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DO STARVING PEOPLE REBEL? HUNGER RIOTS AS *BAB'Y BUNTY* IN SPRING 1946 IN SOVIET MOLDAVIA AND THE RESISTANCE DEBATE

Abstract

The postwar famine in the USSR has received scarce attention in both post-Soviet and Western historiography. Based on newly disclosed archival materials from the former civil police and party in Chișinău and Moscow, this article focuses on the food riots in Soviet Moldavia on the eve of the 1946-1947 famine. Out of 30 food riots in the Spring 1946 registered in the Moldavian SSR, 18 were dominated by women (called *bab'y bunty* by Lynne Viola, 1996). The author tries to understand the agency and contingency in the outbreak of the food riots as well as the public and hidden transcript related to the way the Soviet regime tried to deal with earlier signals of the famine. The larger question to be raised is why people resist to food policies at certain moments of food crises and not at all in some others.

Keywords: Late Stalinism, Soviet Moldavia, hunger riots, bab'y bunty, open protest, resistance.

Hunger riots are among the most visible forms of protest resulting from deprivation and severe food shortage. In every regime, food riots are at the heart of the polity's existence. The very social contract and legitimacy are under question if the political authority cannot guarantee the minimum living standards that ensure survival. This study is about how the Soviet regime dealt with the hunger riots in postwar Moldavia, in the Spring of 1946, just at the threshold of the all-Union famine of 1946-1947. Statistically, about 30 riots were registered in late February-early June 1946, especially in the southern and central Bessarabian districts. Available data on 25 hunger riots cover such aspects as the number of participants, their social and gender composition, and their conclusion. In 70 percent

of them (18 out of 25), the participants were overwhelmingly women. The conceptualization of the hunger riots primarily as riots of women is thus justifiable. The *open* protests against the lack of food or *overt* attacks on the state granaries, whether they were dominated by women or not, did not occur in any other region or republic of the Soviet Union in the famine's wake. The explanation of this fact lies, I argue, in Bessarabia's pre-Communist history, the local political culture, and the peculiarities of the initial phase of Sovietization in the South-Western USSR's borderland.[1]

This paper, which will become a chapter in a broader undertaking on famine in the MSSR in the Soviet and European context, raises for the first time in historiography the question of why the Soviet state failed to address a severe hunger crisis in the early stages of the mass famine of 1946-1947. It also sheds new light on when and how protests occur during mass starvation. I draw on Lynne Viola's analysis of peasant protests and especially *bab'y bunty* (women's riots) at the beginning of collectivization in the Soviet Union in early 1930. The "Spring fever" in Soviet Moldavia, in comparison to the "March fever" of 1930, was not connected to collectivization, though. A food shortage triggered the riots in a not yet collectivized countryside. Rumors that a war between the USSR and Western allies, America and Britain, was imminent served as "a catalyzer for mobilization". Churchill's speech at Fulton, Missouri, March 5, 1946, published in the Soviet press, served as confirmation that the war was a matter of time. Many rioters believed that after the war Bessarabia would become part of Romania again. The need to address the issue is essential and imperative to the extent that the geography of food riots in Soviet Moldavia largely overlaps that of the famine to unfold in the fall of 1946 and reach its peak in winter-spring 1947. It is equally important to understand the factors contributing to the emergence of such a peculiar phenomenon as an *open* non-violent protest and the consequences of how the regime dealt with them.

I will argue that the Soviet regime did not deny agency to the participants in hunger riots. Hunger riots and how the authorities perceived them as a whole had consequences for those in power and for society's structures. The official discourse on the food disturbances varied from one institution or official to another. Although, on occasion, party and militia accounts on riots did acknowledge them as legitimate or quasi-legitimate and interpreted them as a weapon of the weak, the view of the security organs prevailed. The latter's perception was that class enemies were behind the protesters, and, furthermore, that there were national dimensions

embedded in the rallies. The protests themselves and especially their *open*, *defiant* character, were read as proof of resistance against the Soviet power and justified, in turn, harsh measures against those who had organized and supported them. In failing to solve a subsistence crisis with peaceful and non-violent means, the peasant protest later evolved into more violent and brutal forms that served, sequentially, the regime's rationalization of peasant dissent as class war with all the consequences attached.

A Short Note on Historiography, Sources, and Methodology

Lynne Viola is a pioneering historian who analyzed both the rebellions and women's roles in the late 1920s - early1930s Soviet Union.[2] Her work inspired this subject. As to Soviet Moldavia, this study's topic has not been addressed systematically so far in historiography. A volume of documents on the postwar famine in Soviet Moldavia published back in 1993 included, for the first time, a few cases of food riots (Brânzenii Vechi and Ochiul Alb/Nicoreni, see the list and map).[3] A year later, in another volume of documents on late Stalinism in the MSSR, Valeriu Pasat published an MGB document detailing the food riots in Ialpujeni and Dercăuți. In a second document, a speech to local chekists, the plenipotentiary of MGB and MVD of the USSR in the MSSR, N. Golubev, criticized the state security organs for not anticipating it and for taking insufficient measures to prevent it. Golubev called what happened "volynka" (diminutive for riots) and, alternatively, "otkrytoe antisovetskoe vystuplenie" (open anti-Soviet outbreak, or unrest).[4] In 2011, Pasat included several other cases of food riots in his book on the immediate postwar years. He mentioned several food riots such as the one in Țânțăreni, Dărcăuți, Hagi-Abdul quoting fonds of the former KGB in Chișinău destroyed in 1994. Pasat also referred to the ones in Brânzenii Vechi, Dezghingea, Marienfield, and three neighboring villages, and Chirsova.[5] I have myself mentioned in a 2014 book, republished in the following year, a few cases of food riots, namely the ones in Brânzenii Vechi, Marienfield, and in other three villages in the vicinity, as well as Nicoreni, Dezghingea, Chirsova, and Colibași.[6]

Therefore, this study contains ten new, previously unknown, cases of hunger riots, whilst also providing further details about others we did know already. These data come from the party archives in Chișinău and the Ministry of Internal Affairs archives, the latter being accessible for a short time in 2010-2011. In addition to the new empirical data, this study

is the first attempt to conceptualize local granaries' attacks as hunger riots in late February-early June 1946 in Soviet Moldavia. There were no other hunger riots to the best of our knowledge, be they dominated by men or women in other old or new territories of the Soviet Union on the eve of the mass famine of 1946-1947.[7] The famine was indeed an all-Union phenomenon, but people reacted in its earlier stages in different ways throughout the USSR. The focus on a small territory like MSSR offers the possibility to grasp the whole picture from an in-depth analysis of just a portion. As the MSSR was a borderland union republic and the majority of the population non-Slavic, sharing history and language with a neighboring country under the Sovietization process, Romania, it is useful investigating if there was a national dimension of the hunger riots. The documents issued by political police officials would be helpful in this regard.[8]

In some cases, reports related to one or another food riot offer different narratives regarding causation and agency. The timeframe on their elaboration and the institution producing them explains, if only partially, these variations. Sometimes, an official's agency is decisive. The oral sources so far, unfortunately, do not shed light on these episodes, and thus a historian cannot count on other sources than the official ones. These circumstances pose a challenge. There was an inbuilt hierarchy in the Soviet regime's institutional structure, alleging the party had a hegemonic role over militia and security organs, but this is more accurate for Moscow than for local, regional and republican settings.[9]

Oral sources are as essential as the official documents in the reconstitution of things past. There are several hundred interviews with famine witnesses and survivors in Soviet Moldavia published. However, they are silent on the subject of this study. Memory seems to retain the most dramatic events only, and in the context of the period, the food riots were far from being the most critical.[10] As to the press, it does not mention hunger riots either, because this kind of news was deemed very sensible for the Soviet regime.

Food and Political Legitimacy in *Ancien Regimes*

Food crises have been more frequent in human history than periods of plenty. As the resources of food were often scarce and inevitably limited, conflicts and wars ensued. Food is intrinsically related to power. Rulers able to secure more food for their communities could be perceived as

more legitimate to their fellow countrymen. On the contrary, inspired by Thompson and Scott, John Bohstedt has argued that a ruler who cannot guarantee the minimal subsistence for its people faced discontent, food riots, and rebellion from their subjects.[11] In, Russia, Tsarist or Soviet, as Tamara Kondratieva has argued, feeding the population was intimately related to power politics. Moreover, the capacity to secure food was at the very center of political stability and legitimacy question.[12]

As a supreme ruler in medieval France, the King had a moral duty to feed everybody under his jurisdiction.[13] In times of ecologic catastrophes, floods, droughts, or destructions brought by war, the King was responsible for safeguarding the needed supplies and making food prices affordable, otherwise facing sedition from the part of his subjects.[14] Crop failures were fraught with political instability. Hence, the monarch resorted to all-out wheat requisition from the peasants in the common good's interest. Meanwhile, however, the latter could keep other cereals such as rye and barley for their consumption.[15]

The hierarchical order of the medieval world permeated all aspects of every day, including food consumption. Aristocrats were entitled to better rations, especially meat and white bread, not only because they were more affluent and could afford to, but because of ideological reasons as well. Lowest on the social ladder, the peasants were entitled to a specific menu commensurate with the feudal order's moral design and their supposed lack of intellectual abilities.[16]

The pre-modern economy was very much a cereal and subsistence economy. Steven Kaplan resumes this as follows:[17]

> The subsistence problem has dominated life in old regime Europe in a relentless way. No issue was more urgent, more pervasively felt, and more difficult to resolve than the matter of grain provisioning. Cereal-dependence conditioned every phase of social life. Grain was the pilot sector of the economy; beyond its determinant role in agriculture, directly and indirectly, grain shaped the development of commerce and industry, regulated employment, and provided significant revenue for the state, the church, the nobility, and large segments of the third estate. Subsistence needs gave cereal-dependence its most telling expression. The vast majority of people in the old regime derived the bulk of their calories from cereals. Never did the old proverb" a man is what he eats" hold truer. Because most people were poor, the quest for subsistence preoccupied them relentlessly; the study of how they dealt with their never-ending subsistence problem tells us a good deal about who and what they were.

In modern times, the danger of sedition due to the lack of food increases. Among other causes, a food crisis triggered the French Revolution and shattered the legitimacy of the monarchy. More than a century later, the Romanov dynasty ended its 305-year rule in February 1917 due to the outbreak of a food crisis in the capital in the context of a devastating war.[18]

The *ancien regime's* logic in the food-legitimacy relation was perpetuated into interwar Romania, including Bessarabia and much of Europe. Most of the former Tsarist territories, part of Soviet Russia and the Soviet Union after 1922, would experience another type of political authority that would radically differ from the old regimes, including in the food policy domain.[19] The Bolsheviks would use food as a weapon against the undesirables of all sorts and award generously those playing on their side.[20] To that end, they imposed a hyper-centralized food supply system, dismantling the decentralized system of granaries that proved crucial in *preventing* famines in many instances in the past.

Food Policy in the Romanian-Tsarist-Soviet Borderlands before 1946

Bessarabia, the eastern half of the medieval and early modern Principality of Moldavia, became a part of the Tsarist Empire in 1812 as a result of a Russian-Ottoman war. The Tsarist Empire lagged behind the principal continental and overseas empires of the time. But throughout the 19th century, it tried to catch up and synchronize its policies with the West.[21] One of them was to adopt a food security policy. In the mid-1830s, Petersburg extended its food security policy to Bessarabia by creating grain storehouses at the volost and village level. Initially, under the coordination of the Marshall of the Bessarabian nobility and after 1861 under the purview of Zemstvo, local granaries played an essential role in securing peasants with minimal subsistence grain in bad harvest years.[22] To this end, the state granted low-interest loans to the peasants, payable in a few years. Millions of peasants in the Tsarist Empire involved in the state-sponsored cooperative movement did enjoy even better conditions. In case the repayment proved not to be affordable in a few years, the peasants received fiscal amnesty. As Yanni Kotsonis has argued, this had to have somewhat mixed results in developing progressist capitalist relations in the countryside in what he has dubbed as the Making Peasants Backward policy.[23]

Notwithstanding the corruption and mismanagement involved, the local granaries did help prevent mass mortality in most of the period up to the Revolutions of 1917. During the last century before its demise, the Romanovs experienced a local mass famine in Finland due mainly to local administration failures,[24] and another famine in 1891-1892, this time empire-wide.[25] Bessarabia fared pretty well, avoiding mass mortality due to the role played by the institution of local granaries. Only isolated areas in the north, close to Prut river (today in Râșcani and Glodeni districts), experienced food shortages and cholera in 1891-1892.[26]

During the First World War, especially from 1916 onwards, Bessarabia experienced a food crisis that was common to the whole empire. The war effort depleted the grain reserves. The mass requisitioning of horses for the war effort and the mobilization of about 250,000 Bessarabians in the Russian Army impacted agriculture's productivity.[27] The burden of filling the gap in workforce shortage fell upon the women. The food supply worsened in 1917-1918, owing to revolutionary turmoil, political instability, and economic disruptions, which would continue up to the mid-1920s.

Meanwhile, Bessarabia became part of Greater Romania in March 1918. The Romanian Army would continue requisitioning grain and other agricultural produce in the next years, much as the Russian Army did in 1916-1917. However, the phenomenon was not limited to Bessarabia alone, being extended to other Romanian provinces as well.[28] For a while, Bessarabian agricultural goods were not accepted across the Prut River in the old Kingdom until the prices fell to the minimum and were bought for almost nothing by tradesmen and speculators.[29] After the agrarian reform of 1918-1924, the food supply improved, and productivity stabilized in the main. However, Bessarabian peasants and other Romanian peasants always complained that the grain prices were too low to be fair relative to industrial goods' costs.[30] The peak of the peasant unrest came during the Great Depression years, but mass famine was avoided, unlike in the Soviet Union. Strikes in 1929-1933 Romania involving workers were widespread and violent, notably in two instances resulting in fatalities, at Lupeni mines and Griviția railway depot. Workers' strikes due to severe cuts in living standards and increasing prices for food supplies were an often occurrence. This potential was used aptly by the Comintern through the illegal Communist Party of Romania (PCdR) and other quasi-legal satellite organizations.[31] To that end, the 6th Congress of Comintern issued specific recommendations on how to involve more women in skirmishes

with police. The women workers had more motives to be dissatisfied than the men workers, as the former received 50% less pay for the same amount of work.[32]

A severe drought touched Bessarabia and other Romanian provinces in 1923-1925 causing food shortages and a spike in hunger-related illnesses. As a result, the mortality in Bessarabia increased by about 15,000 in three years.[33] In 1935, another severe drought in Bessarabia was about to provoke a famine with mass excess deaths. However, the Romanian government's expedient measures and the Romanian Red Cross avoided humanitarian catastrophe. About 125,000 individuals enjoyed access to food through a public kitchen network established in 1935-1936. Besides, other regions of Romanian received several thousand Bessarabian children in need of special recovery treatment.[34] Several thousand still died from starvation.[35] Overall, the *ancien regime's* food relief worked better than the Soviet one. The involvement of the state and other agencies in the earlier stages of the food crisis as well as the free or quasi-free press proved crucial.[36]

The Bolsheviks were aware of the hazardous role the food issues could play in power politics. Memory about women participating in the hunger rallies, which accompanied the fall of the Romanovs, was fresh. Acknowledging the importance of food, they established the first modern dictatorship based on the monopoly of food distribution.[37] While blaming the Tsarist food policies and the tribute model of modernization, in reality, the Bolsheviks embarked much on the same model,[38] called alternatively internal colonialism.[39] However, the Soviet pattern of modernization was by no means a mere continuation of the Tsarist one.[40] It aimed at implementing a radical social engineering program and knew no restraints in using violence to this end.[41]

Unlike Romania and most of Europe in the interwar, Soviet Russia would experience severe food shortages and famines with high excess deaths. Triggered by revolutionary turmoil resulting in the disruption of the whole economy, the mass famine was a constant during the Russian Civil War, reaching its peak in 1921-1922. Under Herbert Hoover, the American Relief Administration allowed Lenin to give a hand to the starving Russians, saving several million from certain death, and unintentionally, the Bolshevik regime itself from demise.[42] The Tambov peasant rebellion and Kronstadt uprising determined Lenin to give up utopian plans of total control over the economy, introducing the New Economic Policy in March 1921. The grain crisis of 1926-1927 would prompt, among other

factors, Stalin's Revolution from Above in 1929. Agriculture and peasants were to pay a tribute in grain and manpower for the Soviet Union's rapid industrialization. In conjunction with bad weather and a collectivization drive at any cost, it would result in the mass famine of 1932-1933. Between 5,5 and 6,5 million died of hunger, half in Ukraine alone, and more than a million in Kazakhstan.[43] State relief would be slow, late, and insufficient to be able to avoid the catastrophe. Though originating from various factors, the way famine unfolded displayed a disciplinary dimension concerning the peasants. It also served as a motive to reverse the Ukrainization policy in place since the early 1920s, heralding a radical change in the Soviet nationalities policy to survive until the late 1980s.[44]

The wholesale collectivization campaign resulted in a dramatic decrease in agricultural output and, subsequently, in a food crisis in 1930-1931, culminating in the mass famine of 1932-1933. Rebellions against collectivization and open, violent dissatisfaction with the politics of provisions predated the mass famine. The peak of the mass resistance came in the spring of 1930. About 13,000 peasant rebellions and food riots, with more than two million participants, were registered in that year alone. In about one-third of the disturbances, women represented the majority. While the context of the postwar famine is different from the early 1930s, there are some similarities in how the regime perceived and reacted to the food riots, particularly those Lynne Viola labeled as *bab'y bunty*, or women's riots.[45]

What is often absent from most narratives on the Soviet famines, especially the Great Soviet famine of 1932-1933 known as Holodomor in Ukraine, is that these are a result – among other factors – of a fundamental change in the food security policy following the abdication of the Tsar. It was about the introduction of the grain monopoly by the Provisional government in the Spring of 1917, perpetuated by the Bolsheviks after October that same year. Besides, the Soviets had liquidated the granary system as a decentralized institution serving as the critical pillar in preventing and fighting hunger. The Soviet regime introduced instead a hyper-centralized food distribution system immediately after the October Revolution, reinforcing it again after 1929 among other Civil War practices. Praised as efficient by many in war conditions, including during the Second World War,[46] the Soviet food supply system was often dysfunctional and fraught with catastrophic consequences during peacetime. In 1946-1947, that would prove to be the case again. The permanent scarcity of food will accompany the Soviet Union up to its demise owing to the fact that the

collectivization of the countryside brought control over the peasants but prevented making agriculture a thriving domain of the Soviet economy.[47]

During the war, Romania delivered oil to Germany and large quantities of food, especially grain and corn.[48] Already in late 1941, the Romanian government introduced rationing to staple food. The civil population's supply was somewhat acceptable, without significant major disruptions, or mass famine, as was the case in the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, the lack of food was a constant issue caused by the shortage of workforce and exports to Germany. Besides, most of the supplies went to the sizeable Romanian Army of half a million and an initial 62,000 Wehrmacht contingent stationed in Romania, reduced to 26,000 in 1942. In early 1942, the food becomes increasingly insufficient, and the authorities introduced differentiated rations. The military received the best rations that included one kg of white bread per day and 1,5 kg of meat per week. The civil population's main rations instead were beans and cornbread (*mămăligă*, a sort of polenta).[49] Eating cornbread in excess, without or little fats, provokes severe diseases, like pellagra. In the immediate postwar Romania, pellagra increased by 250 percent.[50] In contrast to the civil population, Romanian Jews and Roma did starve and died *en masse* during the war, especially those deported to Transnistria due to the racial policy adopted along German lines.[51]

The Soviet home front excess mortality during the war – not counting Leningrad under the blockade – has been estimated to at least 1 million. If not for American aid in food, the death toll would have been much higher. Providing food for the soldiers was the priority, but given the loss of the leading grain-growing regions, their rations were relatively scarce till early 1944.[52] The military received the lion's share of the lend-lease bread and other food. Still, sometimes it reached Gulag inmates as well.[53] In the Soviet territories occupied by the Nazis, the food situation was much worse. The Germans put in action the infamous Backe Hunger plan, especially in Ukraine.[54]

When the Soviets returned to Bessarabia at the end of the war, the dominant perception of the administration toward the local population was a combination of contempt and envy as to the existing living standards, particularly the possibility of getting bread and other staple food. These perceptions were especially widespread among the military and were partially responsible for the high criminality cases against the local population.[55] The republican party and government institutions as well as the civil police (NKVD) were asking for the punishment of the

Red Army delinquents, but to no avail.[56] This speaks to the fact that the Soviet military institutions had their priorities in waging the war at any costs, thus paying less attention to public sensitivities. In contrast, the local party-state institutions seemingly felt a responsibility in administering a certain territory and wanted to avoid further antagonizing the civilian population.

In a June 1945 interview to the Commission for the Chronicle of the Great Patriotic War, Nicolae Vizitei, the first postwar mayor of Chișinău, stated that upon his arrival a day after the Germans had left (August 24, 1944), there were no food supplies at all in the city. But in a matter of days, the peasants started to bring all the best they had to the market. Without many headaches for the Soviet authorities, the peasants with entrepreneurial spirit Vizitei praised solved the food crisis.[57] But the food situation in Bessarabia in 1944 was better only in comparison. It would worsen in the following period partly due to the long-lasting impact of the war, bad weather, crop failures in 1945-1946, and Sovietization policies. With hindsight and in comparison, according to some accounts, the Romanians were barely taxing the peasants.[58] Of course, it has been an exaggeration of the Antonescu regime's fiscal burden that befell upon the peasants.[59] Still, the impression is worth mentioning as it shaped the Soviets' attitude toward the locals in the next period.

In the north and, partially, in the center, with the notable exception of Chișinău, the Soviets had already introduced their wartime food distribution model and fiscal policies by May 1944.[60] The primary military operations of August 1944 and the attrition war in the previous months took place in the central part of Bessarabia.[61] It would have severe consequences on the immediate peacetime period as a whole and agriculture in particular. The evacuation of the population from a 25 km-strip close to the front line imposed in mid-May 1944 in central Bessarabia brought additional hurdles for the postwar reconstruction efforts.[62] The republic's leadership tried to consider this fact, asking Moscow to reduce procurement plans for the central districts.[63] These efforts had uneven results. Along with the southern areas, the ones around Chișinău will experience the most disastrous losses in human life during the famine to unfold in the fall of 1946 and winter-spring 1947.

By late 1944-early 1946, the situation in Bessarabia was hardly unique. The Smolensk region in Central European Russia experienced dire food shortages following the liberation in the spring and summer of 1944.[64] The same goes for the Kalinin region (now Tver'), one of the first Russian

regions to be liberated.[65] All the Soviet territories, either under the Nazi occupation or not, went through similar hurdles. Criminality skyrocketed, and popular discontent grew steadily. The fact that food shortages were an all-Union problem should not downgrade the importance of embarking on case-studies in a more systematic way. While focusing on a case-study however one is supposed to keep in mind a broader picture since a local phenomenon could not be understood in isolation from larger developments.

Food Riots in Soviet Moldavia, Spring 1946

The impact of the war and the liquidation of the communal granaries, compounded by a bad harvest in 1945, anticipated a severe food crisis in the following year's spring-summer period. The food shortages first afflicted urban dwellers, the rural inhabitants following the lead. Since mid-1945 and the beginning of the next year, bread shortage was felt only in some isolated areas. By spring 1946, it started to become more of a general problem. Initially extremely acute in various districts throughout the Right Bank (Bessarabia), particularly in the north,[66] the food crisis extended to the republic's south and central districts. In the fall of 1946 and the spring of 1947, the north would fare better than the south and center. Starting with April-May 1947, however, the famine would be as deadly in the north as in other regions.[67]

The deterioration of the food supply situation, mainly concerning bread shortage, has been recorded as early as mid-summer 1945. In less than a week alone, July 5-10, 1945, the military censorship of the Moldavian political police (People's Commissariat for State Security; NKGB, in Russian) intercepted 300 letters on the subject. That seemed a temporary setback. In 1946, however the signals of the coming famine resumed on a higher scale. The State Security of the Moldavian SSR (renamed MGB in March) reported 313 similar messages in April alone, their number increasing to 538 in May and almost tripled to 883 in June relative to mid-Spring.[68] Tellingly, the queues for bread in Chișinău and other Moldavian localities increased dramatically. As noted above, the phenomenon was not, however, limited to the Moldavian SSR. In other Soviet republics, mainly in south-eastern Ukraine and Russia, similar cases were registered.[69] Though only in the MSSR, more precisely in its Bessarabian part, the food shortages' dissatisfaction would take the

form of a widespread *open* protest. The phenomenon, then, deserves an explanation. It pertains to multiple factors I will refer to after giving a detailed description of what one can grasp from the available sources.

The *open* protests materialized in storming the local grain storehouses, the *Zagotzerno*, in reaction to the authorities' unwillingness to address the food crisis. These events were by no means unprecedented. Attacks on local granaries were recorded earlier in 1945 and later, from August to December 1946. However, in contrast to the previous and later assaults, the Spring ones were mainly peaceful. The initiators and participants behaved in a very particular way. They were non-violent or, more precisely, employed violence only in a limited way, excluding physical injuries and aiming at getting access to the grain stores in broad daylight, in a kind of public performance setting. It was a form of open protest and, at the same time, an act of sedition in that it exhibited a peculiar culture of opposition to the authorities. As if the protesters were saying, "we know that what we are doing is not legal, but it is not illegal all the same, because our very survival is at stake, i.e., we have nothing to lose." And besides, "we do not hide our discontent by acting openly, in a fair manner, in contrast to the criminals who are stealing during the night, using weapons and violence against the warehouses' wards, police, and officials." Semi-spontaneous, semi-organized, and scattered, the Spring 1946 food riots in Soviet Moldavia in Spring had something in common, as if following a pattern and being organized by a central body. But there was no organization behind them, and in this, they were rather spontaneous representing an authentic grassroots movement.

The assaults on grain storehouses started in late February and ended in early June 1946, reaching 30 in total. Information about almost half of them is relatively scarce, but fortunately, for some of them there are detailed descriptions. As already mentioned, all sources about these disturbances have official provenance. Somehow surprisingly, however, the reports do not converge on the same plot as a whole and sometimes are utterly divergent as to the causation, the distribution of blame, and their significance. The first food riot occurred on February 27, 1946, and, unlike most to follow, would be dominated by men. More exactly, about 200 peasants attacked the grain storehouse in the village of Țânțăreni, Telenești district, Bălți county, some 60 km north of Chișinău. A report of the State Security (MGB) stated that the storehouse's devastation failed on that day due to the authorities' expedient measures. On the next day, six women repeated the attempt. They were apprehended by warders and

local activists while breaking the locks and entering the storehouse. Shortly after, an MGB group arrived on the spot and arrested two men thought to be the real instigators. As Valeriu Pasat rightly notes, without broad support from other villagers, the tentative was doomed.[70] This first incident aiming at plundering a local grain storehouse anticipates in many ways the next ones in terms of organization and shifting the blame from the real perpetrators to alleged ones. The authorities tended to view women at this stage as lacking agency and not capable of acting independently. Hence, the authorities were to look for causes and initiators somewhere else.

Three weeks later, on March 17, 1946, the next attack ensued. Lacking bread to feed their families, about 100-120 desperate individuals, mostly women, attacked the local grain warehouse, *Zagotzerno*, in Brânzenii Vechi, Răspopeni district, Orhei county. They broke the padlocks and confiscated four tons of grain. Moldavian SSR's prosecutor Simon Kolesnik reported the attack took place with the connivance of the storehouse director, D. P. Cecan, and guardians V. G. Camerzan and F. I. Ojog. By provoking the riots, the culprits aimed at concealing the evidence of embezzlement they were allegedly involved in.[71] One can assume the crowd was indeed encouraged by the director and guardians of the storehouse as the archival sources often mention theft and misappropriation of grain by the *Zagotzerno* administration in the MSSR, and across the USSR.[72] However, participating in a food riot was a dangerous enterprise and the decision to partake had to be pondered carefully. Slightly disconcerted as to who participated in the assault, the militia noted that the "main bulk of participants directly involved in the despoliation of grain represented poor people among them women, teenagers, wives of the Red Army recruits and invalids of the Great Patriotic War." Under these circumstances, the attackers did hardly fit into the category of class enemy. On the contrary, participants in the rebellion incarnated the very social basis for which the Bolsheviks seized power in October 1917, the poor and the discriminated against. Usually, as Lynne Viola has shown for the early 1930s, a class enemy to shift the blame on had to be identified or invented in such cases.

In the Brânzenii Vechi food riots, Maria Banari, the main instigator, supposedly belonged to kulaks. An aggravating element pertained to her family biography. The Soviet political police had previously arrested her brother, thought to be an ex-far-right anti-Semitic party member in interwar Romania, the so-called cuzists (followers of A.C. Cuza).[73] The MVD report indicated the responsibility was of those in charge of the storehouse, i.e.,

men, perceived as superior in political consciousness to women, and thus fully eligible to be blamed on and sentenced harshly. All of them, labeled as belonging to the anti-Soviet elements, faced criminal charges compounded by their alleged participation in the Holocaust, as war criminals.[74] One of the guardians, Camerzan, was supposedly involved in the arrest of Jews and confiscation of their property during the war. The other one, Ojog, was allegedly a policeman in Ukraine during the war. Neither Camerzan nor Ojog, however, could be found in the list of Holocaust perpetrators preserved in the former KGB archive in Chișinău. The deportation of 1949 targeted specifically former collaborators with German and Romanian authorities during the war, and their names are not listed there either.[75] It seems, then, that the initial allegations included in the report were fabricated. The hunger riots and their extent, social and gender composition, caught the militia unprepared and created a sense of alarm. Thus, the authorities' first impulse was to use the ritualic formula in explaining what was happening according to the ideological prescriptions of the *Short course of the TsK VKP (b)* and subsequent instructions on the issue, i.e., to look for class enemies behind the purpoted inimical manifestations.[76]

The main culprit's testimonies are extremely valuable as they shed light on the collaboration between women and men during the preparation stage. Maria Banari, testified to the militia that manager Cecan counseled her back in February 1946 on how to get grain. She was supposed to select a few persons responsible for mobilizing a big group of women, especially among the Red Army recruits' poor and wives, and organize an attack on the grain storehouses. When Banari replied that this was dangerous and fraught with criminal charges, Cecan replied that "if you are in big numbers, nobody will sentence you". [77] Banari mobilized the women but personally did not participate directly in storming the grain storehouse. One can infer thus that she was only partially convinced about the reassurances given by Cecan. She participated in the food riot through proxies instead, sending her children. Even though children were less prone to face criminal charges, it was nevertheless dangerous. By delegating her children to participate in the riots, Banari solved however her dilemma on whether it is correct to instigate the action and not participate in it. Anyway, neither she nor her children were convicted. Her gender identity seemed to be crucial. At this stage of the food riots, the authorities chose to be lenient towards women. Besides, she testified that men were the real instigators, and that helped the militia in shifting

the blame. It is more difficult to explain why Cecan and others were not convicted either. Probably the explanation pertaines to the local patronage system that allowed the culprits to avoid being punished.

Other assaults on the local granaries followed in April and reached their peak in May. The attack against the grain storehouse in the village of Marienfield, Cimișlia district, in the south, leaves no room for doubt as to the real culrpits and the participants' motivation. On April 17, 1946, about 45 women from the neighboring village of Ialpujeni broke the storehouse's window and appropriated grain. The reason for such drastic action was the refusal of the storehouse's manager to allot them one pood (16.3 kg) of wheat each. Most of the participants in these food riots were women with children in tow and teenagers. Their husbands were still serving in the Red Army.[78] The Ialpujeni riot is the first to give a real headache to the authorities because it broke out spontaneously, no instigators being identified outside the participants. And the latter were wives of Red Army recruits, i.e., representing the social basis of the Soviet power in the village.

When hunger riots multiplied in the following month, the approach toward women changed. In fact, it had already changed in late April. The Chirsova disturbances (April 24) resulted in the arrest of three women identified as the real perpetrators.[79] In another food riot, held the next day (April 25) in Hagi-Abdul, Vulcănești district, Cahul county, by arresting two women, the authorities made clear again that punishment cannot be ruled out for them as well.[80] In the peasant rebellions of 1930, Lynne Viola established that the woman "like an unruly child or a butting goat, she was not held responsible for her actions, even in cases when she was subject to reprimand or punishment".[81] This observation might be valid for the 1946 food riots in Soviet Moldavia. But as the information in our case is scant, it is difficult to substantiate it entirely. Additional research on how Soviet officials' perceptions of women changed after WWII relative to the 1930s is needed to answer this question. It is safe to assume however that by arresting women in late April when the food riots were rampant, the authorities signaled that nobody should count on condescension. Containing the food riots was perceived as ideologically extremely challenging to deal with because of their *open* and *peaceful* character. Somehow paradoxically, it was easier for the authorities to deal with criminals employing *covert* strategies and *violence* against the warehouses' guardians, activists, and militia.

Other attacks on grain stores followed almost the same pattern and social composition. On April 24, 1946, about one hundred individuals,

mainly women, raided the local *Zagotzerno* in Chirsova, Comrat district, Bender County. In this instance, the preparations were ahead for some time. Two weeks before, the main culprit, Maria Celac, appealed to the village poor and asked the women to join in a collective action to seize grain from the granary. She succeeded in convincing Uliana Hagi, Nadejda Radu, and Stepanida Radu in organizing the mobilization of the population to this end. However, no precise plan was adopted except the storming was supposed to occur on a specific date at a given hour. When the day came, a group of women led by Nadejda and Stepanida Radu headed for the village administration to ask for bread. On approaching the village hall, they met Uliana Hagi, who told the group that it was senseless to ask the local authorities for food assistance. Agreeing on that, the women went directly to the grain warehouse.

Meanwhile, the main organizer, Maria Celac, joined the group. The storehouse' guards were missing, making the crowd's task easy to accomplish. There was probably some connivance with the guardians involved. The rioters had only to remove the wattle walls and seize the corn, about one ton per total. Three initiators, Maria Celac, Uliana Hagi, and Nadejda Radu, were shortly placed under arrest. The civil police investigation on the spot also identified a man who was supposedly involved in the riot's organization, one Ilya Burdji, the local government plenipotentiary for agriculture.[82]

Large numbers of participants in the food riots made the authorities suspect the protests had an organized character. Indeed, it is hardly a coincidence that 50, 60, 100, or hundreds of persons met just occasionally on a specific date in a particular place. In many cases, the preparation for the manifestations started days or even weeks before. In Ialpujeni, Cimișlia district, Bender County, Ana Sprînceanu had started to mobilize the wives of Red Army recruits and war widows as early as April 10 for an event scheduled to take place a week later, on April 17, 1946. In Chirsova, Comrat district, the same County as Ialpujeni, some 65 km south of Chișinău, Maria Celac commenced talking to women and tried convincing them to participate in the raid on the *Zagotzerno* on April 10 for a manifestation coming to fruition two weeks latter, on April 24, 1946.[83]

Several reports point to another critical aspect. Namely, the actions themselves had an open character, but the preparations of the riots implied using mobilization techniques in a more or less transparent fashion.[84] The quasi-public and open nature of the preparation stage lends another peculiarity to the hunger riots. In comparison to both previous and later

protests spurred by food shortages, the preparations, if any, would bear more of a covert and clandestine nature.

The actions in defiance of the state authority were seemingly synchronized in some instances, though unlikely in the two previous ones (Ialpujeni and Chirsova). That happened undoubtedly on May 1, 1946, when in several neighboring villages of Cimișlia district, food riots broke out simultaneously. On that date, about 500 individuals from four contiguous localities Mereni, Javgur, Cenac, and Grădești, organized an all-out assault on the local grain warehouse (located in Mereni). The majority of the participants were women, making the uprising the largest in the period under scrutiny. In this case, at least women from Javgur have been inspired by a previous riot taking place in the neighboring Ialpujeni two weeks prior.[85] In another food riot held in Dezghingea on April 29, women acted in the frontline while men stayed in the back, ready to intervene in case of danger.[86] This scene resembles many registered in 1930 during the "March fever" in the old Soviet territories analyzed by Lynne Viola. Possibly, the same pattern of action occurred in other hunger riots, but the information on about half of them is rather scarce, and it is difficult to say with certainty. Mikhail Sholokhov did refer in his famous novel *The Virgin Land* to such a peasant resistance model in the North Caucasus in the early 1930s.[87]

Most of the hunger riots, either dominated by women or not, took place in villages with a Romanian majority (19 out of 24 cases). In some of them, Gagauz represented the majority, and in one community, the population was mixed, 50/50 Gagauz/Bulgarian (Chirsova). Ethnic Romanians were subject to all-out mobilization in the Red Army, 281,563 participating on various fronts between March 1944 and May 1945.[88] By early 1946, many had not returned home yet or had fallen on the frontline.[89] The Gagauz and Bulgarians, however, were subject to selective recruitment due to their categorization as diaspora ethnic groups, i.e., quasi-enemy nations because their "homelands" fought on the side of Nazi Germany (Turkey, and Bulgaria). In Dezghingea, a Gagauz village, by spring 1946, conscription touched only 18 men in a village of 1200 households.[90] It is safe to admit then that in the Romanian villages, the incidence that women were acting independently without a husband at home to rely upon was higher than in Gagauz ones. The Chirsova and Dezghingea riots are cases in point. While women participated in the incidents, their husbands were at home.[91] It might seem a contradiction that ethnic Romanians also belonged to an 'enemy nation,' still conscripted *en masse*. The explanation

is that from the Soviet perspective, ethnic Romanians were Moldavians, a different nation.[92]

It was not by accident that women dominated among those attacking the state grain stockpiles. But although women dominated most of the food riots, as Viola noticed on the 1930 "March fever," women's riots were a part of the peasant culture of revolt and moral peasant economy writ large.[93] Traditionally women were in charge of feeding their family, and their maternal instinct prompted them to act in whatever manner to deliver food. They would sacrifice food to their children during the incoming famine in the Winter and Spring of 1947. Evidence from the Great Irish Famine suggests that women were much more active in defending their families and securing the minimum food reserves.[94] In general, women would also prove more resilient and resistant to food shortages. However, as Ion Druță, the most celebrated Soviet Moldavian writer would point out in his autobiographical novel *The Burden of our Goodness* (1969), this would have a catastrophic effect on women's health over the years. He describes how starting with 1950, mortality among women increased dramatically due to their sufferings 3-4 years prior.[95] This was true of the rank-and-file women peasants, but even women accepting to collaborate closely with the regime, in what has been called *zhensovety* (women's delegates), did not fare better during the immediate postwar difficulties, including famine.[96]

In several cases, the reports on the food riots mention war rumors. Some of the riots' participants thought a war between the USA and Great Britain against the Soviet Union was imminent. It was expected thus that Bessarabia would become part of Romania again and the famine would be a thing of the past. Romania's image is idealized, many choosing to leave for Romania, either legally or illegally.[97] Few knew that Romania itself experienced a severe food crisis at the same time, especially but not exclusively in Western Moldavia. In contrast to the MSSR, however, food shortages did not evolve into mass excess deaths in Romania.[98]

The rumors of a possible war with the West were fueled by the official Soviet press, especially with regard to Churchill's speech on March 5, 1946, on the Iron Curtain.[99] The hunger riots of Spring 1946 in Soviet Moldavia then occurred in a different context to those from the Spring of 1930. It pertained to the uncertainties of the beginning of the Cold War and hopes of large swaths of the population that Bessarabia could become part of Romania again.[100] The food riots in Soviet Moldavia had a pronounced gender and national, ethnic component (see more in the map and graphs).

Different and Divergent Views on Hunger Riots among Officials

Nikolai Golubev, the Moscow plenipotentiary in MSSR responsible for supervising the local political and civil police, expressed that plainly in a speech to MGB officials in early June 1946. Referring to the outburst of food riots in late February that year, he pointed to the Bessarabian nationalist diaspora in Romania, believed to intensify its covert activity in the MSSR in Spring 1946 by spreading rumors of a possible war between the USSR and the USA and Britain. Notably, he did not mention the women and teenagers who had played a preeminent role in the Spring food riots. He shifted the blame entirely on class and on external enemies.[101] Lynne Viola pointed to the fact that women in the Soviet official discourse were perceived as the most backward part of the peasant world and, in addition, they were viewed as classless. Golubev neglected the gender component in the food riots altogether, probably because he shared this view. It became hegemonic in the MGB milieu, though less so in the MVD one. Iosif Mordovets, the chief of political police, expressed a slightly diffirent view to Golubev's in that he thought the Red Army's wives and widows' requests for bread were legitimate. Except for this difference, he also blamed class enemies for being behind the riots' organization and scolded the party for not addressing the issue properly.[102]

There was no unanimity in the party related to what was happening either. Bychkov, the Bender county party first secretary, for instance, thought that material wants and a severe food crisis did not exist as such. More like Golubev, he blamed the occurrence of protests entirely on the class enemies' instigations, the kulaks, and on other anti-Soviet elements. Another official of the same status in another county looked for faults somewhere else. According to Korneyev, the first secretary in Bălți county, the lack of vigilance from party organs' as well as MVD and MGB explained the phenomenon. The local authorities supposedly allowed for the protests to occur, especially by not strengthening the grain storehouses' protection.[103]

Nikita Salogor, the *ad interim* first secretary of the CC of C(b) of Moldavia, received reports on the protests from local party organs, MVD and MGB. Along with Fyodor Butov, the chairman of the Moscow's Bureau in the MSSR, and Golubev, Salogor thus seemed to be the most informed person in this regard. He left a comment on a report about the food riots in Brânzenii Vechi (March 17) sent on March 23, 1946 by the minister of Internal Affairs of the Moldavian SSR, Fyodor Tutushkin, that

reads plainly as "the famine comes indeed".[104] On another report sent to him by Tutushkin as well, Salogor added a longer comment: "They are otherwise law-abiding citizens. And they resorted to these illegalities because of the famine".[105] This time, it was about the hunger riots in Ordășeni and Zaim (May 18-19, 1946). Witnessing the famine of the early 1930s in the Moldavian ASSR,[106] Salogor seemingly did know how to read such alarming signals. Subsequent events will eventually confirm his grim premonition. By using the word famine at least twice, even though it was about secret documents, Salogor broke a taboo. His comments represented an example of speaking un-Bolshevik, forestalling a reprimand of some sort or another. More than in the 1930s, using the word "famine" to Soviet postwar realities was however fraught with much more severe consequences. After 1945, the famine became associated with Nazi policies in occupied Soviet territories.[107] In any case, it is not improbable to admit that Salogor's crossing the red line contributed to his demotion in mid-July 1946. It was by no means the only motive of his falling into disgrace. Another reason was his letter to Stalin in June 1946 in which he asked for the inclusion of the south Bessarabian territories on the Danube mouths and the Black Sea shores into the MSSR in detriment to Ukraine.[108] Unlike Lev Kopelev,[109] however, Salogor did not arrive to become a dissident. He would not repent his participation in the collectivization campaign of the 1930s in the old Soviet territories. Nor would he revisit his role in the Sovietization of Bessarabia in the first two years following the return of the Red Army in the former Romanian province.

More than reporting, Fyodor Tutushkin had his view on the hunger riots. In a missive to the Central Committee of Moldavia in early June 1946, he blamed the food riots on the intensifying activity of the the anti-Soviet elements. However, the militia chief shared a less ideologically driven perspective than some party or state security officials. He acknowledged that the poor and middle peasants did represent a majority among the participants in the *volynki*. i.e., rural social categories perceived by the Communist ideology and the regime as their allies in the countryside. In the same vein, Tutushkin pointed out that the persons embarking on criminal activities during 1946 were by no means recidivists. The majority of delinquents belonged to popular classes, not the well-to-do peasants, the *class enemy* in ideological parlance. In December 1946, he reported that the percentage of the 'new' criminals increased to 96,8%, i.e., representing the desperate people striving to survive and avoid starving to death.[110] Thus, his premonition expressed in the summer came true in late autumn.

In contrast to the gender composition of the hunger riots, men were dominant among the 'new criminals', even though women also took part in stealing food and other goods.[111] Otherwise, Tutushkin informed his superiors in Moscow, Sergey Kruglov, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the USSR, about the major hunger riots in the MSSR as they unfolded. In the semester reports to Moscow, however, there was no word about the food riots.[112] Women attacking grain storehouses was indeed an uncomfortable reality and not so criminal to be included in criminality reports. Hunger riots were illegal but legitimate.

According to Tutushkin, the pacification of food rioters involved two methods. The first, repression, consisted in the arrest of 3 to 10 persons labeled as instigators and anti-Soviet elements, which were further indicted and convicted. The second, propaganda, represented the authorities' soft instrument and explained 'objective causes of the food problems' to rioters. A summary report dated August 1, 1946, registered April and May as the peak months with 21 hunger riots, most of them taking place in southern areas, Cahul, Bender, Chișinău counties. The Orhei County, in the center-north, and Bălți County, in the north, counted fewer cases, while Soroca, the second northern County, none. At the same time, there was no attack on *Zagotzerno* on the Left Bank of the Dniester River, i.e., in the former interwar Moldavian ASSR already collectivized in the early 1930s.[113]

Why Were There No Hunger Riots on the Left Bank and in Other Old Soviet Territories?

In the spring and summer of 1946, food shortages were worse in Transnistria than Bessarabia.[114] That supports Boshdedt's contention that the food shortage in itself is not enough for food riots to emerge. There are other factors at work, such as political culture and general attitude and knowledge of a given political regime and how it reacts to open protest manifestations.[115] Transnistrians knew the Soviet system from the interwar period and were less keen to go for an open protest. They tended to chosoe other forms of protest, less visible and thus less risky such as sabotage of the work in the kolkhoz, leaving for work in either better-off north Bessarabian or Western Ukrainian areas. In Transnistria, formally collectivized, only about half of the *kolkhozniki* honored their workload (*trudodni*). That was a phenomenon widely occuring in other old territories

of the Soviet Union, being labeled by the Canadian historian Jean Levesque as part-time *kolkhozniki*.[116] It seems thus that the already collectivized peasants acquired an useful experience in terms of survival strategies during food shortages and famine. In comparison to the Bessarabian districts of the MSSR, the number of dystrophies and excess deaths will be proportionally lower in Transnistria.

The hunger or food riots in Soviet Moldavia are similar to those of the USSR's early 1930s. They are explainable both in terms of the peasant culture of revolt and the moral peasant economy. But there are some dissimilarities between the interwar and postwar riots. The 1946 riots in Soviet Moldavia occurred in a different social, cultural, political, and *geo*political post-WWII context. The hunger riots, most dominated by women, were just one form of *open* protest against the food supply policy in postwar Soviet Moldavia. A weapon of the weak, the phenomenon was triggered by the bad harvest of 1945 when the amount of grain harvested was 2,5 times less than in 1940. The high procurement quotas and the military operations in March-August 1944 involving the three armies left their profound impact. But there was another factor explaining why only Bessarabian districts witnessed food riots. It pertains to the recent history of the province as part of interwar Romania. The interwar Romanian regime was far from a fully-fledged democracy. At most, it was an ailing institutional democracy and increasingly authoritarian, especially after 1930, when King Carol II took the reign. In 1938, he established a totalitarian state on the Italian model. Siguranța, the Romanian political police, was extremely repressive and abusive, especially in Bessarabia, where an almost permanent curfew existed partly because of the Soviet guerilla groups permanently sent in throughout the interwar period to destabilize the situation.[117] Regardless, interwar Romania allowed some room for open protest until 1938, albeit less so afterward when the royal dictatorship was established.[118]

The Romanian interwar regime did use repression methods against various social and political groups, but it did so on a small scale and in a restrained manner, on the model of other *ancien régime* countries. Peasant revolts in modern Bessarabia were not a rare occurrence. In the late 19th-early 20th century, under the Tsarist regime, open protests and violent clashes were widespread in Bessarabian villages due to hard material conditions and injustices inflicted by big landowners or state officials.[119] In the interwar period, under the Romanian royal regime, the fiscal burden, high-interest rates for debts, and rising prices for consumer goods triggered

many peasant revolts as well, especially in 1918-1919, 1934, and 1939, notably in the Lăpușna (Chișinău) and Bălți counties. The geography of these revolts in the Tsarist and Romanian periods overlaps somehow with the Spring 1946 hunger riots'.[120] The *longue durée* perspective thus is another one in understanding the peasant revolt in general in the early Sovietization period in Soviet Moldavia. In the Tsarist period, women were seemingly not very active among the protesters, but that pattern changes in the interwar period. Women protesting against authorities was a frequent site in Romanian Bessarabia, especially in the second interwar decade. For instance, in the late 1930s, women with children in tow often protested against their husbands' recruitment into the Romanian Army. Fearing they would not be able to feed their offspring, they requested the authorities to help them with bread and other goods.[121] After 1944, women continued to behave the same way when faced with hunger. Deep inside, they seemed convinced that no regime would let them die of starvation.

While open protest in the wake of famine was specific only to Soviet Moldavia, it does not mean other old and new Soviet territories did not experience dissent in general due to food supply problems. But it took different forms, such as theft, killings for food, speculation, refusal by workers to dine in the workers' canteens or critical remarks in the kitchen, semi-private and semi-public spaces about the supply issues.[122] The religious revival was another response to material hardships.[123]

The way the MSSR authorities as a whole dealt with hunger riots would have a profound impact on the famine to unfold in the fall of 1946 and reach its peak in winter-spring 1947. Soviet Moldavia would have the highest excess deaths among all Soviet republics, proportionally.[124] Failure of employing peaceful methods triggered the emergence of other, more violent forms of resistance, including armed ones perceived by Soviet authorities in an ideological framework as a declaration of war against the regime.[125]

Conclusions

The attacks on grain storehouses in Spring 1946 Soviet Moldavia has so far been a neglected subject. This phenomenon represented a particular form of *open* protest and *defiance* of authority triggered by a region reduced to famine and a severe crisis of *legitimacy* for the new authorities. *Women* dominated much of what I refer to hunger riots,

labeled as such because their primary aim was to get bread for starving families. The food crisis was an all-Union one, experienced by both old and new Soviet territories, occupied or not by the enemy between 1941 and 1944. As it unfolded in 1945-1946, the subsistence crisis *originated* in WWII's devastation but was *aggravated* by Soviet policies. Although the subsistence crisis and the subsequent famine were an all-Union problem in 1944-47, the causes and responses *differed regionally*. I argue that the hunger riots in Soviet Moldavia in Spring 1946 represent a particular pattern of societal response in the famine's wake, a *weapon of the weak* (Scott). Similar disturbances were registered across the Soviet Union in late 1929-early 1930s in the context of all-out collectivization, analyzed in detail, and conceptualized by Lynne Viola as *March Fever* and *bab'y bunty*.

After the Second World War, however, the pattern of open protest accompanied by seizing grain in a *ritualized form of public performance*, *quasi-peaceful* and *non-violent*, is specific only to the *Bessarabian districts* of the Moldavian SSR. The Left Bank districts, Sovietized in the interwar period, did not register such actions. The explanation lies in the fact that Sovietization made people understand this form of protest was counterproductive and fraught with *criminal prosecution*. By 1946, the Bessarabian population still shared the *protest culture* practiced in interwar Romania and Tsarist Russia. According to this *moral understanding of society*, economy, and politics, protesting for subsistence was legitimate. When peaceful means were exhausted, peasants resorted to other forms of protest, *covert* and *violent*. By underlining rioters' social composition as poor peasants and women, i.e., a classless category, MVD reports hinted the authorities should address the causes, not the crisis's effects.

The official discourse on food riots varied from one *institution* and official to another. There was *no unanimity* among county party officials, some castigating class enemies, while others aimed at the Party, MVD, and MGB. The *ad interim* first secretary Salogor empathized with the rioters at least in two instances. Notwithstanding, the Security organs' view on *scapegoating* participants in hunger riots as class enemies and denying the facts that women, and teenagers, *prevailed*.

The food riots in Spring 1946 Soviet Moldavia have relevance to the broader discussion on *resistance* in postwar Soviet Union as a whole. In contrast to the Baltic republics and Western Ukraine, where resistance was widespread and violent from the begining, the pattern in Soviet Moldavia is different. In the latter, opposition to the new regime between

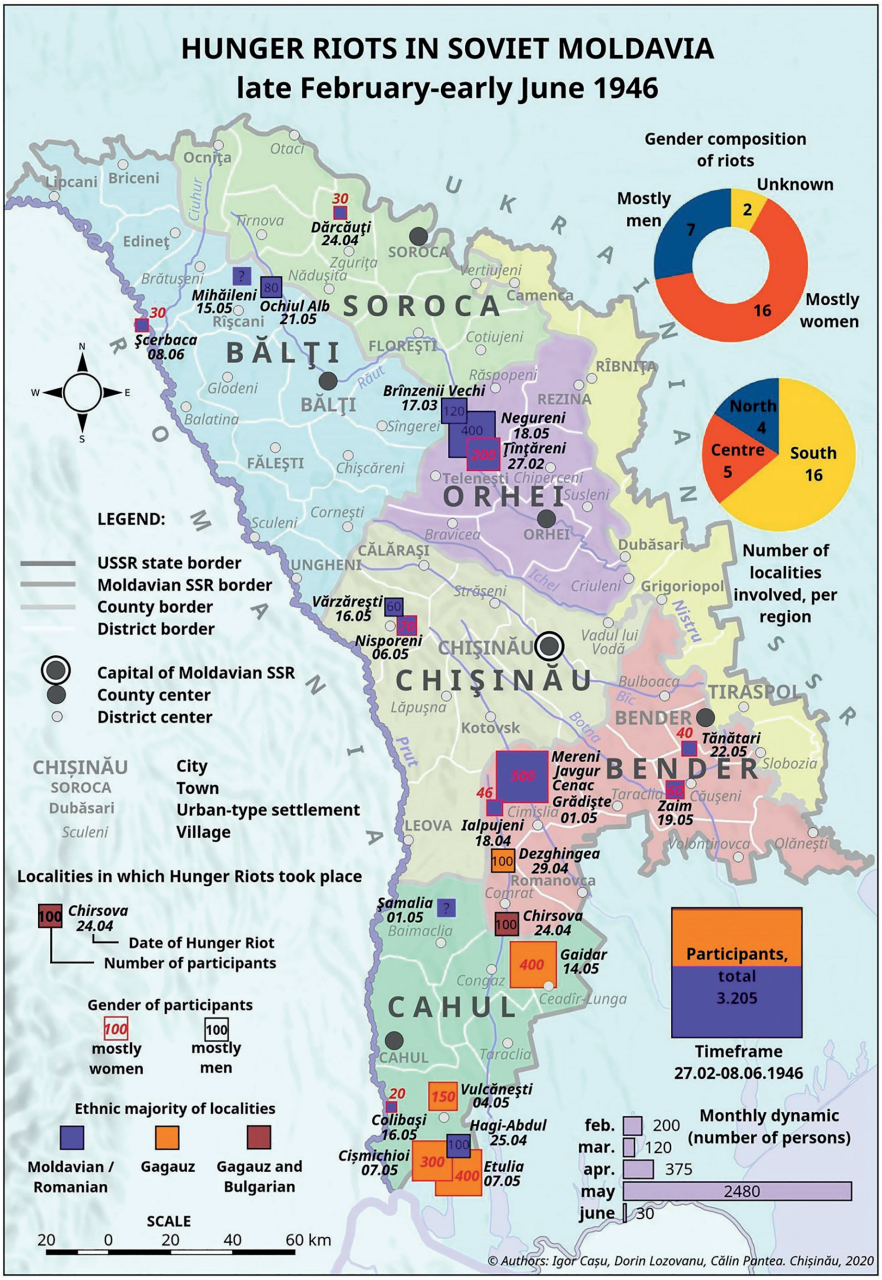
1944 and mid- 1946 was mainly *peaceful*, as witnessed by a peculiar way of attacking grain storehouses. Only after the Soviets failed to satisfy the *legitimate request* for bread did violent forms of resistance occur, beginning in summer and fall of 1946. In turn, more *societal violence* gave an excuse to the authorities to embark on more repressions against a community striving to make ends meet. The peasant protest evolved later into more *violent* and *brutal forms* that subsequently served the regime's *rationalization of peasant dissent as class war* with all the consequences to follow.

ANNEXES

List of Hunger Riots in Soviet Moldavia, late February – early June, 1946

Locality / district	Present day district	warehouse	Date	Number	Composition	Result / region
1. Ţânţăreni, Teleneşti	Teleneşti	Ţânţăreni	February 27	200	**men**	Incomplete, North.
2. Brânzenii Vechi, Răspopeni	Teleneşti	Brânzenii Vechi	March 17	120	**Women**, teenagers; invalids' wives	Complete, 3-4 tons; North
3. Ialpujeni, Cimişlia	Cimişlia	Marienfield	April 18	45	**Women**, poor.	Complete, 1 ton; South
4. Chirsova, Comrat	UTAG	Chirsova	April 24	100	**Women**; men watching	Success,1 ton; South
5. Dărcăuţi, Zguriţa	Soroca	Dărcăuţi	April 24	30	**women**	Complete, 1 ton, North
6. Hagi-Abdul (Al. I. Cuza), Vulcăneşti	Cahul	Hagi-Abdul	April 25	100	**30 women, 70 children** 8-12 years old	Complete, 1 ton, South.
7. Dezghinja, Comrat	UTAG	Dezghinja	April 29	100	**Women**, teenagers	Complete,3 tons; South
8. Şamalia, Baimaclia	Cantemir	Şamalia	April 29	-	-	Incomplete; South
9. Mereni, Cimişlia	Cimişlia	Mereni	May 1	500	**Women**, wives of war invalids	Incomplete; South
10. Javgur, Cimişlia	Cimişlia	Mereni	May 1	Part of 500, went to Mereni	**women**	Incomplete, South
11. Grădeşti, Cimişlia	Cimişlia	Mereni	May 1	Part of 500, went to Mereni	women	Incomplete, South

Locality / district	**Present day district**	**warehouse**	**Date**	**Number**	**Composition**	**Result / region**
12. Cenac, Cimișlia	Cimișlia	Mereni	May 1	Part of 500, went to Mereni	**women**	Incomplete, South
13. Vulcănești	UTAG	Vulcănești	May 4	150	**women**	Incomplete, South.
14. Nisporeni	Nisporeni	Nisporeni	May 6	70	men	Incomplete, Center
15. Etulia, Vulcănești	UTAG	Etulia	May 7	400	**women**	Complete, 1 ton; South
16. Cișmichioi, Vulcănești	UTAG	Cișmichioi	May 7	300	**women**	Incomplete; South
17. Gaidar, Ceadîr-Lunga	UTAG	Ceadîr-Lunga	May 14	400	men	Incomplete; South
18. Mihăileni, Râșcani	Râșcani	Mihăileni	May 15	-	men	Complete, 9 tons; North
19. Vărzărești, Nisporeni	Nisporeni	Vărzărești	May 16	60	**Women**, teenagers	Incomplete; Center
20. Colibași, Vulcănești	Cahul	Colibași	May 16	20	**Women**	success; unknown tons; South
21. Negureni, Răspopeni	Telenești	Ordășeni	May 18	400	**Women**, teenagers	Incomplete; Center
22. Zaim, Căușeni	Căușeni	Zaim	May 19	60	Men	Incomplete; South
23. Ochiul Alb, Râșcani	Drochia	Nicoreni	May 21	80/200	**Women**, teenagers	Incomplete; North
24. Tănătari, Căușeni	Căușeni	Căușeni	May 22	40	men	Incomplete; South
25. Șcerbaca, Brătușeni	Râșcani	Șcerbaca	June 8	30	**Women**	Complete, 1 ton, North.



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NOTES

[1] I thank my colleagues at NEC Bucharest for their feedback on my earlier version of this text. And to Cristina Diac and Carter Johnson for reading the last draft and for their useful comments.

[2] Lynne Viola, *Peasants Rebels under Stalin. Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 132-182, 183-20; women riots were analyzed in another national settings, in the context of the collectivization drive as well. On Romania, see G. Kligman, K. Verdery, *Peasants under Siege. Collectivization of Agriculture in Romania, 1949-1962* (New Jersey: Princeton University Pres, 2011), pp. 25, 35, 38. See also Dorin Dobrincu, Constantin Iordachi, eds., *Edificarea orânduirii socialiste. Violență și luptă de clasă în colectivizarea agriculturii din România, 1949-1962* (Iași: Editura Universității Al. I. Cuza, 2017), pp. 313, 321-322, 327-331.

[3] *Golod v Moldove*, pp. 185, 197.

[4] Valeriu Pasat*, Trudnye stranitsy istorii Moldovy, 1940-e-1950-e* (Moscow: Terra, 1994), pp. 226-229, 231-233. For the English translations of the Russian words as *volynka* and *vystuplenie*, I follow Lynne Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin*, pp. 134-135.

[5] Valeriu Pasat, *RSS Moldovenească în perioada stalinistă*, pp. 269-273.

[6] Igor Cașu, *Dușmanul de clasă*, pp. 195-197.

[7] V. Zima, *Golod v SSSR 1946-1947 gg. Proiskhozhdenie i posledstviia* (Moscow: RAN, 1996); N. Ganson, *The Soviet Famine of 1946-47 in Global and Historical Perspective* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); E. Zubkova, *Russia after the War. Hopes, Illusions, and Disappointments, 1945-195* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1998); Kees Boterbloem. *Life and Death under Stalin. Kalinin Province, 1945-1953* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999); Peter Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia's Continuum of Crisis, 1914-1921* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002); Zubkova, E. *Pribaltika i Kreml', 1940-1953* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2008); Iurii Kostyashov, *Povsednevnost' poslevoennoy derevni. Iz istorii pereselencheskikh kolkhozov Kaliningradskoy oblasti, 1946-1953* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2015); James Heinzen, *The Art of Bribe: Corruption under Stalin, 1945-1953* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016); R. G. Pikhoia, *Sovetskii Soiuz. Istoriia Vlasti, 1945-1991* (Novosibirsk: Sibirskii Khronograf, 2000); V. N. Khaustov, V. P. Naumov, N.S. Plotnikova, eds., *Lubyanka. Stalin i NKVD-NKGB-GUKR Smersh, 1939-mart 1946* (Moscow: Fond Demokratiia, 2006); Khaustov, V. P. Naumov, N.S. Plotnikova, eds., *Lubyanka. Stalin i MGB, mart 1946-mart 1953* (Moscow: Fond Demokratiia, 2007); O. Khlevniuk et al., *TsK VKP (b) i regional'nye partiinye komitety, 1945-1953* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2004); Stephen Wheatcroft, "The Soviet Famine of 1946-1947, the Weather and Human Agency in Historical

Perspective", in *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 64, no. 4 (July 2012), pp. 987-1005; Jeffrey W. Jones, *Everyday life in the "Reconstruction" of Soviet Russia during and after the Great Patriotic War, 1943-1948* (Pittsburgh: Slavica Publishing, 2008); Vanessa Voisin, *L'URSS contre ses traîtres: l'Epuration soviétique, 1941-1955* (Paris: Editions Sorbonne, 2015). Besides, I have looked through the RGASPI and GARF depositories and could find nothing on the matter. I take the opportunity here to thank The German Historical Institute in Moscow for a two-month fellowship in the summer 2019 that made possible my research at the Russian archives.

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67 AOSPRM, F. 51, inv. 5, d. 590, ff. 18-30.

68 Pasat, *RSS Moldovenească în perioada stalinistă*, pp. 242-243.

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71 AOSPRM, F. 51, inv. 4, d.49, f. 46. A similar case when a warehouse's manager had stolen a great amount of goods and set up for a robbery as cover-up was depicted in a later Soviet movie, *Operatsiia Y i drugie prikliucheniia Shurika* [Operation Y and Shurik's other Adventures] (Mosfilm, 1965), part 3. Though a comedy, it reflected a recurrent and widespread Soviet reality.

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74 AMAIRM-MVD, F. 16, inv. 1, d. 39, f. 241. On Holocaust in Romania, see note 51.

75 I had access to the KGB archive in Chișinău for years working initially as vice-chairman of the Presidential Commission for the Study and Evaluation of the Totalitarian Communist Regime in the Republic of Moldova in 2010 and later on identifying the names of the Holocaust perpetrators in the framework of a project signed between the Moldovan and American governments in March 2011 following the visit to Chișinău of the then US vice President Joe Biden. Neither Camerzan or Ojog have a file in the KGB archive. They are not in the list of repressed either in MVD archive. See *Cartea memoriei. Catalogul victimelor regimului totalitar comunist*, vol. 1-4 (Chișinău: Știința, 1999-2004) or unpublished supplemental lists that are available at various archives in Moldova.

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77 AMAIRM-MVD, F. 16, inv. 1, d. 39, f. 242.

78 Pasat, *RSS Moldovenească în perioada stalinistă*, p. 271-272; AOSPRM, F. 51, inv. 4, d. 46, ff. 36-37.

79 AMAIRM-MVD, F. 16, inv. 1, d. 39, ff. 293-294.

80 Pasat, *RSS Moldovenească în perioada stalinistă*, pp. 272-273.

81 Viola, *Peasants Rebels under Stalin*, p. 182.

82 AOSPRM, F. 51, inv. 4, d. 46, f. 36; AMAIRM-MVD, F. 16, inv. 1, d. 39, ff. 293-294.

83 Pasat, *RSS Moldovenească în perioada stalinistă*, p. 272; AOSPRM, F. 51, inv. 4, d. 46, f. 36; AMAIRM-MVD, F. 16, inv. 1, d. 39, ff. 293-294.

84 AMAIRM-MVD, F. 16, inv. 1, d. 39, f. 293; AOSPRM, F. 51, inv. 4, d. 46, ff. 36-37; Pasat, *Trudnye stranitsy*, pp. 231-233.

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92 The best Western, English language contributions on the identity issue are Charles King*, The Moldovans. Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1999), and Rebecca Haynes, *Moldova: A History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020).
93 Lynne Viola, *Peasants Rebels under Stalin*, pp. 202-203.
94 C. Reilly, "Nearly starved to death": The female petition during the Great Hunger", in C. Kinealy, J. King, and C. Reilly, (eds.) *Women and the Great Hunger* (Hamden, CT: Quinnipiac University Press, 2016), pp. 50-51.
95 Ion Druță, *Scrieri*, vol. 2 (Chișinău : Literatura artistică, 1990), pp. 216-228.
96 Diana Cașu, "Sovietizarea Basarabiei și politica față de femei (1944-1945). Crearea adunărilor de delegate", in *Tyragetia*, no. 2, 2010, pp. 251-256.
97 AMAIRM-MVD, F. 16, inv. 1, d. 47, f. 40-45, 57, 59-62, 78.
98 Dorin Dobrincu, "Fuga de foamete. Migrații temporare din Moldova în vestul și sudul României, 1946-1947", în Victor Spinei, coordinator, *Migrații, politici de stat și identități culturale în spațiul românesc și European*. Vol. 1: Flavius Solomon, Alexandru-Laurențiu Cohal, Leonidas Rados, editori, *Ipostaze istorice ale mișcărilor de populație și modele identitare etnolingvistice actuale*, București, Editura Academiei Române, 2019, pp. 313-336.
99 AOSPRM, F. 51, inv. 4, d. 37, ff. 116-120.
100 Pasat, *Trudnye stranitsy*, pp. 231-233; AMAIRM-MVD, F. 16, inv. 1, d. 47, f. 40-45, 57, 59-62, 78.
101 Pasat, *Trudnye stranitsy*, pp. 232-233.
102 Pasat, *RSS Moldovenească în perioada stalinistă*, pp. 272-273.
103 AOSPRM, F. 51, inv. 4, d. 46, f. 39. In this, either he was aware or not, Korneyev resonated with Andrei Zhdanov, the main Stalin's ideologue in this period until his premature death in 1948. According to Zhdanov, organizational measures were the key to success in every domain. See more on that in Shaun Morcom, "Enforcing Stalinist Discipline in the Early Years of Postwar Reconstruction in the USSR, 1945-1948", in *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 68, no. 2, March 2016, pp. 312-344.

104 AMAIRM-MVD, F. 16, inv. 1, d. 39, f. 243. In original: "а ведь начинается голод".

105 AMAIRM-MVD), F. 16, inv. 1, d. 39, f. 295.

106 AOSPRM, F. 51, inv. 1, d. 101, f. 4; d. 100, f. 7; RGASPI, Salogor's personal file, party card no. 06709-120 (1954), party card no. 12795-445 (1973); Marius Tărîță, Lilia Crudu et al., eds., *Instituțiile și nomenclatura sovietică și de partid din RASSM și RSSM, 1924-1956* (Chișinău: Cartdidact, 2017), pp. 158-158.

107 Lizzie Collingham, *The Taste of War,* pp. 190-199.

108 AOSPRM, F: 51, inv. 4, d. 64.

109 Lev Kopelev, *The Education of a True Believer* (New York: Harper & Collins, 1980). Salogor died in Chișinău in 1981 at the age of 80.

110 AMAIRM-MVD, F. 16, inv. 1, d. 39, f. 327; d. 26, 183-184.

111 AMAIRM-MVD, F. 16, inv. 1, d. 39, f. 324-327.

112 AMAIRM-MVD, F. 16, inv. 1, d. 33, 34, 35.

113 AMAIRM-MVD), F. 16, inv. 1, d. 39 f. 323; d. 26, f. 28.

114 AOSPRM, F. 51, inv. 4, d. 157, ff. 1-342.

115 Boshdedt, *The Politics of Provisions,* pp. 37-48; Edward C. Banfield, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (New York: Free Press, 1958).

116 Jean Levesque, 'Into the grey zone': sham peasants and the limits of the kolkhoz order in the post-war Russian village, 1945–1953", in Juliane Fürst, ed., *Late Stalinist Russia. Society between reconstruction and reinvention*, London & New York: Routledge, 2006, pp. 103-120.

117 Pavel Moraru, *La hotarul românesc al Europei. Din istoria Siguranței Generale în Basaraba, 1918-1940* (București: INST, 2008), pp. 435-448 ; Alberto Basciani, *Dificila Unire. Basarabia în componența României, 1918-1940* (Chișinău: Cartier, 2018), 113-197, 341-357; Bogdan Bucur, *Sociologia proastei guvernări în România interbelică* (București : RAO, 2019), pp. 126-151, 374-375.

118 N.V. Bereznyakov et al., *Lupta oamenilor muncii din Basarabia pentru eliberarea și reunirea ei cu patria sovietică, 1918-1940* (Chișinău: Cartea Moldovenească, 1973), pp. 760-761.

119 I. G. Budak, ed., *Polozhenie krest'yan i obshchestvenno-politicheskoe dvizhenie v Bessarabii, 1861-1895* (Chișinău: Cartea Moldovenească, 1964), pp. 39-40, 180-181, 266-268; Ia. S. Grosul, ed., *Khrest'yanskoe dvizhenie v Moldavii v epokhu imperializma. Dokumenty i materialy, 1899-1917* (Chișinău: Știința, 1961), pp. 157-161, 358, 360-361, 408-409.

120 Țurcanu, *Relații agrare*, p. 183-204 (185); Bereznyakov, *Lupta oamenilor muncii din Basarabia,* pp. 274-286, 584-592, 645-666.

121 Bereznyakov, *Lupta oamenilor muncii din Basarabia,* pp. 760-761.

122 Zima, *Golod v SSSR 1946-1947 gg.*, pp. 96-128; Donald Filtzer, *The Hazards of Urban Life in Late Stalinist Russia. Health, Hygiene, and Living Standards,*

1943-1953 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 163-253; Zubkova, *Russia After the War*, pp. 40-50; E. Zubkova, T. Zhukova, eds., *Na "krayu" sovetskogo obshchestva. Sotsial'nye marginaly kak ob'ekt gosudarstvennoy politiki, 1945-1960-e gg.* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2010).

123 Ganson, *The Soviet Famine of 1946-1947*, pp. 73-78; Pasat, *RSS Moldovenească în perioada stalinistă*, pp. 274-275.

124 Ellman, "The 1947 Soviet Famine", pp. 603-633; Cașu, *Dușmanul de clasă*, pp. 189-233. For more on that, see I. Cașu, "Why the Mass Famine in Soviet Moldavia was the most lethal in the USSR in 1946-47?" (forthcoming 2021).

125 Carter Johnson, "From Resistance to Civil War. Why Violence escalated in Lithuania but not in Moldova during Soviet annexation, 1944-1952", in *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 72, no. 2, 2020, pp. 1-25; Petru Negură, Elena Postică, "Forme de rezistență a populației civile față de autoritățile sovietice în RSS Moldovenească (1940-1956)", in *Dystopia. Journal of Totalitarian Regimes and Ideologies*, vol. 1-2, 2013, pp. 59-77; see also Lynne Viola, ed., *Contending with Stalinism. Soviet Power and Popular Resistance in the 1930s*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002; Arvydas Anusauskas, ed., *The Anti-Soviet Resistance in the Baltic States*, Vilnius: The Genocide and Resistance Research Center, 2006; Alexander Statiev, *The Soviet Counterinsurgency in the Western Borderlands*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Abbreviations

AMAIRM-MVD – Arhiva Ministerului Afacerilor Interne a Republicii Moldova, fostul Minister de Interne al RSSM [The Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Moldova, former Ministry of Interior of Moldavian SSR, MVD]
ANIC – Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale [National Historical Central Archives of Romania]
ANRM – Arhiva Națională a Republicii Moldova [The National Archive of the Republic of Moldova]
AOSPRM – Arhiva Organiațiilor Social-Politice a Republicii Moldova [The Archive of Social-Political Organizations of the Republic of Moldova]
NA IRI RAN – Nauchnyi Arkhiv Instituta Istorii Rossiiskoi Akademii Nauk [Scientific Archive of the Institute of History of the Russian Academy of Science]
RGASPI – Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Sotsial'no Politicheskoi Istorii [The Russian State Archive of Social-Political History]

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