

## **BUILDING GLOBAL CIVIL SOCIETY THROUGH CITIZEN DIPLOMACY. A CASE STUDY OF SOVIET-CANADIAN DOUKHOBOR CORRESPONDENCE**

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While the concept of global civil society<sup>1</sup> has become increasingly relevant in a globalized world, there is a dearth of historical study of the development of both the term and the phenomenon itself. This is partially due to the nature of evidence supporting this type of study, as the development of global civil society is often based – at least in its initial stages – on informal contacts and convergence of public dialogue across borders.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to this, an information bias also exists, whereby much of the empirical data used by global agencies is compiled from individual countries by way of national organizations and governmental institutions.<sup>3</sup> However, there are large pockets of evidence that, while informal, are reliable and absent of the fragmented bias of global agencies, allowing for a cross-border understanding. The correspondence and international contacts of the Doukhobors constitute an important example of such evidence.

The Doukhobors, a Russian religious society with Christian roots, profess a faith that is as much a peace-advocating social movement as it is a religious organization. In the Canadian context, there have been several subgroups associated with the Doukhobors, not all of whom are included in the study. The main source material from the Canadian side comes from Doukhobors associated with the mainstream Doukhobor organization

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'global civil society' is here considered to include the Hegelian concept of civil society that is not simply a 'society based on social contract between individuals, but a non-commercial sphere separate from the state which aims to influence policy. This idea of civil society is coupled with a conception of globality that is not simply characterized by increased interaction or increased cultural homogeneity of individual states, but by the blurring of national boundaries for social action worldwide (Kaldor 2003, p. 585).

<sup>2</sup> Keane 1998, p. 5-6.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

known as the Union for Spiritual Communities for Christ (USCC), as well as some independents.<sup>4</sup>

The case study presented demonstrates that sustained citizen diplomacy<sup>5</sup> initiatives between international members of a defined society (accompanied by an expressed desire to affect global affairs) can serve as an important prototype of global civil society in the making. The evidence presented also supports the view that the most significant shift in state-society relations in the USSR, often associated with Gorbachev, began well before 1985. In part, this was brought about by the a massive shift in public morale in public morale. Groups like the Doukhobors, reaching across borders to advocate a more pacifist vision than their respective governments, represented one ice pick in the thaw of the former top-down structure of activism in the USSR. This eventually led to formal recognition of the new Soviet social contract by way of *Glasnost* and *Perestroika*.

The study is here considered central to a modern understanding of the aforementioned phenomena for reasons of place, time and purpose. For example, this group perfectly fits the description of a model group according to John Keane's theories on the maturation of modern global civil society. According to Keane, global civil society was specifically stimulated by the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and was simultaneously the product of the peace and ecological movements (since these movements envisioned a unified goal for all peoples.)<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the cross-border activities of a global peace movement in the late Soviet period can act as an especially edifying case study.

However, some background is necessary in order to understand the dynamics of the case study at hand. Since a large number of adherents to Doukhoborism emigrated to Canada at the end of the nineteenth century, the Doukhobors have constituted a sizeable demographic both in Canada and Russia and its environs. At no time since their emigration have the two factions not kept in contact with each other. The fascinating history of correspondence between Canadian and Russian or Soviet Doukhobors thus spans across many periods.

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<sup>4</sup> The main reason for focusing on the USCC and independents are that some subgroups, such as the Sons of Freedom, have had an extremely tumultuous relationship with the USCC Doukhobors to the extent that the two sides have been irreconcilable and thus can be considered to be distinctly separate elements.

<sup>5</sup> Citizen diplomacy here refers to diplomatic activity between unofficial representatives of different nations, often whom are ordinary citizens. Diplomacy is not used here in the figurative sense, but in the literal sense of national representation and negotiation with foreign counterparts, often with the aim of minimizing conflict and building peace.

<sup>6</sup> Keane 1998, p. 1, 5.

This study, however, is particularly concerned with international Doukhobor correspondence and its implications for citizen diplomacy and global civil society in the period of 1967-1985. The year 1967 marked a turning point in the direction and intensity of Doukhobor contacts. It was in this year that Doukhobor leader John J. Verigin seized upon an appeal from the Soviet government for World Peace, taking it as an opportunity to make the case to the Soviets for an opening up of restrictions on international Doukhobor contacts.

At the same time, he entreated Canadian Doukhobors to tour the Soviet Union and the Soviet government issued them visas to visit all areas inhabited by Doukhobors in the USSR. In this visit, the Canadian Doukhobors took a memorial plaque to the site of the 1895 burning of firearms to commemorate this event and place it there permanently.<sup>7</sup> While the Doukhobors had conducted similar exchanges in the past, as one Doukhobor put it “this was an opportune time for the Doukhobors in Canada to strongly uphold their views on War and Peace.”<sup>8</sup> The contacts further intensified in the 1970s, a decade that saw over 300 Doukhobor visits to the USSR.<sup>9</sup>

While the case study undoubtedly represents an interesting phenomenon in citizen diplomacy, the conclusion that it also constitutes a nucleus of global civil society is subject to one’s definition of the latter term. Thus, the thesis of this study is predicated on the following understanding: specifically, the individuals and groups which make up global civil society are non-governmental and non-commercial in structure, but this does not mean the term can also refer to terrorist groups and organized crime which may also be non-governmental and/or non-commercial. The groups which comprise global civil society must also have or seek to have a purpose in shaping global affairs; this is a logical extension of Jan Aart Scholte’s caveat for civil society, that it “exists when people make concerted efforts through voluntary associations to mould rules: both official, formal, legal arrangements and informal social constructs.”<sup>10</sup>

According to Scholte, there are several major conceptions of the term ‘globality’ and the associated process of increasing globality, known as ‘globalisation’. These associative concepts include internationalism,<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Stoochnoff 1976, p. 44-45.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Tarasoff 1982, p. 210.

<sup>10</sup> Scholte 1999, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> The term is here defined as a state of relatively high interaction and cooperation between individual nations. Ibid., p. 8.

liberalism,<sup>12</sup> universalism and Westernism;<sup>13</sup> and finally, deterritorialism. This last concept represents a vision of global relations as occupying “a social space that transcends territorial geography,”<sup>14</sup> and it is this last concept of globality which best fits the case study at hand since it is particular to the developments of the late twentieth century and a modern understanding of globality.

Historically, global civil society is seen as a fairly recent phenomenon that has developed rapidly. One indicator of this is that today, there are approximately 50,000 international non-governmental, not-for profit organizations – otherwise known as INGOs – in operation. Of these, 90 percent were created after 1969, with a concentration of development in more recent years, if John Keane’s statement that global civil society only reached fruition after the dissolution of the Soviet Union is to be believed.<sup>15</sup>

Likewise Louise Diamond and John McDonald have linked the rise of citizen diplomacy in its modern manifestation to a similar timeline of development, and attributed it to “the burgeoning of visits to and exchanges with the Soviet Union”<sup>16</sup> which they profess took place circa 1985-1986. This however does not account for the Doukhobor visits before 1985, which were certainly a precursor to the type of citizen diplomacy described by Diamond and McDonald. It seems evident that the omission of the pre-1985 Doukhobor contacts is merely an oversight by the two scholars, perhaps due to a preference for pinpointing a trend at the time of its fruition and not at the time of its emergence.

Of course, the very inclusion of a Soviet environment in a study of civil societal development is not uncontroversial. A popular contemporary understanding of totalitarianism as the antonym of civil society has caused many political scientists to conclude that there was no civil society in the Soviet Union. The era in question is a period of particular interest in the development of civil society theory.

However, agency need not depend on the preliminary political environment that surrounds the group in question, for as Allen Feldman has argued, “political agency is not given but achieved on the basis of practices that alter the subject.”<sup>17</sup> Indeed, there is an entire school of thought which conceptualizes civil society as a precursor for building such a

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<sup>12</sup> This represents an economic “laissez-faire” understanding of liberalism. Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> These two concepts, in the context of globality, emphasize sameness in the cultural arena. Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Keane 1998, p. 1, 5.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Warkentin 2001, p. 17.

society in transition states, a phenomenon Gideon Baker calls ‘civil society first’.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, one of Hegel’s most definitive and important contributions to the analytical concept of civil society was to define it as not only separate from the state, but disassociated from the economy as well.<sup>19</sup> This last attribute is useful for drawing comparisons within other economic systems, and this, along with Feldman’s theory, makes it possible to analyze the phenomenon within a Soviet context.

Of course, an assessment of how separate the operations in the case study were from state machinations is imperative if for the purposes of the study they are to constitute a seed of global civil society. To this aim, there is much evidence to suggest the Doukhobors did function independently of the state, at least in the sense that they were not an official state organization or an offshoot of a party committee. However, state organizations acted as intermediaries for many of the exchanges, i.e. state committees such as the Rodina (Motherland) Society<sup>20</sup> and the Canada-USSR Friendship Society,<sup>21</sup> which also assisted in the organization of exchanges, though to a much lesser extent than the Rodina Society.

Nevertheless, there were many incidents which come up in international Doukhobor correspondence that indicate deviation from state policy and point to the importance of such contacts in the building of

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<sup>18</sup> Baker 2002, p. 3.

<sup>19</sup> Chandhoke 1995, p. 116-117.

<sup>20</sup> In the instance of the Rodina Society, there appears to be a lack of consensus among academics as to their role in state-society relations. Tarasoff has argued that the Rodina Society, despite having been sponsored by the Soviet government, was in reality more of a ‘public organization’ that was in essence non-governmental (Tarasoff 1992, p. 128, 159). However, C. Andrew and V. Mitrokhin allege that the Rodina Society was an organization established by the KGB which used the cause of promoting ‘cultural relations with compatriots abroad’ as a front for recruiting agents among émigré groups, with vice-president P.I. Vasileyev heading a secret Rodina intelligence section (Christopher, Mitrokhin 1999, p. 650).

<sup>21</sup> The Canada-USSR Association (formerly the Canadian Soviet Friendship Society) was founded by Dyson Carter, a member of the Communist Party of Canada, and Doris Neilsen in 1949. This organization was established in order to present Canadians with an alternative and more positive image of the USSR than they received in the Canadian press. After 1956, however, due to the damaged image of the USSR abroad, the Canadian-Soviet Friendship Society was re-configured to appeal to ‘average’ Canadian citizens, not just Communist Party Members. In 1960, Carter was replaced as the head of the Canadian-Soviet Friendship Society and the group changed its name to the Canada-USSR Association, a move that reflected a shift towards political neutrality. Finally, in 1970 the erstwhile head of the Canada-USSR Association, Micheal Lucas, broke all ties with the Communist Party of Canada (Anderson 2008, p. 2-3, 9).

global civil society. For example, in one account of a Doukhobor excursion to the USSR in 1971, one man related that someone in his group asked the assistant director of Intourist if Jews could also go to the USSR, “meaning whether they are persecuted there” and on behalf of the Doukhobors he wrote that “we hope, that there is free exit from the country for all those who want it, especially workers who have been victimized in the past.”<sup>22</sup>

As this incident suggests, the Soviets were by no means under the illusion that the Canadian Doukhobors subscribed to the Party line in the Soviet Union. In fact, the Doukhobors sometimes stated this fact explicitly and openly in front of Soviet officials. Ivan I. Verigin, speaking at a conference in honour of the Soviet Minister to Canada Boris Mirochenko, who was visiting Grand Forks at the time, said,

We Doukhobors, a religious society, do not share the political views of the Soviet state, but we can stand shoulder to shoulder together with the Soviet people and with all other people who wish for peace. In principle we agree with this, that a man should guard his work so that cruel people cannot destroy him [...] but on the other hand, we have a past, where our ancestors gave up their lives as evidence that love conquers evil, that it is stronger than evil. We intend to stay on the path of our ancestors and hope that there will be peace and love on Earth, that the words, which we often repeat – your kingdom come – become a reality, and not only words.<sup>23</sup>

Religious references, hardly encouraged by erstwhile Soviet authorities, were also commonplace in Doukhobor correspondence at the time. For example, in Fyodor Tomlin’s account of the Malovs’s visit to the Soviet Union and greeting to the Canadian Doukhobors he writes, “How it is dear to us to know and to feel that you have cherished in your hearts the feeling of brotherly unity and love for us” he says “This means that we live in unity, like a family of Christ.”<sup>24</sup>

Likewise, the following letter from Tomlin to the Canadian Doukhobors hints at religious assembly of the Doukhobors and describes the importance with which the Soviet Doukhobors regarded letters of correspondence from their Canadian brethren,

Your letter was read at our little spiritual meeting of brothers and sisters, who strive for the unity and fellowship of all people and for worldwide peace. All the brothers and sisters who listened with big love and hope

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<sup>22</sup> *Iskra*, no. 1278, 29 January 1971, p. 28.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 1266, 14 August 1970, p. 6 -7.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 1165, 15 December 1967, p. 3-4.

accepted your brotherly greeting and wishes for a happy new year and sent from themselves deepest thanks, and warm brotherly greetings to all of you, our dear family of brothers and sisters in Christ.<sup>25</sup>

In the same letter, a clear statement of the two sides working as one toward the unified goal of peace and friendship worldwide is explicitly expressed:

Let God send to us and to all of you the strength of love and for the future of our life on earth to develop and strengthen this love more closely, as between yourselves and us and with all people on our planet earth, for there to be worldwide peace [...]. From your letter we see that you work for the restoration of peace; let God give you strength and insight in the continuation of these holy works, which we will bolster and add to your voices and thoughts for worldwide peace and for fellowship of all peoples.<sup>26</sup>

In such letters, the visionary and activist qualities of the correspondence are highlighted, emphasizing the political relevance of such contacts. Communication on the question of nonviolence between Doukhobors took on a yet more outspoken tone in other instances. In an example from the Soviet Bloc, Slav Delkinov of Bulgaria summed up his letter to P. P. Legebokov in Canada with the following observation:

Here it is not long since the International opponents of war gathered among them 30 people under the leadership of H. Bing and F. Parker from England. They outlined today's dangerous socio-political situation of the world and came to the conclusion that a revolution for the prevention of war was necessary, but the revolution should be completely in the nonviolent sense. Forgive my outspokenness, with brotherly greetings to all Doukhobors.<sup>27</sup>

It is hard to imagine how talk of a revolution of any kind, particularly with the involvement of foreigners, was allowed to escape the Soviet Bloc censors in 1970. However, it is not the only letter from behind the Iron Curtain in this period that contained potentially subversive content. In January of 1970 a letter from Bulgarian collective farm workers to the Canadian Doukhobors was published in *Iskra* describing the problems of typical collective farm life in Bulgaria. The author recounts a conversation he had with a local librarian, and that upon telling her that the people of his presumably Doukhobor collective farm do not spend their money on drink

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., no. 1178, 22 March 1968, p. 3-4.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., no. 1270, 9 October 1970, p. 14.

like most people do, she replied “In our kholhoz, drunkenness is known to effect not only ordinary kholhozniks, but also the leaders.”<sup>28</sup>

In August 1975, a young Doukhobor from the Ukraine named Natasha Vladimirovna Shkuratova visited Grand Forks and other towns of the Kootenay region. She was the first visitor of her age group from the Soviet Union to Grand Forks, visiting her great-aunt in Canada, and many were eager to meet with her. *Mir* reported that throughout her visit,

Natasha never displayed the slightest hint of a feeling of eliteness, either due to her Doukhobor family background or in being a prime young Soviet student. Instead, her humility, coupled with her refreshing outgoing personality and sincere candid maturity left their imprint on all who had the good fortune to meet her.<sup>29</sup>

Importantly, this illustrates that what would have been a first impression for many young Doukhobors of a Soviet youth was much less politicized and much less characterized by mutual distrust than the erstwhile Cold War environment at the state level.<sup>30</sup> One caption accompanying a photograph of two young women perched on a couch looking at photos together reads: “Natasha and Natasha” (Horkova and Shkuratova – Same name, same age, many common interests transcend the miles separating Canada and the USSR).<sup>31</sup>

A subsequent article in the Doukhobor youth newsletter about Natasha Shkuratova’s visit and other recent exchanges discussed their significance, observing that

They broaden people’s outlooks, and bring people from different backgrounds to a closer understanding. We feel that, if it were possible for all the citizens of “east” and “west” to meet and really get to know each other, this would preclude any possibility of these people going to war against each other.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 1250, 2 January 1970, p. 8-9.

<sup>29</sup> “Visitor From the USSR,” in *Mir*, vol. 3, no. 2, September 1975, p. 12-14.

<sup>30</sup> Accounts of official cultural and scientific exchanges between East and West have shown that they were often viewed as a competition, a zero-sum game between sides. Overall, Yale Richmond states that the Soviets’ main objectives for the exchanges were to access American science and technology, to gain world acclaim for their achievements in art, culture and science and to gain capital; the main American objective, on the other hand, was “to open the Soviet Union to Western influences in order to change its foreign and domestic policies” as well as encourage citizens of the satellite states to seek independence from Moscow (Richmond 1987, p. 1-6).

<sup>31</sup> “Visitor From the USSR,” in *Mir*, vol. 3, no. 2, September 1975, p. 13.

<sup>32</sup> “Canada-USSR. Exchanges a Welcome Activity”, in *Ibid.*, p. 14.



While it could be rightly pointed out that many overtures by politicians on both sides of the Cold War who sought to encourage a ‘thaw’ in relations reflected such conciliatory sentiments, there were also reversals in the general political climate that resulted in an overall rehashing of grievances. Despite the rapprochement of the preceding years, the mid-to-late 1970s was marked by a series of events that damaged Canadian-Soviet relations: 1976 saw Canadian criticism of human rights in the Soviet Union and increased cooperation between Canada and the US; in 1978 Canada expelled 13 Soviet embassy workers on the grounds that they had been spying, and sought compensation for the crashing of the Soviet Kosmos 954 into Canada’s northern territories, and the Soviets responded by painting Canada as a “paradise’ for war criminals.”<sup>33</sup>

These inauspicious developments, however, had no discernable effect on the international Doukhobor contacts and overseas initiatives. From June 30 to July 28 of 1977, thirty Doukhobors from Canada went on a ‘Doukhobor History Tour of the Soviet Union’. This was one of over a dozen tours to the Soviet Union that were organized by the Doukhobors themselves,<sup>34</sup> and a detailed account of the organization of this excursion reveals that various organizations and individuals contributed, the chief overall organizer of whom was a Doukhobor named Nick Verigin who was a high school principal in Pass Creek, British Columbia.<sup>35</sup>

It was observed during this history tour’s stop in Slavyanka, Azerbaijan that the Doukhobor hosts declared peace to be “*the most important* hope of mankind” and that “differences in views must not be allowed to lead to wars.”<sup>36</sup> In Tbilisi, Georgia the group stayed with Wasili and Tamara Chutskoff and family, whom Koozma Tarasoff, a Canadian Doukhobor, had previously met at the World Youth Festival in the 1950s. What is most interesting to note is that the Soviet Doukhobor hosts defined Doukhoborism as a “social movement for peace” that encouraged them to continue contacts and relations with other people overseas.<sup>37</sup>

As the decade drew to a close, official Canadian-Soviet relations grew yet more hostile. The nail in the coffin of détente between Russia and Canada was the invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. This resulted, among other things, in a boycott of the Moscow Olympic Games by Canada and the

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<sup>33</sup> Black 1998, p. 271-278.

<sup>34</sup> Tarasoff 1982, p. 210.

<sup>35</sup> *Iskra*, no. 1455, 18 November 1977, p. 23-27.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

imposition of sanctions. Moreover, Conservative Joe Clark was also elected in 1980, prompting a postponement of official, commercial and cultural visits between the two countries, as well as a reduction in the number of flights between Montreal and Moscow.<sup>38</sup>

Despite this, there was at least one cultural partnership between Canada and the USSR that continued during this period, which the Doukhobors participated in. To celebrate 1979 as the year of the child, a “Canada-USSR Children’s Art Exchange” took place whereby selected paintings and drawings from school children in Canada toured the large cities of the USSR and vice-versa. This exchange, sponsored by Interarts in cooperation with the Canada-USSR association, remained uninterrupted by the events of 1979-1980 and eventually was exhibited in the schools and community centers of Doukhobor communities in Grand Forks, British Columbia.<sup>39</sup>

Around this time, a change in tone from previous letters written by the Chutskovs to the Canadian Doukhobors, as evidenced by the sentences written in capital letters for the first time, shows a heightened enthusiasm and strengthened sense of purpose for Doukhobor peace activism. The letter read:

Dear members of the Committee for struggling for peace! [...]. You are wished the best of luck from all the husbands and wives, and children of the Soviet Union, mothers and sisters who have experienced grief and horrors brought about by war, FROM YOUR LOVED ONES AND COUNTRYMEN, FROM ALL DOUKHOBORS OF THE SOVIET UNION. Mothers know how hard it is to bury sons and brothers. This is why now they are coming out to the front lines of the fight for peace, they all are actively standing up for the right of life for all people of earth, the right to peaceful industrious life. All people know that to protect life, you must stand up for PEACE, and not tolerate the possibility of looming nuclear catastrophe. WORK AND PEACEFUL LIFE! PEACE TO THE WORLD! HAPPINESS AND FUN FOR CHILDREN! MATERNITY AND HAPPINESS TO MOTHERS!<sup>40</sup>

The gradual intensification of Doukhobor contacts from the 1960s and onward demonstrates the existence of a pattern that counters a popular conception of Gorbachev as a great reformer that begat many activist groups through more permissive policies. Pre-Gorbachev, Soviet political

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<sup>38</sup> Black 1998, p. 273-283.

<sup>39</sup> *Iskra*, no. 1512, 8 February 1980, p. 16-17.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 1584, 15 April 1983, p. 11.

tradition was not neutral to the kind of peace movement that the Doukhobors espoused, nor was it Gorbachev that heralded the blossoming of such groups in public life.

In the USSR, the term ‘peace movement’ was almost synonymous with the idea of a ‘workers’s movement’ as it was propagated that Bolshevism was always fighting for a lasting peace on earth. Thus, the idea of peace was always championed, as long as the subjects of the state were willing to engage in military combat in the name of peace. Pacifism was in another category altogether; Lenin once wrote that pacifism was “one of the means of duping the working class” and in the USSR it was considered a bourgeois concept and discouraged.<sup>41</sup> As one Russian scholar writes of the time,

Pacifism, especially domestic, was as though a taboo subject within the decades of Soviet authority’s existence. The society militarized to the limit, and aggressive Bolshevik ideology prohibited the opportunity of objective study of history of peace-making ideas and movements in Russia. To define or consider the concept of “pacifism”, it was necessary to accompany this concept with the definitions “abstract” or “bourgeois”; it was considered a cosmopolitan idea which was alien to Marxist-Leninist dogmas about class struggle and dictatorship of the proletariat.<sup>42</sup>

The significance of this transcends its immediate meaning, for other accounts have also suggested that to endorse pacifism in the Soviet Union was not only a subversive concept in and of itself but also became a symbolic idea connected with wider opposition to the totalitarianist system as a whole. For example, in 1962 the scientist Andrei Sakharov wrote that he considered the erstwhile time as a boundary of change, which by the end of the 1960s took shape in the concept of a nonviolent alternative for Russia and for the whole world.<sup>43</sup>

This concept was indissolubly connected with protest against a totalitarian state which suppressed any free idea, as it seemed clear to Sakharov and his contemporaries that if this kind of state continued to exist, third world war would be imminent. Thus, it is through this concept that pacifism was connected to the appeal for socio-economic reforms in the USSR, for human rights, and for a rapprochement between socialist and capitalist systems.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> East-West Committee 1984, p. 8.

<sup>42</sup> Pavlova 1999, p. 28-42.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>44</sup> Pavlova 1999, p. 34

On the one hand, the Soviet authorities continued to attack Western pacifist organizations, accusing them of “a crusade against socialism”, and on the other hand they continued to attack many domestic grassroots organizations that were emerging in the name of pacifism.<sup>45</sup>

The Doukhobor correspondences most certainly did not reflect such vitriol for Western pacifist organizations, since they in fact constituted one themselves and worked with other Western pacifist organizations. The language of their entreaties for peace did not lay one-sided blame on either Eastern or Western parties for the violent and tense political situation of the Cold War, and this was vital to the success of their relations as ongoing peacebuilding initiatives.

Thus, despite a prevailing perception in both Eastern and Western circles of Gorbachev as the great reformer, S. Frederick Starr also supports the view that Gorbachev purposely distorted the situation and minimized the initiative that Soviet society at large had taken in the years that preceded Perestroika. This, he argues, was done in order to appear as a “revolutionary leader calling a somnolent nation to action” in lieu of a “conservative reformer trying to save a system facing pressures beyond his control.”<sup>46</sup>

He discredits a statement by Gorbachev in June 1986 that “Soviet society is ripe for change” calling it a rhetorical device aimed at distorting the situation. At this point, Starr writes, Soviet society was not ‘ripe’ for change but was already experiencing rapid change – what had yet to change was not society but the state apparatus (which, in order to keep up with the pace of society, was forced to undergo reform).<sup>47</sup>

The Doukhobor correspondence of the pre-Gorbachev era thus further proves Starr’s theory and contradicts the still-prevalent perception that social change in the USSR chiefly followed Gorbachev’s Perestroika and Glasnost instead of vice versa. Andrea Goldsmith, in her study of post-Soviet international partnerships, takes this one step further. She describes the legacy of these early citizen movements which the Doukhobors so exemplified as having brought about the cessation of hostile relations between East and West by their initiatives, as well as having sprouted a new generation of international cooperative movements:

Golubka, Sacred Earth Network, ISAR, IPPNW – all trace the roots of their East-West partnerships to the citizen diplomacy movement during the Cold War [...]. They feel that contact with Westerners empowered the Russians,

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>46</sup> Starr 1988, p. 27.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

and this allowed Gorbachev to warm the relations with the West; in fact, many of those involved in the movement credit citizen diplomacy with stopping the Cold War.<sup>48</sup>

In light of this, it is no wonder that ethnographer Ala Bezhentseva has recently observed that “modern Doukhobors perceive themselves as having built bridges between state and the private sphere, between individual and collective rights, between nations and peoples.”<sup>49</sup>

In retrospect, this perspective seems to accurately reflect the role of Doukhobors in the case study, as their sustained citizen diplomacy between members of a defined group nurtured the development of global civil society in the region and beyond. Indeed, it can be said that they as an international society constituted an early nucleus of global civil society. For it is apparent that there were few parallels between Doukhor relations and state priorities for international diplomacy (since Doukhor contacts remained constant amid the ebbing and flowing of rapprochement in official USSR-Canada relations) and the content of the correspondences and accounts of visits also shows an expressed awareness of global issues, and a willingness to act for the promotion of both at their own behest.

This assessment lends weight to an alternative view of the greater scheme of Cold War events: That the sense of progress for disarmament and international cooperation so often associated with Gorbachev’s term as General Secretary of the USSR was in fact the result of a kinetic force begun by citizen diplomacy initiatives, initiatives which inspired an opening up of Soviet society and created possibilities for formal cooperation with foreign parties. The Doukhobors in 1967-1985 constituted one such ongoing initiative, unique in its history and context as perhaps any that could be conceived. It is, however, but one panel in the tapestry of organizations from which global civil society as we now know it emerged; a tapestry which, though woven over many decades, still remains relatively obscure.

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<sup>48</sup> Goldsmith 1994, p. 53.

<sup>49</sup> Bezhentseva 2007, p. 96.

## Construirea unei societăți civile globale prin diplomație civică. Studiu de caz al corespondenței sovieto-canadiene a membrilor Doukhobor

(Rezumat)

Acest articol cuprinde un studiu de caz privind corespondența internațională dintre membrii unei societăți sociale și religioase cunoscute sub numele de Doukhobor. Studiul se dorește a fi o contribuție la înțelegerea teoretică atât a societății civile globale cât și a evoluției sale istorice și demonstrează totodată că diversele forme de corespondență dintre membrii acestei organizații din Uniunea Sovietică și cei din Canada la sfârșitul erei sovietice constituie un exemplu de diplomație civică, dar și un nucleu al societății civile globale. Corespondența membrilor Doukhobor de la mijlocul și sfârșitul perioadei sovietice prezintă atitudini vizionare și activiste. Mai mult decât atât, comunicarea în problema non-violenței este cât se poate de deschisă și clară în scrisori, ceea ce le conferă acestora din urmă o imensă importanță pe plan politic, având în vedere contextul larg (Războiul Rece) în care avea loc schimbul. Însemnătatea acestor descoperiri rezidă din faptul că ele contrazic, într-o anumită măsură, afirmațiile anterioare ale unor cercetători conform cărora societatea civilă era practic inexistentă în Uniunea Sovietică. Dinamica construirii de legături dincolo de granițele ostile, între oameni animați de un ideal comun, dar și mișcarea analogă de creare a unor legături oficiale în anii imediat următori, au condus la concluzia că o diplomație cetățenească susținută, efectuată la nivel mondial de către membrii unui grup social, poate reprezenta o precondiție esențială în crearea unei societăți civile puternice și funcționale.

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**Cuvinte-cheie:** mișcări sociale, relații internaționale, organizații pentru pace, societate civilă, societăți religioase.

**Keywords:** social movements, international relations, networks for peace, civil society, religious societies.