

‘WE ARE BESSARABIANS HERE’: IDENTITY, TRADITION AND POWER IN SOUTHERN BESSARABIA

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In the last three centuries the multiethnic¹⁰¹ area between the Dniester, the Prut and the Danube Rivers, formerly called Bessarabia¹⁰², has been incorporated in different states (the Moldovan Kingdom, the Russian Empire, Romania and the USSR). Its peripheral location, the lack of a long-lived state continuity, and the failure of policies directed towards uniting people under a national paradigm, have undoubtedly determined the many-century stability of ethnic (and religious) communities¹⁰³ in the area. This was illustrated by the fact that after the disintegration of the USSR, when the region was divided between the two independent countries - Moldova and Ukraine - some of these communities demonstrated their ‘otherness’ by seeking different ways of self-definition within the national paradigm. It suffices here to mention the autonomous regions in the Republic of Moldova: the Gagaouz Republic (Gagaouz Yeri), and the Bulgarian Tarakliiski region, or the aspirations for a special “Bulgarian” status of the Bolgrad area in the Ukraine in the early 1990s.

The present paper concerns Southern Bessarabia, which, after fifty years of Soviet domination (ending 1991) as part of the Odessa district in Ukrainian SSR, has remained within the borders of the independent Ukraine, thus changing its state membership once more. As a border area of the Russian state for many centuries (reflected in the etymology of the name as “near the end”, “at the end”, “at the border”), Ukraine itself today faces new geo-political realities and the need for a new national policy. Despite the previously indecisive geo-political choice (Russia or EU), which seems to have finally been made towards EU after the Orange revolution, Ukraine took an ‘intermediate’ road in the field of national policy. On the one hand it carried out an aggressive national campaign, related to the revival of national symbols and institutions, and the establishment of Ukrainian language, history, culture, etc. On the other hand, Ukraine guaranteed cultural rights, cultural centres and state funding to ethnic minorities, thus ensuring considerable state control over their activities. The successful realization of these policies is a real challenge for the independent post-Soviet state against the background of the difficult transition from authoritarianism to democracy and from a socialist to a capitalist type of economy.

How did these processes influence the ethnic and religious situation in the agrarian multiethnic region of Southern Bessarabia? The question is worth asking, bearing in mind that nationalism (or ethnicisms) is shaped and directed by elites (Gellner 1983). These elites, through national (or respectively ethnic) institutions are able to manipulate the identity of the so-called ‘masses’ by using arguments of real or mostly invented traditions (Hobsbawm, 1983). How did the distance from the centre and the agrarian nature of the area, which suggests a lack of well grounded elites who are needed for the new national paradigm, affect the national, ethnic and religious situation in the region? How are the identities of residents in the small, local multiethnic communities in the countryside of Southern Bessarabia modeled, after decades of Soviet international conception? How much have they been influenced by the new national paradigm? Have the traditional ethnicities¹⁰⁴ and religious identities been preserved? Are new local identities being created out of the changed situation and the centuries-old multiculturalism, as well as from common economic and social interests?

I shall try to answer these questions on the basis of data from a field survey conducted in one of the southern Bessarabian settlements in 1999¹⁰⁵. This survey, as well as a more recent one carried out (on the same subject) in 2005, offers enough material for some theoretical considerations and conclusions. Thus the dynamic processes in Ukraine can be followed in all aspects of the social and cultural life that are inevitably affected by “transition” and globalization.

The village of Mirnoe in 1999: the era of the Bessarabians

A small (1670 inhabitants) multiethnic Bessarabian settlement offers an interesting example of the theory of ‘multiplying’ nationalisms and ethnicisms. In the village of Mirnoe live 70% Russian Old-Believers¹⁰⁶, 21% Ukrainians and 5% Moldavians, Gagauzi, Tadjiks, Byelorussians, Chouvashes and others (Prigarin, 1997). The village is well known for its prosperity in an area that nevertheless experiences the vicissitudes of the transition: poverty, insecurity, lack of law and no real optimistic perspectives. Most of the villages we visited were failures: damaged roads, non-producing collective farms (*kolkhoz*), closed libraries and

cultural centres, worn out and ugly looking houses and public buildings. In contrast, everything was much better in Mirnoe: sufficient food production, a number of social and cultural activities; even new buildings were under construction. The success of Mirnoe, was attributed by the local people to the activity of the Head (*Predsedatel*) of the village collective farm (*kolkhoz*).

The legendary Head – Mihail Ivanovich Derevencha - was only too happy to speak to his old friends from the university and their “colleague from Bulgaria” (the author). As a local “nationalist” he was interested in history and had already promoted and funded a cultural and historical study of the village that was carried out by university colleagues. Naturally, one of the first questions that I asked him concerned the ethnic and religious groups of the village. The answer was significant: “We are Bessarabians here”. The explanation of this neo-ethnonym¹⁰⁷ provides a complete conception, typical of local post-Soviet folklore. This folklore is based on myths from the time of the Cold War and was particularly prominent in Bessarabia during the troubled summer of 1999 when the news about the bombings of ex-Yugoslavia, accompanied by the poisoned water that flowed down the Danube River, meant that people were particularly angry about global politics.

The world conspiracy

The head of the *kolkhoz* explained:

“Everything started during the talks between Gorbachov and the Americans. The design came from the CIA: ‘How to destroy the USSR?’ The answer: ‘From the inside’. The rich countries always create military conflicts and use individual leaders to bribe and discredit. They threw Gorbachov to us and we destroyed everything. What was happening before in Lebanon and in Iraq is now happening in the USSR and Yugoslavia. The Americans are inciting individual countries against each other and then interfere to pacify them. The USA is a world gendarme. Who will be the next one? Such a conflict as in Kosovo can be stirred up everywhere. Separatism, however, will help nobody; the hope that we shall be better independently is never justified. It is the same case with Ukraine trying to operate outside the USSR, Crimea with its separatist aims in respect to Ukraine, the conflict in Chechnya, the case of Kashmir between India and Pakistan and the situation between North and South Korea. That’s why we are Bessarabians here.”

This ‘post-Soviet’ nationalism, filled with an anti-American rhetoric, prevailed among village residents. Ethnic and religious differences were viewed as a potential cause for future conflict, provoked from outside, and were overcome by the means of ethnonymy, even in a wider, “unifying” perspective. “We are Slavs... The Slavs are gypsies... They cannot manage separately. Russia, Ukraine and Belarus must live together.... The Ukraine shall be sold. The same will happen here as in Yugoslavia”, explained a 30-year-old half Old-Believer, half Ukrainian (an atheist), who added in disgust, “And our people want to enter NATO ...”.

Where does this call for unity as Bessarabians, so untypical for countries in transition as well as for the other villages in the area, come from? Why is a non-traditional ethnonym (Bassarabians) used, an ethnonym based on a historical term which has long since been absent from the modern geo-political maps? Where does this devotion to a common Slavic and socialist past and to meta-ethnic terminology come from? What does this pathos aim at? No doubt, the reasons are many and complicated.

The Manager and order in the political, economic and social life of Mirnoe

An explanation offered by the ‘Bessarabians’ and their Head was centered on two words: ‘Manager’ (*hozyain*) and ‘order’ which they set up against the chaos of the transition. The latter is assessed as a period lacking in statehood (in this respect the comparison between the Slavs and the Roma is appropriate, as the latter are a people with no state) and a time of negligence and total insecurity. It is on the basis of the opposition ‘manager/no manager’ that the ethnic communities in the region are characterized: “The Bulgarian is a manager. The Russian Old-Believer is clever, but is no manager at all. With the Bulgarian everything is beautiful. The Bulgarian is a very good house lord: his horse is clean and groomed; the fence of his house is of metal. The Bulgarian villages are the richest in the region. The Old-Believer does not care: he loads his cart, and then he might get drunk and lose it all. That is why the Bulgarian is an owner, the Old-Believer is “so and so”, and the Ukrainian is the worst manager”.

Both ‘order’ and ‘manager’ are synonymous with the head of the local cooperative farm named ‘Friendship’ (very symbolic), without whom, according to the local people, the village would not be the same: “There was no rule in our village: robberies, killings, and the plundering of the churches. Two people were murdered and no one was punished. It is good that the head of the cooperative

farm returned: he is a manager and a man of order. He can hit you and shout at you, but the field will be okay, people will be well, the work will be done", most of the people of Mirnoe told me.

The cooperative farm and its head, Derevencha, have a long history. Derevencha, born in 1935, is an ethnic Ukrainian and a typical 'Soviet personnel'. He is an engineer, a pilot and a reserve major; he graduated from The Higher Communist Party School; and at the beginning of the 1970s he wrote a Ph.D. dissertation "Material Stimulations of Labour in the Cooperative Farms". In addition to that, he is a creative personality: a poet, a writer and a singer and, as I was able to witness personally, an eloquent storyteller. He has a long career in the village of Mirnoe (dating back to 1961): he started as the principal of the school, after which he became the deputy head of the cooperative farm. From 1966 until *perestroika* he was the permanent head and secretary of the village Communist Party. A known innovator, he received 47 "severe party punishments" ("at that time initiatives were punished", he told me), but since the 1980s he led "Friendship" to first place for productivity in the USSR and then "they could not touch me". After "the changes", he was "removed from office" and returned to his native village in the region of Kiev, where he became a successful independent farmer. In Mirnoe, as in most other places, the first years of transition were chaotic: characterized by the plundering of the cooperative farm, a drop in production, and a sharp decrease in incomes. The anxious peasants discussed the crisis and a consensus decided to send a delegation of well-respected Old-Believers who would ask Derevencha to return to head the *kolkhoz*. He accepted. The event, according to the Old-Believers' tradition, was celebrated with a prayer for his health. This started the 'revival' of Mirnoe. The economic problems were resolved: production was restored and the debts accumulated during his two-year absence were paid back. However, his return saw not only a restoration of the previous 'socialist' situation, the challenges of post socialist political and religious pluralism were also met. All party biases were eliminated and a depolarization was chosen: "Why do we have problems in Ukraine? Because all is divided; there are many parties: communists, green, nationalists, and several socialist parties. Also a Democratic Party, a Party of Revival, Agrarian and Peasant parties and so on. There are more than 50 parties... It is the same with the church: several Russian Orthodox churches, several Old-Believer churches, several Ukrainian churches, and sects, as many as you wish! Here the Old-Believers also wanted to be separate, but the people did not allow it ...". The religious situation was solved in a democratic manner: the Old-

Believers remained united around their traditional church, while the Head was personally involved in the construction of an Ukrainian Orthodox Church (no building existed before the changes). He also found a priest for the Church.

Derevencha summarized his economic credo in this way: "The Ukraine used to be in the first place in the world in the export of wheat, milk, butter, etc. Today a clever person sells processed products, the less clever natural raw resources, and the stupid one, the land! Now destruction is to be seen everywhere, because there is no manager! Robberies are the greatest curse. I have managed to restrain them. My concern is first of all for the people and their welfare. It is also my welfare."

Derevencha explained the successes of the village mainly in terms of his dominating role in the social life of the village: "Everything in Mirnoe comes from me. I am a wall and I offer protection and aid. I distribute everything: money and products. I offer products instead of salaries; but my prices are not the same as those on the market. Weddings, Saint days, any celebration, the punishment of thieves and lazy men: I am everywhere".

Of secondary importance is the communication network, established by him: "I communicate with the people, everybody knows how to find me. My official visiting hours are on Tuesday, in my office, where there are 38 seats. These are the official visiting hours, when everything is shared openly in front of the others. However, I have also secret visiting hours, on Wednesday, when people come one by one. You can hear everything, people lay bare their souls".

The public and personal cases solved by him are of a varying nature. The most frequent appeals are for the request for money for a variety of problems. The members of the cooperative receive goods *in lieu* of salaries. Thus there is a lack of cash in the village. Yet it is curious that the scarcity of money does not stop people saving and, after having met their subsistence needs, they give funds to the local library for the buying of books, mostly adventure and romance novels, which are read by all in the village from cover to cover. The competency of the Head covers everything, from public needs to the most intimate problems: "When there is a graduation ball, I give everything for the feast." And in a show of particular fondness for his villagers he added that all of the guests are in beautiful dresses and smiling with happiness; "Here comes a young woman. She could not get pregnant. She needs money for treatment in the town. I gave her money. This same afternoon her mother came to see me: she

needs money for an abortion. I gave her money too. We have many cases of sterility. And there were many successes: new children!"

One of the interesting cases the Head told me about concerned the solving of a 'supernatural problem'. "One fisherman, an alcoholic Old-Believer, once, told me, when we were together fishing: 'You must help me. Each night the Devil comes to me, then sits on my legs and tortures me, it hurts awfully'. (Actually, the old man was suffering from rheumatism due to regular emersion in cold water of the river). I explained to him that when the unholy comes in the night he must put a cross on the devil's neck and then submerge him in a bucket of water. Then he must tie him down in the basement and then the devil will fulfill all his wishes. The old man promised he would do this". Derevencha continued to explain that together, they prepared the bucket but the old man fell asleep. On the following day, "I told him that everything is okay, I had caught the devil but then felt sorry for him and had therefore let him go, on the condition that he would not torture the old man anymore". Since then the old man has stopped complaining about his rheumatism. "And he keeps telling me: you have well scared off the Devil!"

The Head boasted about his pedagogical skills, which he calls "non-traditional educational methods". They include not only protection and help, but also control and punishment. The latter generally take the form of public reproaches, but, according to witnesses, sometimes physical punishments were used. Derevencha told me: "An old man was stealing planks from the cooperative farm. I warned him that I shall make a sudden check in his house, and if I find stolen goods, he will have a hard time! I pretended that I was going to the town, but actually returned back after half an hour! As I had already guessed, the old man was groaning under the load, taking the stolen material out of the house. I caught him red handed with the goods. He admitted his crime and never dared to steal again".

Another story shows the influence of Derevencha in family matters as well: "A young man comes to me during the "secret visiting hours". And he complains that whatever he does, he cannot "please" his wife. 'I' (Derevencha) 'responded: She is simply making fun of you. You have to beat her'. The young man made an offended face and left. One day his wife invited me for a visit. They had prepared a wonderful table, food, drinks, and a full meal. And both of them were thanking me, I could not stop them. It turned out that the wife had fallen under the influence of her neighbour – a feminist - and was listening to her advice. After speaking with me, the

*muzhik*¹⁰⁸ went home and his wife started making fun of him again. Then he gave her a beating with his belt. Then both of them started weeping, embraced each other, confided in each other and forgave each other. Till now they are blessing me".

Many others can supplement these 'instructive' stories, reflecting views held by both the Head and the residents of the village. It is obvious that the small community was organized in a comprehensive concentric structure, and at the centre was the cooperative farm head. Authoritarian, harsh, but fair, he represents the 'happy past' - not only of socialist times, when their cooperative farm ranked first in the powerful USSR, but also a certain mythical time when the Ukraine was "first in the world in the export of wheat, milk and butter". No doubt, the head is also an embodiment of 'the happy present', bringing economic stability and social security to the village. He is a sympathetic and generous ruler, ready to respond to all, even to the most eccentric demands of his fellow villagers, because he knows and understands the local traditions (recall the case of the "devil"). His prognoses for the future was also optimistic, even though based on mystic sources, which nevertheless appealed to the 'masses' more than explanations grounded in political studies: "Nostradamus has foretold that World War Three shall start in the Balkans. New York shall disappear from the face of the earth. Moscow shall become a village, but the Black Sea area shall remain".

Thus the village of Mirnoe is presented as a happy oasis, where traditional power mechanisms and socialist conceptions are harmoniously intertwined with postsocialist reality. In the transitional chaos of the region, one representative of the elite puts forward a model of **local 'nationalism'**¹⁰⁹ – based on being Bessarabian. This model unfolds in a 'far away' and imaginary state¹¹⁰ whose problems are foreign to the common people. It offers an opportunity for an appropriate self-identification of people with confused identities who were formerly proud citizens of USSR. Based on the sense of community, security and order (considered as the dominating 'ethnic markers'), a Bessarabian identity establishes a stable, small society with an "invulnerable" ethnicity in an irresistibly disintegrating world. Undoubtedly, this identity is the result of a centuries long tradition, dominated by various forms of authoritarian power, and an ethnicity in stress, which loses its support in the new changing situation.

The selected ethnonym is not casual, nor is its expression in front of a foreigner from the ex-"sister Bulgaria," an accident. We can recall that

Bulgaria was fighting for its membership in NATO at the time of the study (1999)¹¹¹ and so, officially, a supporter of the NATO bombings. On the one hand the term is “unifying” and maintains the Soviet idea of a “strong, multinational community”. On the other hand, the ethnonym, as well as the absence of Bessarabia on the political and administrative maps, conceals the multiethnic nature of the area, presenting a peculiar guarantee against ethnic conflict that might be triggered by the outside, by “a world conspiracy”. A danger (evident from the recent Transnistrian conflict) which, according to the local people, becomes a real threat with the interference of NATO in ex-Yugoslavia.

A Bessarabian identity can be viewed as a **nostalgic** (Boym, 2003) **‘nationalism’** (equally true for Slavic nationalism mentioned above), while democracy was a synonym for disorder, lawlessness and poverty (at the moment of the study) provoking the wish for a “strong hand”. However, a “Bessarabian” identity, as any other identity, supposes not only unifying elements but also a differentiation, as is demonstrated in the following statement by one of the Old-Believers in Mirnoe, where Bessarabians are clearly seen as distinct from the new independent Ukraine: “Bessarabia is not the Ukraine. The real Ukraine is up to Kiev. There are no steppes in Ukraine, only woods and beauty. But there is no asphalt, nothing is arranged, lazy people are the Ukrainians...”

An anti-state nationalism and anti-globalization alternative?

Undoubtedly, these processes are directed against unification tendencies of the new Ukrainian state, which aims at a homogeneous Ukrainian nation. Thus the Bessarabian identity is the answer to the aggressive state national campaign launched by the independent Ukraine.¹¹²

Bessarabian identity is a form of nostalgia, while its formal characteristics qualify the Bessarabians as indigenous peoples of the region. This is attested to by an appeal to ‘Bessarabia’, as a historical place, as well as by the major Bessarabian markers: attachment to the place and its traditions (social, economic, cultural, religious, etc.) and focusing on immediate social needs¹¹³. Besides, indigenous cultures usually define their identity by calling on their historical attachment to place (Dirlik & Prazniak, 2001).

Thus, Mirnoe suggests an alternative to globalization if the popular definition of globalization is to be accepted: “the free movement of ideas, investment and capital, people and industrial processes over the borders all over the world”

(O'Neill & Purushothaman, 2003). The conservative Bessarabian identity is based on the socialist experience, on the re-creation of traditional economic, social and power mechanisms, as well as on the denial of the changes that have taken place since the 1991 reforms in the Ukraine. A Bessarabian identity represents an escape from the dangers of the global world, a retreat into a world of its own which lives under its own rules and logic of development, thus creating a new regionalism, a Bessarabian one, which ignores ethnic and national borders. Bessarabian regionalism shapes historical borders through inherent social, economic and (multi)cultural traditions. The “Bessarabian” concept preserves and develops religious borders, to which the population has always been intimately attached (it is worth mentioning here the Old Believers’ success in resisting centuries-old religious harassment¹¹⁴).

The above considerations give us grounds to understand Bessarabian nationalism as a regionalism¹¹⁵ opposing both capitalist expansion and global policy. It can be considered an alternative to state nationalism and globalization process. The conservative ‘local cultures’ inevitably tend to be marginalized in a global world.

A local fear of global processes (evident in their discourse which is still shaped by Cold War vocabulary) and recent attempts at creating an alternative social and economic model that draws on traditional and regional arrangements suggests an interesting destiny for this Bessarabian village. They maintain a conservative lifestyle that rejects modern global influences.

The village of Mirnoe in 2005 - the next utopian alternative...

In the summer of 2005 I visited Mirnoe again. Unfortunately, the dreams of an alternative to globalization and Ukraine state nationalism had not come true. Instead, it appears that the revolutionary events in Mirnoe followed those of the Orange Revolution. In January 2005 the Head of the Cooperative farm was overthrown by the village General Assembly. A meeting summoned after an audit initiated by the local agronomist (who replaced Derevencha) revealed huge financial losses and abuses in the cooperative. Stories relating to the behaviour of members of the *kolkhoz* and of Derevencha were quite controversial: ranging from the decisive speeches of “the revolutionists” and “the pushing out of Derevencha through the back entrance” to “Derevencha’s solemn withdrawal with dignity, his last words being: “Preserve the *kolkhoz*!” None of the people to whom I spoke (15 in total) admitted to have been present at the assembly:

everyone stated that they didn't attend this important meeting! (I wonder who were the bold individuals who dared to oppose the authoritarian Head? I could not find them either among the *kolkhoz* members or among the cultural and religious authorities of the village). Obviously Mirnoe did not escape globalization 'vices' (corruption, financial abuses) or democratic virtues (such as the election of political leaders).

It is a pity, however, that "the Bessarabians" were completely forgotten and that the ethnic and religious¹¹⁶ borders again play an important role: the people constructing the Ukrainian church that gained a prominent place during Derevencha's rule, are now complaining that they cannot finish building the church because the new chairman, an Old-Believer, "is helping only "his" people". On the other hand, Old Believers were more interested in discussing the new Ukrainian state leadership and the country's unclear future, than supporting local religious and other institutions.

To conclude, hopes for constructing a new paradigm, reflecting a new local identity, have not completely eventuated – the era of Bessarabian nationalism was short lived. But it is relevant that the term became appealing, and was revived, at a particular moment in history when a particularly high level of chaos meant that there was a need to unify and counter possible divisions (political, religious etc). Such a period is usually characterized by intensive identification activities, preceding the appearance of a new identity (maybe a Ukrainian one) in response to the changing circumstances beyond Bessarabia. The history of the village of Mirnoe exemplifies a possible way of moving from totalitarian regime to democracy, where the intermediate stage includes more or less authoritarian regimes (Zhelev, 1990) - the dreams of the "strong hand" in the years of turmoil and chaos. Authoritarian regimes consolidate the society at a time of extreme social and economic problems. But the hope that local cultures and regional identity are an alternative to globalization still exists. Maybe my next field research in Bessarabia will prove that.

I would like to conclude by returning to the image of Derevencha. Despite all the events, he was still a legendary figure in Mirnoe in 2005. People recalled his support for the construction of the Ukrainian Church, for the order and security during his time, his encouragement of cultural activities in the village, and his voluptuous feasts. Some mentioned with regret his last dream that could not come true: to celebrate his 70th anniversary in the *kolkhoz* before retiring. Unfortunately, the last two volumes of the history of Mirnoe that had been

commissioned by the former Head are now waiting for a new sponsor in order to be printed. The controversial figure of Derevencha, an ambitious regionalist, will continue to be a subject of Mirnoe folklore.

Notes

¹⁰¹ The multiethnic nature of the area resulted from Russian Imperial colonization of the desolate borderlands from the mid-eighteenth century until the 1830s. The region has mostly been settled by Balkan populations (Bulgarians, Gagauzi and others) seeking refuge from the Ottoman Empire.

¹⁰² As the name of an administrative unit, Bessarabia was lastly used in Romania (1918 - 1944).

¹⁰³ These processes match the typology of escalation of nationalism after the disintegration of socialist multinational state unions (the USSR and Yugoslavia). Ethnic nationalism as a state policy (which replaced the socialist ideas concerning internationalism) caused a chain reaction leading to the development of new nationalisms and ethnicisms (neologism, defined by J-F. Gossiaux in 1996, characterizing the nationalism of ethnic minorities), based on the convenient presumption of the guilt of the 'other' for the problems, misfortunes and failures of the society in crisis (Gossiaux, 2002). New nationalisms laid different claims, ranging from demands for independent states (which were often followed by dramatic events) to autonomy claims and the foundation of minority institutions.

¹⁰⁴ I understand ethnicity as a dynamic process of identification/differentiation between groups of people based on the fundamental opposition 'self' – 'other'. This opposition is defined by means of an unlimited and mobile set of markers evaluating otherness (mostly negative) against the background of one's own culture and creating specific ethnic borders (Barth, 1969). The ongoing existence of the ethnic groups depends on the existence of ethnic borders.

¹⁰⁵ By invitation from the Chair of Archeology and Ethnology, Odessa State University, and with financial support from the International Center on the Problems of Minorities and Cultural Interactions Foundation, I participated in a field survey in the Odessa area together with other lecturers, post-graduate students and students from the Odessa and Kiev Universities. My theme was "Multiethnic Coexistence – history, problems, perspectives". During my stay I observed the daily life of ten settlements with various ethnic and religious backgrounds in southern Bessarabia.

¹⁰⁶ The Old Believers are a specific Russian religious community, which appeared after the 17th century Church schism (Razkol) in Russia. After being excommunicated from the Russian Orthodox Church the Old Believers were persecuted by the state. In response, the church and many of its members emigrated abroad. Nowadays the Old Believers diaspora is to be found in Europe, Asia and America; they have an independent Church. The Old Believers culture is extremely conservative, still sharing many medieval concepts. Cf. Anastassova, 1996.

¹⁰⁷ Ethnonym is a term defining the name of an ethnic community. There are two types of ethnonyms: endonyms and exonyms. Endonym means a name given by the community itself (self-designation), while exonym is the name given to the community by the "others". "Bassarabians" in this terminology is a **neo-endonym**.

¹⁰⁸ A traditional Russian term for a strong and stout villager, a man.

¹⁰⁹ Here it is worth remembering that nationalism precedes the creation of a national state. The latter shapes the nation (an "imagined community" – Anderson, 1983) through national symbols and institutions.

¹¹⁰ It is not coincidence that it is the Black Sea region that will survive World War Three and not Ukraine.

¹¹¹ Bulgaria is now a member of NATO and presently (2006) on queue to join the EU.

¹¹² During my 2005 field survey I still felt an opposition to Ukrainian state nationalism among the non-Ukrainian population, especially among Russians.

¹¹³ Undoubtedly a problem during the transition period of the region.

¹¹⁴ The Old Believer's religiosity undoubtedly stimulated a revival in Ukrainian religiosity, partly in response to, the Soviet atheistic period. It is instructive that the Ukrainians in Mirnoe had no Church of their own before the changes. Construction began only under Derevencha.

¹¹⁵ I am indebted to Deema Kaneff for conceptualizing Bessarabian nationalism as a form of regionalism.

¹¹⁶ This is quite different from Derevencha's time, when religious balance was very important. In a personal communication Associate Professor Alexander Prigarin, University of Odessa, informed me that Derevencha was not only a member of the Ukrainian Church but also joined the Old Believers (!), obviously to balance both confessions.

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