2017, 2-3).

As John Law observes, STS tries to answer the question about how science and technology shape the world, how they are shaped by society, and how scholars can intervene in these processes, (2017, 31) including through such devices as a handbook and through their research methods. According to the same author, "STS attends to practice", it "is the study of method in practice", and it "always works through case studies". For John Law, in an STS inquiry, the theory, method, and empirical data are intertwined with social institutions and objects (2017, 31-32). For example, some scholars question the nature of the boundaries constructed between science and society, humans and non-humans, actors and environments, and examine them as being co-constructions produced by social forces, artefacts, and scientists (Kleinman & Moore 2014, 3-4). For Law, the STS inquiry is not to just discover realities created by investigated assemblages, but it participates in the enactment of those realities. Law is interested in what happens to the method when applied in practice (Law 2004, 45).

The STS scholars explain the influences of technoscience on society by using the term performativity. Linguistic philosophy associates this term with the sentences which are at the same time actions (Law 2017, 37). An example of performative sentence is "I do" in the marriage ceremony. Performativity is when a sentence "indicates that the using of the utterance is the performing of an action - it is not normally thought of as just as saying something" (Austin 1975, 5-7). STS scholars have linked this concept with the idea that social life might be regarded as a performance which has real effects and shapes the social. This association produced the idea that methods are staged. From this perspective, a survey makes real the categories with which it operates by staging performative act for people who do not necessarily fit any of those categories.

Another important concept used by scholars to track the influences of technoscience on society is "trope". A trope is a concept coined by scientists, a term which is not politically and socially neutral, and which are marked by such social prejudice or political ideas they reproduce and enforce. They effect the "formatting" of actors through their dissemination and embeddedness in narratives (Law 2017, 37; 39-40). According to feminist material semiotics (the term material semiotics is discussed below), "…tropes or figures of speech bend relations.

Words necessarily select and organise what we know and do and feel and see, and there is no such thing as a neutral language" (Law 2019, 7).

The STS scholars deal in their inquiry with two methodological problems. The first one relates to networks, which are formed of technical, social, professional, economic components and artefacts, when technoscientific projects are implemented. For example, Thomas Edison' electricity system generated an entire web of interconnected groups and artefacts which included the electric network, consumers, and the staff which maintained the work of this system. Without any of these components, the electrical network would not be operational and they give it a social dimension. Each of the components were influenced by the other elements embedded in this web, an issue central to the Actor-Network Theory (ANT) school (Law 2017, 41) (discussed below). Another problem which rises when all these social webs are taken into account is the *problem of difference*. If all elements of a network influence each other, and in each case the practice varies, so does the research method which formats the participants to a network (Law 2017, 43-45).

Bauchspies, Croissant, and Restivo mention that STS is "by no means a mainstream view of science and technology", and the efforts to give a social interpretation to them has tended to pit the representatives of the "hard sciences" against this approach (2005, 1). Nevertheless, in his "anthropology of the moderns", Bruno Latour (an author associated with the ANT school, which will be discussed later) observes that in order to be able to promote such important agendas as ecologization (the adoption of a more ecologically sustainable way of life), the "fragile institution" of science needs to be trusted by people. He asserts that the accusations of "relativism" against the scholars engaged with interpreting scientific practice as a "fragile social institution" are the product of a failure of the scientists to understand that they need the trust of the people on which their success depends, and that the scholars examining science from the perspective of sociology, anthropology, and philosophy are trying to help scientists to attain this trust (Latour 2013, 6). Despite the criticism from the scientific community regarding the relativism of STS arguments, important representatives of the STS and ANT schools are retrained scientists or engineers, as in the case of Michel Callon, Madeleine Akrich, and Antoine Hennion (Farías, Blok & Roberts 2020, xxvi). Among the explanations advanced by STS and ANT scholars for the criticism they receive, is that the animosity of numerous scientists towards this fields is caused by their understanding "that objects in the world are connected to their own agency" which can be understood to weaken the merits of producing scientific breakthroughs. This idea that objects play a role in scientific

innovation contradicts the self-definition of the scientists and their claim to reality (Guggenheim 2020, 68). Bruno Latour calls these disputes "the science war", and states:

> But where does the two-culture debate itself originate? In a division of labor between the two sides of the campus. One camp deems the sciences accurate only when they have been purged of any contamination by subjectivity, politics, or passion; the other camp, spread out much more widely, deems humanity, morality, subjectivity, or rights worthwhile only when they have been protected from any contact with science, technology, and objectivity. We in science studies fight against these two purges, against both purifications at once, and this is what makes us traitors to both camps (Latour 1999, 18).

As Latour summarises here, STS faces criticism from the representatives of both hard sciences and of humanities, because it transgresses the boundaries of traditional domains. Scientists and scholars are trained to see the phenomena they examine through the lens of these purified domains, which are the product of modernity. The origins of these boundaries are examined by Bruno Latour in his book *We Have Never Been Modern*, which will be discussed later. Latour argues that a more connected science will be more accurate, more verifiable and more authoritative (Latour 1999, 18). A mid-in-a-vat science which, in his view, tries to examine and explain an out there world through establishing correspondence between words and phenomena is unrealistic (Latour 1999, 113).

ANT

The Actor-Network Theory (ANT) emerged from STS as a framework for understating technoscience and was developed by Michel Collon, Bruno Latour, and John Law (Sismondo 2009, 81). By the end of the 1990s, the ANT consolidated as a separate field concerned with a wider variety of issues than those dealt with by STS scholars (Farías, Blok & Roberts 2020, xxi). ANT evolved into a general approach to research of the social with technoscience as one of its primary concerns (Sismondo 2009, 81). Latour defines ANT not as a theory of what is the social, but as a school which explains the social by paying close attention to the actor from which it learns, and he admits that the replacement by Michael Lynch of the term "network" with "rhizome" and of "theory" with "ontology" in the syntagma Actor-Network-Theory, has its point (Jensen 2020, 76). This field has provided innovative approaches to the research of the social that go beyond the modern divides of nature-culture and work of technical-social

scholars (Farías, Blok & Roberts 2020, xx). ANT has rejected the notions about that "reality is purely and simply a social, symbolic or discursive construct", focusing instead on the role of technologies, material artefacts, things and materiality in general in the social and in the creation of reality (Farías, Blok & Roberts 2020, xxv). Bruno Latour is one of the key thinkers of this field and among the scholars whose works examines the "institution of science". Latour questions traditional notions about scientific knowledge by examining the relation between the understanding about the known thing produced by the knowing mind, and the reality of the known thing. This relation is epitomised by the example of a map used by tourists to find their way through mountains. Is the map a precise depiction of all signposts, trees, smells, rocks, sceneries encountered by the travellers on their way uphill? Definitely not. Latour argues that precisely this lack of precision, the absence of many details, the simplified depiction, facilitates the task of the traveller to find his/her way by using a map (Latour 2013, 76; 78). Nevertheless, behind the map unfolded and used by the tourists is an entire set of measurements, tools, scientists, trials, and material practices. Because following all the relations between these devices and practices is difficult in the case of the ancient science of cartography (Latour 2013, 89), Latour brings the example of his anthropological research in the scientific laboratory observing that the processes of production of scientific facts are complex and messy, involving numerous failed and successful trials executed by numerous researchers with a wide variety of tools. In order to prove their arguments, scientists perform the same procedure as the cartographers. They distil the processes that took place in their laboratories and present to the reader of their scientific papers only a set of references to a series of successful experiments and the performed measurements. What a scientific paper is missing are numerous objects, persons, tools, materials, things, which interacted between them and participated to the production of the scientific facts (Latour 2013, 89-90). All these things and persons constituted a network which made possible the successful production of the scientific facts (Latour 2013, 93).

ANT comes under the banner of Material Semiotics which is likewise used to refer to feminist material semiotics, and a series of lines of inquiry in social and cultural anthropology, cultural studies, post-colonial studies, and geography. John Law explains the term as a set of tools and sensibilities used in order to follow and examine practices in the social world which are "woven out of threads to form weaves that are simultaneously semiotic (because they are relational, and/or they carry meanings) and material (because they are about the physical stuff caught up and shaped in those relations) (Law 2019, 1). ANT's approach is based on the idea

that there is no single social structure or pattern because the webs consisting of material and social things take different forms and styles. Material semiotics explores topics such as the formation or failure of these webs, the origin of the threads interconnecting their elements, their features and how they might exclude certain participants, the productivity and performativity of the webs, the formatting of the associates in a web, the agenda carried by different actants/associates, the realities enacted in webs, how the webs interact, ignore each other, or interrelate (Law 2019, 1).

The ANT approach to relations is inspired by linguistic semiotics but whereas ANT considers semiotics a since of relations, in contrast, linguistic semioticians regarded semiotics as a science of signs. For linguistic semioticians, signs arise from relations between meditating entities and the signified object. Annmarie Mol, addressing the nature of relationality, refers to the networks of words, which give to a signifier a particular meaning. For example, the word "fish" gets its meaning in part due to material differences between what the words "meat" and "fish" stand for (Mattozzi 2020, 89-90). Tatsuma Padoan observes that in the Latourian definition semiotics sprang from actions, passions, body and materiality (Padoan 2021, 190). Padoan argues that we have to leave aside the Protestant divide between language and body that constitutes the basis of the classical definitions of semiotics, which considers "meaning as a disembodied and inner product of thought" (Padoan 2021, 193). Discourse has a phenomenological dimension, and there is a close relation between the semantics, somatic, sense and senses. Language is a practice because talking requires the involvement of our bodies (not only our phonatory organs) and other material means. The message we communicate to others is not simply projected from one brain to another. Meaning is "a course of actions" and an "articulation of sense". Every form of communication is "a fabric of actions and passions" producing assemblages of actants who participate in the action of communication (Padoan 2021, 193-194). "Every action generates in fact a modal reconfiguration of what its receiver feels […] in terms of obligation, volition, knowledge and power […]. The subject who feels, thus pragmatically reacts producing new actions (Padoan 2021, 194). In this definition of semiotics, "discourse" and "text" are applied as analytical categories. The notions of "discourse" and "text" are understood in their etymological definition: "text from *textus*, meaning 'texture,' 'fabric,' and discourse from *dis-cur-sus*, 'running here and there'" (Padoan 2021, 194). The texts are not only read but seen, heard, or perceived, and for their producers "semiotic texts and discourses are textures, courses of actions and passions" (Padoan 2021, 194). This "nonrepresentational theory of discourse" eliminates the separation between "sense

and matter, signification and action, language and body" (Padoan 2021, 195). The body is "the interlocking element between signifiers and signifieds" (Padoan 2021, 194). The space and its different portions (*topoi)* have a key role in the process of signification according to this nonrepresentational theory of discourse, because different *topoi* open different potentialities of action and elicit certain forms of behaviour for actors engaged in the act of communication, in which it can alternatively play the role of object and subject (Padoan 2021, 195-194). From the perspective of this definition of semiotics, the action of communication is both embodied and materialised, and has spatial coordinates. In order to communicate a message or to receive and interpret one, we form alliances with human and non-human actors. The interlocking between the signifier and the signified is produced through the embodiment of the action of communication. Our bodies constitute the mediators that associate meaning and signs with feelings, senses, and sense. The positioning of the body in space and against other human and non-human actors, shapes the meaning associated with signs, and influences the choosing of signs and the forms of their communication. The act of communication is shaped and accomplished through the means of the relationalities between human bodies and things. ANT scholars pay a great deal of attention to relations, because as Law puts it: ANT "assumes that nothing has reality or form outside the enactment of those relations" (Law 2008, 141). In this sense, ANT is frequently seen as an "empirical translation of poststructuralism". John Law mention that if Michel Foucault urges us to focus on the relational character of the epochal epistemes, ANT attends to the relations between small-scale heterogenous networks composed of actors and to the productive character of their relations (Law 2008, 145).

Scholars associated with ANT regard technoscience as the product of a set of larger networks, similarly to how the politicians create alliances in order to maintain their power. The actors creating and participating to these networks are both humans and non-humans. The actions of these actors are caused by their interests, which can be accommodated and used. Everything from electrons to an election poll can participate in networks. As such, ANT scholars regard the social phenomena as the result of the actions of particular actors rather than the outcome of the social forces (Sismondo 2009, 81). Similar to STS, ANT focuses on case studies, in which the theoretical and the empirical cannot be separated. According to Law, "material semiotics works as a set of varying but overlapping methods, sensibilities and concerns in empirical-and-theoretical practice" (Law 2019, 2).

For Latour the term "network" has two meanings, both of which are associated with the idea of circulation. Only one of the two understandings of this term corresponds to the ANT

perspective on the social. Latour states: "under the word "network" we must be careful not to confuse what circulates once everything is in place with the setups involving the heterogeneous set of elements that allow circulation to occur" (Latour 2013, 32). If we bring again the example of New York electricity network, we can apply two notions of "network" to what Edison has created. There is a wire network which works due to generators and makes possible the energy supply. But at the same time, by identifying all technical and non-technical, human and non-human actors that make the supply possible, we discern another understanding of this term. The circulation of electricity would not be possible without the alliance of the interests of numerous human and non-human actors including the wire, pillars, technical staff, consumers, politicians desiring to improve the living standards of those who elected them.

Latour observes that an important feature of the worldview of modern people is the delimitation in domains of the objects and phenomena they encounter, such as the domains of science, law, and religion (Latour 2013, 29). Traditionally sociology operates with the same domains but the ANT definition of the term "network" challenges this traditional understanding of the social. By including people and artefacts belonging to different domains, Edison's electricity network, for example, transgresses these domains. We can argue that ANT replaces the traditional sociological understanding based on the idea of domains with a new definition of "networks". As Latour observes, not everything in science is scientific, not everything in economy is economic, and not everything in law is juridical. Not everything in law is juridical, but something juridical circulates in it (Latour 2017, 29; 40), as is the case with Edison's electrical network in which electricity circulates but not all its elements are technical. Material semiotics in general resists the idea that there is a social order that can be identified and used in order to explain all social phenomena. What it stands for is the idea of the existence of multiple orders whilst opposing the explanatory reductionism (Law 2019, 9).

Traditionally, sociology defines the "social" as a particular kind of thing or as a specific type of relations. Latour and other scholars associated with the ANT school explain the social as "a very peculiar movement of re-association and reassembling" (Latour 2005, 7). They regard material objects as entities that "…might authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render possible, forbid" the undertaking of actions by humans. In this sense, the distribution and relationality of material things explain the contrasts and the asymmetries in society (Latour 2005, 73-72). As Law puts it, "…material semiotics does not confine itself to a narrow understanding of 'the social'. Rather than simply talking about people or human collectivities, it includes the 'materials' of the world, for the latter are seen as equally

'social'" (Law 2019, 3). According to Latour, things can play the role of mediators or that of intermediaries and are the source of the stabilisation of the associations (Latour 2005, 128). Mediators are characterised by the capacity of transporting and transforming meaning or force, while intermediaries do not modify the meanings and the forces they pass on (Latour 2005, 39).

The generalised symmetry between humans and non-humans is one of the most attractive methodological strategies proposed by the early ANT. The symmetry is the main reason why the language and conceptual repertoire of ANT has become so popular in academia in the context of a growing need to examine the role of things (Farías, Blok & Roberts 2020, xxi). As Brit Ross Winthereik observes, the dictum "follow the actor" has been at the very centre of ANT repertoires. This dictum requires the fieldwork researcher to bracket all her/his assumptions regarding the field s/he is interested in, and to observe the actor attending to practice, which "is all about attending to emergent concepts and theories in ways that allow for determining 'the problems posed by each culture'" (Winthereik 2020, 24). Latour defines this dictum as to follow the actor, thing or words, across a series of transformations (Winthereik 2020, 27). This principle transformed ANT into a politics-free domain, and for this reason for example, it is dismissed by queer theorists who cannot inquire the regimes of gender and sexuality from a neutral position (Race 2020, 168). Likewise, ANT fieldwork is also centred on the idea of symmetry between academic and non-academic knowledge (Rosa 2020, 215).

For Latour, the essence of a network is that it has to be endured, prolonged, maintained or extended, and in order to construct it a set of participants are to be associated, and through them a circulation has to take place. The circulated element never remains the same, as is the case with the actors through which it passes (Latour 2013, 41). As Law observes, an important feature of the networks is that they create "immutable mobiles", "circulating to and from in space whilst holding their form and shape constant" (Law 2008, 146-147). Every alliance in a network is costly, and every element has to be "enrolled, mobilized, shifted, translated" with a network only as strong as its weakest element (Latour 2013, 61-62). As Michael Guggenheim observes, from an ANT perspective "to strengthen a network means to minimise translation steps" (Guggenheim 2020, 66).

John Law argues that "these webs of relations are *performative"* and fragile. For Law, "[y]ou cannot build a network, lock it in place, and throw away the key. It has to be done again and again and again if it is to hold. *Everything is a process*" (Law 2019, 4). For ANT scholars, every situation or action, like the functioning of machines or the acceptance of a set of facts as true, is the product of the work of actors in networks. From this perspective, the work of

technoscience, for example, is a translation of the interest of diverse actors with different agendas, so that they can work in alliance. By performing translations, the elements of a network are put in action, and become actants, things made to act through entering the network (Sismondo 2009, 82). According to John Law, a translation is "to make two words equivalent. But since no two words are equivalent, translation also implies betrayal […] So translation is both about making equivalent, and about shifting" (Law 2008, 144).

The term actant requires special attention. According to Bruno Latour and Madeleine Akrich, an actant is:

> Whatever acts or shifts actions, action itself being defined by a list of performances through trials; from these performances are deduced a set of competences with which the actant is endowed; the fusion point of a metal is a trial through which the strength of an alloy is defined; the bankruptcy of a company is a trial through which the faithfulness of an ally may be defined; an actor is an actant endowed with a character (usually anthropomorphic) (Akrich & Latour 1992, 259).

According to this definition, an actant is an entity endowed with agency. It is an actor which performs a change, one that resists a trial of strength. This leads us to the ANT definition of agency. As Latour puts it: "[a]n invisible agency that makes no difference, produces no transformation, leaves no trace, and enters no account is not an agency. Period. Either it does something or it does not" (Latour 2005, 53). The trial has a central role in identifying and defining an actor. According to John Law, "[a]n actor is always a network of elements that it does not fully recognize or know: simplification or "black boxing" is a necessary part of agency" (Law 2008, 147). As Latour observes:

> Why is an actor defined through trials? Because there is no other way to define an actor but through its action, and there is no other way to define an action but by asking what other actors are modified, transformed, perturbed, or created by the character that is the focus of attention (Latour 1999, 122).

This paragraph from Latour leads us back to the idea of network. In order to identify and define an actant, a scientist has to perform experiments in her laboratory during which, by constructing/extending networks, she creates relations between a new actor and other actors, and interrogates the later about the features of the former. From this perspective, the work of a

scientists is similar to the task of an ethnographer who, let's say, wants to know about the role and impact of an idol in an indigenous community, or about the role of an icon in a Christian community. She will try to establish how the presence of the idol and the icon influence the communities they are part of.

In order to exemplify how, according to the Latourian definition, things exercise agency, Daniel Miller gives the example of a computer which prevents a paper being submitted before the deadline because it crashes, a plant which defiantly grows differently from how those who planted it expected it to grow, or a disease which kills a person. These "are the agents behind what subsequently happens" (Miller 2005, 11). Through the principle of generalised symmetry, ANT inquiry goes beyond the traditional subject/object divide.

Farías, Blok, and Roberts observe that in the last two decades ANT "reinvented itself", re-emerging within a new conceptual framework that can be defined as post-ANT. Among these concepts is *Performativity* (discussed above), *Fractality*, and *Multiplicity* (Farías, Blok & Roberts 2020, xxii). Multiplicity, a term coined by Annemarie Mol, refers to the existence of a multiplicity of realities. The differences between them are the product of the overlapping of different artefacts associated into distinct assemblages located in different spaces. She formulates this definition based on her fieldwork among the medical doctors who treated patients suffering from atherosclerosis. According to the ethnographic evidence, the experts diagnosed this disease based on several techniques, each one applied with a set of devices located in a separate room. In numerous cases, the data collected through these techniques diverged or contradicted the symptoms reported by patients. These contradictions are called the *problem of difference*. In assemblages, things overlap/associate, but *they are not the same*. The *construction* of the object is realised through their integration into an assemblage. Another important conclusion is that similar to people, things become real when they are part of a practice, a reality enacted. Things are real because they are constantly re-enacted. Their identities are fragile and can vary when these things are dislocated in new sites. Realities are created in practices and they exist in relations (Law 2004, 54-57; 59).

Based on Annemarie Mol's research, John Law formulates the notion of "Fractality". According to Mol, based on numerous techniques, such as *mutual exclusion* of things, *creation of different objects* or *composite objects*, *location in different places* (of objects or patients), the medical doctors managed to reconcile the contradictory reports compiled through different

diagnosis techniques. They avoided the multiplicity produced by different assemblages of medical devices, but did they achieve singularity? (Law 2004, 60-61). As Law observes:

> For the absence of singularity does not imply that we live in a world composed of an indefinite number of different and disconnected bodies, atherosclerosis, hospital departments, or political decisions. It does not imply that reality is fragmented. Instead, it implies something much more complex. It implies that the different realities overlap and interfere with one another. (Law 2004, 61)

Based on this observation, Law introduces the concept of *fractional object.* A fractional object is "more than one and less than many" (Law 2004, 62). An example of a fractional object is the set of clinical trials and diagnosis technologies used by the medical doctors to assess the health condition of their patients suffering of atherosclerosis. Numerous assemblages (networks) operated separately and produced their own account of reality due to the overlapping/association of different actors who/which gives them a particular meaning and function through the practices in which they are involved, practices which exist through a set of relations. Annemarie Mol's research shows that "'reality' is not singular, but rather consists in a multiplicity of partly overlapping, partly disjunctive realities or worlds" (Farías, Blok, and Roberts 2020, xxv). Drawing on these observations, John Law formulated the concept of fractality, which refers to composite objects consisted of multiple assemblages creating different versions of reality but nevertheless connected, or overlapped, due to a set of practices that merge those versions of reality according to a set of procedures, and thus create composite objects which are more than a unit and less than a collection of things (Law 2004). This concept creates a third way of looking at objects providing a category located between unity and plurality.

As Farías, Blok, and Roberts puts it, these and other innovative concepts used by scholars to examine the social transformed ANT into a "highly mobile label for a stabilised conceptual repertoire concerned with generalised symmetry, networks and non-humans" (2020, xxii). The scholars engaged with these concepts tend to become post-ANT explorers of the social who experiment with the classic and new ANT repertoire. The same authors mention that the chapters of their volume are explorations from the perspective of a near-ANT, explorations "not simply deploying the existing ANT canon of concepts, research strategies

and writing experiments, but keeping them near as a source of questions, problems and inspiration" (Farías, Blok, and Roberts 2020, xxi).

Farías, Blok, and Roberts regard the shift from "after-ANT" to "near-ANT" as an attempt to provide an anti-exceptionalist account of ANT whose conceptual apparatus is "not exceptionally powerful". In their view, ANT is "rather part of quite specific enactments of a more-than-human social inquiry […,] an expanded field of post-, non- or more-than-humanist problematisations of the common world(s) we construct and inhabit" (Farías, Blok, and Roberts 2020, xxii). Farías, Blok, and Roberts advocate for an open-ended exploration of the social from a near-ANT perspective, which allows scholars to not "stabilise, institutionalise or canonise what ANT is in any finalised or teleological sense", but to use it more as "a notebook than a central perspective" (Farías, Blok, and Roberts 2020, xxii). Near ANT can be defined as a "a certain mode of doing intellectual work, certain kinds of intellectual practices and sensitivities, which include ways of doing conceptual resemblances and differences differently" (Farías, Blok, and Roberts 2020, xxii). As José Ossandón puts it, "ANT has become a particular type of critical intellectual practice. Doing ANT is not simply following the explicit instructions set by canonical texts. To use ANT is also a performance, a creative form of acting the instructions that previous theories set to us" (Ossandón 2020, 54).

Networks and modernity

In the seminal work *We have never been modern*, Bruno Latour explains the mechanisms through which the moderns exploited the material things while silencing and concealing them and their relations to political power and society. These mechanisms relate to political power and their understanding is important for my research on the Soviet antireligious policies, which frequently employed scientific rhetoric in its antireligious propaganda. Likewise, this work explains the divergences between postmodernists and what Latour calls a-modernism.

Bruno Latour begins his inquiry with describing the content and structure of a newspaper. The presented newspaper articles refer to the effects of human activity on ecology the dangers posed by the hole in the ozone layer and the measurements taken in the Arctic worry the scientific community. These articles describe the involvement of political leaders with chemistry, inert gases, and aerosol. Latour calls them hybrid articles and observes that despite that they mix knowledge, science, justice, and power, the modern man tends to regard all these components as distinct domains. The newspaper is structured in headings like "Economy", "Politics", "Science". The diverse actors interconnected in a network by the AIDS virus spread in Africa are accurately inscribed by editors in one of the domains (Latour 1993,

1-3). Latour goes on to observe, that STS was concerned with “retying this Gordian Knot” by relying “on the notion of translation, or network” (Latour 1993, 3). But for Latour this is just half work done, and he states:

> Modernity is often defined in terms of humanism, either as a way of saluting the birth of 'man' or as a way of announcing his death. But this habit itself is modern, because it remains asymmetrical. It overlooks the simultaneous birth of 'nonhumanity' - things, or objects, or beasts - and the equally strange beginning of a crossed-out God, relegated to the sidelines. Modernity arises first from the conjoined creation of those three entities, and then from the masking of the conjoined birth and the separate treatment of the three communities while, underneath, hybrids continue to multiply as an effect of this separate treatment. The double separation is what we have to reconstruct: the separation between humans and nonhumans on the one hand, and between what happens 'above' [in the previously mentioned domains] and what happens 'below' [in the networks] on the other (Latour 1993, 13).

Latour draws on his concepts of the double separation persistent in modern thinking, the separation between nature (non-human nature as examined and explained by science) and the social (human culture), and the partition between the translations (or networks) and the previously mentioned two domains (Latour 1993, 11) when he states that “[a]s soon as one outlines the symmetrical space and thereby re-establishes the common understanding that organizes the separation of natural and political powers, one ceases to be modern” (Latour 1993, 13). Latour states that postmodernism is a line of thought which “is a symptom, not a fresh solution”. For Latour, postmodernism has sensed that something in modernity is in decline, but it exists as a mode of thinking under the auspices of the same ontological way of perceiving the realities it criticises (Latour 1993, 46). Latour introduces the notion of “a-modernism” as an umbrella category for those who organise their critique of modernity focusing on its mechanisms of constructing the abovementioned divides and on its masking of the networks (Latour 1993, 47-48). Latour defines modernism as “the double contradiction that is modern, the contradiction between the two constitutional guarantees of Nature and Society on the one hand, and between the practice of purification and the practice of mediation on the other” (Latour 1993, 62).

Latour begins explaining the nature and the origins of the abovementioned divides by examining the disputes between Robert Boyle and Thomas Hobbes, and the relations between the laboratory (Boyle's Air-Pump) and Leviathan in 17th Century England. Understanding the relation between science and political power is important for my research because I deal with a high modernist regime (Soviet state), which produced an anti-religious discourse based on the tenets of scientism. According to Latour, Boyle and Hobbes agreed on everything. They both wanted a Parliament, a King who controls a unified Church, to bring to an end the Civil War, and they were promoters of mechanical philosophy, but they disagreed on one single issue. They diverged on the status of experimentation and scientific reasoning (Latour 1993, 17; 19). Thomas Hobbes was preoccupied by the body politic, its unity and the authority of the sovereign who was its head. He wanted to eliminate all the ancient sources of legitimacy for discontent, be they religious beliefs that could be considered superior to the sovereign will, or any other form of transcendence, such as nature, that were above the civil authority (Latour 1993, 19).

Boyle's experiments were perceived by Hobbes as dangerous for two reasons. Firstly, they demonstrated the existence of the vacuum, while Hobbes was promoting the purification of the body politic of angels, spirits, and any other entities which could transcend the authority of the sovereign (Latour 1993, 20). Secondly, during his experiments, Boyle made reference to non-human witnesses in order to prove his arguments, which could constitute an uncontrollable source of authority in the body politic (Latour 1993, 23). Latour observes that the interrogation of the objects in laboratory is the invention of facts, it is "an anthropological creation that redistributes God, will, love, hatred and justice" (Latour 1993, 83-84). Finally, Boyle succeeds to create the Royal Society as a milieu where the experiments could take place unrestrained by any form of legal restriction. This last victory of Boyle, was perceived by Hobbes as an infringement on the unity of the body politic (Latour 1993, 20). Latour observes that in fact Boyle and Hobbes made the same invention – "a division of power between the two protagonists, to Hobbes, the politics and to Boyle, the sciences" (Latour 1993, 25). Despite his failure to oppose the creation of the Royal Society, according to Latour, Hobbes produced an important invention: "Power equals Knowledge, an equation that is at the root of the entire modern Realpolitik" (1993, 26). Latour states:

> Boyle is not simply creating a scientific discourse while Hobbes is doing the same thing for politics; Boyle is creating a political discourse from which politics is to be excluded, while Hobbes is imagining a scientific politics from

> which experimental science has to be excluded. In other words, they are inventing our modern world, a world in which the representation of things through the intermediary of the laboratory is forever dissociated from the representation of citizens through the intermediary of the social contract. […] They are […] acting in concert to promote one and the same innovation in political theory: the representation of nonhumans belongs to science, but science is not allowed to appeal to politics; the representation of citizens belongs to politics, but politics is not allowed to have any relation to the nonhumans produced and mobilized by science and technology. Hobbes and Boyle quarrel in order to define the two resources that we continue to use unthinkingly, and the intensity of their double battle is highly indicative of the novelty of what they are inventing (Latour 1993, 27-28).

Hobbs and Boyle developed what Latour calls "the two branches of the modern Constitution" (Latour 1993, 27). The modern Constitution is "describing […] how all the branches of our government are organized, including that of nature and the hard sciences, and in explaining how and why these branches diverge as well as accounting for the multiple arrangements that bring them together" (Latour 1993, 15). Boyle's experiments introduced into the modern Constitution a new type of actors – the objects. They could be witnesses to the laws of natures discovered by the scientists (Latour 1993, 23). This invention created an arrangement which has lasted until this very day. The sovereign represents its subjects, "naked calculating citizens", and translate their will (so he can betray them), while the scientists declare that they speak for facts, facts demonstrated by non-human witnesses, which constitute a translation of nature produced by scientists (Latour 1993, 27-29).

"[T]he modern Constitution invents a separation between the scientific power charged with representing things and the political power charged with representing subjects" (Latour 1993, 29). But at the same time, Hobbes refers in the *Leviathan* to physics, theology, law, biblical exegesis and to God, and how He must rule. In a similar manner, they refer to a similarly large extent of domains, including the boundaries between science and politics, and to Divinity and its authority (Latour 1993, 29). Latour qualifies this as the "paradox" of the modern Constitution. Although they define their domain as science and politics, they both

transgress their limits and refer to issues not related to them. Hobbes and Boyle wrote just one of the earliest stipulations of the modern Constitution, according to Latour (Latour 1993, 30).

In order to function, the Constitution has a number of guaranties, and the first states: "Nature has always existed and has always already been there; we are only discovering its secrets" (Latour 1993, 30). The second guarantee states that: "human beings, and only human beings, are the ones who construct society and freely determine their own destiny" (Latour 1993, 31). These two guarantees should not be examined separately from each other. According to them, nature is transcended, foreign and hostile, and its secrets can be uncovered in laboratories with the help of devices handled by scientists. Despite the fact that their researchers fabricate the laws of nature, at the same time these laws escape human grasp. The realm of the social is organised by people and for people, but the Leviathan, or the state, has the capacity to mobilize resources and things. Nevertheless, the guarantee states that only people constitute the Leviathan. Both these guaranties are playing with transcendence and with immanence (Latour 1993, 31). These contradictions are levelled by the following guarantees: "there shall exist a complete separation between the natural world (constructed, nevertheless, by man) and the social world (sustained, nevertheless, by things); secondly, there shall exist a total separation between the work of hybrids and the work of purification" (Latour 1993, 31). Latour sums up the way the Constitution helps the moderns to play with immanence and transcendence: "On the one hand, the transcendence of Nature will not prevent its social immanence; on the other, the immanence of the social will not prevent the Leviathan from remaining transcendent. We must admit that this is a rather neat construction that makes it possible to do everything without being limited by anything." (Latour 1993, 32). The separation of the things from the social, and the depiction of the citizens as "naked" has a crucial importance for political power. The Leviathan's power cannot be presented as transcendent, when the "things" will account for its might (Latour 1993, 111).

The last guarantee of the modern Constitution referred to God, cast Him out of its construction but at the same time rendered Him to a limited existence in which He is usable. As Latour puts it, "Hobbes's and Boyle's followers succeeded in carrying out this task the former by ridding Nature of any divine presence, the latter by ridding Society of any divine origin" (Latour 1993, 33). Nevertheless, at the same time, in case of a conflict between the laws of Nature and Leviathan, the divine transcendence can be invoked (Latour 1993, 33). The invention of the scientific facts and of the citizen in symbiosis with the religious reformation of the 16th Century, produced a spirituality of the heart. Citizens could be both secular and

believers, and religion could become a resource for criticising nature and society (Latour 1993, 33).

> God was bracketed twice over, once in metaphysics and again in spirituality. He would no longer interfere in any way with the development of the moderns, but He remained effective and helpful within the spirit of humans alone.
>
> A threefold transcendence and a threefold immanence in a crisscrossed schema that locks in all the possibilities: this is where I locate the power of the moderns. They have not made Nature; they make Society; they make Nature; they have not made Society; they have not made either, God has made everything; God has made nothing, they have made everything […] (Latour 1993, 34).

The work of this Constitution is that it makes the work of the hybrids, or the assemblages of humans and non-humans, invisible. As Latour puts it:

> Constitution […] renders the work of mediation that assembles hybrids invisible, unthinkable, unrepresentable. Does this lack of representation limit the work of mediation in any way? No, for the modern world would immediately cease to function. Like all other collectives it lives on that blending. On the contrary (and here the beauty of the mechanism comes to light), the modern Constitution allows the expanded proliferation of the hybrids whose existence, whose very possibility, it denies. By playing three times in a row on the same alternation between transcendence and immanence, the moderns can mobilize Nature, objectify the social, and feel the spiritual presence of God, even while firmly maintaining that Nature escapes us, that Society is our own work, and that God no longer intervenes (Latour 1993, 34).

The modern Constitution allowed the moderns to mobilise the productive forces, and to reverse the arguments in such a way in which their contradictions would be levelled, while the things and the networks remained unnoticed (Latour 1993, 37). As Latour puts it:

> The critical power of the moderns lies in this double language: they can mobilize Nature at the heart of social relationships, even as they leave Nature infinitely remote from human beings; they are free to make and unmake their society, even as they render its laws ineluctable, necessary and absolute (Latour 1993, 37).

The evolution of the theoretical divide between nature and society did not end with the dispute between Boyle and Hobbes. The divide between object and subject is amplified in the works of Kant, Hegel, phenomenologists, Habermas and postmodern philosophers. The ideas about "intentionality" as a central feature of agency "transforms a distinction, a separation, a contradiction, into an insurmountable tension between object and subject" (Latour 1993, 58).

In the current time, according to Latour, the Constitutional system entered a crisis, "The moderns have become the victims of their own success" (Latour 1993, 49). The hybrids have been multiplied to an extent to which they cannot be kept in place by the Constitution which denies their existence but permits their proliferation (Latour 1993, 49). Such hybrids as global warming, deforestation, the hole in the ozone layer, do not fit the old categories and cannot be dealt by the system of purification (Latour 1993, 50).

Some theoretical questions

This thesis is an exploration of the role of religious objects and bureaucratic artefacts in the relations between religious communities and Soviet regime. In order to reconstitute the complex relations which shaped the encounter between Soviet atheism and religions, chapter 2 introduces the ethno-religious landscape of Soviet Moldavia, and chapter 3 describes the roles and spheres of authority of Soviet antireligious institutions (Liquidation Commissions, Antireligious Commissions and Secret Police). Chapter 4 explores the techniques employed by Liquidation Commissions in their endeavour to police religious communities. This chapter looks into how liquidation officers leveraged sacred buildings in order to compel religious believers to participate in different forms of registration used by officials in order to examine and control religious communities. I examine how the liquidation officers attempted to reassemble religious congregations in order to transform them into stable and controllable units with predefined membership. I apply the classical ANT notion of the social, explained as a peculiar movement of association and reassembling of human and non-human actors (Latour

2005, 7), in order to explain the failure of the liquidation officials to achieve a complete reassembling and stabilisation of the membership of religious congregations. Likewise, I use the same theoretical framework in order to examine the police catalogue created by liquidation officials in order to curtail the movement and activity of itinerant preachers and clerics.

Chapter 5 examines the forms of registration of religious communities as immutable mobiles circulating (Law 2008, 146-147) from religious believers to the Liquidation Department in Kharkiv and the performance of several translation steps (Law 2008, 144) in this process, which distorted the image of the religious communities. These translations were produced within a complex set of relationalities between registration forms, religious buildings, bureaucratic artefacts, and officials representing different institutions. In this chapter I explore the semiotics (Mattozzi 2020, 89-90) of the forms of registration and how the relation between these forms as material signs and the signified religious actors and communities were damaged by various practices suggested by the placement of these documents within different networks and their involvement in new bureaucratic practices. The third section of chapter 5 explores the fractality (Law 2004, 54-62) of the files produced by antireligious officials and how they reconciled the overlapping realities presented in the reports produced by different state and party agencies. The final section of the chapter looks into how the structure of an antireligious file encompassing several types of forms containing data on religious communities from two settlements organised the perceptual field of antireligious officials. This last section is attentive to how these bureaucratic artefacts participated in the organisation of the practices carried out by members of Antireligious Commission of Soviet Moldavia in 1926.

Chapter 6 explores the consequences for the religious communities of their participation in the bureaucratic practices introduced into the religious landscape by liquidation officials. Such documents as the stenographs of the meetings of religious communities and the statutes of religious communities were produced by the religious believers as a precondition for the right to use their religious buildings. I examine them in order to understand how these bureaucratic artefacts participated in the organisation of the working environment (Goodwin and Goodwin 1996) within which the councils and general meetings of parishioners organised their resistance against antireligious policies.

Chapter 7 looks into the relationality of sacred buildings within their urban landscapes. Religious buildings played a key role in the interaction between Soviet officials and believers. In order to understand how the relationality of sacred building shaped the perceptions and

shifted the actions of human actors, I explore the case of the Jewish Synagogue of Birzula and its relations with the railway junction and with other buildings from this town. Likewise, this chapter examines the boundaries of the Soviet bureaucratic domain of antireligious policy as a construction produced by modern thinking. As in the case of other domains defined by the moderns, the domain of antireligious policy was subjected to purification work but at the same time contained numerous non-religious and non-atheistic actors whose relationality shaped the strategies and perceptions of antireligious officials.

Chapter 8 examines the investigations of the liquidation officials into religious miracles and compares them with the techniques employed by the 19th Century French scientist Louis Pasteur in his research on microbes in promoting the Hygienist agenda, and in gaining political and social influence (Latour 1993). This chapter aims to identify the procedures deployed by liquidation officials during their investigations into the renewal of Orthodox icons and how propaganda translated the data produced as part of these investigations into narratives about the non-exitance of the divine.

The final chapter explores the relation between materiality and absence. The ANT principle of generalised symmetry (Farías, Blok & Roberts 2020, xxi) is contradicted by some approaches to the social role of absences because they imply at least a mild dose of anthropocentrism (Fowles 2010, 25). In chapter 9, I employ a methodological notion of agency of absence by looking into how the Bolshevik antireligious campaigns disrupted the networks of believers, sacred buildings and artefacts, and how these actors reconnected their networks by replacing the seized or destroyed actors with new objects, practices, or beliefs. These creative solutions were produced through the relationality from within the disrupted networks. This chapter explores the case of the destruction of the Inochentist spiritual centre in 1920 and the subsequent confrontation between religious believers and local officials, who competed in filling the void produced as a result of the liquidation of this monastic complex.

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Chapter 2: Moldavian ASSR: Territory, Population, and Ethno-Religious Communities

Reconstructing in detail the ethno-religious landscapes of the territory of MASSR is a complex and difficult task due to the poor archival sources available and also due to diversity of religious groups present in the region. The objective of this chapter is not an exhaustive account of the religious landscapes of Moldavia, but to introduce four of the largest religious groups present in the region. Special attention will be given to the history of the interaction of these communities with the state in the 19th and 20th centuries. The examination of the policies of the tsarist state towards these groups contributes to a better understanding of the context in which, after the Revolution, the Bolsheviks constructed their perceptions regarding these religious communities. In the first section of this chapter, I will describe the process of creation of the Moldavian national region within Soviet Ukraine, the formation of its borders, and the ethnic composition of its population. In the following sections, I will present the main features of the region's ethnoreligious landscape and introduce the four religious groups that will be examined in the following chapters: Orthodox Christians, German Evangelicals, Inochentists, and Jews.

Territory and Population

The territory which in 1924 came to be known as Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic of Ukrainian SSR (MASSR) was located at the south-western edge of the former Russian Empire and included territories which before 1917 had belonged to Podolia and Kherson guberniias (provinces) (King 2000, 63). By the beginning of 1920, the towns of Balta, Bîrzula, Ananiev and Tiraspol together with their surroundings were under the Red Army's control and the Bolshevik fighters-organizers brought with them into the territory of the future MASSR the administrative system of the new Soviet regime. This process was, however, undermined by a number of factors including the centrifugal tendencies among functionaries, poor infrastructure, and shortages of resources. Additionally, in Balta county, the state of the local administration and the centre-periphery relations were affected by disputes between the authorities of Odesa guberniia and Podolia guberniia regarding the administration of the county which was claimed by both provinces. Balta county, which was traditionally part of Podolia guberniia, was conquered by the Red Army units subordinated to Odesa provincial centre. As a result of the efforts of influential party bosses from Odesa, and because Podolia's party leaders were not capable of influencing decisions being made in Kharkiv to the same extent, in September 1920 Balta became officially part of Odesa Governorate. During these disputes which spread confusion among local functionaries, the activity of a number of local institutions

became paralyzed (TsDAVO, 5-1-245). Up until the establishment of the MASSR in 1924 the northern parts of the Odesa Governorate were a remote area of the province where the centre's policies were implemented with delay, mainly because of the numerous insurgent groups which were fighting for the rights of the peasantry or for the Ukrainian national cause, continued their struggle against the regime up until 1923 (AOSPRM, 49-1-167, p. 5). The highest point of the anti-Bolshevik military resistance in the region following the defeat of the Whites came in April 1920. The forces of Zabolotnyi, a military commander of the Ukrainian Republic who operated in the area, took the Bîrzula-Jerebkovo railway under their control and occupied Ananiev. According to Bolshevik party reports many villages from the vicinity of Ananiev formed armed detachments and sent them to support Zabolotnyi's forces. By the end of April, Zabolotnyi had been defeated (DAOO, P-3-1-13, p. 6) but he and his detachments continued to wage an insurgent war moving from one village to another and attacking the Soviet forces and officials.

According to numerous reports, anti-Bolshevik detachments were spread throughout the countryside where they enjoyed the support of the peasantry and they waged a partisan war against the regime. These detachments were very active, numerous, and well-armed. For example, in March 1921 alone the insurgents conducted 52 raids in Balta county. As a consequence, the Soviet authorities lost 40 men, 20 horses and a significant quantity of grain (DAOO, Fond P-1-1-37, 3-5). Additionally, in the early 1920's in many villages peasants rose up against the Soviet authorities. The best hiding place in the region for the rebels were the forests. Around Balta, Sovransk and Kruty, where there were large areas with forest cover, the insurgency was stronger than in other parts of the northern territory of Odesa governorate. Despite the party reports which present the peasantry's discontent with the grain requisition campaigns and with the abuses committed by Soviet officials as the root of the partisan movement (DAOO, Fond P-1-1-37, 3-7; 10-11), the existence of forest cover in the region was the key element facilitating the manifestation of this discontent through an armed resistance to Bolshevik policies. As Carter Johnson observes in the case of the post WWII anti-Communist insurgencies in the Western Borderlands of USSR, in the regions lacking forest cover the armed resistance movements were insignificant despite general discontent with the regime's policies among the population, while in the territories with forest cover the resistance was more prominent. According to Johnson, the case he examines reinforces the scholarly work on civil wars and insurgent movements which downplay the role of discontent over that of organisation capacities, access to weapons, and safe havens such as forests or mountains (Johnson 2020). In line with Johnson argument, the contingent role of the materiality of the forests during the

Russian Civil War and their capacity to shape official perspectives will be discussed in chapter 9.

As Gerald M. Easter observes, at the beginning of 1920s in order to reduce the centrifugal forces from peripheries, Moscow implemented a policy of regionalisation, or the replacement of the old tsarist system of territorial division (guberniia, county and *volost*[1]) by geographically larger units (*oblast*, *okrug*[2] and *raion*/district). This strategy was employed by central authorities to limit the influence of local cliques of functionaries and to impose over them the authority of elite factions which controlled the distribution of resources at the local level (Easter 2007, 76-79). In Odesa Governorate this policy was implemented in 1923, and in the spring of the same year the okrug of Balta was created (DAOO, P – 12068) with its administrative centre in the town of Balta. It included most of the territory of the future MASSR and a number of other *raions* (AOSPRM, 49-1-23, pp. 1-13), but it did not include the city of Tiraspol which was part of the Odesa Okrug and a number of small territories in the north which were administrated from Vinnitsa until 1924.

The formation of a Moldavian national unit within Soviet Ukraine began in early 1924 with the declared aim of retrieving the bordering province of Bessarabia, the eastern part of Romania, which until 1917 had been a tsarist province, by using the Piedmont Principle[4] and with the prospects of eventually expanding the Revolution to the countries of the south-east Europe (Șișcanu 1992; Cașu 2000, 40; Martin 2001, 9). Moldavians, who were the majority of the population of the contested province of Bessarabia, were the titular nationality of the new autonomous unit that was given the title Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. The MASSR was officially established on October 12 1924 (Voronovici 2016, 182) and its first capital was in the town of Balta.

The new autonomous republic was an overwhelmingly rural region with a total population of 545.500 people. Its soil was fertile, but the arable land was insufficient for its peasant population which resulted in land shortages (AOSPRM, 49-1-98, p. 1). In 1925, MASSR's only proletarian centres were a sunflower oil factory, Birzula Railway Station, and a sugar factory in Rîbnița (AOSPRM, 49-1-164, p. 1). Nevertheless, throughout the late 1920s and 1930's a process of steady industrialisation and growth of the urban centres changed the socio-economic realities, but without transforming the republic into a region with a significant industrial presence.

In 1924, Balta was a small settlement without direct access to the rail network (AOSPRM, 49-1-167, p. 8). The town experienced a steady growth, the population reaching 24.000 people by the end of the 19th century (Tronko 1969, 217), but nevertheless Balta

remained a small, provincial settlement. When Balta became the capital of MASSR, its provincialism, underdevelopment and dire living conditions demoralised the Communists who arrived there to organize and govern the young republic (AOSPRM, 49-1-167, p. 8). Mainly because of the lack of access to railroads, even before the creation of MASSR the authorities of Balta okrug initiated but did not complete the transfer of the administrative centre to Birzula (AOSPRM, 49-1-952, p. 9), which became the second capital of Moldavian autonomy in 1927. This arrangement did not last long because in 1930 the capital was moved again for the final time to Tiraspol.

The territory of Moldavian ASSR was ethnically diverse, and various sources present different numbers regarding the respective proportion of Moldavian and Ukrainian ethnic groups. The divergence in numbers is explainable by the multiple border changes to the territory of MASSR and by the numerous surveys on the number and ethnic composition of the population of the young republic conducted by different institutions. According to a report presented to MASSR's Party Committee in October 1924, the population of the newly established republic was of 545.500 people, 47% of whom were Ukrainians, 32% Moldavians, 9% Jews, 8% Russians, 2.5% Germans, and 2% others (AOSPRM, 49-1-98, p. 1). The statistics on MASSR population with the lowest proportion of Moldavians I have encountered are from 1926 according to which Moldavians represented 29.7% with Ukrainians constituting 48% (Galushenko 2004, 43), while the highest proportion of Moldavians I found in the documents from the 1920's appears in a 1927 report of the Jewish Section of the Central Committee of CP(b) of MASSR according to which the proportion of Ukrainians was of 42.2 % and Moldavians represented 34.3% from the total number of the population (AOSPRM, 49-1-846, p. 2). As can be easily seen from these figures, Ukrainians were the most numerous ethnic group in the republic. As Terry Martin observes, the Moldavian ASSR represents an exceptional case of a Soviet national unit created with the primary purpose of serving as a Piedmont in the relations with Romania. Additionally, the Soviet policy of formation of a Moldavian language and identity distinct from the Romanian language and Romanian nationality was designed to maximize the potential of the new republic to contribute to an eventual annexation of Bessarabia from Romania (Martin 2001, 274-275). Martin's argument is supported by the modest efforts of Soviet officials to put in place a national program for Moldavians before 1924, as was done for other minorities.

Officially, MASSR's districts were classified according to the ethnic composition of their population. In the districts with a Moldavian majority, the Romanian language had to be promoted as the main language in administration and the schools had to be Moldovenized while

Ukrainian villages used Ukrainian in the administration and had Ukrainian schools (AOSPRM, 49-1-97, p. 23; 49-1-167, pp. 6-7; 49-1-618, pp. 58-59). During its entire existence, at a central and at district levels, the authorities of MASSR overwhelmingly used Russian and Ukrainian, while Romanian was evident mainly in schools and in the press.

Although linguistically different, Ukrainians and Moldavians shared a similar way of life in rural areas and intermarriage was common (AOSPRM, 49-1-84, p. 65). Likewise, documents indicate that in some regions like the district of Valeagutsulovo (in Romanian Valea Hoțului), where 71% of the population was Ukrainian and 22% Moldavian, both Ukrainians and Moldavians spoke Ukrainian, Romanian and Russian (AOSPRM, 49-1-24, p. 8). Nevertheless, Romanian had an inferior status to Ukrainian and Russian, and Moldavians had to speak the languages of their neighbours much more frequently than the local Slavic peasants used to speak Romanian. According to archival documents, Moldavian peasants were considered more religious and less literate than their Ukrainian and Russian neighbours (AOSPRM, 49-1-205, p. 21). Moldavians were also less involved in the new forms of economic production and in local political life. For example, according to a report from 1924, in the collective farms located in Moldavian villages from MASSR the majority of *kolkhozniki* were Ukrainians (AOSPRM, 49-1-235, p. 6) with Moldavians more reluctant to join the collectives than their Ukrainian neighbours. In 1925 only 6.5 % of the Communists in MASSR were Moldavians (AOSPRM, 49-1-84, p. 59).

The Religious Landscape of the MASSR

This section describes the religious landscape of MASSR by focusing on four cases: Eastern Orthodox Christians, German Evangelicals, Inochentists, and Jewish communities. The section introduces the Eastern Orthodox Christianity which was traditionally practiced among Romanian-speakers, Ukrainians and Russians living in MASSR. Western forms of Christianity at this point in history were practiced mainly by Germans. The second and the third section will present in some detail the history of the communities practicing Protestantism, their relation with Russian state, and will introduce the case of German Colonies from MASSR. The fourth and fifth section will introduce the communities practicing Inochentism and Judaism, and will trace their relations with Russian state before and after the Revolution.

Eastern Orthodox Christians

The majority of Ukrainians, Moldavians and Russians living on the territories which later came to be known as MASSR were Orthodox Christians. Before the Revolution and Civil War, the

Orthodox parishes from Ananiev and Tiraspol counties were subordinated to Kherson Eparchy (Catalogue of Kherson Eparchy 1906), and those from Balta county were part of Kamenets-Podolskaja Eparchy of the Russian Orthodox Church (Catalogue of Kamenets-Podolsky Eparchy 1900). Orthodox Christianity enjoyed a privileged status in tsarist Russia. The reforms of Peter the Great had laid the basis of state-church relations until the collapse of the Russian Empire in 1917. The tradition of *Symphonia*, or the rule of the Orthodox Church over spiritual matters while the Russian state was in charge of the earthly realm, underwent significant changes under Peter I who abolished the institution of the Patriarchate in 1721 and imposed the state control over the Church (March 2011, 51).

The Russian Empire was a confessional state which categorised its subjects based on their religious affiliation, and associated confession with ethnicity. For example, Orthodox Christianity was perceived as the Russian faith, while Islam was considered as Tartar religion and Lutheranism as a German faith (Werth 2012, 32-33). The Russian Empire was interested in controlling religious affairs for three reasons. Firstly, the rights of the subjects of the empire depended on their religion. For example, Catholics were not allowed to purchase land in certain provinces while the Jews were banished from settling outside of the Pale of Settlement. Secondly, Orthodox Christianity was ideologically important for the empire's political system. Thirdly, the clergy was empowered with administrative tasks, such as keeping the record of deaths and marriages. Hence, any form of religious heresy was perceived as posing a potential danger to the state control of the administered populations. The state protected the interests of the Orthodox Church, but also gave certain privileges to recognised Christian confessions. For example, the law favoured the conversion of members of any confession to Orthodoxy, and the conversion of members of non-Christian confessions to any Christian faith (Werth 2014, 43-44).

The Orthodox Church represented the only confession that could preach its beliefs to persons of other faiths. According to the law, the emperor, the empress, the successor to the throne and his wife had to be Orthodox Christians. Only the Russian Orthodox Church was free of restrictions in performing any kind of public religious procession (Dorskaja 2001, 19). The county police were responsible for ensuring that Orthodox Christians did not leave their Church for non-Orthodox faiths and had the power to punish non-Orthodox preachers (Plotkin 2010, 37). Before the 1905 Revolution, the tsarist criminal code defined as a crime the avoidance by Orthodox Christians of participation in confession and the eucharist while an entire section of the code prohibited their conversion to other religions (*Ulozhenie o Nakazaniakh*, 1867, 66).

The privileged position of Orthodoxy and the protection provided by the Russian State came at a great price. The Orthodox Church lost its economic autonomy after 1764, when the state seized its land and peasants. Additionally, the assertive policy of the Russian State ended the old tradition of election of priests by parishioners. Until the mid-18th century, the parishioners elected their priests by choosing a believer from among themselves and advancing him for ordination to local bishop. This tradition was replaced by a new procedure of selection of clerics, who were now elected and appointed by the bishops. The election of priests by hierarchs from among the students of theological seminaries, and the increasing economic pressure on the parishes that were the main contributors to the eparchial budgets which lacked other sources of income, created tensions in the relations between lay parishioners and the clergy (Freeze 2015, 8). By the end of the 19th century, popular perception associated the image of the parish priest with self-enrichment through extorsion from parishioners. Although Orthodoxy was a state-Church, the majority of priests did not receive a salary from the state. Each of parish priest was entitled to a land plot, but this did not significantly ameliorate their economic situation. As a result, the priests frequently resorted to extracting resources from their parishioners. Additionally, the quality of the priests was affected by the trend among the most promising seminary students to not embrace the ecclesiastic service but to follow other careers (Firsov 2002, 23-29). Gregory Freeze observes that the exclusive dependence of parish priests on bishops, and not on their parishioners, made them less tolerant of the vernacular religious practices of Orthodox believers, which constituted another source of tensions between the Church and the laity (2015, 8).

The tensions between lay parishioners, the clergy, and authorities, intensified after the reforms of 1860s. On August 2nd 1864, the emperor Alexander II signed a law calling the parishioners to form the church councils (*popechitel'stva)* with the objectives of organizing financial and material support for parish priests, the renovation and maintenance of sacred buildings and cemeteries, the organisation of the burials for the poor, and charity activities such as creating parish schools. According to the aforementioned law, the membership of these councils automatically included the parish clergy and the church elders. The chair and other members of the council were elected by the general assembly of the parishioners. These councils had a contradictory position, because on the one hand they represented the parish, but on the other hand they did not control the parish assets and budget for which they collected donations. Additionally, the councils could extend their activities beyond the listed tasks only with a special authorisation from the dioceses, to which they sent annual reports on their work. The number of church councils reached 20,059 in 1910 (Young 1997, 23-24). The donations

collected for different tasks by councils reveal the tensions between lay believers and the clergy. The reports of the Holy Synod prise the active role of the councils, which managed to collect impressive donations for the renovation of the parish churches, support for the schools, and charity. Approximately three fourths of the donations were utilised for the maintenance of the parish churches. Nevertheless, the councils failed in one single task – to support the clergy, for whose wellbeing they collected less than 8 percent of all donated funds (Young 1997, 25). Glennys Young observes that these data reveal the tensions between the parish clergy and their flock. Additionally, these data shows that lay believers perceived the parish churches as their property, and were eager to donate for its maintenance. For example, the parishioners expressed discontent and anticlerical attitudes when the authorities attempted to pass the reform of 1869 intended to merge the small parishes in order to improve the material situation of the impoverished parish clergy. The discontent was caused by the fact that according to this reform, the parish priest would serve in just one of the churches from the merged parishes (Young 1997, 15-16). In 1880s, the Holy Synod was worried by the tensed relations between parish priests and their parishioners, who requested more control over the budgets and assets of their churches and the restoration of the practice of election of priests by parishioners (Young 1997, 26). Young considers that these anticlerical attitudes are at the same time an expression of protest against the state power, which was frequently represented by the parish priest (Young 1997, 27).

A shift in the confessional policy of the Russian state took place after the Revolution of 1905, when religious tolerance was declared through a decree signed by the tsar on 17 of April. The Orthodox Church preserved its status as established church and the exclusive right to proselytise but the Orthodox Christians received the legal right to leave their Church. Numerous religious believers belonging to non-Orthodox confessions but officially registered as Orthodox Christians took up the chance to practice their religions openly. The liberalization of religious policy resulted in numerous other liberties granted to non-Orthodox believers, such as the right to build prayer houses. Nevertheless, starting from 1909 a series of circulars issued by the Ministry of Internal Affairs restricted the rights of non-Orthodox confessions, and imposed a strict police surveillance on their activity (Coleman 2005, 25; 70-72).

During the revolutionary turmoil, the state used parish priests in order to tame the rebellious mood among their flocks. The Holy Synod ordered the priests to urge their parishioners to remain calm and loyal. While some priests maintained a neutral positions, numerous clerics engaged in preaching about the need to abstain from manifestations of revolt. Young considers

that this was a reason for the rural population to perceive the clergy as a legitimate target in their acts of political resistance (Young 1997, 35).

In this period, the parish councils renewed their appeal for financial self-governance and the reinstatement of the election of priest by parishioners. The parish clergy and councils were united in advancing these requests for "parish democracy". In this sense, the Holy Synod was compelled to make concessions. In October 18th 1905 the Synod passed a decree regarding the formation of *prikhodskie sovety*, the church councils, which had some control over parish finances and assets. If before the decree, the parish budget was controlled by the priest and the church elder, the new council of twelve men was elected by the general meeting of parishioners and it could participate to the administration of the finances only if asked by the elder and priest. Although the decree made important concessions, it gave vague legal definitions of the prerogatives of these councils (Young 1997, 37-38). At that time, conservative politicians and reformers debated over the possible roles of the parish in the political life of the country. Conservatives advocated for a parish organised according to pre-Petrine traditions, which would help to avert Russia from a revolution, while the reformers saw in the parish a potential source for the democratisation of the Russian society. It is important to mention that in these political debates, the clergy requested a more prominent political role and legitimised their requests by mentioning their significant administrative and social role (Young 1997, 39-40).

February Revolution of 1917 and the liberties it brought facilitated the consolidation within Russian Orthodoxy of a movement advocating the reformation of the Church and a more prominent role for lay believers in the administration of their parishes. In this period, diocesan councils were held with the participation of elected representatives of lay parishioners who addressed the problem of the reorganisation of Church administration (Lingenfelter 2017, 15-17). Both the Revolution of 1905 and the subsequent February Revolution took place in a period of spiritual and intellectual engagement with Orthodoxy. In the period of Nicolas II's reign, the Russian Orthodox Church strived for self-determination after two hundred years of state-control which had eroded its identity, role and mission (Shevzov 2020, 42-45). This strife for reforms was bottom-up oriented. In the power vacuum produced by February Revolution, the believers took the administration of their parishes in their hands, cast off the unpopular priests, and replaced the bishops with newly elected ones. Although initially the majority of parish priests supported the re-empowerment of lay believers, the anticlerical actions of parishioners diminished this support. The financial contributions of the parishes to eparchies shrunk, and material support to parish priests diminished. The Temporary Statute of the Parish was an act adopted by the Church officials in June 1917 as a concession aimed at taming the

trends among parishioners, but it resulted in an even greater increase of the assertiveness of lay believers (Freeze 2015, 8-9).

The parochialisation of power in the Russian Orthodoxy occurred amid the turbulent events of the inter-revolutionary period. The February revolution was followed by the destruction by the peasants of the old order in the countryside. They replaced the old tsarist institutions, such as the rural police, *zemstvo*, land captains, volost' administration, with village assemblies (*obshchie skhody*). Unlike the village assemblies from before 1914 (*mirskie skhody*), *obshchie sckhody* discussed a wide range of political issues, and they regulated the redistribution of land, including the plots held by the clergy. Another particularity of these new assemblies was that they included a number of social categories excluded from the pre-revolutionary assemblies, such as women and young villagers. Importantly, the young villagers included the veterans of the Great War and the persons who migrated for seasonal work in factories from urban centres. These two categories brought with them new political ideas and shared anticlerical attitudes. Additionally, the urban in-migrants who retreated into the rural areas during the Revolution, shared similar views. In these circumstances, numerous acts of violence were perpetrated against the clergy, and sacred places such as cemeteries, were desecrated. Although these acts were frequent, there were numerous instances during which the majority of villagers protected the clergy and punished the hooligans who assaulted the priests or desecrated holy places. Another important consequence of the peasant revolution was that they took in their hands the parish administration (Young 1927, 51-54).

After the Revolution, in 1917-1918, a Church Council was held, which included 73 bishops, 192 priests, and 217 elected laymen (Kalkandjieva 2014, 13). The Council elected a patriarch after almost two centuries during which the Church was controlled by the state (Lingenfelter 2017, 15-17). The Council introduced the principle of the separation of power in Church administration, with the executive power under the control of the Supreme Church Government which included the patriarch and the members of the Holy Synod and the Supreme Church Council. The all-Russian Ecclesiastical Sobor exercised legislative authority and included clerics and laypeople (Kalkandjieva 2014, 13). The Council was dominated by lay representatives of the laity, which comprised 53% of their members, and promoted the agenda of lay believers (Freeze 2015, 9). The Orthodox communities of Odesa Eparchy went through a similar reorganisation. For example, on July 14 1917 the meeting of the clergy and lay parishioners of Ananiev county elected the Deanery's Council, which included two priests, one psalmist, and two lay believers. On July 27th the elections for Valea Hotului Deanery took place, whose council included four priests, one deacon, one psalmist, and two lay believers

(Eparhial'nye Vedomosti 1917: 15-16, 192; 194). In January 1918, the assembly of the clergy and lay believers of the Eparchy of Kherson and Odesa elected Metropolitan Platon to serve as the bishop of this eparchy (Eparhial'nye Vedomosti 1918: 2-3, 16).

The Bolsheviks seizure of power in 1917, began a new era in the relations between state and Orthodox Church. According to the Marxist-Leninist ideology, religion was supposed to disappear during the development of socialism, and if it did not, then the state should do everything possible to make it happen (Walters 2005, 4). One of the first steps to achieve this was the removal of the privileges of the Orthodox Church, which was perceived by the Party as an enemy of the regime. The new regime used all available mechanisms, varying from legislative acts to repression and harassment, to damage the status and the reputation of the Orthodox clergy and to destroy its institutional structures (Smolkin 2018, 22). In January 1918 the Bolsheviks promoted the Decree on the Separation of the Church from the State (discussed in chapter 3). According to Gregory Freeze, through these Decree the Bolsheviks only legalised the status quo of the Church, when the ecclesiastic hierarchies were disempowered by an increasingly assertive participation of lay parishioners in the administration of their parishes. The Decree dispossessed the Church institutions of all their assets, including the typographies that were used for the dissemination of the decisions of Church authorities, and of financial reserves and other resources needed to maintain an administrative apparatus. The Decree freed the parishes of their obligation to contribute financially to the Church budget. Additionally, the Bolsheviks launched a prosecution against the newly elected Patriarch who was deprived of his administrative apparatus, and they arrested or exiled the bishops from eparchial level and dismantled the eparchial bureaucracy (Freeze 2015, 9). In Kherson Eparchy, according to the annual report of the local Liquidation Commission, the Eparchial Council was liquidated in 1922 based on a decision of the Provincial Council issued in March. The same document reveals that by April 1922 the Eparchial Chancellery was already closed (TsDAVOV, 5-1-2190, p. 173). By the mid-1920s, the repressive policies of the Bolshevik regime towards the clergy resulted in what Gregory Freeze calls “the social revolution in the clergy”. The seizure of Church properties and the elimination of the privileges made the clergy fully dependent on the voluntary donations of parishioners reducing the parish staff to a single priest who was no longer assisted by a deacon and a psalmist as before the 1917 Revolution. The duties of the psalmist were performed by lay believers who took on a more prominent role in the liturgical service. The closure of the seminaries and the shrinking of the number of priests as a result of

the repressive polices changed the social composition of the clergy, who by mid-1920s were less educated and were of modest social origins (Freeze 2015, 10).

Two early campaigns through which the regime attempted to discredit the clergy and diminish its influence were the seizure of church valuables and the opening of the coffins of Orthodox saints. In 1921-1922 the Orthodox Church faced aggressive assaults from the Bolshevik regime, which attempted to use the context of the famine in its anti-religious project. Although the Orthodox Church became involved in collecting relief and donated its own resources to support the starving, Soviet authorities launched a campaign of seizing church valuables. Numerous believers and priests resisted the seizure of sacramental items and were arrested or executed. There is no evidence that the Bolsheviks used the seized valuables for famine relief as they claimed (Peris 1998, 26-27). According to the official reports, the valuables seized from the Churches of Odesa guberniia were stored in the former eparchial storehouse, where in October 1922 an expert assessed their value (TsDAVOV, 5-1-2190, p. 173R). In Odesa Eparchy, the lay believers opposed the seizure of sacramental vessels but the local Bishop, Feodosii, took a more circumspect attitude. In an official meeting with the head of Odesa Executive Committee, he declared his support for the seizure of valuables given the needs of the starving, but lay believers opposed their collection (Freeze 2012 B, 52-53). The authorities seized valuables not only from Orthodox Churches. For example, on the 28th of April 1922, the authorities seized 14 kilograms of silver from the Synagogue of Odesa (5-1-1369, p. 9).

The seizure of the valuables from the churches wasn't the only state campaign devised to discredit the Church. In the years after the Revolution, the 8th Department of the Justice Commissariat implemented the campaign of opening the coffins with the relics of Orthodox saints (Greene 2004, 104; 142). According to church canons the incorruptibility of the relics was not a precondition for the canonisation of a saint. Nevertheless, Soviet officials opened the coffins and claimed that corrupted bodies were a prove of the fraud used by the clergy to deceive believers (Greene 2004, 19-21). According to a 1922 report of the Liquidation Commission from Odesa, no openings of coffins were conducted within the borders of this guberniia. The report states that the churches and monasteries of Odesa guberniia did not have relics (TsDAVOV, 5-1-2190, p. 173r). Most likely, the explanation given in this report is erroneous and was influenced by the incapacity of the provincial authorities to influence the situation on the ground and collect information from the counties. The monasteries and churches from this province preserved the relics of Orthodox saints, some of which were

already seized by local authorities as in the case of the relics of Inochentie of Balta (see chapter 9). This explanation could be used by officials to avoid mentioning the insufficient ability to implement the campaigns ordered by Moscow. Likewise, especially in the northern part of the guberniia, local authorities were still fighting a powerful anti-Bolshevik partisan movement, which made the opening of the coffins a risky measure that could exacerbate the conflict with the peasantry.

In what follows I will describe the evolution of the Orthodox ecclesiastical administrative units in MASSR, the competition between different religious organisations that emerged after the Revolution, and the confrontation of the clergy and lay believers with Soviet authorities in Moldavia. This competition was encouraged by Soviet regime in order to discredit and weaken religious organisations. The Liquidation Commissions played a key role in the implementation of this policy.

During the 1920s, the Soviet regime promoted a schism inside the Church and created the Renovationist Church that was thoroughly controlled by the Antireligious Commission of the Party's Central Committee (Peris 1998, 26-27). The schism was promoted including through the abovementioned antireligious campaigns. For example, the commissions responsible with seizing the church valuables (*Pomgol*) included renovationist priests. Trotsky insisted on this because the involvement of the renovationist priests in such a disputed campaign would deepen the gap between the two camps of clergy (Krivova 1997). The programme of Renovationists included such reforms as the political reorientation towards a full allegiance to the Soviet regime, the consecration of married priests as bishops, the use of the vernacular language in liturgy, the shortening of the liturgical service, the opening of the doors of the iconostasis during the religious service so that lay believers could hear and see better the liturgy, the closure of the monasteries, the replacement of the old Julian Calendar with the Western Gregorian Calendar, and the elimination from Orthodoxy of the cult of holy relics (Freeze 1995, 310-313). In exchange for political loyalty, according to the speeches given at a clerical assembly in Kharkiv, the Renovationists expected from Bolsheviks the return of the properties confiscated from the Orthodox Church, the restitution of the sacred buildings, personal security and protection. The Renovationist Synod in Kharkiv was closely controlled by the GPU through several bishops and its secretary, Archbishop B.T. Dikarev (Freeze 2012 B, 54-55).

The Russian Orthodox Church was subordinated to Patriarch Tikhon and was usually referred in contemporary sources as Tikhonian Church. Apart from the Renovationist and

Tikhonian Church, an Ukrainian Church was formed in Ukraine (TsDAVO, 5-2-194, 27). The Ukrainian Church was established by a Ukrainian Sobor on July 9 1918 as an autonomous exarchate of the Russian Church, with Antonii Khrapovitskii, the Metropolitan of Kyiv, as its head. In 1919, Kyiv was taken under control by the army of the Ukrainian Republic led by Symon Petlyura who declared a brief independence of the Autocephalous Ukrainian Church. In October 1921, after the Bolsheviks reconquered Ukraine, a group of laypeople revived the Ukrainian Autocephalous Church. Because they did not obtain the blessing of a bishop, they invented a new procedure for ordaining the defrocked priest, Vasilii Lipkivskii. The priests laid their hands on the lay participants in the ordination, who, in their turn placed their hands on Vasilii Lipkivskii who was then declared Bishop and head of the Ukrainian Bishopric (Kalkandjieva 2014, 14-15). The official reports refer to the intense competition between Tikhonians and the Autocephalous Church in Ukraine (TsDAVO, 5-2-194, 51).

The confrontation between the Tikhonian and Renovationist Church commenced with a rapid acquisition by the latter of the parishes through the formation of Renovationist eparchial infrastructure, and by compelling the parish priests (with assistance from secret police and local officials) to join their Church. In 1923 the Renovationists claimed 70% of parishes but due to the opposition of lay believers in 1926 this ecclesiastic organisation in reality included only 22% of the parishes (Freeze 2015, 11-12). In his article on the role of lay parishioners in the confrontation between Tikhonians and Renovationists, Gregory Freeze demonstrates that the decisive factor in the failure of the Renovationist Church was the opposition of lay believers to the Gregorian Calendar promoted by Renovationists. The liturgical services, religious feasts, and their calendar were closely linked to the life of parishioners, especially in agricultural communities. This interconnectivity between the liturgical cycle and everyday life was the source of opposition to Renovationists from lay believers, who already controlled the administration of their parishes. Lay believers were more favourable towards the Church lead by Patriarch Tikhon, who under Bolshevik pressure declared the introduction of the new Gregorian Calendar but continuously postponed the actual commencement of the liturgical services according to the new calendar (Freeze 1995, 305-339). Aleksei Beglov observes that during the confrontations between Tikhonians and Renovationists, there emerged among the lay and ecclesiastic believers standing for the subordination to patriarchal Church an eschatological worldview according to which the Antichrist had arrived and the End of Days was soon to come. Through the lens of this worldview, the Renovationists were perceived as the Church of the Evil, which pretended to serve Christ in order to deceive the believers (Beglov 2004, 85-86).

According to a report compiled in June-July 1925, in MASSR the Tikhonians controlled 46 parishes while the Renovationists had 153 churches but were supported only by approximately 30% of believers (AOSPRM, 49-1-84, pp. 60). The confrontation between the Tikhonians and the Renovationists was tense. For example, the documents suggest that between 1924 and 1926 in the Slobozia district of MASSR the Tikhonians and Renovationists struggled over the control of the parishes. However, by 1926 the Tikhonians had gained control over all churches from the district (AOSPRM, 49-1-1419, pp. 14). In January 1927 there were 100 Tikhonian and 98 Renovationist churches in Moldavia. In May 1928 there were 99 registered Tikhonian and 97 Renovationist churches. According to the quoted report, the Autocephalous movement was not present in MASSR, and the competition between the other two ecclesiastic formations was characterised by steady gain of control over the parishes by Tikhonians (TsDAVO, 5-3-1002, 97). According to a report from August 1928, the Autocephalous Church had not gained much ground in MASSR, where it had just one parish (AOSPRM, 49-1-1303, p. 2).

Lay believers played an active role in the confrontation between the competing religious structures. For example, in 1929 several members of the religious community from the village of Nastoita of Dubasari district initiated the collection of signatures from believers for the replacement of the local Renovationist priest by a Tikhonian clergyman. The initiators of the replacement of the Renovationist priest are portrayed in an official report as the enemies of the regime (TsDAVO, 5-3-1055, p. 14), which reveals the hostility of the authorities towards the lay believers who played an active role in the life of their communities. Some of the most violent confrontations between believers and authorities occurred during the campaigns of closure of religious buildings. For example, in 1929 a group of believers resisted the closure of the Cathedral of Tiraspol. The resisting believers were overwhelmed by a mob of workers organised and led by the local authorities who managed to close the Cathedral (AOSPRM, 49-1-1400, p. 3).

Evangelicals and the State Policies towards Religious Minorities

A significant part of MASSR's population professed Western forms of Christianity. As in the case of the Orthodox Church, both before and after the Revolution the Russian state promoted a complex set of policies towards these religious communities. In this section, I present the case of Evangelical communities and the policies of the tsarist officials and Soviet regime towards them.

In the late 19th century Russia, the recognised religions were Roman Catholicism, Armenian Catholicism, Armenian and Gregorian Christianity (Sekirin 2016, 600), Lutheranism, Continental Reformed Churches, Mennonites, Baptism, (Ambartsumov 2014, 44), Islam, Judaism and Buddhism (Sekirin 2016, 600). According to Soviet sources, Polish and German Catholic, Armenian, Lutheran, and Baptist communities were registered on the territories of Balta, Ananiev, and Tiraspol counties before the establishment of MASSR in 1924 (TsDAVOV, 5-2-825, pp. 97-98).

Before 1917, the Russian state promoted favourable policies toward the recognised non-Orthodox confessions for two reasons. Firstly, during its territorial expansion, the Russian Empire encompassed populations with various religious traditions. In order to integrate its newly annexed territories, the Russian state granted certain religious rights to conquered populations. The second reason was the policy of attracting settlers from other countries in order to bring new technologies in agriculture and crafts. Tsarist authorities provided settlers with legal frameworks for practicing their religions. Conversely, minority religious communities that lived in the core territories of the Russian Empire did not benefit from similar privileges. Clearly, state policy toward non-Orthodox confessions was contradictory; on the one hand the authorities provided them with a wide range of privileges and protection but, on another hand, they promoted the conversion to Orthodox Christianity which sometimes was realised through violent means (Werth 2014, 35-40).

The State and the Orthodox Church were very concerned with religious heretics, and especially afraid of religious confessions kindred with Orthodox Christianity (Werth 2014, 33-34). Non-Russian members of non-Orthodox recognised confessions who were born in that particular confession were generally tolerated and benefited from rights, whereas Russian (Russian in its broader understanding that includes Ukrainians, Belarussians and Russians) who split from Orthodox Church and joined the very same confessions were perceived as sectarian, despite the fact that they may have been born in this specific religion (Coleman 2005, 19). This can be explained both by the policy of protecting the interests of the Orthodox Church as well as by the issue of administrative control. For example, the Old Believer movement, which differed very little from a canonical point of view from the official Orthodoxy, was perceived as a rebellion and a trend to not obey to the authorities than as a heresy. The Old Believers were the target of many discriminatory and repressive policies of the Russian state. This way of perceiving the Old Believers explains the repressive policies of the Russian state applied against those who left Orthodoxy (Firsov 2002, 252). The state controlled the entire activity of recognised religious groups. The law contained stipulations about the way the religious

communities had to be administrated. For example, all priests and spiritual leaders had to give an oath to the Tsar and Catholic and Protestant priests received a salary like their Orthodox counterparts (Dorskaja 2001, 22).

As already mentioned, Russian state granted certain rights to the recognised non-Orthodox confessions as well. One of the privileges granted to these denominations was the struggle of the state against dissent movement that emerged inside them. This policy of tsarist state evolved for several reasons. Firstly, the Orthodox Church and Russian state had a long experience of fighting the dissent movements that emerged from the former, and had a general concern regarding all schisms emerged in all faiths. Secondly, the recognised confessions had the role of state institutions, and the Russian state protected their interests. Thirdly, all sectarians tended to engage in active proselytism, including among Orthodox Christians, and this fact made them dangerous for the latter. Fourthly, in some cases the so-called *raskolniki*, or religious dissenters, had connections and even leaders abroad, who could not be controlled by Russian state. Last but not least, from tsarist authorities' perspective, sectarian leadership was too dangerous and unstable to be entrusted with important administrative tasks. At the same time, in some cases there were enough reasons to recognise religious dissenters and to grant them rights. In the first instance, the fact is that through legalisation and institutionalisation of sectarian movements, their followers became less dependent on foreign religious centres or leaders (Werth 2014, 103-104).

The persecutions against unrecognised religious groups varied from double taxation to exile (Werth 2014, 91). The Church authorities, both at local and central level, used all their influence over the state bureaucrats in order to convince them to apply punitive policies against these groups (Sekirin 2016, 603-604). During centuries, the members of Russian unrecognised religious groups were the target of permanent pressure from the discriminatory and repressive policies of the Russian state. An example of a repressive measure taken against a dissent movement emerged within Orthodox Christianity in Kherson province is the exile of Inochentie of Balta in 1913, who was the founder of the Inochentist movement discussed later in this chapter.

Beginning in the 1870's in Odesa region and in other southern parts of Russian Empire, especially Ukraine, Baptists steadily gaining ground among local Slavic populations with the first preachers being the German colonists (Wanner 2007, 23-25). The number of Russian Baptists, who in 1905 counted 66,788 believers, grew swiftly especially after the tsarist authorities provided certain religious freedoms following the First Russian Revolution. From 1905 to 1912 the number of Baptists increased by 21,140 believers (Coleman 2005, 27). The

Baptist faith became even more popular after the Great War when numerous converted soldiers returned to their villages and preached their new faiths. Soviet sources estimate that in 1926 the number of Baptists varied from 400,000 to 1,000,000. In December 1926 the Evangelical leadership evaluated the number of Soviet registered Evangelical congregations at 2500 (Coleman 2005, p. 163). The Baptist faith was the most popular form of western Christianity among Russia's population, but other denominations also existed from the beginning of the 20th century and earlier.

New forms of Christianity were wide-spread in MASSR. For example, a party report of Odesa Governorate from April 1923 mentions the success of sectarian preaching among local Orthodox Christians. Party documents explain this success by the weakening of the Orthodox Church as a result of the competition between the Living Church and the followers of patriarch Tikhon (DAOO, P-1-1-584, pp. 104-106). The authorities of Balta Okrug mentioned, in a report for the period between May and December 1924, the presence in this province of Adventists, Evangelicals, Baptists, Evangelical-Adventists, Jehovah Witnesses, and of other sects (DAOO, P-1-1-171, p. 2).

Religious dissenters drew significant attention in the context of Bolshevik revolutionary activity before 1917. Before the revolution, some sectarian congregations attempted, and even succeeded, in creating agricultural communes earning the admiration of revolutionaries interested in collectivist experiments. Ideas about the building of the Kingdom of God on earth and about creating factories and workshops where the profits would be divided equally among workers were circulating at the time in Evangelical press (Coleman 2005, 133-134). Clandestine revolutionary circles and sectarian religious groups shared the same criticism of the injustices, abuses, and moral state of Russian society and the same expectations for a salvation accomplished through spiritual or political awakening (Slezkine 2017, 19). These trends could not be ignored by revolutionaries, and long before the emergence of Lenin as a political leader, Russian revolutionary movements were interested in the "communist sects" that were persecuted by tsarist authorities (Etkind 2013, 602).

Vladimir Lenin held some admiration for sectarians, and in his early writings the future leader of the Bolshevik revolution described the growing sectarianism as a political protest in religious form. Lenin required his party fellows to spread the newspaper "Iskra" among sectarians. Religious dissenters were reading with interest revolutionary literature and, in some instances, even participated in smuggling it across the borders into the Russian Empire (Etkind 2013, 585-586). Vladimir Bonch-Bruevich was an influential Bolshevik revolutionary passionate about sectarians and was the author of numerous historical volumes and articles

about religious dissenters. He considered the religious dissenters a revolutionary movement that were the key to an efficient agrarian policy of Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) (Etkind 2013, 587-588). Bonch-Bruevich was an expert on sectarian movements and the author of the report on religious dissent read by Lenin at the party congress of 1903. The resolution of this congress stated that sectarianism was one of the democratic movements in Russia and urged the revolutionaries to agitate amongst religious dissenters (Etkind 2013, 588).

The first decade after the October Revolution was a "golden period" for religious minorities. These religious communities experienced a relatively unrestrained growth of number of their members (Wanner 2012, 13) and enjoyed important privileges, especially before 1925. In the early Soviet years, the relations between religious sectarians and Russian state were marked by favourable policies promoted by Bolsheviks, who concentrated their efforts on weakening the influence of the Orthodox Church. As Coleman observes, the Russian Evangelical press of 1918 revealed that Evangelicals approved the intervention of the regime in the affairs of the Orthodox Church, but criticised the violent means through which the officials accomplished their objectives. While welcoming the attacks of the regime on the status of the Orthodox Church, protestant newspapers presented Russian Orthodoxy as a "religion without Christ". Evangelicals considered the opening the coffins of Orthodox saints as an efficient method of campaigning against superstition, and the delegates of the Baptist Congress of 1921 in Moscow visited an exposition of confiscated relics designed to demonstrate that, contrary to Orthodox belief, the relics had decayed. Likewise, Evangelicals portrayed themselves in their press as contributing to the Soviet project through their endeavour to achieve the "revolution of the spirit" through evangelisation. Overall, Evangelicals welcomed the Soviet Decree on the Separation of the Church from the State (discussed in the next chapter) because it brought them rights and possibilities equal to those of the Orthodox Church, and allowed them to compete within Russian religious field after decades of persecutions and restrictions imposed on them by tsarist authorities (Coleman 2005, 159-161).

Following the Bolshevik Revolution, privileges were granted to sectarians who were regarded as a revolutionary force that could contribute to the building of Socialism in the Russian countryside. An example of such privileges is the decree from the 4th of January 1919 that freed citizens whose beliefs did not allow them to bear weapons from the obligation to serve in the army (Etkind 2013, 604-606). Heather Coleman shows that the Bolshevik leadership, including Krasikov, regarded the concessions to conscientious objectors as a possibility given to sectarians to prove their loyalty to Soviet regime by joining the army regardless of their privileges (Coleman 2005, 185-186). Another important policy favourable

to religious sectarians promoted by the central authorities encouraged religious dissenters to establish agricultural communes on the land provided to them by the state. Religious sectarians responded enthusiastically to this appeal, and indeed some religious agricultural communes had already been established much earlier during the Civil War (Coleman 2005, 174-175).

By 1925 the concerns of Bolshevik leaders regarding the results of their experimentation with religious dissenters, and especially with regard to sectarian mass organisations and agriculture collectives, increased. For the leadership, the success of religious agricultural communities in the context of the regime's modest achievements in its efforts to promote a secular version of collective farms looked challenging. In this period, Fedor Putintsev steadily acquires the status of an expert on sectarianism, and he promotes a vision according to which religious dissenters and other religious groups were attempting to create an alternative version of socialism and to form a parallel society. According to his early articles, Putintsev was not against sectarians but against the way they attempted to isolate themselves in a network of distinct organisations and cells (Coleman 2005, 205-207).

By the end of the 1920's the party had rejected the idea that communism had any connections with sectarian beliefs. During the collectivization of agriculture, the campaign for the creation of kolkhozes was applied to sectarian agriculture communes in the same way as to other peasant settlements (Etkind 2013, 626). In 1929, the new law "On Religious Associations" eliminated the right of religious communities to "special children's, youth, women's prayer or other meetings, as well as general Bible, literary, handiwork, labor, religious studies, and similar gatherings, groups, circles, departments, as well as to organize excursions and children's playgrounds, to open libraries and reading rooms, to organize sanatoria and medical aid" (Coleman 2005, 217). Additionally, the elimination of the article on the freedom of preaching from the constitution and the closure of many prayer houses worsened the situation for sectarians in USSR (Coleman 2005, 216-217). By the end of the 1920s the number of arrested and exiled sectarians and religious leaders marked a steady increase. In Soviet Ukraine in 1927 266 clergymen and 33 sectarians were arrested and in the first half of 1929 374 clergymen and 389 sectarians were detained in GPU prisons in Ukraine (Kyrydon 2014, 239). As the 1929 figures show, the number of arrested sectarians was even larger than that of the clergy of other denominations, including the Orthodox Church, which was the majority confession and had been the main target of anti-religious repressive policies policy up to this point.

Immediately after the Revolution, Soviet regime granted numerous privileges to Evangelicals and to other religious dissenters. Nevertheless, in some cases, because of the Civil

War experience and because of the overlapping of religious identities with ethnic origins, Soviet officials perceived as disloyal certain communities professing Western forms of Christianity. One of these communities are German Evangelical colonists.

German Evangelicals

Although Germans represented a small proportion of MASSR's population (AOSPRM, 49-1-98, p. 1), (11.540 people in September-December 1925), they were concentrated in nine big colonies and 16 hamlets (AOSPRM, 49-1-859, p. 15) with a distinct religious and cultural life. The German settlements were spread throughout MASSR but the largest ones were situated in the western part of the republic and the majority of their population were Lutherans, followed by Baptists, Adventists, Reformists, and Catholics. In 1925 in the 10 German settlements with registered religious buildings 8 churches and 11 prayer houses were functioning (AOSPRM, 49-1-859, p. 3). These colonies were established in 1808-1810 by German settlers attracted by the privileges provided by tsarist authorities to the Europeans willing to settle in the newly conquered territories. They moved to the steppes of the south-western Russian Empire from Hungary, Alsace, the Palatinate, Baden, and Württemberg. The colonies of Bergdorf, Gluckstal and Neudorf were three of the settlements established in 1808-1810 (Mukhina 2007, 9). In 1925 more than half of the German population of MASSR was concentrated in these three settlements: Gluckstal – 2456, Neudorf – 2030, Bergdorf – 1453 inhabitants (AOSPRM, 49-1-859, pp. 23-26).

Before 1917, the German population of Russia was fractured in groups of diverse origins, religious affiliation, social status, and geographic location. Frequently, Germans communities avoided contacting each other because of social and religious differences, while the geographic remoteness of the territories with German populations made the connections between them difficult (Mukhina 2007, 7-8). The majority of the Germans living in Russian Empire were Lutherans, but numerous communities of German Catholics, Reformists, Baptists and Mennonites existed as well. In 1914 a Catholic Diocese functioned in Tiraspol and included 350.000 believers 90% of whom were Germans. By the late 1920's the number of German Baptists registered a steady growth mainly due to conversions (Mukhina 2007, 18-19).

In the summer of 1915, the Germans populations living in the rear of the Russian front were exiled by tsarist authorities. According to Eric Lohr the operations did not extent to the territory of Kherson province, but approximately a third of the German population of the nearby province of Bessarabia was exiled. The deportation of the Germans, who were perceived as potential supporters of an imminent German invasion, was associated with expropriation of

landholdings and farms (Lohr 2003, 129-137). In December 1925 a German from Bergdorf, called Steinach, wrote an open letter to the editorial board of the newspaper "Plugarul Roș". He asked if the exiled Germans could reclaim their houses confiscated by tsarist authorities and given to other citizens after the Revolution if they came back from Siberia in 1925. The answer was that the deportees lost the property rights because they were not working on their landholdings in 1920 during the transfer of the property rights (Plugarul Ros 1927, no. 87/259, p. 6). Regardless of whether some local Germans were exiled in 1915, the colonies from what was latter known as MASSR were in immediate vicinity of the province of Bessarabia and the traumatic experiences of the Bessarabian Germans were most likely known in Bergdorf, Gluckstal and Neudorf. Additionally, as attested by Steinach's letter, some of the victims of the tsarist repressive policies lived in these colonies.

German colonists had conflicting relations with Soviet authorities. During the Russian Civil War, the German colonies from Odesa governorate were sympathetic to the Whites and organized uprisings against Soviet authorities during the advance of White forces toward the provincial centre. The Bolsheviks considered that the opposition of the colonists to the Soviet rule was caused by their wealth and by "the national antagonism" (GDASBU, 13-1-926, p. 4). The economic prosperity of German colonists in comparison with their Russian, Ukrainian and Moldavian neighbours, and the Bolshevik perceptions of them as mainly kulaks, influenced the attitude of local Soviet authorities toward the German farmers, who, being richer, had more to lose as a result of the Bolshevik economic policies. In 1919 a rebellion of the colonists from the area of Bergdorf, Gluckstal and Neudorf took place (ANRM, 3401-1-2355, pp. 2;11) in the context of the military confrontation between the Reds and Whites. According to official documents, during the advancement of Denikin's forces in August 1919, the farmers from Glukstal rebelled and Red troops from the area got surrounded. The Reds conducted harsh reprisals, executed an unknown number of German rebels from Glukstal and Old Believers from the nearby village of Plosca. The Red reprisals against rebel farmers were frequently accompanied by house arsons committed by militaries. Some German settlers were involved in the anti-Bolshevik partisan movement during the years following the Civil War. In July 1920 the Red military intelligence reported about a detachment of approximately 300 armed rebels under the command of a number of German colonists active in Tiraspol county (Casu 2014, 25).

After the civil war the Germans from Odesa governorate received significant attention from Soviet authorities. In May 1922 the Section for work among national minorities of the Administrative Department of Odesa Guberniia (*Podotdel Natsmenshynstv Adminotdela*

Odesskoi Gubernii) was established with the purpose of implementing the state national policy toward Germans and Jews (TsDAVOV, 5-1-1832, p. 2). In 1925 in MASSR, four rural settlements with overwhelming German ethnic majority were administered by national rural Soviets, (Bergdorf, Gluckstal, Neudorf and Triokhgrady) while the rest of the settlements had an ethnically mixed population and local administration was conducted in other languages than German (AOSPRM, 40-1-859, p. 16).

The importance of religion in the lives of the Germans from the abovementioned colonies is attested by the high proportion of enrolments in local religious congregations. For example, in 1925 Gluckstal had a total population of 2456 people (AOSPRM, 49-1-859, p. 23-26), 1480 of whom were officially registered as Lutherans, 150 as Shtundists, 25 as Adventists and 10 as Baptists (AOSPRM, 49-1-859, p. 3). In October 1925 Bolshevik authorities considered Bergdorf, Gluckstal, and Neudorf the German settlements with the less politically active population and explained this passivity by the influence of religious sects and their location near the state border (AOSPRM, 49-1-455, p. 5). Usually, by political activism the Bolsheviks meant the interest of the population in official propaganda and involvement in different forms of political, economic, and social organization.

Inochentism

Another religious community whose encounter with Bolshevik authorities during the Civil War marked its relations with Soviet regime during the following decades are the Inochentists. Inochentism is a religious movement that emerged from within the Orthodox Christianity in the territories of the Russian Empire that had a Romanian-speaking population, namely Bessarabia, Kherson and Podolia. Numerous Moldavian peasants beginning in 1909, began to follow the teachings of the charismatic monk Inochentie of Balta, from whom the movement took its name. Thousands of pilgrims gathered at the monastery of Balta where father Inochentie Levizor was preaching a message of repentance, extreme fasting and celibacy in preparation for the impending End of Days. He also performed mass confession and exorcisms (see Kapaló 2019, 90; 94-95). Numerous peasants followed the teachings of monk Inochentie. For example, according to the reports of the Administration of Railways in 1910 every day from each train station from Bessarabia approximately 800-1000 pilgrims departed en route to Balta Monastery (Popovschi 1926, 159). In the late tsarist decades, the development of transport infrastructure facilitated the travel of pilgrims on railroads and steamboats over huge distances. Robert Greene observes that this technological breakthrough facilitated the religious resurgence experienced by Russia's society in the late tsarist period (Greene 2004,

14). In 1912, the Russian authorities exiled Inochentie, giving rise to an intensification of apocalyptic narratives which resulted in many of his followers selling their properties, adopting celibacy and moving to Lipetskoe near Balta, where they built an underground monastery and established an utopian communal society called "Gradina Raiului", the Garden of Paradise, often abbreviated in contemporary sources to "Rai". Inochentie was freed by the amnesty that followed the February Revolution of 1917, but he died shortly after his liberation in December 1917 (see Kapaló 2019, 95).

Despite the persecutions of the Inochentists by the tsarist authorities, the beliefs shared by the members of Balta movement had a strong monarchist component with the last tsar of Russia holding a special place in the Inochentist sacred narratives. According to local sacred legend, Nicholas II survived the attempts of the Bolsheviks to assassinate him and hid in the Inochentists' underground monastery in Lipetskoe, where he asked forgiveness from father Inochentie (Interview by J. Kapaló with Damian Pavlovich Obrejenko 2014). Likewise, according to party reports and secret police investigation files from 1920-21, Inochentists preachers propagated monarchist ideas (DAOO, P- 12233-1-22, p. 11; ASBUOO, file no. 27146, p. 12). Monarchist ideas were popular in the region, including in the form propagated by the far-right movement of Black Hundreds. According to Diana Dumitru, in both Bessarabia and Kherson the Russian far-right movement of Black Hundred had numerous adepts (2017, 41). Some of the most representative features of this movement were its antisemitism and strong ties to the monarchy and Orthodox Church (Laquer 1993, 16-17). According to James Kapalo, the monk Ionochentie was exposed to Russian political currents, and the early Inochentist sacred texts address the social and spiritual crisis of the Russian society (2019, 23). However, Inochentist sacred texts did not promote ideas of Russianness or antisemitism and they criticize intensely the official church (*Life and Deeds*). The special role of the figure of the last tsar in Inochentist religious narratives and sacred texts is explainable by the symbolic dualism between the heavenly order represented by Inochentie and the earthly empire represented by the monarch. This dualism is central to the early Inochentist eschatological beliefs in the impending Apocalypse associated with the demise of the earthly empire and the triumph of the heavenly order. Nevertheless, in Inochentist beliefs the tsar is not an incarnation of the evil but symbolises the earthly world that is redeemed by father Inochentie (Kapalo 2019, 23;100).

Lipetskoe, the Inochentist religious centre, was located in a region of MASSR with a numerous Moldavian population. According to the official data, in 1924 Moldavians represented 63.5 % out of a total of 36.829 rural population of the Ananiev district and the

largest Romanian village was Lipetskoe (AOSPRM, 49-1-24, p. 1). The district of Ananiev was located at the eastern border of MASSR and was separated by a belt of ethnically Ukrainian districts from other predominantly Moldavian regions on the republic's western frontier. Inochentists represented a significant proportion of the population of Ananiev district. In 1921, after the anti-Inochentist operation from September 1920 (that will be discussed in chapter 9) which resulted in the escape of a part of the Inochentists from Rai, the population of the Inochentist settlement was, approximately, 800 adults (ASBUOO, 27146, p. 237). The followers of Inochentie of Balta lived in other villages as well and they had a significant influence on local peasantry. The second district with the most numerous Inochentist communities was Cruty (AOSPRM, 49-1-84, p. 60), which was located in the north-western part of the republic and was, predominantly, an ethnically Ukrainian district. Additionally, numerous Inochentist communities existed in other districts from the south-western parts of Soviet Ukraine, and in Bessarabia which was part of Romania at that time. The authorities of MASSR perceived Inochentism as the most contagious and reactionary form of religious sectarianism (AOSPRM, 49-1-1303, p. 2) and in general Russian and Soviet authorities associated the Inochentism with Moldavian ethnicity, although the spread of this movement and certain documents suggest that Inochentist beliefs also became common among other ethnic communities, especially Russians and Gagauz (see Kapaló 2019, 43; 242).

Jewish Communities

Another numerous religious group present in MASSR were the Jews. Similar to Inochentists, the Jewish community had the traumatic experience of being the target of violent state policies. The Jews of MASSR represented approximately 9% of the Republic's population in 1924 (AOSPRM, 49-1-98, p.1). Part of the Russian Pale of Settlement, the territory of MASSR was dotted with numerous Jewish Yiddish-speaking communities present both in cities and in rural areas (Dumitru 2016, 34). The MASSR encompassed territories that at the end of the 18th century were conquered by Russia from the Ottoman Empire and Poland. Before being annexed by Russia in 1791, the city of Balta was divided by the border between Turkey and Poland, and Jews lived in both sides of the city since the beginning of the 16th century (Skolnik & Berenbaum 2007, Vol. III, 96). In the territories of Moldavian autonomous region that before the Russian conquest were part of the Ottoman empire, Jewish communities were established later than in those from the former Polish-held territories. For example, the Jews began to settle in the city of Ananiev (established in 1753) only at the beginning of the 19th century (Skolnik & Berenbaum 2007, Vol. II, 130). After the Russian expansion in the region the sparsely

populated steps between the Rivers Dniester and Bug were included in the province of New Russia, which stretched along the shore of the Black Sea encompassing the former Turkish and Tatar territories. In order to encourage the economic and demographic growth in these provinces the tsarist authorities granted unrestricted rights of settlement to Jews, unlike in the rest of the Pale of Jewish settlement, where Jews were allowed to live only in areas which already had Jewish populations (Zipperstein 1985, 34).

Before 1917, Russian Jews had a complex history of relations with Russian state and with local Gentiles. Numerous pogroms occurred in Russia's south during the last decades of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th centuries. Strong anti-Semitic moods were common both among large masses and Russian political and administrative elites. In 1881-1882 pogroms occurred in approximately 160 settlements with Jewish population, including Balta. The pogrom of Balta became emblematic for this wave of anti-Semitic violence through the level of violence and the atrocities committed by the Gentiles against local Jewish community (Dumitru 2016, 47).

During the Great War the territory of Kherson province was part of the area of military rule. Russian Military command perceived the Jews as spies and elements that were disloyal and avoided military service. In 1914-1915, hundreds of thousands of Jews were exiled eastward. The deportations were associated with violence and pogroms in which militaries, civilian authorities, and non-conscripted Gentiles took an active role (Lohr 2003, 137-145). After the Great War, Russian Jews were subjected to new persecutions. According to the data collected by Soviet authorities in 1920, pogroms were committed during the Russian Civil War by Petliura's fighters in such settlements as Koloskovo, Bîrzula, Codyma, and Balta of Balta county, Malinovka, Petrovka, Poniatovka, Petrikovka and Grigoriopol of Tiraspol county, and Liubashevka, and Staro-Troetskoe, of Ananiev county. The town of Balta, for example, was one of the most affected in terms of both number of victims and level of atrocity. According to Soviet reports, in February 1919 Ukrainian nationalist insurgents killed approximately 100 people and raped around 100 women in Balta. The documents mention the fact that a second pogrom followed, without specifying when it occurred and by whom it was orchestrated. The reports do not contain exact dates of the pogroms and precise number of victims (TsDAVOV, 5-3-2242, p. 58-60). Facing extreme violence and numerous attacks from local Gentiles, the Jews created detachments of self-defence as it was during the pogrom of 1882 in Balta (Skolkin & Berembaum 2007, Vol. III, 96), or during the Russian Civil War when in early 1920 between 200 and 300 fighters of the Ananiev Jewish self-defence detachment died during a battle with

the army of Ukrainian nationalist commander Tutunik (Skolnik & Berembaum 2007, Vol. II , 130).

On the eve of the 20th century the Jewry from the territory of the future MASSR earned their living by practicing the same trades as their co-religionist from other parts of the former Russian empire, although farming was practiced by a larger proportion of Jews here than in other parts of the Pale (Tartakovsky 2009, 1). Despite major efforts by Soviet regime to eliminate anti-Semitism, this was still a widely spread problem. For example, in 1926 rumours were circulating among MASSR's population that the Jews could not receive land (Plugarul Ros 1926, 105/139, 2). Likewise, in 1927 there were registered cases of known perpetrators of anti-Jewish pogroms holding Soviet official positions (AOSPRM, 49-1-1111, p. 9).

The Jews of MASSR had a vibrant religious life. In 1927 in RASSM existed 56 officially registered Judaic communities. In each Jewish settlement, according to the quoted report, there were approximately three registered religious communities (AOSPRM, 49-1-1111, p. 5). The territory of Moldavian region was located north of Odesa, which was an important centre of Haskalah, which is a version of Judaism emerged in 18th century and influenced by the ideas of the Enlightenment. According to Dmitry Tartakovsky, from the late 19th century the Haskalah ideas spread steadily among the members of Jewish communities from the territories from north of Odesa and among the Jewry of Bessarabia despite the strength of Hasidism in the southwestern parts of the Pale (Tartakovski 2009, p.12). As Steven Zipperstein points out, despite a significant spread of Haskalah among Russian Jewry, traditional Jewish institutions retained their authority, and even such political movements as Zionism remained peripheral for the most of Jews (Zipperstein 1985, 11). The territory of MASSR was a peripheral agriculture region with poor infrastructure which kept local Jewish communities close to traditional customs and institutions.

According to Tetiana Savchuk, Jewish communities from Soviet Ukraine resisted antireligious policies in various ways. Jewish communities protested the violation of their religious rights (see chapter 7) and wrote numerous petitions to officials. In 1926, they organised an All-Union conference in Korosten (Zhitomir Oblast, Ukraine), which advocated the preservation of religious traditions and requested the end of the antireligious attacks on Jewish faith. Believers eluded the official forms of registration of religious communities and continued to hold their religious meetings. A wide spread phenomena was the activity of preachers-*maggids*, who travelled from one community to another preaching in synagogues, reading the Talmud, and urging believers to preserve their faith. Frequently, believers collected donations to support the preachers-*maggids*. In the mid-1920s, Soviet officials identified

numerous underground Jewish religious schools and approximately 38,000 children who attended them but were not frequenting state schools (Savchuk 2020).

Conclusions

MASSR had a highly diverse religious landscape, with numerous religious communities present on its territory. The case studies in this thesis examine four of the largest and most active religious groups present in Moldavia, the Eastern Orthodox Christians, Inochentists, German Evangelicals, and Jews. The perceptions of the Bolshevik authorities regarding these communities were influenced by their status before 1917 and by the Civil War Experience. The Orthodox Church was an important part of the tsarist political system, and before the Revolution it enjoyed a privileged status. After 1917, Orthodox Christianity and especially its clergy experienced frequent attacks because the Church was perceived by the revolutionaries as a tsarist state institution which survived the collapse of the Russian Empire. Despite these perceptions, the Revolution freed the Church from state control and created opportunities for the clerics and believers willing to promote reforms. There were instances of laypeople getting involved in the administration of their parishes and dioceses as elected representatives of the church councils. Notwithstanding these efforts the Soviet regime persisted in attempting to eliminate religiosity by destroying the institutions of the Orthodox Church through many means including the active promotion of church schisms. The Bolsheviks expected Orthodox Christians to give up their faith after the destruction of the Orthodox ecclesiastic institutions, but this did not happen as Orthodox lay believers confronted the officials who promoted such policies the appointment of the priests of the state-controlled Renovationist Church. The Orthodox acts of resistance to these policies came from lay parishioners, who gained control over their parishes after the February Revolution. The Orthodox laity strived to self-governance of parishes and control over the appointment of parish priests. Paradoxically, the Decrees of the Bolshevik atheists facilitated the self-governance of parishes by legalising the control of laity over their parishes gained during the inter-revolutionary years. This independence led to a religious revival which troubled the Bolsheviks through the 1920s.

The German Evangelicals are a religious group towards whom the tsarist state promoted a set of policies different from those implemented in the case of the Orthodox Church. Apart from the fact that the Germans shared a “foreign faith” and had a non-Slavic ethnic origin, and hence were less favoured by tsarist legislation, during the Great War such colonists were exiled from the rear of the Russian front. During the Russian Civil War, Russian Germans provided military support to the Whites, and were perceived by the Bolsheviks as kulaks.

The Inochentists constitute an indigenous religious movement that emerged among Orthodox peasants and were perceived by the tsarist officials as a "dangerous sect". Inochentism was a dissent movement whose forms of organisation and religious practice were too elusive for the state mechanism of control and examination and hence were perceived as a "problem" both before and after 1917.

The Jews are a non-Christian religious group which was persecuted before the Revolution and during the Civil War. During the Civil War, the Jewish settlements formed armed units in order to defend themselves from the Ukrainian nationalist military who perpetrated numerous antisemitic pogroms. After the Civil War, the Bolsheviks promoted a set of policies aimed at eliminating antisemitic attitudes from among the Gentiles, but struggled against Jewish religious traditions and beliefs.

The exploration of the relations between the Soviet regime and these religious groups, which had different historical experiences and belonged to denominations of different origins, provides the possibility to examine the variations of the Soviet antireligious policies and to analyse the responses of religious communities to them.

In the following chapter, I introduce three institutions which were responsible with the implementation of Soviet antireligious policy in the 1920s. Liquidation Commissions, the secret police, and Antireligious Commissions were the key state and party agencies responsible for examining and controlling religious communities in the Soviet Union. They were also responsible for eliminating religions and for struggling against perceived religious enmity. The following chapter focuses primarily on the Liquidation Commissions, which played a key role in relations between Soviet regime and religions, but have received insufficient attention from scholars.

Notes

[1]Volost was an administrative unit subordinated to a county, which existed in Imperial Russia and in early post-revolutionary years. The district (in Russian *район*) is an administrative unit geographically larger than the volost which it replaced after the Soviet administrative reform.
[2]Okrug was a territorial unit geographically larger than a district and a county but smaller than oblast or governorate. The old administrative unit of county was replaced by the okrug.
[3]Terry Martin uses the term "Piedmont Principle" to refer to Soviet Russia's attempt to exploit the cross-border ethnic ties for projecting Soviet influence in neighboring states. See Terry Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire. Nation and Nationalism in the Soviet Union*, *1923-1939*, Cornell University Press, 2001, p. 9.

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Chapter 3: State Institutions and Anti-religious Legislation

By the beginning of the 1920s, the victory of the Red Army in the Civil War brought most of the territories of the former Russian Empire under Bolshevik rule. In the years following their victory, Soviet bureaucrats gradually organised state and party agencies in the conquered provinces similar to those which were already functioning in the inner territories of Bolshevik Russia. These included the agencies through which the regime implemented its antireligious policies such as the Liquidation Commissions, secret police departments, and Antireligious Commissions. One of the most significant problems faced by Moscow in the aftermath of the Russian Civil War was insufficient consolidation of its control in the peripheral provinces. The Bolshevik leadership tackled this problem through the policy of regionalisation which reconnected Moscow to its more distant provinces and imposed a stricter control over the local elite factions which ruled these territories. The regionalisation of the Odesa guberniia in 1923 resulted in a better coordination between the actions of officials at provincial and central level of administration, including in the implementation of antireligious policies. This chapter will examine the way Bolshevik officials implemented antireligious policies before 1923, and how after the regionalisation the Liquidation Commissions, secret police agencies and Antireligious Commissions were created and commenced their activity in the territories which in 1924 came to be known as Moldavian ASSR.

Liquidation Commissions and the secret police were the institutions through which the Soviet regime controlled and examined religious communities. They both operated under the supervision of Antireligious Commissions. These state agencies leveraged religious artefacts and buildings in order to control believers and used them in their investigations of religious phenomena. Additionally, the liquidation officials utilised numerous material artefacts, such as forms of registration, stenographs of the meetings of parishioners, and official agreements signed by believers, in order to control and examine religious congregations. In order to understand the function of these material artefacts in the relations between Soviet regime and religions, this chapter will describe the activity and functions of Liquidation Commissions and the secret police, and will examine their interplay under the supervision of Antireligious Commissions. Likewise, the presentation of the functions and activity of police agencies and Antireligious Commissions will provide a clear explanation of the jurisdictional sphere and role of the liquidation apparatus.

Religious communities and their property, including religious buildings, had a very blurred legal status in early Soviet Russia because they were situated at the intersection of a number of contradictory state policies and laws. Believers who officially had the right to

practice their religion could become the target of violent propaganda attacks or of repressive campaigns based on accusations related to their religious activities. Religious communities could register and had the right to use churches or prayer houses after receiving the proper authorisation but if their religious buildings were considered as assets needed for other purposes that were of social, economic, or political interest, believers could be divested of their sacred spaces (Kelly 2016, 32). Additionally, the Liquidation Commissions responsible with the implementation of the Decree for the Separation of the Church from the state (discussed below), party agencies, the civil and political police in charge of repressive campaigns and other institutions were in permanent competition in relation to the religious field, which was at the intersection of different spheres of secular authority. At the same time, during the 1920's, the Bolshevik leaders themselves had not reached a general consensus on how to formulate their policy on religion and continued to hold contrasting views on this problem (Peris 1998, 22-23).

The first section of this chapter examines how the relations between the Soviet regime and religious believers were influenced by the evolution of centre-periphery relations in the early 1920s, namely how the regionalisation of Odesa guberniia impacted these relations in the region. I will then go in to discuss the Liquidation Commissions, or the Commissions for the Separation of the Church from the State. This agency was subordinated firstly to the Justice Commissariat and from 1922 to the Commissariat of Internal Affairs. Liquidation Commissions were responsible for the implementation of the Soviet project of secularisation that was defined in a series of laws generically called the Decree on the Separation of the Church from the State (henceforth the Decree on Separation). Additionally, the liquidation apparatus was responsible for mapping the religious landscape and making it legible to other state and party institutions, including the secret police. Despite these institutions having played a central role in relations between the Soviet regime and religious communities in the 1920s, they have received little attention from researchers. In this chapter I will present the institutional and legislative context in which the Liquidation Commissions were created and conducted their activity. The third and fourth sections examine the role of the secret police, which was the main repressive agency dealing with religions, and that of the Antireligious Commissions which coordinated the activity of all state and party institutions involved in antireligious policies.

The influence of regionalisation on antireligious policies

Throughout the 1920s the interaction between local Bolshevik officials and religious communities was influenced by the evolution of centre-periphery relations, and especially by the limited control of Moscow, Kharkiv and provincial centres at a county level before regionalisation. This section examines the changes that occurred in the official approach to allegedly hostile religious communities as a result of the regionalisation in 1923 of the territories of the future MASSR (DAOO, P-1-12068).

In the early Soviet years, the antireligious policies were marked by the deficient control by Moscow and Kharkiv over the provincial administrative elites. After the Russian Civil War, the Bolshevik leaders struggled to reconnect the peripheral provinces to Moscow. As Gerald M. Easter demonstrates, in order to administrate the huge territory of Russia and cope with the shortage of infrastructure and scarce resources, after the revolution Moscow used the informal social networks inside the Bolshevik Party to consolidate its control of the peripheries. In the early 1920s the provinces were ruled by Bolshevik party elite corps of fighters-organisers who conquered these territories during the Civil War. These administrative elites were a weak bureaucracy because their hierarchisation and subordination was to a large extent informal, and they identified, acquired and distributed resources needed for successful administration of their provinces through informal social networks. Additionally, the identity of the revolutionary elite and winners in the Civil War gave them a status in Soviet society independent from their formal positions held in Party and state administration. Moscow addressed this problem by replacing the old tsarist system of territorial division (*guberniia*, *uezd*, *volost*) with geographically larger units (*oblast*, *okrug* and *raion*). This reform was meant to limit the influence of local cliques of functionaries and to impose over them the authority of elite factions that could control the distribution of resources at local level. In a second stage of the implementation of this policy, leaders of the factions which received control over the provinces were promoted to administrative positions in Moscow. The relocated leaders reconnected the capital with its most remote provinces through their informal networks and personal influence among the elites of the provinces from which they were promoted. A similar approach was taken to reconnect the provincial centres with the elites ruling their counties and *volost* (Gerald M. Easter, 2007; 5-17; 76-79; 163-167).

A telling example of how the isolation between Moscow and Soviet provinces influenced the interaction between Soviet regime and religious communities are the differences between anti-Inochentist operation from 1920 and the operation from 1923-24 (see chapter 9). The image of an allegedly harmful sect depicted in official documents by party leaders of

Ananiev county before the regionalisation, and without the participation of provincial authorities, and the image produced in the provincial centre after the regionalisation in 1923 differ in many telling ways.

A few months after the conquest of Ananiev county by the Red Army, in September 1920, the local Party Committee launched a military operation to destroy the Inochentist spiritual centre in Lepitcoe. The official documents produced in Ananiev in 1920 present the Inochentist spiritual centre as a place where "counterrevolutionaries are hiding, anti-Soviet preaching takes place, where because of [unintelligible word] against the kulaks, the wealthy elements of the countryside transport grain…"(DAOO, P-12233-1-4, 12). The representation of the Inochentist monastery as a hideout for anti-Bolshevik partisans, which was never substantiated, became a leitmotif of the Soviet anti-Inochentist propaganda up until the end of the regime. These accusations were produced through the projection by local officials of their fears onto the Inochentists.

The official documents produced in Odesa in 1923 during another wave of repressions, present the Inochentists as a different kind of threat to the stability of the regime. The accusations make reference to the cross-border character of this religious movement. The majority of its members were ethnic Romanians from Bessarabia, and the Inochentists frequently transgressed the Soviet border to visit their communities in Romania. From the perspective of Soviet officials, the cross-border character of this religious movement created favourable conditions for the infiltration of foreign spies (ASBUOO 5247, 15; 22). On July 10th 1923 the Executive Committee of Balta *Okrug* ordered the exile of all Inochentists from the border area (ASBUOO 5247, 22-23).

These two anti-Inochentist operations show how at each level of administration Soviet officials had different concerns regarding the alleged danger posed by the same religious group. If at a local level in 1920 the officials were concerned with the local anti-Bolshevik partisan movement and peasant resistance to Soviet policies, then in 1923 and 1924, after the regionalisation, the Inochentists were targeted by repressive policies because of their cross-border religious networks. The regionalisation reconstructed the communication lines between Odesa and Kharkiv, but also those between Odesa and Ananiev. In 1923, Odesa party leaders were better informed about the situation in *uezdy,* while local officials had less autonomy from their provincial bosses in identifying and defining the enemy. If the repressive operation from 1920 was the result of the projections of a set of concerns of local officials regarding the security of the regime and regarding their own survival, than in 1923 the accusations against the Inochentist are constructed based on the concerns of Odesa party bosses, which included

ideas about an imminent threat of foreign invasions and spy infiltration. The image of Inochentists depicted in 1920 in Ananiev does not disappear after 1923, but it was subsumed by latter anti-Inochentist narratives. Up until 1980's Soviet propaganda accuses the Inochentists of sheltering the anti-Bolshevik partisans during the Russian Civil War and of opening fire on Red solders during the destruction of their monastic complex in September 1920.

Additionally, the two operations differ in the level of violence and in the degree to which the conduct of the bureaucrats followed official regulations and procedures. For the operation from September 1920, I could identify only the stenographs of the meetings of Party Committee which decided on the liquidation of Rai (DAOO, P-12233-1-4, 12; 18) and the destruction of the Inochentist spiritual centre, which was a military operation marked by numerous incidents. The Bolsheviks who liquidated the Inochentist monastery opened fire indiscriminately on the inhabitants of Lipetscoe. Additionally, the troops sent by the County Party Committee and the Birzula Rail Station Cheka unit accidentally opened fire on each other. As a result of this incident, the head of the County Party Committee was killed (DAOO, P-12233-1-4, 12; 18; P-2106-1-151, 5; ASBUOO, 27146, 287; Lesi Gomin 1927, part 2-3). This incident is the result of poor communication between the agencies involved in this operation. The indiscriminate violence against the Inochentists is explainable by the insufficient enforcement of official rules that could regulate the actions of local officials and by the scarcity of available resources.

The 1923 deportation of Inochentist from the border area was a better organised and more top-down oriented operation which involved more administrative resources and was characterised by a lower degree of violence. These deportations comprised a set of complex operations of identification and registration of the Inochentist preachers, arrests and deportations (ASBUOO, file no. 5247).

The differences between the anti-Inochentist operation of 1920 and the one from 1923 reveal several important ways in which the reconnection of the Odesa party centre with the peripheries of this province influenced the interaction between religious communities and the Soviet regime. Firstly, after regionalisation the identification and definition of the religious enemy involved more complex notions of state security than before 1923, such as the securing of state borders against spy infiltration. Secondly, as a result of the centralization and consolidation of state and party apparatuses the actions of local officials against religious communities were constrained by better enforced regulations, involved the production of more

bureaucratic documents, whilst the officials employed less violent means in a better organised way.

The Liquidation Department and the Decree for the Separation of the Church from the State

One of the first measures taken by the Bolsheviks against religion and against the dominance of the Russian Orthodox Church after they seized power in 1917 was to promote a set of laws which separated the state from the church. The decree issued on the 23 of January 1918, stipulated that the Orthodox Church was separated from the state and that local authorities could not issue any laws that would grant privileges or would discriminate against anybody based on religious beliefs. Citizens were granted freedom of conscience and the right to not have any religion. All the references to confessional affiliation or non-affiliation had to be removed from personal documents of citizens. Religious ceremonies including processions and the practice of any religion could take place as long as it did not disturb public order and it did not offend other citizens' rights. In such cases the authorities were empowered by law to take measures against it. Religious vows and oaths were replaced by official promises. The registration of civil acts could be done only by civil authorities. Religious education in public or private schools was prohibited. The priesthood of any confession could not receive payment from the state. Religious organisations could not obligate their members to participate in meetings and neither could they collect any kind of mandatory membership dues from them. Churches and religious organisations did not have the status of legal persons nor the right to own property. All buildings and religious items of all confessions in Russia were declared public property and they could only be used for religious purposes with the permission of authorities (Pospielovsky 1987, 133-134). A law similar to the decree on the separation of the church from the state was adopted by the Soviet of the Ukrainian Republic on 23rd January 1919 (Babenko 2014, 249-250).

According to the Bolshevik vision, the Soviet project of secularisation was not complete with the implementation of the Decree. The party programme, adopted on March 22nd 1919, states that in "bourgeois democracies" the separation of the church from the state was only officially declared but in fact there were still many connections between the church and capital. Such a version of secularisation could not suffice the RCP(b). The Bolshevik programme states that the decree is only the beginning of a process that would continue through planning and organisation and through consciousness raising amongst the masses in relation to all their activities that would result in the elimination of religion (The Party Programme, 22 March

1919). The Bolsheviks imagined their struggle against belief and institutionalised religion as an integral part of the project of building a socialist society where there was no place for religion, which according to the Marxist vision was part of the superstructure that would disappear together with its economic and social base. In the first period of church-state relations between 1917 and 1921, the Soviet state attempted to seize the Russian Orthodox Church's proprieties and to destroy its institutional structures. The Orthodox Church, its clergy and churchgoing in general were the target of permanent terror and harassment that aimed at eliminating their influence, while other religious groups were targeted only as part of a general policy of terror (Walters 1990, 4-7).

Nevertheless, when it became clear that religion would not disappear as a result of the destruction of its economic base and institutional structures, the Party took a new approach in its anti-religious policy with atheist propaganda and long-term educative work as its key components. Additionally, after the Civil War, due to economic difficulties and tense relations with the peasantry, a tactical retreat was essential for the regime's survival. In terms of antireligious policy, the years of New Economic Policy (NEP) can be considered as the second period of church-state relations (Walters 1990, 7-13). In February 1922 a circular of the Central Committee instructed all officials to avoid offending believers during antireligious work. The resolution of the Twelfth Party Congress from April 1923 stressed the need to conduct strong anti-religious propaganda avoiding aggressive methods that would provoke the strengthening of religious feelings (Peris 1998, 32).

In April 1918, a special Commission responsible with the implementation of the Decree on the Separation of the Church from the State was created. The Inter-institutional Commission of the People's Commissariat of Justice (*Mezhvedomstvennaja Komissija Narkomjusta*) had representatives of religious communities among its members and was under the supervision of Vladimir Bonch-Bruevich (Odincov 2017, 38-40).

The Inter-institutional Commission, with Bonch-Bruevich at its head, however, did not manage to commence its activity and was abolished because of a number of institutional difficulties and because a section of the party leadership opposed any kind of cooperation with religious leaders. In May 1918, the 8th Department (later the 5th Department and commonly referred as the Liquidation Department) of the People's Commissariat of Justice was created as the main institution responsible for the implementation of the decree with P.A. Krasikov, one of Bonch-Bruevich's critics, as the head of the new institution (Odincov 2017, 38-40). The central objective of the Department was to assist, direct, and control the formulation and implementation of religious policy. The Department issued the publication "Revolutsiia i

Tserkov" ("The Revolution and Church"), which contained laws, orders and instructions on how to implement the Decree on Separation (Luukkanen 1994, 65).

In 1922 the local apparatus of the Liquidation Department was placed under the authority of the NKVD (Commissariat of Internal Affairs). This reform was made in a period in which there was a conflict between Krasikov and the representatives of the NKVD and the secret police. Krasikov protested against the violations of the legal rights of religious groups and believers committed by police officials. Likewise, central state institutions of the RSFSR empowered the Commissariat of Justice with investigating the complaints regarding violations and abuses committed by the civil and political police (Odincov 2017, 111). According to Krivova, the 1922 campaign of seizing the church valuables was a watershed moment for the relations between the state agencies involved in antireligious policy. Starting from this campaign, GPU and Party agencies got an active role in the implementation of antireligious policy, which until then was the sphere of authority of the Liquidation Department. Before this campaign, Liquidation officials opposed the attempts of the civil and political police to get a central role in the implementation of religious policy (Krivova 1997). As Hagenloh observes, in the first years of NEP there were numerous protests by judiciary officials to state authorities against the abusive actions of secret police officers (2009, 33). The 5th Department of the Commissariat of Justice of RSFSR was dissolved in 1924. In the same year, the authorities of RSFSR created the Secretariat for Religious Affairs of All-Russian Central Executive Committee (Odincov 2017, 15-16). The local Liquidation Commissions continued their activity as part of NKVD, and this change constituted a victory of the police officials.

With the creation of the Party's antireligious commissions in October 1922 as the main agency charged with coordinating the activity of all institutions responsible for the implementation of anti-religious policy and for supervision of religious communities (Lobanov 2014, 3;7) the influence of the liquidation apparatus diminished. The antireligious commissions produced their own assessments based on the reports provided by the liquidation commissions and by other institutions, such as the secret police and propaganda agencies. Another important shift in institutional hierarchies was the growing influence of the secret police during the second half of the 1920s, which played an increasingly prominent role in the policy on religion than the Antireligious Commission of the Party's Central Committee in Moscow and its local branches. The increasing involvement of the secret police in religious policy is revealed by the growing number of arrested religious leaders in this period in Ukraine (Kyrydon 2014, 239). Nevertheless, in the second half of the 1920s the Liquidation Commissions continued to conduct their activities in a well-defined sphere of authority. In a 1927 instruction to a newly

appointed Liquidation Inspector, the head of liquidation apparatus, E. Rudina, states that the approach of the liquidation officers "should be official and different from the techniques employed by other agencies. It [was] important to preserve the appearance of neutrality [of liquidation agencies] and to provide a legal basis for all [their] measures." (TsDAVOV, 5-3-266, p. 20) In other words, the sphere of authority of the liquidation apparatus included all possible legal actions towards the curtailment of religious activity, leaving to other agencies, including the secret police, the possibility to act through unofficial techniques if necessary. Despite the decline of the influence of the liquidation agencies in the late 1920s, their reports were still regarded as valuable by other state institutions including the secret police. For example, a 1927 note of the head of the Counterintelligence Department of secret police of Soviet Ukraine required the registration by liquidation officials of the religious community of a secret Dominican Monastery identified by GPU in Kaments-Podolsky. According to the quoted document, the objective of the registration was to identify the leadership of this community and especially those who opposed its registration (TsDAVOV, 5-3-303, p. 30a).

Significantly, from their inception the agencies responsible for the implementation of the Decree for Separation collaborated closely with the police and performed certain policing functions. For example, the instruction issued by the Inter-institutional Commission headed by Bonch-Bruevich in 25th April 1918 stated that one of its duties was to oversee religious leadership and to limit any counterrevolutionary activity concealed under the pretext of "defending the faith" (Gorev 1918). The Commission required police assistance for example in cases when the carrying out of searches was needed (Report of Lipkinakopejshikov to the 8th Department, 1918). The 8th Department organised its activity using the experience of the Department of Foreign Confessions (*Departament Inostrannyh Ispovedanij*) (The Report of Evtokhiev to the 8th Department, May 1918) of the tsarist Ministry of Internal Affairs which regulated the activity of non-Orthodox Christian groups and of non-Christians in the Russian Empire (Werth 2014, 55-57). In the first weeks of its activity, the 8th Department of the Commissariat of Justice sought to employ former officers of the Department of Foreign Confessions in order to draw on their experience. Additionally, the Department intended to utilise the archives and the library of the mentioned tsarist department (The Report of Evtokhiev to the 8th Department, May 1918). Liquidation officials and secret police officers collaborated closely at a local level. For example, in July 1922, the provincial Liquidation Commission of Odesa required the clergy and sectarian pastors to fill in a number of forms. This procedure was ordered by the local department of GPU, which provided the forms (TsDAVOV, 5-1-2190, p. 173R).

The Communist Party had been determined to eliminate religions, but the secularisation of the society was a complex task for which the Bolsheviks did not have a well-defined plan. At an early stage of their rule in Russia, the Bolsheviks expected religion to wane as a result of a revolutionary transfiguration of Russian workers and peasants into a conscientious proletariat. Nevertheless, religions did not decline, at least not as readily as expected, and the Bolshevik regime designed a series of strategies to control believers and to examine religious communities in order to elaborate more efficient antireligious policies. The Liquidation Apparatus was in charge of implementing the techniques of control of believers and of examining the religious landscape. The multiple shifts in antireligious policy were reflected in the changes of the status and functions of the Liquidation Commissions. The transformation of the Liquidation Commissions from an agency responsible for the supervision of religious groups and for maintaining the regime's relations with them into full-fledged policing institutions encapsulates the evolution of Soviet antireligious policies in the 1920s.

Liquidation Commissions in Soviet Ukraine and in the Moldavian ASSR

The Liquidation Department had a network of local representatives at the level of governorates. In Soviet Ukraine each governorate had a bureau (*Stol*) affiliated to the local departments of the Ministry of Justice, which supervised the implementation of the Decree. On 18 August 1921, these bureaus were replaced by the local Commissions for Liquidation. The membership of these commissions included representatives of the Ministry of Justice, local administration, and Secret Police (Tryhub 2009, 180). On the 6th September 1922, Ukraine's Department for the Separation of the Church from the State was placed under the authority of the republic's NKVD. Similar changes were made at the level of governorates, where the Liquidation Commissions were subordinated to local NKVD departments. In governorates, the commissions had as their members the head of the local Administrative Section of the NKVD, a member of the presidium of the Soviet People's Court and a representative of the local secret police department (Cheka/OGPU). At county level, the responsibility for the implementation of the Decree was on the executive bodies of *volost* and cities, with some of their members appointed to collect data referring to religions (TsDAVOV, 5-1-1085, pp. 2-3).

In the early 1920s, branches of the Liquidation Department were established in the provinces from the left bank of the river Dniester. In December 1923, a Liquidation Commission existed in Balta okrug (part of Odesa region and later reorganised into Moldavian ASSR) that was established in the same year (DAOO, P-12068-1-24, p. 42). The apparatus of the Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD) of the Moldavian ASSR (MASSR) was created

immediately after the formation of the autonomous unit in the autumn of 1924. According to an instruction issued by the Soviet Ukraine's NKVD to the Moldavian ASSR's NKVD from 3rd January 1925, one of its main duties was to re-register all organisations and societies, including religious ones. For this purpose, similarly with other regions and okrugs, an Interinstitutional Commission for Communities and Societies was created (*Mezhvedomstvennaja Komissija po delam ob obshchestvakh i souzakh* - MEKOSO). It included a representative from the NKVD, Trade Union, Procuracy, and secret police (TSDAVOV, 5-2-825, p. 1-3). The cases related to the registration of religious groups were supervised by the Liquidation Commissions, but under their new name of Cult Departments which they took on in 1924, while the applications related to registrations were submitted by believers to MEKOSO (Provincial Commissions for the Affairs on Organisations and Unions). The main objectives in the Working Plan for 1925-1926 of the Cults Department of NKVD of the Moldavian ASSR was to create data on religious sects, communities and movements, to conduct the registration of the clergy, to examine religious communities, and to compile case files for each congregation that had to be sent to district executives that were responsible for authorising religious activities (TsDAVOV, 5-2-825, pp. 136-137).

The report of the NKVD of the Moldavian ASSR for April-June 1925 shows that the process of registration of religious congregations was progressing very slowly. According to the above-mentioned report, there were 20 unregistered communities in Dubasari district, 6 in Slobozia district, 10 in Grigoriopol, 3 in Tiraspol, and in Camenca all religious communities where unregistered. At the same time, according to official data in the Moldavian ASSR, there were 199 Orthodox communities (including 143 registered), 14 Old Believer parishes (13 registered), 70 Jewish groups (44 registered), 4 Roman Catholic parishes (3 registered), two Armenian Orthodox groups, and 14 sectarian congregations, including 3 Evangelical, 7 Lutheran, 1 Reformed Evangelist, 1 Czech Baptist congregation, 1 Baptist and 1 Adventist community. The total number of registered clergyman and preachers was 248 Orthodox priests and 4 deacons, 2 Catholic priests, 15 rabbis, 33 shechita, 5 readers of Torah, and 11 sectarian preachers. In the period April-June 1925, two representatives of the clergy were put on trial for violating the existing laws regarding religious activities and 5 clerics arrived from outside Moldavian ASSR and were registered (TsDAVOV, 5-2-825, pp. 97-98).

Apart from the general reluctance of believers to entrust Soviet authorities with information about their congregations, another problem in collecting, systematizing and analysing the required data on religious groups was the unpreparedness and lack of care of local authorities (TSDAVOV, 5-2-825, p. 147). As a report for 1928 shows, the situation had

not improved in the meantime, and the registrations and evidence of religious groups went on with numerous shortcomings. For instance, the report states that district authorities did not supervise and examine properly the religious groups and district administrative departments of the NKVD limited their activity to the implementation of certain orders without applying any initiative. The report mentions that the situation was extremely difficult with regard to the so-called mystical sectarian movements, such as the Inochentists, Dukhobors, and Skoptsy, which had still not been examined (TSDAVOV, 5-3-1002, p. 97-98). The lack of information regarding sectarian communities explains the generally small number of sectarian congregations mentioned in official documents. Sectarian communities, and especially autochthonous ones, eluded registration and some had a secretive organizational tradition from pre-Soviet times. The motivations to avoid engagement with official procedures for registration varied from the impossibility of practicing their religions within the legal framework, because of such religious practices as itinerant preaching, to the refusal to interact with the atheist authorities due to regime's antireligious policy or the apocalyptic religious worldview of believers.

The activity of the liquidation officials was supervised by the Party's antireligious commissions. Additionally, these commissions played a key role in the interplay between the liquidation officials and police officers. In what follows, I describe the activity and functions of Party's antireligious apparatus.

Antireligious Commissions

By the beginning of the 1920s, an extremely diverse set of state and party agencies, such as the secret police, Propaganda Departments of Party Committees, local press, Liquidation Commissions and local authorities, were involved in the implementation of the regime's antireligious policy. The complexity of institutional mechanisms through which antireligious campaigns and policies were implemented required the creation of a central agency that would supervise the activity of all the institutions involved. Krasikov refers directly to this need in his discourse at the 10th Party Congress from March 1921. He presents the activity of the registered religious communities as subversive actions of the social enemies of the regime, and explains the inefficiency of the state policies on religion by the poor coordination of the activity of different institutions (The speech of P.A. Krasikov at the 10th Party Congress).

In October 1922, the Commission for the Implementation of the Decree on the Separation of the Church from the State of the Central Committee of CP(b) R (usually referred to as "the Antireligious Commission") was established (Lobanov 2014, 3;7). The decisions of

the Antireligious Commission had to be approved by the Central Committee's Secretariat, Politburo or Orgburo (Peris 1998, 42). The Antireligious Commission was formed through the merging of three commissions: Commission for Antireligious Propaganda of the Propaganda Department of CC of RCP(b); the Commission for Sectarians; and the Commission for the Movements Inside the Church. The Commission for Sectarians, or the Commission for the examination of the character and different movements inside sectarianism (*Komissija po oznakomleniju s harakterom i razlichnymi techenijami vnutri sektantskogo dvizhenija*) already existed in September-October 1922 (Lobanov 2014, 3;7). According to the stenograph of the session from 27th September 1922, the Commission for the Church Movement (*Komissija po cerkovnomu dvizheniju*) examined the issues related to splinter movements inside the Orthodox Church, propaganda publications, and decided on the expulsion of a number of Baptists. This session was chaired by Krasikov and was attended by the heads of different institutions including the secret police (Stenograph of the session of the Commission for the movements inside the church, 27th September 1922).

As Daniel Peris points out, the formation of the Antireligious Commission marked a decrease in Leon Trotsky's influence on religious policy. Despite the fact that Trotsky was in charge of the seizure of church valuables from the Orthodox Church and was involved in the activity of various working groups on religion, he was not appointed head of the Antireligious Commission. Instead, Emilian Yaroslavskii, a party leader presumably affiliated to Stalin, became the chair of the Commission (Peris 1998, 42). On 17th of November 1922, the members of the Antireligious Commission (Krasikov, Menzinsky, Popov, Skvortsov, Flerovski, and Smidovich) unanimously voted to send a request to the Politburo to appoint Trotsky as the Commission's chair (Stenograph of Organisational Session of Antireligious Commission, 17th November 1922) but the request did not achieve its goal. It is important to mention that despite the leadership of Yaroslavskii, the anti-Religious Commission was an agency where different views on religion and sectarianism were represented. At least in the first years of its activity, the Antireligious Commission could formulate its decisions based on reports compiled by different institutional and political actors with contrasting views on these subjects. For instance, after hearing the report of Bonch-Bruevich on sects and their activity, the session of Antireligious Commission from 21st of November 1922 decided to request a special report on the same subject from the political police (Stenograph No. 5 of Antireligious Commission). At its next meeting on 28th November 1922, after taking into account Bonch-Bruevich's report, the Commission decided to impose some restrictions regarding conscientious objectors' right to obtain military discharge (Stenograph No. 6 of the Antireligious Commission).

Confrontations between the members of the Commission were registered as well. An example is Kostelovskaya, a leader of the Moscow Society of Godless and a competitor of Yaroslavskii, who was appointed as a member by Politburo in July 1923. She complained that during eighteen months since the approval of her membership, the sessions of the Commission were designed to purposefully exclude her. She was expelled from the Commission in February 1925 when the Moscow Society of Godless was merged with the Society of Friends of the Godless Newspaper, under Yarsolavski's leadership (Peris 1998, 53-54). Yarsolavski and Kostelovskaya shared contradictory views on how an atheist society could be achieved in Russia. Yaroslavskii advocated a culturalist approach, which rejected the most violent methods believing that before the economic and social infrastructure of Russian peasant society could be changed, the aggressive attempts to curtail religious life would lead only to a strengthening of religious feelings. He opted for well organised and planned propaganda campaigns conducted by well instructed and prepared cadres. This vision of antireligious policy coincided with the spirit of the NEP but was different from the classic Marxist perspective on religion and its elimination. Kostelovskaya represented the interventionists who opted for a more radical set of measures. They perceived the Orthodox Church as an emanation of the social and economic infrastructure, which was to be urgently eliminated by the most violent means with the participation of existing cadres. The interventionists were impatient to realise socialist transformations and their views were popular among Komsomol members who saw antireligious policy as a series of battles similar to those of the Civil War. In 1926, the interventionist camp was defeated and the Komsomolists remained as the main challengers of the culturalist approach of the League of Godless (Peris 1998, 50-51).

According to Oleg Tryhub, the Antireligious Commission which existed between 23 October 1923 and 17 November 1929, shaped the regime's policy on religions until 1927. The Antireligious Commission was in charge of important technicalities of anti-religious policy in the period from 1927 to 1929 when the secret police had the leading role in formulating the strategies of the regime in its struggle against religions (2009, 154).

In September 1922, the Antireligious Commission created a network of local *troikas,* which were responsible with examining the political orientation of clergy, popularising the results of judiciary processes against believers, bolstering the work of local Liquidation Commissions, and supervising and directing the implementation of a series of other policies like the policy to support and promote the Living Church. The Troika of Odesa governorate was created in September 1922 and it was chaired by G. Levit, the head of the Propaganda Department of the local Party Committee, and the secretary of the Committee of CP(b)U,

Odincov, supervised its activity. In September 1922, the Odesa Troika ordered the formation of similar troikas in each county of the governorate. The Troika of Tiraspol county was created on 23 September 1922. Nevertheless, on 23 September the Odesa provincial commission was dissolved and a part of its prerogatives were transferred to governorate's "Commission for Work on Anti-Soviet Front" (Tryhub, 2009, 161-162).

On 19 March 1924 the Antireligious Commission of CC of CP(b)U created an Antireligious Commission in each province (in each oblast/guberniia and okrug). The commissions were chaired by the heads of propaganda departments of local committees, and had as their members the vice-chair of provincial executive council, the local procurator, and the chief of the GPU department or his or her second in command. Usually, the representative of the GPU held the position of secretary of the provincial Antireligious Commission. In June 1925, the membership of provincial Antireligious Commissions was modified by including the First Secretary of the local party committee, the head of the administrative department of NKVD (provincial Liquidation Commissions were subordinated to administrative departments), and through the exclusion from the Commissions' membership of the Vice-Chair of the Executive Committee and the representative of Procuracy. All institutions involved in antireligious policy were obliged to obey the decisions of Antireligious Commissions, and their correspondence with the central commission in Kharkiv was realised through secret police apparatus. According to the circulars of central authorities, provincial commissions were expected to use in their antireligious work not only the local police forces but also all other institutions like Fiscal Departments, Executive Committees, Procuracy etc. They had three main tasks: to coordinate the activity of all agencies involved in antireligious policy, to research religious groups from a political, statistical, and a social point of view, and to ensure that all directives and orders of the central Antireligious Commission were implemented (Tryhub 2009, 163-164; 166-167).

It is important to mention that in examining the religious landscape, the Antireligious Commission relied on local party apparatus as well. In December 1924 a special Commission for studying the evolution of sectarianism acting under the supervision of the Antireligious Commission, was responsible for elaborating a circular which would instruct the provincial Party Committees on how to conduct an examination of local sectarian movements, and on January 5 1925 the plenum of the Antireligious Commission approved the draft of the circular and decided to send it to local party authorities (Stenograph 62 of the Commission for the elaboration of a circular on the issue of analyse of sectarianism). The examining of materials sent by local authorities was conducted by a commission which included Krasikov, Tuchkov,

Putintsev, Oleshuk, and Shumov. The Commission planned to develop an antireligious strategy based on examined materials (Stenograph 66 of the Plenum of Antireligious Commission, 5th May 1925).

In 1923, among the members of the All-Ukrainian Antireligious Commission were V. Balitski (the head of Ukrainian GPU), M. Cherliunchakevich (the vice-commissar of NKVD), S. Makar, Ya. Raihshtein (the head of the Cadre Department of the Commissariat of Internal Affairs), I. Suhopliuev, (the head of the liquidation apparatus of Administrative Department of NKVD), A. Sokolovski (head of the 5th Department of secret police), V. Loginov (member of the CC of CP(b) of Ukraine and of the Government of Soviet Ukraine), and O. Shumski (head of Propaganda Department of CC of CP(b) of Ukraine). Antireligious Commission were also established at local level (Tryhub 2009, 155-157).

The party archives of the former MASSR contain only the stenographs number 1 to 4 (February - April 1925) (AOSPRM, 49-1-338) and number 8 (11th February 1926) of the session of local Antireligious Commission, together with some correspondence (AOSPRM, 49-1-821). On the 11th of February 1925 the Antireligious Commission of Agitation and Propaganda Department of the Party Committee of MASSR was already functioning. The chair of the Antireligious Commission was Kholostenko (the head of Propaganda Department of Party Committee of CP(b)M - AOSPRM, 49-1-338, p. 3), and Neagu (the Secretary of Propaganda Department - AOSPRM, 49-1-338, p. 18) was its secretary. Among its members were Vaiberg, Khazin, Udilevich, Shoihet, and Bochacher (editor of the local newspaper "Plugarul Ros"). In the first four sessions it discussed and issued decisions related exclusively to propaganda work (AOSPRM, 49-1-341). In its 8th session from January 1926, the Commission had a different membership, but the same chair, and ordered the exile of a group of Inochentists, the organisation of a show trial against Skoptsy in Slobozia, and decided on propaganda issues. Among the new members of the commission were Stroev (the head of local Government), Kornev (the chief of secret police and of NKVD), Bogopolskaja (vice chair of Propaganda Department), and Arbutskii (AOSPRM-49-1-821, pp. 2-4).

The creation of the Antireligious Commission of MASSR marked the beginning of a coordinated activity between local secret police and liquidation officials in this province. Likewise, the formation of this Commission resulted in a more elaborate work of antireligious propaganda and atheist educative circles. All state institutions and organisations involved in the implementation of the antireligious policy were represented in this Commission or attended its sessions on an occasional basis. During these sessions, the officials discussed issues related to religion and formulated or adapted the antireligious policies to the local context.

Secret Police and Religions

The Soviet secret police was the most important repressive state institution and was involved in the implementation of antireligious policies. This institution was supervised by the Antireligious Commissions, and collaborated closely with liquidation apparatus. Technically, all religious communities and believers who eluded the official registration process with the Liquidation Commissions fell under the administrative sphere of the civil and secret police (TSDAVOV, 5-2-194, p. 7). The civil police of Soviet Ukraine were subordinated to the head of the republic's secret police.

The All-Russian Extraordinary Committee, or the Cheka, was established on 7th of December 1917 based on the decision of the Soviet Government, headed by Lenin. The main task of this agency was to struggle against counterrevolutionary activity and acts of sabotage and to take punitive measures against those who engaged in such actions. In February 1918, the Cheka officially declared in the public press its prerogative of applying extrajudicial executions, this being, according to the announcement, the only way to defend the Revolution from its enemies (Jakovlev 2003, 14-15). In September 1918, after the failed attempts to assassinate Lenin and the chief of Petrograd Cheka, the Soviet secret police launched the Red Terror. The Red Terror targeted the regime's political enemies and entire segments of population deemed as counterrevolutionary by nature, including officers of the old army, tsarist officials, bourgeois elements and non-Bolshevik socialists. The Cheka newspapers portrayed these campaigns of terror as "a measure of hygiene" aimed at safeguarding the regime against counterrevolutionary insurrections. This type of operation acquired a central place in the activity of the Cheka and the Red Army during the Civil War. Their objective was to eliminate social elements considered harmful or malignant. These policies were a continuation of the tsarist deportations of population groups, primarily ethnic Germans and Jews, considered a source of military threat during the Great War. The view that these repressive mechanisms were a means of creating a perfect socialist society was strong among Red Army officers due to continuities in personnel (the Red Army used numerous officers of the old tsarist military), but absent among Cheka officials. For Chekists, these operations were a form of social revenge, and they were more focused on internal security than on a constructivist statecraft characteristic of the activity of Red Army intelligence services between 1918 and 1921 (Hagenloh 2009, 27). Unlike the Cheka, the Red Army collected intelligence data regarding the mood of the population. Tendencies toward borrowing and developing techniques of surveillance of the population were exhibited by the Cheka only at the end of the Civil War. In Soviet theory of policing, the idea of social danger was associated with the nature of crime and with the social

category of the criminal, while in practice the Cheka officers defined the socially dangerous elements in urban areas based on their recidivism and geographic mobility (lack of a defined place of residence). These notions of social danger were employed in Cheka operations against petty crime in urban areas, such as property crimes (Hagenloh 2009, 27-28). One of the objectives of the Secret Department of Cheka, established on 24 February 1919, was to struggle against the "hostile activity of churchman and sectarians" (Jakovlev 2003, 17). The head of the sixth section of the Secret Department, E.A. Tuchkov, was the police official responsible for implementing regime's policy towards the Orthodox Church. Tuchkov and the sixth section played a central role in the aggressive assault of the state on the Tikhonian Church, including through the organisation of a trial against the patriarch in order to promote the schism in the Russian Church (Beglov 2008, 34-35).

The first Cheka departments in Ukraine began their activity in the period of Summer-Autumn of 1918 in country's eastern governorates and were subordinated directly to Moscow (Podkur 2000, 19). The All-Ukrainian Extraordinary Committee, or VUCheka, was formed in November 1918 in the city of Kursk, where the Ukrainian Revolutionary Committee was stationed at that moment. Nevertheless, at this stage the main tasks of VUCheka were to collect intelligence information regarding the White movement in Ukraine and to recruit personnel. The VUCheka began more diverse activities after the occupation of the city of Kharkiv by the Red Army in January. The VUCheka had a similar institutional structure and prerogatives to those of the Cheka, and it operated based on the directives of the RSFSR's secret police (ASBUOO, 13-545, pp. 252-254). The existence of VUCheka was officialised through the decree of the Provisional Workers' and Peasants' Government of Ukraine issued in December 1918. According to this act, VUCheka was subordinated to the Government of Soviet Ukraine, but in fact it was controlled by secret police officers sent from Moscow (Podkur 2000, 19-20). During the summer of 1919 the Bolsheviks lost control over Ukraine because of a steady offensive by the White Armies. As a consequence, Soviet institutions in Ukraine were evacuated or ceased their existence. On 13th August 1919 based on the decision of a joint session of Orgburo and the Politburo in Moscow, VUCheka ceased its activity. The officers of VUCheka were sent to fronts or were recruited to other Cheka units (Podkur 2000, 22). As a result of the following military successes of the Red Army, the Bolsheviks gradually regained control in Ukraine, and local Departments of secret police were re-established. In December 1919 the Ukrainian Revolutionary Committee established the Administration of Extraordinary Committees and of Special Departments, which supervised the activity of local secret police Departments in Ukraine (Podkur 2000, 23). At the beginning of 1920 a reform of secret police

replaced the county Departments of secret police with Politburos that were divested of extrajudicial prerogatives. Additionally, governorate Departments could mete out capital sentences only with the authorisation of the Central Administration (Podkur 2000, 24). The situation in Ukraine was still very difficult for the Soviet authorities that encountered a strong resistance, and Moscow's decision from 17 January 1920 to eliminate the death penalty was not applied in Ukraine (Podkur 2000, 28).

On 23rd of February 1922, the Politburo of CC of CP(b) R decided to abolish the Cheka and to replace it with the GPU, or the State Political Directorate, (*Gosudarstvennoe politicheskoe upravlenie*) which had a similar structure and prerogatives (Jakovlev 2003, 24-25). This change was advocated by a part of the Bolshevik leaders who wanted to limit the powers of the Soviet civil and political police. Unlike the Cheka, the GPU was subordinated to the NKVD which was formally accountable to the governments of the Soviet Republics, and the extrajudicial prerogatives of civil and political police were abolished. Nevertheless, the political police was technically subordinated to the Politburo, and Felix Dzerzhinsky, the chief and the founder of the Cheka, continued to head the NKVD. On 9 March 1922, just a few weeks after the elimination of extrajudicial prerogatives of the police, the Politburo authorised the GPU not to pass the cases of counterrevolution through the Civil Courts but to send them to a special commission within the NKVD which was authorised to conduct administrative sentencing of up to three years of exile, or to send the cases to the Central Executive Committee for harsher penalties. Additionally, the legal framework imposed on the activity of the police in 1922 was frequently ignored by officers. Although the police had its extrajudicial powers partially restored, it did not enjoy the same freedom to conduct its struggle against real or perceived enemies as during the Civil War. Likewise, during the NEP the number of GPU staff dwindled and its budget was squeezed. For example, the presence of the political police outside the cities was frequently limited to the visits of GPU plenipotentiaries during counterinsurgency operations or when cracking down on rebellions (Hagenloh 2009, 32-33; 35; 40).

The authorities of Soviet Ukraine promoted a set of reforms similar to those adopted in Moscow. On 10th March 1922, Ukraine's Government ordered the abolition of VUCheka and the establishment of GPU as part of republic's NKVD. V. Mantsev, the chief of the secret police, was appointed the head of Soviet Ukraine's NKVD. Following these changes, all cases of crimes against Soviet order (*sovetskij stroj*), referring to violations of the republic's laws, or speculation had to be passed exclusively through revolutionary courts or people's courts (Podkur 2000, 31). Consequently, repressive mechanisms took a more "lawful" form, but the

new criminal code contained a stipulation stating that anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda, participation in counterrevolutionary organisations or providing support to them was punishable with death or, alternatively, with years in prison or in exile. Lenin considered that this article of the Criminal Code included not only a "narrow" juridical understanding of crime, but created a basis for counteracting "political crimes" as well (Podkur 2000, 32). As Paul Hagenloh observes, frequently the sentences meted out by Soviet courts were no less harsh than those by the secret police. Nevertheless, Soviet officials were worried by the potential for the chaotic repressive mechanisms developed during the Civil War to undermine the relations between the regime and citizens (Hagenloh 2009, 31-32). Following the lifting of restrictions imposed on the GPU in RSFSR, the situation of the secret police of Soviet Ukraine was changing toward a steady increase in powers and prerogatives (Podkur 2000, 33).

In November 1923, following the formation of the USSR, the Soviet political police underwent a number of structural modifications. The political police and civil police (*Militsia*) were separated, and the NKVD became a separate entity. The OGPU, or the Unionwide Unified State Political Administration, was created but the NKVDs of the republics were preserved. The OGPU had the same structure and functions as GPU (Hagenloh 2009, 33-34). Roman Podkur points out that in this period, in the case of Ukrainian SSR the head of GPU, who became a member of the government, refused to present documents or reports relating to police activity to the Council of Commissars, which attests to an increase in the independence of the republic's political police (2000, 34).

The implementation of secret police operations in the provinces was conducted by local GPU departments attached to party committees of governorates, or by special departments (*osobye otdely*) attached to military districts, railways and maritime facilities (Kyrydon 2014, 231). The 5th Department of GPU of Soviet Ukraine, which was responsible with the operations against religious groups and leaders, had representatives at the local level (*Pomoshhnik upolnomochennogo po duhovenstvu i sektantstvu IV-i gruppy sekretno-operativnoj chasti gubotdela GPU*) (Babenko 2014, 263). The secret police was responsible for performing a number of tasks relating to antireligious policy, including collecting and processing information referring to religious groups or leaders, controlling the implementation of orders and laws by religious actors, conducting the surveillance of religious groups, regulating the processes (the cadre policy included) inside religious organisations, and implementing particular policies such as that of creating a schism inside the Orthodox Church (Kyrydon 2014, 232).

The northern part of Odesa governorate, where the Moldavian ASSR was created in 1924, was conquered by the Reds in 1920 (DAOO, Fond P-12233-1-2, p. 1), and Cheka agencies were established at the county level soon after the conquest. Additionally, a special Cheka Department was attached to the border with Romania and had its headquarters in Tiraspol (ASBUOO, 27146, p. 277-279). In 1923, Balta Okrug was created and included territories of the former Balta and Ananiev counties (DAOO, P-12233-1-22, p. 11). Following the administrative reform, local police structures were reorganised as well, the main change being the establishment of the Balta Okrug Border Department of OGPU (ASBUOO, 5247, pp. 10). The creation of the Moldavian ASSR on 12th October 1924 (Voronovici 2016, 182) was followed by the establishment of a series of institutions characteristic of all Soviet units of their type. As attested by archival documents, at the beginning of 1925 the institution of the GPU Plenipotentiary attached to the Government of MASSR already existed. Apart from the GPU Plenipotentiary, in MASSR there also existed a railway police Department in Birzula and a Border GPU Military Detachment (AOSPRM, 49-1-74, p. 16) responsible for securing the western frontier. In this first stage, the GPU of the MASSR was in the process of recruiting essential personnel and organising its activity. In February 1925, the GPU of the MASSR sent a circular to the heads of all institutions from the republic, in which it required information about all their employees who had past service in the Cheka. The name of the chief of the GPU of MASSR in February 1925 was Kornev (AOSPRM, 49-1-176, p. 1), and in 1923 the head of the Balta Okrug Border Department of OGPU was an officer under the same name, (ASBUOO, file no. 5247, pp. 15) which attests to continuity of personnel between these two agencies.

Conclusions

The conquest by the Reds of the south-western territories of Ukraine in 1920 was followed by the imposition of the Bolshevik control. Before the regionalisation of these territories, the relations between Soviet officials and religious communities were marked by the weak control of Moscow, Kharkiv, and the provincial centres over the local elites ruling the counties. Local officials identified religious enemies and constructed their images by projecting onto the allegedly hostile religious groups their concerns regarding the survival of the regime in their counties. The scarcity of the resources and weak control of the local officials in their counties and *volost* resulted in indiscriminate and unregulated violence against individuals and groups perceived as hostile to Soviet regime. The consolidation of bureaucratic hierarchies through the regionalisation process of 1923 led to a better regulated and overall less violent approach to religious communities. The antireligious polices were more top-down oriented and the

accusations against religious communities involved a more complex set of concerns than those of the local officials before 1923, such as the securing of the state border and the elimination of allegedly harmful elements from border areas. Regionalisation was followed by the consolidation and organisation of the state agencies specialised in policing religious communities.

The transformation of the liquidation apparatus into a full-fledged policing institution encapsulates the evolution of Soviet policy towards religions. The shifts in the Soviet policy from experimentation with religious sectarians towards a more restrictive attitude towards these groups and religions in general was reflected in the decrease of the influence of liquidation apparatus. This decrease was the result of the interplay of the Antireligious Commissions, Liquidation Commissions and the secret police in antireligious policy, and of the growing influence of the latter. These were the main agencies responsible for the elimination of religions, each of them playing a specific role. The Antireligious Commissions supervised and coordinated the activity of all agencies dealing with religions and were the agency where the representatives of different state and party institutions were represented and promoted contrasting agendas and different approaches to antireligious policy. The secret police and liquidation officials were directed by Antireligious Commissions in their struggle against religions. The administrative sphere of the secret police included religious communities that conducted their activity illegally. It was against these that officers implemented repressive operations. The Liquidation Commissions dealt with legalised religious communities and collected information relevant for Soviet policymakers. The decrease of the influence of liquidation apparatus was partially the product of the increasing tendency of the regime to deal with religions in a violent manner. The formation of this hostile attitude towards religions was partially the result of the distorted representations of religious communities in the reports compiled by liquidation officials and of the failure of the mechanisms of control exercised by the liquidation apparatus. In the next chapter, I examine the mechanisms of control and of examination of religious movements used by the Liquidation Commissions and I will analyse the main causes of their failure. In the following chapters, I demonstrate that the regime's anthropocentric perspective on the role of non-human social actors and its Marxist understanding of the social, contributed to the failure of these techniques.

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Chapter 4: Making Religious Landscapes Legible: Liquidation Commissions and Religious Communities

In his study on Orthodox underground in USSR, Aleksei Beglov shows how in its struggle against religions, the Soviet regime attempted to control and eliminate Orthodox communities by defining and then squeezing "the boundaries" of the legal framework within which they were allowed to practice their religious life. Monasticism was one of the first Orthodox religious traditions excluded from the Soviet sphere of legality. As a result of the closure of Russian monastic establishments, numerous underground monasteries were established by evicted monks and nuns, who from then on practiced their religion secretly. Starting from 1929, new legislative restrictions were imposed on lay parishioners forcing them to practice their faith clandestinely as many Orthodox monastic communities had already been doing for almost a decade (Beglov 2004, 41-42; 86; 99-100). This chapter examines many other boundaries designed by Soviet regime in the 1920s to curtail religious lives of believers and confine them with ever decreasing boundaries. Among the boundaries imposed by the regime were the rigid legislative definition of the parish as the only legal *locus* of collective worshiping, the administrative borders which infringed on those of the congregations, and the Marxist notions of class based on which the regime attempted to reassemble the religious communities and redefine their boundaries. As Gregory Freeze demonstrates, after understanding that the early Soviet campaigns against Orthodoxy (repressive policies against the clergy, the opening of the coffins of Orthodox saints, and the seizure of the Church valuables) had not led to the desired results, starting from 1923, the regime took a new approach in its antireligious struggle, an approach based on propaganda. This new approach to religions was an analogue of the New Economic Policy. The regime understood that violent assault against the Church had not brought the expected results, and the new antireligious policy based on propaganda campaigns was regarded as necessary for making peace with the peasantry. By 1929, witnessing a religious revival (see chapter 2) and the failure of propaganda to achieve its goals, the regime realised that lay believers are the Church, and the assaults directed solely against the clergy would not bring the desired results. From 1929, the regime began to list among its enemies the lay religious activists (Freeze 2012 A, 88; 92; 96-98; 103-104). Nevertheless, throughout the 1920s the regime showed a clear preoccupation with the religious revival occurring contrary to its expectations, and collected data in order to identify its sources. Additionally, the growing religiosity among the social groups perceived as socially close to the regime, such as poor and middle peasants, was scrutinised through different official inquiries (Freeze 2012 A, 100). The

objective of this chapter is to examine the techniques used in 1920s by the regime to examine and control the Orthodox parishes and other religious communities.

The Liquidation Commissions were the primary institution through which the Soviet regime interacted with religious communities in the 1920s. These agencies were responsible for eliminating religions using legal methods. In this chapter, I will examine the activity and functions of the Liquidation Commissions and their interaction with religious groups by drawing on James C. Scott's work (1998) on the policies of the modern state aimed at making the governed populations legible, and by drawing on insights from Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) (Latour 2005). The ANT repertoire has a central importance for this thesis and will be applied to track the role of the bureaucratic artefacts and their relationalities in the confrontation between Soviet atheism and religious communities. In this chapter, I will employ the classical ANT understanding of the social in order to explain the failure of the policing techniques used by the liquidation apparatus. James C. Scott's theories will be applied to track the lineages of the Soviet high modernism in the policies implemented by the liquidation officers, and to explain the pattern of the mechanism of simplification employed by these officials in order to produce schematised depictions of the realities encountered by them on the ground. These simplified depictions were meant to facilitate the task of the policymakers examining them, but nevertheless, as we will see in the following sections and chapters, they had opposite results. The classical Marxist understanding of the social and the simplified depiction of religious communities by Liquidation Commissions were the main causes of the failure of the mechanisms of control and examination used by these state institutions. This chapter will show how between 1918 and 1929 the techniques used by the Soviet regime to control and examine the religious landscape operated and how they failed to function as expected. The procedure for signing of agreements for the right to use religious buildings and the registration of religious organisations were implemented by the Liquidation Commissions and they became a major tool in controlling, classifying and repressing religious groups.

The Registration of the Clergy, Preachers, and Religious Communities

As James C. Scott observes, the modern state is "several steps removed from" governed populations and is overwhelmed by the complexity of their everyday practices and customs. In order to be able to exercise control and extract resources, states have to make legible the populations they administer by producing cadastral surveys, censuses, various statistical reports, lists of tax payers, maps, etc. These techniques were central to the implementation of well-intended policies as well as to less benevolent ones such as the rounding up and

extermination of undesirables. They had as one of their main characteristics the simplified and schematised depiction of the complex processes and practices on the ground. A common feature of such documents are their abstractions of the realities on the ground. Frequently, however, states make their abstractions real by treating their subjects based on them. In order to make the administration more efficient, modern states, and especially authoritarian ones, tended to homogenise the populations and to make them fit the categories they operated with (Scott 1998, 76-83).

The Liquidation Commissions were created with the purpose of making the religious landscape legible. The tsarist regime had prepared the ground for the accomplishment of this task from the time of the reforms of Peter the Great which had laid the basis of church-state relations in the Russian Empire. Peter I abolished the institution of the Patriarchate in 1721, taking the Orthodox Church under his direct control (Marsh 2011, 51) and involving the Orthodox clergy in a number of administrative processes (Werth 2012, 43-44). The territorial organization of the Russian Orthodox Church and of other officially recognised religious institutions were based on the principle of official administrative territorial divisions. The Bolsheviks inherited the pre-revolutionary administrative-territorial units, and the overlapping of the borders of local state and ecclesiastic jurisdictions facilitated the implementation of antireligious policies by provincial authorities. During the administrative-territorial reforms, religious institutions were required to change their territorial units as well. For example, in 1925 when the governorates and counties were replaced by regions and okrugs, Evangelicals from Ukraine reorganised their territorial-ecclesiastic units accordingly (TSDAVOV, 5-2-2180, p. 7). Following the creation of MASSR, the Moldavian Union of Evangelicals was formed in line with the newly organised republic (TsDAVOV, 5-3-1068, 48). Before 1917, all officially recognised religious institutions had centralised hierarchies and kept official records on their activity. These last two features of the ecclesiastic bureaucratic practices and organisation provided the Bolsheviks with important knowledge and leverage to manipulate religious communities and their clergy. Gregory Freeze observes that the power vacuum created by the February Revolution facilitated an increasingly assertive role of Orthodox lay believers in the lives of their parishes and in Church administration. The parochialization of the power in the Church resulted in a significant decrease in the influence of Church hierarchies, whilst the subsequent legislative measures undertaken by the Bolsheviks after they seized power led to the destruction of the Church administration and eliminated the means through which bishops could govern the church (Freeze 2015, 9). Nevertheless, the state-sponsored Renovationist expansion from the early 1920s was accomplished through the

formation of eparchial administrations which expanded their authority over parishes (Freeze 2015, 11-12). Additionally, even in the case of the Tikhonian Church, the authorities attempted to use the hierarchy (patriarch Tikhon) to promote such reforms as the introduction of the new calendar (Freeze 1995, 327).

Similar to their tsarist forbearers, Soviet bureaucrats from the Liquidation Commissions diligently collected information regarding the membership of religious communities. Before 1917, evidence of membership of Orthodox parishes and of other recognised religious communities was kept by priests (Werth 2014, 102) and was utilised for preserving the dominance of the Orthodox Church. The intentions of the Soviet regime were the opposite but it needed the same information in order to evaluate the results of its antireligious policies and to identify the religious actors who, from its perspective, undermined its control and authority. Every month, provincial Liquidation Commissions had to compile and send to Kharkiv statistical reports regarding their activity, and the religious communities and buildings within their jurisdiction. According to an order sent from Kharkiv to provincial Liquidation Commissions in October 1922, a month after their subordination to the NKVD, their monthly reports had to include the number of all churches, monasteries, and prayer houses from their provinces, the number of sacred buildings used by believers based on an agreement signed with the authorities, the number of religious buildings used without an agreement and explanations for why these communities are not registered, the number of closed and still functioning sacred buildings from state institutions and enterprises, the number of closed monasteries by volost', county, and guberniia, and how these buildings were used, the number of evicted monks and nuns, information about the confrontation between competing ecclesiastic organisations, statistical information on the spread of sectarianism by denomination, and the successes registered during the campaign of opening the coffins of Orthodox saints, statistical and scientific information relevant to this campaign (TsDAVOV, 5-2-1085, 55). The early reports compiled by liquidation officials focused primarily on the number and status of religious buildings, because their main task was to conduct the registration of religious communities by leveraging sacred buildings. By 1922, the Liquidation Department had created files containing the list of sacred buildings for each province (TsDAVOV, 5-1-1086). Additionally, the reports included data on the spread of sectarian religious movements whose members avoided registration. Likewise, the reports contained information about other antireligious policies implemented by Liquidation Commissions, such as the campaign of opening the coffins of the Orthodox saints. In the period 1922-1924, the officials managed to register the majority of religious communities and thus were able to compile more elaborate reports which were richer

in data. As part of the registration procedure, the Liquidation Commissions created a number of documents for each parish. In order to be allowed to practice their religions, every parish had to compile a list of parishioners, which contained the following data on each believer: name, gender, age, nationality, if s/he was a member of the council of founders (*pjatidesjatka*) of his/her community, education, class, occupation, and a separate field for additional notes (TsDAVOV, 5-2-960, 1; 119). The content of the lists could vary slightly from one period to another and from one community to another. For example, some lists produced in the middle of the decade could include a field for data on the military service of believers before and after 1917 (TsDAVOV, 5-2-959, 261) or their attitude regarding the military draft (TsDAVOV, 5-2-959, 2). Some lists, such as the one of an Orthodox community from Podolia, contains additional data on the property held by each believer (TsDAVOV, 5-2-960, 1).

Despite all the possible variations, the data on class belonging was considered the most important. Likewise, the fields for data on age, education, occupation and nationality were always present in all the lists. The lists were filled by religious believers themselves, with the officials from the local Soviets responsible for ensuring that the registered information was accurate, especially regarding the class belonging of each parishioner (TsDAVOV, 5-2-975, 4). A separate list was compiled on the membership of the *pjatidesjatka*. These lists had a similar content except that in most cases they included the address of each member (TsDAVOV, 5-2-959, 1; 40).

The lists, once completed, were sent to the okrug liquidation officials who processed them and compiled detailed reports containing several types of documents on religious communities which included. These reports were named dislocation summary (in Russian - *dislokacionnaja svodka*). These documents were compiled and sent to the Liquidation Department in Kharkiv every four months along with copies of each list of parishioners. The summary usually begins with a short report on the evolution of the general number of religious communities and their membership. The content of these reports varied from one provincial liquidation commission to another. For example, the report of liquidation officials from Vinnytsia for 1925 includes the number of registered and unregistered communities, the number of parishes by denomination and their affiliation to ecclesiastic authority, the number of sacred buildings by denomination, the number of believers by gender and literacy, the number of clergy and preachers by confession, the number of monasteries, and the number of sacred buildings under construction (TsDAVOV, 5-2-976, 2). A 1925 summary for Artemivsk Okrug includes just the number of the clergy, sectarian preachers, and the number of registered communities, but includes more data on the class belonging of believers and members of

pjatidesjatki. The report also displays information on the proportion of registered believers in total population of the okrug (TsDAVOV, 5-2-968, 1a). The report from the first page of dislocation summary contains data regarded by the issuers as the most relevant for their okrug whereas the information from the tables that follows was much less diverse. The first table depicts a list of religious communities listed by district, the settlements where the communities were registered, the name of the parishes, the date of registration and/or registration number, the name of the sacred buildings used by each parish, the number of believers by gender and literacy, and the name of the clerics serving in the parish. For some lists, the name of the priest might be mentioned only in the separate list that presents the data on religious buildings. This last type of lists enclosed to dislocation summary presents data on sacred buildings and contains the name of the settlement where the building is located, the name of the church, synagogue or prayer house, the denomination and ecclesiastic affiliation, the date of registration of the statute of the religious community and of the agreement for the right of use of the building, information on the membership of the parish such as age, gender and nationality, and the number of clerics serving the community. Some lists contain only the name of the settlement, the name of the church, the confession professed by the community and the number of its members (TsDAVOV, 5-2-976, 1-4; 5-2-968, 1-15). The dislocation summaries began to be compiled from 1925 and this fact supports the observation of Gregory Freeze that in this year, the authorities of Soviet Ukraine commenced the collection of data about religious communities in order to assess the proportion and the sources of the religious revival (Freeze 2012 A, 98). Such actions of lay parishioners as the reappointment of the priests whom they evicted a few years earlier (Freeze 2015, 13), or their strife to remain part of the Tikhonian Church produced official perceptions about an alleged counterrevolutionary character of parish councils (Freeze 1995, 332). The documents produced by Liquidation Commissions in the earlier period reveal that their officers perceived the parishes as a potential class enemy or as a milieu dominated by ecclesiastic and lay anti-Soviet elements. A document from October 1922 mentions that in order to purge the parishes and facilitate the Renovationist take over, the Liquidation Commissions had to conduct the "annulment of the agreements with black-hundred [parishioners] through administrative procedure and sign the agreements with the believers that were trusted by the Soviet power" (TsDAVOV, 5-2-1084, p. 125). The report for the second half of 1923 of the Department for Separation of the Church from the State of the NKVD of Ukrainian SSR states that among the objectives of the registration of religious communities was the examination of "the internal physiognomy [*vnutrennij oblik*] and to produce evidence of church forces [*uchjot cerkovnyh sil*]" (TSDAVOV, 5-2-194, p. 7). The

refusal to register was itself a major sign of the "anti-Soviet character" of a religious group. According to the abovementioned report, the communities which refused to register were identified by the civil police. These documents reveal that the objectives of the procedures implemented by Liquidation Commissions were to assess the class composition of religious communities, to identify and eliminate the lay anti-Soviet elements from among them, and to create socially-close congregations as a precondition for the successful elimination of religions.

The registration of believers as part of parishes and dioceses with well-defined geographic borders was not a Soviet innovation. The tsarist *Polizeistaat* pursued the objective of identifying and mobilising more efficiently the available resources by compensating for the lack of a suitable bureaucratic apparatus by involving the clergy in the administrative processes. In order to expand and consolidate the Church organisational network through which the state could reach its subjects from the most remote corners of the empire, the believers were listed in parish registers (Werth 2014, 39-40). Nevertheless, the intentions of the tsarist and Soviet officials were different. Tsarist officials implemented the registration of parishioners as a means of strengthening legal religious organisations, and for curtailing the activity of religious sectarians who undermined the authority of ecclesiastic hierarchies. Soviet officials imposed the registration in order to collect data on religious communities and to destroy ecclesiastic hierarchies and organisations. The intent of the Soviet regime was to interact with the congregations of lay believers directly through its local executive councils (city and village soviets), liquidation officers, and other officials, bypassing the clergy. In both cases the imposition of the state administrative borders on the religious landscape entailed the formation of a hostile attitude towards sectarian religious communities who were geographically mobile and whose hierarchies were based on charismatic leadership.

The following section will examine the techniques through which the liquidation officials managed to constrain religious communities to fill in the lists of registration, and to provide information about their congregations. The Liquidation Commissions managed to instrumentalise the religious buildings and to use them as a lever of control on religious believers.

Leveraging Religious Buildings

Unlike the tsarist regime, Soviet officials that were part of the liquidation apparatus could not rely on the clergy to collect relevant information about religious believers because one of Soviet regime's objectives was to undermine the authority of religious leadership. Instead, the Liquidation Commissions leveraged religious buildings in order to compel religious

communities to provide required data. According to an instruction issued by the authorities of Soviet Ukraine in October 1922, local institutions involved in the implementation of the Decree had to collect data and compile monthly reports on the number of closed, functioning, registered and unregistered religious buildings (TSDAVOV, 5-1-1085, p. 55). As Catriona Kelly observes, on 3rd August 1922, a circular of the NKVD and of Ministry of Justice of RSFSR stressed that all religious communities should be registered, and numerous forms and documents had to be filled in and submitted as part of the registration process (Kelly 2016, 53). In what follows, I will examine these mechanisms of control employed by the liquidation apparatus and explore their implications for the relations between religious communities and Soviet regime.

On November 14th 1922, a special Commission responsible for examining the project of registration functioned under the supervision of the Antireligious Commission of the Central Committee of the RCP(b). Among its members were Krasikov, and Menzhinsky as a representative of the secret police, which reveals the interest of the political police in the process of registrations (Stenograph No. 5 of Antireligious Commission). An instruction issued by the Ministry of Justice on 27th April 1923 underlined the mandatory character of the registration and stressed the unlawful character of the unofficial exploitation of religious buildings and of unregistered religious activities (Instruction on Registration of Religious Communities, 27th April 1923).

Antireligious policies concerned sacred buildings not only because they were the main avenues for practicing religion collectively but also because they were symbols of a traditional way of life. Sacred buildings were immobile assets of major importance for the congregations that could not be moved or hidden and therefore were more easily regulated by secular power than other aspects of material religion. In order to be able to use their churches or prayer houses as well as the religious items they contained, believers had to register their communities, to recognize formally through official agreements the stipulations of the Decree, and consequently to accept the legitimacy of Soviet law and the authority of the state to penalise them in case of any irregularity. From this perspective, the signing of agreements, which stipulated the rights and obligations of religious believers, enforced what Aleksei Beglov calls the "boundary of legality" in the control and repression of religions (Beglov 2004, 41-42). Sacred spaces were crucial for the implementation of these policies, as they served as a means of both requiring believers to engage in all forms of registration and facilitating their subjection to surveillance by the regime. As archival documents reveal, tolerating and officialising the

functioning of some religious buildings was instrumentalised by the regime as a means of controlling religious communities (TSDAVOV, 5-2-194, p. 7).

Religious buildings were used not only for constraining believers to participate to different forms of registration. The liquidation officials used sacred buildings in order to keep under control the number of religious believers actively involved in religious life of their communities, to avoid manifestations of discontent when antireligious restrictions were imposed, and to promote the schism among parishioners.

The first way in which Liquidation Commissions leveraged religious buildings to promote the schism in Russian Orthodoxy was to threaten the parishioners with the annulment of the agreements for the use of sacred buildings in cases where they refused to join the Renovationist Church. Such measures were ordered in 1922, together with repressive actions against the members of the church councils which opposed the Renovationists (Freeze 1995, 308). Another important technique through which liquidation officials leveraged religious buildings was to provide the right to use the same church to two or more competing religious groups, who performed the religious service successively. This policy caused tensions among the believers whilst Soviet officials ensured that they could not be blamed for it. Usually, when the confrontations over the right to use a religious building emerged, the authorities delegated to believers the tasks of collecting the signatures from the members of each group in support of their priests and of counting the votes for the registration of a new community. In this way, the believers could not claim that the splinter group that emerged was supported by state officials. Each group elected three representatives who collected the signatures and compiled the documents needed for the applications for registration of competing religious communities, and each group had to have a priest subordinated to different ecclesiastic authorities (TsDAVOV, 5-1-1085, 31). The consecutive religious services performed by two or more priests consolidated each of the religious organisations represented by them in the parish and instilled competition between the groups of ecclesiastic hierarchies and lay believers. The confrontations caused by these disputes were aptly exploited by propaganda. For example, an article published in September 1926 in “Plugarul Ros” presents as “wrinkled rottenness” the elderly believers from the village of Topala, Alekseevsk district, who were involved in disputes caused by the appointment of a new priest by the bishop to replace the cleric who served in their church (Plugarul Ros, 1926, no. 118, p. 2). Despite the policy to promote schism among religious organisations, there were instances when the registration of new religious communities was denied. According to a 1926 report, registration requests could be rejected when there were too many religious communities of the same denomination in the same

settlement, even when affiliated to different ecclesiastic organisation. Additionally, the registration could be denied when the number of the petitioners was too small for creating a religious community or when they requested the right to use a sacred building of an already registered community whose members could manifest discontent or revolt (TsDAVOV, 5-2-2255, p. 3)

Starting from August 1918, the Soviet authorities required that religious communities undertake repair works of sacred buildings (Young 1997, 59). A special commission composed of technicians and liquidation officials inspected the technical state of the sacred buildings and compiled plans for renovation works to be carried out by congregations (TsDAVOV, 5-2-2166, 1-10). If believers did not fulfil these obligations, they could be divested of their religious buildings. The procedure of closing a religious building commenced with an inspection by the local liquidation inspector who registered the identified irregularity and compiled an act of inspection which was sent to Ukraine's NKVD. After the inspector received the authorisation from Kharkiv, s/he compiled an inventory of all items from the building, sealed it, and declared it closed (TsDAVOV, 5-3-268, 19-20). The mandatory renovation of the buildings served several purposes. Firstly, it ensured the technical preservation of sacred buildings which were needed for the successful implementation of the liquidation policy. A 1923 report of the Liquidation Department mentions that the closure of parish churches was counterproductive because it discouraged the believers from registering and created favourable conditions for the spread of sectarianism. According to the same report, liquidation officers undertook measures to ensure that parish churches were not closed (TSDAVOV, 5-2-194, p. 7-8). The awareness of liquidation officials regarding the importance of the preservation of sacred buildings for the well-functioning of the registration system is revealed by the tensions that occurred between local officials and liquidation officers regarding the status of these buildings.

The liquidation apparatus lacked a state fund commission (*gosfondovaja komissija*), (TsDAVOV, 5-3-268, 1), which meant that after the closure of a church all building materials and valuables that could be extracted from it entered the property of local Soviets. This particularity of the institutional structure transformed the closure of a sacred building into a profitable endeavour for local Soviets. There were instances when religious believers sent petitions to Kharkiv for the preservation of churches endangered by such decisions taken by local Soviet officials (TsDAVOV, 5-3-266, 89).

A second function of the inspections on the technical state of the buildings was, if necessary, to create pretexts for closing religious buildings. According to Party instructions, ideally the believers should have closed their parish churches voluntarily for various reasons,

one of which could be the hight costs of repairs (Freeze 2012 B, 38). Last, but not least, the mandatory renovation of the buildings helped liquidation officers to assess the devotion of a religious community to their church and traditional religious values. The chairs of the congregations had the right to collect voluntary donations for renovation works only from the believers officially registered as members of their parishes (TsDAVOV, 5-3-268, 18). If believers manifested a lack of will to donate enough for the completion of the required renovation works, then liquidation officials could impose bolder restrictions on their religious life without the risk of causing significant discontent among the believers. In cases when liquidation officials considered that believers simply did not have enough money, they could take actions in order to facilitate the release of state funding for the renovation of the buildings. For example, in 1926 the liquidation officials from Odesa decided to provide financial support, if needed, to the religious communities which according to the lists of parishioners were formed mainly of workers. According to the same document, the religious community of the Orthodox Greeks from Odesa could not receive such support because most of its members were traders (TsDAVOV, 5-2-2166, 10).

Despite major efforts by liquidation officials to instrumentalise religious buildings, significant segments of Russia's religious groups were beyond the reach of administration. For example, a report of the Liquidation Department of Soviet Ukraine from 1923 complains about the mobility of religious sectarians who do not have permanent prayer houses, which therefore created difficulties in collecting data regarding them (TsDAVOV, 5-2-194, pp. 7). The complexity of the relations between sectarians and revolution and the existence of a multitude of contrasting opinions on this subject necessitated "research" to be carried out on various movements within the religious landscape in order to identify those sectarians who could engage in the active construction of a Socialist society. The same campaign could be equally useful in identifying the regime's enemies who, from a Bolshevik perspective, could attempt to use the veil of religion in order to conceal their counterrevolutionary activity. The Party Plenum from July 1921 decided to launch a process of general analysis of the social, ideological, and economic features of sectarian movements and to identify "communist sectarians" (The Resolution of the Party Plenum, 26th July 1921). Nevertheless, from mid 1920s religious sectarians were again regarded as a threat by the state (Coleman 2005, 205-209). After this shift in Party's policy, as well, a thorough analysis on religious groups deemed sectarian was required. The Liquidation Commissions were among the main institutions responsible for this task.

In June 1926, a circular of All-Ukrainian Antireligious Commission informed its local representatives that the main obstacles to anti-sectarian policies are caused by the geographic dispersion of sectarians and by their lack of a centralised organisational structures. The circular instructed local antireligious officials that the solution to these problems was to register sectarian communes in order to gather the data needed to analyse the nature of these religious movements, and to encourage the creation of provincial religious associations once religious leadership would be brought under the control of the authorities (AOSPRM, 49-1-337, p. 12). In other words, in order to control the non-Orthodox communities with the same techniques the regime already used against the Orthodox Church, the Liquidation Commissions and other local authorities had to encourage the formation among these religious groups of ecclesiastical hierarchies similar to those of the Orthodox Church. Soviet authorities encouraged the formation of sectarian provincial, all-Ukrainian and national unions and organisations with significant success in the case of Protestants, who eagerly created these types of organisations (Sitarchuk, 2021, 15). The Bolshevik strategy of destroying religious organisations was to seize their properties in order to eliminate their economic independence and to split them from within by using religious leaders thoroughly controlled by the secret police. This strategy was developed during the campaigns against the Orthodox Church and was used for eliminating other religious groups, including the Roman Catholic Church and the Old Believer Church (Coleman 2005, 196-197).

Both central and local religious institutions were important means through which Liquidation Commissions could control, supervise and examine religious groups. Nevertheless, some religious groups and especially autochthonous sects avoided the creation of these organisations. Religious buildings were another important lever which could be used by liquidation officers to control Orthodox communities but not for sectarians. In order to deal with sectarian communities, liquidation officials devised a set of special policing procedures.

Territoriality and Mobility of Religious Actors

Frequently, Bolshevik authorities constructed the image of the regime's enemies and their understanding of the governed populations in relation to territoriality. In 1924, based on data collected during the registration of religious communities, the Department for the Separation of the Church from the State of the NKVD of Ukraine was working on a map of the religious landscape (TSDAVOV 5-2-196, p. 203). This fact reveals a concern of the Soviet authorities with territoriality in relation to perceived religious enmity. This is not surprising because in the same period the Soviet secret police applied the so-called system of "Minus Six", which was

the banishment of undesirables from the six most important Soviet cities, which later expanded to an additional number of cities. This repressive policy had its roots in the practices of the Civil War (Hagenloh 2009, 41) and aimed to secure a number of prioritised regions of the country free from real or perceived anti-Soviet elements.

The most sophisticated technique of policing implemented by the Liquidation Commissions in relation to territoriality and the mobility of religious actors was the so-called system of cards of registration (*Sistema kartochnogo ucheta*). The implementation of this system in Odesa region was in progress in the summer of 1924 (Balta okrug was part of Odesa region). According to a directive, the objective of these registrations was to gather information regarding every religious leader, his or her political and religious orientation and about his or her background. Likewise, it was designed to track the mobility of religious leaders and to prevent their gathering and fomenting anti-Soviet agitation, including those of so-called "vagrant clerics". For every member of the clergy a registration card was created by the executive authorities of the district in which he or she lived, and a copy of it was kept in the okrug centre. Additionally, each of them had a special evidence card for themselves in which notes were made by the executive council of each district of the territory where the representatives of the clergy conducted their religious activity. The cards were circulated between local administrations in cases when members of clergy changed their place of residence thus keeping the authorities well informed about the religious leaders who were living in their territory (TsDAVOV, 5-2-199, pp. 66-70). Religious leaders were allowed to conduct their activities only in the districts in which they were registered (Sitarchuk 2021, 6). The forms for the registration cards contained fields to be filled in with the name of religious leader, year of birth, the date of appointment to current position, occupation before ordination, education, past services in other religious communities, language used in religious services, ecclesiastical authority to which he or she is affiliated, monthly earnings and the payments received from the community, other professions (if practiced), ownership of land and properties. The second page of the form had a field for notes about registrations or departures from the district. The last field in the form was for notes about renunciations of the clerical state (TsDAVOV, 5-2-816, pp. 3-4).

The registration of the clergy was part of the process of the creation of a registry of the religious groups and sectarians (*Reyestr Relihijnyx cerkovnyx ta sektantskix Hromad Ukrayiny)*, which was planned to be completed and ready for use in Ukraine in 1925-26 (TSDAVOV, 5-2-666, p. 48). The registry contained data on religious leaders and also information on each congregation and even on each religious miracle tackled by the authorities.

This model of surveillance was designed to replace the system of lists of dislocation described earlier, (*Dislokatsionn"ye Spysky*) which proved inefficient (TSDAVOV, 5-2-816, pp. 18-22). The lists of dislocation proved especially ineffective regarding the movement of the clergy because they had to be permanently updated. The cards, which were circulated between district executive councils were more efficient in keeping them informed about clerics who conducted their religious activity in their district. Additionally, copies of these cards served as identification documents which helped the officials to combat the unauthorised religious activities. One of the central objectives of the registry was to serve as a tool for making legible and controlling sectarian religious communities that lacked permanent religious buildings, were geographically mobile, and eluded the formal registration of their activities. As the religious buildings served as leverage of control on religious denominations that had well-developed hierarchies, the wandering preachers who were perceived as the main source of the spread of secretive forms of sectarianism had to be thoroughly policed through the system of cards of registration. These measures curtailed the geographic mobility of preachers and clergy and the spread of religious beliefs. Through this policy, the bureaucrats of the Liquidation Commissions attempted to slow down any rapid changes in the religious landscapes and to facilitate their mapping. The Liquidation Commissions relied on local authorities for collecting data regarding religious undesirables.

To a certain extent, the "problem of vagrant preachers" was the consequence of antireligious policies. The destruction of churches and monasteries and repressive operations against religious groups displaced numerous religious actors who travelled from village to village preaching. In many cases their preaching referred to the impending End Time (See the case of Inochentists in chapter 2 and 9).

Liquidation officials did not fully replace the dislocation system with the system of cards of registration. Up until 1929, dislocation summaries were the main form of evidence on the membership of religious communities and on the functioning of sacred buildings whereas the system of cards of registration was used as the main form of evidence for the clergy and sectarian preachers. I could not identify any cards of registration for religious miracles in the Central State Archives of the Supreme Authorities and Governments of Ukraine, which contains the archival fonds produced by the central apparatus of the Liquidation Department of Soviet Ukraine.

As a report for 1928 compiled by the Liquidation Commission of Moldavian ASSR reveals, the Liquidation Commissions achieved insignificant results in registering the followers of the sectarian movements emerged in Russia and Ukraine (TSDAVOV, 5-3-1002, p. 97-98).

Likewise, the files containing the cards of registration from Soviet Ukraine's NKVD Archive reveal that the registration of believers and preachers that did not have permanent religious buildings were rare.

The Reassembling of Religious Communities

Whereas sociology traditionally defines the domain of the "social" as a particular kind of thing or as a specific type of relations, scholars associated with the ANT (Actor-Network-Theory) school propose a different approach, explaining the social as "a very peculiar movement of re-association and reassembling" (Latour 2005, 7). The ANT scholars do not operate with social categories defined in advance by researchers but instead consider the delimitation and definition of groups as the task of actors themselves (Latour 2005, 32). They also approach things as entities that "…might authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render possible, forbid" the undertaking of actions by humans. In this sense, things explain the contrasts, the asymmetries in the exercise of power in society (Latour 2005, 73-72). From this perspective, all laws, rules, and forms of registration elaborated by the Soviet regime and utilised by the Liquidation Commissions can be regarded as devices created not just to shape the relations between religious actors and local authorities, but also to remake religious congregations. In the following pages, I examine the delineation and (re)definition of religious communities as an integral part of the interaction between the Soviet regime and religions from the perspective of the process of registration of religious congregations.

The first way in which the registration of religious groups remade religious communities was to impose the parish as the only unit for the lawful collective religious life. Religious landscape of Soviet Ukraine was highly heterogenous and in permanent change. In this sense, the complexity of the task of examining, surveilling, and controlling Ukraine's religious landscape was increased by extremely rapid changes. As we have seen in the previous sections, the registration procedures were designed to work as a mechanism for curtailing these changes and to effect the "sedentarisation" of religious believers and leaders. Apparently, the parochialistaion of the power in the Russian Orthodox Church seemed to simplify the task of the liquidation officials by consolidating the boundaries of the parish, which was the main unit based on which the Liquidation Commissions examined religious landscapes. The parochialisation, or the increasingly assertive involvement of the believers in the administration of their parish occurred during the pawer vacuum of 1917 and resulted in a complete take over legalised by the Bolshevik Decrees (Freeze 2015, 11), and consolidated the geographic and social boundaries of religious communities in several ways. Apart from the similar socio-

economic background, shared culture, and kinship of those who took in their hands the administration of their parish, the ties between the members of the rural parish were consolidated by the materiality of their church.

One example of how religious materiality participated to the consolidation of religious communities is the role of the bell tolling. Richard L. Hernandez observes that bell tolling called the believers to congregate for the liturgical prayer or for emergency gatherings and virtually extended the walls of the Church to encompass all places where the tolling could be heard and deciphered. The bell tolling signals the liturgical moment in which the faithful are, and thus produced temporal milestones in the lives of believers (Hernandez 2004, 1479-1480). The flip side of the parochialisation was a religious revival, which sometimes had opposite effects. One of the effects of parochialization and a precondition for the subsequent revival was the increasing dependence of parish priests on their parishioners, and the social revolution amongst the clergy whose new members were less educated than their forebearers but closer from a cultural and social point of view to their flocks. Thus, the pre-revolutionary priests, who were very reticent towards popular forms of Orthodoxy (Freeze 2015, 7-13), were replaced by a new generation of clerics who were more familiar with vernacular religious practices and beliefs and lacked the means to oppose them. The increasing freedom of believers to practice their faith as they saw fit created fertile ground for the emergence of new religious practices and believes. According to Freeze, in 1924 alone Soviet officials registered 586 miracles in Ukraine (Freeze 2012 A, 97). The miracles attracted pilgrims from different settlements and hence they transgressed the parish boundaries. Stella Rock observes that Orthodox pilgrimages, which traditionally included the worship of miracle-working artefacts, "testified to the porous boundary between the secular and the sacred", through public processions during which believers displayed icons and crosses. The Soviet regime imposed restrictions on public religious processions which could take place only with special permission from the authorities. Nevertheless, there were numerous instances when believers manifested their piety in public through miracles, processions, and pilgrimages to relics and sacred sites (Rock 2012, 160-162). One of the most common miracles was the phenomena of renewal of Orthodox icons (see Chapter 8). Eastern Orthodox peasants perceived the renewal of icons, when in a miraculous way the icons became new and clean, as an intervention of divine power in their lives (Viola 1996, 53). The miracles were widespread and frequently attracted people from different parishes. According to official documents from 1923, the renewal of icons was connected to the "problem of preacher-travellers" (ASBUOO 5247, 93) and was interpreted by the regime as a subversive action of the White underground (DAOO P-3-1-584, p. 8). According to a 1923

report from Odesa, local authorities were expected to send special commissions that operated under the supervision of the local Liquidation Commission and were responsible with deconstructing the narratives around the renewed icons (DAOO, P-3- 1-584, pp. 19-20). Nevertheless, in numerous cases the approach was much more brutal and simplistic with civil police officers entering villages and confiscating the miracle-working icons. For instance, in 1923 in the village of Antonovka in Odesa region a crowd of approximately 500 tried to prevent the civil police from seizing their miracle-working icon. After firing a number of warning shots, the officers managed to confiscate the icon and to leave behind a group of believers who chased them on horseback (DAOO, P-3-1-584, p. 172). The renewal of icons were spontaneous religious phenomena, that could not be easily prevented or tackled by the authorities. Additionally, the miracle-working artefacts could be easily moved or hidden by indefinite groups of religious believers who spread word about the miracles. The surveillance system designed by the regime could not deal with this type of phenomena and religious actors involved in these miracles were frequently accused of undermining the regime and were subjected to police investigation. The renewals of icons transgressed the boundaries of the parish, consolidated around the parish church, through the agency of other artefacts (miracle-working icons) which gathered religious actors and sacred objects from different parishes in a single religious community. In this sense, the attempt by the regime to prevent the "movement of re-association and reassembling" (Latour 2005, 7) of religious believers and sacred objects made it impossible to effectively deal, in a non-violent way, with religious phenomena that involved the spontaneous emergence of beliefs, religious groups, and the agency of non-human actors such as renewed icons.

The second way in which the system of registration of religious groups aimed at reassembling the parishes was to forcibly eliminate from them certain categories of members. The first example are the priests after the social revolution in the clergy. After the parochialisation of power, the priests should not be regarded (at least in most of the cases) as outsiders who due to their appointment in a parish participated in the religious life of their flocks. In the 1920s, the Orthodox priests were important members of the communities with whom they share the same culture, social and education background. The serving priests are accepted by parishioners who administer the parish and are entrusted with the most important role in liturgical services. As Gregory Freeze shows, there were numerous cases when lay parishioners expelled the unpopular priests (Freeze 2012 B, 51-52; Freeze 2015, 9). Soviet legislation defined religious communities as some sort of groups of consumers receiving religious services from the clerics. In this sense, the clerics could not participate in the

administration of the parish and did not have the status of legal members of the communities.

Another example are the members of the councils of founders of religious communities who were eliminated through unofficial means from *pjatidesjatki* because of their alleged anti-Soviet activity. A document issued by Liquidation Department in October 1922 mentions that local authorities and liquidation officials organised the prosecution against the lay parishioners who opposed joining the Renovationist Church. The criminal prosecution was based on allegations which were not related to their religious activity or to their involvement in the administration of the parishes. Nevertheless, they were perceived as anti-Soviet elements and the hidden reason behind their prosecution was their resistance to state antireligious policies (TsDAVOV, 5-2-1084, p. 125). These documents reveal how the Liquidation Commissions attempted to remake the parishes based on their Marxist understanding of the society. Their intent was to reassemble religious communities in such a way that they would be composed of representatives of the "working people". By eliminating the perceived anti-Soviet elements and social aliens from parish administrations, the registration system implemented by Liquidation Commissions opposed what Bruno Latour calls the "movement of re-association and reassembling" of social actors (Latour 2005, 7). Likewise, Soviet officials operated with notions about religious groups formulated in advance and different from those defined by believers.

Finally, religious leaders and preachers and religious communities were allowed to conduct their activity and to be officially registered only in one district, which was a form of transgression of the boundaries of religious communities by administrative borders. The petitions from 1927 of the German Lutheran Communities of Marienberg, Friedenstal, Triokhgrady, and Safiental from Krasnye Okny district of Moldavian ASSR, complain about the results of these restrictions. The only Lutheran pastor from the Moldavian ASSR, E. Shimke, lived in Bergdorf, a German village from Grigoripol district where he served a number of German congregations. Because of the restrictions, after each service in a community from Grigoripol district, E. Shimke had to deregister with local authorities and register again in Krasnye Okny district in order to be able to serve the congregations from the later administrative unit. Shimke spent a lot of time and money in permanent trips between Krasnye Okny and Grigoriopol for registrations. In a secret report to the Administrative Department of Ukraine's NKVD, the head of Moldavian ASSR's Cult Department, Grigorenko, describes the complexity of this problem. On the one hand, E. Shimke had a significant influence among the Germans in Moldavian ASSR. On the other hand, if local authorities would grant him the permission to serve in two districts without proper registration, the same permission will be

requested by local Catholics, Reformed Christians, Armenians, Jews and other Communities, which would make the system of registration of clerics and preachers ineffective (TSDAVOV, 5-3-1055, pp. 4-9). This case is an example of the contradictions produced by the simplified understanding on which the system of registration was based and designed. The system operated with the existing administrative-territorial units and did not take into account the presence of German settlements on two sides of an administrative border. In addition, the bureaucratic obstacles undermined the authority of the regime and incited discontent among believers. There were numerous cases of infringement of administrative borders on religious communities. The liquidation inspector of Krivoi Rog okrug mentioned in a 1928 note to the head of Ukraine's liquidation apparatus that after the *raionization* of his okrug, numerous sectarian communities from his Okrug were split and their registration was impossible because they lived in small groups in settlements on different sides of administrative borders (TsDAVOV, 5-3-268, p. 1).

In an attempt to sedentarise parishes, to stabilise the boundaries of religious communities, to marginalise the clergy and allegedly hostile believers, and to impose on the religious landscape the official administrative-territorial divisions, the regime infringed on the usual way of practicing religions. The regime operated with a superficial understanding of the religious landscape based on its politicised perceptions and, as a consequence, numerous intended and unintended obstacles were created for believers to practice their religions. These policies placed numerous religious communities outside of the existing legislative and administrative frameworks, transforming them into a "problem" to be subjected to repressive policies.

The system of registration and the theological definition of sectarianism

Archival documents reveal that liquidation officials utilised Orthodox theological notions and concepts related to religious sectarianism in order to register religious communities according to categories. To a significant extent, the use of these notions hindered the accomplishment of the goals of the policies implemented by the liquidation officials. The categories formulated by Soviet officials and based on theological notions did not fit the techniques (dislocation summaries and the system of cards of registration) used by liquidation officials to police religious communities, which caused significant obstacles for the interpretation of registered data.

Based on data collected through the system of lists of dislocation and cards of registration, liquidation officials produced regular reports on the evolution of the number of religious believers and communities. These reports also examined the evolution of the trends within the examined religious groups. The report on the state of religious movements in Ukraine for 1924 contains a historical account about religious sectarians and their origins, which are classifies them in terms of "rationalist" and "mistic" sects (TsDAVOV, 5-2-194, 68-74). Numerous reports issued by liquidation officials in Ukraine make reference to these categories. For example, a report of MASSR's NKVD for 1929 complains about the small proportion of registered mystical sects, which according to the document included the local Inochentists, Dukhobors and Skoptsy. Also, the report mentions the presence of rationalist sects (TsDAVOV, 5-3-1002, 97-98). These two categories were coined by Russian Orthodox theologians and had been adopted or subsumed into Soviet official definition of religious sectarianism.

The Russian Orthodox Church defined sectarianism as a category of versions of Christianity rejecting the bodily worship of divinity, Church rituals and processions, the icons, the sign of cross. This category includes the Khlysts, Skoptsy, and Stundists. The so-called *raskol*, or schism, referred to Old Believers and was defined as the "exclusive worship of divinity through flesh, letters, but not through the spirit" (Smolin 1904, 317-319). The Orthodox Church is presented in missionary literature as the denomination worshiping God through both spirit and body. The same definition divides the sectarians into rationalist and mystical sects. The "rationalist sects" are described in Church literature as being influenced by the idea that the holy scripture can be comprehended through rational examination, while the mysticism is presented as the attempt to comprehend the divine through inspiration and exaltation (Smolin 1904, 306; 317-319). Before the Revolution of 1917, these terms were used by statisticians in official documents and by the clergy in theological studies. After 1917, Soviet officials borrowed the Church definitions of the term sectarian and typology of sectarianisms and used them in official documents (Zhuk 2004, 16).

One avenue through which the Church notion of sectarianism entered the Bolshevik bureaucratic jargon was the employment by the Soviet regime of the former tsarist state officials. The Bolsheviks could not govern the country without the expertise of the former tsarist bureaucrats who were placed under the permanent supervision of party members appointed to key positions in the administration (Heinen 1997, 87). Another source from which Soviet officials borrowed the theological notion of sectarianism was the Orthodox missionary

literature and tsarist official documents produced before the 1917 Revolution. For example, in 1918 the 8th Department utilised the archives and the library of the tsarist Department of Foreign Confessions (The Report of Evtokhiev to the 8th Department, May 1918). Sergey Zhuk observes that the continuities between the antireligious narratives of the Soviet regime and the anti-sectarian discourse of its predecessor are explainable through their common goal – the destruction of the religious movements labelled as sectarian. Frequently, Soviet officials and their tsarist forebears accomplished this goal by denigrating religious sectarians and their leadership (2004, 5). Soviet officials utilised not only the theological definition of the term "sectarianism". The early Soviet experimentation with sectarians involved attempts to define a category of "revolutionary" or "Communist" sectarians (The Resolution of the Party Plenum, 26th July 1921). Nevertheless, these notions appear in official documents issued until 1924, while later reports refer to sectarians mainly as to anti-revolutionary groups (Zhuk 2004, 13).

The utilisation of the category "sectarian" diminished the efficiency of the policies implemented by the liquidation commissions. Firstly, the different definitions employed by the Soviet regime, such as the notion of "Communist Sectarianism" and the church definition of sectarianism, caused confusion among officials. For example, the statistical report of the liquidation officials for Artemivsk Okrug from January 1926 lists as sectarians the Jews and Catholics along with Lutherans, Baptists, Adventists and Mennonites (TsDAVOV, 5-2-968, p. 1-4). Another cause of the obstacles produced by the use of the category "sectarian" was that it did not fit well the systems of registration which functioned based on the leveraging of religious buildings by officials. Despite the fact that official reports frequently present the communities lacking permanent religious buildings simply as "sectarians", not all sectarian communities lacked permanent prayer houses. For example, according to the Orthodox Church definition, Evangelicals were sectarians but numerous Evangelical communities had permanent religious buildings which they had used for decades. Liquidation officials sensed this important discordance between the application of the category "sectarian" and the registration system, when for example, in 1925 the liquidation officers of Korosten' okrug produced a document separate from dislocation reports, which contained a table with the list of communities (presented in the report as sectarians) lacking religious buildings (Adventists, Baptists, Evangelical Christians, and Jewish communities). In the third column of the table, which in a standard dislocation report would include the name of the sacred building, the Korosten officials included the name of the religious leader of each community. The dislocation report for the same year is included in the same file and contains the list of religious communities

which had a religious building, including Lutherans, Baptists, Mennonites (TsDAVOV, 5-2-1006, pp. 1a-5; 13).

An important moment in the history of Liquidation Commissions, which partly eliminated the contradiction between the definition of sectarianism and registration system was the order of Liquidation Sub-Department from 19th March 1926 to all its local agencies to abstain from registering religious communities that lacked sacred buildings. This ban did not extend to the renewing of the registration of already registered communities or to the splinter communities which changed their ecclesiastic affiliation. The reason behind this decision was that numerous religious communities registered only in order to obtain the right to build a prayer house or a church (TsDAVOV, 5-3-261). This exclusion meant that from then on religious communities that lacked a sacred building automatically fell into the sphere of authority of repressive agencies, such as the secret police.

Conclusions

The main role of the liquidation apparatus was to make the religious landscape legible. This was a complex task, especially in Soviet Ukraine, where a highly diverse religious landscape was in permanent change as a result of state policies, disruptions caused by the Civil War, state repression, the activities of numerous religious preachers of different religious orientations, and the religious revival of the 1920s. In order to make the realisation of this project possible, the regime charged the Liquidation Commissions with the implementation of a set of policies that aimed at restricting religious communities to precise geographic locations, defining in a strict way their membership as a means of limiting the influence, activity, and geographical mobility of the clergy and preachers. These techniques were designed based on the mechanisms of control used by the regime in the case of the most numerous religious communities, particularly, the Orthodox Church. Later, the regime attempted to reshape sectarian communities in order to subject them to these same techniques.

The second important task was the examination and classification of religious communities as an essential part of the regime's attempt to eliminate religion from Russian society. This data was to be collected by Liquidation Commissions and used in gauging Russia's progress on the road toward atheism. This was also used in formulating new antireligious policies. Religious buildings and institutional hierarchies of religious groups were instrumentalised by the regime to control and compel religious actors to provide the necessary information.

The strategies used by Liquidation Commissions for examining religious movements and groups and for curtailing their spread proved to be in many ways inefficient and even counterproductive. Firstly, the imposition of the parish as the sole legal form of religious community eliminated other forms of collective worship, such as collective witnessing of miracles and worship of renewed icons. This type of phenomena transgressed the parish boundaries, was perceived by officials as subversive actions of the anti-Soviet elements and was therefore frequently subjected to repression.

Secondly, the creation of the system of cards of registration of religious communities and clerics was based on an abstract idea of what a religious group is and how it is to be defined. The objective of the regime was to reassemble the parishes so that their membership would consist only of working people loyal to Soviet power. The authorities introduced legislative restrictions on the membership of the clergy in the councils of religious communities, even though, especially after the social revolution in the clergy, the priests were an integral part of the religious communities in which they were serving. Additionally, the authorities used unofficial means for eliminating from the parish councils the persons perceived as anti-Soviet elements.

Thirdly, restrictions were imposed on religious preachers and clerics who were now allowed to conduct their activity only in one administrative-territorial unit. Similar restrictions were imposed on religious communities by only allowing them to register officially if all their members lived in the same district. These contraventions of the administrative borders by the boundaries of religious communities made the registration of the congregations whose members lived in small groups in several settlements or in different districts impossible.

The activity of the Liquidation Commissions was marked by the contradiction between three tasks - to examine and understand, to remake religious communities, and to curtail their religious lives. The confusion produced among the officials by this contradiction is exemplified by the usage of the term sectarianism in the registration system. The liquidation officers continued to use the tsarist notions of sectarianism because the objective of state officials before and after the Revolution was to eliminate these religious movements. Nevertheless, the employment of these categories in the examination of the religious landscape did not correspond to the registration system which was based on the leveraging of religious buildings, and favoured a categorisation of communities that held permanent sacred buildings over those which lacked them. At the same time, by depicting as social enemies the religious communities which could not be efficiently policed and remade through the rigid registration system, the Liquidation Commissions facilitated the expansion of the sphere of authority of the secret

police and consequently diminished its own influence and role in the implementation of antireligious policy.

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Chapter 5: Materialising Ideological Tenets: Religious Landscapes, Antireligious Files, and the Official Perceptual Field

This chapter examines the networks in which the documents and forms produced by liquidation officials (discussed in chapter 4) circulated. Based on the lists, forms, and questionaries, produced with the participation of religious believers, liquidation officers compiled their reports, which informed the Soviet policymakers on how to formulate their strategies of eliminating religions. The objective of this chapter is to analyse how the relationality from within the networks of officials, believers, religious artefacts, and bureaucratic devices, shaped the content of the documents produced by liquidation officers, and to examine how these documents were used by antireligious officials as media tools for seeing religious communities.

The first section of this chapter describes the circulation of the forms and reports produced by liquidation officials (lists of religious believers and dislocation summaries), and the translation steps they participated to. I examine these artefacts as immutable mobiles (Law 2008, 146-147) circulating within networks of officials, believers, and objects they interconnect.

The second section looks into the semiotics of the bureaucratic artefacts produced by liquidation officials. It explores cases when their immutability and mobility was damaged by the relationalities they entered at a local level, and how the unforeseen relationalities and practices experienced by these artefacts shifted their meaning and function.

The last section of the chapter analyses a file produced by Antireligious Commission of MASSR in 1925-1926 with the participation of liquidation officials and religious believers. Although this file was not a sample of a type of bureaucratic artefacts reproduced *en masse* by antireligious officials (this is the only file of this type I could identify), it contains a series of documents which constituted part of the standard procedures of registration of religious communities (the lists of the members of religious communities), and reveals how the documents created by liquidation officers were examined against the reports and forms produced by other state agencies. The examined file is a media tool used by antireligious officials for seeing several religious communities from MASSR. The first part of the section looks into how this file functioned as a device produced to stage a confrontation between religious communities and soviet officials. Then I move on to examine the file as a tool used in demasking religious communities and compare its structure with the files produced by police agencies. The third part of this section analyses the role of the file as a fractal object, which materialised the Bolshevik ideological tenets and produced problems to be solved by the

solutions proposed by Marxism. Last but not least, this file will be analysed as a tool which participated to the organisation of the perceptual field (Ueno 2011) of Soviet officials working with it.

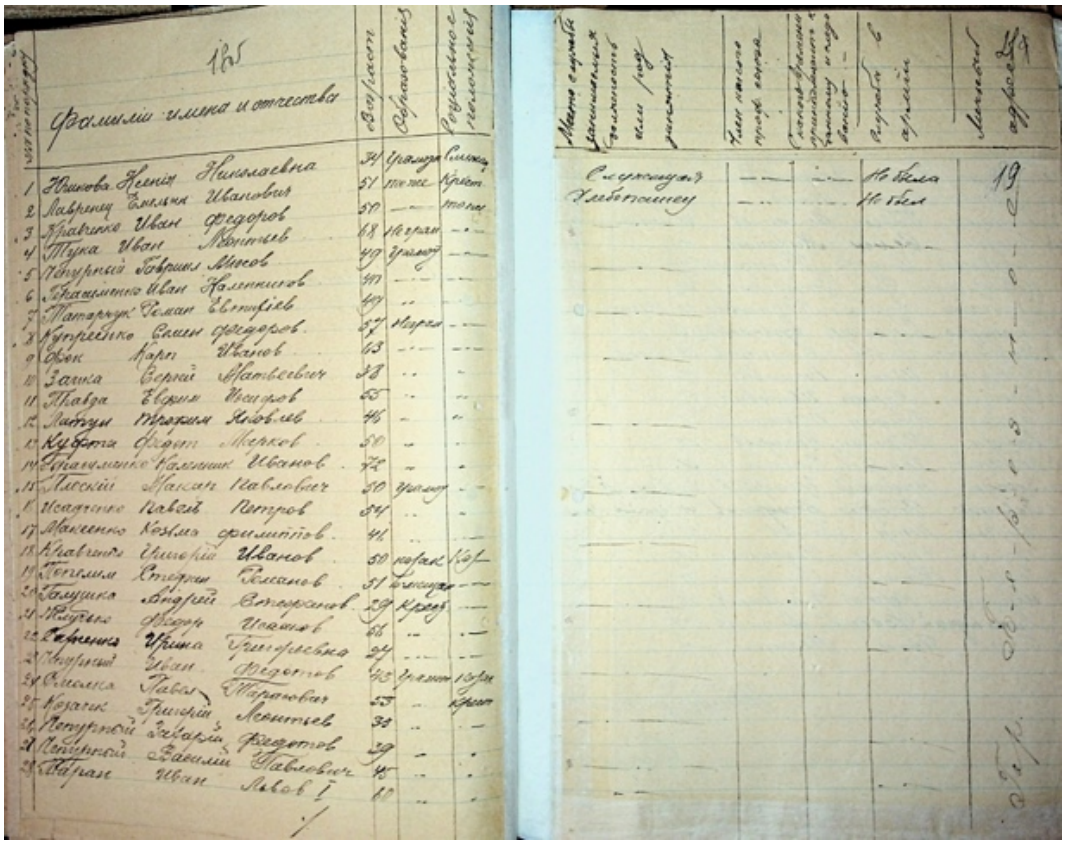
Reconstituting the networks interconnected by the circulating documents produced by liquidation officers with the participation of religious believers, and identifying all actors involved in them, is a complex task. The researcher undertaking this endeavour is confronted with the limitations imposed by the data available through archival research. In the place of direct access to actors, the researcher has full access to the bureaucratic artefacts which circulated in the networks formed of officials, believers, and non-human actors. Case studies form the basis of the STS and ANT repertoires (Law 2019, 2), and the student preoccupied with reconstituting the abovementioned networks should proceed with identifying a case for his/her research. The archives contain swarms of artefacts, each of them having its particular history, and the available data covers only a part of the journeys, encounters and relationalities experienced by these material things. Bearing these circumstances in mind, in this chapter I am compelled to examine multiple cases of material artefacts, each of them bearing the marks of its own history of encountering different actors and of participating to different networks. In each case these are incompletely revealed through textual and non-textual marks they exhibit. Nevertheless, I believe that an examination of multiple cases of bureaucratic artefacts does not contradict ANT and STS prescriptions, for three reasons. Firstly, the artefacts I examine in this chapter ended up being stored in the same archive, where they form relationalities between themselves according to their positioning against each other and they participated and were constitutive of archival and bureaucratic practices. Secondly, they are the product and producers of different realities shaped in different webs of relationalities, and by being enclosed in the same files they became part of fractal objects in which different realities overlap (Law 2004, 62). Thirdly, one of the objectives of this chapter is to examine how the archival devices, which contained bureaucratic artefacts produced within different setups and networks, shaped the perceptions of Soviet officials encountering them.

Bureaucratic devices as immutable mobiles

Bruno Latour warns us that a network should not be confused with what circulates in it (Latour 2013, 32). Applied to our case study, this dictum should be understood as not confusing the documents with the networks of officials, believers, and things, which by being part of a setup entered a relationality which made possible the production, modification, and circulation of these documents. Another tip for an ANT researcher, is to follow the actor (Winthereik 2020,

24), but are the bureaucratic artefacts we aim to examine the right actors to be followed? This study considers the forms and reports compiled with the participation of liquidation officials as immutable mobiles "circulating to and from in space whilst holding their form and shape constant" (Law 2008, 146-147). At the same time every participant to a network does not remain the same, it has to be "enrolled, mobilized, shifted, translated", and every network is as strong as its weakest element (Latour 2013, 61-62). The documents compiled by the liquidation officials were immutable mobiles because, like Spanish caravels, they circulated from one corner of an empire to the other, carrying different content without having changed their predefined parameters manifested in how the content they were carrying was organised and distributed in separate fields and categories.

The artefacts produced by liquidation officers were diverse, and they worked as the cogs of a machine, translating and systematising information, as well as interconnecting different networks and actors. The first type of documents contained in liquidation files are the lists of the members of religious communities (*Figure no. 1*).



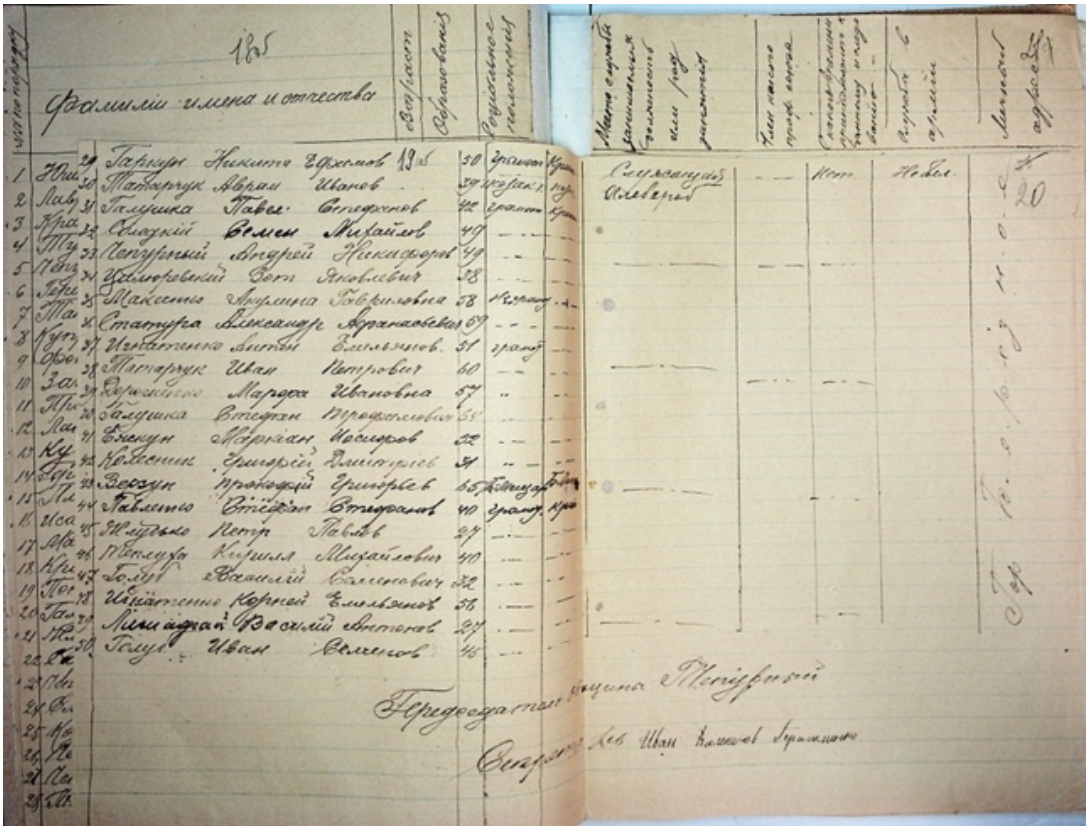
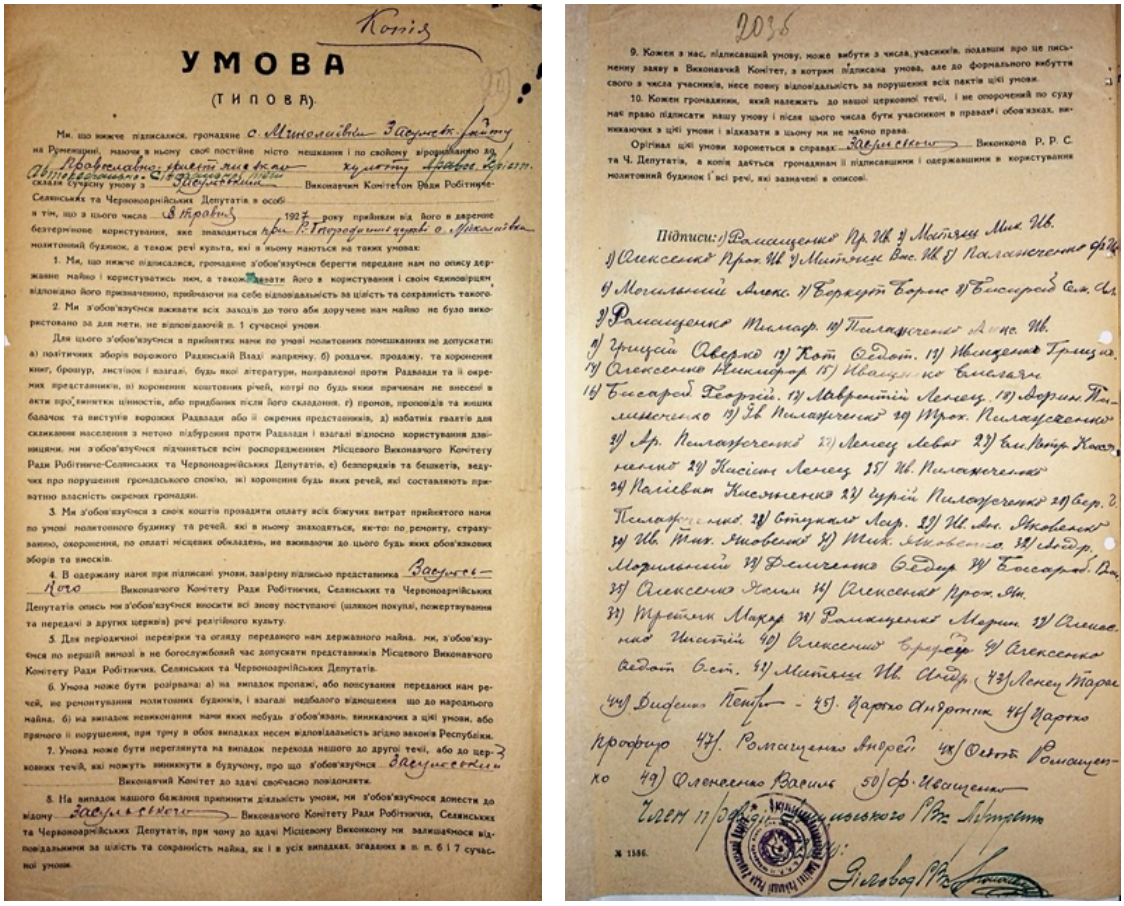


Figure no. 1:The 1925 list of the founders of the Orthodox Christian Community of the Annunciation from Berezna, Chernigov Okrug (TsDAVOV 5-2-959, 19-20).

The lists of founders and the lists of members (the list of members have a similar structure, but contain less data, as outlined in the previous chapter) had multiple roles, and numerous actors participated to their (re)production and circulation. Several copies of the lists (see the images above) were filled and signed by the secretaries and/or chairs of religious communities. Then, the information displayed in them was checked by the secretaries and chairs of the local executive councils (Soviets) (TsDAVOV, 5-2-975, 4). At this level of production of documents, the registration had several functions. Firstly, these procedures formatted the relations between local officials, liquidation officers, and religious believers. These relations and the production of the lists would not be possible without multiple mechanisms of constraint, which compelled religious believers and local officials to produce the required documents. These administrative constraints were produced by police officers who identified and penalised the unregistered communities, and by the authorities from district level who required the Soviet officials to register the believers. Likewise, the materiality of the religious buildings played a key role in the identification of the congregations by officials, and in forcing its members to register because the use of sacred buildings was conditioned by the registration of the parishioners who congregated in it. Secondly, the registration produced an asymmetrical distribution of authority among parishioners, empowering the founders to

represent the community and making them responsible for the compliance of the rest of believers with legal requirements. In this sense, an important role was played by the agreements for the use of sacred buildings, which could be signed only by the founders of an officially registered religious community (*Figure no. 2*). Thirdly, the filling of the lists was a performative act (Austin 1975, 5-7; Law 2017, 37) and contained political tropes (i.e. class origin) (Law 2017, 37; 39-40). According to linguistic philosophy, performativity refers to the utterances which are at the same time actions, like the sentence "I do" in the marriage ceremony (Austin 1975, 5-7). STS scholars link this concept to the idea that social life can be regarded as a performance, where the filling of a questionary might make real the categories with which it operates (Law 2017, 37). Tropes are concepts which are not socially and politically neutral and are marked by prejudice. The dissemination of tropes effects the reproduction of ideas and prejudices, and the formatting of the actors which engage with them (Law 2017, 39-40). William B. Husband observes that by 1926-1928 the language of the petitions written by religious believers and that of the official legislative texts had become virtually identical (Husband 1998, 77; 87; 88), which attests to the effects of the performativity on the believers who filled in the official documents related to the registration of their communities. Last, but not least, the lists and their categories performed a translation of the realities on the ground and of the self-definition of believers into data which could be latter summarised in quantitative statistical reports and compared with data from other regions and settlements (Scott 1998, 76-83).



УМОВА

(ТИПОВА)

Підписи:

Figure no. 2: The agreement signed on May 8th 1927 between the founders of the Orthodox Community from the village of Mikolaevka, Romny Okrug, and the representatives of the local Executive Council. According to this agreement, the religious believers who signed the document obtained the legal right to use the Church from Mikolaevka as long as they complied with the norms formulated by Soviet law.

After being approved by local officials, the lists were submitted to MEKOSO (TSDAVOV, 5-2-825, p. 1-3). Then the lists were delivered to the members of the district executive bodies who were responsible with collecting the data relevant to religious communities (TsDAVOV, 5-1-1085, pp. 2-3). Finally, the lists reached the okrug liquidation commission, which compiled the dislocation summaries based on the lists of members of religious communities, and by using other reports with data collected at district level. Samples of the documents contained in dislocation summaries are presented in figure no. 3.

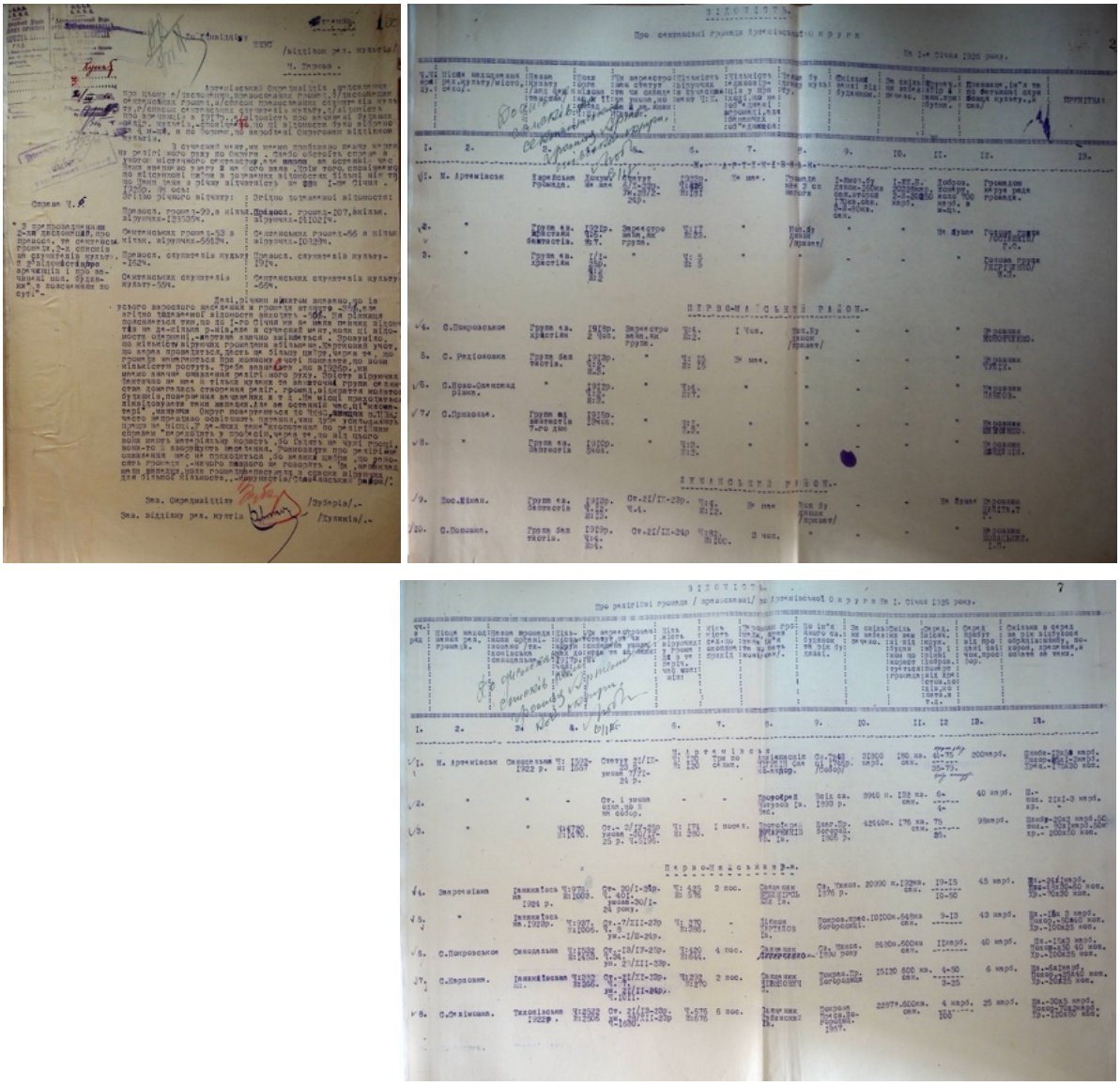


Figure no. 3: The cover page of the dislocation summary of Artemivsk Okrug from March 1926, the first page of the statistical report containing the list of sectarian communities, and the seventh page with the list of non-sectarian communities (TsDAVOV, 5-2-968, 1a-2).

The dislocation summaries were the main statistical instruments used by liquidation officials. These devices contained processed data extracted from the lists of religious communities and from other reports compiled at local level, and were sent to Kharkiv together with the copies of the lists of each religious community registered in the okrug. The first function of the dislocation summary was to distribute the collected data by denomination, and to classify the communities as sectarian or non-sectarian. Secondly, they bound the data to the official administrative-territorial units. Thirdly, the cover page of the summaries gave to the members of the provincial liquidation commissions the possibility of assessing the collected data in relation to the general situation in the okrug reflected in the reports compiled by other

state and party agencies. The membership of a provincial liquidation commission included its chair, a representative of the local judiciary agencies and a secret police officer (TsDAVOV, 5-2-197, 13). At this stage of data processing, the artefacts produced as part of the registration procedure formed a relation to the bureaucratic artefacts produced by police. The secret police officers and judiciary officials who were members of liquidation commissions were influenced by the reading of the police files, and participated in their production. The understanding of religious activism produced by police files is reflected in the dislocation summaries. For example, the cover page of the dislocation summary illustrated in figure no. 3 states:

> In 1926 we have witnessed a significant revival of religious movements. There is no growth of the number of believers, and only the kulaks and enriched peasants strive for the formation of new communities, for opening [new] prayer houses and reopening the closed ones. Such occurrences are frequently liquidated at local level. Currently, the "complainers" bypass the Okrug [state agencies] and they send their complaints [directly] to NKVD [in Kharkiv] and VUTsVK [Ukraine's Government], misrepresenting the problems, and by this they complicate the work at local level. For some [of the complainers], such complaints become a profession, because through this [activity] they achieve economic gain […] (TsDAVOV, 5-2-968, 1a).

The cover page presents the religious activists as socially-alien elements undermining the stability of the regime. This assessment of the dislocation summary of the liquidation apparatus of Artemivsk okrug reveals a correlation between the process of producing the summary and the agenda of police and judiciary agencies represented in the membership of the Commission. Likewise, this report reveals the existence of tensions between local liquidation officials, who were frequently police officers or judicial officials, and the central apparatus of the Liquidation Department, because the interventions of the later as a result of the complaints received from believers complicated the activity of local officials.

The dislocation summaries were sent to the Liquidation Department in Kharkiv, which in 1924 included a chair who guided the work of the apparatus, and an expert who was responsible for providing the theological knowledge necessary for the formulation of the antireligious policies, for compiling the instructions sent to local officials and also for the reports on the processes occurring inside religious movements. The third member of the apparatus was a correspondent, who compiled and sewed the files, sent the technical instructions on how to create the reports to local officials, and produced regular reports on the state of antireligious work and religious movements (TsDAVOV, 5-2-194, 21). The

Liquidation Department in Kharkiv was the agency which took the most important decisions based on the files it compiled, such as those regarding the closure of religious buildings (TsDAVOV, 5-3-268, 19-20). The Liquidation Department compiled two types of files on the membership of religious communities. The first one included copies of the lists of members of religious communities. They created these files separately for each okrug, or they compiled files containing the lists of all religious communities registered in Soviet Ukraine in a particular time span. The second type of file contained the dislocation summaries produced by each liquidation commission.

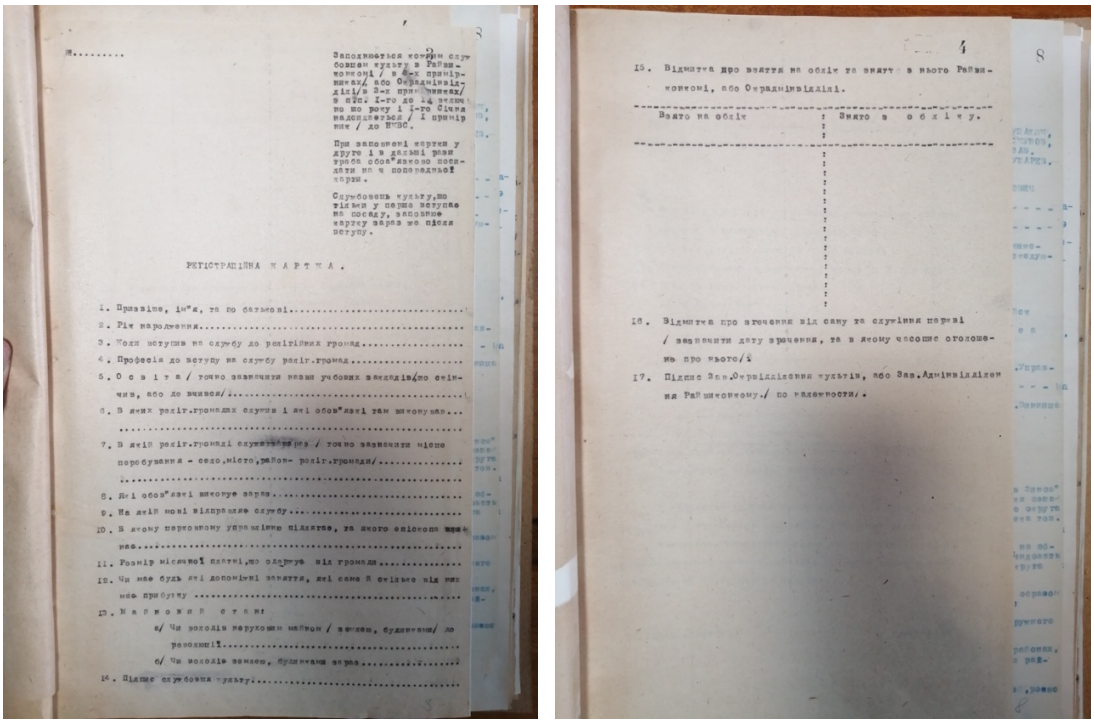
On their way from the believers who filled in the lists of parishioners to the Liquidation Department in Kharkiv, the data collected as part of the registration procedures underwent at least three steps of translation realised with the participation of bureaucratic devices. Firstly, the believers were compelled to fill in the lists according to a predefined set of fields corresponding to ideologically-defined categories. The lists translated their self-definition into the notions of the Bolshevik discourse which were comprehensible for Soviet officials, and were quantifiable and comparable for statistical assessment. Secondly, the data collected in the lists were processed by provincial liquidation officials at okrug centres. The dislocation summaries produced at these okrug centres were examined against bureaucratic artefacts produced by other state and party agencies and then interpreted so as to correspond to the agendas of the institutions represented among the members of the okrug liquidation commissions. Thirdly, as attested by the divergent views of local liquidation officials and their superiors from Kharkiv, the dislocation summaries were examined and interpreted from the perspective of the agenda of the Liquidation Department. These multiple steps of translation and adaptation of the collected data to the tenets of Bolshevik discourse and to institutional agendas, produced distorted understandings of religious communities and of their activity. As Bruno Latour observes, translation is "to make two words equivalent. But since no two words are equivalent, translation also implies betrayal […] So translation is both about making equivalent, and about shifting" (Law 2008, 144). Through the production of bureaucratic artefacts, liquidation officials translated the identities of religious believers and shifted them, distorting the image of religious communities. The translations performed with the participation of bureaucratic artefacts were linguistic, and in order to understand how they function an examination of the semiotic logic behind them is necessary.

The semiotics of the bureaucratic artefacts

ANT is considered the semiotics of the science of relations. Annmarie Mol refers to the networks of words, which generate meaning for each signifier. For example, the word "fish" acquires its meaning in part due to material differences between what the words "meat" and "fish" stand for (Mattozzi 2020, 89-90). In order to explain how the relations between signs and objects, and how differentiality shaped the content of the bureaucratic artefacts produced by liquidation officials, I will examine some instances when the registration system misfunctioned. As Gerald M. Easter observes, in the early 1920s the Soviet provinces were dominated by cliques of Bolshevik elites whose status relied on personal merits rather than on the positions held in the bureaucracy. This particularity of centre-periphery relations in conjunction with the scarcity of the resources needed for an efficient administration of Russia's peripheries by Moscow, diminished the capacity of the state agencies to efficiently implement their policies (Easter 2007, 76-79). The liquidation apparatus was no exception, and some of the disfunctions that occurred in its work help us to understand how the semiotics of the bureaucratic artefacts functioned.

A primary example of how the material differences on the ground influenced the understanding of the technical notions from registration forms by liquidation officials, is the already mentioned case of the 1925 dislocation summary of Korosten' Okrug. Although the common official definition of the category of sectarianism would not include Judaic communities, in their 1925 statistical report the liquidation officers of Korosten' okrug included a document separate from the dislocation reports, which presents religious communities lacking religious buildings, including Adventists, Baptists, Evangelical Christians, and Jewish communities as sectarians. The same dislocation report presents in a separate table the religious communities that, according to its issuer, were not sectarians, including the Lutherans, Baptists, Mennonites (TsDAVOV, 5-2-1006, pp. 1a-5; 13). Hence, for the officials in Korosten' Okrug, sectarians were the religious communities which lacked a sacred building. This particular understanding of the notion "sectarian" was the product of the material differences between religious communities that had a religious building and those that lacked it. Likewise, this understanding was the product of the materiality of the policing system used by liquidation officials, which relied on the leveraging of religious buildings in order to control and examine religious communities. This divergent understanding was generated in a context in which the central authorities from Moscow and Kharkiv operated with different notions of sectarianism and they administered Soviet provinces with scarce resources and through a weak bureaucratic apparatus.

Another example of the influence of materiality on the understanding of local officials relates to the registration cards of clerics and preachers. The following figure presents the standardised form used for the production of registration cards.



РЕЄСТРАЦІЙНА К А Р Т К А.

Взято на облік | Знято з обліку.

Figure no. 4: The standard form used for the registration cards (TsDAVOV, 5-2-816, pp. 3-4).

The cards of registration can be regarded as signs which have their indexicality (Gell 1998, 13), because the material and textual features of a card indicate the existence of the corresponding religious leader. Likewise, the card exhibits the quality of iconicity (Gell 1998, 25) through the photograph of the religious leader inserted in its upper right corner. But these were not the only ways that the cards as material signs were related to the signified person. The material practices of moving the cards between district councils was essential to this relation between the signifier and signified person. The purpose of the production of registration cards was to make possible the identification and, if necessary, apprehension of religious leaders. If a card was not moved when a religious leaders left the district, its relationality to the signified person would weaken, because the administrative resources at the disposal of the officials holding the card would not allow them to identify the cleric for whom the card stood for. As John Law observes, the objects are *constructed* through their integration into an assemblage, and similar to people objects become real due to the practices they are part of, a reality enacted. The re-enactment of things makes them real, and their identities are fragile and can vary when these things are dislocated in new sites (Law 2004, 54-57; 59).

An example of how the misunderstanding of the functions of registration cards and a misplacement of these objects by local officials disconnected the cards from the signified person is provided by the report of an inspection of Balta district from October 1925. The report shows that the cards from the catalogue of clergy and preachers of Balta district were sewn into a single file, which made impossible the transmission of the cards to other districts when some of religious leaders would leave (TSDAVOV, 5-2-825, 147). The registration cards of religious leaders were not supposed to be sewn into files, but nevertheless, local officials in Balta sewed them in. The officials responsible with keeping the archives replicated their usual practice of dealing with archival documents, guided by the materiality of other files contained in their archives and by the bundling (Keane 2005, 188) material qualities of the cards whose forms and dimensions were similar to other documents sewn into the files. By sewing the cards, the officials in Balta made impossible the circulation of cards and weakened the relation between the signifiers (the cards of registration) and the signified persons (religious leaders). They integrated the cards in a different practice and by this they changed their meaning.

In both examples presented above, the weakness of bureaucratic networks and the materialities encountered by local officials undermined the immutability and mobility of the bureaucratic artefacts by obstructing their circulation and damaging the standardised form they had. These examples reveal the importance of the circulation of the immutable mobiles, of communication resources, and material practices for the well-functioning of state agencies. The semiotics of the documents produced by liquidation officials were shaped by the categories and tenets of the Bolshevik discourse encoded in the structure and categories contained by documents, and by the practices they were part of. The standardisation of their structure was meant to make them immutable, so that the content they caried would be translated in a language comprehensible for Soviet officials, and quantifiable in statistical reports. The practices they were part of were meant to make them mobile, so that they could deliver the relevant data from provinces to Liquidation Department in Kharkiv. The passing of these documents through the offices and archives of provincial authorities interconnected the documents with other human and non-human actors, included them in new practices that in turn shifted their semiotics and diminished their immutability and mobility.

The fractality of antireligious files and the perceptual field of Soviet officials

This section explores a file produced in 1925-1926 with the participation of the liquidation apparatus, Antireligious Commission of MASSR, and other state agencies. This file was a place where religious and political identities of the congregations were translated, negotiated and

debated. It represents a compilation of reports and forms containing data regarding a number of Religious Communities from the villages of Neudorf and Lepitcoe. Based on this file, the authorities formed their understanding of the religious landscape of these settlements. The objective of this section is to produce analysis of this file from three perspectives. Firstly, the file will be examined as a policing tool which resembles the biography of religious communities. The structure and content of the file depicting Religious Communities from Neudorf and Lepitcoe is in many ways similar to those of police investigation files (see Vatulescu 2010) that were used in demasking (Fitzpatrick 2005) persons and groups perceived as hostile elements. Secondly, the section explores the file as a fractal object consisting of documents produced within different networks and presenting divergent representations of the same religious communities. In John Law's definition, a fractal object is a composite thing containing different networks producing divergent versions of reality which merge in that object due to a set of procedures. These objects are neither singular nor a collection of things, they are more than one and less than many. The example of a fractal object given by Law is the compilation of medical reports produced by the examination of the same patient with different devices. Sometimes, these reports present divergent data regarding the illness of the same patient, but medical doctors examine them against each other based on a set of procedures and produce the final conclusions on the physical state of their patient (Law 2004, 54-62). The objective of this section is to examine the file presented bellow as a composite object, containing bureaucratic artefacts produced within different state agencies and presenting different versions of reality. This section identifies the procedures through which the antireligious officials merged those realities in order to produce their understanding of religious communities from Lipetcoe and Neudorf. Thirdly, the file is analysed as a device used by officials for organising their perceptual field (Ueno 2011). The perceptual field is an understanding of a social structure produced with the participation of different techniques, devices and categories, which by constituting our understanding of a history becomes part of that history (Ueno 2011, 59). In this sense, the examined file was a device that participated in the reconstruction of the religious landscape. Last but not least, I analyse the compilation of the file as a process involving distributed authorship, a process that disciplined both officials and believers (Goodwin & Goodwin 1996, 2).

Goodwin and Goodwin's article (1996) is pivotal for my argument that follows, as it inspired my thinking about the multiple ways in which the file operated as a device. Goodwin and Goodwin's article analyses cognition in the working environment by investigating the seeing of the airplanes by the employees of a middle-sized airport as a process embedded in a

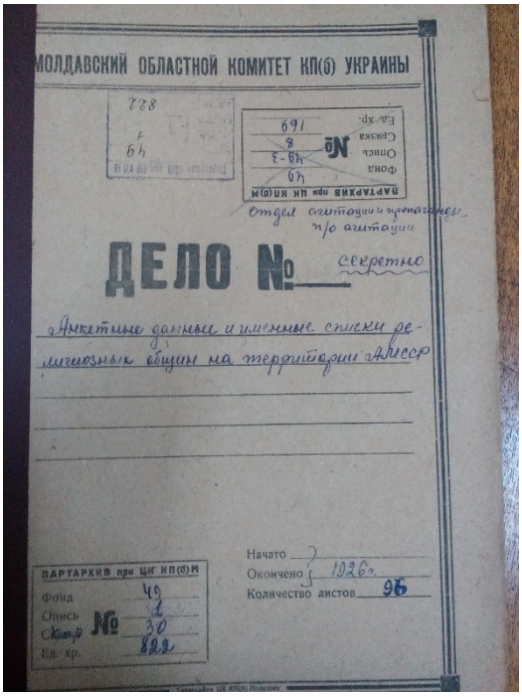
series of work activities. They examine the participation of a series of tools in the process of seeing the airplanes, which serve as mediators between the gazed upon airplanes and the humans involved in performing their work duties (1996, 1). Although an airport is an organisation very different from both Soviet state agencies and from religious communities, there are significant commonalities with the way people interact with tools to formulate their strategies and understandings of their social environments.

Archival files as places of confrontation

In what follows, I will present the file (*Figure no 5*) under analysis and examine it as a place of confrontation between religious believers and officials. In her study on religion in Soviet archives, Sonja Luehrmann regards "the materiality and placement [of the documents] in the [Soviet] archives as traces of the social relationships from which they emerged and that continue to shape them" (2015, 3-4). Luehrmann considers the archives as a place of the confrontation between religious actors and atheist institutions over the role and place of religions in Soviet society, a repository where documents produced by religious and political actors acquire "reality effect" (Luehrmann 2015, 3-4; 22-23). Drawing on ANT repertoire, we can add to Luehrmann's observation that the documents themselves participated in the relations which shaped them. As we have seen in the previous sections of this chapter, the documents had a reality effect, an influence on the setup in which they were compiled long before they were stored in the archives (the influence of the agency of bureaucratic artefacts on the religious believers who participated to their production will be discussed in the following chapter). The file under analysis was a device which participated in the relations between Soviet officials and religious believers, and was used by Soviet bureaucrats as a media tool for seeing religious communities. The examined file contains a compilation of reports and forms with data regarding a number of religious communities from the villages of Neudorf and Lipetskoe based on which the authorities formed their understanding of the religious landscape of these settlements. Many of the forms contained in the file are characterised by distributed authorship because their filing was made with the participation of both officials and believers. The editing of these documents was a process in which religious and political identities were assessed and negotiated.

The file was compiled in 1926 and is stored in the archive of the Party Organisation of MASSR. It contains a number of forms and tables referring to seven religious communities from this territorial unit. The documents enclosed in this file were compiled in 1925 on the Baptist, Reformed, Evangelical, and Lutheran communities from the German settlement of

Neudorf, and on three Eastern Orthodox Christian communities from Lipetskoe (AOSPRM, 49-1-822). The file was created by officials from the Antireligious Commission of the Central Committee of the Party Organisation of MASSR and includes forms filled in by local authorities and questionaries completed by believers under the supervision of the liquidation apparatus. Soviet authorities perceived the villages of Neudorf and Lepitcoe as disloyal communities since the time of the Civil War when German colonists rose up against the Bolsheviks and supported the Whites. The Orthodox communities of Lepitcoe also demanded special attention because among their members were numerous Inochentists whose spiritual centre, which had been destroyed in a Bolshevik military operation in September 1920, was located near this village (see chapters 2 and 9). The documentation compiled on the Orthodox congregations from Lepitcoe is unfortunately incomplete, and so this chapter will mainly focus on the case of the congregations from Neudorf, referring to the case of the Orthodox communities only to the extent to which the available documents allow.


МОЛДАВСКИЙ ОБЛАСТНОЙ КОМИТЕТ КП(б) УКРАИНЫ

ДЕЛО №

секретно

Анкетные данные и именные списки религиозных общин на территории АМССР

Начато

Окончено 1926 г.

Количество листов 96

Figure no. 5: The cover page of the 1926 file containing a compilation of reports and forms with data regarding the religious communities from the villages of Neudorf and Lepitcoe. The inscriptions read: "Moldavian Regional Committee of CP(b) of Ukraine -The Department of Agitation and Propaganda [The Antireligious Commission was organised based on this Department. The Commission and the Department were headed by the same party official] – Secret – Survey data and the lists of the members of religious communities from the territory of MASSR – 1926 (AOSPRM, 49-1-822).

The file contains 96 pages and begins with a form (*Figure no. 6*) containing the names of the registered communities, the number of their members, the membership of the parish councils,

a short history of the communities before and after the Revolution, the growth of their membership after 1917 and 1921, the attitude of believers towards the seizure of valuable religious objects for famine relief, trends towards a change in religious orientation, attitudes toward the military draft, details of local clerics and their pre-revolutionary political background, attendance at religious services on Sundays and important religious holidays, the number of baptisms, weddings, funerals, confessions, and processions, the number of miracles, their nature, place, and time, the influence of the clergy and of the members of the parish council on the local population, existing conflicts among believers, the sources of financial income of the community, the number of prosecutions against local clergy, names of preachers, prophets and their activity, the methods of production and distribution of religious literature, and the nature of the relations of subordination to central ecclesiastic authorities. These forms were filled in by believers and were signed by the secretaries of the religious communities (AOSPRM, 49-1-822).

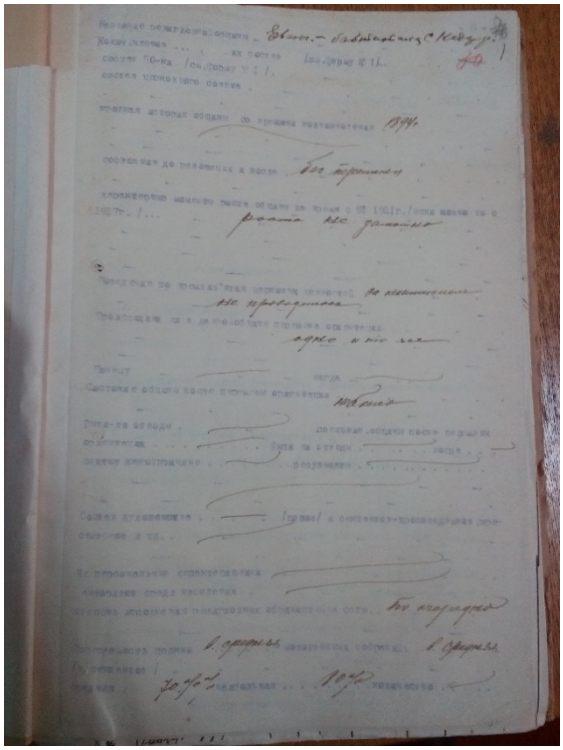


Figure no. 6: The first page of the form filled in by the Baptist community of Neudorf in 1925.

These forms are followed by lists of the members of religious communities which include their names, gender, age, nationality, education, and profession. A separate list was created for each

congregation which are similar to those created as part of the registration of religious communities.

For each of the two villages, local officials filled in a number of forms (*Figure no. 7*), which included the name of the village, its administrative subordination, information about the distance from the district administrative centre and railway connections, population number and its ethnic and gender structure, the level of literacy of the inhabitants of the settlement, local enterprises, the area of available agricultural lands, the number of poor, middle and kulak peasant households, seasonal migration for work, the role of the villagers in the Civil War, local party and Communist youth organisations and their membership (ethnic, gender, age, social structure, and the level of alphabetisation of the Party members), the attendance at open party sessions by non-members, antireligious work conducted by local Communists. Additional forms contained data on the activity of local reading huts and libraries, school attendance, antireligious work in schools, the role of local pioneer organisation, religious influence of the parents on their children, conflicts between parents and local schools caused by religious beliefs, and religious observance among the youth (AOSPRM, 49-1-822).

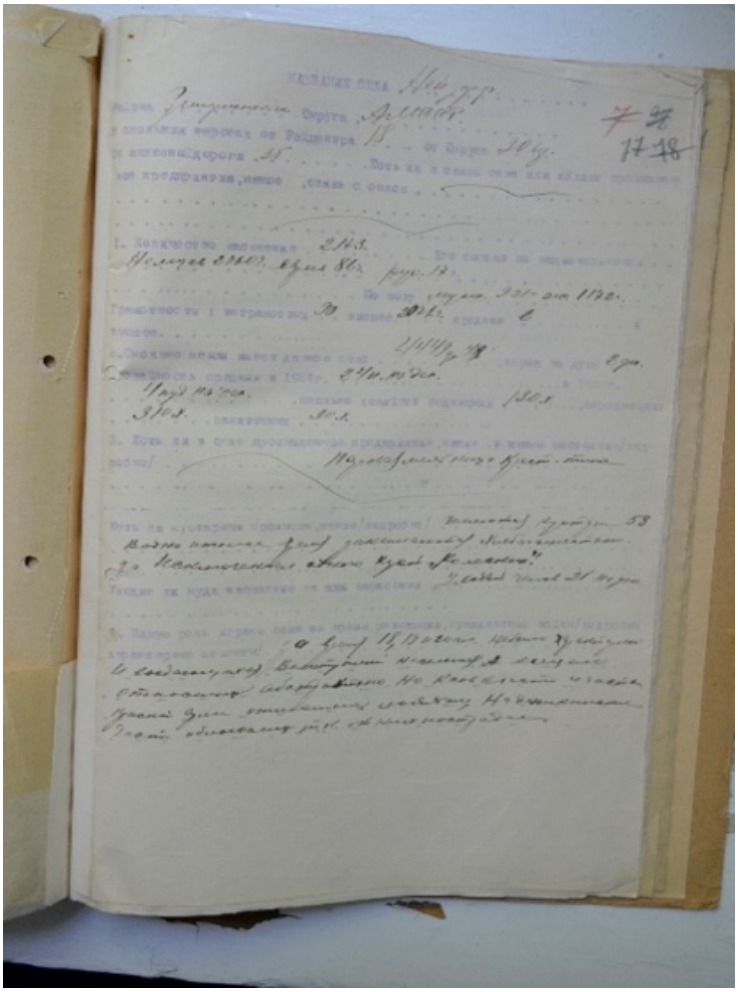


Figure no. 7: The first page of the form filled by the local officials from Neudorf.

This file was a place where religious actors and officials negotiated the religious and political identities of the congregations. Religious believers and officials had different agendas but the nature of the questions on the forms required them to operate with the same notions determined by the Bolshevik discourse.

Goodwin and Goodwin note in the case of a mid-sized airport that "[t]o read [a] scene […] in a work-relevant way Ops personnel [of the airport] bring to bear situated, local cultural knowledge" (Goodwin 1996, 26). In a similar manner, the process of production of the Soviet files by officials was embedded in Bolshevik discourse and in cultural knowledge and was placed in the frame of the complex relations between state agencies and religious communities involved. According to Igal Halfin, the Bolsheviks were preoccupied with conducting an "eschatological diagnosis" of their place in history. The Bolsheviks viewed history as a journey of the proletariat from the darkness of capitalism to a "bright future" of classless society. Salvation would be achieved through the advent of a messiah embodied in the New Men, who were the politically conscious proletarians (Halfin 2000, 1-5). The pivotal point on this

eschatological pathway was the Bolshevik Revolution and the Civil War that according to official ideology marked the beginning of Russia's transformation. Many of the questions on the forms relate to these events. The Bolsheviks expected religions to wane and disappear during their eschatological journey. One of the objectives of the inquiries conducted by the liquidation apparatus was to assess the decline of religions. The data regarding the attendance at religious services, weddings and baptisms, and the social structure of the members of the communities were expected to make possible a diagnosis of the influence of religious ideas, whose disappearance was considered only a matter of time.

The forms contain a field to be filled in with a short historical account of the communities. The Reformists, Adventists, Baptists, and Lutheran Communities of Neudorf (AOSPRM, 49-1-822, pp. 1; 6;10; 81) responded briefly to this question, mentioning the year and place of the formation of their communities, and the Lutherans added a few additional words regarding their presence in Neudorf since the establishment of this German settlement. A second important query from the forms relates to "the state of the community before the revolution". The answer to this question was simple and direct, such as "without change" (AOSPRM, 49-1-822, pp. 1; 10; 81), while the Adventists mentioned in this field that no growth of the community's membership was registered (AOSPRM, 49-1-822, p. 6). This question was important from the perspective of the Bolshevik discourse because the growth in the congregation would indicate a possible activisation of the religious preachers that could be interpreted as reactionary activity undermining the regime.

Answering another important question, the Protestant communities from Neudorf stated that they had no valuable objects to be requisitioned for the famine relief and so they did not resist this state policy (AOSPRM, 49-1-822, pp. 1; 6;10; 81). The campaign of seizure of valuable sacred objects for famine relief in 1921-1922 was a strategy of the Bolsheviks to dispossess the Orthodox Church and other religious organisations of their valuables. Additionally, it was designed to undermine the authority of the Orthodox Church (Peris 1998, 26-27). The official question related to these events was included on the forms in order to assess the attitudes of the communities toward the Soviet authorities.

Changes in "religious orientation" were another important issue from the perspective of the authorities. All four communities stated that no such changes occurred (AOSPRM, 49-1-822, pp. 1; 6;10; 81). These changes from the perspective of the Bolshevik discourse were important as they may represent an ideological response of the reactionary forces to official policies. At the same time, the officials were struggling to prevent the emergence and spread

of new religious movements which the regime had not managed to control efficiently (see chapter 4).

A common feature of the answers given by religious believers was their conciseness and the avoidance of the use of terms borrowed from the Bolshevik discourse. Another common way believers dealt with the questions on the forms was to leave some of the fields empty. These features of the answers reveal the circumspectness with which the questioned religious actors dealt with the forms. An explanation one could advance is that the questions were not well understood by believers, however the repetition of the same pattern reveals that this was perhaps not the case. Being constrained by official regulations, religious actors engaged with the forms but stood back as far as possible from the official narratives. Religious believers formulated their responses in a similar way to how, according to James C. Scott, dominated communities and individuals "play dumb" in order to avoid expressing a direct refusal to the representatives of the dominant groups (1990, 133). The believers who filled in the forms tried to avoid a full engagement with the forms and to present this avoidance as a result of their naïve lack of understanding.

The questions asked in the forms filled in by believers correlate with some of those answered by local authorities. The queries from the forms sent by local bureaucrats were more direct, and for example, asked about the occurrence of conflicts between institutions and locals over religious issues. The forms filled in by officials and those by believers were included in the same file and were compared in order to provide the central authorities with a better understanding of the situation on the ground. The file is not just a place where the voices of religious believers confronted incidentally those of the officials. The examined file was a tool devised to organise this confrontation. The repetition of the same questions on the forms filled out by local officials and on those completed by believers transforms the file into a grid created with the intent of demasking religious communities by identifying differing answers. Despite the reluctance of the religious leaders to engage with the notions of the political discourse, their statements answered a number of politically designed questions, and the forms they filled in were placed next to the forms created by officials. The questions asked on the forms and the placement of the questionaries in the same file with the documents produced by officials decontextualised the answers given by believers and reshaped their meaning. The Bolshevik political discourse was behind the logic of the structure of the examined file and behind the way it was read.

Demasking Religious Communities

In what follows, I explore the examined file as an investigation tool, devised to demask hostile elements. Despite their belief in the forthcoming victory of the revolutionary proletariat and of their materialist worldview, the Bolsheviks expected reactionary forces to try to obstruct the advance to socialism. Identifying and demasking enemies who threatened the accomplishment of socialism was regarded by the Bolsheviks as an integral part of their struggle for the cause of Revolution. Sheila Fitzpatrick observes that revolutionary periods are times in which historic agents engage in self-reinvention, while the revolutionary militants are obsessed with authenticity and with demasking the impostors who try to forge new images of themselves in order to accommodate themselves (2005, 3). The Bolsheviks imagined their enemies not only as hidden individuals, but as masked groups and communities as well. From this perspective, the inquiries made by local officials and liquidation commissions can be regarded as a tool devised to demask believers. The file under analysis is an example of a tool used to demask religious communities and assess their political stance regarding the unfolding revolutionary changes. The main technique of demasking used by the officials was to contrapose the forms filled in by religious believers with those filed by officials. The file under examination contains both types of forms, which reveals that the officials based in Balta who were examining the submissions from Neudorf and Lipetskoe conducted this kind of comparative analysis.

Nevertheless, the local officials from Lipetskoe and Neudorf involved in collecting data and filling in the forms exhibited a clear tendency towards avoiding the registration of information that could present their villages as disloyal communities. For example, the field on the form referring to the stance of the villagers from Lipetskoe during the Civil War is left empty, while in the field from the form of Neudorf the colonists are presented as loyal to the Red Army (AOSPRM, 49-1-822, pp. 20; 77). During the advance of White forces in 1919, the German colonists from Glukstal (Cașu 2014, 25), a German settlement situated in the vicinity of Neudorf, rebelled against the Reds. Later police investigations identified a number of Germans from Neudorf who participated in the rebellion (ANRM, 3401-1-2355, pp. 2, 11). Local officials, however, did not mention these details in the forms. The officials from Lepitcoe mentioned the Inochentist spiritual centre as a "sectarian organisation" located three versts from the village (AOSPRM, 49-1-822, p. 85) and hence not located in the settlement, although other contemporary sources indicate that an Inochentist community was present in Lipetskoe (AOSPRM, 49-1-821, p. 3; Plugarul Ros, 1928, no. 31, p. 4). The contrasting nature of the data from the abovementioned documents reveal that local officials were not guided in their actions by the Bolshevik discourse alone but that ideological tenets were constantly negotiated and

adapted to local conditions. They also had personal reasons to avoid unnecessary attention from their superiors, because the purging of the party and state officials from the border areas was a common occurrence in the early 1920s. For example, in 1923 with the authorisation of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Soviet Ukraine, the Balta Party Organisation was purged. According to the report, because of the proximity of the state border numerous unreliable elements had succeeded in entering the party (SAOO Fond П-3-1-584, 15).

In 1918, Martin Latsis, a leading Cheka official, instructed the police officers that the results of their investigations should depend primarily on the social origins of the suspect, on his or her studies and profession. As Cristina Vatulescu remarks on police investigation case files, the fate of the persons arrested by the Soviet police was determined not based on their deeds but rather depending on who they were, their class, origins, education and profession (Vatulescu 2010, 32; 34). Similar to the investigation files, the surveillance files were produced with the intent of *characterising* the suspects rather than *identifying* the criminals (Vatulescu 2010, 35). One of the functions of the modern police investigation file was to serve as a tool of breaking away individual criminals from crowds perceived as dangerous or suspicious (Vatulescu 2010, 45). Nevertheless, Soviet files "aimed at matching one individual with all the criminal personae that she could potentially take." (Vatulescu, 2010, 54)

An important function of the examined file was to match the images of religious communities with all possible criminal personae. The confrontation of the forms completed by religious believers with those produced by local officials was central to the accomplishment of this objective. The comparative analysis on these two types of forms could result in the construction of explanatory lines connecting unsatisfactory results of the implementation of various state campaigns and the presence of religious communities. For example, in October 1925 the central authorities considered that the inhabitants of the German settlements of Bergdorf, Gluckstal and Neudorf had not manifested interest in Soviet political campaigns, explaining their passivity by the influence of religious sects and by the proximity of the state border (AOSPRM, 49-1-455, p. 5). The connection between the lack of interest in Soviet campaigns exhibited by the inhabitants of these villages and the presence of religious communities was the product of the confrontation of the forms filled under the supervision of the liquidation apparatus and the information provided by local officials. The placement in the same file of these two types of forms materialised the image of one type of criminal persona that the religious communities from Neudorf could take.

The file under analysis, therefore, also functioned as an investigation tool created to demask religious communities. This file presents features similar to those of the police

investigation files. The file matches these communities to all possible criminal personae. Bolshevik political discourse was at the very core of the file and based on it the officials constructed the accusations against religious communities under examination. The materiality of the file and the placement of the forms encompassed through it played a central role in this process.

Archival files as fractal objects

The examined file was a place of confrontation, and hence, the documents presented in it contain divergent accounts of the religious communities from Neudorf and Lepitcoe. The forms enclosed in the file were designed to politicise the activity of religious communities through translations and organise a confrontation between religion and the project of constructing socialism. The positioning of the forms against each other intended to measure the hostility of the religious communities and to construct the image of a fraudulent self-representation to be demasked. The officials constructed the file as a composite object, as a fractal device meant to stage a conflict. John Law defines fractal objects as compilation of artefacts presenting different versions of reality, yet reconciled through a set of procedures meant to merge them and to produce a singular reality. According to Law, the belief in the singularity of reality is crucial for the success of these procedures (Law 2004, 54-62). My argument here is that the Bolsheviks believed in the singularity of reality, a Marxist version of reality, which was materialised through the structure of the examined file and embedded in the forms filled in by religious believers.

Daniel Miller observes that a paradox of all projects of humanity dedicated to the immaterial, be they religious or the rules of the free market, is that they are expressed through materiality. Miller states that "material practice should always accord with the proper vision of the immaterial, the market/the divine, which was its source of authority" (Miller 2005, 28). The Bolsheviks seized power in an overwhelmingly peasant country but were equipped with the tenets of a utopian project designed by Marx for an industrial society. At the same time, the Bolsheviks were convinced that their project of building a socialist society would encounter the resistance of socially-alien elements. The Bolshevik belief in the existence of the social enemy was as strong as their belief in the up-coming socialist revolution. But how did the idea about the antagonism between working class and its social enemies materialise? The structure of the file examined in this section is an example of the materialisation of the ideas about class struggle. The documents containing the official reports about the relations between local

institutions and religious believers and about the achievements of Soviet policies in Neudorf and Lepitcoe were set against the questionaries filled in by believers.

But why the need to materialise the idea about class struggle by pitting the forms filled by believers and those produced by Soviet officials against each other? Through the compilation of the examined file the Bolsheviks produced material evidence of the existence of an enemy to be demasked, of a backward countryside to be enlightened, and above all they produced the material evidence of an antagonism which could be solved only by applying Marxist ideas. The examined file serves as a fractal materialisation of Marxist ideas about class antagonism, and it worked as material proof of the applicability of Bolshevik ideological tenets. This file stages a contradiction which conforms with the solutions proposed by the Bolsheviks.

Organising the perceptual field

The examined file can also be understood as a tool which participated in the organisation of the perceptual field of the officials and in the reorganisation of the religious landscapes. As Goodwin and Goodwin observe in the case of the job of a baggage loader in an airport, "finding a relevant flight are responsive to, and contingent upon, the detailed organization of the environment in which she is working" (1996, 7). The organisation of the environment and the process of examination of the current situation in order to take relevant decisions is accomplished, in both Goodwin and Goodwin's example and in case of Soviet officials, with the participation of material artefacts (Goodwin 1996, 17).

Similar to the airport examined by Goodwin and Goodwin, the religious landscape was highly complex and their administration required the collection of detailed data which had to be systematised in order to make the accomplishment of the regime's policies possible. The forms enclosed in the examined file were tools that participated in the reorganisation of religious communities and in the systematisation of the religious landscape. In this context, the forms filled out with the participation of religious believers and the lists of parishioners fulfilled multiple functions. Firstly, the compilation of the lists and forms directed the members of religious communities towards redefining the meaning and objectives of their belonging to a parish. They were no longer just individual believers constructing the relations between themselves through collective participation in religious services and through informal means, but were bound by a shared responsibility for the religious building received from the state. Secondly, the completion of the forms was a performance that consolidated the authority of the lay leaders of the community among the believers. The forms were signed by the secretaries of the religious congregations (AOSPRM, 49-1-822, p. 3). Finally, the process of filling out the

forms involved believers becoming accustomed to the ideological tenets of the official ideology.

According to Naoki Ueno, human perceptions in a working environment are constructed through the organisation of the perceptual field by tools or inscriptions that give directions to our observations (2011, 61-62). Ueno defines the perceptual field as an understanding of a social structure or community that is produced through different techniques, devices and categories, which by constituting our understanding of a history becomes part of that history (Ueno 2011, 59). The examined file, therefore, was a tool that reorganised the perceptual field of the officials.

As a final product, the file was available to the provincial Antireligious Commission, while local officials, religious leaders, and liquidation apparatus were involved only in the production of some of the documents contained in the file. The forms enclosed in the file had a standardised structure and content, and they directed the attention of the local officials and of religious leaders towards specific moments from the history of religious communities, leaving unregistered numerous other details relevant to the identity of the congregations. The placement in the same file of the forms filled in by religious leaders and local officials invited the readers of the file, who never interacted directly with the religious believers to whom the documents referred, to conduct an inquiry into the contrasting statements made by believers and officials, and to regard the religious communities represented by the file as potentially enemies to be unmasked.

As Goodwin and Goodwin observe, the decision-making and problem-solving activities in a working environment involve numerous tools. For example, an officer of the Ops Room of an airport looks at a number of devices, such as a clock, a grid and a screen, before answering the work-related question asked by another employee (Goodwin & Goodwin 1996, 18). The enumerated devices shape and direct the perceptual field of the officer. The file examined in this chapter was a complex device containing multiple tools, whose order reveals the logic of the way provincial antireligious officials read them. The structure of this file repeats the structure of the secret police investigation case files, which usually began with an initial interrogation report in which the accused was allowed to speak about her/his life as they understood it and ends with a report of the investigation which presents the same person as a demasked criminal. Through its structure, the examined file and its constituent forms shaped the perceptions and actions of the officials who worked with them and made them the inscription point of what Michel Foucault calls discipline (Foucault 1995, 137). The structure

of the file directed the reader towards searching and identifying deceitful statements by religious actors.

Conclusions

The bureaucratic artefacts produced by liquidation officials with the participation of religious believers were immutable mobiles circulating through a network formed of numerous actors, including state officials, religious believers, objects, and numerous other bureaucratic documents. Along their way from the secretaries of religious communities who filled the lists of the members of their congregations and other official forms, the data collected through these procedures underwent at least three steps of translation. The first one was the filling of the lists of believers, which translated the identities of the later into the notions of the Bolshevik discourse. Likewise, this procedure formatted the relations between Soviet officials and religious believers and manifested their performativity by formatting the language and notions with which the believers operated. Non-human actors also participated to these relations, an example being the religious buildings which facilitated the identification of religious communities, and which were important in the work of the mechanisms of constrain deployed by state agencies and used to compel believers to register. The second step of translation was produced through the creation of the dislocation summaries by the provincial liquidation commissions. At this stage of collecting and systematising data related to religious communities, the collected information was modified, translated, shifted, so as to meet the interests and institutional agendas of police officers and judiciary officials who were among the members of the provincial liquidation commissions. Bureaucratic artefacts produced by liquidation officials formed relationalities with other bureaucratic documents, including the police files, which formatted the way provincial liquidation commissions interpreted the data collected in districts. The last step of translation was the interpretation of the summaries received from provincial officials by Liquidation Department in Kharkiv.

Along their long journey from Ukraine's provinces to Kharkiv, the immutability and mobility of the documents produced by liquidation officers was weakened by the relationalities they entered with local officials and bureaucratic artefacts. The semiotics and structure of the liquidation forms was damaged by local officials due to the influence of the materialities with which they related at a local level. In some instances, the bureaucratic devices used to police religious believers had their mobility damaged by their integration in new practices. This was the case when the cards of registration were sewed in files. The sewn cards could not be transmitted to another district council when the religious leaders would leave the district. The

practice of sewing the cards in files was suggested by the bundling of their material qualities and the materiality of local archives. This practice undermined the relation between the cards of registration of religious leaders as material signs and the persons they stood for. At other instances the materialities encountered on the ground by Soviet officials dictated them to change the standardised structure of the registration forms, such as in the case of the dislocation summary produced in 1925 by the liquidation officials of Artemivsk okrug, who registered as sectarians all religious communities lacking sacred buildings. This definition of sectarianism was formulated through the encounter between soviet officials and the materiality of the policing system used to surveillance religious communities based on the leveraging of religious buildings. These disfunctions occurred in the 1920s, when Moscow experienced difficulties in governing the provinces because of a weak bureaucratic apparatus and scarce resources.

The file analysed in the second section of this chapter represents a place where authorities and religious landscapes met and engaged in the production of an image of religious communities. The guiding principles of this process were the tenets of the Bolshevik discourse, which were incorporated into the questions on the forms and in the structure of the file. The production and reading of the file were activities which disciplined both the functionaries and believers, shaped the relations between them, reorganised the religious landscape, and reorganised the perceptual field of the officials. From this perspective, the examined file and its structure were a materialisation of the Bolshevik ideology and served as a tool of this materialisation and as a proof of its correctness. In this sense, the fractality of the examined file which pitted against each other the forms filled in by believers and those filled in by officials, produced a "problem" which conforms with the predefined solutions proposed by the Marxists. By compiling and reading this file, the ideologically trained party officers could establish explanatory connections between documents describing different social, political and economic phenomena which overwise were not necessarily closely interconnected. The connection between the persistence of religious beliefs and traditions in Neudorf and the unsatisfactory results of Soviet policies was the product of an ideological grid materialised in the examined file and visible only to the party officers trained in Bolshevik ideology.

The role of different tools and devices such as the file examined in this chapter was central to the relations between the Soviet regime and religions. Because both state officials and religious actors participated in their compilation, a key question is what, if any, was the influence of these devices on religious communities? The next chapter examines the impact on religious congregations of the official procedures introduced into the religious landscape by liquidation officials. It shows how these documents served as mediators in the relations

between the Soviet regime and religions, and emphasises the dialogical nature of these relations. Based on the case of the Eastern Orthodox Community of Cioburciu, I illustrate how the documents compiled by the believers during their registration influenced the techniques of resistance employed by this community in order to elude the antireligious restrictions imposed by the state.

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Chapter 6: Organising Religious Resistance: Contingent Procedures, Material Religion and State Repression of the Orthodox Community of Cioburciu

In his studies on the early Soviet encounter with the Orthodox parishes, Gregory L. Freeze (1995; 2012; 2015; 2017; 2020) demonstrates that the parochialisation of power in Russian Orthodox congregations, or the increasingly assertive role of the lay believers in the administration of their parishes, was a process accelerated after the February Revolution and during the 1920s. According to Freeze, the sources of parochialisation were the old desires of the lay believers to regain control over their parishes and the appointment of the parish priests, the collapse of the Tsarist regime which before 1917 enforced the ecclesiastic control on parishes, and the dissolution of the ecclesiastic hierarchies and bureaucracy. The Bolshevik Decrees only legalised the status quo in the relations between ecclesiastic authorities and lay believers, and the control of the laity on parish life. In this chapter I will demonstrate that the Decrees and especially the system of registration of religious communities imposed by the Bolsheviks to religious landscape played a much greater role.

In this chapter, I will demonstrate that the introduction into the religious landscape of the official procedures by Soviet officials enhanced the capacity of the parishioners to pose an organised resistance to antireligious policies at a local level. Additionally, by dispossessing the parishes of their churches and granting the right to use the sacred buildings only to parishioners who officially registered, the Soviet regime involved more believers in the administration of religious communities. After the state seized control of religious buildings, believers where motivated to participate in the administration of their parishes not only by their desire to have a greater influence in Church life but also by the necessity of preserving their religious life intact and defending their sacred buildings. Additionally, the participation of the religious believers in the production of official documents resulted in the emergence of a new type of lay religious leaders. They were the secretaries and chairs of the religious communities, who mastered the skills of production of official documentation and learned how to defend the interest of their congregations through legal means.

As demonstrated in chapter 4 and 5, the forms, agreements and other documents produced by liquidation departments with the participation of religious believers shaped the official perceptual field and systematised the religious landscape. Religious actors participated in their creation, and through this process they learned the legal principles and the language of

the official political discourse. Additionally, through their engagement with official processes of registration, religious congregations adopted new forms of organisation and redefined the meaning and objectives of their belonging to their parish. In what follows, I will demonstrate that these new forms of organisation and the participation in the production of official documents made religious actors more capable of navigating within the frameworks of Soviet legislation and of defending, through both formal and informal means, their religious practices. The same processes organised the perceptual field of lay leaders of religious communities and created antagonism between believers and officials alike. The last part of this chapter examines how Soviet officials constructed their politicised understanding of the organised resistance of parishioners. The chapter centres on the case of the Orthodox Church of our Lady of Kazan from Cioburciu, the construction of which was at the heart of the confrontation of the Orthodox believers from this settlement with the Soviet authorities.

As Vera Shevzov observes, tsarist legislation did not define clearly the status and role of the lay believers in the life of their parishes. During the second half of the 19th and early 20th century, the involvement of lay believers in the administration of their parishes was limited. The members of the parishes had no rights to acquire property for their congregations or administer the finances of their churches. The churches and their resources were controlled and administered by the diocesan administrations through local clerics (Shevtsova 2003, 20-25). The Revolution of 1905 brought with it some improvement in the status of laity in parish life. The regime was compelled to make some concessions and the authorities allowed the formation of *prikhodskie sovety* (parish councils), which could participate to the administration of the parish finances only with the permission of the local priest and parish elders. Nevertheless, the status and prerogatives of these councils, which included twelve lay parishioners, was vague (Young 1997, 37-38). After the February Revolution, a social revolution was unfolding in the countryside, with peasants acquiring a new political and economic status through the meetings of the villagers that redistributed the land and by getting involved in the administration of their parishes (Young 1997, 51).

Following these earlier developments, in 1917 the Church underwent a number of significant reforms. Parishioners were now electing representatives who participated in diocesan assemblies which debated issues related to politics and Church life, such as the removal of local bishops, financial independence of the parishes, equal representation for clergy and lay believers in these councils, and the abolition of the obligation to serve in the army. These movements from below culminated in the Church Council of 1917-1918, which elected Vasilii Belavin (named Tikhon after election) as the patriarch of the Russian Orthodox

Church after almost two centuries since the abolition of the institution of patriarchate and state control over the Church. Another important decision taken by the Council was about the participation of lay parishioners in the administration of the Church (Lingenfelter 2017, 15-17). As Scott Lingenfelter observes, the Decrees issued by the Bolshevik leaders after they seized power, were in many ways a response to a revolution of the Church (2017, 17). According to Gregory L. Freeze, the Bolsheviks legalised the inter-revolutionary conquests made by the lay parishioners. The laity were the new masters of the parish, who decided over the firing and hiring of the parish priests, and administered the parish finances (Freeze 2015, 9). Nevertheless, as we have seen in previous chapters, the Soviet Decrees dispossessed the parishes of their sacred buildings, declaring them state property.

The Bolshevik legislation sought to limit the influence of the clergy and to control the believers by seizing religious buildings and granting the right to use them only to officially registered communities of lay parishioners. This approach conformed with the aim of reducing the role of the clergy to simple employees of the communities that were to be administered by lay believers elected by parishioners and officially approved by the authorities (see chapters 2 and 4). The Bolshevik Decrees were accompanied by aggressive antireligious propaganda campaigns and with repression. According to William B. Husband, believers' response to the violent assault of the state on the Church was manifested in three ways. Believers used violence and terror to intimidate local officials, co-opted bureaucratic procedures and Soviet legislation to resist antireligious restrictions, and relied on circumvention strategies to elude the restrictions when the former two ways of resistance failed. Husband observes that the believers learned to exploit the stipulations of the 1918 Decree on Separation in order to defend their religious lives. Believers became so adept at utilising the stipulations of the Decree and the bureaucratic procedures that by 1926-1928 the language of their petitions and that of the official legislative texts were virtually identical (Husband 1998, 77; 87; 88). The argument of this chapter is that the bureaucratic procedures imposed by the regime to religious landscape increased the capacity of believers to pose an organised resistance, shaped their relations with Soviet regime and the relations within the religious communities.

The New Church of Cioburciu and its Materiality

In 1910 in the village of Cioburciu (Tiraspol county, Kherson guberniia), believers commenced the construction of a large Church dedicated to Our Lady of Kazan. Following the Revolution and Civil War, the local Orthodox community wasn't authorised to use the

unfinished Church for religious purposes or to continue its construction because in Cioburciu there was an older Church of the Intercession of the Theotokos that was used for religious services, and also because the new Church was located in the yard of the local school (AOSPRM, 49-1-1419, pp. 14-16).

According to an article edited in 2010 in the newspaper of the Moldovan Orthodox Eparchy of Tiraspol and Dubasari, the Intercession Church was built in 1809 by the villagers from Cioburciu. This Church was made of stone and two priests served there. The author of the article (the name of the author is not mentioned in the newspaper) interviewed the elders from the village of Cioburciu, who told her/him that "The Intercession Church was not large, but beautiful" (*Pravoslavnoe Pridnestrovie* 2010, 17(275): 3). Likewise, at the beginning of the 20th Century, the parishioners built a mudbrick house for their priests (*Pravoslavnoe Pridnestrovie* 2010, 17(275): 3). The villagers from Cioburciu thus had a long tradition of caring for their parish church, and in 1910 they commenced the building of a new one.

The newspaper of the Kherson Eparchy (*Khersonskie Eparhial'nye Vedomosti*) is an important bibliographical resource for reconstituting the process of construction of this Church. This newspaper contains the official decisions of the Eparchial administration, the stenographs of the meetings of its governing bodies (for 1917-1918), information about the appointment of new priests, psalmists, and parish elders, the blessings from the local bishop to the collectors of donations for new churches. The first reference to the Church of Our Lady is from May 1912, when the Eparchial administration approved the appointment of the peasant (*tsaranin*) Stefan Gandapasu as the elder (*starosta*) responsible for the completion of the construction of the new Church from Cioburciu (*Khersonskie Eparhial'nye Vedomosti* 1913, 13: 205). In September 1913, peasant (*tsaranin*) Ioan Josanu replaced Gandapasu in this position (*Khersonskie Eparhial'nye Vedomosti* 1913, 18-19: 436). The editions of *Eparhial'nye Vedomosti* for 1910-1918 do not contain data related to earlier appointments in this position, which suggests that the collection of donations and the building works were administered by the parishioners of the old Church of the Intercession of Theotokos. Likewise, the editions of *Eparhial'nye Vedomosti* suggest that the peasants who took on the position of *starosta* of the new Church were from Cioburciu and were members of the Theotokos parish. Firstly, the elders who were responsible for the building works are presented as *tsaranin* (*ţăran*- peasant in Romanian), a term used by tsarist bureaucrats to refer to Moldavian peasants living in the Russian Empire. Cioburciu was a Moldavian village, a fact attested by the special requirement of good command of Romanian for the candidates applying in 1912 for a vacant position of parish priest in Theotokos Church (*Khersonskie Eparhial'nye Vedomosti* 1912, 15: 299).

Secondly, we can deduce that the appointed elders were locals because the surnames of one of them are listed among the female parishioners of Theotokos Church, who in 1916 collected donations for the Russian militaries fighting in the Great War (*Khersonskie Eparhial'nye Vedomosti* 1912, 19: 330). Finally, the editions of *Eparhial'nye Vedomosti* for 1910-1918 contain numerous news items about the generous donations for the building of churches offered by nobles, traders and rich people in general. In the case of the Cioburciu Church, I could not identify such news items, which suggests that its building was an endeavour undertaken exclusively by local peasants who made modest donations. The elders interviewed in 2010 by the author of the article from the newspaper of the Eparchy of Tiraspol and Dubasari, remembered about "the construction of the new Church of Our Lady by the villagers from Cioburciu" (*Pravoslavnoe Pridnestrovie* 2010, 17(275): 3).

The building of a new church in Cioburciu was necessary because of the large number of believers, for whom the Theotokos Church had become too small. Before the commencement of the building of the new Church, Cioburciu was a parish with two priests, a fact indicating that the number of parishioners was too large for one cleric (*Khersonskie Eparhial'nye Vedomosti* 1912, 15: 229). Likewise, the elders from Cioburciu remembered in 2010 about the Old Church as being small (*Pravoslavnoe Pridnestrovie* 2010, 17(275): 3). In 1916, Cioburciu is listed among the villages of Tiraspol County which had two parishes (*Khersonskie Eparhial'nye Vedomosti* 1916, 13: 448), which suggests that the new building of the Church was close to completion, and that liturgical services might have already been performed in it or in another building located in its vicinity.

During the 1920s, the parishioners of the Church of Intercession of Theotokos donated money, agricultural products and building materials for the completion of the construction of the new Church. They continued the construction of the Church, despite the interdictions imposed by Soviet legislation in 1920, when the Red Army took under its control the Tiraspol County (AOSPRM, 49-1-1419, pp. 14-16). The relations between Soviet regime and the religious community from Cioburciu were marked by the violent assault by local officials against the believers. According to the memories of the elders from Cioburciu, in the early 1920s Soviet officials entered the house of the local priest to search for valuables and killed him. The elders also remembered that in 1929 the construction of the new Church was almost completed. The believers installed the bells and the crosses on the domes. The consecration of the Church was scheduled for the holyday of the Icon of Our Lady of Khazan (July 21st), and the remaining works related only to the interior decoration (*Pravoslavnoe Pridnestrovie* 2010, 17(275): 3).

In 1929, the NKVD banned the continuation of the building works and the collection of donations. The building of the new Church was seized by the authorities who planned to use it for cultural and political activities for local peasants (AOSPRM, 49-1-1419, pp. 13-16). According to the account of the local elders, in 1931-1932 the Church of Our Lady was destroyed by the officials, who used the stone from its walls to build a school in the German colony of Glückstal and for building the Factory "October" from Krasnoe (Slobozia district). The Church of the Intercession of Theotokos was deconsecrated on Christmas day in 1935, and in 1936 it was demolished (*Pravoslavnoe Pridnestrovie* 2010, 17(275): 3).

The relations between the villagers and their Churches were formed through the practices of collecting donations and through participation in their construction. The endeavour of building the Churches by means of their own resources, both financial and human, organised the believers and endowed those parishioners who guided the building works and those who were the most capable acquiring the materials necessary for its construction with a special status. The building works produced an asymmetrical distribution of authority in the community. Additionally, the Churches related to local Orthodox believers through non-material concepts and beliefs that provided it the status of a sacred place. In the Orthodox tradition the sanctified building of the Church is the place where Christ with his saints surrounded by hosts of angels descend to Earth to participate in the liturgy (Benz 1957, 8). The building of the Church is the place where the congregation reunites with the heavenly Church in the performance of the sacraments. Although the new Church of Cioburciu was unfinished, according to Orthodox tradition internal and external architectural forms of the church are constituted of Christian symbols that make reference to scripture (The Handbook of the Clergyman 1985, 15). Hence, gazing on the architectural forms of the unfinished Church invited the believer to contemplate the celestial and thus also consider it a sacred place. According to Soviet legislation and official regulations, the new Church of Cioburciu could not serve as a place for religious services but nevertheless, religious actors from this settlement continued to build it taking the risk of being prosecuted for breaking the law.

The materiality of the new Church was not the only non-human actor involved in the continuation of the building works despite official restrictions. A number of additional things related to religious believers and through these relationalities redistributed the authority in the community and reshaped the way parishioners interacted between themselves. Among these objects are the official documents produced with the participation of believers and officials as part of the registration of the old Church from Cioburciu. The official procedures and

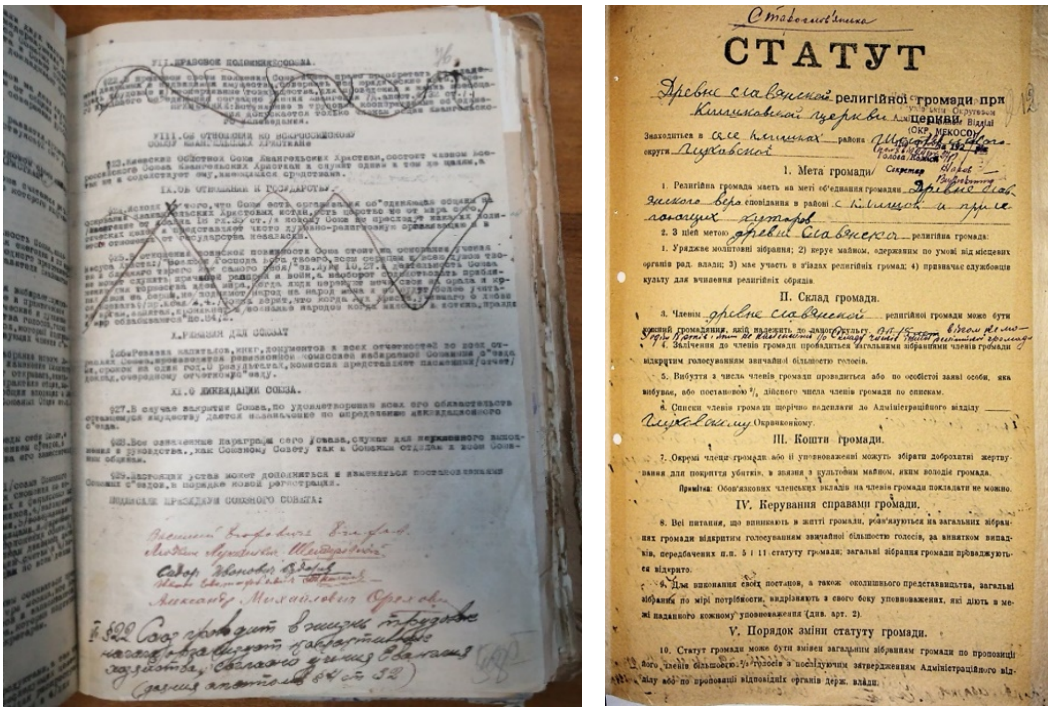
documents imposed by the Soviet regime on religious believers shaped the way religious actors interacted with authorities, mobilised parishioners, and organised their perceptual field.

Adapting to the Soviet Regime

In what follows, I examine the production of documents related to the registration of religious communities as a process of adaptation of believers to the conditions created by Soviet regime. By participating in the production of official documents believers acquired multiple skills important for the defence of their religious life against antireligious restrictions. Additionally, these processes helped believers to grasp the antireligious strategies of the regime and were crucial for the elaboration of the techniques employed by parishioners in order to resist antireligious policies.

The first way in which official documents related to the process of registration influenced the techniques of resistance of believers was to inform them about the restrictions imposed by the regime. A telling example are the parish statutes (*Figure no. 2*) which religious communities were obliged to produce and sign in order to receive the authorisation to practice their religions and to use their sacred buildings. The statutes were written based on Soviet legislation, which contained numerous stipulations that imposed restrictions on religious practices and defined the situations in which believers could be divested of their sacred buildings and religious communities dissolved. For example, the communities did not have the status of a juridical person, and hence could not own, buy or sell any properties. The communities could be liquidated when the state institutions issued a decision in this sense (TSDAVOV, 5-1-2190, pp. 46-47). The writing of the statutes was a process which involved the production of drafts by believers and their correction by liquidation officials.

A telling example of a statute whose revisions and corrections are well represented in archival documents is the one of the Union of Evangelical Christians of Kyiv Region (*Figure no. 8*) signed in 1922. Many of the paragraphs from this document were crossed out before the document was signed. Among the sentences that were eliminated are the stipulations about the role of the Union in the education of the younger generation, the stamp of this religious organisation, representing in courts the interests of religious communities, the buying and selling of properties, independence from the state because the Church is "a kingdom not of this world", and the refusal to bear arms (TSDAVOV, 5-1-1085, pp. 75-76). All stipulations that were crossed out did not correspond to Soviet legislation and its formulations regarding the role of religious communities (TSDAVOV, 5-1-2190, pp. 46-47), or referred to sensitive issues such as the military service of believers.



СТАТУТ

Древле славянської релігійної громади при церкві

1. Мета громади

2. Її метою древле славянська релігійна громада:

II. Склад громади.

III. Кошти громади.

IV. Керування справами громади.

V. Порядок зміни статуту громади.

Figure no. 8: The image on right: the last page of the Statute of the Evangelical Union of Kyiv Region. The document is signed by lay religious leaders, and three paragraphs of the text are crossed out by the officials from liquidation department (TsDAVOV, 5-1-1085, 75). The image on left: starting from mid 1920s, liquidation officials began to use standard forms for the statutes, in which the believers introduced only the name of their congregation, and some other details such as their confession (TsDAVOV, 5-2-959, 212). Probably, these forms were created in order to avoid the complex procedure of correcting the drafts of the statutes of religious communities.

The process of editing the drafts of the statutes and of other documents related to the registration of religious communities informs us about those aspects of their religion that were restricted but could not be abandoned or negotiated with the authorities. These aspects of religion and the restrictions imposed on them represented the focal points in the confrontation between religious actors and officials. They produced and defined believer's discontent with the regime's policies.

Another result of the involvement of believers in the production of official documents and of the interaction with the authorities was that believers learned the language of the Bolshevik discourse and of Soviet bureaucracy. For example, according to official investigations, during the 1920s the Orthodox community of Cioburciu received official authorisation multiple times for the collection of donations for the building of their new Church by writing requests formulated in elusive terms in which the believers referred to the renovation of an unnamed prayer house (AOSPRM, 49-1-1419, pp. 14-16). These practices reveal a good

command of the language used by Soviet bureaucracy and of the terms of official political discourse.

A third result of the participation in the production of official documents was that believers learned about Soviet agencies involved in antireligious policies and about the officials who they could approach informally. For example, in 1928 the believers from Cioburciu paid 330 roubles and 50 kilograms of potatoes to the technician of the Slobozia District Council, Bazhyrov, in order to receive his help in obtaining the official approvals necessary for the continuation of the building of their new Church. In his official assessment regarding the technical state of the new Church, Bazhyrov did not mention about the local school that was located near the Church (AOSPRM, 49-1-1419, pp. 14-16). As revealed by the case of the new Church of Cioburciu, corruption and other informal practices played an important role in the way religious actors evaded the restrictions imposed by the regime.

After the investigations conducted by officials in 1929, the NKVD and provincial party leaders decided to liquidate the religious Community of the Church of Intercession and to allow the reorganisation of the Community only with a different membership. The Commissions responsible with the building works of the new Church were also liquidated, the building materials and donated resources were confiscated and the building of the new Church was declared state property (AOSPRM, 49-1-1419, pp. 14-16). The decision to liquidate the Community of the Church of Intercession reveals that the authorities were aware of the level of organisation and the knowledge acquired by the local religious leadership. The dissolution of the Community and the permission to reorganise it only with a different membership was a measure of unmaking the organisational forms used in resistance against antireligious policies that were constructed and organised with the participation of the documents produced by believers and introduced into the religious landscapes by the Liquidation Departments.

Organising Religious Resistance

As Goodwin and Goodwin observe, the successful accomplishment of work tasks by an employee of an organisation is "responsive to, and contingent upon, the detailed organization of the environment in which she is working" (1996, 7). The organisation of the environment in which s/he works is accomplished with the participation of material artefacts (Goodwin 1996, 17). As demonstrated in the chapter 4, the liquidation apparatus and Antireligious Commissions used numerous tools for systematising religious landscapes and for constructing their perceptual field. These tools served as mediums of interaction between these institutions and religious communities and shaped the actions and the perceptual fields of both believers and

officials. In the following section, I examine the contingency and the influence of these tools on the way religious believers organised their resistance to antireligious policies.

As demonstrated in the chapter 5, the forms of organisation introduced by the regime into the religious landscape consolidated the ties between believers through the formation of a shared responsibility for the preservation of their sacred buildings as places used for religious purposes. The completion of the forms and lists by the members of the communities, the writing and signing of agreements, the election of the administrative bodies and Commissions by the general meetings of parishioners, involved the believers in the administration of their parishes and consolidated the lay leadership. The involvement of parishioners in the life of their communities and their organisation in commissions and administrations similar to those from state institutions, increased their capacity to pose a collective resistance to antireligious policies. An example of the kind of document the compilation of which organised and disciplined the believers are the stenographs of the meetings of the parishioners of religious communities (*Figure no. 9*). They opened with the title of the document, the name of the Community, the date of the meeting, number of participants, the name of the elected chair and the secretary of the meeting. Then the stenographs were filled with the list of the debated problems and resolution and were signed by the chairman and the secretary of the community (TSDAVOV, 5-1-2190, pp. 15-18).

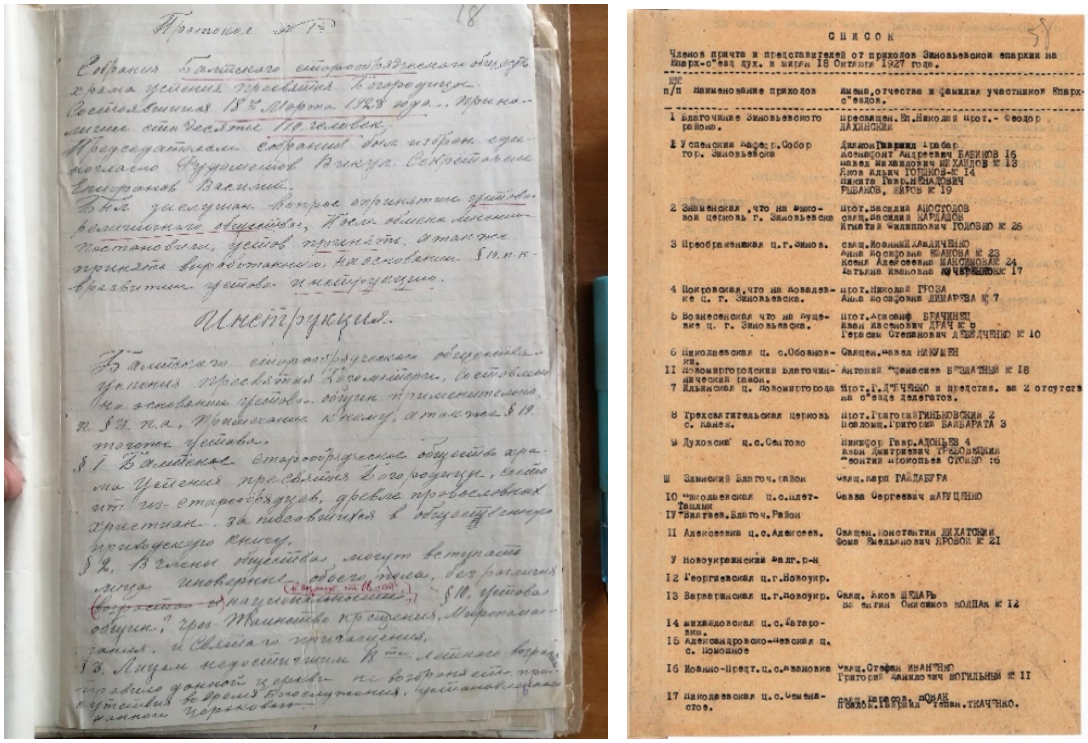


Figure no. 9: The document on left is the stenographs of the meeting of the parishioners of the Old Believer Church of Dormition from Balta (TSDAVOV, 5-1-2190, pp. 18). The document on right is one of the pages of stenograph of the meeting of the clergy and laity of Zinoviev Okrug, held in October 1927. The document contains

the list of the representatives of each parish, which include the parish cleric and one or more lay believers (TsDAVOV, 5-3-262, 58). The eparchial meetings were usually attended by the head of the local Liquidation Commission (TsDAVOV, 5-3-262, 60).

The efficiency of these forms of organisation is revealed by the case of the Community of Cioburciu. In 1926, the congregation of the Church of Intercession organised a Building Commission headed by Ivan Samoilov that was responsible for the completion of the construction of the new Church. The community decided to collect 10 roubles from each member able to contribute to the construction of the new Church. In September 1927, the Community created four Commissions for Collection with 60 members. The believers managed to collect the sum of 1684 roubles and 50 kopeks in money and agricultural products. In the same period, the number of the officially registered members of the congregation of the Church of Intercession increased steadily. By the end of 1926, the number of the members of the Community increased from 564 parishioners to 1641 persons, reaching 2486 members in 1928 (AOSPRM, 49-1-1419, pp. 14-16). Due to the organised involvement of lay parishioners in religious life and in the construction of the new Church, believers managed to use their informal relations with other Orthodox villagers to collect resources for the construction and to register more members in their community. Probably, the leaders of the Community hoped to use the increasing number of registered believers as an argument for the registration of the new Church after the completion of the building works. Additionally, the registration of the new members made possible the collection of more resources legally. In his 1928 correspondence with the head of the Liquidation Department, the chair of the liquidation apparatus of Krivoi Rog okrug mentions that the chairs and secretaries of the religious communities were allowed to collect donations for the renovation of religious buildings only from the officially registered members of their congregations. As a result, the representatives of religious congregations did everything possible to register as many believers as possible (TsDAVOV, 5-3-268, 1).

Each time the members of the Orthodox parish of Cioburciu met to decide how to continue the collection of funds, the administrative bodies of the Community issued official decisions which were sent for approval to the NKVD. The believers continued the collection of funds regardless of the cancelation by the NKVD of some of the decisions of the general meeting of the parishioners (AOSPRM, 49-1-1419, pp. 14-16). These practices reveal the importance of the completion of documents for organising the voting and legitimising further actions. The documents produced by religious communities served as material evidence and as guiding devices for the meetings. The standardised form of the documents disciplined the

believers and induced among them the feeling of shared responsibility for the decisions taken collectively. These practices undermined the authority of the officials and created antagonism between the Community and the regime. When a decision adopted through voting by the members of the Community was cancelled by the NKVD, the acts of resistance were perceived as legitimate by the will of the majority of the congregation. The trend towards the manifestation of the antagonism between the officially registered communities and the regime is revealed by the case of another congregation. A report of the Birzula district Party Committee for the period between April and June 1926 mentions that the Evangelical Community from Staryi Kuyalnik excluded a member for his denunciations to the authorities (AOSPRM, 49-1-610, p. 28). This case shows how religious believers used official procedures in order to consolidate their congregations and to eliminate the members perceived as unreliable.

Organising the Perceptual Field of the Parishioners

In what follows, I examine the official procedures for the production of documents by the lay leadership of religious communities as a process central to the organisation of their perceptual field (Ueno 2011, 59). Likewise, the produced documents will be analysed as tools that directed the actions of the lay leadership and of believers.

The status of lay religious leaders relied on the official documents they produced under the supervision of liquidation apparatus because these were the means through which they made the use of sacred buildings by believers and the practice of communal religious life possible. Additionally, by participating in the production of the documents, lay religious leaders acquired multiple skills that made them the most capable believers to deal with the authorities. The official documents were the source of their authority, of their understanding of the communities and of the regime's policies. As leaders, the lay representatives of religious communities could not operate outside the framework of the official procedures and documents.

The documents and the forms of organisation of believers implemented by officials organised the perceptual fields of lay religious leaders in two ways. On the one hand, the work with official documents informed them about the restrictions imposed by the regime on religious practices and about the strategies employed by bureaucrats. On the other hand, the forms of organisation imposed by the regime on religious parishes created a democratic forum in which believers could manifest their discontent with the restrictions imposed by officials. These procedures situated the lay leaders between their communities and state institutions, defined the focal points of the confrontation with authorities and the means with which the acts

of resistance could be organised and accomplished. For lay leaders, the meetings of believers were a means of mobilising, organising, and consulting the parishioners. The roles of the participants in meetings were defined by the structure of the produced documents (such as the stenographs of the meetings), which created a disproportionate distribution of influence among the believers and constructed a map of the community with the help of which the lay leaders could mobilise and involve members of the congregation in various activities. In the case of the Orthodox community of Cioburciu, the undertaking of efforts to continue the building of the new Church were decided through voting by all members of the community and these sessions were registered in official documents (AOSPRM, 49-1-1419, pp. 14-16). This practice reveals the importance of the documents for the organisation and hierarchisation of the members of religious communities and for the exercising of the role of the leaders of congregations.

The importance of the documents for the organisation of resistance and for the emergence of lay religious leaders is revealed by another case of confrontation between religious believers and Soviet officials from elsewhere in the Soviet Union. On the 15 of March 1924, 120 Orthodox believers from the village of Lopatnichi (Volyn Province) met in order to discuss a number of issues, including the status and technical state of the local Churches and the election of the 20 believers who officially registered as the members of the Community. Although the stenographic records of the meeting contain only issues relating to the status of the local Church and Religious community (TsDAVOV, 5-2-199, pp. 80), the following petition sent to Ukraine's Council of People's Commissars and signed by the chair of the Orthodox community of Lopatichi on behalf of religious believers, complained not only about the closure of the local Church, high registration fees, and the prosecutions against the local priest, but also about taxation quotas imposed on local peasants. Additionally, the chair of the religious community asked on behalf of all villagers for the replacement of the head of the rural Soviet by a local person (TsDAVOV, 5-2-199, pp. 71-74; 80). The documents produced by the community of Lopatnichi reveal that official procedures imposed by the Soviet regime on religious believers invested the lay religious leaders with the authority to represent the interests of believers on issues not related to religions. In some cases, the lay leaders even competed with local state officials.

Lay leaders of religious communities and the officials from the liquidation apparatus and Antireligious Commissions organised their perceptual field with the participation of the same devices and organised the religious parishes based on similar principles. Nevertheless, the perceptual fields they produced were different. Goodwin and Goodwin observe in the case

of the Ops personal of an airport that the work-relevant assessment of a scene by an worker involves "situated, local cultural knowledge" (Goodwin 1996, 26). Although these are organisations very different from religious communities, I argue that the interaction between humans and artefacts in these social environments are in many ways similar. The organisation of the perceptual field and the formulation of strategies in a work-relevant way is situated in cultural knowledge and lay religious leaders and Soviet officials operated within the context of different worldviews. The differences between their perceptual fields are revealed by the confrontation between them over the status of the new Church of Cioburciu. For lay leaders, the restrictions imposed by the regime were an infringement on the religious life and freedoms of their community, while for the officials, religions were a hindrance to be eliminated. These understandings were shaped by different cultural knowledge in which they organised their perceptual fields but with the participation of the same documents. At the same time, each of these two groups of actors based their status on different principles. If the status of lay leaders relied on the religious community who they represented, then the officials based their authority on their offices. It can be argued that lay leaders adopted a position in defence of religious communities not only due to their beliefs and involvement in religious practices, but also because these were the source of their authority.

Identifying the Sources of the Organised Resistance by Workers-Parishioners

In the following section, I analyse the way authorities examined within the framework of Bolshevik ideology the organised resistance of parishioners and how they explained it. I argue that the organised resistance by lay believers was perceived by the authorities as a subversive activity of the enemies of the regime, which resulted in a steady increase in the level of violence towards religious actors. Official documents portrayed lay religious leaders of the Orthodox Community of Cioburciu as kulaks exploiting the backward inhabitants of this village (AOSPRM, 49-1-1419, pp. 13-16). The officials found themselves incapable of grasping and expressing within the framework of their anthropocentric ideology, the role and nature of the relations between believers and the Church of our Lady of Kazan. Soviet officials did not grasp the contingent effects of the engagement of the believers with the bureaucratic practices introduced into the religious landscapes. By introducing new bureaucratic practices and forms of organisation in the religious landscape, the regime transposed to the religious communities some of the organisational techniques used by bureaucrats, which enhanced the capacity of parishioners to resist state policies. Soviet officials could translate the resistance of parishioners

into the terminology of the Bolshevik discourse only as actions of religious workers or peasants deceived by the class enemies that were to be identified and arrested.

From its early stages, Soviet regime tended to perceive any unauthorised activity by religious communities as subversive actions by its perceived enemies. For example, at the 10th Party Congress from March 1921 the head of the liquidation apparatus, Krasikov, mentioned in his speech:

> […] this petit bourgeois assault which has showed itself, of course, is looking for an ideology, for a policy and practice of life. And where has it found it? The peasantry searches and finds for itself a leadership in the old or renewed ideology: the Christian-clerical, the Baptist, the sectarian [ideologies] […] I have to say that there, in Samara governorate, flourishes not only the "workers' opposition", but also the opposition of Tolstovtsy, Baptist, Anabaptist, etc. (The speech of P.A. Krasikov)

Krasikov perceived religion as an ideological construct prone to be exploited by social enemies, and continued his speech by naming those enemies:

> On the materials and documents received by our organs we can see that Russian intelligentsia – lawyers, professors, former students, and engineers […] register among these believers, sign under those agreements based on which they receive the churches at their disposal. All sorts of elements from among the "former people" are now the most religious persons doing the most specific agitation and propaganda. (The speech of P.A. Krasikov)

This part of Krasikov's speech reveals that the Bolsheviks used the data collected by liquidation officials regarding the social origins of religious believers in order to identify the perceived social enemies who manipulated the workers and peasants. At the same time, the speech suggests that another principle based on which the regime demasked the perceived enemies from among believers was their active involvement in the life of the communities through such activities as preaching. Based on this last principle, any religious actors with an active role in the life of the community could be deemed as an enemy of the regime.

The incapacity to comprehend within the framework of the Bolshevik ideological framework the role of the technologies implemented by officials in order to systematise the religious landscape and that of the relationality of the believers to religious materialities, resulted in a misinterpretation by authorities of the sources and the nature of organised religious resistance to antireligious policies. We can argue that this misinterpretation was one of the

sources of the increasingly prominent role of the secret police in the relations between the regime and religious communities, which became increasingly subjected to repression.

Another source of the misinterpretation of religious activities and of the role of the believers perceived as social enemies was the official concept of "religious community" which was based on Marxist principles. From its inception, the process of registration of religious communities was devised to limit the influence of religious actors perceived as social enemies. A telling example of a policy intended to limit the influence of the social alien is the marginalisation of the clergy in the administration of religious communities (see chapter 4). Another way the regime tried to limit the access of perceived enemies among the officially registered parishes was to collect data regarding the social origin of members of the congregation (see chapter 4 and 5). The collected data was used in identifying the perceived enemies and the congregations dominated by them. The Bolsheviks expected that social antagonism between workers and perceived exploiters was to emerge and strengthen while Russia progressed on its road to Socialism, and that this antagonism would manifest in the membership of religious communities. The Bolsheviks expected workers and peasants registered as members of religious communities to not allow socially alien elements as members of their communities.

The Bolsheviks operated with a set of Marxist predefined social categories and expected registered communities to became permanent units to which antireligious officials could apply the regime's policies. The ANT (Actor-Network-Theory) school proposes a perspective on the social different from that of Marxist approaches (Latour 2005, 7). ANT scholars do not examine the social through the perspective of a set of categories defined in advance but instead consider the delimitation and definition of groups as the task of actors themselves (Latour 2005, 32). They also approach things as entities participating in the social (Latour 2005, 73-72). From an ANT perspective, therefore, the Bolshevik concept of class struggle and Marxist social categories can be regarded as theoretical constructs that failed to grasp the "peculiar movement of re-association and reassembling" (Latour 2005, 7) involving permanently changing practices, religious beliefs and materialities which bound the members of each community together and were important sources of change in religious landscapes.

The Bolsheviks believed that the Marxist eschatological course of events (see chapter 5) was the only way history could develop. At the same time, they expected the reactionary forces to attempt to divert Russian workers from this path. Any evolution in the religious landscape that did not fit the expected course of events was interpreted by the Bolsheviks as a subversive action undertaken by hostile elements. The labelling as kulaks of the lay leaders of

the parish of Cioburciu was the product of a politicised interpretation that relied on the ideas of the unavoidable emergence of a class division among believers during the eschatological progress of Russia on the path to Socialism.

Conclusions

Sonja Luehrmann asserts that the archive is a repository where documents produced by religious and political actors acquire "reality effect." Based on the voices of religious believers and of officials expressed in documents, the policymakers formulated their strategies for struggling against religions (Luehrmann 2015, 3-4; 22-23). The documents produced by religious actors, under the supervision of the liquidation apparatus, and the case of the building of the new Church of Cioburciu demonstrate that the production of documents with the participation of religious believers had a reality effect long before the documents were stored in the archives. The process of production of these documents influenced the way religious communities constructed their strategies of resistance and the relations between the Soviet regime and religious believers.

The transition of lay religious parishioners from the role of participants in religious life, passive in the administration of their communities, to the role of members of congregations actively involved in their organisation and sustainment was the result of the systematisation of religious landscapes by the regime and of the contingency of the devices used for the accomplishment of this objective. The regime transposed into the religious landscape the organisational forms and techniques of production of documents characteristic of bureaucracy, which enhanced the capacity of believers to pose an organised resistance to antireligious policies. The documents produced as part of the official interaction between believers and officials informed the former about the antireligious strategies of the regime, introduced them to the linguistic and structural techniques of production of Soviet official documents, and provided them with a good knowledge of the structure and functions of state institutions involved in the implementation of antireligious policies. The process of production and the structure of the documents completed as part of this interaction between religious groups and officials and the official procedures imposed by the regime on religious communities disciplined the believers and legitimised their resistance to state policies. The official procedures and documents were the source of authority of lay leaders of religious communities and provided the frameworks within which they constructed their strategies to evade the antireligious restrictions. The official procedures and documents placed the lay leaders between the regime and their communities, defined the focal points of the confrontation with authorities,

the means with which the acts of resistance could be organised and accomplished, and produced maps of religious communities with the help of which the leaders could mobilise the parishioners. Similarly, the same devices produced the perceptual field of the state officials, but it differed from the perceptual field of lay religious leaders because the bureaucrats and the representatives of religious communities operated within different sets of cultural knowledge.

The worldview of the officials, which today we could describe as anthropocentric, did not allow them to grasp the social role of the documents introduced by the regime into the religious landscape as the sources of the organised resistance of religious believers. Instead, all events and actions occurring in religious communities that did not correspond to official eschatological expectations (see chapter 5) were deemed to be the result of the subversive actions of hidden enemies. It can be argued that the failure of the authorities to grasp the role of non-human actors in the emergence of organised resistance posed by congregations resulted in the increasing involvement of the repressive apparatus in relations between Soviet regime and religious communities.

Gregory L. Freeze observes that in 1929 the list of the class enemies expanded to include *tserkovniki* ("church people") - the lay activists (Freeze 2015, 14). The documents examined in this chapter demonstrates that the emergence of *tserkovniki* is explainable not only by the parochialisation of power in the Russian Orthodox Church after 1917, but also by the introduction into the religious landscape of the bureaucratic practices and artefacts by the Soviet regime. The organised involvement of lay parishioners in the administration of their parishes and their resistance to Soviet antireligious policies were accomplished with the participation of numerous bureaucratic procedures and artefacts. The chairs of religious communities and the members of their councils of founders were the religious believers who acquired a prominent position in their congregations due to their skill in operating with the bureaucratic techniques of production of documents. Their skills were vital for religious communities because only through engagement with official procedures and bureaucratic artefacts they could continue their religious life and use their religious buildings.

Curiously, according to the article published in *Pravoslavnoe Pridnestrovie*, the destruction of the Church of Our Lady was made possible due to a bureaucratic fraud committed by local officials. According to the elders interviewed by the author of the article, the local officials deceived a group of approximately fifty poor villagers with the promise of providing them with plots of land. They requested the villagers sign a document related to the land they were supposed to receive. After the villagers added signatures, the officials attached the last pages of the document, which contained the signatures to a different document

according to which the villagers gave their consent to demolish the church (*Pravoslavnoe Pridnestrovie* 2010, 17(275): 3). Unfortunately, I could not identify any archival reference to this document. A significant part of the archival collections of the MASSR have been lost or were destroyed during the Second World War. Nevertheless, the persistence of the memory of the fraudulent production of the official document about the destruction of the Church reveals the importance of the bureaucratic artefacts in the confrontation between the Orthodox community of Cioburciu and the Soviet regime. Even after the liquidation of the religious community of Cioburciu and the destruction of its Churches, the believers did not give up their intent to restore their religious life. During the Second World War, after the Red Army retreated from the area, the believers participated in the opening of a chapel in the building of the former Soviet Club. After the fall of Communism, they rebuilt the Church of the Intersession of Theotokos.

Religious buildings played a key role in the relations between Soviet officials and religious believers, and not only due to the policing techniques employed by the liquidation officers. At a local level, the relationality of the sacred buildings shaped the perceptions and actions of local officials and religious believers. The next chapter explores the case of the closure of the Synagogue of Birzula in 1923. This case illustrates how the relationality from within an urban landscape shaped the official and religious perceptions regarding this Synagogue. Likewise, the case exemplifies how the networks of human and non-human actors to which the Synagogue participated, transgressed the boundaries of the bureaucratic domain of antireligious policy.

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Chapter 7: The Making and Unmaking of the Synagogue in Birzula: Materiality, Relationality, and the Bureaucratic Domain of Antireligious Policy

As we have seen in previous chapters, sacred buildings played a key role in the relationship between the Soviet regime and religious believers. Nevertheless, the documents produced by liquidation officials contain scarce data about how at a local level the relations between religious buildings and urban landscapes influenced the actions and perceptions of religious believers and Soviet officials. The aim of this chapter, through the presentation of a case study that explores the impact of a sacred building and of its relationality on the perceptions and actions of human actors, is to further develop the core argument of this thesis, that materiality in general and religious buildings in particular played a key role in relations between Soviet atheism and religions.

The second objective of this chapter is to address the conventional boundaries of what Soviet officials defined as the domain of antireligious policy. In official understanding, this term referred to a domain which included the strategies, institutions, and bureaucratic devices created by the Soviet regime in order to curtail the religious lives of believers, and it also referred to people and objects regulated by these strategies, devices and institutions. The definition of domains, such as law, religion, and science, are a representative feature of modern thinking. In order to explain how and why the ANT scholars consider these conventional categories as unreliable constructions, I will present the ANT definition of networks. According to ANT repertoire, the term network has two meanings, and for illustrating the difference between them, scholars associated with the ANT school bring the example of the New York electricity network of Thomas Edison. The first understanding is conventional, and refers to electricity, lightbulbs, wires, pillars, generators, and maintenance personal. The second definition of a network is more attentive to all actors whose participation to a process makes possible the functioning of the network they are part of. The functioning of the electricity network would not be possible without the consumers using the power from the wire grid, and without the politicians who decided to sponsor its construction in order to gain the support and sympathy of their electors (Law 2019, 9). Hence, according to ANT repertoire, the networks transgress the conventional domains defined by modern thinking and by traditional sociology, because networks include actors considered as part of different domains (Latour 1993, 1-3). Not everything in science is scientific, not everything in economy is economic, and not

everything in law is juridical, but something scientific, economic, and juridical, circulates in them (Latour 2017, 29; 40). Similarly, the domain of antireligious policy, as well as other domains of activity defined by Soviet bureaucrats, are conventional. These domains were defined based on the specialisation of the state and party agencies, whose activity was nevertheless closely interrelated. Something atheistic and something religious circulated in the domain of antireligious policy, but not everything related to this policy was atheistic or religious. The student of religion exploring the Soviet archive is prone to falling into the trap of limiting her/his examination to the conventional boundaries of the bureaucratic domain of antireligious policy. In this chapter, I explore a case study which illustrates how human and non-human actors, which according to a conventional definition are not part of the bureaucratic domain of antireligious policy, shaped the strategies of atheist and religious actors involved in the confrontation over the status of religions in Soviet society.

The case study examined in this chapter is that of the 1923 closure of the Synagogue of Birzula, a town located in the northern part of the Odesa region of Ukraine, which in 1927 became the capital of the MASSR. The Synagogue of Birzula is a convenient case study because this town was established in the 1870s, and we can reconstitute how different religious communities settled there and erected their sacred buildings. This chapter explores the complex network composed of the expanding railway system, growing population, religious communities coagulated around their prayer buildings, and a growing urban landscape providing insufficient housing for an increasing population. The chapter examines how the relationalities from within this network shaped the strategies and actions of the Soviet officials and Jews of Birzula, as well as how they influenced the self-definition of the Jewish religious community.

The Jewish Community of Birzula

The case under analysis is the closure of the Synagogue in the town of Birzula in Odesa oblast of Ukraine in 1923. This settlement had been formed around a rail junction after the building of the railway lines between Odesa and Kyiv in 1865, and Birzula and Kharkiv in 1869 (Tronko 1969, 566). The railway station and the settlement took their name from a nearby village called Birzula (Catalogue of Kherson Eparchy 1906, 617-618). The settlement of Jews in Birzula was banned by tsarist authorities in 1882, but in 1903 this restriction was lifted (Evrejskaja Enciklopedija 1906, vol. 5, 585). In 1897 there were only 95 Jews in Birzula but their number grew rapidly to 2,507, or 25 per cent of the total population, in 1926 (ESJF 2019/20 surveys in Ukraine). Because of the steady growth of the entire population of the settlement, by 1923 housing had become a major problem in Birzula (TSDAVOV, 5-1-2190, p. 138). The existence

of a Jewish cemetery at the beginning of the twentieth century is attested by tombstones, the oldest of which dates from 1910. A pogrom was perpetrated in Birzula in 1905, and in 1919 50 Jews were killed by the followers of Simion Petlyura (ESJF 2019/20 surveys in Ukraine). At this time, the Christian population of the city was increasing as well. In 1897 the building of an Orthodox wooden Church was completed, and in 1906 it had a total number of 1,642 parishioners. According to official data collected by the Russian Orthodox Church around 1906, there were no sectarians or Old Believers living in the settlement (Catalogue of Kherson Eparchy 1906, 618). According to Soviet sources, Birzula was a settlement where revolutionary ideas had spread among railway workers from before the revolution, and a number of locals were actively involved in a local revolutionary underground (Tronko 1969, 567-568).

The building of a stone Synagogue in Birzula commenced in 1913 and was completed after the end of the Great War. In 1923, 200 Jews were members of the Trade Union of Birzula and signed the petition for the transformation of the local synagogue into a club-theatre (TSDAVOV, 5-1-2190, p. 138) following which Soviet officials and activists closed the Synagogue. The making and unmaking of this Synagogue reflect the efforts to consolidate and to transform the Jewish community of Birzula undertaken by the members of Jewish religious community and by local Bolsheviks. These two groups engaged in a confrontation over the Synagogue that encapsulated the broader struggle over the role, status and place of religion in Soviet society.



Figure no. 10: The building of the former Synagogue in 1983, when it served as a cinema hall (Source: https://www.etoretro.ru/pic179822.htm).

The Campaign of Closing of Synagogues and the case of Birzula

In 1923 there was a campaign of synagogue closures that affected Jewish communities in numerous cities and small settlements across the Soviet Union, including Birzula. This spate of closures represents an interesting example of the mass seizure of sacred buildings in the early Soviet period. A report of the Antireligious Committee to CC of RCP(b) for the period between May and mid-September 1923 mentions that most of antireligious work among Jews was conducted by local authorities. A number of important articles were published in the Yiddish edition of the newspaper "Pravda" with the purpose of involving the masses of workers in antireligious activities including closing choral synagogues and struggling against Jewish religious holidays. The report states that the party workers were successfully achieving the goals set for this campaign (The Report of Antireligious Commission, 15-25 September 1923). Anna Shternshis mentions that during the period between 1917 and 1929, 646 synagogues were closed. Numerous synagogues were seized with the purpose of demonstrating that Jewish religion received no privileged treatment and they were subsequently used for organising political and cultural activities for the same communities that used them earlier as prayer houses (Shternshis 2016, 7-9). Based on a series of interviews, Anna Shternshis (2016) concludes that the majority of Jews considered antireligious propaganda and the marginalisation of their religious traditions as the price they paid for the rights that the Soviet regime granted them. In the 1920s and 1930s, the anti-religious campaigns of the Soviet regime divided Jewish communities into those who promoted atheist ideas and those that defended religious tradition. Usually this was a confrontation of generations, with a part of the young Jewish population actively involved in Soviet campaigns against Judaism that was defended by older generations (Shternshis 2016, 9-11).

A letter written before 20 July 1923 referring to the campaign of closure of synagogues was sent by the leaders of the Jewish communities from Moscow, Minsk and Kharkiv to the Soviet Government. The document mentions that the Jewish religious community from Moscow had received numerous letters signed by the members of Jewish communities from small settlements and provincial cities complaining about the closure of their Synagogues by local authorities who transformed them into clubs or theatres. The believers asked the Moscow Jewish community to intervene. The document enumerates the Soviet laws breached by the actions of local functionaries and mentions the artistic and historical value of the closed Synagogues. The complaint states that the process of closure of synagogues commenced in 1920 and that by the first months of 1923 the level of aggressivity of this policy had increased. Local activists of Yevsektsiya (Jewish Section of the Communist Party) played a central role

in this campaign and some of the Synagogues were not used for any purpose for several years after their closure. The local executive councils ignored the petitions sent by believers and the official position of such state agencies as Rabkrin (People's Commissariat of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection) and the Ministry of Justice that attempted to defend the rights of local Jews (The letter of the elders, 1923). The complaint of Jewish communities from Moscow, Minsk and Kharkiv, mentions the situation of the closed Jewish prayer buildings from Minsk, Kharkiv, Vitebsk, Poltava, Kremenchuk, Simferopol, Smolensk, Kyiv, Odesa, Taganrog, Birzula and from many other cities and settlements (The letter of the elders, 1923).

On 20 June 1923 the Jewish Community of Birzula sent two petitions, one to the Executive Committee of the Ukrainian Soviet and one to the Executive Committee of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. The petitions requested an intervention by the central authorities in support of the congregation whose Synagogue had been seized by local authorities. The petitions read:

> […] violating the sacred principles of national and religious freedom declared by our Socialist Republic, they [local officials from Birzula] took from us the Synagogue to [organize there] a club-theatre.
>
> Until 1914 the Jewish population of Birzula […] officialised its religious rites in three Prayer Houses […] in private houses […] which were enough for up to 500 persons and in 1914 the Jewish population commenced the building of a special synagogue. […] only due to weekly donations made by every Jew of Birzula from their modest earnings was it possible to build the main Synagogue, only its stone walls. The war began [and] the economic situation of the Jews of Birzula became even worse and only with heroic efforts could we succeeded to build the wooden roof […] and this wretched national and religious patrimony was taken from us.
>
> During the black days of Petliura's incursion in our region, we preserved our Synagogue by risking our lives […] [and now] we lose our national patrimony? (TSDAVOV, 5-1-2190, p. 131)

In their petition, the Jews of Birzula build a very specific image of their religious community, mentioning some very important points. Firstly, they present themselves as a Jewish Community of modest economic means witnessed by the technical details and by the history of the building of their Synagogue. Secondly, they present themselves as beneficiaries and supporters of the liberation of their town by the Red Army from forces of Ukrainian

Republic, who had committed a pogrom against local Jews in 1919. Thirdly, they invoke the principles of religious and national freedom declared by the Soviet authorities, reminding those they are addressing of the tragic pre-Soviet experience of the Russian Jews. These three elements of the petition legitimise the requests of the Jews of Birzula, stressing the necessity to preserve the Synagogue as a prayer building by mentioning a large number of believers who used it for this purpose. Additionally, they present their Synagogue not only as a piece of religious heritage but as part of their national patrimony and a physical and material evidence of who they are.

As in other cases of closed Synagogues mentioned in the petition of Moscow Jewish community, the requests of the Jews from Birzula received the support of the central authorities. On the 3rd of August the Executive Committee of the Supreme Soviet sent an order to Birzula through which it required all relevant documents for investigations, ordered the return of all religious items to the community, and authorised the use of the Synagogue for religious purposes between 10 September and 15 October (TSDAVOV, 5-1-2190, p. 130). As in the case of other closed Synagogues, the Government took a stance favourable to believers and ordered local authorities to allow local the Jewish community to use the Synagogues while an investigation was conducted.

One of the first reactions in Birzula to Moscow's decision was an undated petition by the local Trade Union signed by 180 workers. The petition, which was sent to the local executive committee, stated:

> […] we, the members of the unions, workers and [public] servants of Birzula district ask you to consider the following: […]
>
> 2. […] apart from this prayer house in the town of Birzula for 500 Jewish inhabitants there are another 3 old Prayer Houses /Synagogues/ […]. Likewise, the Prayer House occupied by us served the religious necessities of only 38 families from the local bourgeoisie […]
>
> 3 […] we strongly ask you to leave to us this building in which we have made significant investments, especially because its return [to the religious community] would give an occasion for celebration for a small clique of local bourgeoisie and [will cause] a deep sorrow to the workers of our city. (TSDAVOV, 5-1-2190, p. 142)

The petition presents the Jewish religious community as a small group of socially alien elements, who had misinformed the central authorities. Additionally, the petition manipulates the emic and etic meanings of the terms "prayer house" and "synagogue". By presenting as

synagogues the three existing prayer houses organised in private homes, the petition suggests that the main synagogue was not the only building of its kind in Birzula and that the Jewish community had deliberately misinformed central authorities.

The investigation report produced by the functionaries responsible for examining the situation in Birzula concludes that the petition sent by believers contained deliberate misinformation, which refers particularly to the statement according to which the disputed building would be the only Synagogue in Birzula but also exaggerates the number of members of the Jewish community. Additionally, the issuer mentions that the Synagogue would be used only by rich Jews who would not allow the poor believers to attend it. Likewise, the report states that the signatures on the petitions were not genuine (TSDAVOV, 5-1-2190, p. 138). On 13 October 1923, the Executive Committee of the Soviet of Ukrainian SSR debated a number of petitions and investigation reports relating to the case of the main Synagogue from Birzula. The Committee decided to decline the petitions of the local Jewish Community and to let local authorities continue using the building as a club-theatre for organizing political and cultural activities for workers (TSDAVOV, 5-1-2190, p. 127). The Executive Committee based its decision on the fact that an agreement of exploitation of the building was not signed in due time between the religious organisation and the authorities (TSDAVOV, 5-1-2190, p. 142).

The relationality of the Synagogue and the Bolshevik perceptions

Approaching the materiality and relationality of the Synagogue of Birzula through textual documents allows us to regard it as a process. The petition of the religious community from 1923 describes a recent experience of building the Synagogue as an endeavour of the entire Jewish population of the settlement to create a single religious venue accessible to all its members and capable of accommodating all of them together. For a community using three prayer houses up until that point, and experiencing a steady growth of the number of its members, the joint efforts to create a common religious place was central to the process of building a community and of forming and consolidating ties between its members. From this perspective, the Synagogue and railway junction played an important role in the formation of the Jewish community of Birzula. The Jews came from different parts of the country to settle in Birzula due to the proximity of the railway junction and the construction of the Synagogue was the process through which they constituted the ties between themselves as a new religious community. The railway junction and the Synagogue can be regarded as two poles of a network within which the Jews of Birzula organised their life and activity. By settling in Birzula and practicing trades related to the presence of the railway junction, the Jews became part of a

young urban community which thrived due to its proximity to the railways. Through the process of building the Synagogue, the Jews established a distinct community within Birzula's population, with its own traditions and culture.

As attested by the petition, the Synagogue became a symbol of the Jewish community which built it and a means through which it was constituted. From this perspective, the petition signed by the members of the Trade Union can be regarded as an attempt to reverse the process of creating a traditional Jewish community through seizing its religious space, defining a social alien group among its members, and readjusting the Synagogue into a place whose technical features would facilitate the spread of the ideas of class war. The closure of the Synagogue was the product of two relationalities, the first of which is the one between the railway junction and the Synagogue itself. The railways were regarded by the Bolsheviks as a strategic facility, that warranted the creation of party cells at railway stations and junctions (AOSPRM, 49-1-98, 10) as well as mass organisations such as trade unions, which could implement Moscow's policies. Additionally, due to its access to the railway, Birzula became the administrative centre of the district where numerous officials and institutions resided. The railway junction facilitated the presence of the Bolshevik officials as well as the spread of Soviet political ideas in Birzula, which produced the split within the Jewish community between the Jews who promoted the Bolshevik reforms and those who defended the old traditions. The railway junction had the capacity of gathering actors and relating to them and it changed the urban landscape and shifted relationalities from within.

The second relationality which produced the intentions on the part of the officials to seize the Synagogue relates to its affordances. Not all synagogues closed during the inter-war decades were transformed into theatres or clubs only the largest of them (Shternshis 2016, 7). The affordances of a building can be measured in relation to the size of surrounding buildings and number of the population. Hence, it is calculable based on a relationality that shaped in humans' mind the understanding of the Synagogue and its possible roles. The report of the Commission that investigated the situation in Birzula concludes that in this settlement the Synagogue was the only building capable of accommodating the Jewish (and other) workers (TSDAVOV, 5-1-2190, p. 138).

There was also an Orthodox wooden Church in Birzula. Apart from the fact that the conversion of the Orthodox Church into a club for workers would potentially provoke the discontent of a numerically larger ethno-religious community, the nature of the substance out of which the Synagogue and the Church were built also played an important role in determining which building was targeted. The materiality of the stone in contrast to the wooden walls of

the Orthodox Church were not just more appropriate for the Bolsheviks' ambition to build a new modern world but were more durable in time. The builders of the Synagogue imagined their sacred space in relation to other Jewish religious buildings and to the number of local Jews, but not in relation to the wooden Orthodox Church, the spaces available for use for Bolshevik political activities, or in relation to the entire population of the settlement. Nevertheless, by being part of the same urban landscape, these buildings and the population living in Birzula formed a set of relations between each-other. The wooden Church, the Synagogue, the railway junction, and other buildings from the town were never projected to be part of a network, and were built at different periods, but by being present in the same settlement, they constituted part of a network which exercised its agentive power by directing the Bolshevik grasp towards the Synagogue to create a space for a proletarian congregation.

From the perspective of the definition of the domains of bureaucratic specialisation, the Synagogue, the Orthodox Church, the railway junction, and the population of the town of Birzula belonged to different domains. Nevertheless, by being part of the same network, the relationality between these actors shaped the perceptions and actions of antireligious officials and religious believers. The case of the closure of the Synagogue of Birzula reveals that the boundaries of the conventional domain of antireligious policy were porous. Something antireligious (i.e. official documents) and something religious (the petitions of religious communities) circulated within it, but not every actor participating to the relations between the Jewish community and Soviet regime belonged to the domain of antireligious policy. The relationality between the Synagogue and railway junction, the buildings constituting the urban landscape of Birzula and the populations inhabiting it, shaped the actions and perceptions of the Jewish religious community and local officials involved in the confrontation over the status and role of this religious building.

Conclusions

Soviet antireligious policies and religious communities' responses to them are traditionally explained exclusively in ideological and social terms, and these are indeed central for understanding these processes. Nevertheless, numerous non-human actors participated in the social relations within which official policy was negotiated and implemented. The Synagogue of Birzula was not simply a subject of an interaction between humans. This building constituted an integral part of a set of relationalities through which it exercised its agency. The relationality between sacred buildings, the urban landscapes they were part of, and the populations of

humans inhabiting those landscapes, shifted the context and strategies of human actors involved in the confrontation between Soviet atheism and religion.

In most cases the processes of interaction between the atheist regime and religious communities which involved non-human entities can be very effectively explained from an anthropocentric perspective. Nevertheless, I argue here that without this kind of material analysis one might miss the significance of the existence of a railway junction, sacred and secular buildings, of a contested synagogue, and the way in which their relationalities provoked a more violent confrontation between local activists and believers by shifting their calculations and perceptions. Through its affordances, relationality, and materiality, the Synagogue of Birzula shaped the perceptions, strategies, and actions of human actors.

The conventional boundaries of the bureaucratic domain of antireligious policy were transgressed by relationalities of human and non-human actors involved in the confrontation between Soviet atheism and religion. The antireligious strategies were adapted to the local context shaped by the relationality between religious buildings, urban landscapes and populations inhabiting them. The official understanding of the role and status of a religious building was defined in relation to numerous other buildings and to the number of diverse populations using them. The adaptations of the antireligious policies to the local context by the officials who implemented them, proves that the conventional separation of the bureaucratic activities by domains and specialisations does not reflect the real complexity of the calculations made by the state agencies and the diversity of the actors related to them. Similar to the domains of law, economics, and science, described by ANT scholars as conventional constructions of the moderns which do not encompass the real complexity of the relationalities between things and people (Latour 1993, 1-3), the bureaucratic domain of antireligious policy related to numerous things and humans who conventionally would not be defined as belonging to this domain.

Another category of non-human actors which influenced the relations between religious believers and Soviet regime were the religious artefacts. The following chapter examines the techniques and concepts employed by liquidation officials in their attempts to deconstruct religious narratives about miracles related to Orthodox icons. The next chapter shows how by mimicking scientific procedures, liquidation officials conducted their investigations on religious artefacts. The superficial understanding of the role of these objects in the religious life of believers did not provide the official investigators with the knowledge necessary for the production of efficient translations of the data collected during their inquiries into efficient arguments for antireligious propaganda.

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Chapter 8: Trials of Strength: Holy Images in Official Investigations

This chapter examines the procedures and investigative techniques used by Liquidation Commissions to deconstruct the miracles and narratives related to Orthodox icons. In what follows, I explore the similarities and differences between how Soviet officials and French hygienists used the trials of strength and the translations (Latour 1993) in order to prove their point and to promote their agendas.

In what follows, I examine the ways that liquidation officials used religious objects and images in order to make sense of religious phenomena, formulate more efficient antireligious policies, and deconstruct sacred narratives related to religious miracles. The examination of the role of religious artefacts in official inquiries contributes to a better understanding of the influence of the relationality of these objects in the responses of the Soviet regime to permanent changes in the religious landscape. Using Latour's example of the trials of strength deployed by Louis Pasteur (Latour 1993), I examine the ways in which religious images were subjected to tests by Soviet officials and how the results of these tests were translated into scientific arguments for the antireligious propaganda discourse. Similar to 19th Century hygienists, the Bolsheviks were marked by the scientism which was popular at the time. The excessive belief in the potential of technology and science to better the human condition shaped political expectations throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, and the Bolsheviks were no exception. Bolshevik inquiries into religion deployed a set of techniques that mimicked scientific procedures with the collected evidence translated by Soviet officials into a source of poverty and social injustice for Russian workers.

This chapter adds new important points to Robert Greene's explanation of the failure of the Bolshevik campaigns of deconstructing the narratives related to religious miracles. Greene observes that the campaign of opening the coffins of Orthodox Saints registered modest achievements because the Bolshevik leaders did not fully grasp the depth of the relations between believers and their relics. The hopes of the Bolshevik officials regarding the opening of the coffins were unrealistically high and the propaganda narratives produced within this campaign gained ground only among young people radicalised by the experiences of war and revolution, while the majority of believers continued to worship their relics. According to Greene, the opening of the coffins containing corrupted bodies could not achieve its goal because the main source of the special devotion of the believers to the relics were the miracles worked by the saints in the communities that hosted their bodies (Greene 2004, 194-195). This chapter argues that the simplicity of the Soviet official understanding of what a miracle meant

for the believers was the product of an adaptation of the investigation procedures to the necessity to translate their results into propaganda narratives. Additionally, the simplistic understanding of what a miracle meant for believers facilitated the implementation of the campaign of opening the coffins and the policy of deconstructing the narratives about the renewal of icons by numerous officials in different provinces across the country.

In *The Pasteurisation of France*, Bruno Latour examines the techniques employed by hygienists in the 19th Century France to promote their agenda and to gain political and social influence. Louis Pasteur was a key figure in this process because he has become emblematic of the successful elimination of numerous infectious diseases. Latour analyses the activity of Pasteur and the context in which he conducted his scientific and public work in order to explain how this scientist became known as the genius of public hygiene. Although the solutions proposed by Pasteur for tackling infectious diseases in urban areas were not new, he managed to successfully promote them by using chains of translations formulated in the favourable context in which scientism was gaining ground (Latour 1993). Similar to the argumentation of the 19th Century hygienists, the Bolshevik antireligious translations relied on numerous assumptions but did not benefit from a favourable context and were highly disputed amongst the Soviet citizenry. The Bolshevik antireligious message and arguments aimed at demonstrating the nonexistence of the divine constituted a set of translations insufficiently calibrated to the worldviews, experiences and expectations of Soviet citizens.

In the first part of the chapter, I describe the role of icons in Eastern Christianity. The significance and meaning of the icons in Eastern Christianity explains how and why these artefacts constituted one of the main targets of the Bolshevik antireligious campaigns. In the second section, I go on to present the case of a miracle of renewal of an Orthodox icon in 1924 in Zhitomir, which was investigated by liquidation officials. In this section, I look into how Soviet antireligious officials deployed what Latour calls “trials of strength” (Latour 1993, 79) in order to examine the miracle working Icon from Zhitomir. I compare the principles used by Pasteur in order to create his laboratories (Latour 1993, 73-74) with the procedures used by Soviet antireligious officials to set up a context for their inquiries into the renewal of the icon. Finally, I analyse the data collected by antireligious bureaucrats that were translated into arguments in support of propaganda discourse and compare them with the translations employed by hygienists in the 19th Century France (Latour 1993, 10-11). The objective of this chapter is to examine the features and principles of the Soviet official investigations conducted into religious phenomena and how the resulting translations worked, or failed to work, as effective arguments in anti-religious propaganda.

Sacred Images and Miracles in Russian Orthodoxy

In order to understand the context of the dynamic explored in the case studies below, it is important to understand the significance and meaning of icons in Orthodox Christianity. The etymological origin of the term "icon" is the Greek word "*eikon*", meaning "image". The images that have the status of holy icons, are visual representations of divinity, saints, or angels, and have a central place in Orthodox religious practice (Benz 1957, 1;4). The apologist and venerated Orthodox saint John of Damascus explains the importance of religious symbols in Christian life as follows: "We [the humans] are unable to rise ourselves to the contemplation of the spiritual without a mediation, hence in order to aid our ascension we need what is kindred and akin to us" (The Handbook of the Clergyman 1985, 158). The Orthodox tradition considers that the Holy Spirit inspires and directs the production of Christian icons (The Handbook of the Clergyman 1985, 158), which are considered to be reflections of celestial archetypes of saints and God. These archetypes are discovered by the painter and revealed in a miraculous way on the painted surface (The Handbook of the Clergyman 1985, 159). Therefore, icons are conceived as self-imprinted images of the sacred, which interconnect the celestial and this world (Benz 1957, 5). As Erns Benz observes, icons are produced according to a set of strict rules. Traditionally, they were manufactured by monastic communities and in most cases, the icon painters remained anonymous with the identity of the manufacturer reflected in the style of the painting, which varied slightly from one school to another (Benz 1957, 1;4). In Orthodox tradition, the production of an icon is first of all a spiritual exercise. The tradition requires a high degree of holiness from the painter-monk, who practices penance and fasting before commencing his/her work with the tools and materials utilised in the painting also being consecrated before use (Benz 1957, 5).

The belief according to which the humans were created by God "in the image of Himself" and the belief in the incarnation of Christ in a human body that redeemed God's image stained by sin, links the hope of eternal salvation to the idea of image (Benz 1957, 18-19). According to Orthodox belief, the first icon was "made by no hands"; it was miraculously imprinted by Christ on a linen cloth with which He dried his face (Benz 1957, 7). The prayer of consecration of icons refers to Christ's linen cloth and reads: "He who once deigned to imprint upon the sweat-cloth the outline, not made by hands, of his perfectly pure and divine human countenance, Christ our true God, mild lover of men, have mercy upon us and save us" (Benz 1957, 14). The same explanation of the role of icons is made by Russian (The Handbook

of the Clergyman 1985, 159) and Romanian Orthodox ecclesiastic literature (Remete 2000, 283-285).

Icons with the Virgin Mary have a special status. Many of them were miraculously found or revealed by Mary herself. In other sacred accounts, icons with the Virgin Marry painted themselves in a mysterious way (Benz 1957, 7;14). The places where, according to tradition, the Virgin appeared and revealed her icons "made by no hands" are considered sacred and frequently monasteries were later founded at these sites (Benz 1957, 14).

The veneration of icons "made by no hands" was a well-established tradition in pre-revolutionary Russia. The Kazan Icon of the Mother of God was one of the most venerated icons and was considered as miracle-working. It had the status of the protector of Russia and the day of its celebration was an official holiday before 1917 (Shevzov 2007, 63). According to Orthodox tradition, this icon was found in Kazan in 1579 on the site of a church that burned down. It was found by a young girl who saw the Mother of God in her dreams showing her the place where the icon was buried. After the Kazan Icon was found, local clergy and believers organised a procession during which the Icon worked numerous miracles of healing (Shevzov 2007, 63-64).

The renewal of icons represents one of the most frequent types of miracles associated with icons. This type of miracle could even take place in the private houses of the believers, each of whom had an icon mounted on the eastern wall of their dwellings. Generally, the renewal of icons can be defined as the miraculous renewal of the colours of iconographic paintings that occurred in peasant communities in times of crisis and was perceived by Russian peasants as an intervention of divine powers in their life (Viola 1996, 53). As windows between this world and the celestial, icons were the artefacts from which believers expected miraculous signs, redemption, and God's help. For believers, the renewal of icons was the transformation of a painted icon into a "made by no hands" miracle-working artefact. The renewal of the colours of the icon were not the only change that occurred as part of such miracles, they also imply a new quality of relational experience.

The gaze of icons belongs to a specific visual paradigm which involves "the seeing into being", which shapes the personality and the perception of the reality of the viewer (Leuhrmann 2016, 238). As Dorothy C. Weaver observes based on her fieldwork in contemporary Russian and American Eastern Orthodox Christian communities, for believers the gazing of an icon is "…a communication directly to a believer's soul (rather than intellect), or a window through which the living and a saint could see one another". According to Weaver's interviewers, "…[i]f you wait long enough, and listen, it [the icon] will talk to you" (Weaver 2006, 396;

398). According to these formulations, the renewal of an icon involves not just the increasing of the brightness of the painting's colours, but also an experiential and cognitive change on the part of the believers during her/his encounter of the icon. These changes occurred during a face-to-face communication between the praying believer and the image of the venerated saint.

In pre-revolutionary Russia, the miraculous phenomenon of the renewal of icons produced instances during which the traditional religious hierarchies and the subordination of the laypeople to clergy were challenged. As Vera Shevzov observes, unlike the Eucharist, the veneration of icons is a religious practice which does not require a mandatory participation of the clergy (1999, 27). The emergence of sacred narratives about the miracles worked by icons was the product of the religious experiences of believers who worshiped these religious artefacts. Due to potential for icons to subvert the authority of the Church hierarchy, the Russian Orthodox Church and the tsarist regime implemented a set of policies designed to consolidate their control on religious gatherings and practices related to the emergence of miracle-working icons. According to the February 1722 law, Church and state officials were to launch investigations regarding the emergence of miracle-working icons and to take the artefacts to provincial cathedrals and monasteries for "safekeeping" (Shevzov 1999, 38). The objective of these investigations was to verify if the miracles were genuine. On rare occasions the icons were confirmed by the officials as miracle-working but when proven wrong the believers who reported the miracles were reminded that the encounter of the sacred through miracles happens only to those who lead a righteous life. In most of cases the narratives about the miracles were presented by Church officials as the result of the peasants' ignorance and superstition. In some instances, the civil and Church officials presented the miracles as fabrications intended to exploit financially the naïve, uneducated but pious peasants. Based on the 1722 law, the ecclesiastic officials ordered the removal of numerous icons from private houses and churches (Shevzov 1999, 38-39). Believers protested against these actions and in some instances resisted the removal of the artefacts by organising militias to defend them on a twenty-four-hour basis (Shevzov 1999, 42). The emergence of miracle-working icons revealed the growing tension between spiritual officials and laypeople which were not only about whether the revealed artefacts were to be preserved and worshiped by believers or seized by the authorities. In their investigations into the miracles performed by icons, the clergy manifested their scepticism regarding the competence and ability of laypeople to discern a genuine spiritual experience. Likewise, Church officials and believers had different notions of religious experience worthy of being recognised as a miracle. Last but not least, this divergent

understanding involved questions regarding the role of lay believers in Russian Orthodox Church (Shevzov 1999, 45).

The theological meaning of icons in Eastern Christianity relates to its fundamental beliefs about the creation of humans by God in His own image, and about the redemption of mankind through the incarnation of Christ in a human body. Icons have a central place in the religious lives of Eastern Orthodox Christians, who regard them as reflections of the celestial archetypes, and as windows through which they can communicate with the saints. In pre-revolutionary Russia, icons were the artefacts from which believers expected miraculous signs, redemption, and God's help. The icons constituted one of the sources of autonomy of believers from Church hierarchy, because the veneration of these artefacts did not require mediation by clergy. The religious miracles associated with icons and witnessed by lay believers were regarded with suspicion by the tsarist regime and Church officials, who doubted the competence and ability of laypeople to discern a genuine spiritual experience. Church officials conducted investigations into these miracles, and in most of registered cases, they seized the miracle-working icons and presented the miracles as the result of peasant's ignorance and superstition. After the 1917 Revolution, the liquidation officers conducted investigations into the miracles worked by Orthodox icons and seized numerous miracle-working artefacts from their worshipers. In the 1920s, these religious phenomena were regarded by Soviet bureaucrats as subversive actions of the regime's enemies. In order to tackle this phenomena, Soviet state officials launched propaganda campaigns presenting the miracles as fraudulent fabrications by religious leaders used for extracting donations from ignorant believers.

Faith and Dust: the Miracle-Working Icon from Zhitomir and Official Investigations into its Renewal

Soviet officials acquired a Marxist materialist worldview and they perceived religious believers and especially the clergy and the preachers as the main source of religious phenomena. Nevertheless, official reports and police files reveal that religious artefacts played an important role for religious phenomena, such as the renewal of icons or the emergence and spread of religious narratives and beliefs. The investigations conducted by Soviet antireligious officials into religious phenomena had multiple objectives. They aimed at identifying the perceived anti-Soviet elements who allegedly exploited religious sentiments and undermined the regime. The investigations gathered incriminatory evidence for use in the prosecution of cases against

believers. And finally, the investigators collected data, textual and visual materials to be utilised later in propaganda for the public denigration of religious actors and of their faith.

Among the documents produced by Zhitomir provincial Liquidation Commission as part of its report to liquidation officials in Kharkiv about its activity in 1924, there is a clipping from an unnamed newspaper (TsDAVOV, 5-2-196, p. 99). After browsing the periodicals edited in Vinnytsia oblast, I identified the newspaper as "Volynskii Proletarii" with the clipping coming from number 103 of the 9th of May 1924. The article contains a report on the renewal of the icon of the Mother of God in the Podolian (*Podolskaja*) Church of Dormition from Zhitomir and a pamphlet written by officials which describes the emergence of the belief about the renewal of the icon and mentions some of the believers involved in the miracle (TsDAVOV, 5-2-196, p. 99).

The Commission conducted its investigations on the 8th of May 1924. It was chaired by the liquidation official Dubovaia, a member of the local Court Ezava, and included the representatives of the Governorate Executive Commission, Ivanovskii, Governorate Soviet of Trade Unions, Titaev, the leadership of the Orthodox communities, Pavel Pilevskii and Leontii Gozhenko, the local serving priest Pliskevich, the representative of the Volin Orthodox Eparchial Administration, Viktorovski, the specialist in chemistry, Solovushkov, the painter Antonov, and an official from the procuracy named Uelski (Volynskii Proletarii 1924, no. 103, p.1). Similar commissions were created in this period for the exhumation of the relics of the Orthodox saints. In the first Soviet years, the 8th Department of the Justice Commissariat implemented the campaign of opening the coffins of the saints. These commissions included physicians who compiled forensic reports on the revealed bodies (Greene 2004, 104; 142). The composition of the commissions, which included technical and medical experts, reveals the intent of the authorities to confront religious beliefs with scientific knowledge and method.

The report of the liquidation officials from Zhitomyr states one by one all the conclusions drawn by the members of the Commission during their investigations. Firstly, the icons from the Church had been painted recently, and the painter Antonov concluded that therefore their renewal was impossible. Secondly, the officials compared the renewed icon with other icons produced at the same time. They concluded that the metallic elements of the icon of the Mother of God were shinier than those from the icon of the Saviour and from other icons. According to the report, the believers who participated in the examinations agreed that the icon of Mother of God is clean of dust and its glass cover is cleaner than those of other icons. Thirdly, the examination of the icon of the Saviour had shown that its metallic elements were covered in dust and its glass cover hadn't been polished. Fourthly, "with the permission of the

priest", one of the members of the Commission wiped a part of the metallic elements of the icon of Mother of God and demonstrated that after this procedure a part of the icon looks shinier. The same experiment was conducted on the icon of the Saviour. Based on the abovementioned observations, the members of the Commission concluded that the renewal of the icon had not taken place.

The report is followed by a pamphlet describing a visit to the Church of Dormition by the author who signs with the initials "T-i". The visit had been undertaken after the investigations conducted by the Commission and the author mentions the spots left on the icon by the tissue with which the investigators wiped it. As described in the pamphlet, the Church was full of praying visitors, deemed by the author to be ignorant worshipers of a miracle proven false. T-i presents the Church as a place of the confrontation between "darkness" and "light", and states:

> A righteous Jew was the first to note the miracle and he informed the vicar. Why a Jew whose place in Hell has been long prepared for his stubborn unbelief in the triune saviour? The explanation is not difficult. The miracle will be less disputable. Can't you see, even a non-believer has been honoured! (Volynskii Proletarii 1924, no. 103, p.1)

The pamphlet contains numerous hints that the miracle was an enterprise designed for enrichment. The author concludes:

> Here, in the place of a miracle, a confrontation is taking place. [The struggle of the] [l]ight against the darkness, of critical thinking against the slavish feeling of non-resistance and spiritual submission. Miracles to miracles, but life keeps going on. […] An "Operator" [pickpocket] from the crowd managed to take the last *poltinik* [50 kopeks coin] from the pocket of a sleepy believer. Here near the miracle "the producer" of ice cream set up his "cooperative" and boldly sells his stale waffles. […] Wherever there is a church, and especially a miracle, there is always a marketplace [*bazar*]. (Volynskii Proletarii 1924, no. 103, p.1)

The pamphlet and the report of the Commission are a single body of text, which aims at deconstructing and explaining the miracle from the perspective of a Marxist worldview. It depicts the miracle as a fabrication whose objective is economic benefit and which thrives on the ignorance of simple believers.

Although highly politicised and frequently guided by expediency, the investigations conducted by Soviet officials including the one into the renewal of the icon from Zhitomir were in many ways similar to scientific investigations. In *The Pasteurisation of France*, Bruno Latour emphasises the crucial role of the laboratory for the investigations conducted on microbes by French scientists at the end of the 19th Century (1993, 73-74). In laboratories, the scientists set trials of strength on the objects of their examination. Latour states:

> We do not know beforehand what an agent [a microbe] is doing. We must try it out. This one corrupts a veal stock; that one transforms sugar into alcohol; the other one survives in gelatine but is interrupted in urine. How are we to define a shape? Like all the others: they are the edge of trials of strength that others subject them to. If we boil water five degrees more, a new species is then defined, whose "edge" is to resist the temperature of 100°. If we deprive it of oxygen, then others are defined that do not need air (Latour 1993, 79).

In this Latourian formulation, the wiping of the miracle-working icon from Zhitomir by officials can be regarded as a trial of strength. The report states:

> One of the members of the Commission (with the permission of the abbot of the church) wiped the [metallic] vermeil of the icon of the Mother of God and that spot got shinier. The same was done on the vermeil of the icon of Christ with a handkerchief given by an attending citizen, and the wiped spot from the vermeil shined [and] suddenly became distinguished from the rest of the icon (Volynskii Proletarii 1924, no. 103, p.1).

The officials approached the renewal of the icon from the perspective of all the material elements that influence the experience of seeing it, and demonstrated that they can be manipulated in order to reshape the visual experience. Likewise, the Commission tried to prove the lack of any difference between the miracle-working icon and other icons by conducting the same experiment on other metallic vermeils. These manipulations were not enough to prove the existence or the nonexistence of a miracle-working force but the official assumptions about the nonexistence of divinity was enough to translate the manipulability of the artefact and of some elements constituting its environment as proof of the impossibility of miracles.

Some details mentioned in the pamphlet suggest that the members of the Commission did not apply their tests on important features of the icon. The officials had a partial understanding of what visually the renewal of an icon meant for the believers. The experiments conducted by the officials were not applied to the parts of the icon which were at the centre of

believer's experiencing of the miracle. T-i mentioned in her pamphlet the words of an old woman present during her visit at the Church. The woman stated about another renewed icon of the Mother of God from the same Church: "[It/She w]as dark […] but look how ruddy it/she is now" (Volynskii Proletarii 1924, no. 103, p. 1). Although Russian declinations do not make clear if the woman referred to the Mother of God or to the icon in general, the term ruddy (*rumjanaja*) refers specifically to the feature of the human face. This statement suggests that for the believers the renewal of the icons from Zhitomir did not manifest only in a simple brightness of its painting and vermeil, but it included the gaze and a changed facial expression of the saint, which expressed a particular state of the spirit and communicated something new. The believers continued to visit the Church to pray to the icon after the inquiry, which proves that the "facts proven" by the investigation were not convincing to them, and that the icon resisted the trials of strength deployed by officials. The renewal of the icon of Zhitomir did not consist only of a simple increase in the brightness of its colours, but involved the believers in a new way of experiencing the sacred image and communicating with it. In this respect, the investigations conducted by Soviet officials were similar to the ecclesiastic inquiries into religious miracles undertaken by tsarist officials before 1917. In both cases, the ideas about the nature of the phenomena of renewal of icons were different from those held by lay believers who witnessed the miracles. According to Vera Shevzov, ecclesiastic authorities involved in investigations on the authenticity of the miracles looked for events relevant for the ecclesiastical and institutional interests and not for those important for the lives of the individual believers or parishes (1999, 45). Soviet officials were preoccupied with the scientific examination of the changes that the icon underwent during the reported miracles. They collected details about the physical elements of the environments in which the miracles occurred that could be examined scientifically and they paid attention to those ideas about the renewal of icons which could be interpreted from a scientific point of view as natural phenomena. In both cases, the officials underestimated the religious experience of lay believers who encountered the sacred by the means of the renewed icon and the importance of these artefacts in the lives of individual parishioners and religious communities.

The officials produced simplistic explanations of how the believers experienced the renewal of icons, and a similarly simplistic explanation was produced by liquidation officials in order to describe role of relics in Russian Orthodoxy. According to theological canons the incorruptibility of the saintly body was not a precondition for the canonisation of a saint. Nevertheless, Soviet propaganda claimed that corrupted bodies were a prove of the fraud used by the clergy to exploit naïve believers (Greene 2004, 19-21). Next, by examining the

techniques employed by liquidation officials in their investigation into the renewal of the Icon from Zhitomir, I will demonstrate that the simplistic explanations of religious phenomena were convenient for Bolshevik officials. The simplicity of the definition of religious miracles facilitated the translation of the data collected during their investigations into propaganda narratives about the exploitation of naïve believers by the clergy.

The investigations conducted into the renewal of the icon from Zhitomir shared some features with scientific procedures. *The Pasteurisation of France* examines in detail the role of the laboratory in the construction of the image of Louis Pasteur as the inventor of the means to struggle against infectious diseases. Latour states:

> "[t]o win, we [the humans] have only to bring the enemy [the microbes] where we are sure we will be the stronger. A researcher like [Louis] Pasteur was strongest in the laboratory. […] Why did Pasteur gain strength in the laboratory? He did so because there, as in every laboratory, phenomena are finally made smaller than the group of men who can then dominate them. […] In it the power ratio is reversed; phenomena, whatever their size-infinitely great or infinitely small - are retranslated and simplified in such a way that a group of men can always control them" (Latour 1993, 73-74).

Similar to the 19th Century scientists, Soviet officials had to make religious phenomena "[…] smaller than the group of men who can then dominate them" (Latour 1993, 74). The collection of religious artefacts and their examination in a staged context, or the arrest or the forced involvement of religious believers in various investigations, served this purpose for the Soviet officials.

The investigation into the renewal of the Icon from Zhitomir was conducted with the presence of four believers – the chairs of two religious communities, a priest, and a representative of the Eparchial Administration. During the campaign of exhumation of the relics of Orthodox Saints, the commissions which implemented this policy also opened the coffins in the presence of the clergy. As Robert Greene observes, the forced participation of the clerics in the desecration of the relics was meant to make them participate in what the officials considered as the unmasking of the clergy's own fraud (Greene 2004, 143). The investigations into the renewal of the icon from Zhitomyr and the membership of the Commission which conducted them reveal a similar intent to humiliate and blame the clergy for a fraud. The clergy and the chairs of religious communities were the most easily controllable believers because they were involved in numerous forms of official registration (See chapter

4). The Commission turned the Church into something similar to a laboratory. The presence of religious leadership was similar to the collection of samples by a scientist in her laboratory. The constraint, intimidation, and fear were the levers with which the investigators aimed at turning the Church into a favourable battlefield on which to fight the miracle. The religious believers and not the Icon itself were the agents combatted by the members of the Commission, because they perceived religious leaders as fabricators of the religious miracles. The investigators set a trial of strength for religious actors and their narratives against the mechanical manipulation of the non-human material objects and substances involved in the renewal of the icon. This displacement equates to a scientific falsification, because it intentionally confuses the object of research with the public that, the investigators claimed, were the target group for the dissemination of the results of the investigations and that were registered among the members of the Commission.

One of the main objectives of the investigations into religious miracles was to collect information necessary for convincing the believers in the nonexistence of the divine. Hence, the translation of the results of the investigations into an antireligious narrative was essential. Similar translations were used by the representatives of the hygienist movement in order to promote their agenda in 19th century France. *The Pasteurisation of France* is an examination of the techniques through which the hygienist movement in France managed to obtain political and social influence through the implementation of its project of public hygiene. Latour observes that the translations played a key role in their success, especially after France's 1870 military defeat by Germany. In order to illustrate the drifting of translations used by hygienists to make their point, Latour references an article by one of the promoters of the hygienist programmes:

> You want revenge? asks the writer. For that, you need soldiers. In order to have soldiers, you need healthy Frenchmen. But what is it that watches over health? Medicine. And what does medicine itself depend on? The sciences. And what are the sciences in turn made up of? Money. And where does money come from? The state budget. But parliamentarians are right now discussing subsidies for research [...] (Latour 1993, 10-11).

In Latour's explanation, the hygienist movement managed to gain its influence and to implement its projects by successfully translating its agenda into the vital interests of the French nation. But as Latour observes, translations are never neat and entirely precise:

> [A successful translation] does not mean that the groups understood one another well. Translation is by definition always a misunderstanding, since common interests are in the long term necessarily divergent. (Latour 1993, 65).

Similar to French hygienists, the Soviet antireligious officials had to achieve their purpose – the eradication of religions - through chains of translations intended to convince religious believers to give up their faith. The Soviet project to root out religions from the society was marked by numerous conflicts. The first one was the conflict between their ideology and the material and social realities of Soviet society. The promised betterment of the lives of working people was far from being achieved and Russia's poor infrastructure and scarce resources were strained because of the Civil War and a deficient administration. The second conflict was that between the materialist ideology of the Bolsheviks and the traditional way of life and worldviews of the population. The Bolsheviks spoke in a new language about technological, social and political innovations unknown to religious believers. These innovations were to come as a reward for the acceptance of the Bolshevik political and social worldview.

In order to make their point understood and for it to be accepted by a wide public, the antireligious officials had to translate their investigations of religious phenomena into something less disputable. In the case of the icon from Zhitomir, they used the article to link the renewal of the icons to economic profiteering and the enrichment of the clergy, lay religious leadership, traders, etc. The article produced a triple translation. Firstly, the investigation report made a translation of a belief in the metaphysical capacity of the icon to produce miracles into a materialist explanation of this phenomena. The investigators deconstructed the miracle by mentioning the role of the dust, rust, lightening as agents modifying the experiences of believers gazing on the icon. The pamphlet produced a second translation. Based on the report, the pamphlet made an explanation of the miracle from the perspective of Marxist ideology as a fabrication by the social enemy who had been enriching themselves through it. The third translation was the expression of such Marxist terms as "market" and "non-working elements" into colloquial terms such as "marketplace" (in Russian *bazar*), thief, and salesman selling stale goods. In this way, the propagandists produced a drift aiming to dissociate the regime from responsibility for the dire economic conditions and to associate this instead with an imagined social enemy who exploited religious believers and fabricated miracles. Hence, the miracle was to be despised by the working people as an invention of their enemies who were attempting to subjugate them.

A similar translation was made by liquidation officials and the Soviet propaganda machine during the campaigns of opening the coffins of Orthodox saints. As in the case of the icon renewal, in order to make the scientific manipulation with sacred objects and the translations possible, the authorities operated with a simplified explanation of religious miracles. Although from a theological point of view, the incorruptibility of the saintly body was not a mandatory precondition for his/her canonisation, Soviet officials and propaganda insisted that it was (Greene 2004, 19-21). This standpoint was convenient for Bolshevik antireligious narratives. Firstly, the incorruptibility of the bodies was scientifically measurable and could be "unveiled" by a simple opening of the coffins. Secondly, the statement according to which the Church always promoted the idea that a saintly body cannot be decayed when many of the relics were indeed corrupted was a convenient narrative on which to construct the accusations of fraud against the clergy. The accusations of exploiting believers through fraud corresponded with the Marxist notion about the exploitation of working people by higher classes, including the priests. To a similar extent, the propaganda narrative about the renewal of icons as a simple increase in the brightness of their images created the preconditions for a simple scientific measurement of this phenomena and for its qualification as fraudulent. Similar to how scientists construct the objects they examine, which are characterised by multiple meanings which influence the research questions (Kleinman & Moore 2014, 4-5), the liquidation officials reinterpreted the meaning of the religious artefacts in order to facilitate the required translation steps. Likewise, the liquidation officers simplified the meaning of the religious artefacts and of the miracles in order to reduce the number of the required steps of translation. By involving numerous religious and non-religious actors into their investigations, the liquidation officials constructed networks, and as Michael Guggenheim observes, the reduction of the number of translation steps strengthens a network (Guggenheim 2020, 66). Nevertheless, despite these simplifications which apparently should have improved the efficiency of propaganda narratives about the falsity of the miracles, the propaganda accounts formulated by liquidation officials during their investigations did not achieve their purpose. This failure is explained by the fact that the process of simplification was associated with a displacement. In order to make use of their scientific tools and concepts, liquidation officials presented as the source of the examined miracles the material elements of the environment of the miracle-working artefacts which were not the main source of the examined religious phenomena but could be measured with those tools and analysed through those concepts. This displacement of the source of religious phenomena doomed to fail the propaganda narratives

designed to convince the believers that the miracles were fabricated by religious leaders who exploited the naïve workers.

In a similar manner to other techniques employed by modern states in controlling the governed populations, which were based on a simplified understanding of complex phenomena occurring on the ground (Scott 1998, 76-83), the examination of the miracles by Soviet officials relied on simple notions about icon renewal. Thousands of officials were involved in the inquiries into the miracles that occurred in different places and among various communities all over the Soviet Union. These required a standardised and simple investigation procedure applicable to all examined cases and easily communicated to local bureaucrats through documents issued by central authorities and expressed in standardised and comprehensive terms. The simplified understanding of religious miracles facilitated the implementation of the campaigns of opening the coffins and the policy of deconstructing the narratives about the renewal of icons by numerous officials in different provinces across the country.

Conclusions

Soviet official investigations into religious phenomena wore the veil of scientism. The commissions involved in the investigations utilised a set of practices which mimicked scientific procedures. When dealing with religious artefacts, the official investigators relied on a few principles. Firstly, they isolated the examined artefact from the rest of the religious landscape. This isolation was essential because it allowed the officials to reinterpret and examine the object in question in a context which advantaged them and removed interferences from other religious actors. Secondly, they exposed the sacred objects to trials of strength. The Bolsheviks' manipulations of religious artefacts were aimed at trialling the strength of human religious actors involved in the examined phenomena. When inquiring into miracles, the trials were simple procedures which proved the manipulability of the context that shaped the encounter between the sacred artefacts and believers. Nevertheless, the assumptions of the officials about the nonexistence of supernatural forces resulted in the translation of this manipulability into proof of the nonexistence of the divine.

The third principle was to translate the collected data. The officials presented the sacred as a manifestation of the material, of class antagonism and of the backwardness of believers. The translations were drifts intended to reconcile such conflicts as those between official ideology and material and social realities of Russian society, the materialist ideology of the Bolsheviks and the traditional way of life and worldviews. One of the main reasons for the lack of success of the investigations conducted by Soviet officials into the miracles relating to

icons and to the relics of Orthodox Saints was their simplistic materialist understanding of these phenomena. The officials understood the renewal of icons as a perceived increase of the brightness of the paintings. The devotion of the Orthodox Christians to the relics of their saints was explained as the result of a perceived incorruptibility of the saintly bodies. These simplifications were convenient for Soviet officials for two reasons. Firstly, they facilitated the examination and deconstruction of these phenomena with scientific tools and concepts. Secondly, they facilitated and reduced the number of translation steps necessary for the translation of the collected data into narratives about the fabrication of miracles by the clergy who exploited pious but ignorant working people. Nevertheless, the simplification was associated with a displacement of the sources of examined religious phenomena. In order to make the use of scientific instruments and concepts possible, officials presented as the source of the examined religious phenomena those elements of the religious artefacts which could be examined by these tools. This displacement resulted in the failure of the propaganda narratives presenting the religious miracles as fabrications. The translations and investigations conducted by liquidation officials were not calibrated enough to the experiences of religious believers who encountered the miracles.

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Chapter 9: From Darkness to Light": Materiality, Absence and Agency in the Inochentist Spiritual Centre

This chapter explores the case of the closure of the Inochentist spiritual centre by Soviet authorities in the autumn of 1920 and the ensuing anti-Inochentist policies from the mid-1920s. The chapter analyses the social role of the absence of this Monastery and the competition between religious believers and local officials to fill the void created through the closure of this monastic complex. Through this case I examine the agentive power of the relationality and materiality of the monastic complex and its capacity to shape the perceptions of local authorities. The chapter illustrates how local authorities used the Inochentist monastic complex in a similar manner to the way that a few years later the local Liquidation Commission instrumentalised sacred buildings in order to control religious communities. This chapter will explore the relation between materiality and absence as reflected the case of the Monastery of Rai.

The ANT repertoires are the product of an attempt to do justice to material things, to examine how things and people interrelate and how they are shaped by those relations (Law 2008, 145). Severine Fowles argues that despite the important contributions made through the study of the social role of things, materialist studies have a blind spot. According to Fowles they are lacking an inquiry into the social role of absence (Fowles 2010, 31). An exploration of the social role of absences with the same methodological tools we use in examining the role of material things is problematic because the former would imply at least a mild dose of anthropocentrism (Fowles 2010, 25). This anthropocentrism contradicts the research strategy of ANT, and its key principle of generalised symmetry between human and non-human actors (Farías, Blok & Roberts 2020, xxi). The potential of absence to shape human behaviours can be explained from an anthropocentric perspective as a projection of the thoughts of those who fill in the void created by the disappearance of a material thing. Nevertheless, in some instances the absence is felt as a material presence which exerts power similar to the agentive role of materiality. The power of absence cannot be reduced solely to ideas, because it has material consequences that make certain things impossible or can constrain people to undertake certain actions. A paradox which is central to the manifestation of absence is that it can be expressed only through presence (Fowles 2010, 26-28).

According to Fowles and Heupel, absences emerge after long experiences of encountering things that suddenly go missing (Fowles & Heupel 2013, 13). As Meyer and Woodthorpe emphasise, absence can have its spatial coordinates and can materialise in objects

that serve as vehicles that make it present. Absence has its agentive power to engage human actors in actions constructed around what is missing, inherited from and lost in the past, and represented through material evidences of the missing of something (Meyer & Woodthorpe 2008). Lars Frers observes that the distinction between absence and presence is not disrupted by this paradox, because "'the presence of an absence' refers to the absence itself", while "'the absence of a presence' refers to the missing thing" (Frers 2013, 434). Fowles and Heupel regard absences "as a special category of things" that are "foreign to the world" (2010, 39).

An example of the manifestation of the agentive role of absence is the loss of a bunch of keys. As a bunch of keys makes possible the opening of doors and the movement of humans, losing the keys would have consequences similar to those produced by materiality. Without the missing keys, the owner of the apartment would not be able to enter his/her house (Fowles 2010, 26). The keys are part of a network within which the materiality of walls and doors restrict the access to a house for those who lack the keys. The losing of keys extends onto the owner of the apartment the restrictions imposed by this network to strangers. The Soviet antireligious policies involved aggressive assaults on religious communities during which sacred objects and buildings were destroyed or seized. The examination of the strategies of adaptation employed by religious communities in response to the absences experienced within their networks of believers, artefacts, and sacred buildings, after some of these things or persons were seized by Soviet officials, can advance our understanding of the relations between Soviet atheism and religions. This chapter examines how the networks of believers and religious artefacts continued to function after Soviet officials seized some of the actors participating in these networks. The chapter shows how the relationality, materiality and absence of the Monastery of Rai influenced the perception of the local officials, the beliefs and religious practices of the Inochentists, and how it shaped the traits of the religious underground and of the relations between the Soviet regime and religious communities.

The Liquidation of Rai

Numerous reports from the 1920s issued in Ananiev, Balta and Odesa, mention the existence of Inochentist communities such as this report by a party worker who visited a number of villages in the vicinity of Ananiev during the first months of 1920.

> By coincidence I was near the "Monastery Rai", which is located near Gandrabura. It was a holiday and approximately 2000 peasants gathered there. After the service, the priest made a speech saying "you are not humans but pigs and you do not need an authority. Now the country is ruled by pigs. We need a

> tsar." In the caves, *petliurovtsy* [fighters for the Ukrainian Republic] and weapons are possibly hidden. The caves shelter saints, and everywhere there is lying and thieves (DAOO, Fond P-12233-1-22, 11).

Besides the reported sedition, the attention of the party worker was attracted to the underground monastic complex. The network of underground spaces built by Inochentists appeared to be a perfect hiding place that was beyond the control of the authorities. The perception that the Inochentist underground was a hideout for anti-Soviet elements took an official form in September 1920 when the Party Bureau of Ananiev county decided to take measures against Rai monastery and liquidated it because "…in "Raiskij Sad" [...] counterrevolutionaries are hiding, [and] there is anti-Soviet preaching …" (DAOO, Fond P-12233-1-4, 12; 18).

Eliminating any possibility of hiding was one of the main aims of the measures taken by the authorities in their struggle against the insurgency. For example, in order to make the forests from the region less suitable for sheltering anti-Bolshevik insurgents by 1923 the authorities had replaced the forest guards with Red Army veterans (DAOO, Fond P-12068-1-18, 1). The colonization of strategic and border areas with veterans was a measure used by the regime to create social support in territories where it was most needed (Viola 2014, 56). For the local Soviet authorities in Ananiev, the elimination of the underground network of tunnels that were controlled by a monarchist sect (ASBUOO 27146, 12) was to prove of equal importance to the appointment of veterans to guard the forests. The Inochentist underground was still a source of concern for local authorities even in 1921, one year after the liquidation of the Monastery. One of the most frequent questions asked by the secret police officers during the interrogation of the Inochentists arrested in 1921 was if they had a secret entrance to the underground other than the known ones that had been sealed by the authorities one year earlier (ASBUOO 27146, 62-224).

The Monastery of Rai and its preachers were the focus of the Soviet authorities, however, not only because of their underground Monastery and anti-Soviet preaching. On 6 September 1920, a decision of the county Party Committee explains the need to take measures against the monks of Rai:

> About "Raiskij Sad", the Inochentist monastery where [unintelligible word] counterrevolutionaries are hiding, anti-Soviet preaching takes place, where because of [unintelligible word] against the kulaks, the wealthy elements of the countryside transport grain, clothing, money and valuables during the night.

> Resolution: It is necessary for Special Troika to pay attention, especially to village Tocilovo, through which the kulaks of the surrounding villages like Lipetskoe, Baital, Gandrabura, Perelioty, transport their property during the night (DAOO Fond P-12233-1-4, 12).

The text of this decision reveals that the economic activity of the Inochentist monastery whose active members were travelling through villages, preaching and collecting donations, was interpreted by local authorities in a manner that linked the Inochentist problem to the official narrative about the struggle against the kulaks. The Soviet regime imagined the kulaks as an "avaricious, bloated, and bestial" enemy from the countryside and it kulakized all peasants who opposed its policies (Viola 1997, 16) especially the requisition of grains, which was one of the main tasks of the local authorities. The gathering of economically significant donations by the network of Inochentist preachers gave rise to suspicions that the Inochentists constituted an organised kulak conspiracy and that the community held large quantities of agricultural produce and valuables in the underground Monastery. Significantly therefore, in the early 1920s, during a period in which the central Soviet authorities were promoting a set of policies favourable to religious sectarians who they encouraged to establish agricultural communes (see chapter 1) on the land provided to them by the state (Coleman 2005, 174-175), the Inochentist commune, on the other hand, was nevertheless perceived and labelled in the local context as an enemy.

One of the earliest propaganda accounts of the closing of the Inochentist Monastery that I have identified is an article published in 1927 in the newspaper of the Central Committee of Party Organisation of MASSR, "Plugarul Ros" (The Red Ploughman). The article describes the liquidation of Rai in the following terms:

> […] immediately after the counterrevolution was identified in Rai, and after the "holy fathers" began their fight against the Soviet authorities, Cheka undertook appropriate measures to drive them away, and indeed it forced them to leave. [...] The liquidation of Rai did not take place without casualties, without bloodshed. The first victim was the head of the Revolutionary Committee from Nanile [Moldavian name of Ananiev], comrade Anosov. Anosov was killed by Ionko, the brother of the most beloved women (nun) of Inochentie [...] who was the commander of the Bîrzu Railway Station [...] He took a group of Red Army soldiers and attacked Anosov [and his troops that besieged the Monastery] (Lesi Gomin 1927, part 2-3).

According to the article in “Plugarul Ros”, during the liquidation of Rai two separate Soviet military detachments clashed with each other. We can make sense of this based on two contextual factors. Firstly, there were ongoing clashes locally between the authorities and bands of insurgents and secondly, a breakdown of communication between the detachments sent by Birzula railway administration and by the county administration might easily have happened as a consequence of the poor state of communication infrastructure.

An important figure in the propaganda narrative of the closure of Rai is Anosov, the secretary of Ananiev Party Committee. His death during the violent closing of Rai is confirmed by the fact that according to archival documents on the location of Rai Monastery an orphanage was established which was named after the dead secretary Anosov (DAOO, Fond R-2106-1-151, p. 5).

In a recent unpublished interview with the son of one of the Inochentists who took part in the events, the details of whose account correspond in numerous ways with the archival data, Anosov died as a consequence of an accident.

> In 1920, Anosov came from Ananiev with his troops, surrounded the [Rai] Garden and opened fire on people. The people got scared and hid in the caves. Approximately 200 people entered the caves. […] I do not know who informed the authorities in Kotovsk [the new name of Birzula/Birzu] that a group of bandits killed people in the Garden [of Rai]. From Kotovsk, Alexandru was sent with his troops. He came to the hill and opened fire. Anosov got scared and started to run toward the forest and he was killed… (Interview by J. Kapaló with Damian Pavlovich Obrejenko 2014)

This oral account states that the Inochentists were not involved in the killing of Anosov. According to the interview, Anosov and other Soviet officials died as a result of an accidental exchange of fire between two separate armed groups of Bolsheviks and soldiers.

The political police criminal case file created during the repressive operation against the Inochentists in 1921 confirms some of the events described in the article from “Plugarul Ros” and in oral history. A document mentions that Aleksandr Ionko was a former tsarist officer who served as the vice commandant in Birzula and who was arrested in 1920 but succeeded in escaping from the Cheka (ASBUOO 27146, 287). According to the documents from the same file, during the operation from September 1920 the authorities of Birzula were misinformed by the Inochentists that the Monastery had been attacked by a group of bandits

who opened fire on civilians (ASBUOO 27146, 104). Accordingly, any statement that Aleksandr Ionko had connections with the Inochentists can be dismissed. In order to diminish the responsibility of local authorities for the incident which resulted in Anosov's death, propaganda accused the Inochentists of involvement in the killing of the secretary of Ananiev Party Committee.

A few weeks after the closure of "Rai", the Party Bureau of Ananiev county discussed some possible abuses committed by Podzakhodnikov, the military commander of the Cheka unit that had assaulted the underground Monastery after Anosov's unsuccessful attempt to close the Monastery. On 15 October 1920, at the session of the Party Bureau the events were described in the following terms:

> [...] Comrade Podzahodnikov reports: The long attempts to convince them [the Inochentists] to leave the underground were unsuccessful. A secret water pipe was discovered and destroyed. This spread panic among the monks who proposed to leave the cave during the night time after the soldiers would withdraw. It was proposed that they should to do so within two days, otherwise harsher repressive measures would be taken. When leaving Rai, I ordered that weapons should be used in case of any excesses. […] During the night they undertook an attack on comrade Bondarshiuk, who threw the bomb.
>
> [Later,] comrade Podzahodnikov mentions the inefficiency of the commission and expresses his belief that harsher measures should be taken against workers [of Rai] who do not want to work. Regarding the permanent drunkenness of Bondarshiuk, Podzahotnikov mentions that the work in Cheka is very hard, and he himself uses drink quite often and he allows his subordinates to do the same. (DAOO Fond P-12233-1-4, 18).

In this report, Podzakhodnikov, who was the superior of Bondarshiuk, defended his subordinate, who committed a number of abuses. Nevertheless, in its resolution, the Party Bureau of Ananiev county disapproved of the permanent drunkenness of Bondarshuk and ordered the launch of an investigation regarding his conduct during the liquidation of Rai:

> Resolution: The causes of the closure of Rai should be made public. It is unacceptable that a party member is a drunkard. An investigation regarding the conduct of comrade Bondarshiuk should be made, and in case he is found guilty, he should be expelled from the party. Remove comrade Bondarshiuk from Rai. […]

> Make an official request to Odesa Governorate Party Committee to replace comrade Podzahodnikov because of his overwork (DAOO Fond P-12233-1-4, 18).

The decision of the bureau to launch an investigation and to fire Podzahodnikov reveals that his explanations did not correspond with reality or were perceived as doubtful. With regard to the population of the county, the bureau decided to start explaining the causes of the closure of the Monastery to local citizens before the investigations into Bondarshiuk's conduct were complete. The repressive operation of 1920 appears to fit very well the context of War Communism. The so-called liquidation of Rai was characterised by chaotic, indiscriminate violence, by confusion and accidents which resulted in casualties amongst both civilians and officials. The representation of the underground Inochentist monastery as a hideout for anti-Bolshevik fighters, which was never substantiated, became a central myth of propaganda narratives about this religious community. It was produced under the extreme circumstances of Civil War and peasant resistance to the Bolshevik regime with the local authorities projecting onto the Inochentists a set of fears related to their concerns for the regime's survival in the region. These associations produced a distorted image of Inochentists and triggered the repressive operation of 1920 in precisely the period in which numerous other sectarian communities enjoyed privileged treatment by the Soviet regime.

Bolshevik Counterinsurgency and the Materiality of Rai

The Inochentist Monastery was spatially secluded from the world from above the ground, and it produced amongst visitors an experience of emplacement in a different spatial and temporal dimension. This seclusion was both the product of religious beliefs and of the materiality of the Monastery. The underground monastic complex was referred to by believers as *Noul Ierusalim*, New Jerusalem, *Grădina Raiului*, the Garden of Paradise, and *Raiul Pământului*, Heaven on Earth (Kapaló 2019, 43; 47-48). The Monastery had a central place in Inochentist belief and worldview, and was imagined as a reflection of the Heavenly Kingdom on Earth, a place where the redemption of sins and eternal salvation could be accomplished. The materiality of the monastery played a role in the construction of this belief. Its location in the underground marked a clear border between the monastic life and secular world, between the sacred and profane, and produced among the visitors the experience of encountering holiness.



Figure no. 11: An Icon confiscated by the secret police in Rai in 1921 *(ASBUOO, file no. 27146).*

The belief that the Monastery was a sacred place secluded from the profane is expressed in this icon (*Figure no. 11*), that was confiscated by the police officers from Rai in 1921. The icon above contains an iconographic representation of Rai that shows the Monastery as a flock of sheep surrounded by a fence inside which father Inochenetie, depicted as a saint with a halo, protects the believers. A number of characters guided by demons and in official uniforms drag the sheep away from the safety of Rai. The central figure in this icon is father Inochentie, who preached in Rai before the Revolution and whose relics were placed in the underground Monastery after his death in 1917.

Although the relation between the Garden and the Kingdom of Heaven was metaphysical, networks of human and non-human actors materialised it. The account of Father Andronic, a missionary priest who inspected Rai in 1917 in order to assess the canonicity of Inochentist religious practices and beliefs, mentions that the churches from Rai "were decorated with beautiful expensive icons," and priests and a deacon conducted processions and

sprinkled crowds of believers with holy water. The tomb of father Inochentie was in the underground Monastery, where choirs of young singers performed religious hymns, and numerous believers who took the monastic vow lit their way with wax candles through long corridors and monastic cells (Andronic 1917, 21-22; 26-27; 31-32). These material and religious practices created an experience of holiness and distinguished the Inochentist Monastery from the churches of the nearby villages. Official documents report that the Inochentist holy site was frequently visited by peasants from the nearby villages and that religious services were attended by thousands of praying people (SAOO, Fond П-12233-1-22, 11).

The Inochentists imagined Rai as a place of salvation and as a reflection of the Heavenly Kingdom on Earth, but official documents from 1920 present the Monastery as a place of hiding for anti-Bolshevik forces (SAOO Fond П-12233-1-4, 12). Even if during its early stages Inochentim was not a secretive religious movement, and the Monastery functioned openly as a community and site of pilgrimage (Kapaló 2019, pp. 107-108), the underground complex hid from official gaze numerous underground spaces which, according to the perceptions of local bureaucrats, could serve as an extension of the forest cover which was used by anti-Bolshevik fighters as a shelter and base for their military operations.

Religious and official interpretations of the role of the Inochentist sacred space sprang from the materiality of the underground Monastery. The Monastery bundled (Keane 2005, 188) the qualities of a hideout, shared with the forests which served as military bases for the anti-Bolshevik partisans. The Monastery functioned openly for years, but only during the Civil War its capacity to serve as a hideout was perceived by the authorities as a danger. Webb Kean observes that bundling is central to the biography of things, because the value and utility of things shift from one context to another (Keane 2005, 188). The impenetrability of the Monastery was the product of its placement in the underground, and produced its similarity with the forests with which it shared the same property of concealing from official gaze things and people.

To a certain extent, the counterinsurgency policy of eliminating possible hideouts of anti-Bolshevik fighters was aimed at destroying the marks of an absence. The military actions of the partisans were based on a hit and run tactic, and their successfulness was partly accomplished due to the incapacity of the Soviet officials to efficiently police the area. The actions of the partisans had material consequences, but most of the time they were absent from the official gaze, which produced a profound sense of insecurity among the officials. Local Bolsheviks destroyed the marks of the absence of efficient policing techniques by designing a

set of policies aimed at eliminating the spaces which were not reachable by their policing techniques rather than produce new methods of surveillance. The destruction by officials of the marks of the absence of sufficiently developed policing techniques can be explained as the product of the incapacity of the Bolshevik officials to extend the network through which they policed the county. One of the key features of networks is that they have to be endured, prolonged, and extended (Latour 2013, 41). Because of the scarce resources, the network of bureaucratic devices, armed officials, police informers, and other administrative mechanisms of constraint, could not be extended into such spaces as the underground monastic complex. Instead of extending the network in order to make it endurable and prolong its existence, the authorities eliminated the spaces impenetrable for the available actors which could be co-opted to the network though which they policed the county.

The Use of the Material Religion and Beliefs by Local Officials

The second major anti-Inochentist operation was conducted in October 1921 when approximately 55 leading Inochentists from Rai were arrested and imprisoned, exiled or condemned to death (ASBUOO 27146, 4). The criminal investigation case file referring to this operation and the way local police and party officials handled the case reveal important details about how the underground Monastery and religious beliefs were instrumentalised in order to control the Inochentist settlement. From the perspective of the officials the operation had a significant economic and propaganda importance. The techniques designed by local authorities were similar to those used by the liquidation apparatus which reveal that the officials intuitively understood the capacity of non-human actors to influence religious communities and that to a certain degree they managed to exploit them in achieving their purposes.

As the file compiled by the secret police officers in 1921 reveals, the village officials from Rai managed to exploit the relationality of the closed underground Monastery. In order to limit the influence of religious leadership on the rest of the population of Rai, the authorities established a state farm with Inochentist leaders denied the possibility of becoming members (ASBUOO 27146, 11). By limiting the access of religious leaders to the spiritual centre of Rai, the authorities undermined their influence and obstructed their capacity to perform religious rituals in which the Inochentist sacred place played a central role. Another important consequence of the establishment of the farm was that the believers living in Rai were kept away from the influence of their religious leadership. At the same time, the presence of the underground Monastery kept in place the rest of the believers, who were agricultural workers in the local state farm. The inhabitants of the settlement of Rai had donated their property to

contribute to the building of the monastic complex and the establishment of the settlement. By exchanging valuables and sacred objects, participating in religious rituals in the Monastery, and by organising their everyday life near the Monastery they produced a set of relations between themselves and Rai. From this perspective, the establishment of the collective state farm in Rai confronted believers with a choice. They had to choose between being expelled from the settlement and losing access to their sacred place, or to enrol and work in the collective farm. The efficiency of these techniques employed by the authorities is revealed by the fact that the 1921 attempt of the Inochentist leaders to regain control on Rai was a request sent to Odesa which asked for the liquidation of the existing state farm and the formation of a religious agricultural commune (ASBUOO 27146, 11). The liquidation of the state farm would have as one of its consequences the elimination of the restrictions imposed by officials on Inochentist leaders, who could not settle in Rai and did not have access to the monastic complex.

A report from the police file compiled in 1921 reveals that local officials exploited Inochentist beliefs and collaborated with a part of Inochentist leadership in order to control the workforce from Rai. The main accusation against the believers arrested in 1921 was inspired by a report of the head of party cell from Rai, Dicul, about the situation in Rai according to which two distinct groups of Inochentists existed. The first one was described as the so-called Zinovievists, or the followers of Zinovie Gâștemulte, who were poor peasants believing that they could redeem their souls through work. Zinovie had the status of a prophet amongst this group. Zinovie's good relations with the administration of the local state farm are revealed by the fact that he was in charge of organizing, deploying and supervising the workers of the state farm. Nevertheless, as a religious leader Zinovie had only around 50 followers and the absolute majority of the inhabitants of Rai did not consider him a prophet. The second group, according to Dicul, comprised the Inochentists who were kulaks and the leaders of the liquidated Monastery, who believed that they should not work but pray and opposed the state farm (ASBUOO 27146, 11; 93; 179). During the police interrogation of arrested believers, one of the main questions asked was to declare belonging to one of the abovementioned groups (ASBUOO, 27146, 109). The interrogation reports and Dicul's request reveal that local officials and police officers were aware of the various beliefs and practices of the Inochentist community and how this manifested as resistance and attempted to impose on them a certain form of religious identity. Likewise, Dicul exploited the religious capital of Zinovie Gâștemulte in order to mobilize and control a part of the population of Rai. Additionally, Dicul's categorisation was part of a codified request to the secret police to not exile the entire

population of Rai but just to reinforce order because the Inochentist settlement was important for the local economy.

The file from 1921 reveals how local officials dealt with the religious beliefs and the Inochentist Monastery and instrumentalised the monastic complex and its relationality in order to implement their policies. Firstly, officials used the monastic complex in order to keep in place the Inochentist workers and to reinforce their authority. Secondly, by establishing the state farm in Rai and denying membership to Inochentist leaders they attempted to diminish the influence of Inochentist prophets and preachers and to keep the rest of Inochentist population away from their preaching. Thirdly, they instrumentalised certain religious beliefs shared by a part of the Inochentists and collaborated with a number of religious leaders in order to mobilise and deploy the workers from Rai. The way how local officials used the Inochentist spiritual centre and collaborated with a part of religious leaders in order to control the workforce available in the settlement from Rai is very similar to the methods employed by the liquidation officials for controlling religious believers. The policies employed by officials at Rai and the policing techniques used by Liquidation Commissions relied on seizing the sacred buildings, providing a limited and conditioned access to them for a part of believers, and on moving religious authority from the resisting leaders to more easily controllable religious actors. These similarities strongly suggest that religious materialities and their relationality influenced Soviet techniques, and that officials intuitively understood the importance and the agentive power of the relationality of the sacred buildings.

Creative Responses by Religious Believers to the Closure of the Monastery

During the years following the closure of the Monastery, the absence of the Inochentist spiritual centre created a void that was filled by religious believers through a number of practices. Inochentist leaders and believers who were banned from living in Rai gathered near Lipetskoe and build a new underground Monastery. According to a report from 1925, the new catacombs provided enough space for 100-140 monks and nuns. Additionally, the builders of the new monastic complex undertook several attempts to retrieve the old Monastery, which resulted in violent clashes with authorities (AOSPRM, 49-1-159, p. 15). The newly built Monastery's role was to fill the void created by the seizure of Rai, to make possible the continuation of religious practices, and to serve as a centre where the old Monastery could be memorialised. The establishment of the new Monastery was an attempt to reproduce but not to replace the old monastic complex. The complex network of religious believers, preachers, icons, sacred sites, through which circulated pilgrims, literature, ideas, news about visions, sacred images,

donations, could not function without a monastic complex similar to the one seized by the authorities. The construction of the new Monastery reconnected the network disrupted by the partial destruction of Rai and kept in motion the people and artefacts which circulated within it.

One of the major factors that created the emptiness in Rai was the seizure from the Monastery of the relics of father Inochentie in 1920. In 1921, a number of religious leaders wrote a petition to the county authorities asking for the body of father Inochentie to be handed over to the community and placed to rest in the Garden (ASBUOO 27146, p. 351). The authorities refused to release Inochentie's body to believers, and as a result numerous beliefs emerged among the Inochentists, which filled in the void created by the absence of this relic. According to the oral tradition recounted in a hagiography called *Life and Deeds of Inochentie of Balta*, when seizing the relic, the authorities encountered the miraculous preservation of Inochentie's body that gave off an unearthly aroma. According to this belief, the body was taken to Ananiev for a medical check-up but when the doctor attempted to dissect the body, the relic started breathing. The coffin and the room were sealed but during the night the guardians were knocked senseless by an unearthly light and Inochentie resurrected and ascended to the Heaven (Kapaló 2019, 49).

This narrative serves as an example of how religious believers filled a void with a new belief. This belief transformed the absence of the relic into a presence of a different kind. As Fowles observes, religious reflection about divinity frequently relied on the presence of a void that directed the process of signification. The simultaneous presence and absence of God in the world relies on an absence that can be expressed through materiality (Fowles 2010, 28). From this perspective, the seizure of the relic from the Rai directed the process of signification towards attributing a divine identity to father Inochentie. At an early stage of the movement, some hagiographic accounts of the life of Inochentie of Balta presented him rather as a righteous hieromonk than a divine entity (ASBUOO 27146, p. 290-300). These early hagiographic accounts coexisted with narratives about the incarnation of the Holy Spirit in Inochentie (Andronic 1917, 31). The absence of the relic, we can argue, facilitated the acceptance by believers of the later narrative over the former. The paradox of Inochentie's simultaneous absence and presence was materialised in numerous icons in which he is presented as the incarnation of the Holy Spirit (*see figure no. 11*). Robert H. Greene observers that narratives about the miraculous disappearance of relics and about the ascension of saint's bodies emerged among Orthodox believers after the opening of the coffins of the saints by Soviet officials during the campaign of exhumation of their saintly remains (Greene 2004, 161-

62). Greene explains the emergence of these narratives as a manifestation of the resilience of religious believes and of their "self-confirming character" (Greene 2004, 161-163). Nevertheless, this phenomenon consists not just of a confirmation of older beliefs, but of the emergence of new ones. Although the believers could not anymore worship the lost relics, their religious life was still organised around numerous other artefacts and beliefs that had to be reorganised and reconnected in a new system of material practices and beliefs which would prevent the disruption of their network. A telling example of how the religious life of believers is changed by the sudden loss of religious materiality is described by William C. Fletcher in his article on underground Orthodoxy in the interwar period. *Cherdachniki* are a religious group that distanced itself from the official Church and hence from an entire range of material practices and sacred objects that could not be practised clandestinely. Fletcher describes one of their rituals, which symbolised the Resurrection and Ascension of the Saviour. In this ritual, Khakilev, the leader of the community, was lifted on hands by believers who climbed with him the stairs leading to the attic through an opening on the ceiling (Fletcher 1970, 375). This ritual was a creative response of the believers to the conditions of secrecy imposed by underground religious life and the loss of a sacred building in which they could perform the procession during the Holly Week and Pascal liturgy, when the epitaphos (*plashchenitsa*) (which is covered with the image of Saviour's body) is lifted and carried on hands around the church (The Handbook of the Clergyman 1985, 558-565).

The organisation by the expelled Inochentist leadership of a new underground monastic complex, of religious processions, and the emergence of sacred narratives about Inochentie's resurrection were creative responses aimed at filling the void created by the violent disruption of Inochentist religious life. The early strategies employed by officials to eliminate Inochentism were constructed around the idea of destroying the Inochentist spiritual centre and seizing important material artefacts from the community. Nevertheless, these strategies proved inefficient. They created multiple voids for the believers, whose creative responses posed new obstacles to official policies and made the official control of this religious movement more precarious. In order to counteract the contingency of the creative response of the Inochentist community, the officials designed a set of strategies with the purpose of filling the void that emerged after the closure of the Monastery aimed at involving the believers in a secular way of life and organisation.

Local officials and the absences produced through the seizure of religious object and buildings

The underground Monastery was a popular site of prayer and pilgrimage which preserved its importance long after its closure. As already described above, thousands of believers from the region attended the religious services at the monastery (SAOO, Fond П-12233-1-22, p. 11) making donations to sustain the spiritual life at Rai (SAOO Fond П-12233-1-4, p. 12) and in return received religious objects such as icons or crosses. From this perspective, the believers who exchanged goods and the exchanged religious items formed a network with the Monastery as one of its key actors. The closure of the Monastery by authorities partially disrupted these practices and connections, and created an absence. Nevertheless, believers memorialised Rai and their religious practices and sacred objects preserved their relationality to the monastery and between themselves. For example, Lesi Gomin, working for Plugarul Roș, the newspaper of the provincial Party Committee, complained in an article in 1928 that during a trip to Lipetskoe no one could show him the way to the collective farm "From darkness to light" established in the early 1920s by authorities in the Inochentist settlement, but everyone knew about Rai and could easily explain how to get there (Gomin 1928). Additionally, the former inhabitants of Rai did not give up their hopes of retrieving their Monastery, and made several attempts to take over the sacred site (AOSPRM, 49-1-159, p. 15). Local officials had to deal with the remaining material religious objects and with the void produced by the closure of the Monastery in a manner in which both the memorialisation of the Garden and religious practices associated with it would be eliminated or modified in a convenient way.

One of the main measures undertaken by local authorities after the closure of Paradise was to close the underground Monastery and its three Churches, but not the wooden Church built by Inochentists in the centre of the settlement. They appointed to that Church an Orthodox priest subordinated to the Renovationist Church (see chapter 2), which was closely controlled by the regime. The local authorities understood that the remaining Inochentists were not going to give up their faith and that new religious practices that emerged as a response to the absence of the monastic life posed a challenge to their control in Rai. This appointment was made with the intent to involve the inhabitants of Rai in practicing the official version of Orthodoxy, which the authorities perceived as less dangerous.

Soviet techniques of control of religious communities were constructed around material religion objects and buildings that were amongst the most easily reachable aspects of religions. The authorities from Rai attempted to use the wooden church as a lever of control of the Inochentists. Nevertheless, in 1921 Zherebkovski, the Renovationist priest who served in Rai,

mentioned in a police interrogation that the locals were "fanatics" and that the church should be closed (ASBUOO, 27146, 12). What Zherebkovski perceived as "fanaticism" were the Inochentist religious practices which differed from the official form of Orthodoxy. The strategy of appointing an Orthodox priest in Rai did not have the expected results because from its early stages Inochentism was quite distant from the non-monastic branch of Orthodox clergy. Likewise, after the closure of the Monastery, the newly appointed priest looked rather more like a representative of the regime than a clergyman serving the needs of the Community.

After the closure of the last Church in Rai during a police operation from 1921 when an important part of the Inochentists leaders were arrested, the building of the Church was turned into a club for political and cultural activities for workers. According to a newspaper article, the former Church had benches, a stage, a piano, and instead of icons, portraits of the Bolshevik leaders were mounted on all walls (Faerman 1926, p. 3). The competition between believers and officials over the status of the underground Monastery included a confrontation between two distinct materialities. Stephen Kotkin regards Bolshevism not only as a set of institutions, an ideological system, and as a set of "powerful symbols and attitudes", but also being comprised of "new ways of behaving in public and private", a "new styles of dress – […] an ongoing experience through which it was possible to imagine and strive to bring about a new civilization called socialism" (Kotkin 1997, 14). Bolshevism had a material dimension and encompassed practices and things which had their agency. From this perspective, the readjustment of the wooden Church into a club equipped with benches, a stage, a piano, and portraits of the Bolshevik leaders (Faerman 1926, p. 3), introduced into the confrontation a set of non-human entities and practices that encouraged the visitors to follow the path leading to Socialism. They transformed the Inochentist spiritual centre into a place where the materiality of Bolshevism and material religion competed, produced contrasting experiences and desires among the visitors, and gave contrasting meanings to the void created by the closure of the Monastery and diverging interpretations to the marks of the absence of religious life in the Monastery.

An important technique through which the authorities tried to encourage a different interpretation to the marks of the absence of the Monastery was to organise excursions for workers and peasants to the former monastic complex. An article published in 1926 by a visitor of Rai contains a short account on one of these excursions. The short article entitled "Sincere thanks to the commune 'From darkness to light'" was published in the newspaper "Chervoni Orach" on behalf of a group of 30 workers from Balta who visited this commune by a reader named A. Faerman. Faerman begins his account with a short history of the commune. Probably,

the visitors were informed about the history of the commune and former Monastery by local officials and non-Inochentist members of the collective farm. Faerman presents Inochentism as “a purulent wound on the body of workers inflicted by the tsarist [regime], bourgeoisie, and intoxicated labourers”. The workers visited “the underground monastery with tens of corridors [and] with [monastic] cells”. Faerman describes the monastery as a former shelter of “the Christ’s army”, which “was a counterrevolutionary army” during the Revolution and Civil War (Faerman 1926, p. 3). Faerman reads the materiality of the Monastery as a transcript of the transfiguration of Inochentist settlement into a socialist commune. He presents the former wooden Church turned into a club and the name of the commune, “From Darkness to Light”, as evidence of the transformation of the settlement into a socialist community. In these propaganda techniques, the absence of monastic life and monks, whose marks were the empty underground Churches and cells, had a central place. The authorities tried to fill in the void with a set of practices aimed at engaging the peasants and workers in an ideological reading of the marks of the absence of monastic life.

Faerman used the name of the commune, “From darkness to light”, to emphasis the dramatic change of the political nature and lifestyle of the settlement after the establishment of the commune. The Manichean character of the name of the commune is rooted not only in Bolshevik ideology, which imagined their political project as a battle of the “light of the revolution” against the “darkness of reactionaries”. Once again, the materiality of the underground Monastery played a role in shaping this perspective. The Inochentist underground Monastery was spatially secluded from the world, it produced among the visitors an experience of emplacement into a different spatial and temporal dimension, which provided the possibility for multiple interpretations. While for believers the Monastery was a place of salvation and redemption, the Bolshevik propaganda constructed an image of the Inochentist underground as a place of exploitations, fraud, and crime. In both cases, the technical features of the Monastery provided the means for delimitating its spaces from the outside world. In this sense, the Monastery created the preconditions for a spatial delimitation of the sacred from the profane, and the Bolshevik propaganda inversed the Inochentist notion of Rai as a sacred place. For Bolsheviks the sacred was above the ground, the space where they were engaging the society in a process of socialist transformation, while the Monastery was the dark space of reactionary forces.

Conclusions

The Soviet model of modernisation consisted of a complex set of policies including aggressive state interventions aimed at eliminating everything that was deemed as backward, including religion. The violent character of these interventions made sharper the experiences of the voids they produced.

In the case of the struggle against religions, the destruction of sacred sites and the disruption of religious life led to the emergence of numerous new practices and narratives among the believers. In the case of the liquidation of Rai, the monastery was destroyed as a result its materiality which bundled a series of qualities similar to those of the nearby forests. This bundling produced the perceptions according to which the Monastery was used as a hideout in the context of the Civil War. Likewise, the incapacity of officials to extend the network through which they policed Ananiev County, sprang their intentions to eliminate the Monastery as a place which could not be surveillanced through this network. The responses of the networks of religious believers, sacred artefacts and buildings, disrupted by the loss of some actors destroyed by the Bolsheviks were reconnected through new practices and materialities produced in order to prolong, endure, and extend those networks. Soviet antireligious policies targeted primarily material religion as the most easily accessed aspect of religions, but by eliminating sacred buildings and objects, officials made their control of religious communities more precarious. Soviet antireligious policies included violent actions targeting material religion which produced voids both for believers and for officials who had been attempting to control them. The disappearance of non-human material actors forced believers and local officials into a competition to fill voids. They employed creative methods and technologies and filled the emptiness with practices, materialities, and narratives, that slowly shaped the religious underground as well as the traits of an authoritarian regime increasingly violent towards religions. From this perspective, believers and Soviet officials were not the only participants in the confrontation over the status and role of religion in Soviet society. Religious materiality and the materiality of the new Soviet way of life also participated in this confrontation, manifesting their contingent agencies by shaping the perceptions and actions of human actors.

The way the regime dealt with religious communities was influenced by the agentive power of religious materiality and its relationality. Local officials leveraged religious materiality and its relationalities in exercising control over believers. The techniques they employed were similar to those used by Liquidation Commissions in policing religious communities discussed in earlier chapters.

It can be argued that the absence of destroyed religious artefacts and buildings continuously shaped the Soviet religious underground, and some of the Inochentist religious practices are telling examples of its impact. After the destruction of Rai, believers and preachers spread through Ukraine's countryside where they marked the absence of their spiritual centre and made possible the continuation of their religious practices by establishing new underground monasteries in hidden places. These new monasteries served as sites for religious gatherings, conversion, and memorialization of Rai. The Inochentist clandestine networks of itinerant preachers was created around these underground monasteries, which through their materiality and relationality reconnected the networks disrupted by the destruction of Rai, and encouraged believers to preserve the memory of Rai and to continue their collective religious life in secret.

Returning to the theoretical problem introduced at the opening of this chapter in relation to absence, materiality, relationality, and the anthropocentrism inherent to the theories related to the agentive power of absence, a few points should be made. Although solving these theoretical questions is not the objective of this chapter, the examined case study provoked me to reflect on the notions of modernity, materiality, networks and absence. For Fowles and Heupel, modernisation can be regarded as a process of production of emptiness despite the fact that industrialisation and mass production have enriched us with an increasing number of material things. This absence is an emptiness and poverty of the human condition produced through damaging the environment, through spiritual decline, and the overshadowing by images and symbols of their references (Fowles & Heupel 2013, 2). This understanding of modernity is constitutive of the theories concerned with the social role of absence. The notions of agentive power of absence imply a mild degree of anthropocentrism, considered by materialists as a vice of traditional thinking. The notions of agency employed by scholars concerned with the role of absence and those applied by ANT scholars belong to different paradigms of explaining the relations between humans and non-humans. Despite the anthropocentrism inherent in notions of the agentive power of absence, as we have seen, in some instances the absences generated a methodological agency which is manifested as that of a material presence. In such cases, we can examine the agency of the absences as the product of the relationalities from within the networks experiencing a loss, or as the result of the incapacity of some networks to extend. This perspective would not contradict the notions of modernity formulated by ANT scholars and those defined by the scholars examining the social role of absence. If from an ANT perspective one of the key features of modernity is the increasing enrichment of our life with new artefacts and the production of hybrids, then their

production has as one of their main results the destruction of the environment and the production of emptiness. The necessity to extract resources for the production of artefacts, as well as the necessity to extend networks, has brought the traditional ways of life and entire ecosystems and species to their extinction. The point of divergence in this explanation of modernity would be what some theorists would call anthropocentrism. The incapacity of the networks to expand produces the frustration of humans who eliminate the places that couldn't be invaded by those networks, as in the case of the destruction of Rai. New religious narratives emerged as the result of the loss experienced by humans such as in the case of the seizure of the relics of Inochentie of Balta. But aren't human actions and perceptions, according to the principle of generalised symmetry, shaped by their relationality to material things and people? The absence as well as the emptiness are experienced by humans, who are influenced by their relationality to human and non-human objects. After all, the Anthropocene, the timespan in which our environment has experiences profound changes and numerous loses, is characterised by the presence within it of humans who have been learning from and relating with things. This chapter pursued the risky path of trying to define the absence and its consequences as the product of a set of relationalities, which shaped the actions and perceptions of humans, who along with non-human actors, experienced the loss of some of the participants in the networks they participated to.

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Conclusions

Miracles, materiality, and networks

In May 1924, the Podolian Church of Dormition from Zhitomir, which hosted two renewed Icons of the Mother of God, was the place of the encounter between an old woman who came to worship the miracle-working Icons and the author of a pamphlet from the newspaper *"Volynskii Proletarii*". In the pamphlet, which presented the miracles worked by these artefacts as fabrications of the class enemies, the old woman shed a tear in front of the Kozeletskaia Icon of the Mother of God when noticing the increase in brightness of the saintly figure and that the face of the Virgin got ruddy. The proofs of the renewal presented by the old woman did not convince T-i, who entitled the news item composed for her pamphlet and the official report of the Commission that conducted the investigation into the renewal from the Church of Dormition, *Against the inventions of the [people] intoxicated with religion. There was no "renewal" in the Church of Dormition. This was the conclusion of a Special Commission which included priests* (Volynskii Proletarii 1924, no. 103, p.1). At the same time, the investigations conducted by the Special Commission appear not to have convinced the believers that miracles are impossible because they continued to worship their Icons. If for the worshipers of the Icons the experience of gazing upon the saintly figures produced the proof of the presence of a miracle-working power, the perceptions of T-i regarding the sacred artefact were informed by the results of the investigation conducted by the Special Commission through mechanical manipulations of the materiality of the icon (they wiped the metallic vermeil of the icon in order to prove that its brightness can be manipulated). Regardless of the divergent perceptions shared by T-i and by the old women regarding the reported miracle, their understandings of the renewal were profoundly marked and organized in accordance with the material features exhibited by the Icon. I have described this brief account as the different understandings of T-i and the old woman based on the material features of an icon exemplify how the materiality of sacred objects meditated the encounter between Soviet atheism and religion.

The investigation into the renewal from the Church of Dormition was conducted under the supervision of the officials from Liquidation Department, the Soviet institution responsible for the implementation of antireligious policy. The liquidation officers employed numerous material practices and artefacts in their activity directed towards controlling and examining religious communities and were responsible for deconstructing narratives related to religious miracles. Their investigations mimicked the scientific procedures employed by scientists in

laboratory research. Similarly to the way scientists set up the context for their investigations in laboratories, where the examined "phenomena are […] made smaller than the group of men who can then dominate them" (Latour 1993, 73-74), the liquidation officials thoroughly organised the setup in which they conducted their investigations. As attested by the official investigation into the renewal of the Icon from Zhitomir (see chapter 8), the objective of the investigations of the liquidation officials was to prove the nonexistence of the divine. In order to accomplish this goal, they isolated the examined artefacts from the religious believers except those believers who were most easily controlled by the regime. By isolating the examined artefacts, liquidation officials ensured that there would be no interferences which could disturb their investigations.

The liquidation officers confronted religious beliefs with scientific knowledge and method, and the commissions which investigated the miracles included scientists and technical experts. Similar commissions were created during the campaign of opening the coffins of the Orthodox Saints, a campaign also implemented by liquidation officials (Greene 2004, 104; 142). The second stage of the investigations into the icon renewals was to manipulate the physical elements of the environment of the miracle-working artefact in order to prove that these manipulations influence the experience of the believers gazing upon the icons. Although the officials claimed that their investigations concerned exclusively the material artefacts, in fact the investigations of the liquidation officials on renewed icons consisted of a series of trials of strength deployed through the manipulation of the materiality of sacred objects on religious leaders who attended the investigations. As in the case with the campaign of opening the coffins (Greene 2004, 19-21), the investigations into the renewals were designed to undermine the authority of religious leaders and to present them as fabricators of religious miracles. The inability of religious leaders to oppose the arguments formulated by official investigators, and the manipulability of the material elements of the environment in which the renewals occurred, were translated by propaganda into arguments about the nonexistence of the Divine.

Propaganda translations played a key role in the Soviet policy of deconstructing the narratives related to religious miracles. In the case of the Icon from Zhitomir, the propaganda narrative about the falsity of the miracle was produced through at least three translation steps. Firstly, the religious beliefs in the possibility of a miracle were translated into a materialist explanation of the renewal. Secondly, the propaganda narratives made another translation through a Marxist explanation of the miracle as a fabrication of socially alien elements exploiting the working people. Finally, the propaganda narrative translated the notions of Marxism into terms comprehensible for a wider public.

The investigation into the renewal of the Icon from Zhitomir did not achieve its purpose, because the believers continued to worship the Icon. Robert Greene observes that in the case of the campaign of opening the coffins of the Orthodox saints, the liquidation officials also did not achieve their purpose, because the propaganda narratives presenting the cult of relics as a fraud of the clergy demasked by the opening of the coffins containing rotten bodies gained ground only among a small fraction of the population. Greene explains the modest achievements of this campaign through the fact that Bolshevik leaders did not grasp the depth of the relation between religious believers and the relics of their saints. The opening of the coffins could not achieve its purpose because the main source of the devotion of religious worshipers to their relics were the miracles performed by the Saints in the communities which hosted their bodies (Greene 2004, 194-195).

Similarly to the campaign of opening the coffins, the official investigations into the renewing of icons operated with simplistic understanding of this phenomena according to which the renewals consisted only of an increase of the brightness of the colours of the painting. In chapter 8, I argued that these simplifications were produced not only by a superficial understanding of religious phenomena by Bolshevik officials. The simplifications reduced religious phenomena exclusively to those elements of the materiality of religious artefacts which could be examined and measured through the available scientific methods and tools. Likewise, the simplifications resulted in the decrease of the number of translation steps, which facilitated the production of less disputed propaganda narratives. Additionally, the simplified definition of religious phenomena resulted in less complex investigation techniques, which smoothened their application by numerous officials in provinces across the country. The simplification was accomplished through the presentation of the most easily controllable and examinable material elements of the artefacts as the source of the miracles. In the case of the icon renewal, liquidation officials presented the increase in the brightness of the painting colour as the sole source of the experience of encountering the miracle of renewal of Icons. This displacement of the source of the miracle doomed the official investigations and propaganda narratives to achieving only insignificant results, because the propaganda narratives were not calibrated to the experiences and the beliefs of religious actors.

The case of the investigation into the renewal of the Icon from Zhytomir suggests that this instance of the encounter between Soviet atheism and religion was shaped not only by the human participants and by the material features of the renewed Icon. The choice of the liquidation officials to examine some particular material features of the miracle-working artefacts was dictated by the availability of scientific tools and knowledge that could be used

in analysing them, by the capability of the bureaucracy to implement these procedures in different provinces across the Soviet Union, and by the conflicts existing in society which had to be addressed through the translations of the renewal of icons into propaganda narratives about the non-existence of the Divine. This observation reflects the idea formulated by the scholars associated with ANT school, who regard the social as "a very peculiar movement of re-association and reassembling" (Latour 2005, 7) of human and non-human actors in networks in which none of them remains the same because they are shaped by their relationality (Latour 2013, 61-62). In this respect, the definition of Icon renewal formulated by liquidation officers and Soviet propagandists was shaped by numerous relationalities between human actors and things which covered as a web the entire society.

Liquidation officials and the system of registration of religious communities and clerics

It is perhaps easier to explain how the complex relations discussed above shaped the encounter between Soviet atheism and religions by examining the system of registration of religious communities. This system relied on the circulation of numerous bureaucratic artefacts between the Liquidation Department in Kharkiv and the religious believers and local officials. These documents are stored in the archive of the Liquidation Department and exhibit material and textual marks of the relationalities and practices experienced by them during their journeys. In order to explain the role and function of the system of registration of religious communities, more has to be said about the role and jurisdictional sphere of the liquidation apparatus.

The main role of the Liquidation Commissions was to make the religious landscape legible for the Soviet policymakers. Similarly to the institutions of other modern states (Scott 1998), Soviet Liquidation Commissions were overwhelmed by the complexity of everyday practices and customs of the communities they examined. The accomplishment of this task by liquidation officials was especially difficult in Soviet Ukraine, where the religious landscape was highly diverse and was in permanent change as a result of disruptions caused by the Civil War, state repression, the activities of numerous religious preachers of different religious orientations, and the religious revival of the 1920s. In order to make the accomplishment of this task possible, the Liquidation Commissions implemented a set of policies that aimed at restricting religious communities to precise geographic locations, defining in a strict way their membership as a means of limiting the influence, activity, and geographical mobility of the clergy and preachers. These techniques of control used by liquidation officers were designed based on the mechanisms of control used by the regime in the case of the Orthodox Church.

Later, in order to subject sectarians to the same techniques, the regime attempted to reshape their communities.

The second function of the liquidation officers was to examine and classify religious communities. This data was essential for the formulation of new antireligious polices as well as for estimating the progress of Russian society on its road to atheism. Religious hierarchies and sacred buildings were instrumentalised in order to compel religious believers to provide liquidation officials with information about them and their congregations.

The official regulations and the registration systems implemented by liquidation officials infringed on religious practices of religious communities and were in many ways inefficient and even counterproductive. Firstly, they seized religious buildings and sacred artefacts from the clergy and believers. Secondly, they imposed the parish as the sole form of collective religious worship, eliminating other forms of religious gatherings such as the collective worship of the renewed icons. The renewal of icons and other miracles transgressed the boundaries of the parish and were perceived by Soviet officials as subversive actions of the social enemies of the regime. Thirdly, the system of registration of religious communities was based on an abstract idea of what a religious group is, and through this system the liquidation officers attempted to reassemble the congregations as groups of working people loyal to Soviet regime. The system of registration of religious communities restricted the participation of the clerics in the administration of their parishes, although after the social revolution of the clergy the parish priests were an integral part of the congregations they were serving. Additionally, the liquidation officers used unofficial methods, such as criminal prosecution, in order to eliminate from religious communities the believers perceived as anti-Soviet elements. Thirdly, they limited the geographic mobility of the clerics and preachers and registered religious communities only if all their members lived in the same district. Through these restrictions, the administrative borders infringed on the life of religious communities. All these restrictions were counterproductive because they provided limited possibilities for religious communities to practice their religions and consequently numerous congregations chose to continue their religious life clandestinely, automatically falling into the sphere of authority of the repressive apparatus of the secret and civil police.

The registration system relied on numerous materialities and practices instrumentalised by liquidation officials in order to compel religious believers to register. Religious buildings were declared state property, and their use by religious believers was conditioned by the registration of their congregations. Likewise, the unregistered religious communities were subjected to repression and criminal prosecution. The liquidation officials organised a network,

which included religious buildings, believers, officials, documents and numerous other religious and non-religious artefacts. Despite this, not all participants in this network were controllable by liquidation officials, such as renewed icons which could be easily moved and hidden by believers, or religious believers who by encountering a miracle could engage in illegal religious practices. Believers practiced their religious life within complex networks composed of religious artefacts, people, sacred buildings, and many of them constituted a source of resistance against the system of registration imposed by the liquidation officials. A network is as strong as its weakest element (Latour 2013, 61-62), and the network organised by liquidation officials through the system of registration of religious communities had plenty of weak actors, including religious artefacts, believers, and insufficiently trained bureaucrats.

The system of registration of religious communities and its immutable mobiles

As John Law observes, one of the features of networks is that they create immutable mobiles, which "circulat[e] to and from in space whilst holding their form and shape constant" (Law 2008, 146-147). In order to make their network sustainable, liquidation officials created numerous bureaucratic artefacts produced by officials with the participation of religious believers. These documents functioned as immutable mobiles circulating within the networks of believers, sacred buildings, officials, bureaucratic devices, and religious artefacts, preserving their form immutable. Their journey was between the religious believers who filled in the forms of registration and the Liquidation Department in Kharkiv, and they formatted the relations between parishioners, officials from district level, provincial Liquidation Commissions, and the Liquidation Department from Kharkiv. Along their way from the registered parishioners to liquidation officials in Ukraine's capital, the content of these artefacts underwent at least three translation steps.

The materiality of these bureaucratic devices and their relationality to numerous Soviet officials, documents, religious believers, sacred buildings and artefacts, produced a distorted representation of religious communities. The first translation step occurred during the filling of forms by religious believers. The practice of filling in the forms of registration translated the identities of the religious believers into the notions of the Bolshevik discourse because those forms had a standardised structure defined based on the tenets of Bolshevik ideology. The second translation step occurred at provincial level, where the members of the Liquidation Commissions produced the dislocation summaries. Through the production of dislocation summaries, the information collected through the registration forms was modified, translated and shifted, within a complex relationality between the institutional agenda of provincial

liquidation officers, many of whom were police officers, the realities encountered by them on the ground, and the bureaucratic artefacts produced by different state agencies including the police. The last step of translation was the interpretation of the summaries received from provincial officials by the Liquidation Department in Kharkiv. The product of these translation steps were the distorted images of religious communities, which were frequently presented in official reports as anti-Soviet elements. The translation steps were produced by the materiality of the documents and through the relationalities experienced by these artefacts along their journeys from religious believers to Kharkiv.

The immutability and mobility of the documents produced by liquidation officers were weakened by their involvement in new bureaucratic practices and through their participation in networks of bureaucrats and documents at a local level. An example of such a practice is the sewing into files of the registration cards of religious leaders by the provincial liquidation officials. This practice undermined the connection between the cards as material signs and the religious leaders as signified persons because it made impossible the circulation of the cards when the clerics would leave the district. This practice exemplifies how the placement of these immutable mobiles within local networks of bureaucratic artefacts and officials sprang new practices which shifted their utility and meaning and weakened their immutability and mobility. Similarly, the placement of the documents produced with the participation of believers and liquidation officers within the network of parishioners and religious artefacts produced relations which manifested their contingency by undermining the control of liquidation officials on religious communities. The capacity of the relationalities experienced by bureaucratic devices on the ground to change their meaning and function is reflected by the case of the Synagogue from Birzula (see chapter 7). The relations between the Synagogue and the railway junction, the building of the Orthodox Church, other buildings from the urban landscape of Birzula and the population of this town, shaped the perceptions and shifted the strategies of the local official and religious believers engaged in a confrontation over the role and status of the Synagogue.

Religious believers, bureaucratic procedures, and the resistance against antireligious restrictions

The systematisation of religious landscapes by the regime and the contingency of the devices used for the accomplishment of this objective enhanced the capacity of believers to pose an organised resistance to antireligious policies. At a local level, these devices entered new relationalities, and their meaning and use was shaped by different cultural knowledge and

different practises. The documents produced as part of the official registration of religious communities informed the believers about the antireligious strategies of the regime, introduced them to the linguistic and structural techniques of production of Soviet official documents, and provided them with a good knowledge of the structure and functions of state institutions involved in the implementation of antireligious policies. According to Natalia Krivova, during the campaign of seizing the church valuables a significant part of the complaints written by believers had the same text, and probably were written by the members of deaneries, multiplied, distributed to every parish and signed by parishioners (Krivova 1997). William Husband observes that by 1926-1928, the language of the petitions written by believers and the language of official documents was identical (Husband 1998, 77; 87; 88), which reveals that during the 1920s, due to their participation to different bureaucratic procedures, believers learned the language of Bolshevik bureaucracy. The engagement of believers with the official procedures of production of documents imposed by the regime on religious communities both disciplined the believers at the same time as legitimising their resistance to state policies. These bureaucratic procedures and documents constituted a source of authority for lay leaders of religious congregations and defined the frameworks within which they formulated their strategies to evade the antireligious restrictions. The official procedures and documents defined the focal points of the confrontation with antireligious officials and the means with which the acts of resistance could be organised and accomplished whilst producing maps of religious communities through the asymmetrical redistribution of power in parishes, which were then used by religious leaders in order to mobilise their parishioners.

Gregory L. Freeze observes that the parochialisation of power in the Russian Orthodox Church and the religious revival of the 1920s were the result of the disestablishment of the Church hierarchies and the collapse of the Russian Empire which enforced the control of the clergy on the administration of parishes. In the inter-revolutionary years, believers seized the control of their parish churches and became the arbiters of parish life with the power to fire and appoint priests. The Soviet Decrees only legalised the *status quo* achieved during the inter-revolutionary years (Freeze 1995; 2012; 2015; 2017; 2020). Nevertheless, by nationalising the sacred buildings and providing free access to them only to officially registered religious communities, the Soviet regime seized some of the power of the lay parishioners acquired between the Revolutions. Likewise, they transformed the churches into objects of dispute between lay parishioners and Soviet officials. In this new context, the bureaucratic procedures and documents introduced into the religious landscape by liquidation officials organised and legitimised the acts of resistance against the antireligious restrictions. At the same time, they

defined the framework in which the confrontation between Soviet atheism and religions occurred and produced the lay religious leaders and activists (the secretaries, chairs and members of the councils of founders of religious communities) who in 1929 entered the list of the enemies of the Soviet regime under the name of *tserkovniki*.

Reconnecting the networks: the role of absences

The system of registration of religious communities was enforced through the seizure or destruction of the religious buildings and artefacts of unregistered religious communities. The loss of sacred buildings and artefacts had a major impact on underground religious communities. The networks of clandestine religious believers, and their religious artefacts, buildings, and practices underwent significant changes due to the requirements of the new underground religious life they lived. Additionally, the seizure by officials of the relics, sacred buildings, miracle-working icons and other non-human actors participating to the religious life of the communities subjected to repressive policies, produced creative responses to the restrictions imposed by the state. These innovations were suggested, dictated, required, by the relationalities of the networks disrupted through the seizure of religious artefacts and buildings. The liquidation of the Inochentist underground Monastery is a prime example of how a religious community reconnected its networks disrupted by the partial destruction of the monastic complex. Through the construction of numerous new secret underground monasteries, this community reconnected the networks of believers and sacred objects and made possible the continuation of the circulation through these networks of pilgrims, miracle-working artefacts, icons, literature, news about visions, and donations.

The restrictions imposed by the liquidation apparatus in the early 1920s which made impossible the continuation of religious life of numerous congregations, and the seizure and destruction of sacred artefacts and buildings, shaped the traits of the emergent religious underground. The restrictions imposed by the liquidation officials defined the forms of concealment employed by underground communities and the contours of the new materialities and practices which constituted an alternative to the banished or destroyed ones. The interconnectivity between the clandestine religious communities and the restrictions imposed by the regime, despite the secretive life of the former, attests the power of the networks to transgress the domains and boundaries defined by humans, and the capacity of their relationalities to shape human perceptions, actions, and self-definitions. Aleksei Beglov observes that the Soviet regime attempted to control and eliminate Orthodox communities by defining and then squeezing “the boundaries” of the legal framework within which they were

allowed to practice their religious life (Beglov 2004, 41-42). By examining the relations between Soviet regime and religious communities from a materialist perspective, we can argue that those "boundaries" - as a conventional term that refers to the restrictions enforced by state officials through repressive means - disturbed the relations between religious actors and the rest of society. Nevertheless, these boundaries did not cease those relations, but stimulated them to take new forms. The relationality between underground religious communities and state institutions continued to exist through the indirect influences of the imposed restrictions on the way underground religious communities organised their life. These relations multiplied as a consequence of the proliferation of hybrids (Latour 1993), such as those produced through the practices of creating bureaucratic devices related to the registration of religious communities or the emergence of the miracle-working artefacts which attracted worshipers from different settlements who hid those artefacts from the authorities. These hybrids expanded and strengthened the web of relations covering society, and enhanced the interconnectivities between state institutions and religious groups and the dialogical nature of the relations between religious communities and the Soviet regime.

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