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UNSECULARIZING THE WORLD: MOLDOVAN BAPTISTS AND GLOBALIZATION OF RELIGION

Globalization and Religion

a) The Globalization Debate

A citizen of Saudi Arabia fights in the mountains of Afghanistan, far away from his country, for the cause of Islam. A group of Moldovan Baptist missionaries preach the Gospel in the predominantly Muslim Turkey, Tajikistan and the pagan Russian Far East. Meanwhile dozens of American Mormons and local followers of the Brazilian preacher Edir Macedo's Universal Church of the Kingdom of God are trying to gain converts in the mostly Eastern-Orthodox villages of Moldova. A Ghanaian Methodist is attempting to re-Christianize the secularized England while an Ivorian Coast Roman Catholic is aiming to do the same in the strongly laicized France. A Nigerian, Sunday Adelaja, acts as senior pastor of the largest church in Ukraine, "The Embassy of the Blessed Kingdom of God for All Nations, Kiev". An Argentinean Jesuit becomes Pope of the Catholic Church and Bishop of Rome. An American Muslim is listening in his/her basement in Dearborn, Michigan to sermons of Saudi Arabia clerics delivered via interned. Many Muslim citizens protest simultaneously in London, Beirut, Damascus, Teheran, Nairobi and Jakarta against the publication of 12 cartoons that depicted the Islamic prophet Muhammad in a Danish newspaper.

None of these vignettes surprises us especially or sounds too exotic to be true. They all are too familiar and even the average citizen of places as distant from each other as Moldova and Ghana, the US and Ivory Coast would encounter such situations in his/her daily life once in a while. After all, if your laptop contains pieces assembled in China, made from metals coming from Guinea Bissau, Congo and Colombia, why to wonder that

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religious missionaries from Africa, America or America would knock at your door trying to make you believe that salvation is just around the corner?

But what story do these vignettes tell? Could it be a story of return of religion in public life? Could it be a story of religious groups taking advantage of the advancements in technology and communications in order to spread their message? Could it be a story of religions abandoning their local contexts and going global? Could it be a story of the loss of confidence in the power of science and/or political ideologies and the returning to old spiritual recipes?

It is probably all of them and many other entangled stories. I will attempt to integrate all these stories within the framework of "globalization and religion".

This attempt is by no means the only way to make sense of these stories. We can think of (and there are!) a lot of other ways to describe and analyze the entanglement between religion, communication and globalization. Some authors have argued that these stories show that modernity was wrong, that the word of God has defeated all pessimistic predicaments and has resisted the combined assault of secularism, science and ideology. Other authors, from other camps, have argued that what all these stories show is in fact the resurgence of religion, the explosion of hatred and the advent of the new era of religious intolerance.

Compared to this, the "globalization and religion" approach offers not only a neutral, as objective as possible, theoretically driven and empirically grounded perspective, but also a self-reflexive, self-critical viewpoint.

For, both fields of study – religion and globalization – are not merely objects of study but important constellations of practices and meanings from which people borrow guidance for actions and within which people try to make sense of their lives. The study of "religion and globalization" should take into account not only explicit claims and lines of argumentation, but also what Foucault has aptly called, their *unthought*.

There have been several attempts to philosophically capture this novel type of social reality characterized by increasing interconnectivity. Globalization, cosmopolitanism, world-systems theory, globalism, industrial society, atomic age, global village, post-modernism - are some of them.

All these theories, of course, are not merely descriptions of social processes but contain important normative assumptions. Thus they are

highly contentious, argue between themselves and are embedded in social, philosophical, cultural and political contexts.

Globalization appears to be, by far, the most controversial term although it is among the youngest ones (in contrast, cosmopolitanism has been around for at least two thousand years).

Various sources put the origins of the word "globalization" somewhere in the end of the 50s but the concept was in the air much earlier. Some scholars even claim that the globalization idea was expressed for the first time by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in their *Communist Manifesto* published in 1848 although in different terms (Veseth, 2010). Globalization was included in the 1961 edition of Webster's Dictionary.

The concept remained marginal up until around 1980 and then became immensely popular. A comprehensive survey of the electronic database Factiva operated by a journalist found only two entries of the word "globalization" in 1981, a number that grew spectacularly to over 57 000 in 2001 and remained well over 40 000 after that (Chanda 2007:246).

A preliminary distinction made by many scholars is that between the two basic aspects of the concept: globalization as a description of processes occurring in the social world and globalization as an ideological agenda driven by certain powerful actors (Dicken, 2011; Evans, 2008; Scholte, 2005).

Marko Ampuja summarizes it well: "Globalization is a multi-accentual sign, which represents not only intellectual endeavors but also the nightmares and aspirations of subordinated social groups as well as the powerful interests of privileged minorities." (2012:20).

Let's start with the theory of globalization.

Most of the contemporary scholarship on globalization understands the process as referring to a complex and contradictory series of political, economic, social and cultural changes caused by advances in technology and communications.

The most frequently invoked such changes are: time-space compression, the weakening of the nation-state, the emergence of a global civil society, the global spread of capitalism etc.

But the magnitude, the newness, the direction, the dynamics, the meaning, the driving forces and the outcome of these changes constitute a subject of debates and controversy.

Over the time, three groups of opinions on globalization have crystallized.

One group, called the hyper-globalizers or globalists, argues that changes brought by globalization (understood mostly as the spread of capitalism on a global scale) are unprecedented, inevitable and unstoppable. Although different factions in the group disagree on the question on the ethical evaluations of globalization processes (David Harvey (2005) considers it to be bad, while the likes of Thomas Friedman (2000) see it as a necessarily good project), there is a large consensus in this group that the impact of globalization is real and tangible. Globalization is thought to bring a radical change in the configuration of time and space (Robertson, 1992; Harvey, 2005, Giddens, 1990). Further it is argued that globalization brings into existence a borderless world where the physical borders of the nation state do not count and the nation-states themselves are in danger to be made irrelevant by the global capital (Ohmae 1995). In the sphere of culture globalization is supposed to bring a homogenization of the world where cultures become more and more similar (Tomlinson, 2009, Ritzer, 2011). In the technological realm, the advent of bitsphere (the hyperextended habitat) where individuals are connected with each other through technologies that are able to circulate across state, political or spatial borders is considered to be responsible for the arrival of an international online community that will make state-nations irrelevant (Mitchell, 1996).

A second-group, called the skeptics, has taken a different point of view. For them, the globalized world is more a promise that has yet to be realized or a utopian project rather than a concrete reality. When empirically scrutinizing the claims made by the hyper-globalizers, skeptics have arrived at the conclusion that most of these are not supported by evidence. Against the argument that globalization represents an entirely new phenomenon in the world economy, Hirst and Thompson have argued that 'the present highly internationalized economy is not unprecedented' (2009:3). They also showed that in terms of mobility of people and capital, the contemporary world is less globalized than the world of 1914. Further, the skeptics have challenged the globalist assumption about the death of the nation-state. They have found that states still have a tremendous amount of power especially in the areas of regulation. Transnational corporations, the main rivals and substitutes are still deeply embedded in the structures of the nation-state (Hirst and Thompson, 2009; Mann, 1997). As for culture, skeptics contended, the claim that globalization is bringing homogenization was unsustainable. On the contrary, globalization caused the revival of local identities and

the emergence of conflicts along civilizational/religious/cultural lines (Huntington 1996) or even more fundamentalism and nationalism.

A third group, the transformationalists, has emerged in between these two. This group rejects most of the pathos of both hyper-globalizers and skeptics and attempts to evaluate the magnitude of changes (if any) brought by globalization. In contrast to the globalist claim that globalization is inevitable and unstoppable, transformationalists have argued that globalization represents a rather larger trend that comprises multiple processes including cross-border connections and interdependence (Hay and Marsh 2000). In the political realm, transformationalists see not the death of the nation-state, but rather its reconfiguration (Sassen 2001) along a variety of geographical scales, some of them old (the national and the international) and some of them new (the subnational and the global city). Along the same lines, Slaughter (2004) discusses the transformation of the state into a fragmented arena penetrated by governmental and nongovernmental transnational networks but also by domestic forces. On the international political scene some scholars have described the emergence of new actors that are able to play multiple games on multiple stages: multinational corporations, transnational advocacy networks and even international mafia and terrorist organizations (Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Beck, 2005). In the area of culture, transformationalists argue, globalization does not just bring the homogenization of cultures around the world nor does it only create local rejections of global culture and revival of ethnic and tribal values. Instead, it facilitates the creation of "mixes, mélanges hybrids, cut'n'mix, transgression and subversion between local and global forms" (Nederveen Pieterse, 2009).

To these contentions, another one could be added: the question of the driving force of globalization. This question is indeed very important. Existing theories can be roughly arranged along two lines of divide: *culture vs economics*. One of the schools holds that globalization is being mostly driven by economic and technological advances (see Wallerstein 2004, although he never uses globalization and prefers instead the concept of "world-system") . The other school argues that culture and communication technologies are the main driving forces behind globalization (Giddens 1990; Robertson 1992).

From this short overview it should be clear that there is no unitary approach or unified theory of globalization and that many aspects of globalization are still being contested and questioned.

However, as pointed above, globalization represents as much a social theory debate as an economic policy debate, a political, religious and cultural agenda. Academic discourses on globalization are not the only ones in town. There are others too.

One such public talk about globalization is the optimist discourse performed by the likes of Thomas Friedman (2005) who argue that not only globalization is somehow inherently good but it is also necessarily the only way for the poor nations to get rid of poverty.

This discourse was embraced by many powerful international organizations (the IMF, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization) and transformed into a universal recipe that was imposed to other countries in the guise of the structural adjustments programs (SAPs) and austerity policies (McMichael, 2000). To further complicate the picture, in some cases, powerful interests have described the advance of globalization as inevitable and thus, in a sense, natural. This had, in the words of Manfred Steger, some important consequences: "it neutralized the challenges of alterglobalist opponents by depoliticizing the public discourse about globalization: neoliberal policies are above politics because they simply carry out what is ordained by nature" (2009:70-71).

b) Religion

Many authors have indicated that the term religion has explicit Western, Judeo-Christian origins (Dubuisson 1998; Harrison 1990; Pye 1994; Fitzgerald 2003; Asad 1993; Masuzawa 2005; Pui-Ian 2011). Most of these scholars that come from fields as diverse as comparative religion or post-colonial studies have claimed that religion - as a term, as a category to classify certain human practices, as a discourse and as a field of scientific inquiry - was born in the Western world.

The concept of religion has clearly originated in the West and other cultures lacked it before the encounter with the West. The word itself comes from the Latin word *religio* but had no established precise meaning: various authors have used it for various purposes and often the same author will use the term to designate different things.

Surprisingly enough, Medieval Christian theology demonstrated little interest and eagerness to work on the term *religio*. Although all the early Fathers have used the term, with the exception of Saint Augustine, no one took the effort to refine the concept or to give it an official interpretation.

In his *De Vera Religione* St. Augustine conceives of religion as being the intimately personal encounter with the divinity. Further, according to St. Augustine Christian religion ensures the best conditions for such an encounter and the role Church is to make the encounter possible (Smith 1962).

This meaning was more or less carried through the Renaissance and the Reform: thinkers and theologians such as Marsilio Ficino, Huldrych Zwingli, Jean Calvin have used it to denote the liaison between human beings and God. For obvious reasons, Zwingli and Calvin dismissed the idea of a body (the Church) to be able to mediate in any way this connection.

Only in the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries, religio acquired its modern significance: "a distinctive space of human practice and belief" (Asad 1993:27). The Enlightenment instilled three distinct dynamics into the term. First, there was an *externalization and universalization*. Religion ceased to signify the individual piety and came to mean any system of specific human practices and beliefs. Second, there was an *autonomization* of the term: by opposing religious power to political power, by constructing antagonisms between religion and reason/science, scholars were also defining the boundaries of religion establishing rules according to which various phenomena of human experience/practice would count as "religion". Third, there was an *intellectualization of religion* thereby reason asserted the right to be the only possible and legitimate way to understand and control the surrounding environment, humans, nature and society. Religion was left to deal with the domain of the supernatural but it had to take into account science.

In this way, as Masuzawa (2005) has shown, the discipline study of religion has always had in mind European religions, and mainly Christianity, as the model of the universal religion against which all other religions were compared.

These developments were not, of course, merely intellectual speculations and conceptual developments. Indeed, a logic of power was ingrained in them from the beginning.

Richard King has presented compelling evidence of the process through which Europeans have attempted to make sense of the diversity of faiths in the East. Since the local context provided a wide variety of religious practices loosely united by the worship of the same gods/temples, European scholar invented a series of new categories in order to classify and understand these practices: Buddhism and Confucianism.

This process was accomplished by applying to religious practices in Asia the framework of religion created in the Western world. Among the central features of this model were: the literary bias (a conception, born in Europe after the Reform, according to which texts are considered to be the locus of religion), the rise of scientific rationalism, the emergence of theology as a separate discipline and eurocentrism (1999:43). The same goes, as Talal Asad shows, for the Muslim world. In their attempt to study Muslim beliefs, traditions and practices, sociologists and anthropologists have heavily relied on the concept of religion as it was understood in the West (1993:1).

Furthermore, if the case of the invention of Eastern religions is somehow benevolent and even anecdotal, in other contexts, the embeddedness of religion in western imperial apparatuses of knowledge and power was far more tragic. Such is, for example, the interplay between religion and power in Africa. David Chidester (1998), has presented a vivid story of the ways in which European colonial powers (France, Britain, Portugal, Belgium) have used selectively and abusively the term religion as a classificatory scheme in order to justify their domination over Africa and in order to subjugate and exploit the indigenous African peoples. In the beginning, European travelers, missionaries and civil servants described African tribes as lacking religion. Moreover they "coupled the lack of religion with the absence of other defining human features, such as the institution of marriage, a system of law, or any formal political organization. In many cases, the diagnosis of an alien society without religion was delivered bluntly in the assertion that such people were brutes or beasts" (p.14). In this narrative lack of religion becomes lack of civility and culture and thus it provided Europeans with the necessary excuses to plunder the whole Africa. If religion (in the Western understanding) is universal and inherently human, lack of religion (in the Western understanding) means lack of humanity! This not very sophisticated reason, claims Chidester, allowed European colonial empires to see Africa as pretty much an empty space to be conquered and civilized.

Of course, the intertwining between the concept of religion and the intellectual history of the West, its intimate connection with the colonial exercise of power are not the only criticisms that the concept has to endure.

A highly influential school that started with William Cantwell Smith (1962) has asked the question as to whether the concept of religion does actually describe what it pretends to describe.

Smith has expressed doubts about the accuracy of the concept. He argued that it appears to be inadequate in two ways: first, it doesn't capture neither the personal aspect of belief nor its collective, communal side. Second, it conceives of religion as static, fixed and established. In order to eliminate these difficulties Smith recommends that the term religion should be dropped altogether and should be replaced with *faith* for the personal dimension and *cumulative tradition* for the collective aspect of religion. In the same way, Ninian Smart (1987) argues that "worldview analysis" is a good replacement for religious studies.

c) Religion and Globalization

Some scholars have argued that religion is the original globalizer, i.e the social system that first acted to interconnect communities and cultures across geographical and cultural borders (Lehmann 2002). This view seems to me to be somewhat exaggerated, mostly because it does not take into account the role of other systems (such as the state) and it also suggests for religion a universal agency of its own. Arguments that assign religion a force on its own or a primacy in the processes of globalization should be checked against the concrete historical context.

It is more correct to say that religion acts as one of the original globalizers along others (Meuleman 2002). And this is especially true with the advent of monotheistic religions that contain a very strong kernel of universalistic claims such as the claim to hold a timeless truth that need to be spread as much as possible and the claim that the acceptance of this truth can help believers overcome whatever ethnic, linguistic and other differences they might have).

How religion behaves in the global context?

Peter Beyer (1994:86) states that in the global condition, religions and faith have but two mutually exclusive choices: *the liberal option* and *the conservative option*. The liberal option means for a church/religion/ to accept (even if selectively) certain aspects of globalization, to accept pluralism, tolerance and to adopt an ecumenical attitude towards other religions.

The conservative option, on the other hand, means that pluralism will be rejected and religions will try to impose their views over the views of other religions.

While partially true, this account gives, in my opinion, a too simplistic picture of the existing variety of reactions of religions and religious groups

to the various processes caused by or associated with globalization. Besides, it is not necessarily that one religious group will use only a single type of reaction: the Moldovan Orthodox church, for example, employs a dual discourse, one aimed to the internal audience and another one for the Moldovan Diaspora abroad (Italy, Spain, France). The discursive strategy for the domestic audience is more in line with the conservative option – the Church aggressively defends its claims to be the most respected church on Moldovan territory and promotes the idea of Orthodoxy as being the national religion of Moldovans. On the other hand, since many Moldovans have immigrated to Western Europe because of the economic crisis in the country, the church has to fulfill their spiritual needs too. But it cannot hold and defend the same claims in Italy or Portugal, for example, where Catholicism is the dominant religious group and thus the church tends to be more ecumenical, more cooperative with the Catholicism but also with other churches and religious groups. The contradiction between these two discourses became clear in January last year, when a Moldovan Orthodox priest serving a community in the Padova region, Italy, participated in a collective prayer for the unity of all Christians with representatives of other religious groups. The gesture was heavily criticized in Moldova as some people viewed it as a betrayal to orthodoxy.

Conservative religions do not reject globalization. They rather engage it.

I deliberately chose the notion "engagement" because it seems to best fit the need for a neutral and encompassing term. It has several layers of meaning.

The first layer is the self-reflexivity of religion. As Beckford puts it: "Religions are not simply the effects of external forces; they are also agents, observers and critics of their own development. In fact, there is evidence to suggest that religious organizations can be sensitive and pro-active agencies for processing information about the changing circumstances in which they operate" (2003:105). This means that religions are constantly aware of the external world in which they activate and structure their behavior according to this information.

A second layer of engagement refers to the fact that most religious groups deal, in a way or another, with modernity's legacy, sometimes appropriating it (as is the case with liberation theology), sometimes trying to reform it, sometimes trying to replace it with a project on their own. To be sure, many authors have pointed out that even the supposedly most anti-modernist religious movement are in fact very modern both in terms of message and practice. Olivier Roy (2004) has shown how the new

concept of *ulamah* - envisaged through individualization, deculturation and deterritorialization – and promoted by Muslim Neofundamentalists is not only very modern, but also goes hand in hand with globalization. The same has been said about Jewish Orthodox groups such as Habad (Friedman 1994).

Deterritorialization of religious systems it's probably one of the major consequences of globalization. So far, argues Casanova "cultural systems throughout history have been territorially embedded" (2001:428). This embeddedness is of course of a different type than the territorial embeddedness of the nation-states: unlike states religions were not organized along strict, clear borders. It is true that most religions do have some privileged spaces or sites that they consider highly significant (i.e. sacred): Christians with Nazareth and Rome, Muslims with Mecca, Judaism with Jerusalem, Buddhism with Bodh Gaya. But these spaces are not territories. Furthermore, the constant movement of groups of people – immigration – has operated differently for states and religions: it consolidated the first, but expanded the latter.

Short History of the Baptist Communities in the Russian Empire, USSR and Republic of Moldova

When writing the history of Baptism and Baptist communities[1] in Eastern Europe generally and in Republic of Moldova specifically, choosing the starting point represents a particularly difficult endeavor. We should avoid the usual story that describes a complex historical process that first begun with the Protestant Reformation in Europe the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries and later spread to other parts of the world, including Eastern Europe. The main problem with this approach is not its historical accuracy but its socio-historical validity: its portrayal of Reformation gradually growing and spreading to new territories risks to present an altered picture whereby something (the Reformation) that has originated in one place is progressively being diffused in other places. In this narrative, the Reformation is being constructed as a powerful external "agent" that reshapes other religious contexts.[2]

Such arguments are, of course, wrong on many levels, but for the purposes of this paper I will focus only on one point that seems to me to be extremely relevant, namely the fact that within this framework the local

religious, cultural and political context is being constructed as passive, static and weak.

The short historical account I will present draws a different picture, one in which the local matters almost as much as external. For analytical purposes, I divide the factors that have contributed to the establishment and flourishing of Baptism in Moldova into two groups: indigenous developments and religious diffusion.[3]

a) Indigenous Religious Developments, Political Context and Religious Dissent

News about the Reformation quickly found their way to the principalities of Moldavia, Wallachia and Transylvania.[4] Crucial to the success of the Reformation in Transylvania are the efforts of Johannes Honterus, a Saxon theologian very active in the city of Kronstadt (now Brașov, Romania). In September 1542 the Reformation was introduced in Kronstadt. It appears that authorities in Transylvania have even tried to convert the local, eastern-Orthodox Romanian population to the new faith. One indicator of such efforts is the translation into vernacular Romanian of a book, the *Catechism of Sibiu,* by Philippus Pictor. It was published in 1544 in Hermannstadt. Later, in 1550, the successor of Honterus, Valentin Wagner, wrote another *Katichisis* in Greek supposedly also intended for the Orthodox clergy of region but also probably for the Orthodox clergy in Wallachia and Moldavia (Keul 2009:66-82).

Books and printing, so crucial to the success of the Reformation in Western Europe, were not the only way to spread Reformation in the three principalities. Attempts were made to impose it from above. In the second half of the XVth century, a Reformed Greek soldier, Jacob Heraclides (1561-1563) became ruler of the Principality of Moldavia. Jacob (in Romanian he is known as Despot Vodă) tried to convert the country from Orthodoxy to Lutheranism. Additionally he inaugurated the Latin School in Cotnari taking inspiration from the German universities. The school represents arguably the first university in this space and was active up until 1588, almost two decades after the death of its founder (Hancock-Stefan1997:82; Iorga 1908:168).

The local religious context in the three principalities (and in the region as whole) was far more diverse than many historians would admit and far more filled with tensions and conflicts.[5] Moldavia, especially, was at the border (and a site of contention) of two Eastern Orthodox jurisdictions:

the Constantinople and the Moscow Patriarchate. Internal developments in both jurisdictions but also the conflicts and the competition between them have greatly influenced religious life in Moldavia.

A first major split in the Russian Orthodox world, with consequences for the whole region, is the Schism of 1688 in the Russian Orthodox Church: a group called the Old Believers separated itself from the official church in order to protest against the church reforms implemented by Patriarch Nikon between 1652 and 1666. Although the Old Believers constitute the best known instance of religious dissent in Russia, they were neither the first nor the last dissent group (called in the official historiography of the Russian church "heresies"). They were preceded by the *strigolniki* (an orthodox urban movement in the XIVth century directed against the traditional clergy; they denounced the practice of selling ecclesiastical offices)[6] and *the thought of Skhariya the Jew* (rus. *Жидовствующие*) - a religious group which relied heavily on the Old Testament, denied the sacred nature of Christ, and performed some Judaic religious rituals. Later, another group of dissenters known as Spiritual Christianity broke with the church and started to develop its own theology and religious practices (Berdyaev 1916). The doctrines of Spiritual Christianity resembled, in many ways, doctrines and religious beliefs issued from the Reformation – emphasis on individual belief rather than ecclesiastic authority most importantly - although the contact between the two groups was minimal. Two groups that developed out of this movement are of big importance for this study: the Molokans and the Doukhobors.

The first Molokan community was established in Chisinau already in 1806 (United Council of Evangelical Christian Baptists 1989:319).

Large groups of dissenters have migrated to the Southern frontier of the Russian Empire, in the area known generally as Bessarabia and entered in contact with local populations.

But Bessarabia had its own religious tensions and conflicts too. In the early 1890s-1900s a Moldovan monk, Inochentie (Ioan) Levizor founded in Balta (now Ukraine) a millenialist Charismatic Christian movement that split from the Orthodox Church. A larger than life character, Inochentie preached the imminent arrival of Christ and claimed to have been visited by the Holy Spirit. He gained popularity by delivering his sermons in Romanian[7] to masses, using a simple and accessible language. Later Inochentie began the construction of the New Jerusalem in Balta and started to perform miracles. His monastery became an important (and embarrassing for authorities) centre of pilgrimage – only in 1910 it attracted

more than 80 000 pilgrims (Clay 1998:251). Some researchers have called the New Jerusalem in Balta "a Moldavian Lourdes" (Clark 1927). Imperial authorities tolerated Inochentie for a while but later, at the insistence of the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church, he was deported to the Solovetsky monastery located on a remote island in the White Sea. Only after the February Revolution of 1917 was Inochentie allowed to return to Balta but he died shortly after his arrival. Innochentism survived the death of its leader and later was persecuted by successive political regimes. There are small islands of Innochentism surviving until today.

Another interesting religious movement emerged from the Jewish community. A Jewish lawyer from Chisinau, Joseph Rabinowitz, put the foundation of "Israelites of the New Covenant", a syncretic Hebrew Christian mission and congregation. The movement included a mix of Christian and Jewish elements. The Jewish community in Chisinau was reluctant to convert to the new faith. Isolated from both the Jewish and Orthodox communities, Rabinowitz later converted to Protestantism (Kjaer-Hansen 1994).

b) Contact with Colonists

The Russian Empire gained control of the territory around the Black Sea known today as Bessarabia and Novorossia after the Russian-Turkish wars of 1768-74 and 1787-92. The area was scarcely populated and the Russian government even tried to recruit Old Believers and religious dissidents from other provinces of Russia in order to populate it (Zhuk 2004:36). After the wars, Russian governors offered incentives to foreigners to settle in the area and thousands of French, Swedes, Jews, and Germans have come. Among these incentives were land; monetary advances for agricultural development; freedom from all taxation, duty and billeting; self-government; religious freedom; and exemption from military service (Schmidt 2011:43). Many of these foreigners represented various strands of Protestantism. The German settlers, for example, brought with them Stundism, which itself issued from Pietism.[8]

Imperial authorities praised German colonists for their work ethics, creativity and rationality and opposed them to the supposedly apathetic, passive and unindustrious Russian peasants (Zhuk 2004). Further, German colonists were perceived as important agents of modernization of the South.

Local populations entered in contact with the settlers and with their ways of life. More importantly, German colonists were open about their religion and invited usually their servants and helpers to family worship. There were many other factors that made Stundism and other "German" faiths like Mennonites attractive to the local population: the high prestige and wealth of German colonists, often attributed to their faith; the huge shock that came after the abolition of serfdom in 1866.

The high level of alienation and conflicts with the Orthodox clergy also drove peasants into "sects": the abuses of priests, their "sinful" life, their inability to explain religious matters and their ignorance in general are often quoted as motives for leaving Orthodoxy and going to one of the many sects that flourished in the region.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century the Orthodox Church became increasingly worried about the inroads made by Protestant groups in what it perceived to be its canonical territory. The Church pressed and obtained the introduction of a provision in the Penal Code from 1845 (revised in 1869) that prohibited proselytism and religious conversions. Individuals found guilty of these crimes were exiled to Siberia and other parts of the Empire. They suffered imprisonment, banishment to Siberia, exile abroad, confiscation of property, state seizure of children from Evangelical families, and state and Orthodox harassment of "sectarians" and "sectarian" worship Elliot (2003: 6).

Russian Protestants did not secure a clear legal existence in the Russian Empire until the 1905 Edict of Toleration.

The first Baptist community was established in Chisinau in 1908 by A.F. Ivanov and A.A.Lebedenko. The community gathered on Meşianskaia, 20 street (Michiurin in the Soviet era, now Sfatul Tarii) in the house of Joseph Rabinowitz. In 1912, T.P. Hiznyakov inaugurates the choir of the Baptist community (initially 16 singers). Until 1918, Baptist communities existed only in Chisinau and Tiraspol, later they appeared also in other cities: Balti, Glodeni, Vulcanesti, Floresti, Briceni, Anenii Noi, Hincesti, Ciadir Lunga, Cantemir.

In 1918 a large part of Bessarabia joined Romania and remained part of the Romanian state until June 1940, and again for a short interval (1941-1944) during the WWII.

In 1921, B.P. Busilo becomes presbyter of the Chisinau community. In 1922 the first Baptist prayer house was built in Chisinau, on the Vokzalinaya street (currently Ciuflea). In 1924 a primary school (4 classes) was opened by the church. Two years later the community started to

build an asylum for the Baptist elderly and single believers. In 1926 the community opens its second prayer house, "Bethel", whose constituency was mostly Jews that converted to Christianity. "Bethel" maintained also a tailor workshop for girls and women from poor families. In 1927, the Congress of Representatives of Churches from Bessarabia proclaims the unification of Evangelical and Baptist churches. In the 30s, the community also collects around 514 lei for the missionary activity of Olivier Oyerinde in Nigeria (United Council of Evangelical Christian Baptists 1989).

During the Second World War the community had to endure several blows: its presbyter, Busilo, was arrested by Soviet authorities and was later executed. Also, part of the Baptist community converted to Pentecostalism.

In 1944 Bessarabia becomes part of the Soviet Union under the name of the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (created formally in 1940).

During the war Soviet authorities softened their attitude towards religion and started to find a way of accommodating the state and religious communities (with the exception of Jehovah Witnesses that continued to be persecuted because of their refusal to enroll in the army).

The attitude of the Soviet state towards religion in general and Baptists-Evangelicals in particular would change again many times. In 1948 the presbyter Rudenko was arrested on charges of "anti-Soviet declarations" and deported to Arkhangelsk for 7 years.

Subsequently, the Communist Party decided to use the same technique that it employed in relationship to the Orthodox Church: trying to co-opt it. In 1960, the All-Union Council of Evangelical-Baptist Christians surrendered to the pressures of the state and adopted two administrative documents that introduced changes in the way the community was organized. One of them was secret and was called *Letter with instructions for the superior presbyters* (rus. Инструктивное письмо старшим пресвитерам). The secret letter contained, among other things, provisions on limiting proselytism and forcing an opening of the community to the secular culture (Mitrokhin 1997:414). A large part of the community (the so-called Initiative Group, rus. Инициативники) refused to submit to these requirements and decided to quit the All-Union Council of Evangelical-Baptist Christians. The traces and division lines created by this split are visible even today in the community.

The Baptist community in Chisinau numbered, during the 70s, more that 600 members. In the beginning of the 80s, it comprised already more than 1000 members. They represented all nationalities living on the territory of then Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldova. An internal survey of

Chisinau's Baptist community shows the following ethnic distribution (as for January1, 1984): Ukrainians – 490, Moldovans – 302, Russians – 142, Bulgarians – 45, Gagauz – 15, Germans – 6, Poles – 6, Belorussians – 3, Jews – 2 (bethel.md).

In 1988 the Communist Party of Soviet Union allowed Christian organizations to celebrate the 1000-th anniversary of the Christianization of Russia. Moldovan Baptists used the moment to "tell to as many people as possible about Jesus Christ" (bethel.md). This is also the moment when local Baptist communities are being visited and helped by foreign missionaries (4 Finnish pastors). During the next year, 1989, the Bible is translated for the first time in Moldovan (Romanian with Cyrillic characters). Also in 1989, Gideons International, an evangelical Christian organization dedicated to distributing copies of the Bible opens an office in Chisinau, the first in USSR.

In the new independent Moldovan state, Baptists were able to practice, more or less freely their beliefs.[9]

According to the Baptist World Alliance, as of December 31 2009, UCEBCM comprised 470 churches and a rough estimate of 20 400 regular believers. These numbers do not include sympathizers or non-decided Baptists (bwanet.org). The most recent general Population Census (2004) conducted by Moldovan authorities indicates a different number: 33 000 Baptists organized in 270 churches. These differences can be attributed partly to the fluid character of religiosity in the region, with large strata of population migrating from one Protestant denomination to another.

Moldovan Baptists and Globalization: A Case Study

I will investigate here several significant issues.

First, there is the issue of religion and globalization/globalizing processes. It revolves around the question: in which ways is religion being transformed (if at all) as a consequence of the various processes of globalization at work – spread of capitalism, diffusion of internet and communication technologies, global outreach of media etc?

Second, There is the question of how different understanding of religion (in this case, Baptism) confront/collude/interact in settings such as Moldova where the local version of Baptism has entered into contact with American versions? I will try to show on how these encounters are not always harmonious. On the contrary, sometimes the sides enters

unequal relationships whereby American culture wars are being imported to Moldova or the theology of Moldovan Baptist imports American topics into local political debates (such as the discussion about evolutionism and creationism).

Third, what is the relationship between religion and politics? On the one hand, before Moldova gained independence in 1991 Baptists avoided any participation in the political and cultural life of the country. On the other hand, the new generation of Moldovan Baptists is actively participating in the political life of Moldova, are forging various alliances with political and religious groups, speak loudly on public issues and have their representatives in the Parliament.

a) Some Preliminary Considerations about the Moldova Context

The discussion about religion and religiosity[10] in the territories of the former Soviet Union is somewhat strange. On the one hand, we would expect that after more than 50 years of anti-religious propaganda religious feelings must be if not eradicated then at least attenuated. On the other hand, the cultural and political isolation of USSR have kept Soviet society from religious and social transformations that have emerged in the West during the second half of the twentieth century.

Not only religion did not disappear in the former Soviet Union, but it came out to be one of the dominant forces in the region. According to Ramet (1998:310) three factors can possibly explain this incredible revival of religion, and the huge amount of religion demand that accompanies it.

First, we can see growing but unsatisfied demand for nontraditional religion. Neo-Protestant cults such as Baptism are, so to speak, in trend with the individualization forces at work in different parts of the world. The most important feature of this individualization is an operation through which individual belief instead of social conformism becomes the basis of religious behavior (Roy 2004, Van der Veer 2001: 10). Individualization goes trans-nationally and trans-culturally: currents and cults of 'born-again' Muslims (movements such as Tablighi Jama'at) have been registered both in Europe and the Muslim world (Van der Veer 2001: 10).

A second factor is the abrupt lifting of controls in the religious sphere. This relaxation of religious legislation opened huge possibilities for missionary work and created favorable conditions for evangelization efforts by foreign and local missionaries.

Finally, the psychological, social, political and economic uncertainties of the post-Soviet scene are profound. Harsh economic conditions, political instabilities, the erosion of communist social institutions – collective property, welfare state – all have contributed to create a general feeling of uncertainty and insecurity. The transition to the market economy is neither easy, nor unproblematic: the welfare state has been dismantled; factories and collective agricultural farms (kolkhozes) were closed and the unemployed rose dramatically. At the individual level a demand for solutions unusual for the setting emerge – Chinese acupuncture, Tibetan herbalism, witchcraft and healing sessions (Ramet 1998:320). Not surprisingly, in these circumstances, the most popular TV show on the Soviet television, watched by millions and millions of Soviet citizens, was a program of collective hypnosis led by two faith healers: Allan Chumak and Anatoly Kashpirovsky that pretended to perform sessions of mass healing through mass hypnosis (Ramet 1998: 321). Situations like these almost always serve religion's interests.

To these can be added also: the *legitimacy vacuum*, existing and maintained *contacts between religious communities* in the West and those from the Soviet Union. The later have existed despite the strong control of the Soviet religious life by the Party and the state.

The Christian missionaries have also benefited from a transitory fascination with everything connected with the United States, as well as from the openness to novelty, brought by the sudden disappearance of the communist old order (Ramet 1998: 265).

Regimes of visibility

This paper will investigate transnational ties among three main actors: Moldovan Baptist communities in the USA, Baptist organizations in the USA and Baptists in Moldova. The aim is both ambitious and difficult. Troubles come mainly from the fact that most of the transnational links between these communities are invisible, hidden from the public view.

The regime of visibility changes according to needs, local contexts and general strategies. In the democratic system of America, for example, Baptists and Baptist organizations are highly visible, trying to push federal and state authorities to promote specific policies. A famous example is the intervention of the former American president Jimmy Carter on the behalf of an imprisoned Baptist pastor, Zaur Balaev, in Azerbaijan. Carter wrote to the country's president Ilham Alyev to freed Mr. Balaev, after a

huge press campaign of both the Baptist World Alliance and the European Baptist Federation (The Baptist Times, 2008).

Reversely, in order to face authoritarian regimes and/or the monopoly of the Orthodox Church in Moldova, local Baptist communities are at times trying to become invisible and non-intrusive.

For these reasons, quantitative data about the extent of Baptists in Moldova, the penetration of the country, the rate of churches per region, the amount of material support Moldovan Baptists receive from abroad is almost impossible to obtain. Thus, I will rely on two types of sources: publicly available journal articles, newspapers, declarations and interviews.

Also Baptist websites and discussion groups (both local and foreign, mostly US based) were used to gather information about other key aspects: transnational collaboration, joint campaigns and missionary news.

The final picture is far from being exhaustive but nevertheless it represents one of the first attempts to map these communities and their interdependencies.

Moldovan Baptists in USA

Moldovan Baptists began to arrive in the US right after the country proclaimed its independence in 1991. It is known that large Baptist Moldovan communities have settled in Sacramento (California) – a rough estimate of 1000 people, Portland and Boise (Oregon), Springfield, Westfield and Agawam (Massachusetts) – another 1000 people, Seattle (Washington state), Hickory (North Carolina), Ashville (South Carolina). Also, small Moldovan Baptist communities have been attested in Georgia, Burlington (Vermont) and Minneapolis-Saint Paul (Minnesota).

The spatial distribution of Moldovan religious communities on American soil was influenced and finally shaped by:

First, there is the influence of the existing patterns of mobility of Moldovan religious immigrants. The first Moldovan Protestants came to United States as refugees seeking political asylum (see Simkin 2012 for a detailed history of religious immigration to the US). Being persecuted for their religious beliefs and practices (by the Soviet State and the new independent republics) they were offered asylum and consequently settled in different geographical areas of the US. The choice of specific places to settle was partly a random process, where individuals were trying to find

good opportunities for life, partly an informally regulated process with various American Baptist communities playing a significant role. The North American Mission Board (NAMB), a branch of Southern Baptists Convention that operates domestically, in USA and Canada, played an instrumental role in the process of assisting immigrants from Moldova and helped settle the religious refugees in various locations.

Political refugee statuses were accorded on an individual basis and later refugees began to bring their closest relatives under the clause of family reunification. Thus, these first established Moldovan Baptist settlements in USA were de facto extended families. Later, this pattern was preserved and perpetuated. New immigrants and/or refugees go to settle in these places where Moldovans were already established.

Another principle of organization of the Protestant migration was linked to the territory of origins. It consists into the fact that people from the same religious community preferred to settle in the same place. According to one of my informants, in Minnesota, for example, there is a Moldovan Baptist Church that serves a community of more that 150 people. The community is composed mainly from immigrants originating from the district of Sângerei. And most of them are relatives (cousins, uncles, aunts, husbands or spouses of cousins and so on).

Second, we should take into account the existing patterns of mobility of ethnico-religious communities that are close to the Moldovan Baptists: Romanian/Russian speaking Baptist groups. Because of their affinities (ethnic origins, shared language) Moldovan Baptists tended to settle in place where significant Romanian/Russian Baptist presence was already established (Oregon, Georgia, Florida, California, South Carolina).

Third, the activity of charismatic leaders and organizers.

American Baptist Organizations and their Connection to Moldova. Transnational Institutions

Christianity itself carries a seed of universality. In its ideal representation, the Christendom acts both as a spiritual community and a political project of constructing a global community of Christians regardless of culture, ethnicity and language.

What is new in the process of re-spiritualization of the world is the incredible amount of instruments and possibilities – means of communication, resources, transport – that economic globalization opens

for social movements committed to the spreading of the Gospel around the world.

A picture of a paradoxical and sometimes even contradictory dynamics of a double movement of people, resources and money emerges when one takes into account all forces involved in these processes of religious globalization and creation of transnational Christian communities.

On the one hand, significant flows of Moldovan Baptist have chosen to emigrate in the United States searching for better living and career opportunities. Most of them have left behind careers, broken lives and despair and arrive in the New World with hopes to succeed.

On the other hand, Christian organizations in America (the Southern Baptists for example) are spending large amounts of money and resources in order to train foreign ministries and missionaries (Americans but also people of other nationalities) to do fieldwork and "church planting" in Moldova. This training usually includes mastering of Russian or Romanian, basic cultural and communication skills.

These two parallel flows of people represent, in a sense, the two sides of the same coin: globalization. For ones it brings poverty at home and thus it becomes necessary to emigrate. For others, this is a wonderful opportunity to conquer new spiritual spaces.

Let's follow some of these connections.

The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), the largest protestant body in the United States, with over 16 million members "who worship in more than 42,000 churches in the United States" (SBC.net) sponsors more than 5,000 foreign missionaries in 153 nations of the world. It is a remarkable and complex organization that has many subsidiaries doing specific jobs and implementing specific policies. It is also the main hub of distribution of Baptism in Moldova.

One of the branches of SBC, the International Mission Board, represents the body entitled to "evangelize the lost, disciple believers, develop churches and minister to people in need across the globe. This is accomplished by mobilizing prayer support, appointing missionaries, enlisting volunteers, channeling financial support and communicating how God is working overseas"(SBC.net).

The Georgia Baptist Convention (GBC), an autonomous organization connected with the SBC, is another donor and partner to Baptist communities in Moldova. It contributes mainly to organize evangelistic festival and summer camps: during 2006 the festival 'Jesus Christ – the Living Water" was organized on GBC's money.

Another link for the Moldovan Baptists is the European Baptist Federation (EBF). It comprises more than 800 000 European Baptists from Portugal to Russia (ebf.org). EBF operates a major educational hub for training future pastors and evangelical propagandists, the International Baptist Theological Seminary (IBTS) in Prague, Czech Republic. From 2002 to 2004, Valeriu Ghiletchi, the head of Moldovan Baptist Church (currently a deputy in the Parliament of Moldova from the Liberal Democratic Party of Moldova), has acted as the organization's president, a fact that emphasizes the importance of the former soviet republics as new territories for evangelization. EBF has developed a different approach from SBC: instead of training foreign evangelists and church planters in USA and sending them in targeted countries, EBF relies on indigenous missionaries. The Indigenous Missionary Project (IMP) provides funding for suitably gifted people to work as evangelists and church planters in their own countries. (EBF.org). By April 2010, EBF managed 6 IMPs in Moldova, more that any European country!

The local Baptist organization is the Union of Christian Evangelical Baptist Churches of Moldova (UCEBCM), a member of both the European Baptist Federation and the Baptist World Alliance.

A somewhat different transnational practice between Baptist communities in the US and Moldova is represented by the deployment of high-profile American activists and pastors in order to help local Baptists win or resist various theological or political struggles. Especially illustrative is the contention over homosexuality. The current Moldovan government wants to join EU and one of the conditions is to provide rights to sexual minorities. Moldovan Christians of all denominations refuse the 'legalization' (as they put it) of homosexuality.

Paul Cameron, a well-know anti-gay activist, a sex researcher who argues that homosexuality is associated with child sex abuse and other social evils and whose work has been repudiated by major professional associations in the United States has visited Moldova three times, in October 2008, in May 2009 and again in October 2011.[11] In January 2011 another controversial anti-gay activist - the pastor and lawyer Scott Lively partially responsible for the harsh anti-homosexual laws in Uganda - visited Moldova and warned, on that occasion, Moldovans about the dangers of homosexuality. Both Lively and Cameron were invited to Moldova by two conservative Baptist groups -- Pro Familia and Moldova Crestina.[12]

This brief survey of American and European Baptist organizations that maintain contact and support Baptist groups in Moldova shows clearly that

in just twenty years there have been established the seeds of a transnational religious community.

Baptists in Moldova

UCEBCM operates the Institute for Inductive Bible Study in Chisinau in collaboration with Moldova Precept Ministries Association. The institute represents an educational body that organizes Bible study groups, which are "the basis for planting a church in the future" (Precept.md). Another branch of UCEBCM administers the language school "English for a new life". It provides opportunities for learning the Gospel and the English simultaneously (http://efnl.org/rom/). In addition, UCEBCM has a school of technology – "Script Techno" which instructs missionaries and future pastors to use internet technologies (blogs, websites, and forums) to spread the Gospel.

Whilst these educational organizations are domestically oriented, UCEBCM runs an educational facility oriented toward missionary missions abroad: the College of Theology and Education (CTE) in Chisinau. The college received its official government registration in 1995 (Turlac, 2004). It was founded by disciples of the Emmanuel Bible Institute (EBI) in Oradea, Romania – one of the first Baptist schools in the region that began to operate in October 1990 with 60 students from Romania and 12 from Moldova. (Johnson 1996). CTE was intended to train students for missions in Russia and other countries of the former Soviet Union. Initially it hosted students from the Caucasus and Siberian and Far East Russian regions including Yakutia (Sakha) and Chukotka (Turlac, 2004). Later, it trained Gagauz students from the autonomous Moldovan Gagauz region to serve as missionaries to fellow Turks in several Central Asian republics and in Turkey also. The graduating class of 2003, for example consisted of students that have come to study at CTE from Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Korea, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan (Turlac, 2004).

Apart from these, UCEBCM manages some nursing facilities for elderly, an Association of Christian Businessmen in Moldova, the Tae-kwon-do Federation of Moldova which started as a sport club but when director Ion Cheptene became a Christian through a Bible study, his club became a Christian mission. The federation now has 60 Christian karate clubs and has seen more than 60 people accept Christ (Merchant, 1999).

Transnational Practices

The main operational channels of Baptist religious organizations are:
- The production and distribution of Bibles and other Christian literature;
- Crusades and Evangelical Festivals;
- Church-sisters;
- Missionaries
- Relief and Charity

The official history of importing Bibles in territories of the former Soviet Union begins in the days USSR still existed. It would be fair to suppose that "Bible smuggling" as a practice has never disappeared, but officially it started in the late 1980s. Just between 1985 and 1989 some 2 million copies of the Bible or the New Testament had been imported into the USSR (Ramet 1998: 235). United Bible Societies, a transnational organization that began in 1946 and currently includes offices in 120 countries is the main institutional umbrella for practices of distributing Bibles globally. Bibles are printed in local languages and support is raised through local congregations" (Wuthnow and Offut, 2008: 223).

In 2006, for example, "approximately 24 million Bibles were distributed worldwide by United Bible Societies. For Moldova, data is available for just one year, 1992, when United Bible Societies have distributed more than 100 000 Bibles" (East andWest, 1993:4).

Crusades and Evangelical Festivals are regular events organized usually during the summer. They are managed and implemented by joint teams that comprise international (American, British or European missionaries) and local pastors. They could be: summer camps, concerts, trips. Sometimes prominent Baptists from other parts of the world participate as honorary guests. For example, between July 8 and July 10, Franklin Graham, an American Christian evangelist and missionary has organized a series of "Festivals of Christianity" in nine different regions of the country. For three days Franklin Graham presented the Gospel to over 100,000 people from all parts of Moldova. More than 700 evangelical churches have joined the effort in organizing this project, representing Evangelical Christian Baptist Union, Pentecostal Union, Bible Church, Evangelical Christians, and other denominations. (MoldovaforChrist.org) "In three evenings more than 13,000 people trusted Jesus!" Later that year, Graham visited Ukraine, where a crowd of more that 120 000 assembled at the Olympic Stadium to celebrate him.

Another event with joint participation occurred in 2006, the festival "Jesus Christ – the Life Water", organized by UCEBCM and sponsored by Georgia Baptist Convention.

Moldovan Baptist communities in the US have developed a special sister church program, sometimes formal (at the community level), sometimes informal (at the individual level) to help Baptist churches in Moldova, either in their place of origins, either in other part of Moldova. A Moldovan Baptist from the Minneapolis-Saint Paul community helps the Baptist community from his village in Moldova, as one of my informants told me. He sends regularly money that is used to buy different supplies for the local Baptist Church or is used for relief work. Holidays are another occasion to help the community in Moldova: a special program of child-to-child-letters was developed. Children from Baptist communities in USA write letters to Baptist children in Moldova and send them packages with candy, school supplies and toys. At the community level, the Minneapolis-Saint Paul Moldovan Baptist community supports as a sister-church the Baptist church from Carpineni, Hancesti (Moldova).

The use of missionaries is another important strategy of the church. Under the leadership of SBC, American Baptist churches sponsor evangelization trips abroad. For example, the Bethany Baptist Church, McDonough, Georgia has sent, since 1987, nearly 80 members of its congregation to serve as missionaries throughout Moldova, Ukraine and Russia. Other major fund provider for these trips is the First Baptist Church Marshallville (Georgia). It supports training of pastors in Moldova, as well as medical clinics and Vacation Bible Schools there. The most amazing fact about Marshallville is the fact that 78 percent of the city's population is African-American. It is interesting to see how Baptist Christianity operates as a way to transcend differences of race: black Baptists in America helping their Christian white brothers in a poor country in Europe.

In addition to direct evangelical propaganda, Baptist churches implement programs for relief and charity, non-intrusive actions and procedures that are intended to expose people to baptism in a non-direct way. For example, another of my informants told me, Baptists would request the permission from the administration of the Rusca Prison and would organize a dinner for the female inmates there. Or, another case, they would help a person in need - especially elderly people – repairing the walls, digging the garden, chopping wood. After all the work is done, Baptist would perform a ritual pray and would thank God for help. In most

of the case, this impressive display of community support and compassion would lead to the conversion of the target.

From Moldova to the World

A completely different set of transnational practices is the work of Moldovan Baptists as missionaries and church planters in Russia or other parts of the world. The extent and the scale of such missions will remain unknown since Baptist Churches are reluctant to make it publicly available. In what follows, I will present some parts of that picture.

On January 12, 2004, Serghei Basarab, a pastor in Isfara, Hujand in northern Tajikistan was shot by a Muslim as he knelt in his home for morning prayers. He was shot 13 times with a Kalashnikov automatic rifle. Basarab was pastor of one of six churches that make up the Baptist Union of Tajikistan, a member of the European Baptist Federation (Associated Baptist Press). Also, he was the 10th Baptist to be murdered in that country over a 10-year period[13] (by 2004). Serghei was a Moldovan citizen and student at "Precept Ministries" (a Christian evangelical organization based in Chattanooga Tennessee that hosts Training Workshops, Bible studies, trains individuals to conduct Bible studies). Basarab was also one of the most prominent Moldovan Baptists.

The other story comes from Turkey, where on August 17, 1999 a massive earthquake shook the region of Izmit. Three American Christians and a Moldovan Baptist, Vladimir Rictor, a teacher at Moldova College of Theology and Education, who had been on a ministry trip in Turkey, organized by International Interns, gathered outside with Ozpolat, a Turkish Muslim (International Mission Board, 9/2/1999). The day following the earthquake, they handed out packets of food, supplies and offered New Testaments to those who wanted them. The joint trip of the Moldovan Baptist and the Californians was coordinated by Southern Baptists and funded by International Interns (IMB, 9/2/1999).

These case are, by no means, isolated incidents and/or accidental trips of Moldovan Baptists to other countries. On the contrary, it is a part of a massive set of processes of targeted movements of people and resources that characterize the actual development and diffusion of Baptist Christianity.

In both cases Moldovan Baptists acted as agents of a transnational community of faith. In both cases, their specific skills and knowledge were used in order to help it to attain its goals. Vladimir Rictor, himself

a Gagauz – an ethnic group in Moldova speaking an old form of Turk and the only Turkic people group not predominantly Muslim – was part of a greater plan of Baptists organizations to reach Turkey. Moldovan missionaries with a Gagauz background and knowledge of Turkish would be very useful for that purpose, as they have been instrumental for Russia, due to their excellent command of Russian. In the words of Walt Shearer, president of International Interns, "Moldova is a very strategic country." (IMB, 9/2/1999).

In Tajikistan, Moldovan Baptists served not only as pastors but also as the main providers of highly-trained missionaries and religious functionaries. Moldovan Baptists helped to launch the first Bible School there, with 29 students, and acted as the governing body of the school. Teachers and pastors were also recruited from former students of the College of Theology and Education of the Moldovan Baptist Union. At the same time, Moldovan Baptists provided the backbone of the process of "church planting" in Tajikistan.

Oleg Turlac, dean of theology at the College of Theology and Education, Kishinev, Moldova, and a doctor of ministry candidate at Beeson Divinity School, Samford University, Birmingham, Alabama lists, not without a big deal of joy, the reach of Moldovan Baptists and their significant role in the process of spreading Baptism in the world:

Vyacheslav Grini, Peter Litnevsky, and Vladimir Gladkevich, graduates of CTE, serve in Chukotka near the Bering Strait in Siberia. Yuri Vylkov serves as a missionary in Bulgaria. In the Yakutia region of Russia, Lyubomir Tataev, a 1998 graduate of CTE, and Alexander Kravchenko, a 1997 graduate, have joined together in ministry. Viktor Koval serves as a missionary in Yoshkar-Ola, while Mikhail and Inna Biryuk serve in Chita in the Russian Far East. Evgeny Shablenko, Alexei Botnari, Pavel Belev, and Sergey Kul'kov serve in different regions of Russia, while Mikhail Arabadji ministers in Turkey and Nikolai Khripko ministers in the Odessa region of Ukraine. Vyacheslav Verbitsky and Emil Agaev founded a Bible school in Shymkent (Chimkent in Russian), Kazakhstan. The Bible school in Shymkent became the first satellite school of CTE. Igor Kohaniuk, a graduate of CTE's Bachelor of Divinity program, started a Bible school in Tajikistan in 2003. In the fall of 2003 CTE's professor Serghei Namesnic traveled to Tajikistan to teach homiletics to 34 students at the Bible school in Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan. (Turlac, 2004)

Inequalities and Contradictions in the Baptist Religious Globalization

Do transnational religious movements reproduce structural inequalities between the West (conceived broadly as richer and more powerful) and the East? Or "the love for the Gospel" could attenuate these differences and solve inherent conflicts and disputes that may arise?

The answer is very complex and is complicated by the shortage of available information. Conflicts within and between Protestant Churches rarely get outside the boundaries of the community - to the general public - and usually are solved within it.

The few available testimonies can only suggest the existence of such conflicts and inequalities. One of them is that of Danut Manastireanu, a lecturer in theology at Emmanuel Bible College, Oradea, Romania. It was published in the *East-West Church Ministry Report*, back in 1998. Manastireanu's account summarizes some key aspects of the complicate relationship between Protestant centers in the US and local realities in Romania. They are:

First, an almost exclusive theological dependence upon the West, especially the United States. According to Manastireanu "it is absolutely vital for us to learn from those who are ahead of us theologically. We are confronted, however, with a sort of theological aggressiveness, even with a form of theological "imperialism," which can have very serious negative consequences for the future relevance of Evangelical theology in a cultural environment totally different from the American Evangelical context." (Manastireanu, 1998).

Second, import of Western theological disputes in cultural and intellectual contexts where these debates are irrelevant or without roots. Manastireanu provides two examples of such "theological imports': the so-called "Lordship salvation" dispute and the dispute on inerrancy. This, argues Manastireanu, "may satisfy and reassure some donors, but it will surely not help Evangelicals in Romania very much in the long run" (1998).

A side-effect of importing Western disputes is the 'import of the US culture wars'. The expression was used by Warren Throckmorton, an associate professor of psychology at Grove City College, a Christian college in Pennsylvania who closely follows the visits of American preachers to Eastern Europe.[14] Julie Dorf, a senior adviser with the Council for Global Equality, a U.S.-based NGO that works to oppose human rights abuses directed at individuals because of their sexual orientation or gender

identity. She criticizes Lively and Cameron's visits to Moldova by arguing that they bring to Moldova messages that have been rejected in the US. There is a risk, contends Dorf, that American anti-gay crusaders will abuse both the vulnerability and the ignorance of Moldovans in order to promote their agendas.[15]

Third, Christian vocations and salaries. Neo Protestant sects share a dualistic approach to life, with a strong emphasis on the full-time Christian ministry as the highest possible calling. This leads to the fact that many talented young people leave their promising careers in the secular life (politics, business, art) in order to become pastors and evangelists. They are well paid according to Romanian standards, but their salaries come from donations originating mainly in the US. "What will happen with the national workers when the Western support ceases? … It's a true manifestation of «free market» capitalism." (Manastireanu, 1998)

Fourth, cultural alienatedness of Protestant cults from the local cultural religious and spiritual culture. Most of the Protestant worship, music, theology and liturgy are import products with no effort to accommodate them to the local cultural context.

Politics and Religion

Moldovan Baptists are active participants in the public sphere. They engage in discussions about abortion, granting rights to sexual minorities, the introduction of creationism in the educational curriculum. They express their opinions on the internet (where they maintain a quite impressive presence), on social networkings sites, in the blogosphere, on dedicated channels on Youtube etc. They have even managed to get two of their most prominent members – Valeriu Ghilețchi and Veaceslav Ioniță elected in the parliament. The somewhat stereotypical figure of the contemporary urban Moldovan Baptist will be: culturally and theologically aware,[16] technically savvy and politically active.

The situation has not been always this way. On the contrary, Protestant communities in general Baptist in particular, have tried, due to the specific context of their existence (a relatively small community living at the margins of an immense Orthodox world), to avoid as much as possible the contact with the state as the latter changed its mind so many times in history and has persecuted the community in so many various ways.

After the 1905 Edict of Toleration, Baptists in Chisinau obtained finally legal recognition. But after Bessarabia joined Romania in 1918

their fate changed dramatically. Although the Romanian Constitution of 1866 guaranteed formally the freedom of conscience (art. 21), in practice authorities used various ways to limit the activity of Baptist congregations – arrests, persecutions, closure of houses of prayer, sophisticated procedures needed to obtain legal recognition etc (Popovici 1980). The situation worsened in the 30s, with various right-wing governments coming to power in Bucharest. In December 1938 all Baptist churches in Romania were closed.

When Bessarabia was again incorporated in the Soviet Union in 1944, the attitude of the Soviet State towards religious groups was already somewhat benevolent (with the exception of the Jehovah Witnesses), but the situation changed after the death of Stalin and installment of the new general secretary of the Communist Party, Nikita Khrushchev. But this time the state did not proceed to kill or deport religious dissenters. Instead, it launched a massive propaganda campaign that aimed to ridicule religious belief as being archaic, obsolete and obscurantist (Froese 2008).

In this situation, the Baptist community developed a strategy of maintaining at a lowest possible level contact with the state. The state was to be avoided and its coercive secularism rejected (Mitrokhin 1997; Nikolskaya 2009; Simkin 2012). That pushed the community to live at the margins: to avoid any political career and to not take any participation in the political system of the country (membership in the Party or in the organizations for the youth), to develop a "system" of informal homeschooling in order to counteract the official education and its political-atheist content, to avoid as possible the contact with the official Soviet culture (many of my respondents said that for a very long time their families did not own phones, TV or radio sets, did not go to the local cinema), to take jobs that did not involve participation in the Party life or Party membership (low level jobs in collective farms, factories, plumbers etc).

In the beginning of the 1990s, when the Soviet State collapsed and the newly independent former Soviet countries from Eastern Europe started to build new political systems that were, at least in theory, democratic, the community found itself at a crossroad. On the one hand, if there was any lesson to be drawn from the entire history of the community, that lesson was that the state could change its mind any time. This implied a continuation of the old strategy of living on the fringes.

On the other hand, the newly created political infrastructure (democratic in its pretentions!) provided Baptists (but also other non-Orthodox religious

groups) with the opportunity not only to participate in the political, social, economic and cultural life of the state, but also to have a say in the process of building a new society.

Much of the community chose the second path. There are two major explanations for this choice.

- The huge prestige, influence and material support that came (and continues to come) from Evangelical groups in the United States. Foreign missionaries appeared at the end of the 90s and by now they are familiar figures of the religious landscape in Moldova. They brought with them not only Bibles and money but more importantly, ways of organizing, practices of participation and attitudes toward the political system.[17]

- Change in religious demographics. Another major shift in the community that happened in the 1990s is the huge influx of new converts that very quickly surpasses the number of traditional believers. These new converts (some of them coming from Orthodoxy, others are former atheists that discover the new faith) do not share the institutional, cultural and political history of the traditional believers. For them being apolitical in a democratic system does not make sense.

These transformations did not happen without leaving traces. Many believers from the older generations have expressed, in interviews, a certain feeling of alienation from the new Baptists. One of them said: "Everything we believed: discretion in prayer, avoiding politics and the state, avoiding contacts with secular culture, beware of the dangers of technology – now is turned upside down. These new Baptists pray on television, participate in elections and use computers and internet."

Time however, is on the side of new Baptists. The new social reality – that of globalization – is on their side too. As shown above, they are active just on all fronts.

They participate in local politics, but also, occasionally, in international politics. Recently, the Council of Europe has adopted a new resolution calling for more acceptance of religious pluralism. The resolution was proposed by Valeriu Ghiletchi, a Moldovan politician and former president of the European Baptist Federation.

They initiate, wage and participate in culture wars. In January 2013 they asked the Ministry of Education to make amendments in the curriculum and to add creationism as a valid "scientific theory that should be taught along evolutionism."[18] The ministry denied the request but it was supported by the Orthodox Church. In 2012, when the Moldovan Parliament decided to adopt the Law on Equality of Chances (also known

as the Anti-Discrimination Law), Moldovan Baptists were protesting loudly. Moreover, on the "abortion" and "anti-gay" fronts, they receive support from influent conservative groups from the US – several prominent conservative figures such as Paul Cameron and Scott Lively came to Chisinau in order to help the community fight the evil of homosexuality. These preachers also met with the Metropolitan of Moldova in order to elaborate platforms for future collaboration.

Conclusions

Theories of cosmopolitanism and globalization have often neglected religious movements and their transnational connections/actions. Deemed as being parochial and condemning the believer to absolutism and a lack of tolerance (Van der Veer 2002: 104), religion was neglected in the large cosmopolitan pictures of our times.

The picture of religious globalization is nether static, nor fixed. Instead, religious globalization is, in the words of Valentine Moghadam, a "movement of movements". Paraphrasing her description of Islamic social movements, we can say that the main goal of religious globalization is the establishment or reinforcement of different religious laws and norms (Christian, Islamic) as the solution to economic, political, and cultural crises. (Moghadam 2009:50)

Without any doubt, religions are transnational and they do have a project of globalization on their own. This is valid for both the new forms of religion (neo-Protestant cults) as well as for the traditional religions: Islam, Eastern Orthodoxy and Hinduism.

The Orthodox Church, for example, is also a transnational religion. Its administration and structure was established by seven Ecumenical Councils, the last of which was held in the eighth century, i.e. long before national states and territories were constituted. Secular and religious borders sometimes coincide (e.g., Bulgaria, Greece, Romania), sometimes strongly diverge (Russian Orthodox Church with a strong presence in Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine) (Matsuzato 2009: 240).

Religion or faith, like capital, is in a sense rootless: it flows freely across borders, states and spaces. It could serve, along with the ideology of the free market and individualism as a fully developed project of globalization.

But religion is also embedded in existing social and economic relations – sometimes it even replicates them.

There are streams of money and resources with concrete address and locations, origins and destination. These material phenomena can be linked to circles of ideas and ideologies that have also concrete origins.

The actual religious revival could be treated as another form of cultural expansion of the West, since western countries, USA in the first place, are the main exporters of religion on a global scale. Will the religious globalization stop in the very unlikely situation that USA runs out of money?

Existing relationships and inequalities suggest that in the absence of western money local protestant communities will face harsh times. Which, in neither case, does not mean that we doubt their adhesion to the faith.

In this sense, Moldovan Baptists are global citizens, both shaping and being shaped by globalization processes.

NOTES

[1]   Baptists are members of one of the many religious groups that grew out of the Protestant Reformation. The official history of Baptism begins in 1609 when John Smyth, an Anglican priest that broke with the Church of England and subsequently migrated to Holland, baptized himself and others thus initiating the first Baptist congregation (for a comprehensive guide to Baptists and their history see Brackney 2009)

[2]   This leads further to the argument (with many political consequences) that if such is the case, then Protestantism must be a foreign religion, a religious phenomenon that is not characteristic to "our" place and was brought/ imposed/imported here.

[3]   These factors are not to be thought in a functionalist way as causes that add up mechanically in order to create a new social reality. Rather, I speak of them as contact points between complicated social processes that are simultaneously cultural, religious, political, ideological etc.

[4]   The first mention of Martin Luther occur in a letter from 9 March 1524 from Lajos II, King of Hungary, to the Hermannstadt (now Sibiu, Romania) town council (Keul 2009:47).

[5]   For a history of confessional diversity in the principalities of Moldavia, Wallachia and Transylvania see Istvan Keul, *Early modern religious communities in East-Central Europe ethnic diversity, denominational plurality, and corporative politics in the principality of Transylvania, 1526-1691.*

[6]   A bibliography of heresies in the Russian Church is beyond the scope of this work, however there are several excellent works on the subject. See Никольский, Н. М. История русской церкви (The History of the Russian Church), 1931; Клибанов А.И. (ed) Русское православие: вехи истории (1989);

[7]   At that time religious services in the Russian Empire, Bessarabia included, were conducted only in Russian.

[8]   The name Stundists comes from the fact that the members of the community gathered in their houses in order to discuss and read the Bible during the special hours (germ. *Stunde*) after the church service.

[9]   Reports such as International Religious Freedom Report elaborated by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor of the US State Department talk about formal and informal restrictions that Baptists but also other religious groups encounter in Moldova.

[10] Religion and religiosity are considered to be different concepts that explain different social realities. I embrace Olivier Roy's taxonomy: *religiosity* (self-formulation and self-expression of a personal faith) and *religion* (a coherent corpus of beliefs and dogmas collectively managed by a body of legitimate

holders of knowledge). See Roy, Olivier. 2004. *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah.* Columbia University Press, pp. 5-6

11   http://wthrockmorton.com/2011/03/14/scott-lively-goes-nuclear-in-moldova/
12   http://www.rferl.org/content/gay_rights_take_center_stage_in_moldova/2337579.html
13   http://www.abpnews.com/content/view/2537/117/
14   http://www.rferl.org/content/gay_rights_take_center_stage_in_moldova/2337579.html
15   *Ibidem.*
16   One of the many articles on moldovacrestina.md, a website maintained by Pastor Vasile Filat with the goal of providing guidance to Baptists in a variety of areas (personal life, popular culture, religion, politics) engages critically the curriculum for…Romanian literature. Some believers have had issues with the excessive use of curse words and dirty language by some contemporary writers (see http://moldovacrestina.md/Raspunsuri-din-Biblie/mama-nu-permite-copilului-sa-faca-temele.html).
17   Casanova (1994) describes the process through which evangelicals in the US have evolved from total isolation from the cultural/political life of the country in the 1920s, after the Scopes trial, to full engagement and active participation in politics in the 1980s. American missionaries that came to Moldova were part of this new generation of active evangelicals.
18   Scrisoarea bisericii "Buna Vestire" adresată Ministrului Educației cu privire la modificările în manualele școlare privind teoria evoluționistă http://moldovacrestina.md/social/scrisoare-mininster-educatie-modificari-manuale-evolutie/

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