An Anthropology of Ritual Among the Saskatchewan Doukhobors, 1895-1915

by

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ABSTRACT

The Doukhobors originated in Russia in the 18th century and faced many instances of persecution over the years, including exile, imprisonment, and forced assimilation. Despite these challenges, the Doukhobors managed to maintain their community and culture through their unique rituals and practices. This thesis explores the role of Doukhobor rituals in fostering a sense of community that helped them withstand decades of persecution and asks how rituals functioned among the Doukhobors between 1895 and 1915. How did Doukhobors adapt their rituals to the challenges around them to maintain their group cohesion? Through these rituals, the Doukhobors created a tight-knit community that provided emotional support and solidarity in the face of external threats. Doukhobor rituals were linked to the most intimate part of their lives—the celebration of love, recognition of the soul's departure, their history, and their identity. These rituals highlight perseverance, joy, and community building.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"Ritual is a medium [...] for communicating or sustaining a particular culture's root metaphor, which is the focal point and permeating undercurrent for its worldview."

—G. S. Worgul (1980, 224)

In 1895 thousands of Doukhobors[1] gathered across the Caucasus to collectively burn their weapons. The weapons represented state oppression against their religious freedom and personal autonomy and were lit ablaze at midnight on June 28/29.[2] When they immigrated to Canada in 1899, people outside the community noticed that the Doukhobors bowed to one another as equals when greeting. When non-Doukhobors became close to the group, they observed how the Doukhobors would frequently gather, for various reasons and at various times, to sing their prayers and oral history. Yet, when describing Doukhobor culture and faith, many sources neglect ritual as a subject deserving attention. Authors such as Svetlana Inikova, Veronika Makarova, and Gunter Schaarschmidt have discussed Doukhobor rituals from incantations to the use of Doukhobor Russian as a ritual language. This thesis draws from the authors who have focused on Doukhobor rituals and asks how rituals functioned among the Doukhobors between 1895 and 1915. This period of time was chosen as it is representative of a time

[1] Doukhobor is the spelling used by Canadian Doukhobors, while Dukhobor is the transliteration of their name from Russian. Scholars use both spellings depending on the context of which they are writing.
[2] This is the Julian calendar date. The Gregorian calendar date equates to July 10/11.

when the Doukhobor community was experiencing many abrupt and continuous changes. The 1895 Burning of Arms led to a brutal persecution of the Doukhobors, and many would eventually emigrate to Canada from the Russian Empire. Once they arrived on the Canadian prairies in 1899, they were faced with the pressure of Anglo-Canadian social norms and values (Androsoff 2011, 2). How did Doukhobors readapt their rituals to the challenges around them to maintain their group cohesion?

The Doukhobors experienced decades of oppression throughout their lifetimes and this caused many different periods of unrest within the community. Consequently, some rituals like the Burning of Arms signalled their separation from dominating social norms within the Russian Empire, particularly against conscription. Other aspects of ritual life, such as the Living Book, rejected a permanently written doctrine for dictating Doukhobor life. In both Transcaucasia and Canada, the community dealt with internal disagreements about how the community should live and practice their faith, which resulted in several groups going in slightly different directions regarding faith and ritual practices. Despite these splits in the community, I argue that ritual maintained the social bonds between the Doukhobors, which allowed them to survive numerous periods of persecution and attempted assimilation.

Chapter two provides a historical background of the Doukhobors' beliefs and practices leading up to their arrival in Canada. I argue that Doukhobor rituals contributed to group cohesion and identity. Their rituals helped them to resist external pressure from the Russian Orthodox Church, the Russian state, and the Canadian government. Although it is important to cover the history of Doukhobor persecution, I do not want to overlook Doukhobor perseverance. There is a tendency to focus only on the persecutory history of

an oppressed group, and this negates drawing attention to ways that different groups coped with external forces infringing on their autonomy by being joyful, loving, or even angry. The Doukhobors are more than an oppressed group, and their rituals extend beyond the Burning of Arms. They had weddings that were only valid if the couple loved one another, they commemorated the deaths of other members of the community, and they gathered to sing their prayers and oral history. This chapter analyzes the 1895 Burning of Arms, Bonch-Bruevich's article "*Obriady dukhobortsev*" (Doukhobor Rituals) about the rituals he witnessed in 1899-1900, and the regular communal assemblies (*sobranie*) when Doukhobors gathered to make group decisions, sing psalms, and pray. Catherine Bell's ritual frameworks will be used to describe how and where Doukhobor practices fit into ritual theory and will also bring other ritual theory scholars into focus, such as Émile Durkheim, Clifford Geertz, and Victor Turner. As these were scholars in the field of sociology and anthropology, their theories draw attention to the function of rituals and why they matter. The methodology includes a review of ethnographic works, archival newspapers, primary sources, and secondary works. An article published in Russian by Vladimir Dimitrievich Bonch-Bruevich—an early ethnographer of the Doukhobors—about their rituals in 1900 will be the main source for the rituals being performed when the Doukhobors first arrived in Canada. Other primary sources include newspaper articles published in Saskatchewan between 1899 and 1915, official reports, and the travel journalism of Mary Agnes FitzGibbon, a first-wave feminist and writer for the *Globe* who wrote under the pseudonym Lally Bernard.

The third chapter explores the role of ritual in the Doukhobors' struggle to resist assimilation and assert their own cultural identity. The Doukhobors struggled against

external perceptions of being primitive (unmodern), irrational, and undesirable as settlers. Bonch-Bruevich, as a Bolshevik, saw them as a group that could be propagandized into contributing to the revolution; many Canadian officials and journalists saw them as an irrational Other to assimilate into what it meant to be a Canadian. Although Doukhobors rejected the rituals of the state church, they developed a rich repertoire of practices that sustained their community. My aim is to consider the deep and inescapable role that ritual played in their society as they sought to maintain their identity against hegemonic religions and cultures in Russia and Canada.

CHAPTER 2

DOUKHOBOR HISTORY & RITUALS

The exact origins of the Doukhobors are disputed. Although the ethnonym "Doukhobor" was invented only in the 1780s, the Doukhobor movement, which rejected the priesthood, sacraments, icons, and temples of the state church, existed much earlier. Some scholars, such as the philologist Svetlana Inikova, argue that radical Protestants from central Europe created the Doukhobor movement in the early 18th century when they brought their Anabaptist ecclesiology and iconoclasm to Ukraine, where they found a ready audience for these doctrines (Inikova 2007b, 78). According to Inikova, the earliest Doukhobors took their foreign faith into Russia from Ukraine. Other scholars point out that there is little concrete evidence to support this hypothesis. In fact, the dissenters, who were later called Doukhobors, first appeared in the historical record in the mid-18th century Tambov region of southern Russia. For the Soviet Marxist historian Pavel Ryndziunskii, the Doukhobors originated as an autochthonous social protest movement in the 1760s around the Tambov region, where they were first arrested and tried (Clay 2013, 227). Ashleigh Androsoff has suggested that the Doukhobors emerged with other sectarians after the schism of the Russian Orthodox Church in 1652 (Androsoff 2011, 32), while Koozma Tarasoff has suggested that the ideas of Doukhoborism originated before this (Tarasoff 1982, 2). Doukhobor oral history has multiple origins for the Doukhobors. I. P. Obrosimov wrote to Bonch-Bruevich that they descended from the three youths in the Book of Daniel; Ananias, Azariah, and Misail (Olkhovskii 1905, 241) This is also described in the *Book of Life of Doukhobors* recorded

by Bonch-Bruevich from 1899-1900 and translated into English in 1978 (*The Book of Life of Doukhobors* 1978, 21, 22, 32).

In the earliest heresy cases from Tambov in the 1760s, the religious dissenters attracted the attention of the local authorities by their open refusal to attend church, receive communion, venerate icons, make the sign of the cross, or welcome clergy into their homes. These early Doukhobors compiled a statement of their faith, which affirmed the Bible, but rejected the manmade means of salvation that the state church had fashioned. They regarded their own community as the true church, the assembly of the faithful. Rather than venerate icons, which were no more than painted boards, they venerated one another, believing that the spirit of God resides in all people (Androsoff 2011, 33). Although they did not observe the Orthodox fasting calendar, they did follow the Old Testament prohibition against eating pork. In their own worship gatherings, they sang hymns of their own composition as well as the canonical psalms. While denying that marriage was a sacrament, the Doukhobors practiced their own form of marriage, insisting that a "suitor should choose his bride out of love and, having accepted her before witnesses, should live with her according to God's law" (Inikova 2007b, 33).

The Russian state brutally oppressed these early Doukhobors for their blasphemous teaching. The authorities seized Doukhobor children and placed them in garrison schools for a lifetime of military service (Tarasoff 1991, 3). Doukhobor leaders were beaten, forcibly drafted into military service, or sent into exile (Androsoff 2011, 39). Despite this persecution causing death to many Doukhobors (Inikova 2007b, 18), the community survived and propagated their faith. By the 1780s, there was a significant Doukhobor community in the region of Ekaterinoslav (present-day Dnipro) in Ukraine.

Sometime in the mid-1780s, the Russian Orthodox Church applied the epithet "Doukhobor" to these dissenters. Doukhobor means "spirit wrestler," from the words "*dukh*" (spirit) and "*bor*" (struggle). The name was meant to imply that they were wrestling against the Holy Spirit. This term also associated the Doukhobors with an unrelated fourth-century Christian heresy of "spirit-wrestlers" (*pneumatomakhoi*), but the Doukhobors eventually reappropriated this name to mean that they were fighting *with* the holy spirit of God *against* the oppressive church and state (Woodcock and Avakumović 1968, 19; Inikova 2007b; Clay 2013).

The Doukhobors used rituals in their struggle to preserve their faith and identity. Decade after decade, Doukhobors struggled to maintain their community's autonomy in the face of opposition from local, church, and state authorities. They were able to do this in ways that were at first subtle. Women's dress became a "denominational marker" as they began dressing differently from Russian Orthodox women by not wearing earrings, not braiding their hair, and not wearing ornaments (Inikova 2007b, 36). In order to communicate secretly and locate one another, the Doukhobors had secret passwords (Inikova 2007b, 31). Inikova even suspects that there may have been a rite of initiation among the early Doukhobors, though she does not provide evidence of this (Inikova 2007b, 31). These different ways of dressing and secretly communicating to members of the community with passwords highlight the idea that the Doukhobors were creating insiders and constructing an identity.

Doukhobors in Caucasian Exile

In the early 1800s, the Doukhobors were permitted to settle land in the Milky Waters region (*Molochnye Vody*) along the Molochna River in what is now Ukraine. In 1830 the Doukhobors—as well as other sectarians considered to be a political problem by Russian officials and a faith problem by Orthodox leaders, such as the Molokans and Subbotniks—were forcibly exiled to Transcaucasia (Breyfogle 2005, 2). There, the Doukhobors formed dozens of settlements across the Caucasus mountains.

Gorelovka, a village founded by Doukhobor exiles in 1842 in Georgia, was one of the most important of these settlements. The leaders of the Doukhobor communities in the Caucasus lived there. Gorelovka was also the site of the Doukhobors' central institution, formally called the Orphan's Home (*Sirotskii dom*), built in 1847, which functioned as a communal treasury and meeting place as well as a philanthropic enterprise (Breyfogle 1995; Breyfogle 2005, 222-23).

In 1864, the widow Lukeria Vasil'evna Kalmykova (née Gubanova) succeeded her late husband, Petr Kalmykov, to become the head of the Doukhobor community, a post she held for 22 years until her death in 1886 (Breyfogle 2005, 222). Kalmykova was the only woman to be a spiritual leader at the time and the only one to have acquired her leadership through marriage, but she was the most beloved (Breyfogle 2005, 222). She became the spiritual leader when the Doukhobors were living in Transcaucasia and not only maintained order within the Doukhobor community but maintained a strong working relationship with the tsarist officials as well. As the leader, Kalmykova also controlled the core of the Doukhobor community—the Orphan Home—and the community's financial capital (Breyfogle 2005, 204, 223).

Upon the death of Lukeria Kalmykova in 1886, a power struggle ensued within the community. Mikhail Gubanov, Kalmykova's brother, was next in the familial line to become the spiritual leader. However, during her lifetime, Kalmykova brought up her personal secretary, Peter Vasilevich Verigin, to be the next leader. Before her death, rumours had already spread that there was a relationship between the two that went beyond mentor-mentee or friendship, though this was never proven. When the issue of lineage was pressed, Verigin's relatives stated that he was the son of Peter Kalmykov, which made him a direct descendant of the Kalmykov bloodline. Regardless of the truth to any of these claims, Verigin found much support among the Doukhobors (Breyfogle 2005, 224).

This was unacceptable to a more oligarchic group of Doukhobors and their supporters, which included Mikhail Gubanov (Breyfogle 2005, 224). The division of support resulted in a split between the Big Party—Verigin's supporters and the largest party—and the Small Party, Gubanov's supporters. Because Verigin had support from the majority to become the next spiritual leader, the Orphan Home—along with all of the capital associated with it—should have been handed to Verigin, but Gubanov refused to relinquish it. The Small Party relied on the tsarist inheritance laws to benefit themselves and maintain their own power and control (Breyfogle 2005, 227). This split was so severe that Doukhobors of the Large Party and Small Party completely separated themselves. When they came together for Kalmykova's *pominki* (a wake that takes place six weeks after death to remember the deceased)—when the next spiritual leader would become officially acknowledged—the Small Party blocked Verigin's ascension to power by

bringing in state officials. Verigin and five other leaders in the Large Party were arrested, and all were sent to northern Russia (Breyfogle 2005, 234).

Verigin was still able to communicate with the Large Party by sending messages to his inner circle. He revived traditional practices, such as a ban on drinking and introduced a ban on smoking while he was living in exile. He was literate and began reading Tolstoy while serving his sentence. As a result, he adopted vegetarianism, deciding that it was wrong to kill humans and harm any living being (Woodcock and Avakumović 1968, 91; Breyfogle 2005, 248-249). A majority of the Doukhobors embraced Verigin's reforms. When his message was delivered, they poured out all their liquor, and tobacco "was burnt in little ritual bonfires in all the villages of the Large Party" (Woodcock and Avakumović 1968, 91). Not all Doukhobors in the Large Party supported Verigin's reforms, particularly concerning vegetarianism, which split the community once again into two groups within the Large Party: the Fasters (*postniki*) and the Butchers (*miasniki*) (Breyfogle 2005, 251).

The Burning of Arms

Prior to Verigin, the mid-nineteenth century had marked a solid end to the Doukhobors avoiding military conscription in Transcaucasia. While Tsar Alexander II had treated the Doukhobors more favourably, his assassination in 1881 by the People's Will Party meant the end of liberal policy in Imperial Russia. His son, Tsar Alexander III, renewed the oppression of sectarian minorities (Woodcock and Avakumović 1968, 75). In 1887 when the draft was introduced in Transcaucasia, community members went to war but remained conscientious objectors by not shooting at their opponents (Breyfogle

2005, 262). When Tsar Alexander III died in 1894, he was succeeded by his son, Nicholas II, whose first act was to demand an oath of allegiance from all his subjects; those who refused to take it would be subject to punishment (Woodcock and Avakumović 1968, 93). Conflict arose at this time, as Doukhobors could not swear oaths of allegiance. This was an added problem to the long list of grievances the Doukhobors were facing in being able to live out their spiritual lives freely, and as Verigin was awaiting relocation to Siberia in 1894, he gave instructions to his brother and another fellow Doukhobor:

> Christ had forbidden oaths; therefore no Doukhobor should swear allegiance to the tsar. It was wrong to kill any of God's creatures; therefore no Doukhobor should either directly or indirectly take any part in war. Military service must be rejected, and those already in the army must return their arms and uniforms to their officers and refuse henceforth to take any part in violence (Woodcock and Avakumović 1968, 93-94)

His order at this time was kept secret until a very specific time, being only delivered to a select few elders, which specified that on Peter's Day, 1895, the 29th of June, the Doukhobors were to destroy their weapons in multiple bonfires that would "symbolize their complete break with all the compromises [made for the State] that had marred the purity of the Doukhobor faith" (Woodcock and Avakumović 1968, 94). Leading up to this burning, the Doukhobors collected firewood, kereosene, coal, and dung-cakes and built piles to burn their weapons in. As June 28th ticked into June 29th, in a highly performative ritual, thousands of Doukhobors stacked piles of weapons across three communities in Transcaucasia and lit them ablaze at midnight (Breyfogle 2005, 217).

While there is no single universally accepted scholarly definition of ritual, Émile Durkheim, Clifford Geertz, Victor Turner, and Catherine Bell have identified several

useful attributes and categories that can be applied to analyzing Doukhobor practices. French sociologist Émile Durkheim took a functionalist approach to define ritual, arguing that ritual could be divided into negative rites and positive rites: negative rites imposed restrictions to separate the profane realm from the sacred realm, while positive rites brought the sacred realm into the social (Durkheim 1995, 339-340). Durkheim classified the sacred as *things* that were set aside from everyday life and the profane as *things* that were not set aside for anything special. Therefore, positive and negative rites both deal with *things* set aside as something special. *A thing* can be any*thing*; a physical object like a chalice or a blade of grass, a ceremony that brings a couple together in unity, or a belief that there is an omnipotent being (Durkheim 1995, 34-35). Positive rites affirm a society's collective identity and shared values, while negative rites protect and purify the social group from anything that may threaten its stability. Together, positive and negative rites create a sense of social cohesion and reinforce the bonds of solidarity among members of a society.

Neither guns nor flames were sacred to the Doukhobors, and yet when combined together to push back against tsarist policies that were out of their control, these *things* became the object of a combined positive-negative rite, in the Durkheimian sense. The Burning of Arms was a positive rite because it affirmed the shared values of the Doukhobors, yet it was also a negative rite meant to protect and purify them from the militarization forced upon them. Durkheim also conceptualized intense emotions brought on by ritual as collective effervescence, where “the influence of some great collective shock […] the result is the general effervescence that is characteristic of revolutionary or creative epochs” (Durkheim 1995, 213). As the Doukhobors had begun rearranging

socially under Verigin's reforms, the Burning of Arms was a collective connection to something that felt bigger and transformative.

The anthropologist Victor Turner, who approached ritual as both performance and symbol, is helpful for understanding the function of the arms-burning. Turner defined ritual as "prescribed formal behaviour for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical beings and powers" (Turner 1967, 19). He also claimed that rituals "celebrate or commemorate transcendent powers" (Turner 1982, 201). By creating *antistucture*—liminal spaces that temporarily suspend the normative social and moral *structure*—rituals offer their participants the opportunity to challenge social hierarchies, experience a sense of freedom, and make meaning. Within this liminal space, rituals strengthen social bonds by fostering *communitas*, characterized by feelings of togetherness, equality, and a sense of belonging, and transcendence, where individuals experience a sense of connection to something greater than themselves. This period of communitas was correlated to the subversive anti-structural space and periods of liminality during a ritual (Turner 1991, 97).

The Burning of Arms illustrates the power of Turner's theoretical approach. This collective action celebrating Verigin's followers' pacifist convictions strengthened their sense of community. To the Doukhobors, the arms-burning affirmed the truth of their faith; to outsiders, it signalled their dedication to their ideals. A highly symbolic act, the arms-burning challenged Russian colonial society's normative social and moral structure in the Caucasus. For a brief moment, the ritual participants created a liminal space where they could imagine a different world governed by an entirely different set of values. They made a calculated guess that officials would respond to this protest violently (Breyfogle

2005, 264). Until the protestors suffered state punishment, they felt the bonds created by communitas.

The community that experienced the harshest punishment was Orlovka. By morning, Cossack troops descended on their communities, trampled them with horses, and whipped them until they bled. During this attack, the Doukhobors gathered in a circle and pulled the most injured into the center so that the least impacted would be pushed to the outside (Woodcock and Avakumović 1968, 102). In the weeks after the Burning of Arms, many Doukhobors were scattered and left to die of exposure. Over 4,000 members of the community were exiled to various regions in Transcaucasia, notably Georgia, Ossetia, and Imereti, hundreds of kilometres from their villages (Breyfogle 2005, 271). The Cossack troops stayed in the communities torturing and terrorizing the Doukhobors, including gangraping the women (Brock 1964, 170; Breyfogle, 269, and chapter 7 in general for a more descriptive narrative of the resulting persecution). The scattered Doukhobors found support from the indigenous populations of Transcaucasia, especially the peasantry. Georgian nobles were initially pleased with their arrival but became quickly disappointed when the Doukhobors would not work for them, preferring to work for the poor (Breyfogle 2005, 280). The ongoing persecution faced by the Doukhobors being dispersed was gaining support from other pacifists in and outside of Russia, such as the Tolstoyans and Quakers. This, in addition to concerns from officials that the Doukhobors could radicalize the indigenous peoples of Transcaucasia, resulted in the negotiation of a large group of Doukhobors to be resettled in Canada.

Shocked by the violent treatment of the Doukhobors, the famous novelist Leo Tolstoy gathered the funds necessary to help them emigrate. In 1899 the first ship, with

7400 passengers, arrived in Canada, where they settled in the Assiniboia District of the Northwestern Territory. Over 12,000 stayed in Russia; more would eventually travel, but this marked a major geographic schism within the Doukhobor community (Woodcock and Avakumovic 1968, 149-151). Their first destination was in the Northwestern Territory in Treaties 4 and 6, areas that the Canadian government negotiated in 1874 and 1876, respectively, from the First Nations for settlement.

Obriady dukhobortsev

The Doukhobors were not the first group to reject specific rituals by creating rituals that enact an opposing value; Edward Muir described in his book *Ritual in Early Modern* Europe how the Quakers attempted to "eliminate all forms of ritual as an offence to the plain truth of God's Word" (Muir 2005, 133). They dismantled linguistic courtesies and physical actions that reinforced social class—such as bowing and curtsying—believing their only superior was God. However, Muir suggested that the Quakers "could not entirely escape the rituals of social life" (Muir 2005, 133). They adopted the egalitarian gesture of shaking hands when greeting and parting. Although the Quakers attempted to reject ritual, they accepted "an egalitarian system of ritualized gestures" (Muir 2005, 134).

The Doukhobors had several standard daily rituals which they performed throughout the day. In the morning, they would awaken and begin praying as a family in their home, which at the time the Doukhobors first settled in Saskatchewan in 1899 was a hut. Bonch-Bruevich highlighted how men stood with lowered hands while women and children stood with their hands clasped across their stomachs (Olkhovskii 1905, 234).

Children had their errors in reciting prayers corrected by an older female: a mother, a grandmother, or even an older sister. Bonch-Bruevich noted that women acted primarily as elders passing down oral history and psalms to children; fathers and other men in the community were hardly ever involved (Olkhovskii 1905, 234). Morning prayer began with the words, "In the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit," and was then followed by a psalm chosen by the family at the time, the Lord's Prayer, a second psalm, and then children would say a "little psalm" (*psalomchik*) (Olkhovskii 1905, 235).

The morning ritual ended with mutual greetings and bows. The Doukhobors asked each other about their night's sleep and their health. They praised God, and they bowed deeply to one another. These mutual greetings were not limited to a prescribed amount of time. In some families, this ritual took up the entire morning; in others, only the head of the family or the elderly participated (Olkhovskii 1905, 236).

Bowing was a significant practice among the Doukhobors for two reasons. First, bowing indicated respect for God's spirit residing in each individual (Tarasoff 1995, 5). Second, bowing broke down the dominant gender hierarchies that prevailed at the turn of the twentieth century (Androsoff 2008, 93, 104). Officials and outside observers noted that Doukhobor men treated women as equals, which should, perhaps, speak more to the fact that non-Doukhobors treated women much less like equals, making Doukhobor gender relations seem like men and women were equal. Doukhobor women experienced a level of equality that was uncommon at the time. This should not distract from the fact that gender inequalities still existed; Bonch-Bruevich described how, during the religious assembly (*sobranie*), men would stand toward the east and women westward because "man is older than woman" (Olkhovskii 1905, 244) which may be a reference to Adam

and Eve, though Bonch-Bruevich does not elaborate on this. He does specify that men would bow to each other three times and bow a fourth time to all the women in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary, while the women would bow to each other three times and bow a fourth time to the men in honour of John the Apostle (Olkhovskii 1905, 245-246). This was also an acknowledgement that the Doukhobors saw women as a "source of living water" (Holy Spirit) because they gave birth to Doukhobor men (Olkhovskii 1905, 248).

Prayers at meals were also significant, and they happened before and after the meal. Doukhobors began with tea and bread during traditional lunches and dinners (*narodnye obedy i uzhiny*). Once tea and bread were served, everyone present stood and said a prayer before sitting down and eating from a shared dish (Olkhovskii 1905, 236). When everyone had finished the meal, they said another prayer. Bonch-Bruevich noted that

> [a]fter saying this prayer everyone bows, and if there are guests then it is customary for them to thank the hosts and cooks aloud, saying to them; 'for bread, for salt, save, Lord!' If there are only members of the household at the table, then they will say aloud: 'Save, Lord!' (Olkhovskii 1905, 237)

The Doukhobors next recited prayers in preparation for sleep. After the women made the beds, the family recited several psalms as they had during morning prayer. Before retiring to bed, the Doukhobors wished one another a good night, asked each other about their day, and praised God.

Many of these behaviours Bonch-Bruevich described as rituals may seem insignificant if we compare them to our daily routines. Countless people wake up and say good morning to others in their household or ask how they slept. The intent behind the action turns the mundane into a ritual; an attempt is made to connect to the divine, a

collective identity is invoked, or a meditative thought or action is made to create a feeling of being grounded. Some*thing* is separated from the ordinary and made special. When a Doukhobor woke up—at least during the time period Bonch-Bruevich was doing ethnographic work in Saskatchewan—they gathered together, as family and friends, to reflect on their gratefulness for having woken from sleep. They prayed for a day filled with God's light, guidance, and safety, and then they ended the day with thanks and praise to the Lord so that his blessings might continue.

Weddings and funerals were different from the ceremonies outsiders would recognize. Funerals were marked by washing and dressing the deceased in their finest clothes. This was a special set of "mortal" (*smertenuiu*) clothes that Doukhobors had made to be buried in, and the clothes would even be brought on extended travels—just in case (Olkhovskii 1905, 261). Twelve girls would sing and read psalms over the corpse as it was prepared for burial, then as others arrived, they would all sing psalms together (Olkhovskii 1905, 261). As they believed death was a deliverance from earthly suffering, crying was seen as indecent and sinful (Olkhovskii 1905, 263). The coffin was taken to the cemetery on the second day while more psalms were sung. Six weeks and again one year after death, Doukhobors, like Russian Orthodox Christians, gathered for ritual wakes [*pominki*] to remember [*pominat'*] the deceased.

Weddings were initiated when a couple told their parents they intended to live together. The ceremony would take place at the bride's home on a designated evening, and all friends and family would attend, except for the groom's parents (Olkhovskii 1905, 266). The father asked whether they loved each other, and once they responded, he said, "You know, children, that if 'there is love on both sides, the word is the law'"

(Olkhovskii 1905, 267). The groom repeated the father's words, then bowed to the mother and father, kissing them three times. This completed the ceremony, and festivities of singing, eating, and being joyous commenced. After supper, everyone walked the bride and groom to the groom's parents, where everyone sat down once again for another meal (Olkhovskii 1905, 267). For as long as there is "love on both sides," the marriage is absolute, but if this changed, the couple was then allowed to divorce, for there was no longer love on both sides.

Childbirth, surprisingly, did not receive much in the form of ritual. Although there was a sense of reverence towards women for their ability to have Doukhobor children, Doukhobors generally avoided the babies and new mothers themselves. Quoting a Doukhobor who had written to Bonch-Bruevich in 1898, I. P. Obrosimov described how when a baby was born, a small group of elderly Doukhobors would simply give the baby a name and sing a single psalm. Bonch-Bruevich described how Doukhobors did not even express that a baby was born but rather would say, "I have found a boy/girl." It was also not normal to talk about a newborn or the new mother in public (Olkhovskii 1905, 268).

The Doukhobors celebrated several holidays prior to arriving in Canada and during the time Bonch-Bruevich spent with them. He referenced two manuscripts provided by two Doukhobors, I. Fominov and I. P. Obrosimov, along with his own observations and conversations with the Doukhobors. The holidays, which are also celebrated by Orthodox Christians (though not always for the same reasons) included: January 6th, Epiphany, which commemorates the baptism of Jesus; March 25th, Annunciation, which celebrates when the Archangel Gabriel revealed to the Virgin Mary that she would give birth to the son of God; Easter—the commemoration of Christ's

death and resurrection—followed by Trinity Sunday (Pentecost), which is 50 days after Easter Sunday and celebrates the Trinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; June 29th, Feast of Saints Peter and Paul, which honours the martyrdom of the apostles Saint Peter and Saint Paul. On this day, they also commemorated the Burning of Arms and honoured their martyred ancestors, as well as their leaders, such as Petr Kalmykov and Peter Verigin, who bore the name Peter. They observed August 15th, Dormition of the Mother of God, which honoured the death of Mary as well as celebrated the memory of Lukeria Vasil'evna Kalmykova and the deceased wives of Doukhobor leaders; October 1st, Intercession of the Theotokos, which celebrates the Holy Mother's protection of the faithful; November 8th, Michaelmas, though Bonch-Bruevich could not discern why this celebration took place, and it was not universally celebrated. The Doukhobors he consulted also did not know why, though they suspected they were commemorating someone important named Michael (Mikhail). The Doukhobors also observed the Feast of the Nativity of Christ on December 25th (Olkhovskii 1905, 241-243). Doukhobors could add, remove, and modify holidays, which can be seen in the modifications to the June 29th Feast of Saints Peter and Paul. During his stay, the Doukhobors even told Bonch-Bruevich that it was likely they would establish a holiday to remember their immigration from Transcaucasia to Canada and that they would commemorate Lev Tolstoy on that day (Olkhovskii 1905, 244). In addition to these holidays, the Doukhobors held weekly Sunday *sobranie*.

The Communal Assembly (*Sobranie*)

Prior to their arrival on the prairies, the government of Canada promised religious freedom to the Doukhobors; then Minister of the Interior, Clifford Sifton, agreed to exempt the Doukhobors from military service, grant them land, and give them internal autonomy so that they could arrange their communal life free of government interference (Rak 2004, 38). As early as 1900, Canadian officials realized that Doukhobor's beliefs and practices were counter to the Anglo-Protestant identity Canada was shaping for itself. The government reneged on its agreement to not interfere with internal affairs within the group (Woodcock and Avakumović 1968, 166). The Doukhobors did not believe in registering marriages or deaths, individually owning land, or swearing oaths. Peter Verigin was still their spiritual leader, but he was living out the last years of his exile in Siberia and would not arrive until 1902. Canada was supposed to grant them freedom, and when it did not come through, the decades of persecution and trauma within the Doukhobor community, along with limited guidance from Verigin, came crashing down and generated a three-way schism. In 1906, Frank Oliver replaced Clifford Sifton as the Minister of Interior, and he imposed his own interpretation of the Dominion Land Act—which allowed the Doukhobors to hold lands communally—onto the community by no longer allowing them to hold lands communally. Some Doukhobors in Saskatchewan became Independent Doukhobors; with so much external pressure, they opted to become landowners and would eventually send their children to public school. The Doukhobors had a large portion of their lands seized by the government in 1907, and it was redistributed to other settlers. The majority of the Doukhobors left Saskatchewan in 1908 and settled in British Columbia, where they attempted to maintain their communal

lifestyle. They became known as the Community Doukhobors. A third group became radicalized by the years of imperial pressure experienced in the Russian Empire and now Canada—they burned down their homes and schools and marched naked. They were called Sons of God/Sons of Freedom, Freedomites, and *Svobodniki*, and the media-driven fetishized images of them marching naked and burning down their properties became the identity of all Doukhobors to outsiders who did not understand the differences between the different groups of Doukhobors (Androsoff 2008).

Although Doukhobor ritual practices did not prevent schisms in the community, they did help to create and sustain a separate, but contested, Doukhobor identity. The Independent Doukhobors, the Community Doukhobors, and the Sons of Freedom all claimed to be Doukhobors, but disagreed about the nature of the community of faith to which they belonged. Despite their divisions, they continued to practice many of the same rituals, such as the weekly assembly. According to Turner, structure— the social and cultural norms of a group, which includes rituals that help to define a group's identity and provide a sense of order and stability—can be challenged and overturned by anti-structure (Turner 1991, 94). This overturning of the social structure can occur during rituals when social hierarchies and rules are temporarily reversed, but they can also happen during times of crisis or great change. For example, Turner argued that millenarian religious movements were "essentially phenomena of transition" that passed "from one cultural state to another" (Turner 1991, 111-112). With their hopes of creating a pacifist society, the Doukhobors were arguably just such a movement. Over the two decades from the Burning of Arms to the outbreak of World War I, the Doukhobors experienced many crises in a very short period, and disagreements over *how* to *be* a

Doukhobor were often a central conflict in the community. The conflict after Kalmykova's death that split Verigin's supporters from Gubanov's supporters was a disagreement over who should lead the community. Divisions among Verigin's supporters between the Fasters (*postniki*) and Butchers (*miasniki*) was another conflict that arose from the changes taking place with Verigin's reforms (Breyfogle 2005, 251). In Canada, the split between Independent Doukhobors and Community Doukhobors happened over disagreements over individual vs. communal land ownership. Many Community Doukhobors resettled in British Columbia in 1908 to re-establish their communal structure, and their Living Book changed over time to reflect their community (Schaarschmidt 2008).

Although there were fundamental differences that developed between the Independent, Community, and Sons of Freedom Doukhobors, what remained constant was the assembly they formed to sing psalms. One of the oldest recognizable practices of the Doukhobors takes place during their worship gatherings (*sobranie*), which is when the Doukhobors assemble to offer prayer (*molenie*), and sing psalms and hymns. Orthodox Christians noticed in the 1760s that the Doukhobors sang psalms in a particular way, a unique style that has carried on until today (Inikova 2007b, 36). One Doukhobor, Koozma J. Tarasoff, describes *sobranie* as "a traditional form of gathering" that takes a "multipurpose form, including religious, business-political and social aspects" (Tarasoff 1982, 224). The ritual language of the Doukhobors does not come in the form of sermons but in *zhivotnaia kniga*—The Living Book. The Living Book contains the vast oral history passed down through generations of Doukhobors in the form of psalms and hymns sung in an archaic dialect of Doukhobor Russian. As Gunter Schaarschmidt has

shown, the Living Book contains old grammatical constructs that no longer exist in contemporary Russian and an admixture of Ukrainian. Schaarschmidt describes how even native Russian speakers struggle to understand the concepts expressed in the Living Book. Not until Bonch-Bruevich attempted to document the Living Book in 1899-1908 was there such a substantial written record of the Doukhobor's oral history.

The Living Book contains psalms and hymns that contain teachings from the Bible, tales from the Doukhobor's history, and moral and ethical teachings that developed through many Doukhobors. William Blakemore described in his report for the government of British Columbia in 1912 how

> they do not study religious books, not even the Bible, but the sayings of Christ, and the teachings based upon them, are passed down from one generation to another by word of mouth. It is astonishing that in such a manner they should have acquired a perfect knowledge of the Scriptures, especially of the New Testament, although they are by no means superficially versed in the Old Testament. In the course of discussion on religious matters, they frequently give Old Testament references, and always with accuracy (Blakemore 1912, 48)

English professor Julie Rak describes how "Doukhobor epistemology is verbal, embodied, and dialogic: it requires more than one person to transmit knowledge and to make a change, whether that change is spiritual, material, or both," and this is indicative of the way that the Living Book functions as the *thing* of social ritual within the Doukhobor community (Rak 2004, 1). Understanding their spirituality is amplified through communal ritual experience.

When the Doukhobors first arrived in Saskatchewan, they started building community prayer buildings specifically for *sobranie* because of the harsh winters and brutal mosquitos in the summer (Makarova 2020, 109). As mentioned in the discussion on bowing, men would enter the prayer home and on the west side while women stood on

the east side. Children would attend, but Bonch-Bruevich noted that he had never seen babies or children as old as 7 or 8 attending the prayer portion of the assembly (*sobranie*) (Olkhovskii 1905, 245). People would come and go from prayers, and some did not attend at all, as participation was not mandatory. At the end of their prayers, the Doukhobors said a commemorative prayer for all the deceased leaders, beginning with Saveli Kapustin and ending with Lukeria Kalmykova.

The semiotic theoretical approach pioneered by the American anthropologist Clifford Geertz provides a helpful tool for understanding the Doukhobor rituals described by Bonch-Bruevich. According to Geertz, ritual “is some sort of ceremonial form [of] moods and motivations which sacred symbols induce in men and the general conceptions of the order of existence which they formulate for men meet and reinforce one another” (Geertz 1973, 112). For Geertz, rituals were not just repetitive actions but complex performances that communicated a wide range of meanings and emotions. He argued that rituals are cultural texts that can be read and interpreted to reveal a society's underlying cultural assumptions and values (Geertz 1973, 127). The Burning of Arms is evidence that the Doukhobors valued collective action and pacifism, as well as the fact that they resisted when they were collectively under pressure. Their ritual salutation of bowing highlighted the value of equality across gender and socioeconomic classes. Doukhobor weddings and funerals, in their simplicity, indicate a value of the spirit over the material. *Sobranie* also reveals the value of community, especially in a more communalist sense, equality, and spirit.

Catherine Bell took a practical approach that was more concerned with the action of ritual, the process of ritualization, and what ritual specifically *does*. Bell argued that

ritual is a form of social action characterized by its repetition, formality, and symbolic meaning. Her theory of ritualization argued that rituals are practical and pragmatic functions that mediate social relationships and maintain social hierarchies, but also that ritual can challenge and subvert social relationships and hierarchies (Bell 1992, 108). As she drew from foundational scholars before her, such as Durkheim, Geertz, and Turner, Bell's categorizations of ritual offer a structured and straightforward way to think about ritual in relation to the Doukhobors.

Bell distinguished six basic characteristics of ritual: (a) formalism, (b) traditionalism, (c) disciplined-invariance, (d) rule-governance, (e) sacral symbolism, and (f) performance (Bell 1997, 138-169). Formalism refers to restricted behaviour and codes of communication which can be seen in outward expressions and gestures. Formal activities are explicitly different from informal activities, as they are more strictly organized and are one of the most easily recognizable traits of ritual. The function of traditionalism is to make an activity appear as an old cultural practice. It may, in fact, be an old cultural practice, or it may be a newly invented practice that emulates something we recognize as old or timeless. Traditionalism gives legitimacy to the practice as it implies the activity has always been that way for a long time. Disciplined-invariance indicates the disciplined set of actions marked by repetition and physical control. Where traditionalism is an appeal to the passage of time, disciplined-invariance is "more concerned with ignoring the passage of time in general" (Bell 1997, 150). Rule-governance is simply the rules imposed to restrict human action and/or interaction. These rules "hold individuals to *communally* approved patterns of behaviour [that legitimize] that form of *communal* authority" (my emphasis) (Bell 1997, 155). Sacral symbolism is

the use of sacred symbols which, for Bell, is not limited to the supernatural, but any*thing* that evokes “experiences of a greater, higher, or more universalized reality—the group, the nation, humankind, the power of God, or the balance of the cosmos” (Bell 1997, 160). Performance involves dramatic and deliberate symbolic action in public. It forms a space in which there are outside observers and inside partakers.

Along with ritual characteristics comes ritual typology; this encompasses the reason for the ritual taking place. The basic types distinguished by Bell, which may not encompass all rituals, are (i) rites of passage, (ii) calendrical and commemorative rites, (iii) rites of exchange and communion, (iv) rites of affliction, (v) rites of feasting, fasting, and festivals, and (vi) political rituals (Bell 1997, 94-135) These rituals may be prescribed in written doctrine or as an oral tradition like the Living Book. The aforementioned characteristics and typologies can apply to non-religious rituals, but for the context of this thesis the underlying factor will be focused on religion. Considering Durkheim’s concept of the sacred and the profane, Geertz’s concept that ritual reifies truth and order, Turner’s concept of structure, anti-structure, and communitas, and—finally—Bell’s theory of ritualization are all important to approach the topic of Doukhobor rituals.

Many Doukhobor rituals evoked traditionalism, as this is the characteristic most intertwined with identity. It is how they imagined themselves in the past, which reached across time into their lives, that was the basis for rituals such as the burning of arms and the recitation of the Living Book during *molenie*. Many of Verigin’s reforms in Transcaucasia were a form of rule-governance mixed with traditionalism. The Burning of Arms drew on formalism, traditionalism, sacral symbolism, and performance. It was also

a rite of passage and a political ritual. The Doukhobor holidays and rituals can be placed in an endless combination of these categories, but what is most important to understand about them is that they function as a way to bind the Doukhobors together in a singular—though multifaceted—Doukhobor identity.

The special moments and days described throughout this chapter brought families and friends together in a way that was different from everyday life. Weddings and funerals marked a rite of passage from one stage of life into the next. Daily prayers, meal prayers, and salutations may not immediately stand out as a ritual, but they reinforce both an outward and inward identity depending on the context. These were the rituals that Bonch-Bruevich observed during the year he spent with the Doukhobors from 1899 to 1900. By the time he left Canada, he had noted that Doukhobor practices were beginning to shift once again, as they had ten years prior with Verigin's reforms.

CHAPTER 3

THE DOUKHOBORS AS SEEN BY OTHERS, 1895-1915

In the Russian Empire, missionaries, government officials, and ethnographers often denigrated the Doukhobor faith for its pacifism, communalism, antisacramentalism, and iconoclasm (See Inikova, 2007b; Breyfogle, 2005; Woodcock and Avakumović, 1977). Even so, the Russian government understood the Doukhobors to be indispensable colonizers for the imperial expansion into Transcaucasia. The Doukhobors grappled with the conflict of being considered "ethnic Russians" and "loyal subjects" by tsarist officials, even as they sought to live out their vision of the Christian community, which differed sharply from both the Russian state and church. (Breyfogle 2005, 261) The ethnographic works of Vladimir Tchertkoff, Aylmer Maude, and Bonch-Bruevich are fundamental to understanding how narratives of the Doukhobors were shaped by those in positions of social and political power at the turn of the 20th century. Bonch-Bruevich was a scholar and friend of the Doukhobors, though his research of them grew out of an ethnographic tradition focused on how the *narod* was linked to a true Russian identity. His ethnographic research began as he crossed the Atlantic Ocean with one of four groups of Doukhobors as they migrated to Saskatchewan.

Primary sources on journalistic perceptions of the Doukhobors will come from the travel journalism of FitzGibbon and from various newspaper publications in what is now Saskatchewan, such as *The Saskatoon Daily Star*. The *Debates of the Senate of the Dominion of Canada* from 1901 highlight the opinions of government officials and, juxtaposed with journalistic perspectives, help to shape a more rounded narrative of Anglo-Canadian perspectives from 1899 to 1915. Finally, a report written in 1915 by

Edmund Henry Oliver, *The Country School in Non-English Speaking Communities in Saskatchewan,* will highlight where the Doukhobors were situated in the process of assimilation. These documents show not only how the Doukhobors were responding to pressure to educate their children in the public school system but also how officials positioned different diaspora groups on a hierarchy of who was assimilating fastest.

Vladimir Tchertkoff was a renowned Tolstoyan who edited Tolstoy's works. Tchertkoff and several other Tolstoyans authored an article titled "An Appeal for Help" to gather support for the Doukhobors. Consequently, he was exiled from Russia. He travelled to England where he established a Tolstoyan colony in Essex and continued to champion the Doukhobor cause (Woodcock and Avakumović 1968, 112). His book *Christian Martyrdom in Russia: Persecution of the Doukhobors*, originally published in 1897, garnered much support, and funds poured in from sympathizers. This book was an appeal to non-Doukhobors to the Doukhobor struggle against persecution; Tolstoy and his followers were highly sympathetic to the Doukhobors and helped them immigrate to Canada from Transcaucasia. Tchertkoff wanted others to understand the Doukhobors through the context of their suffering.

A Peculiar People: The Doukhobors was written by the English translator and friend to Tolstoy, Aylmer Maude, and he became fascinated by the Doukhobors because of their egalitarianism and history of persecution. The first edition of *A Peculiar People* was published around 1900, but the 1904 copy contained amendments and additional commentary from Maude. He visited the Doukhobors when they first arrived in Canada with preconceived notions of how they would be, and became disillusioned (Maude 1904, 6, 11, 24, 62). Maude had romantically exoticized the Doukhobors, even referring to the

late Lukeria Kalmykova as “Chieftainess of the Doukhobors,” (Maude 1904, 24), suggesting that they were a “primitive” people. Maude also referred to the Doukhobors as primitive people in a passage where he described how Verigin plagiarized Tolstoy, stating how the “modern code of literacy ethics was, however, not recognized […] among primitive races, and it would be quite unfair to apply it to Verigin’s actions” (Maude 1904, 160). Maude was not the only person to call the Doukhobors primitive (see Lally Bernard in the following section) but—as with others—it is indicative that he viewed them as unmodern, possibly embodying a perceived true form of Christianity and social structure due to their Christian communalism (Maude 1904, 246).

Vladimir D. Bonch-Bruevich was an early Bolshevik revolutionary who took his research of the Doukhobors beyond any other person in his time. One can scarcely discuss anything Doukhobor-related without mentioning Bonch-Bruevich, at least from the late 1800s onward. As Inikova states, Bonch-Bruevich always tried to “discover the secret meaning of the [Doukhobor’s] psalms and rituals which was usually hidden from strangers,” and this in itself is indicative of the trust he was able to build within the community. One of his greatest ethnographic achievements was the collection and publication of the *Living Book of the Doukhobors* (*Zhivotnaia Kniga Dukhobortsev*)—their oral history and psalms—which he published in 1909. His footnotes in the *Living Book* add context and explanations from the Doukhobors themselves, made possible by his special relationship afforded to other researchers at the time.

Canada

As the first ship carrying the first group of Doukhobors crossed the Atlantic in 1898, the *Manitoba Weekly Free Press* (quoting *The Montreal Gazette*) printed that the Doukhobors "are all anxious to come to Canada, to pursue their only avocation, agriculture […]" (*Manitoba Weekly Free Press* 1898, 4). That their entire culture was reduced to agricultural prowess would shape how politicians and journalists advocated or opposed their settlement in the Northwestern Territory. In 1899, Mary Agnes FitzGibbon, a writer for *Globe*, travelled around the Doukhobor communities that had settled in the Assiniboia district and wrote travel letters under the pen name Lally Bernard (Androsoff 2008; Androsoff 2011). As a first-wave feminist, FitzGibbon was interested in the Doukhobors as, in 1899, it was mostly women who had settled. Many Doukhobor men were still in exile in the Russian Empire and would arrive later.

Many were wary of the Doukhobors strictly because of their pacifism. In the growing Dominion of Canada, imperial expansion into the Northwestern Territory was highly important to Canadian officials and, by extension, Anglo-Canadians. The question of how to defend such a large country brought the Doukhobors under scrutiny, as it was established that they would not fight on behalf of Canada. FitzGibbon defended the Doukhobors by arguing

> that the fighting strength of an army will depend greatly upon the prowess of our grain growing community has long ago been proved, and the men who break the stubborn earth and devote their attention to the grain growing districts of the far West will contribute in no small way to the defense of the Empire. That great question of the 'food supply' benefits considerably from this influx of men to our west who have under the most disadvantageous circumstances demonstrated their ability as skilled agriculturalists, and not only this, but had built up trade in this section of the country given over to lawless hordes (Bernard 1899, 9-10).

FitzGibbon, in her defence of the Doukhobors, once again reduced them to their agricultural ability. They could still be used to benefit all of Canada; their farming capacity could drive a war machine. FitzGibbon used exoticized language to describe the Doukhobors and even wrote that they were "primitive Christians, and the writer […] saw in the worship of these people a strange likeness to those gatherings held in the Catacombs and in the chamber of some poor home in the far East." (Bernard 1899, 66) It is interesting that FitzGibbon linked the Doukhobors to the Far East in this way because Adalyat Issiyeva has suggested that Western Europeans often situated Russia as being in Asia and not Europe (Issiyeva 2020, 4).

The Doukhobors learned very early in their arrival to Canada that the government intended to collect vital statistical information, and this went against the deal the Doukhobors thought had been made with Clifford Sifton regarding the management of their internal affairs (Woodcock and Avakumović 1968, 131-134). Twenty-nine members of the community issued a petition to the Immigration Commissioner in July 1900 with the help of a Russian man, Mr. Bojianski (*The Windsor Star* 1901, 5). While there was skepticism over how much these 29 signatures represented over 7,000 Doukhobors, the petition led to an outcry from conservative politicians and newspapers. FitzGibbon was, like Bonch-Bruevich, trying to help the Doukhobors. To understand the highly negative views of many Canadians at the time, it is helpful to look at the *Debates of the Senate of the Dominion of Canada* from 1901. On March 26, 1901, several senators engaged in a heated exchange about the rights of the Doukhobors. Most of the conversation took place between Conservative Senator Thomas-Alfred Bernier of St. Boniface, Manitoba, Conservative Senator Lachlan McCallum of Monck, Ontario, and

Liberal Senator and Minister of Justice David Mills of Bothwell, Ontario. In these debates, the senators often reduced the Doukhobors to their economic function as farmers.

> Hon. Mr. Bernier: We were told that they were the most moral and most desirable of all immigrants. Now, we have the other side of the medal. They have hardly been here for two years, and they are up already with their grievances. They object to our land laws, to our laws in relation to marriage, and to our registration laws. […] I cannot put it before the House better than in the terms which I find in the Halifax Chronicle, a newspaper friendly to the government: '[…] It is revolting in the extreme to think of blood such as this being destined to mix with our good, clean British and French Canadian blood […]'

Doukhobors believed that marriage was only established through mutual love, and some were unwilling to register their marriages with the government for reasons that are two-fold: They wanted to practice their traditional form of marriage and manage their own internal affairs, and they were also wary of the government creating lists of Doukhobors, as this list-keeping aided their persecution in the past (Androsoff 2011, 8).

The Doukhobors did not practice Anglo-normative marriage and divorce patterns, and some men in power interpreted this as polyamory or open marriages (*The Weekly British Whig* 1901, 2), which is one reason why Senator McCallum referred to the Doukhobors as cattle in the following statement. He was also deeply disturbed that another member of Parliament had compared the Doukhobor's struggle to assimilate to the Scottish Highlanders during their own period of assimilation by England.

> Hon. Mr. McCallum: […] [Hon. Mr. Mills] was particularly unfortunate in his reference to the Highlanders, my countrymen. He said that after a while they learned to speak English and made good settlers, and he wanted to class them with the scruff from Russia in the North-west. He wanted to compare my people, who are the descendants of statesmen and warriors, with that venal tribe that he speaks of, who left their homes to till the soil in the North-west […] I cannot remain silent while my countrymen are being placed in the same category as

> Doukhobors because they could not talk English […] It is too much that the descendants of these people to-day should be classed with the scruff of Europe […] Yet this hon. gentleman wants to class such people with Doukhobors who take their women and drive them as the Boer does his oxen to do his ploughing with them […] We should not be anxious to settle this country with such people as the Doukhobors. I say away with them […] the lowest of humanity. […] And how are they oppressed? Simply because they cannot take other men's wives. Is it desirable we should have free love among our people like the cattle of the fields? […] they have been spoon fed by the people of Canada. We helped to bring them here. We fed them when they came and we gave them land and still they will not stay with us, though my hon. friend says they are satisfactory settlers. The Minister of Justice speaks of settling them in the North-west with the Highlanders and the Germans. Does he suppose that the Highlanders and the Germans will have anything to do with such people? Let us have a Christian, a moral country. We do not want such cattle here.

The reference Senator McCallum made to Doukhobor men driving their women on the plough was due to the circulation of images of this exact occurrence, though his observation lacked any kind of nuance.[3] The image of Doukhobor women pulling ploughs to break the earth was taken when there were few men living in the communities. Many were still in Russia at the time the photo was taken, and once they arrived in Canada the men had to go away to find work for financial security. This left the women to do the farm work, which was common for Doukhobor women but definitely went against Canadian norms. In fact, one of the reasons FitzGibbon wrote about the Doukhobor settlements was to give empowerment to the Doukhobor women, who were judged harshly for doing unladylike work at the time. For McCallum, this was the second reason he reduced them to cattle.

[3] See Androsoff, Ashleigh. 2019. "The Trouble with Teamwork: Doukhobor Women's Plow Pulling in Western Canada, 1899." *Canadian Historical Review* 100, no. 4: 540-563.

As for where they were measured on the ethnic hierarchy depended on who was talking about them. The following is a continuation of the Senate debates between Mr. McCallum and Mr. Watson:

> Hon. Mr. McCallum: I repudiate any connection with the Doukhobors and any comparisons between my countrymen and the scruff of the population that has come from Europe, from the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. I do not want them here. Canada does not want them here […]
>
> Hon. Mr. Watson: […] Before honorable gentleman rise in this chamber and make a tirade against any class of settlers, they should know something of what they are talking about. The speeches in this House this afternoon prove that statements are made without any foundation of fact whatever, and I could not let the opportunity pass without stating what I know of this matter […] It is absurd for hon. gentlemen to speak of [the Doukhobors] as the scum of the earth […] If my hon. friend felt genuine zeal on behalf of the Highlanders, he would have remonstrated with Mr. McMaster when he referred to the Highlanders of Scotland as being as much barbarians as the Indians of the North-west." (*Debates of the Senate of the Dominion of Canada* 1901, 140-149)

The Doukhobors were often positioned in relation to other Eastern European settlers, such as the Galicians, Ruthenians, and Bukovinians, as well as Indigenous peoples, all of whom were placed below Anglo-Saxon, French, and German settlers. As the Doukhobors began to split into Independent Doukhobors, Community Doukhobors, and Sons of God throughout the early 1900s, the media continued scrutinizing them. An article titled "Fair Play to the Doukhobors," written in 1907 and published by *The Daily Phoenix* in Saskatoon, wrote that

> […] this simple people migrated here and settled on a reservation which at the time was not in request by any other settlers […] But the Doukhobor has his peculiarities. He is simple and unskilled in many of the most familiar traits of so-called civilization […] He appears odd to the western man […] That the Douks are simple people is all the more reason for caution, for it is the simple man who nurses a wrong until he can see and feel nothing else. It has all along been the policy of Great Britain and of Canada to treat primitive races with magnanimity, leaning towards the side of patience and tolerance and so shunning the appearance

> of meanness. The Doukhobors in many respects is as primitive as the Indian (*The Daily Phoenix* 1907, 2)

During this time, the Doukhobors were splitting into subgroups based on the difference of opinion on how to live according to their faith, not unlike during the Veriginite reforms in Transcaucasia. Like the petition to the Canadian government referenced during the *Debates of the Senate* in 1901, the Doukhobors had written other petitions to the government and protested against their rights—which had been agreed upon by Clifford Sifton—being infringed upon. The author of *The Daily Phoenix* article is implying that because the Doukhobors received land to settle, they should be grateful, but, as the author argues, they are not intelligent enough to think about this instead of focusing on what they perceive as a wrong.

By 1915, attempts to assimilate the Doukhobors were in full swing. Though most of the Community Doukhobors and Sons of God had left Saskatchewan to settle in British Columbia, the Independent Doukhobors decided that they would own land as individual landowners and stay in Saskatchewan. This would eventually bring them into conflict with the Saskatchewan Public School system. In a 1915 address to the Saskatchewan Public Education League, vice-president Rev. Edmund Henry Oliver stated that "[…] the crushing of the Uprising of 1885 that told the world that this was to be a white man's country"[4] was to produce "Canadian Citizens" (Oliver 1915, 6-7). Oliver was deeply committed to building an English-only public school system in Saskatchewan, believing that if the Saskatchewan people were left to build their own

[4] The North-West Rebellion of 1885 was an armed resistance movement against the Canadian government by the Metis led by Louis Riel in the District of Saskatchewan. In the aftermath, Riel was found guilty of treason and hanged. For more see George Stanley. 1949. "Gabriel Dumont's Account of the North West Rebellion, 1885." *Canadian Historical Review* 30, no. 3: 249-269.

ethnically diverse communities, Saskatchewan would become the next Austria. As Europe had just entered the second year of the First World War, Oliver used this to politically charge his fight for assimilation when stating: "Are we to be a homogenous people on these plains or are we to repeat the tragic sufferings of polyglot Austria? This question must be solved in our elementary schools. And we must solve it now. A few years and it may be too late" (Oliver 1915, 7). Oliver's solution to this was to force everyone into an English-only public school system where everyone is assimilated into having the same language and cultural values. In 1915 *The Saskatoon Daily Star* published an article titled "Cutting Out the Bi-Lingual Clause", referring to the defeat of a proposed clause in the School Act that would allow for bilingual education in Saskatchewan. The article concludes,

> [i]n the great process of assimilation, […] the stock of the mixture must be British, and the flavorings of German, Polish, Ruthenian or Russian. While they may serve to create the masterpiece of a great future Canadianism, must not, during the seething process, be allowed to dominate that British ensemble (*The Saskatoon Daily Star* 1915, 4)

These snippets of Anglo-Canadian imperialism and assimilation processes were a great challenge to the Doukhobors as they attempted to establish and maintain their traditional and desired ways of life. Their rituals became an expression of Doukhobor-ness, which in turn helped to maintain this identity. Early authors like Tchertkoff and Maude championed the Doukhobor cause by focusing on their years of persecution, which is a highly important topic in Doukhobor history (which, at the time, was contemporary) to outsiders and to the Doukhobors themselves. But the ways they pushed back against persecution should also be remembered—beyond the Burning of Arms—as it speaks to

the importance of ritual in building communities, challenging hierarchies, and preserving identities.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

Doukhobor rituals were linked to the most intimate part of their lives–the celebration of love, recognition of the soul's departure, and their history–as well as their identity. Only the outsiders closest to them were privy to seeing most of these rituals and receiving an explanation from them–notably Bonch-Bruevich. FitzGibbons may have romanticized or exoticized the Doukhobors, but it should not be forgotten that as a first-wave feminist, she was writing in a man's world, and those men in power were in Parliament debating whether or not the Doukhobors were humans or cattle.

Many Doukhobors lost their proficiency in Russian as multiple generations of their children were forced into a school system that, to this day, would not allow education in their own language (Makarova 2012, 90). Despite this, Doukhobor Russian can still be heard in the prayer homes within Saskatchewan as *sobranie* takes place. As a ritual, it has served in its function to bring together the Doukhobors so that they may *be* Doukhobors.

During modern *sobranie* in Saskatchewan, men and women arrange themselves with men on one side and women on the other, with both groups turned toward each other. In the middle stands a small table with a loaf of bread, salt, and a pitcher of water: a symbol of their faith, represented by life's basic necessities. Hugh Herbison described *sobranie* as "a settling-down into the past, an immersion of self into the group. The singing at [*sobranie*] is monotonous, persistent, inescapable; it is vocal magic which takes the place of other forms and determinants of unity" (Herbison 1968, 546). These are expressions that can be heard in Ryan Androsoff's documentary. *We've Concluded Our*

Assembly (2019). Several Doukhobors discuss what it feels like to take part in *sobranie*; "The singing is amazing and you feel at home [in the prayer home] when you're there and have a deep sense of acceptance" (R. Androsoff 2019, 33:00); "When I walk through those doors, I'm home" (R. Androsoff 2019, 33:40); "singing is good for the soul" (R. Androsoff 2019, 34:50); "singing in such a large group brings a spiritual feeling" (R. Androsoff 2019, 38:45). For the Doukhobors, singing is such a deeply meaningful collective experience that it is interwoven into their social identity. Talal Asad wrote in 1993 that

> a crucial part of every religion, ritual is now regarded as a type of routine behavior that symbolizes or expresses something and, as such, relates differentially to individual consciousness and social organization. That is to say, it is no longer a *script* for regulating practice but a type of practice that is interpretable as standing for some further *verbally definable*, but tacit, event (Asad 1993, 57)

While ritual was once thought of as a prescribed set of rules, it is now understood as a way to form deep connections and express shared values that bind communities together. Throughout the documentary, the Doukhobors discuss the important role of singing and how it relates to the transmission of their oral history. Much of the discourse is indicative of the ritualistically transformative, traditional, and performative attributes that can be used to describe *sobranie* and the Living Book. It symbolizes the collective consciousness within the community that is spread across many parts of the world. This collective consciousness is emphasized by separating *sobranie* as a sacred *thing* that is part of a positive rite.

The Doukhobors were aware that their rituals would be another target for outsiders to attack. Bonch-Bruevich had written about their incantations that he witnessed

during his ethnographic research but never published it. Inikova suspects that the Doukhobors asked him not to (Inikova 1999, 118). The lack of mention in other ethnographic works from this time highlights how these authors were not privy to information about Doukhobor rituals. Between 1895 and 1915, Doukhobor rituals functioned as they always had: to hold them together as Doukhobors. Although Bonch-Bruevich saw the beginnings of a schism that would shift ritual practices among the different groups, the Saskatchewan Doukhobors held on to *sobranie* and their oral history.

G. S. Worgul stated in 1980 that "ritual is a medium […] for communicating or sustaining a particular culture's root metaphor, which is the focal point and permeating undercurrent for its worldview" (Worgul 1980, 224). For the Doukhobors in Saskatchewan at the turn of the 20th century, these root metaphors and worldviews were centred around pacifism, the presence of God in all living things, and universal brotherhood between men and women. It was also a burning fire within—that same internal fire that lit a real blaze of weapons on the night of June 28/29 in the Georgian countryside—that symbolized their refusal to bend their belief in pacifism in any way.

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