RUSSIAN PEASANT WOMEN’S RESISTANCE AGAINST THE STATE DURING THE ANTIRELIGIOUS CAMPAIGNS OF 1928-1932

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This study seeks to explore the role of peasant women in resistance to the antireligious campaigns during collectivization and analyze how the interplay of the state and resistors formed a new culture of religion in the countryside. I argue that while the state’s succeeded in controlling most of the public sphere, peasant women, engaging in subversive activities and exploiting the state’s ideology, succeeded in preserving a strong peasant adherence to religion prior to World War II. It was peasant women’s determination and adaptation that thwarted the party’s goal of nation-wide atheism.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

From 1928 to 1932 Stalin implemented his First Five Year Plan aimed at modernizing the USSR. Collectivization, Stalin’s aggressive plan to reform agriculture and requisition grain from the countryside to provide the army and cities with cheap food, created great social unrest amongst the peasantry. As Stalin strove to forcibly convert an agricultural country into an industrial one, massive swaths of the population were thrown into upheaval. Zealous party members urged on a reluctant peasantry towards a new concept of agriculture, society and beliefs. In order to fabricate their new ideal society, the Bolsheviks sought to destroy every aspect of the old culture, including religion. The State’s assault on religion was met with resolute defiance by the peasantry. The demographics of the countryside were changing also. Women increasingly outnumbered men as many men who survived the wars were drawn to the cities in search of better jobs. In this atmosphere of upheaval and change, peasant women found a way to assert power and regain a measure of control through spearheading much of the resistance to governmental anti-religious policies. Through utilizing a variety of resistance methods, peasant women played an important part in foiling the party’s goal of eradicating religion, and shaped the new peasant culture in ways unforeseen by the rulers.

This study seeks to explore the role of peasant women in resistance to the antireligious campaigns during collectivization and analyze how the interplay of the state and resisters formed a new culture of religion in the countryside. I argue that while the state’s succeeded in controlling most of the public sphere, peasant women, engaging in subversive activities and

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exploiting the state’s ideology, succeeded in preserving a strong peasant adherence to religion prior to World War II. It was peasant women’s determination and adaptation that thwarted the party’s goal of nation-wide atheism.

I will begin with an evaluation of the available scholarship on religion, peasant resistance, and peasant women. No study has combined the three together to evaluate the role women played in resisting antireligious attacks by the state, a gap my research will fill. I will also show that despite the state’s devastating blows to the institution of the Russian Orthodox Church, strong religious belief in the population persisted. Often historians correlate a weakening of the church institution with a lessening of religious beliefs, but that is not the case in the USSR prior to World War II. After defining a few key terms, I will give a brief account of peasant women and religion from prerevolutionary to 1928 and describe the religious culture of the village at the time of collectivization. Next I will present the antireligious actions and ideologies of the state during collectivization. This will show what the peasantry responded to: printed propaganda, attempts to educate away religion, closure of churches, and abuses to religious symbols. Then I will explore the resistance methods utilized by peasant women, both active and passive: religious rumors, gossip circles, pronouncement of miracles and signs, riots, and turn to sects and superstition. Finally, I will evaluate the success of the state’s campaigns and of the peasant women’s resistance.

Historiography

Studying topics concerning the collectivization of Soviet Russia has long been difficult for scholars as sources are classified and are heavily biased. State record documents were secret for decades and tainted by the motivation of the state agents to portray all events and statistics
in a light pleasing to the Central Party Organs. Personal papers are limited in scope for three primary reasons: high illiteracy rates in rural areas, authors’ fear of being labeled an enemy of the party leading to self-censorship, and state agents confiscating or destroying them. These problems and more combine with the tight control placed over Russian State Archives to form an inhospitable atmosphere for researchers. Little verifiable information was available to western scholars until the opening of the archives in 1991, but since then many excellent studies and collections of documents have expanded the knowledge of the peasantry and religion during collectivization. However, most studies have separated religion and peasants, and focused on one or the other.

Studies of religion under Stalinism typically focus on the State’s attack on religion or on the Orthodox Church and clergy. Centering studies on the government’s actions toward the state, citizens are portrayed primarily in the background. Though some works specify the location of the policies and programs enforced by the state, most speak in general terms with location being unspecified. One of the earliest works is Religion in Soviet Russia: 1917-1942 by N.S Timasheff published in 1942. The western totalitarian state-focused model he presents continued to be the norm until the Revisionist’s social history model took over in the 1970’s. With only publications from the government itself and a few secondary English language sources, Timasheff admirably displays a Russian populous that was not united in religious ideology, but split religiously.² He contends that the state’s aggressive assault on the Church was defeated only through faith.³ Though heavy with bias and lacking in sources, Timasheff’s identification of the peasantry as an active player in the unfolding events was unusual during

³ Timasheff, 145.
the early period of scholarship on religion under Stalin. I share his desire to discover what perpetuated religion despite persistent attacks from the state.

Other works sought to determine what the driving force behind policy was, and if Stalin did have total control of policy and the population. These works create a foundation for my analysis of the state’s behavior, successes and failures in regards to religious policy. One such work is the article collection *Religious Policy in the Soviet Union* edited by Sabrina Ramet that seeks to “shed light on the thinking, goals, assumptions, methods, and instruments of policy” that regard religion⁴. Larry Holmes’s article in this collection, “Fear No Evil: Schools and Religion in Soviet Russia, 1917-1941,” investigates the State’s anti-religious policy within schools and their compliance with the policies⁵. He notes that the schools failed to be a primary location of successful religious eradication; unfortunately he makes no distinction between urban and rural schools, which certainly would have responded differently.⁶ Another article in the collection, “Leadership of Antireligious Propaganda” by Joan Grossman, evaluates the propaganda methods implemented under a number of party “lieutenants”.⁷ Adopting the totalitarian mindset, Grossman argues that the antireligious propaganda prior to World War II lacked effectiveness because of the poor leadership of Stalin. In Dimitry Pospielovsky’s essential work, *Soviet Antireligious Campaigns and Persecutions*, examines the Soviet attacks on religion from 1917 through Khrushchev, but seeks to “deal with the day-to-day application” of the

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⁶ Holmes, 126.
campaigns. He credits much of the propaganda to regularly published newspapers and journals that sought to portray the Church as a fraud and connect it to the evils of the bourgeoisie. He also describes how the state initially began attacks primarily on the Orthodox Church, but by the 1930’s it was no longer selective of which religion or sect it attacked. He notes that the state blamed troubles, such as the famine of 1933, on religious believers who allegedly sabotaged crops and fields. Often religious leaders were used as scapegoats in propaganda, and the label of priest became slanderous and criminal. Both Grossman and Pospielovsky are severely limited in their source materials writing prior to 1991, which pulls their studies toward politics rather than social or cultural.

Numerous studies examine the assault on the church organization and clergy. Tatiana Chumachenko sought to redraw the personal and institutional relationships of communists and church leaders in Church and State in Soviet Russia: Russian Orthodoxy from World War II to the Khrushchev Years. She proposes that both sides collaborated to advance their own agendas. She cites correspondences between high ranking Soviet officials that emphasize the practical consequences rather than ideological consequences of anti-religious activities. Her work portrays the reality of differences between state policy and implementation during the later Stalinist era that I found present during collectivization. The revival of the Church and the

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9 Pospielovsky, 19, 29.
10 Pospielovsky, 27.
11 Pospielovsky, 33.
12 Tatiana A. Chumachenko, Church and State in Soviet Russia: Russian Orthodoxy from World War II to the Khrushchev Years, (Armonk, NY: M.E Sharpe Inc, 2002), ix.
support it was able to raise for the Red Army during World War II indicates the survival of religion in great numbers within Russia despite the near obliteration of the Orthodox Church.\textsuperscript{13} 

Following the Revisionist model of social history, Glennys Young’s *Power and the Sacred in Revolutionary Russia: Religious Activists in the Village* bridges the study of the church hierarchy and the religious population. Young focuses her research on the “relationship among Orthodox clergy, laity, and Communist Party cadres” during the New Economic Policy period, 1921-1928.\textsuperscript{14} Her objective is to analyze how religious activists in villages were able to shape Soviet politics, not just be affected by them. Her central argument contends that the village assembly was used by villagers as an effective political tool to shape the larger Soviet politics, which allowed religious activists an avenue to resist the persecution of the Church. Young observes the rural populations’ opposition to any changes in traditions, especially religious practices\textsuperscript{15}. Their reluctance to any type of change underlies many of the peasant reactions to state imposed policies. I follow her model of centering the focus on the resistors, but I include all forms of resistance rather than singling out state-documented resistors. That expands the resistance methods I observe beyond riots and Soviet committee manipulation Young evaluates and allows me to include subtler forms of resistance such as rumors, gossip and teachings.

For my task, studies that orient themselves around the religion of the populous prove more useful than those examining the structure of the Church. As historians began to utilize the cultural turn model to analyze Stalinism in the late 1980s and 1990’s, Marjorie Balzer edited *Russian Traditional Culture: Religion, Gender and Customary Law* which sought to legitimize

\textsuperscript{13} Chumachenko, 3.  
\textsuperscript{15} Young, 16.
historical research on popular religion under Stalin. Previously popular religion was dismissed as inconsequential aspects of religious history. The works in this collection analyze the impact of popular religion on the formation of the Russian identity. T.A Litstova, a contributing author discusses the midwives “place in social, ritual, and practical life” from 1850-1930. She demonstrates intertwine between daily life and the spiritual and religious beliefs and customs of the peasantry. Further her work conveys a continuity of tradition in the countryside from pre-revolution to 1930. The full experience of religion includes aspects often-ignored by scholars, like midwifery. The state identified them as part of the backwardness of peasant culture and grouped all aspects of peasant religious life into the label of superstition and sought to eradicate it. Litstovia’s scholarship broadened my own definition of peasant religion, and illuminates further the integration of religion into the daily life of peasantry.

Gregory Freeze, a prolific writer of the history of the Russian Orthodox Church, details the populous rejection of renovations to the Church that the state desired in “Counter-Reformation in Russian Orthodoxy: Popular Response to Religious Innovation, 1922-1925”. The pro-Soviet OGPU organized the Renovationist Church (also called Living Church) was intended to split the church hierarchy and erode support for the traditional Orthodox Church (also called Tikhonite Church). Freeze notes that previously little attention had been given to the “grass-roots dimension” and the focus of historians had almost exclusively been on the political

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dimension of the creation and failure of the Revisionist Church. After describing the difficulties of uncovering popular opinions during the Soviet rule, he suggests that by looking at documents written by parishioners and carefully examining government documents, one can begin to form an idea of what was the popular opinion. Freeze argues that the primary objection of the populous toward reformation of the Church was due primarily from a desire to keep traditional rituals, not from a disagreement on the ecclesiastical level. He continues that “the failure of religious reform derived chiefly from the parochialization of power in the church, complemented by several other factors—the Renovationists’ lack of preparation and unity, the collapse of church institutions after 1917, the virtual absence of an ecclesiastical press and the weakness of parish clergy.” This was not the first time that there was an attempt to modify the Church and the previous attempts either failed or caused a schism in the Church. The Renovationists collaborated with the state, which ultimately sought to split the Church in three ways: politically, ecclesiastically and liturgically. These changes were met with opposition from parishioners, and were evident from documents of the Renovationist clergy members. Freeze is interested in why the Renovationists ultimately failed, and he concludes that the attempt to modify the liturgical aspects of the Church led to the Revonationists’ failure to attract large numbers of believers. The populous was aware of the political and ecclesiastical changes proposed by the Renovationists, but petitions and resolutions from the parishioners focused on complaints against liturgical changes. In another article Freeze examines the religious revival

19 Freeze, “Counter-Reformation in Russian Orthodoxy,” 308.
20 Freeze, “Counter-Reformation in Russian Orthodoxy,” 314.
within Ukraine that occurred in the mid-1920’s as a result of Soviet antireligious campaigns. He notes the laity’s dislike of many clerical practices prior to the October Revolution and the state’s attempt to capitalize on these sentiments to destroy the Church. The overly zealous cadres’ actions tried to hasten the end of religion, backfired, and stirred up support for the Church. Freeze then traces the rekindling of religious activities and the state’s slow comprehension of its own failures that led to the renewed antireligious campaign in 1928.

Freeze’s work provides a historical foundation from which to build my own research. The resurgence of religious activities in the 1920’s clashed with Stalin’s desire to overhaul peasant culture, and culminated in the resurgence of antireligious campaigns and the resistance to those campaigns during collectivization.

Another avenue of historiography important to evaluate is the study of the peasantry. These portray a broader picture of the peasantry than the religious histories mentioned above. Life for the peasantry was vastly different from the urban hubs and the center of politics. Much of the theoretical blocks I build my study upon are based on James Scott’s classical work on resistance strategies of the weak. In his 1985 monograph *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, Scott analyzes how peasantries are able to derail the desires of far more powerful actors, generally states. Noting the scarcity of successful peasant rebellions, he believes it is “more important to understand what we might call everyday forms of peasant resistance- the prosaic but constant struggle between the peasantry and those who seek to extract” commodities from them. Though his field work is in a Malaysian village, the theoretical

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aspects are extremely useful. He illuminates the everyday resistance strategies of “foot-dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so forth.” He notes that these methods only marginally impact the exploitation of the peasantry, but the strength of everyday resistance is in numbers; “multiplied many thousandfold, such petty acts of resistance by peasants may in the end make an utter shambles of the policies dreamed up by their would-be superiors in the capital.” As I will prove below, it was exactly these kinds of everyday resistance acts that proved most effective against the party-state during the anti-religious campaigns of 1928-1932.

Cathy Frierson noted that in 1861 when the serfs were emancipated, the gentry and educated had difficulty understanding who the peasants were, but believed classifying this segment of society to be important to the broad cultural self-definition of the Russian people. The forms or models created during this time period (1860’s-1890’s) were a reoccurring theme that the Soviet government uses as well. The muzhiks, narod, kulaks and babas appeared as the same stereotyped images in both the late 1800’s and the first several decades of Bolshevik rule. Chris Ward also notes the elite’s failure to understand the peasantry as more than a blank slate, or one that could be cleared easily. Ward also adds that the Bolsheviks in their modernization project had planned to change the ignorant backward peasants into “enlightened citizens of a secular, rational community and a modern agricultural system.” The majority of peasants, however, had no intention of being transformed according to the socialist ideals and resisted

23 Scott, 29.
24 Scott, 35-36.
26 Chris Ward, Stalin’s Russia, 2nd ed. (London: Arnold, 1999), 97.
27 Ward, 97.
imposed collectivization and governmental interference. This resistance has gained the attention of numerous scholars who typically take the cultural turn approach to history as they strive to understand the identities, motives, and everyday life of the peasants.

Sheila Fitzpatrick wrote the first notable monograph on the resistance of the peasantry under Stalin. In *Stalin’s Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village after Collectivization*, her subject “is the range of strategies Russian peasants used to cope with the state-inflicted trauma of collectivization, and the way they tried to modify the kolkhoz so that it served their purposes as well as the state’s.”

Focusing on the 1930’s, Fitzpatrick argues that the shock of collectivization caused similar cultural patterns of resistance throughout Russia’s countryside. She continues to describe various forms of resistance including refusal to work and flight from the kolkhoz. During the aggressive push by the state to overhaul peasant culture which occurred simultaneously with collectivization, the assault on religion seemed to sting the peasants the most. Fitzpatrick discusses these attacks on religion and the peasants’ responses on several separate occasions within the book. She notes that the Komsomol (Youth Communist League) was particularly hostile to religion to the extent that in 1923 the XII Party Congress emphasized avoiding affronts to believers and condemned the Komsomol’s obsession with closing churches.

In the end, she says that although collectivization almost destroyed the Orthodox Church, the 1937 census shows that personal beliefs of individuals persisted. She also notes that collectivization had been intended by Stalin to modernize the village on a non-

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29 Fitzpatrick, 34.
30 Fitzpatrick, 204.
property basis, but this did not occur largely due to peasants’ attachment to traditions and the land.  

In *Peasant Rebels under Stalin*, Lynne Viola focuses upon the year 1930 to help fill in the gap of scholarship around the revolts and resistance of the peasantry to collectivization itself. She suggests that Fitzpatrick’s disregard of the peasants’ revolts during collectivization is mistaken, and while concurring with her general conclusions, Viola identifies more overt varieties of resistance. Viola believes that “resistance serves as a prism, distilling aspects of peasant culture, politics and community to the historian. The components of resistance—discourse, behavior, and action expressed through rumor, folklore, symbolic inversion, popular culture, passive resistance, violence, and rebellion—form bridges of understanding into the peasant world.” She seeks to clarify some of the regional differences in peasant reactions to the formation of kolkhozy, but comments that without access to additional OGPU’s files this is difficult. Viola dedicates a chapter titled “We let the Women do the Talking: Bab’i Bunty and the Anatomy of Peasant Revolt” to the explanation of women’s riots against collectivization, which were a large portion of all revolts. She argues that what the state identified as hysterical, irrational outbursts from ignorant, frenzied women were actually rational acts exploiting inaccurate state stereotypes. Viola notes that these women’s revolts were the “most effective and widespread form of peasant collective action against the state.” Yet peasant revolts never brought an end to collectivization or Soviet rule. Remarking that the revolts were bound to fail and led to more state repressive measures, Viola concludes that the ultimate failure of

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31 Fitzpatrick, 314.
33 Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin*, 5.
34 Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin*, 181.
35 Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin*, 204.
peasant revolts should not distort the original purpose and intent behind them.\textsuperscript{36} Her work proves invaluable to my study. Though I am analyzing resistance to antireligious attacks rather than collectivization, many same themes develop as collectivization and antireligious persecutions often overlapped. Her evaluation of \textit{babi bunty} also provides a foundation to evaluate the Bolshevik’s stereotype of women’s resistances.

Tracy McDonald focused her article “A Peasant Rebellion in Stalin’s Russia: The Pitelinskii Uprising, Riazan 1930” on a particular region’s experience in the early months of 1930. By recounting the events through several differing viewpoints, McDonald delves into the rebellion of the Pitelinskii region.\textsuperscript{37} This rare instance of passionate rebellion pose the question of why was peasant rebellion so infrequent in the harsh conditions they lived under. McDonald agrees with James Scott that “peasants rebel when they are pushed beyond the line of subsistence, when the ‘moral economy’ of the village is violated” but argues that it falls short in explanation of these events.\textsuperscript{38} She contends that it is the complicity of the local soviet council in exploiting the villages in the Pitelinskii district that underlies the rebellion. Elsewhere the OGPU complained of uncooperative local soviet councils that slowed the collectivization process; this slow process kept peasants from outright rebellion. This work provides an indepth analysis of a single occurance of violent resistance during collectivization. Narrowly focused articles such as this one add deeper understanding of specific events of resistance discussed in monographs and lends an alternative method of analyzing peasant resistance which I found informative.

\textsuperscript{36} Viola, \textit{Peasant Rebels under Stalin}, 234.
\textsuperscript{38} McDonald, 139.
Other studies investigate peasant women specifically. The article collection *Women in Russia* edited by Dorothy Atkinson, Alexander Dallin and Gail Warshofsky Lapidus, developed from ideas suggested during a conference held in 1975. They used the modernization approach to analyze how women fit into the modernizing system of the Soviet Union; to accomplish this they included articles covering a large timeline to show continuity and differences in women before and throughout the Soviet State. Ethel Dunn contributed the article “Russian Rural Women,” which describes women through a series of statistics Dunn had available. Though this data is unreliable given it was acquired prior to western researchers having access to archives, the broad trends presented are still useful to my study. Literacy rates among women were extremely low before World War I. In the Simbirisk region the official literacy rate provided for women was under 4% and the best presented rate was the Moscow region at 25.9%; even if these numbers were lowered by the Soviet government to justify some of their actions in the countryside, women's literacy rates were deplorable. Dunn also notes that in 1932, women made up the majority of able bodies in kolkhoz populations, some regions they exceeded 75%. These numbers help illuminate the conditions of the villages and the population undergoing collectivization, and signify the importance of women in the villages. The high percent of women was likely due to a combination of peasant soldier deaths in the wars of the 1910’s, peasant men abandoning the countryside in hope of better job opportunities in cities not available to women, and higher male arrest numbers. The exact

40 Atkinson, Dallin and Lapidus, v.
42 Dunn, 173.
reasoning behind the substantial gender ratio differential in villages cannot be found in the examined documentation.

*Russian Peasant Women* edited by Beatrice Farnsworth and Lynne Viola contains articles depicting peasant women before and after the revolution. They note “there is no full-length history of Russian peasant women in either Russian or English,” and, though they do not attempt one here, they seek to gather a substantial amount of information on peasant women from the 1860’s onward into one location for the ease of other scholars. 43 Through the articles they argue it is apparent that transformation of peasant women was a process that began long before the 1917 Revolution. After the 1917 Revolution, the government had many changes planned to transform the family and women’s roles. Women were granted formal equality, and it was expected that the exploitation of women would end when “the collectivist principles of child rearing, housework, and food preparation were introduced.” 44 In reality, entrenched values derailed these ambitions, especially in the countryside. Farnsworth and Viola suggest that “the situation of peasant women in a sense represents in microcosm the Revolution in the countryside,” and “the study of women during these years offers a paradigm of peasant culture and behavior, illuminating the dual nature of the Russian Revolution as a socialist revolution in the city and a peasant war in the countryside. The peasants’ revolution, moreover, was one that, far from creating a new socialist order, either reinforced preexisting peasant culture or brought changes that were part of a peasant, not Bolshevik, dream of revolution.” 45 By portraying the role of women in rural society and in their families, I can extrapolate from this

44 Farnsworth and Viola, 137.
45 Farnsworth and Viola, 139.
work to realize how women were able socially to take on the lead role in religious resistance and why their religious instruction to their children was effective in preserving religious beliefs.

The primary sources I use are a mix of collections of translated archival documents, memoirs, and oral history interviews. Felix Corley’s *Religion in the Soviet Union: An Archival Reader* provides government documents relating to religion from 1917-1989. Through this collection Corley hopes to depict how closely the state watched and analyzed all aspects of religion in the USSR from its inception to demise through documents which mostly had not been translated prior to 1996. The other document collection I utilize is the website *Seventeen Moments in Soviet History: An Online Archive of Primary Sources* created by by James von Geldern of Macalester College and Lewis Siegelbaum of Michigan State University. The multimedia archive of primary materials contains a series of essays built upon photographs, laws, letters, videos and other primary sources meant to introduce key topics in Soviet history during seventeen years the creation team identified as pivotal. The primary sources available are excellent in breadth, and the laws on religion as well as Stalin’s “Dizzy with Success” speech greatly contributed to my work. The collection edited by Sheila Fitzpatrick and Yuri Slezkine, *In the Shadow of Revolution: Life Stories of Russian Women from 1917 to the Second World War*, provides unique insight into the world of a wide variety of women. Here any discussion of religion occurred naturally as the authors tell their life story, and this authentic nature of storytelling allows for a fuller understanding of how religion impacted their lives. These stories

are relayed through memoirs, sections of autobiographies, poetry and even articles meant for publication in newspapers. The Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System (HPSSS) proved to supply indispensable knowledge for my topic. The HPSSS online is a compilation of transcripts of 705 oral interviews conducted with refugees from the USSR from 1949-1953. In the interviews, the lives and opinions of the interviewees from 1917 until the mid-1940’s were recorded and later made available online. Due to the fact that all interviewees were refugees who had left the USSR either by choice or because of territory shifts, their stories must be viewed as trends not universal amongst the people of the USSR. However, numerous stories reiterating the same occurrences indicate that many people in the USSR share the underlying truths presented. Thus the available sources include government documents, personal documents and oral histories.

The historiography portrays the available information and different viewpoints of scholars regarding peasant religion, resistances, or gender roles. Together they formulate a foundation upon which I pursue my own research. As seen in the historiography, the culture of resistance to collectivization has been illuminated since 1991; however, studies on peasant women and popular religion in the countryside remain absent. Further, the role of peasant women in the resistance to antireligious aggression by the state has not been explored. This is what my research will do. By utilizing a variety of primary sources, I will examine the role of peasant women in preserving religion during the antireligious campaigns of the Bolsheviks occurring in tandem with collectivization.

Definitions of Terms

When discussing broad terms that often are attributed various meanings, it is necessary to first define them. The definition of religion has varied over time, and, as Cameron David Warner notes, “definitions of religion tend to fit the parameters of the study at hand: the priorities of the researcher and her audience.”

Emile Durkheim’s definition of religion is a “unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and surrounded by prohibitions- beliefs and practices that unite its adherents in a single moral community called a church.”

A difficulty with this definition is the necessity of the connection to community. This negates the individuals’ practices that are not linked with a larger group. I hold that religion can exist with a single person, as shown by beliefs and practices of individuals scorned by a community, such as witchcraft. Also, during collectivization it became dangerous to be associated with a community (or church) of believers and people chose to hide their beliefs from the public. Thus, for the purpose of this paper, I look at what the Soviet government sought to eradicate with the antireligious campaigns and what they identified as problematic. Superstition for the Bolsheviks was synonymous with religion. Many definitions of superstition have typically involved fear and ignorance. The Soviet ideology seems to follow economist Adam Smith’s 1776 definition that superstition is a curable condition as “science is the great antidote to the poison of enthusiasm and superstition.” As such, the definition of religion here is: a system of practices and beliefs relative to the divine or supernatural which is not observable by science. I will use the term superstition to denote alternative religions not

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52 Warner, 136.
accepted within the confines of the primary modes of monotheistic religion present in the
villages. This includes paganism, witchcraft and other beliefs and rituals not connected with
divine power or powers, such as bad luck.

The state I refer to here is the party-state system of government present in the USSR. As
the USSR was a one party system with the Bolsheviks in complete control of the government, I
use ‘state’ and ‘Bolsheviks’ interchangeably. Stalin, as the head of the Bolshevik party and the
government, directed and led the policies implemented by the central government. When
discussing the public sphere, I refer to not only political participation, but also any action
observable by state officials, the OGPU, or informants to the OGPU. This means that almost all
actions of the peasantry outside of their homes were part of the public sphere.

I have chosen to focus on the peasantry rather than include the cities because a vast
majority of the population was peasants, and religion was stronger in the countryside.
Additionally the urban population had a very different experience than the peasantry during
the First Five Year Plan, and trying to discuss both presents to large a topic.
CHAPTER 2

THE PEASANTRY AND ATTACKS ON RELIGION BEFORE COLLECTIVIZATION

The interaction between the Bolsheviks and the peasantry are rooted in the fundamental differences of the two. The leadership of the Bolshevik party was well-educated and a child of urbanization and modernization. The majority of the peasantry, in contrast, was decidedly traditional and opposed to modernity. Leonid Heretz notes that “on the eve of the Revolution, the Russian peasantry believed, thought, and acted in accordance with ancient tradition that extends as far back in time as the historical record takes us.”

To comprehend the interaction of the Bolsheviks and peasantry during collectivization, it is necessary to first backtrack. This will also provide a fuller understanding of women’s roles in rural life and resistance. Much of the conflict that occurred during collectivization between the peasantry and the Soviet State is traceable back into the 19th century. The inability for the elite educated classes in the cities to understand the mentality and motivations of the rural masses so evident in the late 1800’s extended past the Revolution and Civil War and arguably through collectivization.

The 1861 emancipation of the serfs did little to improve or modernize the life of the peasantry. Peasant mobility was hampered by a collective responsibility for paying the state for their new land which extended into the early 1900’s, and most peasants felt little had improved from serfdom. In 1906 reforms initiated by Prime Minister Petr Stolypin enabled peasants for

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54 Fitzpatrick, 21.
the first time to own and operate the land as private property.\textsuperscript{55} As many men gained the right to vote along with property rights, women began to petition for their own rights. If a woman owned land, she was forced to cast a vote through a male relative; the absence of a willing male relative to vote for her meant the inability of casting a vote, leaving the majority of women with property disenfranchised. In 1912, reforms included provisions for daughters and widows to inherit a portion of the land and equally divide other assets.\textsuperscript{56} Women’s suffrage was second in importance to women’s marriage rights; even though beating and mutilating one’s wife was illegal, wife beating was commonplace amongst the peasantry.\textsuperscript{57} The rural population had a separate court system and many of the reforms did not impact peasant women’s lives.

The peasantry, though over 80% of Russia’s population in the late 1800’s, was a complete mystery to the Russian elites, intellectuals and policy makers.\textsuperscript{58} The educated elite became fascinated with discovering who the peasantry was as they saw this to be critical to the broad cultural definition of Russians. This same sentiment of desiring a unified definition for people led to Stalin’s Cultural Revolution when he sought to forcibly mold Soviet citizens into an abstract ideal. The labels given to the peasantry by the elite extended to the Bolsheviks. This turned out to be a profound problem as the creators of the peasant labels and definitions “were not scientists by any definition, nor were they experts or specialists,” and they were created from anecdotes, paintings, literary-journalistic sketches and reports from state commissioners.\textsuperscript{59} The generic peasant, the \textit{narod}, were viewed as the positive “other” full of

\textsuperscript{55} Fitzpatrick, 22.
\textsuperscript{56} Dorothy Atkinson, “Society and the Sexes in the Russian Past,” in Atkinson, Dallin and Lapidus, 32.
\textsuperscript{57} Atkinson, 33.
\textsuperscript{58} Frierson, 3, 8.
\textsuperscript{59} Frierson, 3, 13.
possibility and completely vague.\textsuperscript{60} They were at the same time seekers of truth and ignorant, homogenous and diverse, believers and drunks, patriots and individualists. Their image was manipulated and used in the Revolution as allies of the proletariat, but their image was transformed easily into selfish petite bourgeoisie during grain requisitioning by the Bolsheviks. Likewise, the construction of the \textit{baba} stems from the late 1800’s. Much of the intellectuals’ notion of the \textit{baba} came from the writings of Aleksandr Nikolaevich Engelgardt. Engelgardt was a Chemistry professor who became a progressive landowner after being exiled to the countryside for spreading democratic ideas to his students; once in the countryside he published his notes on the contemporary peasantry. In the 1870’s the educated elite in the cities became disturbed by the dissolution of the extended family unit previously dominant amongst peasants. They believed that the model of extended families living together was the healthiest for the peasant (without understanding the hardships occurring with the emancipation of serfs in 1861), and sought to determine the reason for the change. Their solution was the derogatory \textit{baba}, an individualist by nature who was “the great divider and manipulator in family life.”\textsuperscript{61} The elites believed that the \textit{baba}, as the informal leader of the household, utilized her unnatural and unhealthy power to split the successful model of the extended family and create multiple nuclear family based households doomed to fail. She was separated from the \textit{muzhik}, an ideal image of the peasant, which “relied on his mind, on strength, on ability to work.”\textsuperscript{62} These descriptions of the \textit{baba} were originated by Engelgardt and were then disseminated and accepted amongst the Russian elite. Engelgardt’s

\textsuperscript{60} Frierson, 52. \\
\textsuperscript{61} Frierson, 164. \\
\textsuperscript{62} Frierson, 165.
contradictory relationship with women, both promoting independence of his female students yet desiring patriarchal submission from the peasant women near his estate, certainly tainted his descriptions of peasant women.

The reforms of the early twentieth century were disrupted by war. World War I took a heavy toll on the peasantry with little to show for it. Maria Belskaia wrote in her memoir:

Our father, Karp Dmitrievich Nedobitkov, a peasant, returned home to his native village after spending three years at the front in the First World War. His wife died while he was away. Leaving four children.

A soldier’s trenchcoat was the only thing he brought from the war- not counting a warm hood and a large enamel mug. That was all the wealth a peasant soldier had.\textsuperscript{63}

This tragic story demonstrates the hardship present in the peasantry following the war. However, the peasantry would not be given a chance to recover.

In Russia, the First World War was interrupted by the fall of the Romanov dynasty and subsequently civil war erupted. The Bolsheviks won after three years of fighting. The new Soviet state promised social transformation.\textsuperscript{64} To many, revolution equaled liberation; as Fitzpatrick and Selzkine noted, particularly the young saw it as “emancipation from the stuffy conventions of ‘bourgeois morality’.”\textsuperscript{65} Women were promised full equality in economic, political and family life. Laws extended full citizenship to women and sought to close the gender gap. Abortion and divorce was legalized and made easier to obtain. Farnsworth and Viola point out that Bolshevik legislation trying to equalize women’s rights were founded on entrenched patriarchal attitudes, and furthermore, “the Bolsheviks failed to consider the importance of traditional values and


\textsuperscript{65} Fitzpatrick and Selzkine, 167.
attitudes as variables independent of socioeconomic structure.” As such, they had difficulty comprehending peasant resistance to these changes in women’s roles as anything but subversion by the old regime and its supporters.

Bolshevik attacks on religion came in a series of four waves. The first anti-religious push was from 1918-1925 and targeted the institutional hierarchy of the Orthodox Church. The second wave coincided with collectivization, 1928-1932 and expanded to everyday religion and ordinary believers. The third wave occurred during the Great Terror from 1937 until World War II. After Stalin’s death in 1953, the fourth and final major wave transpired as Krushchev initiated a renewed aggression against religion that eased after he was removed from power in 1964.

These waves indicate intense, purposeful attacks on religion by the state. The years in between heavy antireligious campaigns eased the ferocity of religious persecution, but the attacks still happened, just less frequently.

The first large scale attack on religion came during the Revolution through the Civil War and into the mid 1920’s. The clergy generally supported the Whites, and the Red government that prevailed persecuted its rivals ruthlessly. The Orthodox Church, perceived by the Bolsheviks as a pillar and ally of the monarchy, became the primary target of oppression during the first wave of religious attacks. The Bolsheviks immediately passed a decree in January 1918 separating Church from the state, specifically schools, which went against centuries of tradition. The decree closed religious academies and seminaries as well as sacking all teachers of religion.

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66 Farnsworth and Viola, 138.
and depriving them of pensions. The first Soviet constitution deprived clergy of the rights to citizenship, jobs, housing, food, rationing, etc. In a secret letter to Molotov that was distributed to the members of the Politburo in 1922, Lenin suggested starting a major attack on the Orthodox Church. To destroy the unified and strong institution, Lenin blamed the Church in conspiring against the new regime. He believed the famine of 1921 had opened an opportunity for the Bolsheviks to crush their enemy and benefit monetarily through the confiscation of church valuables nominally collected to feed the starving:

Now and only now, when people are being eaten in famine-stricken areas, and hundreds, if not thousands, of corpses lie on the roads, we can (and therefore must) pursue the removal of church property with the most frenzied and ruthless energy and not hesitate to put down the least opposition. Now and only now, the vast majority of peasants will either be on our side, or at least will not be in a position to support to any decisive degree this handful of Black Hundreds clergy and reactionary urban petty bourgeoisie, who are willing and able to attempt to oppose this Soviet decree with a policy of force.

We must pursue the removal of church property by any means necessary in order to secure for ourselves a fund of several hundred million gold rubles (do not forget the immense wealth of some monasteries and lauras). Without this fund any government work in general, any economic build-up in particular, and any upholding of soviet principles in Genoa especially is completely unthinkable. In order to get our hands on this fund of several hundred million gold rubles (and perhaps even several hundred billion), we must do whatever is necessary. But to do this successfully is possible only now. All considerations indicate that later on we will fail to do this, for no other time, besides that of desperate famine, will give us such a mood among the general mass of peasants that would ensure us the sympathy of this group, or, at least, would ensure us the neutralization of this group in the sense that victory in the struggle for the removal of church property unquestionably and completely will be on our side.

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Lenin believed that the peasantry would accept the confiscation of the church valuables and the persecution of the church because their focus would be on the starvation and hardships they faced. Additionally as church attendance had been dwindling since the mid-1800’s, Lenin believed that atheism would take hold. Despite some elements of anticlericalism in the population existed prior to the 1920’s, they dissipated with the brutality of the Bolshevik’s attack on the Church.

Early Bolshevik aggression extended also to grain requisitioning and forced confiscation of goods, enraging the population. The result of the aggressive assault on the church in the early 1920’s had several unintended consequences that bolstered support for the church and hindered the Soviet’s goals. Gregory Freeze studied this phenomenon and noted that four results occurred the Soviet’s had not planned. First, the persecution and heavy taxes caused a restructuring of the clergy and the thinned out unpopular clergy, leaving the church more respectable. Second, the persecution brought democratization to the clergy and ended the hereditary constraints of the clergy many peasants had disliked about the church. Similarly the third result of state aggression was the closing of seminaries led to a more diverse clergy that was not selected by finances or ancestry. Finally, he argues that these early attacks placed more power in the hands of the parishioners. All of these changes eliminated cast elements in the Church, a leading cause for the emerging anticlericalism within the peasantry.69 During this time large numbers of clergy were killed or imprisoned. In the second half of 1918 alone an incomplete report reported one metropolitan, eighteen bishops, 102 priests, 154 deacons and ninety-four monks and nuns were killed; four bishops and 211 priests were imprisoned; 718

parishes, ninety-four churches, and twenty-six monasteries were closed. In subsequent years these numbers rose significantly.

Lenin had gauged incorrectly, and the anti-religious attacks did not go undefended. The laity resisted the confiscation of valuables and the closure of churches violently at times. Trying to split the Church and create a weakened opponent, the Bolsheviks promoted a new wing of the Orthodox Church loyal to the regime, the Renovationist or Living Church. This OGPU creation never gained popular support and vanished in the mid 1920’s after the Orthodox Metropolitan Sergei declared loyalty to the state in 1927. In 1923, the Politburo directed moderation in religious policy as resistance and an increase in religious attitudes in the countryside became evident. By the end of 1928 it had become obvious that attacking the clergy would not eradicate religion. The first wave of antireligious attacks proved to the state that a different approach would be necessary to eliminate religion from the people. During the second wave of antireligious campaigns, the new focus became controlling all religious organizations and the populations ability to practice religion.

After several years of consolidating power, in 1928 Stalin was ready to implement his vision for the modernization of the USSR. His legitimacy as complete party leader hinged on his ability to shape the country to his desires. The first five year plan would lay out his design for the country that included the reshaping of peasant culture and renewing attacks on religion.

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70 Pospielovsky, 15.
72 Corely, 14-16.
73 Freeze, “Subversive Atheism,” 36.
Stalin’s First Five Year Plan included several parallel and overlapping aspects that directly assaulted the lives of the peasantry. He sought to transform Russia economically and culturally at a break-neck pace. In a speech to factory workers in 1931, Stalin stated that Russia had been beaten throughout the ages by various enemies “for military backwardness, for cultural backwardness, for industrial backwardness, for agricultural backwardness. [Russia] was beaten because to do so was profitable and could be done without fear of punishment... We are fifty years behind the advanced countries. We must make good this lag in ten years. Either we do this or they crush us.”

The Bolsheviks envisioned a world in which urban industry flourished and agriculture existed as support for the factory workers, to accomplish this, the country underwent industrialization and collectivization simultaneously with disastrous results to the population. Viola categorizes collectivization as “a violent and bloody clash between two cultures at fatal variance with one another. It was a campaign of domination and destruction, which aimed at nothing less than the internal colonization of the peasantry.”

Organized by party members sent into the villages, the peasantry resented and opposed the radical changes being forced upon them by outsiders. Oppression from the state came as both implementation and reaction to policy as it tried to remold a countryside it viewed as backward, bourgeois, and dangerous to the socialist project.

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74 ‘O zadachakh khoziaistvennikov (rech’ 4 fevralii 1931 g)’ in I.V Stalin, Voprosy leninizma (Moscow, 1945), 328, quoted in Stalin’s Russia, Chris Ward, (London: Oxford University Press, 1999), 251.
75 Viola, Peasant Rebels under Stalin, 3.
76 Fitzpatrick, 3.
Collectivization, the consolidation of independent peasant households into a collective farm (kolkhoz), began in 1929 in order for the state to secure grain. Kolkhozy, obligated by law to produce specified quantities of meat and grain for negligible compensation, enraged the peasantry. To prevent livestock from being collectivized, many peasants slaughtered their animals leading to a critical shortage of livestock throughout the USSR.\textsuperscript{77}

Parallel to and often overlapping collectivization and industrialization, the government also sought to remake the Soviet people through a cultural revolution. As seen in the quote above, Stalin saw cultural backwardness as much an impediment to the success of the country as industrial or agricultural backwardness. Peasant culture was alien to urban dwellers that formed the basis of Bolshevik support, and represented peasant autonomy.\textsuperscript{78} To unite the country behind their vision, Stalin and the Bolshevik party needed to change peasant’s self-identity, values and, perhaps most importantly, loyalties. Religion, here primarily Christian Orthodoxy, had long encapsulated all three of those categories. Where previous attacks by the state had been focused on the Orthodox Church’s hierarchy, clergy and material goods, in 1928 and 1929 an all out assault on believers and their religion began. The attacks had four goals: control religious organizations, eliminate competition for the social services of the state, close churches and remove bells, and educate the population to eliminate superstition and religion. However, the state ran into two difficulties that hindered its effectiveness: official reports masked reality by minimizing the magnitude of unrest and local authorities failed to enact the laws and policies via the central authority’s visions.

Controlling Religious Organizations

\textsuperscript{77} Viola, \textit{Peasant Rebels under Stalin}, 68.  
\textsuperscript{78} Viola, \textit{Peasant Rebels under Stalin}, 38.
The Soviet ideology had always stated that religion was incompatible with communism, but in 1929 the Central Committee passed several laws that allowed and encouraged a more aggressive attack against religion and believers. On April 8, 1929 Mikhail Kalinin, then President of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee (VTsIK), signed into law a decree on religious organizations. Its sixty-six points greatly interfered with religious practices as well as the religious organizations themselves. Religious associations of all sizes were to be registered along with “a list of members of the association or group, of its executive and of the administrative bodies and the clergy serving it.”

This registration requirement could result in banning or the forced moving of groups to areas that would prohibit any spread of their beliefs, as was the case in 1931 for a tolstoyan commune. The tolstoyan communes followed the ethical and religious practices of Tolstoy which included the refusal to participate in military service. P. Smidovich, a member of VTsIK replied on May 30, 1931 to a request from the Kuznets District Executive Committee (RIK) to once again relocate one of the tolstoyan communes that already had previously been moved. Smidovich stated that the argument for its original resettlement near the town of Kuznetsk “was the consideration that [the tolstoyan commune] must be removed from the remote places among the peasantry over whom they could exert a harmful influence and to settle them in one place near a proletarian center in an area of organized population over whom their influence would not spread.” The two tolstoyan communes that registered were easier to control, to keep track of, easier to relocate and easier

81 P. Smidovich, 100.
to punish. Smidovich also noted that proletariat work amongst the tolstoyians proved more effective for the two registered communes rather than the unregistered. The last three tolstoyan communes, which had been relocated to Siberia in the late 1920’s, were destroyed in the early 1930’s when all members were arrested.82 Mandatory registration of religious associations and its members also provided authorities with easy to name scapegoats. The dictated organization of executive body having three members or one member, dependant on the number of believers in the group, gave local authorities easy targets for punishment in case of mass disturbances by peasants and gave a list of kulaks that could fill quotas during purges of dekulakization.83

The law also prohibited religious associations from a number of theologically and traditionally ingrained practices.

Religious associations are prohibited from:
(a) setting up funds for mutual aid, co-operatives or associations of producers, and from using the effects at their disposal for any purpose other than the satisfaction of their religious needs,
(b) granting material aid to their members,
(c) organizing religious or other meetings specially intended for children, young people or women, biblical or literary meetings, groups, sections, circles, or handicraft meetings, religious instruction, etc., excursions, or children’s play-groups, or from opening libraries, reading rooms, sanatoria, or providing medical aid.
The only books which may be kept in religious buildings or on religious premises are those indispensable for conducting a service.84

The Soviet government did not want religious ideologies to spread whatsoever, and the above mentioned activities were apt to cause conversions to Christianity. These prohibitions directly opposed evangelical faiths. Many protestant sects went unregistered and became very

82 Corley, 11.
84 Sistematicheskoe sobranie zakonov RSFSR (Moscow: iurid. izd-vo NKIU RSFSR, 1929), text 353. Sobranie uzkonenii i rasporiazhenii, 1929, No. 35, stat’ia 353.
secretive, documented only by some groups’ emergence once again after the Constitution of 1936.\textsuperscript{85}

Eliminating Competition for Social Institutions

Traditionally, religious institutions had provided many social services to the community including aid to the needy, education, medical services and organized social gatherings. By eliminating the ability for religious institutions to provide these services, the population would be forced to rely more on the state and shift loyalties entirely to the state. In theory, the law forbidding of religious groups to grant aid eliminated competition for state institutions and prohibited faith-healers, witchcraft and other belief based medical assistance. These alternative medicines were the norm in remote areas and for most of the peasantry in certain situations, such as childbirth where midwives were also accredited with knowledge of spells and charms necessary for mother and infant welfare.\textsuperscript{86} Midwives were integrally attached to the religious community, and although they became non-denominational in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century and therefore able to serve Orthodox and Old Believers (a fundamentalist wing), the peasantry considered them a part of religious life. The state did not have the means to replace midwives with formally taught doctors, so in practice most villages continued to rely upon midwives. Further, midwives also had the ability to perform emergency baptisms when necessary, a function that became more important as the number of priests declined with direct state persecution.\textsuperscript{87} The prohibition of faith-healers and midwives contributed to the image of the Soviet state as the antichrist; these actions portrayed the state as trying to end the protection

\textsuperscript{85} Fitzpatrick, 212.
\textsuperscript{86} Listova, 122.
\textsuperscript{87} Listova, 126.
of infants’ souls and opened up new mothers to evils which peasants believed a midwife could prevent.

Closing Churches and Removing Bells

The 1929 law also provided local authorities to legally confiscate buildings permitted for religious activities “if the building is indispensable for state or social needs”, or if the building is deemed to be unfit. 88 The building and its assets are then to be liquidated, which anything of monetary value goes to the local authorities or the People’s Commissariat of Education. Thus local authorities benefitted greatly financially by closing churches and mosques. The overzealous actions of local leaders can then be seen not as solely ideologically driven, but also monetarily. Soviets, Komsomol activists, and the League of Militant Godless utilized the law to aggressively close churches, remove bells, arrest priests and disrupt religious activities. 89 Local militia closing churches and confiscating religious artifacts was the cause of many violent clashes between the peasantry and authorities.

In a Top Secret report to the OGPU, Deputy Lieutenant-Colonel of the OGPU for Western Regions Davydov and the corresponding local head of the Information Department of the OGPU wrote about one such incidence. 90 On August 7, 1929 by the order of the district administrator several local government representatives including Militia agents went to the village Olshanitsa to gain possession of a church and liquidate it. A crowd of several hundred, mostly women, were summed by the church bells and prevented the church keys from being handed over by threatening violence upon the government agents. The response was to blame

88 Sistematicheskoe sobranie zakonov RSFSR (Moscow: Iurid. izd-vo NKIU RSFSR, 1929), text 353. Sobranie uzakonenii i rasporiazhenii, 1929, No. 35, stat’ia 353.
89 Viola, Peasant Rebels under Stalin, 39.
90 Davydov, Document 43, in Corely, 82-83.
the local activists’ lack of proper anti-religious propaganda prior to going to the church to take the keys, and suggest that further anti-religious education and propaganda be provided for the peasants in the village.  

Often, more than a scolding of words was dealt out in punishment to local authorities. In the village Shumyachi in 1930, a cemetery church was closed, bells removed and religious artifacts were taken. However, the crosses remained on the building as it was turned into a social club. The local chairman of the district executive committee (RIK) Kovalev and the chairman of the fire service Komissarov ordered the fire brigade to remove the crosses on a market day. “When the church people had come running, hysterical women started to obstruct the tidying up of the club, throwing sticks, and tried to place their own locks on the door.” The conclusion was similar to the other church closing debacle; blame was placed on local authorities lack of anti-religious propaganda. This time, however, the RIK chairman Kovalev was handed over to the courts for trial and “the necessary disciplinary punishment.”

Official Minimizing of Unrest

These two situations provide interesting examples of Soviet actions in response to disturbances caused by the closing and liquidation of churches. In the first case, interestingly, the reported numbers of participants decrease by a third, and the danger of villagers rioting was minimized between the original report and the subsequent report by higher authorities. The initial report from the Deputy Secretary of the Regional Committee held that “up to 300-350 women” with “sickles and stakes” opposed the committee, while the response from the head of the Area Administration Department and Area Militia stated that only “up to 200

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93 Yerokhin, 85.
women...ran up in a group, from which sticks and stones flew at the members of the village soviet.” This conveys the higher authorities’ propensity to minimize the reaction by the peasants. The smaller numbers and less imposing weapons allows for an easier dismissal of the situation as merely an over-reaction of uninformed people. The true anger of the peasantry is dismissed, the more central authority refusing to acknowledge that the problem has deep-seeded roots that it is unable to comprehend or alter. The roles of men are masked, and the only men mentioned are a priest “in a drunken state” and “the old man DROZDOV in his seventies.” They are clearly not a danger to Soviet control.

In both situations reported, authorities latched on to attributing the disturbances to ‘hysterical women’. The Soviet officials are able to retain the charade that the ‘logical’ and better reasoning male sections of peasant society do not object to the closure of churches. This phenomenon known bab’i bunty, roughly translated as hysterical women riots, was viewed by officials as unpredictable and aimless. Viola notes that the state’s response to women’s riots differed from riots led by men. They believed that educated women would not riot, and, as it was ignorance and the influence of kulaks that caused bab’i bunty, local authorities were to blame, not the women. In the following chapters I will evaluate the women’s utilization of the state’s perception, but here I will examine the state’s actions regarding these types of riots. The Bolshevik idea of peasant women stemmed from the late 1800’s. A.N. Engelgardt’s notion of a manipulative, ignorant baba persisted through the 1930’s. Soviet officials utilized this imagery to minimize the seriousness of the peasant opposition. By attributing disturbances to irrational,
ignorant women capable of manipulating the rest of the peasantry into actions they would not have otherwise done, the entire impression of the resistance changes from a reaction to state policies and actions to an unpredictable, spontaneous occurrence committed by senseless people.

Differences between Central and Local Authorities

Falsifying reality was rampant amongst Soviet authorities for good reason. Local officials were responsible for the events taking place under their oversight. As seen with the case in Shumyachi, the chairman of the RIK Kovalev was punished for the riot provoked by his orders. Soviet organizations were responsible for poor implementing central party instructions, and the officials in charge could be punished for not properly conducting the various programs. The League of Militant Godless was responsible for spreading anti-religious propaganda and for promoting atheism. In September of 1929, an order was sent by the department head of the Agitation and Propaganda Department of the Regional Committee Grenkun to the Plenipotentiary Representation of the OGPU and Administration Department detailing the information to be collected for presenting at the upcoming congress of the League of Militant Godless. The following was required:

1. The number of church communities in the region by faith and denomination.
2. The number of servants of cult by faith and denomination.
3. The number of prayer houses ([Orthodox] churches, [Catholic] churches, synagogues.)
4. The number of sect members of the various persuasions.
5. The number of their communities (by persuasion).
6. The number of preachers, presbyters and leaders of sectarian communities (by persuasion).
7. The number of prayer houses they have (by persuasion).
In addition it is necessary to give information on the anti-soviet and counter-revolutionary activity of church people and sect members (the most typical cases).\textsuperscript{98}

As it was part of the League’s job to curtail the numbers of believers, and in the 1920’s there was a religious revival occurring, there is no surprise that local members of the League aggressively closed churches and agitated for the arrest of priests. The OGPU reports could help or hinder Soviet officials’ careers, but also the local cadres carrying out orders. In two separate secret reports local authorities were told by the Commissioner of the Regional Department of the OGPU of unfavorable OGPU reports on religious revival in their area and were given instructions to take measures to curtail religious activities and report the results of those actions.\textsuperscript{99} The central authorities encouraged local cadres, whether part of a Soviet, Komsomol or the League of Militant Godless, financially and through fear of punishment to liquidate churches and minimize the number of believers.

Local activists boldly carried out their tasks with aggression and violence. Richard Hernandez noted “Bolshevik activists self-consciously viewed themselves as the vanguard of a militantly modern New Way of life (novyi byt) at mortal odds with an Old Way of Life (staryi byt).”\textsuperscript{100} The situation in Riazan in 1930 portrays an extreme case of a local brigade’s actions including rape, emptying barns of all grain, confiscating all property including clothing peasants were wearing, and other excesses.\textsuperscript{101} In the Shelkovskii sel’ sovet, “cadres lined up icons for execution by shooting, each with an inscription that the represented saint had been sentenced

\textsuperscript{98} Grekun, Document 41. September 5, 1929, No. 4/51, in Corely, 80-81.
\textsuperscript{100} Richard Hernandez, “Sacred Sound and Sacred Substance: Church Bells and the Auditory Culture of Russian Villages during the Bolshevik Velikii Perlom,” The American Historical Review\textsuperscript{109}, no. 5 (December 2004): 1477.
\textsuperscript{101} McDonald 152, 153.
to death for resisting collective farm construction.” In the Urals, district level organs created a competition to close the most churches. In the village of Novouspenskoe, Komsomol members, in various stages of intoxication, performed several acts of hooliganism after confiscating a church. They dressed in priests’ vestments, rang bells and disturbed the tombs of old landowning families.

While the central party also held the goal of eliminating religion, a clear difference in methodology can be seen between the central party and local activists. The denouncement of local excesses found in Stalin’s article “Problems of the Collective-Farm Movement” on March 2, 1930, better known as “Dizzy with Success,” was a political maneuver to publicly condemn the excesses Stalin and the Politburo actually inspired. He stated that collective farms “cannot be set up by force. To do so would be stupid and reactionary.” Yet pressing to set up collective farms by any means was exactly what Stalin had promoted in his Five-Year Plan. He extended the rebuke of causing undo stress on the peasantry to local authorities who, in Stalin’s speech, linked collectivization with activities aggravating the peasantry that were not essential actions in the drive for modernization, such as removing church bells. He noted that such policies discredit collectivization, and the local officials must stop such excesses. Though he called the rural areas backward, he warned against stirring up animosity amongst the peasantry. Stalin skillfully distanced the central party from local activists, and excused activists’ behavior as an expression of their over eagerness to aid the peasantry, and ultimately the country, in progressing.

102 Viola, Peasant Rebels under Stalin, 39.
103 Fitzpatrick, 60.
Among several factors, one of the simplest and intuitive reasons, for the differences between local party member’s actions and the policies of the higher offices in the party was the sheer proximity to the peasantry. Stalin did not deal with the peasantry, nor did members of the Central Committee. They were not directly involved with villages, and so all of their policies were merely theoretical. Local officials were given decrees to carry out, but no guidance in how to practically go about these changes. Further, one of the main organs, the Komsomol, was a youth organization. The organization’s newspaper, Komsomolskaya Pravda, invited agitation through articles pleading for actions from the youth unhindered by tradition, family and religion. One such article “instructed its readers to sacrifice their family ties for the sake of atheism: no compromise with family religious traditions for the sake of family unity or loving pity for the old grandmother. Pity should not stand in the way of building socialism: ‘You must beat religion on the head every day of your life in all its expressions in daily life’.”

The young activists were full of enthusiasm and desired to change the countryside without the tact and thoughtfulness gained through experience. As a result, the cadres carrying out policies often acted without consideration toward the peasantry. Seizing and liquidating church buildings produced immediate changes the local activists could see and triumphantly report. Lacking patience, both the local and central powers favored implementing immediate results over plans that took time to come to fruition, but the central government placed blame for these failures with the local authorities. However, as I shall show later, these immediate results though

105 Nirkov, 73-74; Grekun, 80-81; Shchukar, Document 42. September 20, 1929, No. 4/53, in Corley, 8; Fitzpatrick, 7.
pleasing to activists, antagonized the peasantry and discredited collectivization, communism, and the Soviet state in their eyes.

Anti-religious propaganda and education required time to gain the desired effects, but was the path the central party organs officially chose. It took many forms including posters, newspaper articles, slogans and chastushkis (poems favored by peasants). Pospielovsky closely examines propaganda in his work, and finds that anti-religious propaganda took a “sinister turn” in the late 1920’s but “became less and less dynamic, publishing only a routine of hate and insults without any originality or search for new approaches.”

In a letter to Stalin, Gorky, a famous Soviet thinker and writer, argued that propaganda should be the primary tool against religion, but propaganda with a deep understanding of church history. He wrote:

> It is furthermore imperative to put the propaganda of atheism on solid ground. You won't achieve much with the weapons of Marx and materialism, as we have seen. Materialism and religion are two different planes and they don’t coincide. If a fool speaks from the heavens and the sage from a factory--they won't understand one another. The sage needs to hit the fool with his stick, with his weapon.

> For this reason, there should be courses set up at the Communist Academy which would not only treat the history of religion, and mainly the history of the Christian church, i.e., the study of church history as politics.

> We need to know the "fathers of the church," the apologists of Christianity, especially indispensable to the study of the history of Catholicism, the most powerful and intellectual church organization whose political significance is quite clear. We need to know the history of church schisms, heresies, the Inquisition, the "religious" wars, etc. Every quotation by a believer is easily countered with dozens of theological quotations which contradict it.

Gorky believed that arguments against church theology would sway believers. However, as Heretz notes, “Russia peasants knew little of formal theology,” which makes arguments

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107 Pospielovsky, 43.
109 Gorky.
directed at theology or church history unlikely to sway peasants away from religion.\textsuperscript{110} Further, peasant faith was not built upon scientific rational, and so trying to use reason against religion was futile. Gorky’s letter illuminated the Bolsheviks’ lack of understanding peasant religion, and the ineffective ideas they had about argument eradicating religious faith.

**Attempting to Educate Women away from Religion**

While general anti-religious actions of the state impacted peasant women, some policies were directed specifically at them. A common theme in official reports after riots of peasant women was the failure of appropriate preparatory education in the villages.\textsuperscript{111} In Agrippina Korevanova’s memoir *My Life*, she details her experience as a party member working in village reading rooms.\textsuperscript{112} Her task was to educate and argue against religion, and she did so through organizing meetings for women and reading aloud propaganda articles. One article she read to the women told of a priest who had syphilis, kissed the cross and transmitted the disease to everyone in the village that also kissed the cross.\textsuperscript{113} State officials took away the priest and confiscated the church and everything in it because it had all been contaminated. The women Korevanova was reading to were shocked and said “a thing like that would never even occur to us women. We kiss the cross and go to communion. We even take our children with us because we think it is something sacred, then lo and behold a thing like this happens. Come to think of it, you really never know what kind of priest you are going to get!”\textsuperscript{114} Interestingly, the women do not blame the church or religion, just the individual priest. This circumstance portrays the failure of propaganda to change religious beliefs or practices; the women didn’t say they would

\textsuperscript{110} Heretz, 9. 
\textsuperscript{111} Cherkasov, 84. 
\textsuperscript{112} Agrippina Korevanova, “My Life, 1936”, in Fitzpatrick and Slezkine, 169-206. 
\textsuperscript{113} Korevanova, 187. 
\textsuperscript{114} Korevanova, 188.
stop kissing the cross or taking communion. In other villages she went to she was not welcomed and at times was harassed, but reasoned it was due to their ignorance and obedience to men. Her story conveys many of the problems the state had in persuading peasant women to cease being religious. Korevanova would just get settled and get to know the women before being relocated to a new village.\textsuperscript{115} Much of her job was based upon building relationships, but being moved around prevented this from occurring. There were many villages that had no previous party member, and Korevanova was the first to implement education for the peasant women.\textsuperscript{116} This lack of local organization hampered activists’ effectiveness. Peasant women distrusted newcomers, and would not change traditions easily.

The Soviets believed that teaching women to read, telling them about unethical priestly behaviors and educating them about women’s rights would make peasant women natural allies to the state.\textsuperscript{117} They failed to understand that religious traditions were deeply ingrained, and that the peasants’ religion had prepared them to expect false-teachings, persecution and hardship. The Soviet offensive had shifted its focus from only attacking the structure of religion to include the laity; however the brutish tactics of the local party activists hardened the resolve of peasants against the state and proved their claims of Bolshevik wickedness.

Chapter Conclusion

During the First Five Year Plan, Stalin aggressively pushed his notion of modernity onto the peasantry which he believed was holding the USSR back from international greatness. Along with collectivization, Stalin passed laws targeting religion, a pillar of peasant culture and a

\textsuperscript{115} Korevanova, 189, 195.
\textsuperscript{116} Korevanova, 192.
\textsuperscript{117} Korevanova, 192.
reminder of peasant independence from the Soviet program. These laws legalized state control of religious groups, elimination of the state’s competition for social institutions, closure of churches and removal of religious symbols, and hampered religious rituals. The subsequent arbitrary implementation of the laws by zealous cadres infuriated the peasantry. The central government, in shrewd political maneuvers, distanced itself from the local authorities’ actions. The Bolsheviks’ reliance on repression and fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of religious beliefs and women’s roles in resistance and a propensity to minimize the threats posed by women hindered the state’s ability to control them.
CHAPTER 4

PEASANT WOMEN’S RESISTANCE METHODS

The Russian peasant’s traditional way of life had been under siege by modernization since the 1800’s. Collectivization was the next phase in a long line of changes from the government thrust upon the peasantry without their desire or consent. However, collectivization was implemented more violently than previous reforms and directly attacked peasant values and traditions while taking away goods without adequate compensation.\textsuperscript{118} Modernizing peasant culture was of foremost importance to the state, and since religion permeated all aspects of peasant culture the state believed it had to be eliminated.\textsuperscript{119} This chapter examines the various ways peasant women resisted these changes the state imposed. I have chosen to examine women in particular because of their dominant presence in religious resistance. Women’s dominant role resulted from the population inequality, their relative freedom to resist compared with male peasants, and their informal power within the home. Women vastly outnumbered men in villages, some regions were as high as 75% women, and thus the study of peasant women portrays the majority of the peasantry.\textsuperscript{120} Viola argues that “peasant women emerged as natural leaders of revolt, an outcome both predictable and logical given that collectivization impacted most seriously on women’s sphere of interest: the domestic economy of private plot and livestock, the care of children, and matters of family subsistence.”\textsuperscript{121} Religion does not fit into these classifications; men had traditionally been the guardians of faith and even the structures of the dominant monotheistic religions in the USSR

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{118} Fitzpatrick, 4.
\bibitem{119} Heretz, 3.
\bibitem{120} Dunn, 173.
\bibitem{121} Viola, \textit{Peasant Rebels under Stalin}, 5.
\end{thebibliography}
were patriarchal. However, due to the state’s misconception of women, women were able to defend religion without the consequences their male counterparts would have faced.

Though I discuss peasants that resisted, it is important to note that not all peasants resisted the Soviet programs. Some peasants chose to exploit the system to their own advantage. Some peasants, mostly poor peasants, joined the local Soviets and actively participated in the new government system and benefited from dekulakization. Other peasants acquiesced to the Soviet rule without actively joining or resisting it. Also not all peasants were religious believers; some were atheists, often the younger generation, and others simply did not affiliate themselves with any kind of belief system.

The peasants I am evaluating in this thesis, however, are the large groups who were believers and did resist antireligious attacks from the state. Due to the nature of passive resistance, it is impossible to cite statistics on the total numbers of those who resisted. Yet, as the act of continuing to believe in God or supernatural beings defied Soviet objectives, the fact that over 57% of the population claimed to be believers in 1937 shows that a majority did resist in some form. Further some Soviet officials also engaged in rituals, thus resisted antireligious policies. Village priests would bless Soviet candidates before elections, officials would hold Orthodox funerals for kin, and some participated in religious festivals.

In studying resistance the first question is what is being resisted. As seen in chapter two and three, the Soviet government had passed several laws and implemented policies that directly attacked peasant culture and their traditional way of life, and the focus here are those aimed at religion. The second question is why peasant women resisted these actions. There are

122 Fitzpatrick, 204.
123 Viola, Peasant Rebels under Stalin, 51.
two predominant theories amongst scholars regarding this. James Scott argues that resistance, “the prosaic but constant struggle between the peasantry and those who seek to extract labor, food, taxes, rents, and interest from them,” is part of the culture of peasantry. Fitzpatrick extends Scott’s argument to the Russian peasant, whom she contends had continued practicing everyday resistance from serfdom. Some forms of Scott’s everyday resistance comprised of foot dragging, desertion, lacking initiative, and refusal to work can be extended to religious resistance. The refusal to accept to the seven day work week instituted in 1929 and the refusal to work on religious holidays are examples of these forms of resistance that were familiar and natural to the peasantry and fit into Scott’s mold of everyday resistance. Rumors of the apocalypse appeared periodically in Russia for centuries particularly in times of social turmoil and unrest. Other passive resistance strategies such as simply ignoring or claiming ignorance to religious policies portray the idea of “everyday resistance” in the religious realm. An alternative to the idea that resistance against collectivization was simply an expression of an innate part of the fabric of peasant culture, Viola argues that peasant resistance was a response to “the state’s violation of peasant interests as a whole,” and “reflected a collective consciousness of intent, action, and hoped-for resolution.” Across her scholarship Viola consistently proposes that peasant actions were coherent attempts to improve their situation. This can be seen in regards to religious resistance through the occurrences of riots and mobs as well as the religious education of children and withdrawing them from the mandated public

124 Scott, xvi.
125 Fitzpatrick, 5.
126 Viola, Peasant Rebels under Stalin, 47.
127 Viola, Peasant Rebels under Stalin, 5, 9.
schools. I suggest that forms of semi-conscious ingrained resistance accompanied and fueled the intentional, logical, and overt acts of resistance.

Religion was an aspect of peasant life that had not been under attack previously. The Orthodox Church had been closely tied to the czarist regime and the peasantry had gradually, under the pressure of modernization, become less religious towards the end of the 1800’s until the Revolution. The Soviet assault on the clergy and efforts to dismantle the church in the 1920’s led to a religious revival, as shown by Freeze. Both of the two theories above, one offered by Scott and the other by Viola, explaining peasant resistance center upon resistance to forced alterations to external behavior, that is to say the peasants resisted reforms or policies meant to alter their observable actions or methods. The policies and laws concerning religion aimed at eliminating peasant beliefs and values, so here peasants oppose an assault of a psychological, internal nature. Importantly, the Soviet project did not provide an acceptable replacement to religion. While the Bolsheviks did offer the ‘cult of leader’ as an alternative, most peasants rejected it as a substitute. Some peasants incorporated the cult of leader into their religion, placing pictures of Lenin or Stalin next to icons of saints in their icon corners of their home, but continued to worship and believe in Jesus Christ or witchcraft as well.

The question I wish to focus the rest of this chapter on is how peasant women resisted the anti-religious campaign. I will discuss two categories or resistance, passive and active, which often supplemented and motivated one another. Passive resistance strategies include religious rumors, gossip circles, miracles and omens, a refusal to work due to religious reasons, continued observances of forbidden practices and the religious education of children. As I will

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128 Freeze, “Subversive Atheism,” 27.
129 Viola, Peasant Rebels under Stalin, 42.
show, passive resistance was the most pervasive style and ultimately contributed most to the long-term survival of religion. Active resistance includes rioting and mobs preventing officials from carrying out anti-religious actions. Though more visible, active resistance resulted in harsher penalties and was, by nature, easier for the government to identify specific culprits to punish.

Religious Rumors

Peasant culture expressed current events through metaphors and symbolic inversion, these metaphors and symbols were then circulated to other peasants by word of mouth, forming rumors. Rumors provided an understanding and coping mechanism for peasants. The atmosphere created by the mass propaganda, restriction of information, and censorship in the Soviet Union led to an abundance of rumors. Citizens could not trust newspaper and official sources, and alternatively turned to traditional networks of word or mouth for information as many interviews of the HPSSS show. The peasantry was particularly prone to rumors. Non-religious rumors of impending war and the return of serfdom and landowners were common, but most rumors were religious in nature. Some rumors acted as a form of resistance through negating official lines and providing an alternative to the official discourse presented by untrustworthy newspapers and radio broadcasting, and more problematic for the Soviet state, rumors spread fear amongst the peasantry and fostered their unity against

131 Viola, Peasant Rebels under Stalin, 45.
132 Fitzpatrick, 45-47.
outsiders.  

I will explore these oppositional rumors that undermined the legitimacy of the state and its policies.

The official view of rumors held that oppositional rumors were largely the domain of women, but were started by a hidden kulak. This view fit neatly with their perception of women as gullible chatterers easily influenced by malicious men. Perhaps underlying the state’s perception of women were facts and traditional modes of behavior. Peasant women, whose literacy rates were far below their male counterparts, relied more on verbal networks to obtain news. Women traditionally had been excluded from power and rumors provided an anonymous form of rejecting official narratives without fear of punishment that might accompany a public statement of disapproval by a powerless individual. Whether or not women were the primary vessel of rumors, the state portrayed rumors as a negative, feminine act to minimize the threat posed by oppositional rumors.

The oppositional rumors circulated among the peasantry center upon St. John’s Revelation, and can be divided into four subtly distinct categories, each with its own overarching message of protest against policies, the state, or Bolshevik leaders. Apocalypse rumors warned against impending judgment by God and protested events and actions. Antichrist rumors linked the Soviet state and specific leaders to the devil and evilness and protested the authority of those named through discrediting these individuals. ‘Mark of the beast’ rumors warned against joining the kolkhoz and equated joining the kolkhoz with siding with Satan. The final type of rumors was rumors of the immorality of communism which incited

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133 Viola, Peasant Rebels under Stalin, 46.
134 Viola, “Bab’i Bunty”, 192.
135 Korevanova, 192.
fear against the ideology of the Bolsheviks. These rumors were often repeated together, reinforcing and bolstering one another. Women were generally cited as the carriers of rumors by officials. Viola suggests that the officials may have attributed more rumors to women than occurred to lessen the credibility of the rumors.\footnote{Viols, Peasant Rebels under Stalin, 61} The Soviets particularly favored crediting the \textit{baba} as the spreader of rumors, and identified kulaks and village priests as the sources of rumors. Some rumors, especially those concerning the amorality of communist women or rumors of a ‘common blanket’ (the nationalization of women in the kolkhoz), were geared toward women and would likely have been delivered by women.

Apocalypse rumors have existed throughout time and across nations particularly in times of economic and social stress. Within Russia there was a historical tradition of apocalyptic rumors, and a portion of the intelligentsia had even taken to interpreting the apocalypse into art, music and writings at the turn of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century.\footnote{Viola, Peasant Rebels under Stalin, 48.} These images were embellished by the peasantry, and resurfaced during the Revolution and continued past collectivization. The four horsemen, conquest, war, famine and death, were easily identifiable with the social catastrophe of the Revolution and collectivization, and use of the horsemen in rumors was common.\footnote{Viola, Peasant Rebels under Stalin, 60.} As Viola states, “the apocalypse provided peasants with a lexicon of current events and a vocabulary of rebellion.”\footnote{Viola, Peasant Rebels under Stalin, 55.} Also, the peasant vision of the apocalypse was entirely pessimistic. There was no sense of an earthly kingdom of saints after the reign of Antichrist. God was exacting his judgment before ending the world. One deacon declared, “I pronounce unto you that the end of the world is coming. With the help of God it is necessary to struggle
against Antichrist and his sons.”\textsuperscript{140} Similar proclamations were given, sometimes with exact dates and length of reign for the Antichrist or survival of a specific kolkhoz.\textsuperscript{141} Some apocalyptic rumors directly carried the suggestion of additional resistance such as “Why sow if the world is coming to an end.”\textsuperscript{142} Another widespread rumor of apocalypse was that of Bartholomew’s Night Massacre, a synonym of revenge and punishment. It was said that all who joined the collective farm would be massacred and the rumor warned of “destruction according to the writ of God.”\textsuperscript{143} The Bartholomew’s Night Massacre rumors appeared from 1929 to 1931 in numerous regions such as the Moscow Region, Chapaevskii raion, Ivanovo Industrial Region, Khar’kov area Urals and Chavash areas.

On interviewee from the Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System recalled the reason for his uncle’s arrest leading to seven years imprisonment:

My uncle was a very religious person. He read St. John’s Apocalypse and knew how to interpret it. Back in 1925 he went to the Raikom and gave away all his land. He did it because he believed, on the basis of the apocalyptic writings, that since the revolution Christ left earth and the devil began to rule over the land. In 1930 when the churches had been closed he began to arrange secret meetings in the garret or the woods... To keep away from the NKVD those men who attended such meetings dressed themselves in women’s clothing. The house where such a meeting took place was guarded by three or four men.

I was there twice with my mother. If you are interested in these underground meetings, then my mother can tell you all about them, because she attended them very often. In 1934 he was arrested and sentenced to seven years concentration camp... He was sentenced publicly. But he refused to sign his sentence. He said he would not put his signature on the “devil’s papers.”\textsuperscript{144}

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{140} RGAE, f. 7486, op. 37, d. 102, pp. 53, in Viola, \textit{Peasant Rebels under Stalin}, 62.
\textsuperscript{141} Viola, \textit{Peasant Rebels under Stalin}, 62.
\textsuperscript{142} Fitzpatrick, 47.
\textsuperscript{143} Viola, \textit{Peasant Rebels under Stalin}, 56.
\end{footnotes}
His story provides a wealth of insight into apocalyptic thinking, rumors, and the seriousness which the NKVD handled it. Firstly his uncle sincerely believed the apocalypse had arrived. The necessity for his uncle to know how to interpret Biblical writings was important in gathering other peasants to listen to him. The other peasants also had to believe in what he was saying to be willing to dress in disguise and risk being caught by the NKVD in a meeting that was illegal under the 1929 Law on Religious Organizations. Both men and women attended these meetings, but the men had to disguise themselves. This suggests that women were given more toleration to attend meetings, and the peasants exploited the officials’ toleration of women. Disguising themselves also shows that the peasants were aware of the danger that could come from attending the meetings and did so regardless. They consciously chose to listen and undoubtedly pass along what was said at these meetings. This story also shows the devotion of his mother, as she attended very often, and chose to take her then 15-year-old son with her. Though his father was very religious and ensured his children prayed in the mornings, at meals and at night, there is no mention of his attending the meetings with his wife and son. This story also shows the deep hatred the interviewee’s uncle had toward the Soviet state through his calling the official sentencing papers the devil’s. He was likely an Old Believer, and so would have rejected the legitimacy of the state by refusing to acknowledge any state document with his signature. His conviction and defiance despite imminent danger conveys religion as being thoroughly ingrained into his life that all aspects relate to it.

145 Sistematicheskoe sobranie zakonov RSFSR (Moscow: Iurid. izd-vo NKIU RSFSR, 1929), text 353. Sobranie u扎konenii i rasporiazhenii, 1929, No. 35, statute 353, found in Seventeen Moments in Soviet History: An On-line Archive of Primary Sources.
Rumors labeling the Soviet state or officials as the Antichrist are closely connected with imagery of the apocalypse as the Antichrist appears during the end times in Christian theology. In the deacon’s declaration of the apocalypse above, the Antichrist and his sons is a direct reference to the Soviet state and the state officials and activists sent to the villages.\footnote{Viola, \textit{Peasant Rebels under Stalin}, 62.} Old Believer’s used the imagery of Bolsheviks as Antichrist to justify refusing to recognize the Soviet state.\footnote{Viola, \textit{Peasant Rebels under Stalin}, 52.} Since the mid-seventeenth century, this wing, split off of the Orthodox Church, denied recognition of the state out of principle.\footnote{Viola, \textit{Peasant Rebels under Stalin}, 47.} Rumors claimed “joining the collective farm you sign yourself on to Antichrist’s list. Save yourself, save your soul.”\footnote{Viola, \textit{Peasant Rebels under Stalin}, 56.} Labeling Stalin as the Antichrist was common also. A Belorussian peasant woman interviewee in the Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System was questioned about Stalin’s power and ruling to which she said “I think the devil helps him.”\footnote{HPSSS. Schedule A, Vol. 34, Case 109/(NY)1462 (interviewer J.F., type A4). Widener Library, Harvard University, http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:981827, (accessed January 30, 2016).} While answering another question, she responded “it was the devil whom the Komsomol served”.\footnote{HPSSS. Schedule A, Vol. 34, Case 109/(NY)1462 (interviewer J.F., type A4), 14.} Such statements could lead to serious punishment if the OGPU heard of them.\footnote{The OGPU is often called NKVD by HPSSS interviewee’s because the OGPU became the NKVD in 1934 and these interviews were done in 1950.} One interviewee remembers a friend’s story:

He had gone on a trolley car with his friend, and he read in the paper something about Stalin, and said “Oh the devil on Stalin.” After he got down from the trolley car a man was following him. The man stopped him and showed him his badge. He was from the NKVD. They stood in the street and talked there for a whole hour... The NKVD man finally told him to be more careful in the future.\footnote{HPSSS. Schedule A, Vol. 14, Case 258 (interviewer J.B., type A4). Widener Library, Harvard University, http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:951462. (accessed January 30, 2016).}
The government was aware how subversive rumors could be and were guarded against it. However, discrediting rumors continued circulating among the peasantry.

Images taken from St. John’s Revelation, ‘Mark of the Beast’ rumors instilled fear into the peasantry against joining the collective farms or Soviet groups. It was said by joining a kolkhoz, a stamp would be placed on one’s forehead or hand condemning them to damnation. These were often accompanied by immorality rumors that tied communist with immorality and perversion. Many of these rumors were directly aimed at invoking the fear of women. Rumors that wives would become collective property and all members of the kolkhoz would sleep under the ‘common blanket’ were widespread. Late 1929 in the North Caucasus region a rumor filled with immorality circulated:

In the collective farm, there will be a special stamp, [they] will close all the churches, not allow prayer, dead people will be cremated, the christening of children will be forbidden, invalids and the elderly will be killed, there won’t be any husbands or wives, [all] will sleep under a one-hundred meter blanket. Beautiful men and women will be taken from their parents, there will be wholesale incest: brothers will live with sisters, sons with mothers, fathers with daughters, etc. The collective farm-this is beasts in a single shed, people in a single barrack.

This rumor combines the ‘mark of the beast’, damnation of innocent babies, violation of the purity of marriage, and perversion of incest. These themes are common elsewhere, and prey upon women’s maternal instincts. It was widely believed that infants and their mother’s were especially vulnerable until the baby had been baptized. If a peasant chose to join a collective farm after hearing these rumors, he labeled himself as accepting, if not approving, of these moral atrocities. Praskovia Nikitichna, known as Pasha Angelina, was a Stakhanovite (a shock-

156 Fitzpatrick, 47.
157 RGAE, f. 7486, op. 37, d. 61, p. 45, 59.
158 Listova, 126.
worker) who became a tractor driver in 1930.\textsuperscript{159} In 1930 she was struck by lightning while working on a Sunday. Despite the fact that Pasha survived after quick responses from her friends, the villagers responded to the near disaster by warning, “That was God’s punishment for Pasha.”\textsuperscript{160} The implicit statement was two-fold: follow the new seven-day work week by working on a Sunday and God will punish you, and work enthusiastically for the Soviet’s and God will punish you.

Through religious rumors, the peasantry had eliminated the possibility of neutrality; they forced people to choose sides, good or evil, religion and salvation from God or communism and death by Satan.\textsuperscript{161} Oppositional rumors discredited the state, Stalin, and through association, their supporters. The demonization allowed peasants ease of conscious in disobeying laws and orders, and promoted active resistance shown later. Using religious language to frame their rumors was itself an act of resistance by refusing to use the more modern, secular language of the Bolsheviks, and it separated the peasants from the Soviet government.\textsuperscript{162} Though any one particular rumor may not have been believed by every listener, the abundance of rumors and remarks portray the peasantry’s legitimate fear and hatred toward the state.

Gossip Circles

A similar passive resistance strategy was that of gossip. Like rumors, state officials associated gossip with women in their reports, as it was considered a natural occupation of women, as the more sociable of the sexes, and unsuitable for strong, thoughtful men to

\textsuperscript{159} Pasha Angelina, “The Most Important Thing, 1948”, in Fitzpatrick and Slezkin, 305-321.
\textsuperscript{160} Angelina, 312.
\textsuperscript{161} Viola, Peasant Rebels under Stalin, 61.
\textsuperscript{162} Viola, Peasant Rebels under Stalin, 50.
participate in. Distinct from rumors, these were aimed directly at individual officials, Stakonovites and other peasants within their acquaintance. Scott defined gossip as “a story told about an absent third party; once launched, it becomes an anonymous tale with no author but many retailers... Behind every piece of gossip that is not merely news is an implicit statement of a rule or norm that has been broken.” The purpose of the gossip was to undermine and discredit the target of gossip by implying the target has violated an accepted rule of society. For some peasants, gossip served as a tool to disgrace the target and by association tarnish policies and actions the target enforced.

In Korevanova’s memoir she recalls going to the village of Tashkinovo in the Mikhailovsk district to open the reading room for the education of women. Her tasks included anti-religious education and implementing communist holidays over religious holidays. She wrote:

The village was the most isolated place in the district. Most of the population were members of religious sects. In other words, it was an old prerevolutionary village. Agitation against me began on the very first day. The woman who guarded the reading hut told the other women: “She’s here to deceive our women. Don’t have anything to do with her. Who needs her, the old hag! Her place is on top of the stove, but here she is, meddling in the library, scaring the young folks away.”

By discrediting Korevanova, the gossiper prevented her from being successful for quite a long time. Korevanova arrived in September and it was sometime in the spring before she was able to get women interested in learning to read, and then she notes that her work continued slowly. The Department of Education sought to promote anti-religious education through teachers such as Korevanova, but without voluntary attendance, the teachers were unable to be effective. Gossip, likely emerging from peasant suspicion of outsiders, added to the

163 Scott, 282.  
164 Korevanova, 190.  
165 Korevanova, 192-193.
discrediting of their work. By saying that she was there to deceive the women, the values and traditions Korevanova would have been arguing against would be safe guarded and the gossiper proven correct. This form of gossip acted as resistance by preventing the communists’ version of education from being heard. Other gossip that circulated was aimed at peasant youth who joined the Komsomol or priests who blessed Soviet candidates. Gossip served to alienate the target, discredit their opinions and actions, and warn others from following their example.

Miracles, Signs and Pilgrimage

Most other form of passive resistance had a non-religious parallel used to resist collectivization, dekulakization or other state policies. The reports by various peasants of miracles and signs and the pilgrimages some peasants made to holy sites had no affiliated non-religious forms as they were inherently faith based. Believers circulated the supposed occurrences like rumors and gave legitimacy to religious claims. The reported appearances of divine miracles and signs bolstered religious resistance by providing proof of the divine and hope for divine intervention into peasant’s hardships. Wanner notes that “Orthodox practice places a distinct emphasis on the sacred and mysticism.” The Soviet government’s ideology of Marxist materialism and the acceptance of only scientific experiments to explain bizarre occurrences were explicitly rejected by the rural religious believers. Women often were the recipients of the miracles and signs, and were reported frequently as those traveling to pilgrimage sites.

\[166\] Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin*, 51.
\[167\] Wanner, 7.
Miracles and signs were not a new phenomenon. In 1924, a wave of reportedly renewed icons and cupolas excited the peasantry. Pospielovsky records one anecdote from the early 1920’s; during a riot in a Ukrainian village near Vinnitsa policemen fired into the crowd. Supposedly, no one in the crowd was injured, but a crucifix was hit and began to bleed, and it drew large numbers of crowds. Despite the government attempts at dispelling the incident through propaganda and a scientific explanation, the “bleeding” crucifix became a pilgrimage site for large numbers of believers. 168

The continued belief in the signs and miracles during collectivization in the face of the Bolshevik attempts to dispel miraculous reports as counterfeit functioned as resistance against the regime. Resistance was enhanced by the nature many of the signs took. In a village in Khar’kov area peasants stated that a sign appeared on the church’s cupola proclaiming “Do not go into the collective farm and commune because I will smite you.” 169 The death of an Octoberized infant was seen as a bad omen and was encouraging peasants to return to religious baptisms. 170 One interviewee of the Harvard Project stated that though he tended towards disbelief in God, the enthusiasm and stories of believers left him unsure. He recounted stories of Tibetans living without food or water for months surviving because of the intervention of God. 171 He attributed this as a miracle, and commented how he did believe in mystical powers such as those Rasputin had. 172 Reportedly, icons and church cupolas mysteriously became clean

168 Pospielovsky, 22-23.
169 Viola, Peasant Rebels under Stalin, 57.
170 Viola, Peasant Rebels under Stalin, 52.
172 HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 8, Case 110 (interviewer R.F., type A4), 42.
and shiny, proving their legitimacy.\textsuperscript{173} Some messages came in physical form. Letters claiming to be from the Virgin Mary or God himself arrived with authenticating seals. In Oirotiia, God gave an ultimatum for a return to faith within two years or he would end the world.\textsuperscript{174} These miraculous letters validated apocalyptic rumors and encouraged additional religious resistance. Peasants interpreted such signs and miracles as instruction from God that communism and the collective farm specifically was evil.

Pilgrimages to holy sites were forbidden, but peasants continued to seek them out throughout Soviet rule.\textsuperscript{175} Needing to be physically close to the relic, icon or blessed object, believers would travel to restricted areas despite the dangers and persecution. Processions beginning at shrines celebrated past miracles, and although the 1929 Law on Religious Organizations forbade these processions from occurring away from a church and required official permission, large numbers of peasants continued to march long distances to honor the shrines.\textsuperscript{176} Some processions of the cross were used to disrupt elections, such as one that took place in the Penza region. It began as thirty women, and grew to over one hundred. One of the women leaders then began to agitate against the collective farm “supposedly in the throes of religious ecstasy.”\textsuperscript{177} Stella Rock records the memoir of Vera Vasilevskaja’s secret pilgrimage to the closed monastery of Diveevo which held sacred springs:

After the closure of the monastery they [authorities] assiduously filled them in with earth in order to obliterate people’s memory of their grace-giving power. But it didn’t help: now here, now there the spring water broke afresh through the earth’s surface. To

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{173} Viola, \textit{Peasant Rebels under Stalin}, 53.
\bibitem{174} Viola, \textit{Peasant Rebels under Stalin}, 63.
\bibitem{175} Stella Rock, “‘They Burned the Pine, but the Place Remains the Same’: Pilgrimage in the Changing Soviet Landscape,” in Wanner, 159.
\bibitem{176} Rock, 164; Sistematichesko sobranie zakonov RSFSR. in \textit{Seventeen Moments in Soviet History: An On-line Archive of Primary Sources}.
\bibitem{177} Rock, 162.
\end{thebibliography}
begin with it surprised me when I saw how someone passing would bend down to the ground, looking and listening attentively to something. Drawing nearer I heard the rapturous whisper: “the spring is flowing!” The spring was filled in again, and again flowed free- a living symbol of God’s unquenchable mercy to humankind.”

Healing waters was a common trend of holy sites. The apparition of holy figures near a spring to a woman in 1924 still drew large number of pilgrims seeking healing in the late 1920’s. After the observance of a miracle by three women, local villagers erected a cross at the spring where it occurred to act as a marker for pilgrims. Seeking out sacred sites became harder in the early 1930’s and little documentation remains of pilgrimages during these years.

I contend that with so little hope of improvement in living conditions and void of power to force improvement, the peasants turned to miracles and signs for hope. To endure the repressions of the state and not give in to absolute despair, some peasants imbibed supernatural elaborations and explanations to the unexplained, and likely many stories were completely fabricated. However, it was the psychological drive to accept, or in some cases to at least not dismiss the possibility, of the miraculous that the Bolsheviks could not combat. I believe that the persistence of miracles and signs shows a continuation of the peasant’s attempts to strip a level of power out of the hands of the state and reserve it for the divine and themselves through association. It is also likely that reporting miracles and signs were encouraged by priests and clergy. Reports of miracles become scarcer after 1928 as the number of priests left in villages plummeted.

Alternative Practices, Superstition and Turn to Sects

178 Vera Vasilevskaia, Pravedniki nashego vremeni: Katakomby XX veka: Vospominaniiia, 85-86, Keston Archive, Baylor University, Waco, Tex. SU/Ort S. V. Ia. in Rock, 164.
179 Viola, Peasant Rebels under Stalin, 53.
180 Rock, 164.
A methodology of resisting the anti-religious campaigns that the state had particular difficulties dealing with was the alteration of traditional religion and rituals. The Soviets had dismantled the structure of the Orthodox Church in an attempt to end religion, however many peasants simply adapted their own religion or converted to a different sect rather than abandon religion altogether. Confession to priest had been a staple in the Orthodox Church for acquiring forgiveness of sins. However with the greatly reduced number of priests and the fear that many priests hearing confession were spies for the OGPU, peasants opted for general confession. General confession is when a priest reads out a list of generic sins to a group of assembled penitents. Other adaptations some peasants made because of the lack of priests included allowing designated laity to perform religious rites. In a village in the Central Volga region, two peasant women gathered in a home to perform religious ceremonies. In a religion with a very strict patriarchal structure that had no formal roles for women within the parish, this was a radical adaptation.

Alternative beliefs replaced Christianity at times, or combined with Christianity to create a blended religion. Pagan beliefs and superstitions often had covertly coexisted in the peasantry’s Christianity for centuries; with the banning of public Christian rituals, some peasants turned to habitual underground rituals of magic and paganism. One peasant woman remembered being very concerned over her sister’s conversion to spiritualism. Pagan beliefs in forest spirits, demons and witchcraft resonated with many peasants trying to make sense of the ever-present turmoil. Charms and magic were reality for many peasants, and knowing how

181 Nadieszda Kizenko, “Sacramental Confession in Modern Russia and Ukraine,” in Wanner, 196.
182 Fitzpatrick, 205.
to protect oneself against harmful magic (sorcery) was crucial.  

In the region of Lake Baikal, it was said that the best remedy for sorcery was an unused needle; as long as it was kept on one’s person, they had nothing to fear from magic.  

Iron and iron objects were common in the protection from evil spirits. One interesting phenomenon that arose was the blend of Christianity and ‘cult of leader’. Icon corners, a standard area of peasant houses, added images of Lenin or Stalin alongside images of saints. The spiritual needs of the population and an attachment to the transcendental could find an outlet in the adoration and near divination worship of the leader. Cult of leader, as scholars suggest, performed the function of legal civil religion in the USSR responding to the needs of human psyche.

Turning to other Christian sects that were harder for the Soviets to attack presented peasants with a strategy for escape. During the 1920’s while the Orthodox Church was persecuted, the Bolsheviks ambivalent attitude toward other sects previously attacked under tsarism and the Orthodox Church resulted in the rise of sects. After the second wave of religious persecution began in 1928, sects became a less visible alternative to Orthodoxy. Some Russian sects grew in numbers, but it was particularly Protestant evangelical groups that gained followers. The stress Protestantism placed on literacy, sobriety and fraternity paralleled many of the communist arguments against Orthodoxy, but it did not emphasize class war, a communist message that was unpopular among peasants. A member of the Godless League noted that sects were adept at manipulating government policies for their own goals.

Viola, Peasant Rebels under Stalin, 50.


Viola, Peasant Rebels under Stalin, 42.

Viola, Peasant Rebels under Stalin, 52.
[They] willingly agitated for the closing of [Orthodox] churches and gave their signatures to statements about the closing of churches, but in place of one closed church they tried to open one or several sectarian prayer “clubs” at home. Now these sectarian “clubs,” existing in many villages and towns, are trying to unite and transfer to the position of officially registered sectarian communities and groups.\(^{188}\)

These groups also attracted the highly literate and younger followers, demographics that worried the Soviet regime.\(^{189}\) Their secrecy that hid them from government interference also renders much of their actions hidden from scholars as well. One Harvard Project interviewee remembered the Lutheran services were held in a gymnasium, and commented that, “All religious people have to hide.”\(^{190}\)

**Practicing and Teaching Religion**

The final types of passive resistance demonstrated by peasants were religious education and continuing to follow traditional customs of religion. The 1929 Law on Religious Organizations forbade:

- organizing religious or other meetings specially intended for children, young people or women, biblical or literary meetings, groups, sections, circles, or handicraft meetings, religious instruction, etc., excursions, or children’s play-groups, or from opening libraries, reading rooms, sanatoria, or providing medical aid...

No teaching of religious faith of any sort shall be tolerated in state or private schools or other educational establishments.\(^{191}\)

The law also prohibited religious ceremonies from occurring in public, including funerals. Other policies included the confiscation of icons and religious artifacts. However, there are countless instances in which the peasantry ignored these decrees. An interviewee of the Harvard Project

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\(^{189}\) Fitzpatrick, 206.


\(^{191}\) Sistematicheskoe sobranie zakonov RSFSR, in Seventeen Moments in Soviet History: An On-line Archive of Primary Sources.
remembered peasants requesting her father, a priest, to perform Christenings and weddings despite them being forbidden. “This was done in the strictest secrecy, of course.” In 1936 he was arrested and deported to Pervomaisk, accompanied by his wife. Later he was shipped to an undisclosed location; his family never heard from him again, and his wife returned to their children. Despite this tragic event, the interviewee believed that she should get married in a church, and would not do so otherwise. In another interview, a woman recalled a man who “served as the ‘older brother.’ He knew all the necessary prayers, and people brought newly born babies to him for baptism.” By simply continuing to practice religious traditions secretly, the peasantry thwarted the Soviet goal of eradicating religion.

One of the most powerful resistance strategies employed by peasants, particularly women, was religious instruction. All educational institutions like religious academies and seminaries to educate clergy had been closed in the 1920’s; publishing religious literature and books had been forbidden. So here I refer to the religious instruction occurring in homes from parents and grandparents to children. As seen above, villagers went to extreme lengths, including cross-dressing, to attend meetings with religious teachings. Mothers were the most influential teachers, however, because they taught their children religion which ensured the long-term survival of beliefs. Teaching the Bible to children was the indictment that sent more women to prison than any other religious related charge. Numerous peasants interviewed in the Harvard Project recalled religious teachings and instructions by their mothers. The man that had been taken by his mother to his uncle’s meetings had further religious education by both

his parents, and remained zealous for his beliefs. He recounted, “In 1932 when the Communist idiots threw out the icons from the houses, I was so angry and so mad that I wanted to kill them. Many a time I wondered why God was so merciful and did not punish those devils in human flesh.”196 One man had been an atheist and was convinced his religious mother was wrong until World War II. While serving in the army he became a Christian and remembered his mother’s teaching.197 Many remembered religious observation at home as obligatory, and retained practicing it on some level.198 The large number of men who responded this way is particularly insightful. Mother’s did not just influence their daughter’s beliefs, but also passed down their religion to their sons. One female interviewee’s response encapsulated many themes found in other answers:

My father had very little to do with our religious upbringing because of his long hours at work. But my mother paid special attention to our moral upbringing. She was a Catholic, but because there were no Catholic Churches where we lived, she attended the Orthodox Church and brought us up according to Orthodox doctrine. It was very dangerous to have and show any religious beliefs under the Soviets. The governmental attitude toward religion was worse than any other in human history. The Soviet authorities proclaimed that religion was opium for human thoughts, that it was a scheme to exploit poor people by “non-productive” churchmen, monks, nuns, and because the Soviet government cared for the people’s livelihood, such exploitation was forbidden...

My mother remained very religious in her heart and she kept icons in the house. She always made sure we had a Christmas tree in the house... There are no religious holidays so we had to go to school on Christmas day. She sent us to school on such Holy Days but always warned us not to say a word to anybody of what we did at home. 199

197 HPSSS. Schedule A, Vol. 23, Case 470 (interviewer M.F., type A4), 41-42.
Mothers’ religiosity generally was remembered fondly by interviewees. Themes of religious adaptation, secrecy, and dislike of Soviet anti-religious policy appeared throughout interviews. By instilling faith and religious practices in the next generation, peasant women effectively fought against communist ideology taught in Soviet schools. Persecution by activists or officials only cemented the children’s disdain for the Soviets and reinforced their parents’ teachings. Peasants recognized the importance of early influences on child psychology and went to great lengths to teach the proper values. Youth who joined the Komsomol often faced the anger and punishment of their parents. Participating in communist celebrations could result in children being forced to day-long prayers and Bible readings. Some parents chose to even remove their children from Soviet schools to prevent atheist and anti-religious education although the authorities applied pressure to bring them back to the mandated schools.

It must be noted here that not all religious believers taught their children to be religious. Some parents hoped that their children would be better off without religion. Some even omitted teaching family histories and knowledge of foreign languages to their children to shield them from knowingly having an ancestry of nobility, priests, or merchants which would limit the children’s futures. Acceptance into schools and availability of work heavily depended upon a meager family background and compliance with state promoted atheistic beliefs. One interviewee who had no religious upbringing commented about his parent’s beliefs “I would

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201 Viola, Peasant Rebels under Stalin, 51.
not say that they were atheists, but they would not talk about religion.” When pressed further he remembered his mother praying, but he was not taught to pray himself.

Riots and Mobs

Active religious resistance by peasant women occurred in response to actions taken by local militia units, local officials, or the OGPU. Though the majority of peasant women’s resistances were peaceful, tens of thousands of riots broke out across the Russian countryside in response to collectivization, dekulakization, and state attacks on religion. These highly visible forms of protest are more studied than other resistance forms. The anger behind the riots was often voiced in religious language, reiterating religious rumors. The various resistance strategies mentioned above fueled each other along with atrocities of zealous activists. Policy and ideology promoted by the central government lead to overly aggressive activists, Komsomol members, League of Godless Militant members, and OGPU agents implementing these decrees. These decrees and aggressive actions were turned into religiously framed rumors by angry peasants. Reports of miracles and signs proved to peasants the validity of their beliefs and the evilness of Soviet power. Teaching and practicing religion in secret reinforced beliefs while also leading to further repression by the state. It’s necessary to keep in mind that religious persecution coincided with collectivization in which the state forcible took grain stores and livestock from the peasantry. Those who resisted collectivization could be arrested for a number of crimes, or stripped of their possessions and arrested if denounced as a kulak. This atmosphere provided fertile ground for mass disturbances.

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203 Viola, Peasant Rebels under Stalin, 10.
Viola compiled a series of charts denoting the mass disturbances in 1929 and 1930 and citing causes. In 1929, 23.5% of the 1,307 recorded ‘religious grounds’ as the cause of mass disturbances. Of the 13,754 mass disturbances in 1930, church closures and the removal of bells caused 10.8% of them.\(^{204}\) Other religiously motivated disturbances, such as the dekulakization of priests or church members, are not included in this number. The only two causes with higher numbers of disturbances are collectivization and dekulakization, both of which could have ties to religious resistances.\(^{205}\) March and April 1930 had more mass disturbances than any other months during collectivization. Peasant participation from 1929 to 1930 increased tenfold, and averaged around 250 participants per disturbance.\(^{206}\) Many of these protests were lead by women and were vastly more tolerated by officials than protests led by men. The state labeled the women lead riots as ‘Babi bunt’, and attributed their outbursts as unpredictable, emotional, uncontrollable eruptions of protest from ignorant, manipulated females.\(^{207}\) However, the average number of participants in the riots approximates the average village size, suggesting that the entire village participated in the riots despite official reports.

The mass disturbances varied in intensity; some were processions of chanting peasants, while others became lynch mobs. Since these riots were mostly unorganized, the intensity of the riot occurred spontaneously, and local brigades and officials could not predict the level of violence that would occur.\(^{208}\) Some protests ended without physical violence. In the Spas Demensk raion, a group of approximately 300 women formed a procession while singing hymns

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\(^{205}\) Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin*, 140.

\(^{206}\) Viola, “*Babi Bunt*”, 190.

\(^{207}\) Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin*, 141.
to protest the closing of a church. At a collective meeting, a large group of women disrupted the proceedings demanding the release of their arrested priest.

Yet many riots and mobs included at least the threat of violence. Meetings turned into angry mobs easily, and lynching or beatings of officials occurred. In a village, a Komsomol teacher calling for the closure of a church barely escaped a lynching. In Siberia, a branch of the League of Godless Militants became afraid to walk past a church they had forcibly closed because of the anger of the villagers. In the riot reported by Davydov, a group of approximately 300 women prevented the closure of their church armed with sickles and stakes, and then drove away the representative of the district committee. The alarm call of bells still resonated deeply with the peasantry, and when rung peasants hurried to the church building armed with whatever they could grab. In Shumyachi the ringing of bells brought both believers and “indifferently-minded” people to the church (which had been turned into a club) to obstruct the removal of crosses. “When the churchpeople had come running, hysterical women started to obstruct the tidying up of the club, throwing sticks, and tried to place their own lock on the door.” Riots and mobs served as an outlet for the building fear, anger and anxiety of the peasantry. Some riots succeeded in temporarily reopening churches, freeing priests or even destroying the collective, but most ended in punishment by the government and the resuming of policies.

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209 Fitzpatrick, 61.
210 Viola, Peasant Rebels under Stalin, 152.
211 Fitzpatrick, 62.
212 Davydov, 82-83.
213 Yerokhin, 85.
214 Yerokhin, 85.
Chapter Conclusion

The many peasants choosing to resist religious persecution employed both passive and active methods to thwart the Soviet goal of eradicating religion. These took many forms: rumors, gossip, reporting miracles and signs, making holy pilgrimages, adapting religious rituals, turning to sects and superstition, teaching children religious practices, and riots and mobs. The state attempted to depoliticize many of these resistance strategies by feminizing them. In doing so they failed to realize the potential women had in preserving religion and subverting their will. Men had the benefit of utilizing the resistance tactic of flight, whether to the cities or to remote religious fundamentalist settlements in Siberia; less mobile women rarely had the option of flight as jobs in the city for women were scarce, and the care of households and families kept women bound to the village. As a result, women exercised the resistance strategies available to them inside the villages, generally exploiting the state’s conception of the *baba* to avoid punishment.
CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF SUCCESS

Lynne Viola writes: “Resistance serves as a prism, distilling aspects of peasant culture, politics, and community to the historian. The components of resistance...form bridges of understanding into the peasant world. As historians of other times and places have suggested, peasant consciousness reveals itself through these components of resistance, thereby allowing values, beliefs and attitudes rooted in peasant culture to become visible.”

I would add that resistance also identifies the boundaries of power and influence of two opposing sides. The subordinate actor will innately push against the imposing force revealing the limitations of both parties; the degree to which both sides succeed and fail in their struggle against one another illuminates the strengths and weaknesses of each. This chapter will analyze the successes and failures of both the Soviet state and the peasantry. Many of the goals held by the two were not mutually exclusive, so the state could fail without it being a success for the peasant women and vise-versa.

State Goals

Most of the state goals during collectivization were orchestrated by Stalin. General goals of collectivization often held implications for religion. In the speech to factory workers mentioned in chapter 3, Stalin explained the need for “cultural backwardness” to be corrected quickly. The women peasants represented the “darker sector of the already dark peasant masses.” Education was thought to be the fix-all solution for peasant women, and activists

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216 Viola, Peasant Rebels under Stalin, 5.
217 ‘O zadachakh khoziaistvennikov (rech’ 4 fevralii 1931 g)’, 251.
218 Viola, “Bab’i Bunty,” 190.
like Korevanova were sent out to enlighten the peasants.\textsuperscript{219} Part of this education was to eliminate religion. Gorky wrote a letter to Stalin describing improved ways to fight against religion which, in the Bolshevik mind, was a great contributor to the cultural backwardness of Russia.\textsuperscript{220} Stalin sought to gain total control of the peasantry, including taking away choice and freedom of thought. He wanted to end all remnants of peasant autonomy and to him that equated to eliminating peasant culture.\textsuperscript{221} The methods chosen were education, propaganda, intimidation and repression.

State Successes

The government had successes in the war waged against religion; however, they failed to completely fulfill Stalin’s project. Their strength was in controlling the public sphere and breaking the spirit of the peasantry. The structure of the Church was effectively dismantled, public displays of religion were lessened, and believers feared being targeted for dekulakization. The state gained partial victories in social realms. Peasant culture was changed, and many young people joined Komsomols and abandoned beliefs.

The dismantling of the Church hierarchy had begun during the revolution and was the focus of the anti-religious movement during the 1920’s. During the second wave of persecutions, the 1929 Law on Religious Organizations gave further legal justifications for churches to be closed.\textsuperscript{222} Peasant resistance rarely prevented the closure of churches.\textsuperscript{223} Fitzpatrick records the devastation to the church structure during collectivization. By 1933 over half of the churches still functioning in 1929 had been closed. In a report of TsIK Cult

\textsuperscript{219} Korevanova, 187.
\textsuperscript{220} Gorky, Library of Congress.
\textsuperscript{221} Viola, \textit{Peasant Rebels under Stalin}, 38.
\textsuperscript{222} Sistematiceskoe sobranie zakonov RSFSR.
\textsuperscript{223} Davyдов, 83; Yerokhin, 85.
Commission about the condition of religious organizations in the USSR in January of 1936, of the 72,523 Orthodox churches opened before the revolution, only 30,543 remained open (42%), and no monasteries at all were left open.\textsuperscript{224} Recorded clergy dropped from 79,000 in 1926 to 31,000 in 1937 during the respective censuses.\textsuperscript{225} Oral histories corroborated the dramatic drop in churches and priests.\textsuperscript{226} Here the success of the Soviet offensive was extensive. They excelled at controlling public spaces and institutions. Peasant riots and mobs rarely did more than delay the inevitable. In a last resort, a few peasants, typically men, chose acts of terror, typically murder, assault, or arson, to express their anger and rage against religious attacks. In 1930, though 13,731 acts of terror were committed against officials, religion was cited as the cause of only 38 (0.3%).\textsuperscript{227} No documented long-lasting religiously motivated rebellion occurred during collectivization, and militia groups and OGPU squads were willing to violently reprimand villages when ordered. After 1930, mass disturbances by the peasantry became rare.\textsuperscript{228}

The government also succeeded in halting many public religious displays. Fear of punishment by the government was widespread among believers and limited their outward religious actions.\textsuperscript{229} This was especially seen in male religious participation. The case of comrade Yemelyan Doyla in 1929 conveys many of the difficulties men faced regarding religion. Doyla had been a member of the local Soviet and Kolkhoz, and was accused of acting against the collective in a variety of manners. Fellow Soviet members stated against him:

\textsuperscript{224} GARF 5263, op. 1 d. 32, L. 2-4 provided by Olga Velikanova.
\textsuperscript{225} Fitzpatrick, 204.
\textsuperscript{226} Kizenko, 198.
\textsuperscript{227} Viola, \textit{Peasant Rebels under Stalin}, 104.
\textsuperscript{228} Viola, \textit{Peasant Rebels under Stalin}, 136.
There is evidence that comrade Doyla goes to church, baptizes his children and conducts agitation for the break-up of the collective... Comrade Dolya at present has old traditions and it is impossible to regard him as a cultured person but as one who milks the collective farm... Doyla has completely given up on political life. Goes to church, baptizes his children, now even the grown-up ones go to church and he hangs icons in his room...

Doyla refuted these accounts:

...As for old traditions I personally never go to church and don’t recognize icons, it doesn’t mean anything to me. As for my family I don’t deny my wife and children go to church. I can’t force them and don’t want to cause a fight. 230

A few months later further Doyla was further indicted with observing religious rites at the cemetery on Radunitsa (day of commemoration of parents). Ultimately he was stripped of his member status and kicked out of the collective. 231 It is possible that he was falsely accused because of some personal grievance against him, but the evidence against him suggests that he did observe at least some religious practices, and certainly his family did. Losing his status as party member and being kicked out of the collective would have had dire consequences for him and his family. There is no further record of his fate, but without the collective farm he had little if any land and no economic prospects. Doyla’s rebuttal’s portrays the level of fear he had in losing these things and the lack of control he had once after his religiosity was discovered. 232 This was the level of fear and control the state had over the lives of men. This was a huge success for the state. Men had to be particularly careful in being religious or risk losing everything and being deported as a kulak. Again, however, women were not treated with the same level of punishment. In a survey of conducted in the Central Black Earth oblast in 1934,

230 “Document 40. Record of the Joint Meeting of Members and Candidates of the ACP(b) of Prikhabsky, Usmylnsky [Party] Attatched to the DEC, the Usmylnsky Attached to the Village Soviet and the Komasinsky Candidate Group of February [1929],” in Corley, 77-78.
231 “Document 40,” 79.
only 10% of men in the 25-39 age range reportedly carried out religious rituals in comparison with 38% of women. Conclusions from this survey must be considered carefully as in 1934 the constitution which at least nominally granted more religious freedoms had not yet been written, and so believers, especially men, would have been extremely wary of answering affirmatively to practicing religion. Also, men held more governmental positions than women and so were more apt to be dismissed for affirming their belief. It seems safe to say that if nothing else, women felt far safer in proclaiming religious adherence then men.

Another section of the population the state’s campaigns succeeded to influence was the younger generation. Anti-religious teachings in schools and the draw of the Young Pioneers and Komsomol often turned children against the religiosity of their parents. Other children struggled to decide whether to believe the communists or their parents. One man remembered his school days, “When I was little I was taught little prayers, and during the time of the NEP we were often taken to church. The family was opposed to what was taught in schools. I remember that I myself spent sleepless nights. I was plagued by the question: Is there a God or is there no God? And in the last year of my elementary school... I was particularly embarrassed because I was exposed to these two contradictory influences. On the one hand, what I had learned in school, on the other hand what my parents told me.” In 1934 the survey mentioned above, the age group of 16-24 had significantly lower percentages of religious practicing: 12% of women and only 1% of men. The younger generation was less religious than the older

233 Fitzpatrick, 205.
234 Viola, Peasant Rebels under Stalin, 51.
generations, a trend noted by scholars.\textsuperscript{236} The state’s success in extinguishing religion amongst the younger generation was not complete as numerous children who had been atheists returned to belief later in life.\textsuperscript{237} Though the census noted the percentage of people in their twenties who considered themselves to be believers, 45%, was over thirty points lower than the 78% of people in their fifties affirming belief in a religion.\textsuperscript{238}

State Failures

However, the victories of the state was superficial; the Soviet state failed in the war against religion in many respects. Its greatest weaknesses were its inability to control peasant thoughts and beliefs, lack of understanding peasant women, and the failure to control how peasant culture changed. These failures show the limits of Soviet power. They could force change, but could not control how the change occurred; they could cause fear, but they could not fully control thoughts; they could attack religious practices, but they could not comprehend why religion persisted.

Another failure of the central government was to fully control the action of local authorities and groups. The disjunction between the central government’s vision when initiating laws and the actual implementation at the local level created many unintended results in the village. Hatred and animosity toward communists and Stalin grew. Rumors defaming Stalin and communists often emerged as a reaction to aggression from local party cadres.\textsuperscript{239} Despite Stalin’s “Dizzy with Success” speech that laid blame for undue violence and property destruction on zealous activists at the local level, many peasants continued to associate Stalin

\textsuperscript{236} Fitzpatrick, 205.
\textsuperscript{238} Fitzpatrick, 204.
\textsuperscript{239} Viola, \textit{Peasant Rebels under Stalin}, 48.
with evil and immorality. Punishments dealt to local authorities who inflamed peasant resistance, such as that given to Kovalev for poorly managing the removal of church crosses in Shumyachi, did not appease the peasantry nor end excesses.

Fighting ‘cultural backwardness’ was one of Stalin’s primary goals, but in a specific way. He wanted to mold the countryside into a submissive, productive workforce that was loyal and void of religion. In this the state failed considerably. The fear and repression tactics they used to push against religion did not motivate peasants to work harder. The continuous work week failed to take hold in the villages that still retained their holy days. As noted earlier, rumors of the antichrist and ‘mark of the beast’ deterred some peasants from joining the kolkhoz, and other resistance strategies were used once they had joined. Religious holidays were liberally utilized to avoid work. Peasants celebrated all manner of religious holidays, including pre-Christian holidays, sometimes celebrating up to 180 a year. Local officials were reluctant to attack these excessive holidays, and some even participated in the holidays themselves. The biggest cultural transformation was in the practicing of religion, which went underground. Rituals that had previously been pillars of faith ended due to the lack of churches and priests. Confession became less common as peasants either had no priest to hear their confession or the peasants worried the priest was a spy for the OGPU. In Ukraine in 1928 “clergy of every denomination, including Mennonites, Lutherans, Muslims, and Jews, worked as informants” and were listed on the party’s payroll. Some religious ritual elements remained visible in the countryside. Pilgrimage to sites of miracles, keeping of icons and baptism continued despite

\[240\] Stalin, “Dizzy with Success”; Viola, Peasant Rebels under Stalin, 56.
\[241\] Yerokhin, 85.
\[242\] Fitzpatrick, 206-207.
\[243\] Kizenko, 193.
efforts made to end the practices. Wanner notes the biggest modifications made by the Soviet state were “altering the power and ability of religious institutions to affect governance;” however, “new objects, places, practices and symbols became revered as sacred and were integrated into noninstitutional, often improvised, experiences of everyday religiosity.” Religious practices adjusted and went underground, but did not disappear, and the peasant culture had been altered, but not in an economically productive way.

A large part of what lead to the failure to modify peasant culture to Stalin’s vision came from the failure to correctly perceive peasant women. One speaker at the Sixteenth Party Congress confirmed that women played the “most advance role” in opposition to the collective farm. In official reports sometimes women were noted as the instigators. However, their involvement was discounted and not viewed as a threat to the state. Communist officials still believed the faulty 19th century image of the peasant woman as a *baba*. They saw an ignorant, foolish, stubborn, hysterical woman susceptible to the dangerous influence of the ever conniving kulak. As such, she was rarely held accountable for her actions; when criminal charges were pressed they were not accused of counterrevolutionary crimes (which held harsher punishments) as men committing similar crimes were. Further, the state believed education was the solution to these outbursts. Here a partial success for the state can be seen. Women literacy rates prior to World War I were dismally low. In the Simbirsk and Penza regions only 3.8% of women were literate, and the highest rate for women’s literacy was in the

244 Wanner, 9.
246 Davydov, 82. Cherkasov, 84. Yerokhin, 85.
247 Frierson, 164
249 Viola, “Bab‘i Bunty”, 190.
250 Farnsworth and Viola, 137.
Kuban province with 47%, an extremely rare finding.\textsuperscript{251} By 1926 the overall literacy rate for women was at 35% and grew significantly to around 70% by 1939.\textsuperscript{252} However, education did not equate to a drop in religiosity, the result the state expected as seen in the 1937 census.

Peasant Women’s Goals

The female peasantry had its own agenda while fighting to preserve religion. One peasant woman’s experience encapsulated the desires of many religious peasants:

\begin{quote}
My parents always went to the church; they took me along and taught me to pray and live according to God’s laws. But Stalin did not like God’s laws. In 1929 our church was destroyed totally by the communists and the place where the church stood was ploughed by the anti-Christ. I never stopped believing in God and praying. Although later I had no opportunity to go to the church, I prayed at home all the time and taught my children to believe in God and pray...

I taught my children to live as my parents taught me, that is, to be religious, honest, industrious, dutiful, etc. I am of peasant stock, my husband is also of peasant stock; I grew up on the farm, I liked farming. I like our rich Ukrainian land and I wanted my children to be peasants too and live according to God’s laws as our parents lived.\textsuperscript{253}
\end{quote}

They were fighting to retain their way of life and culture.\textsuperscript{254} Religion was sewn into the fabric of peasant culture and formed the basis of their world view. Survival was a preeminent goal, but eternal survival of the soul was as important as staying alive on the earth, so limits were placed on the religious adaptation they could allow.\textsuperscript{255} Ingrained in all Judeo-monotheistic religions, which encompass most if not all of the Russian peasantry, is the emphasis on the temporary nature of this life and the permanent nature of an afterlife. In order to have a good afterlife,

\begin{itemize}
\item Dunn, 171.
\item Fitzpatrick, 226.
\item Farnsworth and Viola, 138.
\item Viola, \textit{Peasant Rebels under Stalin}, 46.
\end{itemize}
proper beliefs and actions had to occur. These ideas were particularly embedded into Orthodoxy.\textsuperscript{256}

With the inability of men to actively resist without severe repercussions, peasant women stood on the frontlines protecting the souls of the peasantry. The peasantry also traditionally desired to maintain a level of autonomy from the central government.\textsuperscript{257} The peasantry was used to a remote master with village affairs and daily workings left up to their own devices. The intrusion by Soviet officials into the internal workings of the villages was unwelcome. Decrees directed at peasant culture and religion aggravated many peasants’ sense of infringement, and some middle and wealthy peasants sought to regain what control they could.

Peasant Women’s Successes

The short list of successes of peasant women had a major lasting impact. Their success came from preserving religion. Intermittently they would score a minor victory in forcing the reopening of a church or saving a priest from arrest, but this was rare.\textsuperscript{258} The peasantry found ways to adapt under the new order without sacrificing what they believed would provide them with eternal life; these adaptations were necessary for survival and they made it harder for the government to target religion. By finding ways to continue practicing and teaching religion, it was mainly the peasant women who ensured the prolongation of religion and the protection of adherents’ souls.

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{256} Heretz, 22. Viola, \textit{Peasant Rebels under Stalin}, 66. \\
\textsuperscript{257} Viola, \textit{Peasant Rebels under Stalin}, 22. \\
\textsuperscript{258} Fitzpatrick, 62; Viola, “Bab’i Bunty”, 198.
\end{flushleft}
Individual villages occasionally would successfully protect their church, holy site or priest. After one priest was arrested as a kulak during the formation of a kolkhoz, the village women created an uproar that broke up the collectivization meeting and forced the officials to let the priest go.\textsuperscript{259} Elsewhere 200 peasant households responded to their church’s icons being destroyed by activists by resigning from the kolkhoz. However, the dramatic decline of churches during the years of collectivization shows that these successes were rare indeed.

Continuation of religion was the greatest success of peasant women. No statistics are available immediately after collectivization, but the census of 1937 illuminates the great success in preserving religious belief. Over 56 million people declared belief in the census, and likely many more believers remained silent due to fear.\textsuperscript{260} That equates to 57% of the population over 16-years-old willing to risk pronouncing their belief. The older generations were more likely to claim belief, but still 45% of people in their twenties were believers. Further evidence of the continued strength of religion was provided by the resurgence of church attendance during and after World War II. Under German occupation churches reopened and, after land was retaken by the Soviets, the churches continued to be left open. The fact that Stalin retreated and shifted policy toward the Orthodox Church during the war in order to garner support and soldiers reveals the success of believers.\textsuperscript{261} After the war one religious man recalls:

The thing that was interesting was in 1946 you went into the church you noticed that at least 70% of the people were young people. I remember there was a very big religious holiday in August and there were many young people there, little ones too, and I saw

\textsuperscript{259} Fitzpatrick, 62.
\textsuperscript{260} Fitzpatrick, 205-206; Velikanova, 17.
\textsuperscript{261} Harvey Fireside, \textit{Icon and Swastika: The Russian Orthodox Church under Nazi and Soviet Control} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 33.
them cross themselves and bless themselves and worship, even though it had been a long time since religion had been practiced openly. Everybody knew how to do it. 262

Women were the primary religious teachers in the villages, and the main reason religion survived. As the story shows, children had been taught in secret religious traditions and customs. This was a carefully crafted form of resistance women believed was necessary for their families well-being both on earth and after death. 263 In public, women allowed the image of the baba to explain their resistance. However, Viola shows that women’s resistance was not irrational or as spontaneous as officials reported. 264 Officials failed to understand, or try to understand, the explainable concerns and fears peasant women held that led to resistance. Further, officials did not recognize that an increase in literacy did not equate to a decline in religiosity. Protestant sects, who greatly increased their believers during collectivization, were popular amongst the highly educated portion of the population as well as the peasantry. 265

Converting to sects and other forms of adaptation also enabled women to successfully preserve religion. While continuing practices required for the protection of souls, like baptism, they allowed other traditions to fall away. Making do with the resources at hand, women helped religion evolve into a more pliable system better able to withstand the assault from the Soviet state.

Peasant Women’s Failures

264 Viola, “Bab’i Bunty,” 199.
265 Fitzpatrick, 206.
Many of peasant women’s ambitions were unfulfilled. Stalin desired to change the countryside, and although the peasants were sometimes able to modify the transformation, the countryside was forever altered. The peasants’ goal of retaining traditional culture was untenable in the USSR under brute force and modernization. The attack on the church structure alone ensured that many peasant practices would have to be changed due to a lack of buildings. The Kuibyshev region had 2200 religious structures before the revolution and only 325 by 1937. The dramatic closure of churches was accompanied by a drop in priests. Dekulakization claimed many priests and clergy. Global modernizing forces, particularly secularization, also eroded traditional peasant culture. Believers could not continue their traditions as they had in the past. Collectivization also permanently changed the culture of the peasantry. Peasant autonomy was gone and was replaced by government officials presiding over a bureaucratic system of soviets and kolkhozy. The Proletarian dictatorship dragged the peasants along by Stalin’s vision of progress and forced them to adjust.

Peasant women restricted the ever-reaching power of the Soviet state in terms of internal beliefs. The Soviet state was unable to control the thoughts and beliefs of the peasantry, its most important goal in the war on religion. It succeeded in public realm of destroying churches and pushing religion underground, but ultimately reached its limits of power and could not eradicate religion even after the third and fourth waves of Soviet religious attacks. Younger age groups were less religious, but as Harvard interviewees recounted, many found faith later in life, especially during World War II. The peasantry found strength in subverting the state’s ideal cultural modification, but was unable to retain autonomy. Many

266 Pospielovsky, 66.
women succeeded in preserving religion through transmitting to younger generations beliefs, values, and traditions, but had to do so secretly. This seems especially impressive as other families chose not to educate their children in religion to secure a successful future in the atheistic state. Though we cannot measure the effectiveness of faith transmission at home, the resurgence of religion in Perestroika demonstrated that the religious undercurrents were not broken in Soviet Russia and religious belief did not vanish even in the fourth Soviet generation.
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

Unlike the first wave of religious persecution in the USSR focused on the Orthodox Church’s hierarchy, the second wave of attacks from 1928-1932 targeted all believers. Striving to obliterate religion in an attempt to mold peasant culture to Stalin’s vision, the state used education and oppressive measures to try to control every aspect of peasant life. Additionally, external modernizing forces, like mobility, technology, secularization, etc. further disrupted the traditional culture of the peasantry. The state succeeded in dismantling the church structure, but failed to completely control the peasants’ thoughts and beliefs.

Peasant women’s strategies of opposition reflect the methods of the weak and disempowered in confrontation with a powerful state. An examination of primary sources has shown how peasant women exploited the state’s misunderstanding of women and were able to adapt to the pressures issued by the state and secularizing forces; these sources have proven that women in their positions as fighters, mothers and teachers were a leading reason for the strength of religious adherence amongst the peasantry prior to World War II.

The primary defense of religion was led primarily by peasant women, who were viewed by the state less threatening than men, and who were less likely to receive punishment for their opposition. The resistance methods women utilized reinforced each other and were fueled by local officials’ actions. Overzealous cadres frightened and angered many peasants leading to rumors and gossip couched in religious language. Miracles and signs affirmed divine control and reiterated the rumors of apocalypse and final judgment, validating the peasants’ religious worldview. Turning to sects and superstition provided religious bonds and a transcendental
outlet for beliefs. Occasionally, some peasants’ anger boiled over when the state closed churches, removed bells or arrested priests, and riots or violent mobs emerged, justified by religious rumors. However, passive resistance dominated the forms with which peasant women chose to resist attacks on religion. Of these, peasant women teaching their children religion that was the cornerstone of continued religious belief. The Bolshevik attacks bent on destroying religion ultimately failed, and were followed by a brief interlude before resuming during the Great Terror in the late 1930’s. After the startling revelations of the census of 1937 which included the question about religion, the state suppressed the census and ordered many of those involved with the issuing and collecting of the data to be arrested. In 1939 a new census was taken omitting any questions of religion. Many believers refused to participate, or named God as the head of their household in protest.267 The third wave of religious attacks ended in World War II when Stalin recognized his need for the Church’s support in raising troops and in preventing sympathy for the invading Nazi army.

The second wave of antireligious campaigns from 1928-1932 was a continuation of an unfolding battle between the Bolshevik state and religious believers. Through utilizing government documents, personal documents and oral histories, I have demonstrated the role peasant women had in the resistance against these campaigns. I also demonstrated that despite the near obliteration of the institution of the church, the religious beliefs of the peasantry endured.

267 Fitzpatrick, 206.
EPILOGUE

AVENUES FOR ADDITIONAL STUDIES

Scholars have recently contributed significantly to the field of peasant resistance in the USSR, but the historiography of women and popular religion during the Stalin era is greatly lacking. My research helps begin filling in this gap, but there are several potential avenues branching off of my work. Exploring further the evolution of women as pawns to leaders in resistance against the state from the early stages of the revolution through Stalin’s reign would provide better understanding of the impact women had and how they utilized newly acquired legal rights. Another possible direction is analyzing the differences and similarities in religion between the cities and the villages. The last study I believe would be highly valuable: investigating the psychological and/or ideological reason for the failure of the anti-religious campaign. There appears to be a psychological need the population had that was filled by religion and not by anything the communists offered. Other programs pushed by Stalin such as collectivization and industrialization, were met by resistance, but eventually took hold. This did not happen with religion, and the question is why? These and other studies would greatly contribute to the growing works on Stalinism and might hold fascinating new suggestions about the Soviet people.
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