“Nothing Could Happen to a Grandmother”:

Religious Veneration in Discourses of Subjective Dissent during High Stalinism

The University of Chicago

A paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the Master of Arts degree in the

Master of Arts Program in the Social Sciences

By

William Sweek

August 2024

Table of Contents

Mastery of four elements gladdens the heart,

but human freedom has set up a fifth.

Is not the dominance of space denied

by the chaste lines of this created ark?

Osip Mandelstam, "The Admiralty," *Black Earth*

What is this—a policy of leading the collective farm, or a policy of disintegrating and discrediting it? And what about those "revolutionaries" —save the mark—who begin the work of organizing an artel by removing the church bells. Remove the church bells—how revolutionary indeed!

Iosef Vissarionovich Stalin, "Dizzy with Success," *Problems with Leninism*

Abstract

This thesis began with a pair of testimonies collected by the Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System in its effort to interview Soviet refugees in the United States and Western Europe during the decades immediately following the Second World War. During the Stalinist 1930s a combination of economic, educational and cultural reforms reshaped the Soviet Union. They came with a shocking human price. Some of the most seminal anti-Soviet thinkers matured under the rule of Iosif Vissarioniovich Stalin, yet this paper's focus is on the social milieu in which authors like Vassily Grossman and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn developed. To better understand the ideological and cultural environment within which the most vehement defenders of Stalin's victims developed their thinking, this thesis seeks to clarify a single, small cultural foothold through which ordinary citizens were able to repurpose elements of Stalin's Bolshevism. By engaging with this particular cultural phenomenon as it was expressed by refugees of Stalinism abroad, I will illuminate some of the ideological richness of that regime's discontents often reduced merely to nostalgia or bitterness and offer readers a tool with which to better understand the *mentalité* of High Stalinism.

Introduction

When asked by an American interviewer in December of 1950 about his experience with religion as a child, a school director from Munich responded, "I have more religion in me than any priest has."[1] This man had begun life as a peasant in the USSR, before moving to the city to complete a university education in the mid-1920s. He is unnamed in the file later typed up by his Harvard University interrogator, who had been commissioned as part of a project begun by Harvard to create an ethnography of Soviet refugees and emigres. The respondent, our middle-aged school director in Munich, makes a careful point of asserting two aspects of his personal philosophy that might catch the reader's eye. First, that his religion is distinctly and fully his own, something he holds within himself regardless of religious or state institutions, a "higher grace and a higher freedom."[2] Second, he firmly asserts that the virtue and value he associates with religion originated from his mother: "My mother wanted to be a humble person. She did not want me to offend people, she wanted me to pray to God." The moral reverence for the matrilineal inheritance of personal religion expressed here by this Munich school director provides a glimpse of the ubiquitous theme of subjective religious memory in the study of Soviet subjectivity. In fact, this man's quip about his highly personal religiosity is a good clue for understanding both this respondent and the memory he shares of the 1930s with so many other discontents of High Stalinism.

To what extent did the coincidence of religiosity and motherhood provide a social code for discontent? In order to answer this question, one needs to look back at the early years of Soviet totalitarianism. In the 1930s, Joseph Stalin was pioneering the methods that would elevate the Bolshevik party to one of the most distinctive examples of mass cultural mobilization

[1] Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System, Schedule A, Volume 5, Case 61, 25.
[2] HPSSS, Schedule A, Volume 5, Case 61, 26.

achieved by any modern or postmodern state.[3] During these years—marked for long decades in Western historiography by famine, purges and terror—Soviet citizens faced an ultimatum: become participants in a new civilization and fashion themselves into the New Soviet Man, or become implicated in the backward and undesirable culture of the previous centuries.[4] It is with these individual self-fashioning citizens that this thesis will explore various persistent connections between motherhood, religion and dissent.

Gender and religion overlapped in the psyche of Soviet dissidents to the extent that their coincidence in the language of dissent became a source of moral authority stored within the individual, enshrined in the family, and safe from the State. As David Hoffman notes in his monograph *Stalinist Values*, the Bolshevik Party under Stalin was just as invested in the fashioning of a new Soviet Man as it had been under his predecessors: "Stalin's government sought to instill socialist values in all members of society and to transform human nature itself."[5] Hoffman ties this phenomenon to the USSR and Russia's Enlightenment heritage, a fact of which he argues the Bolsheviks were acutely aware. Scholars of the Stalin years continue to return to the question of how individual citizens understood their relationship to the State and its civilizing mission, a debate which continues in part because of the Bolsheviks' own investment

[3] "I am going to argue that culture's function went beyond that. Whether consciously or unconsciously, the ideal that stood before the country in the 1930s was an aesthetic state, a *Kunststadt*… the connection between the aesthetic and the political can 'form values, "aesthetic morals," through which such a people sustain and elaborate their social and cultural unity.'" Katerina Clark, *Moscow, the Fourth Rome: Stalinism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Evolution of Soviet Culture, 1931-1941* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011), 12.

[4] "This self was made an object to care about, to reflect upon, to perfect. Peasants who became workers who became Communists started for the first time in their lives to think and write about themselves, to care about the possession and development of an individual self." Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia : A Study of Practices. Studies on the History of Society and Culture* (Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 199), 5-6.

[5] "Moreover, to characterize Stalinism as a retreat from socialism and a return to prerevolutionary ways is to ignore the Stalinist leadership's continuing commitment to social transformation and the creation of the New Soviet Person. In addition to its policies of industrialization, urbanization, and modernization, Stalin's government sought to instill socialist values in all members of society and to transform human nature itself. This attempt at social and human transformation contrasts sharply with the social conservatism of tsarism; it represents a particular Soviet version of the more general Enlightenment impulse to remake and improve society." Hoffman, *Stalinist Values*, 3.

of energy in monitoring participation and ideological commitment. The overlapping social codes of religious moralism and motherhood were often mobilized by Soviet citizens in the effort to fashion a protective mask, or second self, used to hide their private identities.[6] Here, then, lies an entry into the various memories of the Soviet cultural ecosystem, as well as the historiography of the modern state itself.

The role of religion in the Soviet psyche was complicated by the fact that, before the Bolsheviks, the czarist stance on the church was nearly as forceful as the Bolsheviks' was hostile. Respondents recall an unwavering, unquestioning assumption on the part of the imperial state that religion would be accepted and followed without hesitation, a testimony reflected in the centuries of brutal subjugation of religious minorities and sects on the part of the czars.[7] The Bolshevik application of a Marxist—and eventually Marxist-Leninist—understanding of religion was not revolutionary in its extreme nature, though the Soviet state's methods of enforcement were several degrees more intense than what had preceded them. In emigres' memories that repression takes on a distinctly unpleasant character, as they recall aggressive reeducation campaigns and punishments leveled at anyone who observed or outwardly demonstrated their belief in religion. The change brought by the Bolsheviks, particularly during the Stalin years, was to introduce a level of force into the suppression of religious observance that was generally unforgiving and destructive.

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[6] My use of the word mask is rooted in Jochen Hellbeck's *Revolution on My Mind*, specifically his discussion of Stepan Podlubny's 1930s personal diary. Note here his assessment of the two questions Podlubny threaded through his life in the 1930s, which dovetail with Hoffman and Clark's conceptions of self-fashioning and fitting the individual into the larger project of Soviet society. "Two contradictory questions marked his life throughout the 1930s: Could he successfully mask his alien identity and escape the punitive gaze of the Soviet regime? And, in the longer term, could the wolf turn into a sheep?" Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary Under Stalin* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009), 166.

[7] For more on the extent of Imperial Russia's efforts to propagate Orthodox Christianity, even in its most peripheral regions: Nicholas Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); Aleksandr Etkind, *Internal Colonization: Russia's Imperial Experience* (Cambridge, UK ; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2011).

Victoria Smolkin's narrative of the to and fro between Lenin and his underlings even during the Russian Civil War is valuable here.[8] Smolkin highlights the nuance of Lenin and the Bolshevik Party's view of religion, both as an obstacle to revolution and a potential catalyst of popular resistance to Bolshevik policy: "Yet even as Lenin cast the church and clergy as political enemies that needed to be neutralized, he continued to caution against aggressive antireligious action among the masses."[9] The source of Lenin's caution was in part the excitement with which Bolsheviks took to requisitioning and destroying church property, both within and without the law. While Stalin expanded the persecution of the clergy enormously in the Purges of the 1930s, the Party fought against the opium of the masses on the home front with the League of the Militant Godless and the constant attentiveness to intellectually inculcating the Soviet self against belief. Hoffman summarizes this well: "Stalinism offered a means of self-fulfillment—a means… of participating in the world-historical task of building socialism, and of discovering and cultivating the best qualities within themselves."[10]

In the narrow space between the threat of being labeled a dissident and being pushed to reconfigure one's psyche in accordance with the Bolshevik party line, the home became a point of tension. As the double burden placed on women as child bearers and workers grew and grew, it was most often the grandmother who stepped into the role of educator: "Of these additions to the family, the most usual is the grandmother, in the villages more often the husband's mother and in the cities either the husband's or the wife's mother."[1112] One has to acknowledge the work

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[8] Victoria Smolkin, *A Sacred Space is Never Empty : A History of Soviet Atheism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 2-3, 31-37.
[9] Smolkin, *A Sacred Space is Never Empty*, 29.
[10] Hoffman, *Stalinist Values*, 33.
[11] H. Kent Geiger, *The Family in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 201.
[12] Occasionally the grandmother was explicitly granted maternal authority: "These circumstances result in the development of a pattern previously mentioned, the grandmother who is assigned the role of mother. A striking example is reported by the young son of an army officer and party member… : 'I spent my whole day with my grandmother. In fact, I called her "Mother."'" Geiger, *The Family in Soviet Russia*, 311.

of Nancy Ries, who sharply observed the following phenomenon in a story she heard of a grandmother hunting for sugar: "Family members told it again and again to their friends and acquaintances: '*Babushka ushla i ne vernulas"* … through this tale's telling and multiple retelling, *Babushka* was sacralized."[13] The Russian, above: grandmother left and did not return. It is easy to imagine the potency of this sacred, invulnerable grandmother outliving this anecdote, and perhaps preceding it by several eras.[14]

The connection of Soviet self-fashioning to questions of buy-in or rejection of Soviet State Socialism has been well explored and tested among scholars of High Stalinism. Hoffman and Clark both contribute to my approach to Stalinism as both a decade and civilization: the former classifies Stalinism as a consistently state-socialist civilizing project, and the latter frames the state as an aesthetic ideal whose subjective morals gave citizens a language for situating themselves as members of a state and a culture.[15] Elizabeth Wood's monograph, *The Baba and the Comrade,* gives much-needed context for what Marx, Lenin and the Bolshevik State framed as the Woman Question. In order to make clear the perception of women in discourses of religious and moralistic dissent, we must first understand their role in the Revolution, the State's narrative of the New Soviet Woman, and her own experience of Soviet propaganda. Wood argues that Soviet women—at first inert party subjects less threatening than men—were made responsible for the state building process, eventually achieving a somewhat unexpected degree of

[13] "Grandmother walked out and did not return." Nancy Ries, *Russian Talk: Culture and Conversation during Perestroika* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997), 53.
[14] Ries suggests that the potency of the religious Mother of God (*Bogomater'*) is worth acknowledging. "By far the best known, best loved and most poignant of icons in the Russian Church were icons of the virgin.…What I am suggesting, rather, is that a certain sacred stance has endured in Russian culture: a stance of saintly acceptance of suffering, which appeared in its most intense forms in kenotic practices, and of which the Virgin has been the highest emblem." Ries, *Russian Talk*, 150.
[15] Again, Clark's *Kunststadt*. See also, in Clark: *Petersburg: Crucible* and *Soviet Novel*.

political power.[16] Methodologically, Wood's work approaches gender history from the top down, focusing on Party policy and its outcomes.

These approaches become even more appropriate when combined with the work of two more scholars of the fashioning of the Soviet self, Oleg Kharkhordin and Stephen Kotkin. For Kharkhordin, the Soviet citizen was in constant dialogue with his or her state, a state that "by making continuous efforts to emphasize the practice of self-perfection, the Bolsheviks intensified the relation to the self among Party members, and then among the rest of the Soviet citizens."[17] Kotkin, meanwhile, is interested in the process of actively living Socialism; further, he argues that, given the absence of a call for counterrevolution, Stalinism has to be read on the same continuum as Leninism insofar as they adhere to Soviet State Socialism. By extension, so must all the "little tactics" he isolates as both survival mechanisms and methods of identity-forming under the perceived gaze of the Stalinist State.[18] Further, he arranges methods of identity-forming as intimately connected to enacting and performing state power, especially at the interpersonal level.[19] Finally, Victoria Smolkin's *A Sacred Space is Never Empty* lends some immediacy to the question of religious language, insofar as the interests of the Bolshevik State

[16] "On the level of rhetoric the regime insisted on the fundamental identity of goals for males and females… On the level of institutions this study argues that the Bolsheviks created the women's section of their party only reluctantly in response to competing pressures from other political organizations… yet this organization, once created, began to take on a life of its own." Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade,* 4.

[17] "This self was made an object to care about, to reflect upon, to perfect. Peasants who became workers who became Communists started for the first time in their lives to think and write about themselves, to care about the possession and development of an individual self." Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual,* 5-6.

[18] Kotkin argues first that by maintaining its construction as an antifascist bulwark, the USSR did not perform a great reversal, and Bolshevism maintained an agenda for the "politics of everyday life." Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (University of California Press, 1995), 6.

[19] Note too Kotkin's assessment of what bottom-up, individualized history means in the study of Stalin's USSR: "As Foucault has argued, studying power relations at the micro-level hardly means ignoring the state. At the same time, however, he has repeatedly demonstrated that power is not localized in the central state apparatus. This holds true even when there is thought to be no separation between the spheres 'state' and 'society,' as was the case in the USSR… mechanisms of power—such as mutual surveillance and self-identification—will be shown to exist alongside state machinery, on a much more ordinary level, yet to sustain the state just as effectively as its primary institutions." Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain,* 23.

itself are concerned. If Kotkin and Kharkhordin are correct in their assessment of socializing under Stalin as state-connected, and Clark and Woods are correct in their understandings of the aesthetic state and women as state builders, then Smolkin's argument needs to be woven in here as well: for Soviet Communism, religion represented, above all, an obstacle to its monopoly on political, ideological and spiritual authority."[2021] Smolkin allows us to finally connect religion to the dichotomy of citizen and State, illuminating a moral battleground in which the citizen and State struggled over the possession of moral authority.[22]

This conversation in Soviet historiography tends to prioritize individual subjectivities, social concerns, and methods of survival when uncovering trends in the trajectory of the USSR, rather than the other way around. The method employed in this paper is ideographic and highly personal, piggybacking on the Soviet focus on the individual in order to better understand the cultural history of longer periods, inspired in large part by Robert Darnton's work. Where scholars like Wood and Kotkin show us how to understand the relationship between Bolshevik identity and the Soviet State, my focus will be on moments of emotion in the Harvard Project's archives, testimonies, and primary sources. My attention to emotion is motivated by Darnton's analysis of jokes as in-roads into cultural analysis.[23] In a set of archives that consist largely of respondents relating their subjective experiences of life under Stalin—taken down by interviewers with varying levels of experience with the Russian language and a heady mixture of

[20] Smolkin, *A Sacred Space is Never Empty*, 2-4.
[21] "Ideological indifference" – "Atheism, then, was a mirror that reflected Soviet Communism back to itself by forcing it to contend with the significance of religion for the Soviet project over the course of its historical development." Smolkin, *A Sacred Space*, 5-6.
[22] This paper's goal is to add maternally informed religiosity to the debate over Soviet subjectivity. That debate has to be acknowledged. Two more scholars, Anna Krylova and Eric Naiman, built on the discussion between Kotkin, Halfin and Hellbeck, in their respective articles: "The Tenacious Liberal Subject in Soviet Studies," *Kritika* 1, no. 1 (Winter 2000); "On Soviet Subjects and the Scholars Who Make Them," *The Russian Review* 60, no. 3 (July 2001).
[23] Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 78.

1950s political biases—some of the only moments of clarity one can locate are expressions of emotion. Humor, rage, sorrow, resignation, irony, pride, and disdain are all of great value to a reader of Soviet testimonies: when a respondent cannot help but express a derisive comment about how he may have more religion within him than any so-called priest, a critical reader cannot afford to look away.[24] That kind of neglect for human identity in these old interviews, so often muddied by the influence of their creators, ought to be considered avoided if at all possible.[25]

The reclamation of moral authority through a gendered religious vernacular represents a distinct turning point in the bottom-up perception of Bolshevik totalitarianism, as it allowed citizens to beat the Bolsheviks on their own terms, manipulate language and reframe social relationships to reclaim dignity, authority and community. The paper's execution lies first in a relatively straightforward examination of the HPSSS based on a set of keywords: religion, priest, moral(s), ethic(al/s), mother, grandmother, family. The limitations of the Harvard Project are serious, yet the isolation of emotion softens the blow of using testimonies collected with a CIA-generated questionnaire.[26] The Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System is a digitized collection of just over seven hundred interview transcripts conducted with Soviet refugees in the early years of the Cold War. Though this disambiguation is more a set of guidelines than what one might call a strict rule for separation, the HPSSS interviews are categorized by schedule:

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[24] The Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System, Schedule A, Volume 5, Case 61, 25.

[25] The Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System is a brilliant but fraught resource. David Brandenberger, in the guide to the HPSSS, offers this regarding the CIA-funded questionnaire: "HPSSS interviewing also subscribed to a rather crude set of assumptions about modernization theory that tended to conflate the idea of technical, legal, social and cultural progress with westernization.… HPSSS assumptions about modernization also occasionally imbued project interviewers with rather simplistic notions about Soviet governance ("despotism") and state-society relations ("us versus them"); they also led interviewers to endorse characterizations of Soviet cultural underdevelopment ("primitive," "backward") that today seem reminiscent of the colonialist syndrome of Orientalism." David Brandenberger, "A Guide to Working with the Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System Online" (Harvard: 2020), 15.

[26] *Ibid*, 14-17.

Schedule A is composed of general interviews, while Schedule B interviews are topic-specific. As a source it is rich, yet complicated to engage with: it both provides a unique level of highly personal data, extracted verbally, that functions towards analyses of early Soviet—particularly Stalinist—culture, politics, warfare, education, and social subjectivities.[27] Yet, these are pulled from refugees: people who loathed the Soviet Union enough to flee alongside retreating Wehrmacht troops.[28] Generally speaking, such interviews are fantastic for more personal historical work, but more complicated when making structural arguments. The HPSSS is susceptible to this too, as its respondents are disproportionately ethnically Slavic, not to mention perhaps one of the most anti-Soviet demographics in any archive you could choose.[29] The use of Russian as a *lingua franca* exacerbates this ethnic skew further.[3031] That having been said, it still

[27] Gibson's "Minutes of History" applies all too recognizably to the HPSSS: "However, the foregoing analysis should caution us about reaching any conclusions about what arguments were not presented. Thus, the most that can be said is that, so far as we know, the suppression that began earlier continued on the twentieth." While the HPSSS' interviews are more grounded in one particular way than high-speed meeting minutes—they almost totally avoid ephemeral talk—they are conducted across at least one language barrier, and the questionnaire was heavily influenced by a 1950s CIA. So, Gibson's rule of never trying to infer what was "not presented" is crucial. David R. Gibson, "Minutes of History: Talk and its Written Incarnations," *Social Science History* 4, no. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Fall 2022), 666.

[28] Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System, Schedule A, Volume 31, Case 306, 50.

[29] "According to the 1939 Soviet census, Russians accounted for 58% of the population, Ukrainians–16% and Belorussians–3%." From HPSSS Guide: This Slavic preponderance skewed the HPSSS sample, leaving many individual Soviet peoples underrepresented and compromising the survey's ability to inform issues concerning the non-Slavic population of the USSR as a whole. This shortcoming stemmed in part from the demographic makeup of the former Soviet refugee population in central Europe between 1950 and 1951. That said, it was exacerbated by the HPSSS team's reliance on Russian for the vast majority of its interviewing." David Brandenberger, "A Guide to Working with the Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System Online" (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020), 14.

[30] The HPSSS Source Guide is a brilliant resource, and one I should have been told to read more carefully when I was first assigned to work with this archive. Brandenberger offers this regarding the CIA-funded questionnaire: "HPSSS interviewing also subscribed to a rather crude set of assumptions about modernization theory that tended to conflate the idea of technical, legal, social and cultural progress with westernization… HPSSS assumptions about modernization also occasionally imbued project interviewers with rather simplistic notions about Soviet governance ("despotism") and state-society relations ("us versus them"); they also led interviewers to endorse characterizations of Soviet cultural underdevelopment ("primitive," "backward") that today seem reminiscent of the colonialist syndrome of Orientalism." Brandenberger, "Guide," 15.

[31] "The interview process itself typically paired ex-Soviet subjects with western-educated academics or graduate students. Some interviewers appear to have spoken Russian quite fluently and may have had a limited knowledge of Ukrainian and Belorussian; others appear to have had a more halting grasp of these languages." Brandenberger, "Guide," 16.

provides the alert and informed user with accounts and information that is more proximate to daily life in the NEP and High Stalinism that is hard to achieve anywhere else.

There are a total of thirteen Harvard Project respondents surveyed here. The list was selected based on response content, and as such, the demographic makeup of the group is occupationally and sexually diverse, but ethnically mostly Eastern European; when Great Russian is marked, we cannot be certain that the interviewer is very discerning when it comes to the ethnic diversity of even what the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic contained, not to mention the rest of the USSR. Most of the men below were in the army, but not all, and the technical education among both men and women ranges from middle school, to Soviet officer school, to special art school. One man, a Russian radio operator, is identified by his interviewer as General Chuikov's personal radio lieutenant; a Ukrainian woman, now living in the United States, had a career as a commercial artist. The respondents' family backgrounds also range from worker, to white collar, to pre-revolutionary gentry, and even to what Harvard calls rank-and-file intellectuals. So, the thirteen cases consulted below are by no means a representation of all the people of the Soviet Union, and neither should they be: rather, they display the potency of an idea across a range of educational, military, civic, economical and familial backgrounds. The real value of this list lies in the diversity of relationships these respondents had with the Soviet state. It is the range of occupations and families that allow us to examine the consistency of the idea of maternal religiosity among nurses, radio technicians, artists, farmers, cartographers, engineers, lawyers and housewives, whose families ranged from class-conscious workers to the often vilified gentry or peasants.

The attention paid to religion by so many different Harvard Project respondents tells us that we ought to take seriously the discontents of Stalinism when they say that the religion their

grandmothers and mothers taught them is necessary to the functioning of almost any good society. Religiosity was a persistent and crucial piece of Soviet subjectivity. Inherited from pre-Revolutionary grandmothers by Soviet youth across Stalin's empire, belief remained a ubiquitous piece of the era's subjective memory: it lived on in the respondents of the Harvard Project, who both accepted and competed for the family as a crucial ideological battleground. The choice to make religion matrilineal, not to mention retrospectively optimistic, reflects the cumulative effect of destruction wrought by the Purges, forced collectivization and the Second World War. In addition to combining religious sensibilities with an enduring, almost sacred grandmother figure, they brought religion into questions of hypothetical, idealized utopias. This genealogy of early Soviet subjective religiosity allows us to examine not only the competition for spiritual authority, but the evolution of the new Soviet person that endured and outlived Bolshevik totalitarianism.

The Religious Tone of Discontent

The truism alleging a certain invulnerability among grandmothers might catch the eye of several different kinds of observers. An unaware or untutored skeptic might reduce this statement to an expression of the kind of peasant superstition so common in both internal and external stereotyping of rural Russia. A well-read skeptic would ask if this statement is based on the respondent's experience of reality, or a practiced habit of making oneself sympathetic to one's interrogator against accusations of party disloyalty or political dissent. While the second of these two hypothetical skeptics' views is much closer to the truth, we know that the historiography of Soviet subjectivities under Stalin's regime involves a great deal more subtlety than simple questions of whether someone is telling a truth or a lie.[32] To understand the deliberate force behind his comment regarding his grandmother's enduring strength, we have to understand not simply what was said, or why he said it, but how he said it.[33][34]

Whether from the brutality of the Soviet state, the sabotage of enemies within, or misfortune of a more abstract, general nature, the alleged invulnerability of the grandmother offers a wealth of information about the respondent herself and the legacy of the Stalinist 1930s. The young woman interviewed in Schedule B, Vol. 15, Case 108 was born in rural Belarus, and worked as a *sovkhoznik* until she was captured and enslaved by the Third Reich's *Ostarbeiter*

[32] In point of fact, one might caution against such a truth-lie binary precisely because it restricts reality with some of the same crudeness as Stalin's own security forces.

[33] In drawing this distinction I echo Kotkin, Darnton and Kharkhordin, to establish the following conditions: first, that Stalinism was actively lived by the citizens of the USSR, not simply impressed upon them; second, that respondents in the Harvard Project are doing more than neutrally describing reality, but using language in a far more potent manner; third, as Darnton uses the cat massacre to describe channels of power that travel in myriad directions between state and subject, so too may we understand this discourse of claims and recollections not as superstition or nostalgia, but as echoes of a highly involved socio-political system that allowed its citizens, under the state's strict control, a great deal of power regarding the shaping of themselves, their lives and their political future.

[34] In mentioning the unusual or outsized potency of language in Stalin's Soviet Union, I refer to the thinking displayed by the following passage and author. "In a Communist society *langue de bois* has the monopoly of intellectual formulation, and we should not under-estimate the advantage it derives from that. In a society where so much is unsaid, what *is* said has extra weight." Françoise Thom, *Newspeak: The Language of Soviet Communism* (London: Claridge Press, 1989), 79.

program, an initiative promoted by the Reich to enslave captured Eastern Europeans in heavy manufacturing. She was interviewed in 1950 in Munich at age twenty-seven, at which point she had married and had two children outside of the Soviet Union. In recalling her upbringing, she describes a set of competing beliefs and philosophies in the home, offering the following example of a father and son:

> The son is going to defend his opinion and say that he understands the question more correctly. But the parents are going (to insist on) their opinions. (Q.) It could be different—each one of them can remain with his own opinion—it depends on the society--in the Soviet schools religion is not taught. It plays a great role in what society the son is in. If the son was at home—well, the father would never talk with his son about politics—this is dangerous, but he can talk about religion and the son can agree with him.[35]

Note the hyperbole: the father would "never" talk about something so "dangerous." Admittedly, in the Stalinist context perhaps the second is not hyperbole. For B.15.108, there is a persistent tension between state and home, both in the terms of childhood development and the way the society itself behaves and functions. It is in this discussion that the comment about her own mother and grandmother appears:

> (Q. Wasn't it dangerous to talk about religion?) Yes, of course, it was. For instance my mother never taught me religion, but my grandmother did. Nothing could happen to a Grandmother. Grandmother always talked about how well she lived before. For five kopeks it was possible to live and not be hungry. It seemed like a fantasy to me.[36]

Here we can explore the driving force behind B.15.108's comment. One can observe a roughly proportional relationship between the scarcity of language and its potential effect on the lives of those who use it; this excerpt ought to be read with the same attention to B.15.108's remark. Her assertion that nothing could happen to a grandmother is situated specifically during her

[35] HPSSS, Schedule B, Vol. 15, Case 108, 13.
[36] HPSSS, Schedule B, Vol. 15, Case 108, 13.

childhood in the 1930s, while her grandmother was teaching her a particular form of religion at home. This is the only use of the word religion in the whole transcript: unlike other respondents further on, she does not spend much time talking about conscience or God.[37] This veneration of her grandmother sticks out in part because it is in a relatively isolated series of questions regarding religion, but also because in that small section it is unique. It seems it was worth it to B.15.108 to cut through the hypothesizing regarding education and politics not only to foreground her grandmother—a choice perhaps more easily explained psychologically than historiographically, though I am not necessarily eager to do so—but to assert that even in the 1930s under Stalin, nothing could happen to a grandmother. The conditional mood—nothing *could* happen to a grandmother—is of some real import here, as in using such language B.15.108 is making a claim not about her grandmother, but about the category of grandmothers. While it would be rash to ascribe too much determinative power to so broad a statement, B.15.108's statement tells the reader that this woman in her late twenties cared a great deal about asserting her grandmother's role in Soviet society, and was invested in using her grandmother to understand society writ large, of which her grandmother was one particularly dear part.

The case of B.15.108 in establishing the ubiquitous attention to religion among Stalinism's discontents requires further support, this time from Schedule A, Volume 15, Case 305. This respondent was a thirty-two-year-old Ukrainian man who had been imprisoned after serving in the Red Army, and he was interviewed in December of nineteen fifty in Salzburg. Described as a "rank-and-file intellectual"—note the somewhat amusing Harvard Project phrasing—he was born to a white-collar working family and educated at the Institute of Military

[37] She mentions God in the immediately preceding lines, yet regarding her own personal philosophy she leaves it alone. "A child has to have some kind of religion "Without God you even get to the rapids, but with God you will reach the sea"—[*Bez Boga ni do poroga a s Bogom khot za more*]—then he will feel secure, he will not break the windows [that is, he is not going to be a delinquent]." HPSSS, B.15.108, 13.

Engineers.[38] A.15.305 offers a brilliant anecdote from his years at the military institute, echoing the sensitivity to religion that defines the family recollections of B.15.108:

> At the institute we used to have questioning sessions, when all the students and all the professors would meet and the students were permitted to ask any questions they wanted to [sic] the professors. At one of these sessions, a student got up and asked this particular professor, who was a very good fellow and whom everybody liked, "Do you believe or not?" The professor was very much embarrassed, but he found a way out. He answered the student, "Believe in what?" Of course, everyone knew what the student had in mind, and the professor did, too, but everyone was afraid to come right out and say it. So the student had to reply, "In anything." Then the professor replied, "Yes, I do believe in something very much—in science." Everyone's heart stood still until he made that answer. At heart everyone in the Soviet Union remained religious [sic] in his own way. Perhaps his religion was not what the church would have demanded, but he was religious just the same.[39]

Note the emotion with which the respondent asserts that "hearts stood still" following this question. This not only presents a curious glimpse of the emotional clarity with which this respondent remembers his school years, but also a valuable claim regarding the nature of the Soviet 1930s. Quoted in its entirety, the anecdote offers an example of the stakes of even raising the question of belief in a classroom, particularly a military one. Yet, the respondent also clarifies that belief was already on everyone's mind—evidence to this point provided by the intensity of the consternation felt by the motionless students surrounding him—and still affected the way his classmates and colleagues interacted with their instructors, and by proxy, the Soviet state. The assertion that the Soviet citizen "was religious just the same" has pervasive and potent implications: it is A.15.305's contention that no matter what the Bolsheviks taught their subjects, they still had a theistically calibrated epistemology, processing new information about politics and life in "his own" religious way.[40] As with the previous respondent, the point is not

[38] HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 15, Case 305, 1.
[39] HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 15, Case 305, 36.
[40] HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 15, Case 305, 36.

necessarily to take this literally, but to extrapolate the kind of energy that would motivate this respondent to make such a sweeping claim; far from simply an observation about Soviet society, this is a critical and aggressive argument regarding the efficacy of Bolshevism as a whole.

What makes A.15.305's claim about religiosity in the minds of his classmates even more striking is his description of the household that produced, in his case, a sharp attentiveness to religious thinking. Working backwards from the anecdote from the military institute, the family is described once again as an ideological battleground between competing philosophies and generations. The line of questioning that prompted A.15.305 to think back to his school days had to do with family, and while he begins with a comment about his grandmother, the point of his comment here seems to be the tension between his mother and grandmother and his father, another trope relatively common in the Bolshevik era.

> My grandmother was quite religious, and my mother was, too… my mother kept ikons in the house and frequently prayed. My father always told her that she should not make her children cripples. He said she should let her children be like everybody else, not handicap them by making them religious. He understood that a person could not carry out his religion in Soviet conditions.[41]

The language of this passage is harsh, in particular the use of a word like *cripples*, yet it offers much-needed context to understand the respondent's attitude towards the episode at the military institute. As he relates it above, religion was one generation closer to him in his childhood years, yet so too was the accompanying tension between observance and the Soviet state's program for its subjects: the memory of the father's use of a word like *cripples* is striking, as it hinges upon a definition of religion that adheres to the Bolshevik party line. This also demonstrates an enormous amount of energy on the part of both parents: with the mother, resisting not just the state but her own husband, as with the father driven to great agitation at the idea of his children

[41] HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 15, Case 305, 36.

failing as members of society as a result of the intellectual handicap of religion. The outcome of this upbringing in the case of A.15.305, was a calm, wide-ranging assertion that almost everybody around him thought about the world in a religious fashion—they chose to "believe in something very much," in his professor's words. This contrasts with B.15.108's sensitivity to religion: spilling over the banks of the personal, A.15.305 is pretty confident in making a claim about the way society functioned when he was a student in Stalin's USSR, and he seems to have seen some kind of religion—which he tells us his mother and grandmother kept alive—in almost everything around him. Indeed, this is a man whose house was torn regarding belief, and who had the capacity to be extremely skeptical of those around him.[42] The emotions with which he describes his father's language and the classroom episode betray a persistent attention to belief, brought with him through the war and out of the Soviet Union.

Two more examples provide still more insight into the way respondents in the Harvard Project seemed to think through belief and religiosity, either in their day-to-day lives or in society in general. One of these examples comes from the responses of a young woman, again twenty-seven, interviewed in Munich and born in a large city. Schedule A, Vol. 21, case 431 worked as an interpreter during the German occupation until 1943, her family described as "rank-and-file intellectual, pre-revolutionary gentry."[43] Her testimony echoes a mixture of the same experiences with religiosity at home and in public as the previous two cases: recalling her father, she felt sure that while she did not ask him about such things, she knows "that he believes and I would say that he believes profoundly." When asked of her own beliefs, she simply says "I

[42] Note the respondent's description of the effect the question of belief had on his class, on 36, as well as his reaction to the reopening of the churches: "In 1941, when the churches were reopened, I did attend church with pleasure, even if it was only to see what it was like. I enjoyed the celebrations of the religious holidays. I do not know whether God exists in the way that religion teaches us, if there really is a person who lives in the sky and guides man's life, but I do know that going to church is restful, like going to the theatre, although in a different way. Religion is food for the spirit." HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 15, Case 305, 37.
[43] HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 21, Case 431, 1.

have always believed."[44] While her insight is not necessarily dramatically different from the other cases above, it is the circumstances of her religious observance that demand our attention:

> My great-aunt lived with us and so did my grandmother on my mother's side. My grandmother always lived with us for half of the year and both my aunt and my grandmother were religious. I was a member of the Komsomol and yet went to church with my grandmother in 1937, in 1938 and 1939. She was blind and I could always say that I had to lead her since she could not go to church by herself, but we had to go quite a way, because this church was a cemetery chapel on the outskirts of the city.

Here there is less intellectualizing of the relationship between grandmother, mother, aunt, daughter, and belief in a higher power, yet the lengths to which A.21.431 went in order to observe are quite striking. Even with the excuse of caretaking, she went far above and beyond the call of duty to find herself in a church, specifically in the final three years before the Great Patriotic War. Journeying to and from the outskirts of the city, coming up with a set response for authorities who might question her and her grandmother's behavior, and the ability to make a habit of this for three entire years illuminate a surprising reality; even in a large urban area during one of the ugliest phases of Stalin's regime, A.21.451 was able to make a point of religious observance, despite potential consequences.[45] Further, another factor complicates A.21.431's particular case: she was a Komsomol member, a committed participant in the Soviet social system. Perhaps this gave her the very privilege to take her grandmother to church; perhaps it subjected the pair to outsize scrutiny compared to *kolkhozniki*, *sovkhozniki,* or other non-Komsomol members. Either way, her membership in such an institution put her far closer to the state apparatus, and made her a far more active participant in Soviet urban society. While she spends less time conceiving of religion in a structured or systematic fashion, her engagement

[44] HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 21, Case 431, 21.
[45] Consequences, of course, varied: see Lynne Viola in her monograph on the *bab'i bunty*. Lynne Viola, *Peasant Rebels Under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996),* 220-240.

with it during the latter half of the 1930s is of particular note, since at a fundamental level it would have been enormously risky. Indeed, while she may have observed the conceptual contradiction between the Komsomol and her religious habits, she seemed comfortable allowing the two to coexist in her daily life.

One final respondent, Schedule A, Vol. 32, Case 176, exhibits another kind of attentiveness to religion, specifically the kind that flourished in the GULag. I include it not to distract from the more uniform list of respondents examined above, but to illustrate the reappearance of religiosity in a manner that only partly overlaps with what we have seen so far. Additionally, A.32.176 represents a sizable demographic among Soviet believers that simply demands acknowledgement, and to which I will return. A.32.176 was interviewed at age fifty-seven in Rockland County, New York, having made it all the way to the States after the war. As of August 1951, the date of his interview, he had been living in New York for twenty-one months. For one thing, he is closer in age to the parents of many of the other respondents. Additionally, while he may have had a far more biased memory of the early Soviet era, he was also far more mature when Stalinism became a part of his social reality.

First, A.32.176 recalls the same tension between Soviet citizens and belief in the home: "Because God was excluded from the family life. Man without God cannot have a clear conscience and good will to help and love others."[46] Casting aside the more dramatically religious second phrase, the exclusion of God from the family, as this respondent puts it, fits neatly alongside the conflict produced in the home lives of other respondents by Soviet anti-religious programming. Earlier in his testimony, he also recalls a multigenerational tradition of religious instruction in the home, though in his case this is owed in large part to his having

[46] HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 32, Case 176, 21.

descended from village elders.[47] Moving further, A.32.176 describes the following phenomenon in his prison camp. After being imprisoned for refusing to become an NKVD informer, the respondent chose an extended stay in the wastes of Siberia as punishment. When asked about Siberia, he offered the following image:

> In Siberia we gathered in the wood, prayed, and sang religious songs. In the morning, when there was no opportunity to pray, we sang religious songs while going in lines into the wood. The guards did not forbid us to do that because they knew that our religious zeal could not be suppressed.[48]
> [49]

While the question of the guards' rationale is probably worth asking, and probably not totally answerable, the energy he expends above on presenting his somewhat idealized version of GULag religiosity offers far more valuable data to readers. A.32.176 demonstrates a persistent adherence to the kind of religious behavior that presented great risk to him, especially lacking a Komsomol membership or a disabled grandmother to take care of. This is not to hint at some creeping argument about the staying power of religious fervor against all odds, but rather to illuminate A.32.176's alertness to a particular understanding of religion while remembering the unpleasantness of the 1930s: it is the idea of religion that captivates him specifically when retrospectively examining these troubled years. We ought to pay close attention to how this respondent rehabilitates a treasured image through subjective memory, as it will continue to inform the insights of other respondents. This kind of enthusiasm—admittedly shown here in a more extreme case—gives a sense of the range of religious subjectivities, not to mention the less predictable overlaps in the ways Soviet refugees conceived of and characterized religiosity.

[47] HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 32, Case 176, 17.
[48] HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 32, Case 176, 17.

The Gender of Religious Inheritance

Let us return now to that original comment made by the young woman from Belarus in Schedule B, Volume 15, Case 108. Other cases corroborate her tendency to gender the inheritance of her religious practices and ideals, yet as mentioned above, the truth value of a claim like this in the context of one of history's most repressive state regimes has to be treated with more subtlety and care. In order to grasp the potency of maternal imagery in the survival of Soviet subjectivities, one must be able to navigate the competing influences on the politics of Stalin's memories. It is certainly tempting to extrapolate a great deal from the general assertion that, during the Stalinist 1930s, nothing could happen to a grandmother. Using the approach to Bolshevik ideology and language in practice visible in the work of Oleg Kharkhordin, Stephen Kotkin, and Françoise Thom, one is able to understand more power behind the language of these Harvard Project respondents than simply truth and non-truth; after all, the Bolsheviks taught millions of people who had never been able to use the written word that language, like realist art, was a tool that could manipulate and mold the world into a utopia. It is not unreasonable then to wonder as to the intent behind the persistent tracing of religiosity through the maternal line, especially if done so with a particular emotional bent.

The burden shouldered by the women of post-revolutionary Russia took a tremendous toll, yet it produced some unexpected social and cultural outcomes. In her comprehensive study of the culture of peasant resistance during forced collectivization, Lynne Viola examines the *bab'i bunti*, which were peasant revolts during forced collectivization led by and composed almost entirely of women.[50] Viola's description of the ugliness of the state's attitude towards

[50] Also used in Woods' monograph, *The Baba and the Comrade*, the word *baba* used for women demands attention. *Baba* is technically a conversational shortening of *babushka*, the word for grandmother, yet colloquially it is a harsh derogatory term of opprobrium for old, superstitious, cantankerous and troublesome older women (see also *starukha*/старуха). Used by Soviet authorities first, it was intended to describe a group of women that were too

women, particularly in the agricultural communities deemed "backward" by Stalin, is worth noting.[51]

> In the mid-1930s, collective farm women Stakhanovites faced persecution, beatings, and even rape by relatives and fellow collective farmers who resented their activities. A woman activist risked doubly violating village norms by breaking ranks not only with her community but with the subordinate role expected of her by other peasants.[52]
> [53]

The political and social risks faced by women protesters in these brutal years illuminate the context in which the Harvard Project's respondents choose to make such comments as "nothing could happen to a grandmother." The previous decade had already established a high standard for the investment that the USSR demanded of its women, both in the workforce and at home. The violence they faced when they pushed back against this was often proportionately horrific. Yet, Viola notes as well that the women of the *bab'i bunti* occasionally ran into curious leniency, albeit often from an understanding of their protests as feminine hysteria.[54] Viola's examination of a Soviet Supreme Court case in the village of Belovka offers a good example of how these protests often proceeded. She notes that the *kulak* instigator of the riot was ruled by the court to have been the exclusive instigator, having manipulated the women who made up the majority of the actual demonstrators: "The women were viewed as no more than naive dupes of the local kulaks … The soviet's failure to work among the women and prepare them for the new policy

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intellectually incapable to be reeducated or punished with the hope of improvement, and as such had to be shepherded around and placated to avoid any further inconvenience.

[51] "To slacken the pace would mean to lag behind; and those who lag behind are beaten … Russia … was ceaselessly beaten for her backwardness … For military backwardness, for cultural backwardness, for political backwardness, for industrial backwardness, for agricultural backwardness." Quoted in E. Waters, "The Modernisation of Russian Motherhood, 1917-1937," *Soviet Studies* 44, no. 1 (1992): 123.

[52] Viola, *Peasant Rebels Under Stalin*, 228.

[54] "Wiser officials, or those who knew something of village women, hid out or ran away, waiting for the babii bunt to run out of steam or the men to take control of their women." Viola, *Peasant Rebels*, 190.

transformed them into ammunition that the kulak could fire at the Soviet regime."[55] In this way, the women of the USSR found a way of exercising an unexpected and occasionally underrated power in resistance to Stalin's collectivization, even in the face of the brutality that was often employed by battalions of state enforcers.

Let us return to the occasions in which the Harvard Project respondents mention the father, either as an authority figure or a source of a recognizable patriarchal home-based power. The father's stipulated power in the home is no surprise, not least of all because of the way the State itself participated in the discourse of gender roles, fatherhood, motherhood, and the fashioning of good communists by both parents and the enormous, avuncular leader of the Soviet Union: Stalin himself. Indeed, at the tail end of the 1930s and the outbreak of the Great Patriotic War, women in the Soviet visual vernacular became even more ubiquitous than during the Five-Year Plans, the NEP or the Revolution itself. One need look no further than the classic *rodina mat' zovyot*—the Motherland calls—and the war-oath she carries with her, wrapped modestly in a hooded red cloak and silhouetted against a forest of raised, bayoneted rifle barrels. Yet, the connections drawn in the Harvard Project between mothers and the state are far less patriotic; even moments of suggested martyrdom are sprinkled few and far between. The way the refugees of the Stalinist 1930s discuss their mothers, grandmothers, and aunts is reverent, yet it is not as a symbol of Stalin's motherland or the conscientious young Soviet woman in the almost equally famous *ne boltaj* poster. Perhaps it would be fair to say that these respondents associate the maternal with an ideal, yet it is often not the state they fled, nor even a discrete political entity. It

[55] Viola complicates the relationship between the women of the *babii bunt* and their alleged ideological ringleaders, noting that Petro Grigorenko, in a memoir, describes the *bab'i bunty* as a tactic. Women would "initiate opposition to the collective farm or other policies and the men would remain on the sidelines until the local activists attempted to quell the disorder. At that point, the more vulnerable peasant men could safely enter the fray as chivalrous defenders of wives, mothers, and daughters rather than as antisoviet podkulachniki." Viola, *Peasant Rebels,* 191.

is an ideal world governed by a peculiar hodgepodge of Enlightenment, Bolshevik, and occasionally Dostoyevskian ideals. Yet, it is a world whose contradictions one must tolerate in order to piece together a picture of the *mentalité* among the discontents of High Stalinism.[56]

The image of the maternal appears under various conditions in the Harvard Project's interviews. Schedule A, Volume 27, Case 522 contains an interview with a thirty-eight-year-old Great Russian (the Harvard Project's words): born in Finland to Russian parents, the report supposes that he was lieutenant colonel in charge of radio communications at the Red Army headquarters of none other than General Chuikov. The report adds that he was "probably during war in charge of radio contact with partisans behind German lines."[57] His recollection of home life centers the religiosity of both his parents, probably a contributing factor to his attitude towards society as a whole: "At home religion was obligatory. Father and mother both were religious, and so was I. Mother taught me religion and at least inwardly I have always kept something of it."[58] Curiously, while A.27.522 is on the more religious end of the spectrum than, say, the *komosmolka* from one of our other cases, yet he still asserts that the teaching of religion, of which he has never let go, came from his mother. In light of the propaganda that regarded Soviet citizens as builders of good new communists, this kind of assertion ought not to be taken lightly.[59] Here, A.27.522 is pretty confident that his mother was indeed instrumental in his

[56] Note here Elizabeth Waters' gloss on the image of the mother in the early Soviet Union. "Ironically, it was in these years of extreme hardship for mothers that their image was adopted by the political iconographers. In a society living under extraordinary pressure, in constant flux, the sense of continuity offered by the maternal image, its suggestion of intimacy and solace, had therapeutic possibilities. With the disappearance, one after the other, of those institutions mediating between the family and the government-political factions, voluntary organisations, (relatively) independent unions and press, and the zhenotdel (women's department)—the iconic conflation of mother and motherland, family and state served to humanise and legitimise the party." "The Modernisation of Russian Motherhood, 1917-1937," *Soviet Studies* 44, no. 1 (1992), 124.
[57] HPSSS, Schedule, A, Vol. 27, Case 522, 1.
[58] HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 27, Case 522, 13.
[59] I think specifically of Kharkhordin's work here: "By making continuous efforts to emphasize the practice of self-perfection, the Bolsheviks intensified the relation to the self among Party members, and then among the rest of the Soviet citizens… This self was made an object to care about, to reflect upon, to perfect. Peasants who became

education, yet in a manner that went completely against the grain of Bolshevik messaging. Moving further, he ties his mother's teachings to far more broad arguments regarding the behavior of citizens in an ideal society, Soviet or not. When questioned regarding the functions of a relatively vague ideal state, in the report's "Philosophy" section , A.27.522 responded as follows:

> The government must not influence the church. (Probe A.) No, why should it? Let everybody believe in and pray as he wishes. (Probe C.) No, this is not part of the State's functions. For that you have the parishes and church organizations. (What about anti religious [sic] propaganda?) It should not be permitted if it acts against the church directly. Rather than propaganda, let anybody do as he pleases, including disbelief.[60] [61]

Herein lies the really substantive implication of the respondent's comments about religion in the family. Evident in his language and the nature of the standards he sets for his social philosophy—asserting that disbelief should be just as free and available as belief, and that prayer ought not to be bound by rules or language—the respondent seems not to be wedded to the way he was raised, but perhaps to the ability to raise children in that manner or various others. However, he is no anarchist, and maintains that the church ought to be protected against anti-religious propaganda. Indeed, his mother's teachings may have left quite a strong impression on him, so much so that while he appreciates disbelief and separation of church and state, the ideal society as expressed by A.27.522 is in fact a religious one. Moreover, this respondent is not so critical of his peers and classmates to relegate everything to a religious epistemology: rather, he

workers who became Communists started for the first time in their lives to think and write about themselves, to care about the possession and development of an individual self." Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual*, 5-6.

[60] HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 27, Case 522, 29-30.

would prefer that the kind of religion his mother taught him be far more popular, ostensibly to everyone else's benefit.[62]

Indeed, the figure of the mother-as-teacher appears several more times, though not always specifically ensconced in the domestic space. One respondent understood the question as regarding retrospective intellectual development, framing her own progression towards a religious aversion to the Soviet social system according to moments shared with her mother and grandmother. Schedule A, Volume 25, Case 501, a woman of twenty-seven, was interviewed in Stuttgart, having become a nurse after her time in the Red Army. She and her family are both described as rank-and-file intellectuals; while A.25.501 avoided arrest, an unnamed family member is listed as arrested or imprisoned. A.25.501 recalls only one moment at church during her childhood years, when her grandmother took her somewhere between 1929 and 1930.[63] Indeed, she presents a sequence of events between her childhood uncertainty regarding religion and her spiritual clarity as an adult: "In general I resolved the question in favor of God… Of course much after." Her narrative is as follows:

> When the Germans came the churches were opened and I remembered my grandmother. Then I could see everything more consciously. Then I talked to my mother about it. (And before?) Before I was little concerned about it. Life was filled with other things, friends, lessons, I could not give a final answer to that, Besides it was not fashionable to talk about it. I can only ask certain questions to my mother.[64]
> [65]

[62] Another respondent offers an almost mirror image of this series of conclusions. "Religion is a matter for each individual. Let each one do as he pleases. (How did you personally feel toward religion?) Since I have studied a lot of natural sciences, Darwinism for example, the teachings of religion and teachings of science seem to me to be mutually contradictory. So I am a partisan of science, not of religion. What is your opinion on this? (I explained it.) But I believe that believers should have full freedom to visit church and baptize their children, complete freedom." HPSSS, Schedule A, Volume 29, Case 611, 48.

[63] "When grandmother lived she took me once to church. This was in 1930 or 1929. Then as a child you don't think much about it. When the Germans came the churches were opened and I remembered my grandmother." HPSSS, Schedule A, Volume 25, Case 501, 25.

[64] HPSSS, Schedule A, Volume 25, Case 501, 25.

In the case of A.25.501, there is a clear explanation of her progression towards anti-Soviet religiosity, and it is discernible in the matrilineal record. She remembers her grandmother, and ties this directly to a more "conscious" vision, adding that her mother was one of her only other sources of answers regarding subjects "not fashionable" to discuss in public. She describes other details that contribute to this narrative of her past: her father was neither religious nor godless, her mother kept an ikon hidden in her locker; and until she was first taught Darwin in school, A.25.501 remained "convinced of everything" her grandmother taught her. Yet, the ambiguity of her personal philosophy was not actually resolved by her living grandmother, but by the memory of this older woman. This is the narrative that becomes the driving force of her adult life and her Harvard Project testimony. Crucially, it is this respondent's subjective narrative, as her grandmother and her Soviet education were in close competition until she remembered the former's place in the years during and following the German invasion of the Soviet Union. She selects her grandmother and her religiosity from that morass, lifting her out and using it as an interpretive code for the world around her.

The level of complexity with which respondents tie their religiosity to matrilineal inheritance varies somewhat, although the connection remains consistent. A young Belorussian man, twenty-two, also former Red Army but from a peasant background, was interviewed at an unnamed location in Schedule A, Volume 18, Case 345. His testimony regarding his personal tie to religion comes across as somewhat more straightforward. When asked about his family life, he describes his parents as "very Orthodox," as well as his grandparents.[66] He adds, "At school they taught us to be against God. But at home mother taught me God. She taught me to observe the religious holidays."[67] For A.18.345, the answer to his religiosity is just as clear as for our

[66] HPSSS, Schedule A, Volume 18, Case 345, 14.
[67] HPSSS, Schedule A, Volume 18, Case 345, 14.

previous Stuttgart nurse, perhaps with less retrospection and certainly with a more overtly religious household and upbringing. Indeed, he goes on to describe the place of religion in society in curiously selective terms: "They must believe in religion and not in sin."[68] In the immediately previous pages—part of a question-and-answer section regarding the workings of the respondent's ideal society—he argues that there should be no agitation against religion, that the state ought to have the right to criticize but not abolish churches, and that of course, believers and nonbelievers are perfectly capable of coexisting.[69] In point of fact, A.18.345 is not as concerned with the lineage of his religious beliefs as he is with their application. The product of his upbringing, his inheritance and his apparently persistent belief is a view of how religion ought to be handled by a society distinctly at odds with the Soviet social system; more to the point, the respondent ties this to the fervor of his mother's belief in the ikon episode with perfect candor. The clarity with which he remembers an anecdote regarding his mother's treatment of a portrait of Stalin is yet another clear example of the same kind of memory-rehabilitation we have seen from the other Harvard Project respondents:

> (Did you have an ikon in the house?) Yes, but they came and they tried to make us throw out the ikon and hang Stalin's picture in the corner instead of having God's picture there. But mother took Stalin's picture and threw it on the ground. They grew angry but my father explained that she was old and nervous and wasn't really responsible for her actions.[70]

Crucially, in the testimony of A.18.345, it results in a strikingly similar tone of dissatisfaction with Stalin's Soviet state; it also gives a perfect cross section of the ideological battleground in which religion and the State jockeyed for position. Here, the replacement of the mantlepiece of a religious *ikon* with a portrait of the country's leader is a clear demonstration of the state asserting

[68] HPSSS, Schedule A, Volume 18, Case 345, 26.
[69] HPSSS, Schedule A, Volume 18, Case 345, 24-5.
[70] HPSSS, Schedule A, Volume 18, Case 345, 14.

not just social and political power over its citizens, but spiritual power as well. Yet, we can also take A.18.3485's mother's resistance in that ideological battleground as a favorable result, an attempt to recapture and reinforce her household and herself in the face of subjugation.

Two final testimonies contribute to the image and tone of gendered, inherited religiosity among the respondents of the Harvard Project. Those are the testimonies contained in A.16.308 and A.12.149. Both are men older than many of the other cases mentioned above. A.16.308, forty-three, was interviewed in Salzburg, and had been a government-employed screenwriter and cameraman. In point of fact, he had received the Stalin Prize and his picture had been printed in Pravda. Both he and some unnamed members of his family had been arrested or imprisoned. A.16.308 describes a persistent tension between the education he received at home and what he received at Soviet technical school: his parents were monarchists, apparently, yet he wanted an education, and pursued a reasonably functional Soviet life. He never applied for the Komsomol, as his parents would have "expelled" him from home.[71] He seems relatively blasé about the extreme nature of parents' and grandparents' ideology, however, claiming that they lived their lives waiting out the Soviet regime and trying to fly under the radar as best they could. A.16.308 notes that there was little conflict regarding his participation in the society they so dearly wished would someday fall, and that his parents offered him the freedom to pursue a university education. It is in the description of his own family that he switches to religion:

> My mother taught me most about religion, and there were never any conflicts, but at that time it was impossible to say anything in favor of religion, as this would be very dangerous.… The child's grandmother told him to be religious. My wife, and this was the big tragedy, was of a completely different background, and her grandmother had a colossal influence upon her, and this was tragic because this grandmother was a convinced Communist.[72]

[71] HPSSS, Schedule A, Volume 16, Case 308, 16.
[72] HPSSS, Schedule A, Volume 16, Case 308, 17.

Even in the case of Soviet socialism, A.16.308 ties ideological inheritance to grandmothers, despite the disagreements between he and his former wife that ended up driving the two apart. Perhaps his relationship with communism and religious belief is of a particularly emotional nature, yet the data he offers is still worth preserving. For A.16.308, a religious ethical education is crucial for his son and children in general, and he cements this moral inheritance in his childhood memories of his mother. Indeed, he is willing to generalize the idea somewhat, spilling the banks of his own family structure.

The final case for this section is that of A.12.149, a fifty-seven-year-old man interviewed in Munich, also imprisoned at one time or another, and at the time of the interview working as a lawyer. His age is of particular interest to us, as his birthdate in the late nineteenth century would have made him a teenager and a young man during the Revolution; it also makes his testimony somewhat more extreme in its tone and ideology, as he remembers singing in church choir with his father and wishes that all the people of the Soviet Union could live as they did before the Revolution.[73] Of more specific interest is the comment he makes regarding his own religion: "I would like to bring them up in the same spirit that my mother taught me," which he describes not only as religious, but "to be honest in all their actions."[74] For A.12.149, this is not limited to an abstract question of an idealized childhood education system, but a direct response to what he saw as one of the chief problems that arose in the early Soviet Union, which he describes as follows:

> In the Soviet Union, parents do not give their children a proper upbringing. They cannot, because the children are drawn away from their parents and are taught to consider their parents enemies and to hate them if they hear them say anything against the regime.[75]

[73] HPSSS, Schedule A, Volume 12, Case 149, 49.
[74] HPSSS, Schedule A, Volume 12, Case 149, 49.
[75] HPSSS, Schedule A, Volume 12, Case 149, 49.

This description of the home as an ideological battleground seems to be the real driving force behind the use of religion as an educational foundation. Perhaps, it is the means by which A.12.149 engages in subjective dissent, not the ends. In looking back on his own Soviet past and asserting that the particular kind of education provided by religion could mend the ideological and social harms wrought by the Bolsheviks, he is not only rehabilitating the concept in his own past, but in a hypothetical and idealized future society.

Invoking Religious Futures

So, how did the respondents of the Harvard Project think about religiosity within society? How did they explain their belief systems when asked by foreign interviewers, living abroad in western Europe and occasionally the United States? The kind of religiosity that appears across the Harvard Project's interviews with Stalinism's discontents is peculiar not only in its gendered inheritance, but in its highly personal nature, something that sets it apart from the kind of harshly institutional religion of the tsars. The nature of an ideal society—more to the point, the ideal citizen that might inhabit it—that took shape in the interviews above is difficult to parse. Not only is this hypothetical society the product of several ideological genealogies, but it is in direct competition with both the tsarist past of the Soviet Union's myriad territories, and the Bolshevik present of the 1930s. Yet, when one is able to read between lines of the respondents' arguments regarding ethics, religiosity and state policy—or, as can be just as vitally important, to take them at their word—the picture becomes somewhat clearer.

The distance between these respondents and their homeland is valuable in understanding their testimonies of Soviet subjectivity, at least insofar as it drew heightened attention to the Soviet era in retrospect. The men and women interviewed by the Harvard Project were physically separate from their homeland, yet this could make their memories of the Soviet Union and its subjective legacies all the more potent in their recollections. Here, the USSR can appear larger than life. However, because of the kind of regime it was—a regime of repression, but also of revolution, self-fashioning and civil empowerment—it can become a malleable legacy, rehabilitated and reformulated in the words of the Harvard Project's testimonies in real time. Indeed, this kind of rehabilitation is often one of the two things the respondents above are intent

on doing. The second, of course, is the enumeration of the rules and restrictions of a new hypothetical future society. It would be fair to mention that these particular respondents are not hasty to return to the Soviet Union itself, and would rather flee by extreme means and imagine a new, brighter future. However, that does make the tools they use in their social and political imagination of that future any less valuable to understanding their experience of the Soviet past.

One respondent who offers a succinct, if slightly idealistic, answer to the question of an ideal society is the man interviewed in Schedule A, Volume 17, Case 334. Another "Great Russian," married, aged thirty-three, and briefly a sailor, his file interviewer marked him as a "rank-and-file worker," with an intellectual father and a working mother—neither imprisoned—who at some point had been expelled from the Party.[77] A.17.334 presents a relatively uncompromising framework for the relationship between citizen, government, and religion. To borrow his own turn of phrase, he is in agreement with one idea of the Communists:

> That the church should be separate [sic] from the government. But the Communists interfere in it. The church should be quite separate [sic]. In the Bible [sic] it is said that the church should have nothing to do with the government. It can only support the government. With prayers and everything. But it should not occupy itself with politics. Religion should be free.[78]
> [79]

There are a few statements one can pick out here, but the separation for which A.17.334 advocates should not be mistaken for bearing some kind of constitutional dog whistle. The point the respondent actually approaches here is twofold. First of all, there should be a mutual collaboration between church and government, supported by each in all but the legal code. Indeed, the respondent follows on the same page of the transcript with the simple rule that "if

[77] HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 17, Case 334, 1.
[78] HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 17, Case 334, 56.

religion tries to undermine the government then it isn't a real religion." This is neither a constitutional nor an atheistic thought, but an optimized blend of state and religious interests.

Furthermore, the final assertion in this passage—religion should be free—is a distinct observation on its own, having far more to do with citizens themselves than the functions of government. A.17.334 maintains not only that the church and the government ought to deal with their respective problems separately, but that when it comes to belief, "Each person has the right to believe what he wants to.… Every person answers to God in the end. But let every person decide for himself."[80] This is followed by a relatively in-depth schema for assessing ethical and unethical behavior: smoking or drinking to excess, sinning, sacrifice, atonement. Perhaps, for this respondent, this discourse is connected to the anxiety that, "in the Soviet Union man has even lost his conscience."[81] Taken together, these statements point to more than a simple dissatisfaction with the Soviet system—let alone the vigorous religiosity that, of course, has plenty of risk and complications attached to it. Indeed, A.17.334 is describing solutions to these problems, insisting on locating religious ethics at the center of this hypothetical new society.

Another curious example of the enshrining of religious practices, belief or institutions in some vision of a better society occurs in Schedule A, Volume 22, Case 452. A single young Russian man, twenty-seven years old at the time of his Munich interview, A.22.452 was a pilot, educated in aviation school, but was imprisoned after going absent without leave sometime during the war. His opinion of religion's place in society is perhaps more analytical, as he stresses the incompatibility of his own upbringing and his participation in religious practice:

> Faith, religion in general, is very important. Men's spiritual training depend on religion. But a man cannot just sit home and pray. He has to work, he has to arrange something for his own life. But that does not mean that he should violate the laws of the state or of the

[80] HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 17, Case 334, 56-57.
[81] HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 17, Case 334, 57.

> people, and religion teaches him not to violate those laws. (Do you yourself believe in God?) I was brought up in such a way that I do not believe in God. But I consider religion important for the spirit, the morals [sic] of men. It is essential to a normal life.

There is an immediate similarity here between A.22.452, our young former pilot, and the previous respondent, A.17.334. Both of these young men argue that a citizen's religion ought only to exist within the bounds of the government, and that it cannot conflict with the interests of the state; they also both note that religion ought to be an active, highly participatory practice, something citizens can realize in their day-to-day lives rather than simply going to a church or ineffectually praying at home. While at first glance this echoes some of the same anxieties that appear in Bolshevik programming against apathy, from the Stakhanovites to the miles of propaganda, there is something more elemental in this passage from A.22.452. Indeed, this respondent seems to be making an argument for the compatibility of religiosity and a high-functioning civilization, in spite of his own upbringing. He remarks on the following page, "I believe that God exists, but I have had no religious training and I do not know anything about the different religions."[82] Discarding his preferences regarding observance, he is still fairly certain that his ideal society would contain a healthy number of practicing believers, if for no other reason than that without a degree of religiosity, a "normal life" is simply impossible.

Several other cases echo sentiments that seem to support the idea of a separation between a man's religiosity and the state's preferences for his spirituality. In Schedule A, Volume 35, Case 97, the Harvard Project interviewed a thirty-nine-year-old woman living in Philadelphia, who had emigrated to the States from Ukraine and worked for some time as a commercial artist. A.35.97 sounds strikingly similar to the respondents above in one particular passage:

> If one desires to be an atheist, he should have the right to be one. The Church should stay clear of politics and the state should stay clear of religion. If there should be religious

[82] HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 22, Case 452, 55.

> sects which are dangerous to the State and to society, such as are the Dukhobors in Canada, then the State should step in and outlaw them, if necessary, in order to protect the State. The government should support religion, even if only by allowing it to exist. I think that Churches should be supported by the believers alone.[83]

Again, we are reminded that the separation of church and state is of a meaningfully different character than the way it is often understood in the United States: for A.35.97, the two really ought to work in concert, just not legally. Indeed, for this respondent, the key to the church's support is really the individual believer. She notes, following this expression of government and church balance, that "The Church should teach the ideas of truth and understanding. By truth, I mean the socially acceptable concept of usefulness to society as, for example, the concept that all people are basically good and should trust one another."[84] It is worth noting that A.35.97 ties a lot of her ideation regarding religiosity in society to anxieties about the current state of the Soviet Union, and its state at the time of her emigration. Similarly to the respondent above who argued that the Soviet man has lost his conscience, this woman expressed great dismay at the state of Soviet youth: "The Soviet young citizen, in contrast to the Soviet older man, is very arrogant and very vulgar. These two characteristics are the result of the loose education and socialistic upbringing."[85] It seems that here lies some of the energy behind her assertions on behalf of religion in society, either in the Soviet Union or some hypothetical, ideal future. Either way, this respondent fits into the through-line visible among the others examined here: in the search for improvements to the Soviet existence, she draws a connection from the home through religious ethics, to the building of a better society through the activity of the individual citizen.[86]

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[83] HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 35, Case 97, 56.
[84] HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 35, Case 97, 56.
[85] HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 35, Case 97, 58.
[86] From the home: "The government should not interfere with one's private life. No government should have the right to come to my house and search the whole place without a reason. In Soviet Russia, policemen come into your home any time of the night," 55, then continued on 56: "The Church should teach the ideas of truth and understanding. By truth, I mean the socially acceptable concept of usefulness to society as, for example, the concept

that all people are basically good and should trust one another. I held this same philosophy when I was in the Soviet Union." HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 35, Case 97, 55-56.

Conclusion

The persistence of matrilineal religiosity in Soviet subjectivity prompts us to reconsider several aspects of the competing and diffuse memories of High Stalinism. The respondents above engage with the question of belief in a variety of ways, from highly personalized ideas of religious ethics to the relocation of religion in constructing hypothetical new societies. Yet, the enduring tendency of these Harvard Project respondents to repurpose pre-Revolution religiosity using the various frameworks of post-Revolution Soviet politics alerts us to a highly active dimension of religiosity among the populations of Stalin's USSR. When problematizing the behavior of the individual citizen, usually in terms of ethical or moral guidelines, the respondents who invoke their mothers' and grandmothers' religion do so not simply to express negative dissent, but to assert the myriad possible forms of some future society that might succeed the USSR. In other words, they use the Bolshevik language of self- and world-fashioning on their own terms, and the invocation of the gendered religious educator is so very often crucial to this process.

Understanding the mechanics of Soviet memory, both subjective and shared, is necessary not only if one seeks to understand the cultural history of the several Soviet republics, but indeed of the USSR as a whole. The subjective memory-spaces generated by the Harvard Project's respondents should not, and indeed cannot, be reduced to nostalgia or bitterness. Rather, they represent the appropriation of a distinctly Bolshevik ideological toolkit for a subjective and often energetically independent purpose. The former Soviet citizens interviewed in the 1950s by Harvard's scores of interrogators and ethnographers are not interested in expressing simple disapproval or fondness. Often enough the reader faces the opposite problem: conflicting ideological claims and narratives whose logical extrapolations may well end up in direct

contradiction. This, however, is generally beside the point. Instead, the envisioning of new societies made up of a patchwork of Soviet, pre-Soviet and entirely new ideas, points to a new facet of Stalinist civilization: the organic reclamation of Stalin's totalitarian regime's various methods of subjugation. When a Harvard Project respondent asserts that her grandmother was immune from harm, not to mention grandmothers as sources of religious education, we would be wrong to leave the passage at its literal meaning. Rather, it is an example of the respondent idealizing a new and better world for herself and for her grandmother's memory.

The implications of this kind of memory rehabilitation far exceed basic testimonial recollection. As we have seen above, just as many respondents tend to unite the idea of matrilineal religiosity with dissent and ideological conflict as with hard-nosed spirituality. The persistence of the archetypal woman-as-religious-educator points to an equally persistent desire to reclaim that role from the state. This is all the more evident in the consistent overlap between ideas of mother-grandmother religious inheritance and complex ideas for creating new institutions and societies, to the benefit of various competing ideological movements and groups. Once again, the substance of this phenomenon lies not in the ideas these respondents express but in the framework they choose, or better yet, fashion for themselves. This self-fashioning, to which the Bolsheviks returned again and again, reminds one of the Enlightenment's language, yet the product of these competing ideas that appears among these Harvard Project testimonies is something entirely unique and distinct. The expression that nothing could happen to a grandmother is part of a larger and far more forceful argument, the closest approximation of which might be, instead, nothing should happen to grandmothers because they give us the tools we need to build ourselves a new society.

A coda, drawing on our Munich school-director who asserted that he bore more authentic religion within himself on a given day than any priest: A.5.61 and B.15.108 were the first two interviews in which I caught what seemed like a parallel too rhetorically potent to be accidental. Within these two respondents' testimonies a reader may find the pair seizing control over the tools handed down to them by their imperatorial state. That act of ideological reclamation, in the context of Bolshevik political aesthetics, entails both the use of Bolshevik tools and the employment of dissenting ideologies. Indeed, it may offer a useful clause in the definition of what scholars once called *Homo Sovieticus*. If the ideological means outlived the Bolsheviks, even eclipsing their original purpose, then we have gained from these two respondents a clearer vision of what it meant to be a new Soviet person, and which of that person's characteristics endured even the most aggressive and hostile years of Stalin's regime. Finally, we have our sought-after foothold in at least one subculture produced by the Stalinist 1930s. The image of the combined mother, *babushka*, and grandmother, enshrined in the memory of home and a source of mythical wisdom and therapeutic spiritual authority, held tremendous emotional power in the cultural vernacular of High Stalinism. Furthermore, she was of absolute necessity to the respondents of the Harvard Project as they survived Stalin, navigated Europe and the States as refugees, and looked to the future. Perhaps the enduring grandmother animated so fondly in these testimonies outlives those troubled decades to this day.

Appendix

1.

The original Russian text for Osip Mandelstam's Admiralty/Адмиралтейство.

Нам четырех стихий приязненно господство,
Но создал пятую свободный человек:
Не отрицает ли пространства превосходство
Сей целомудренно построенный ковчег?

2.

Original poster: Do not chatter/Не болтай![87]

[87] The original text appears as follows: Не болтай! Будь на чеку, в такие дни послушывают стены. Недалеко от болтовни и сплетни до измены. *Ne boltaj! Bud' na cheku, v takie dni poslushyvajut steny. Nedaleko ot boltovni i spletni do izmeny*. Its literal translation is "Do not chatter! Watch your back, for in such days the walls are listening. Not far from chatter and gossip is the changing of sides." It is worth distinguishing this from the common gloss on "do izmeny"—"borders on treason"—given the fact that the literal translation is an established form of representing physically traveled distance, using the expressions *from* and *up to* in conjunction with the genitive case to express origin and destination. Rather than a distinct border, physical or virtual, I argue that this emphasizes an alertness to something closer to a slippery slope; the suggestion of the poster is really that the same kind of people who gossip and chatter may risk lapsing from unreliability to genuinely traitorous behavior.

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