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A Larger Frame: “Redressing” the Image of Doukhobor-Canadian Women in the Twentieth Century

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Article abstract

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Abstract

The image of a naked “Doukhobor” woman standing before her flame-engulfed home has been used repeatedly to embody the Doukhobors’ difficult adjustment to life in Canada. Here, the author argues that public attention on Doukhobor women’s bodies predates the publication of nude imagery in the middle of the twentieth century. A review of twentieth-century descriptions of Doukhobor-Canadian women reveals that their bodies were subjected to intense public scrutiny from the moment they arrived in Canada in 1899. Publishing descriptions and photographs of Doukhobor women engaged in hard farm labour, doing “women’s work,” wearing traditional ethnic dress, and in partial or total states of undress, the Canadian media significantly shaped “public knowledge” about the Doukhobors by focusing on the peculiarity of Doukhobor women’s bodies.

Résumé

L’image d’une femme « doukhobore » nue, se tenant devant sa maison ravagée par les flammes, a été utilisée à maintes reprises, au milieu du vingtième siècle, comme personnification de la difficulté qu’ont eue les Doukhobors à s’ajuster à la vie canadienne. Dans cet article, l’auteur montre que l’attention publique portée au corps des femmes doukhobores précède la publication de telles images. Un examen des descriptions de femmes canadiennes-doukhobores tout au cours du vingtième siècle montre que leurs corps ont fait l’objet d’une intense attention publique dès leur arrivée au Canada, en 1899. Par la publication de portraits écrits et de photographies de femmes doukhobores occupées aux durs travaux de la ferme, accomplissant des travaux féminins, revêtues de robes folkloriques traditionnelles, en partie ou entièrement dévêtues, les médias canadiens ont façonné de façon significative un « savoir public » au sujet des Doukhobors, qui mettait l’accent sur les traits distinctifs du corps de leurs femmes.

Throughout the twentieth century, the Doukhobors attracted significant public attention in Canada and abroad. Local newspapers in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba ran regular reports on the Doukhobors settled within those provinces over the course of the twentieth century.¹ *Time*, *Life*, *Newsweek*, *Maclean's*, and *Saturday Night* printed over 40 articles about Canadian Doukhobors during the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. The Toronto-based *Globe* (the *Globe and Mail* after 1936) printed nearly 600 articles concerning the Doukhobors between 1898 and 1999, almost 40 of which were printed during the Doukhobors' first year in Canada. Given the modest size of this group (fewer than 8,000 upon immigration in 1899) and their limited dispersal (all settled in small, isolated pockets in remote rural areas of western Canada), the disproportionate national and international media attention paid to the Doukhobors is noteworthy.

Of all images used by journalists in their coverage of the Doukhobors' adjustment to life in Canada, one predominates: that of a naked, overweight Sons of Freedom Doukhobor woman standing before her flame-engulfed home.² Members of the Sons of Freedom Doukhobor sect, a minority representing less than ten percent of the Doukhobor population, periodically removed their clothing or set fire to their own or others' possessions to protest real or perceived mistreatment at the hands of government and law enforcement

1 The Doukhobors settled in the Northwest Territory in 1899, within the boundary of what would later become Saskatchewan. Carl J. Tracie, "*Toil and Peaceful Life*": *Doukhobor Village Settlement in Saskatchewan, 1899-1918* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, University of Regina, 1996). In 1908 Doukhobor leader Peter Vasilievich (Lordly) Verigin purchased 8,800 acres in the interior of British Columbia; by 1912 approximately 5,000 Doukhobors had migrated to British Columbia. George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), 228-9. Though a few Doukhobors settled independently or in villages in Alberta and Manitoba, the majority of Doukhobors lived in British Columbia and Saskatchewan throughout the twentieth century.

2 Though the Sons of Freedom first used nudity as a protest strategy and manifestation of their religious beliefs in 1903, nude photos were not generally printed in the press until the late 1950s. Note that "image" in this case refers to multiple visual images portraying various individuals in various circumstances. For examples of such images, see "Naked Doukhobors Go On Rampage," *Life* 28, no. 19 (8 May 1950): 29-33; Simma Holt, "Freedomites Explain: Fires a 'Telegram to God'," *Vancouver Sun* (9 September 1962), 1; "The Vanishing Sons of Freedom and the Tough Reporter Who's Finally Told Their Story," *Maclean's Magazine* 77, no. 21 (2 November 1962): 40; Pete Mossey, "Fair Play Group Needed for the Non-Doukhobors," *Vancouver Sun* (28 November 1962), 5; Simma Holt, "Protest by Fire," *Canada Month* (September 1962): 20-1; Simma Holt, *Terror in the Name of God: The Story of the Sons of Freedom Doukhobors* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1964); "Toil and Troubled Life: Flesh, Fire and Freedom Among the Doukhobors," *Canadian Heritage* (August 1980): 35-6; Allison Markin, "Know Me For What I Am, Not Some Distorted Image," *Vancouver Sun* (24 June 1995), D7; Robert Matas, "Meet the Last Radical Doukhobors," *Globe and Mail* (9 March 1998), C2; Kirsten Stolee, "Aged Freedomite Guilty of Arson," *Vancouver Sun* (31 August 2001), A5; Jim Beatty, "Province Extends its Regrets to Doukhobors," *Vancouver Sun* (5 October 2004), B1, B6.

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officials, to express their rejection of materialism, or to signify spiritual purity. The Sons of Freedom considered themselves the protectorate of the true Doukhobor faith and the vanguard against Canadian assimilation. They sought to ensure that the Doukhobors who suffered so extensively in Russia for the sake of their religion did not compromise their religious principles in Canada.

These religious principles were broadly interpreted. The Doukhobors are Christians who believe that the spirit of God resides in each person. This conviction led the Doukhobors to adopt pacifism and communalism, and to reject materialism. These ideals, at times, led to conflict with government authorities. Negative experiences with government representatives in Russia had made the Doukhobors wary of state interference in their private affairs. Some Doukhobors could not see any justification for the Canadian government's insistence that births, marriages, and deaths be registered, and feared that the government collected such statistics in order to maintain registries of potential conscripts. Many Doukhobors also feared that state-imposed education would strip Doukhobor children of their religious sensibilities, and suspected that the lessons taught in Canadian schools would prime their children for military service and inspire the spirit of competition and materialism.

Many Doukhobors protested what they perceived as pressure to compromise on their religious principles, especially during the first decades of the twentieth century as the Doukhobors adjusted to life in Canada. Most Doukhobors protested simply by refusing to comply with the government's demands, if the demands could not be reconciled with their beliefs. Sons of Freedom Doukhobors took their protest activities to greater extremes, especially following the mysterious and sudden death of respected Doukhobor leader Peter Vasilievich Verigin in 1924. Verigin's authoritarian leadership may have held the Freedomites' fervour in check, especially since Verigin functioned as a negotiator with federal and provincial government officials. The trauma of losing Verigin, along with renewed government pressure to enforce compulsory education among the Doukhobors living in British Columbia, provoked the Sons of Freedom to increase their protest activity, which included removing their clothing in public.

On one level journalists' use of the image of naked Sons of Freedom Doukhobor women is not surprising. It might be argued that journalists were merely reporting "what happened," or that the popularity of this image was a manifestation of the adage that "sex sells," admitting that photographs of naked women appeal to a certain market. Though titillation may be part of the explanation for this image's popularity, the novelty would wear thin rather quickly. It is worth noting that journalists hesitated to use nude images in the middle of the twentieth century.³ Since journalists had the option to describe nude

3 Herbert J. Gans, *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBC Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek, and Time* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 243-4.

protests verbally without using photographic evidence, the use of nude images in the latter half of the twentieth century requires further analysis and explanation. That the image of a naked female body has been used repeatedly to represent the Doukhobor-Canadian experience suggests that there may be more to this image than meets the eye.

Given the prevalence of this image, a corresponding amount of historiographical attention to the experience of Doukhobor-Canadian women in the twentieth century might be expected. No such correspondence exists. There are few scholarly studies of the history of the Doukhobors in Canada and fewer still of the history of Doukhobor-Canadian women.⁴ That the image of Doukhobor-Canadian peculiarity was predominantly female merits scholarly examination. An attempt to “redress” the image of Doukhobor-Canadian women is overdue.

A review of reports printed in newspapers, magazines, and popular literature reveals that Doukhobor women’s bodies were subjected to considerable public scrutiny throughout the twentieth century. Descriptions of the women’s physical characteristics frequently overshadowed descriptions of Doukhobor women’s spiritual, emotional, and intellectual dimensions, even before the widespread publication of nude photographs.⁵ The women’s size and shape, their physical strength, their capacity for hard labour as well as fine handiwork, and their apparent lack of modesty interested Canadian journalists who presented Doukhobor women’s bodies as unusual: unusually powerful, unusually large, and unusually naked. In short, the Canadian media framed the Doukhobor-Canadian woman’s image around the image of her large frame.

However earnestly journalists strive to portray their reports as objective, news making must be viewed as a constructive exercise. In providing their audience with a daily dose of information deemed important, relevant, or interesting, journalists distill a massive amount of data in order to provide readers or viewers with a “representative image.”⁶ Journalists might not directly tell

4 Notable scholarly book-length works on the Doukhobors include: Harry Hawthorn, ed., *The Doukhobors of British Columbia* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia and J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1955); Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*; William Janzen, *Limits on Liberty: The Experience of Mennonite, Hutterite, and Doukhobor Communities in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990); Tracie, “*Toil and Peaceful Life*”; Julie Rak, *Negotiated Memory: Doukhobor Autobiographical Discourse* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004); and Gregory J. Cran, *Negotiating Buck Naked: Doukhobors, Public Policy, and Conflict Resolution* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006). Annie B. Barnes’ “Doukhobor Women in the Twentieth Century” in *Spirit-Wrestlers’ Voices: Honouring Doukhobors on the Centenary of their Migration to Canada in 1899*, ed. Koozma J. Tarasoff. (Ottawa: Legas, 1998) provides a retrospective look at the lives and experiences of Doukhobor women.

5 For an analysis of Canadian “body” scholarship, see Lisa Helps, “Body, Power, Desire: Mapping Canadian Body History,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 41, no. 1 (Winter 2007): 126-50.

6 Gans, *Deciding What’s News*, 312.

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their audiences what or how to think, but they play a significant role in shaping public opinion through their selection, presentation, and framing of news-worthy material.⁷

Reporters' portrayals of Doukhobor-Canadian women can be classified in two ways: by type and by tone. Four types of portrayals of Doukhobor-Canadian women prevailed in the Canadian press: the labourer, the artisan, the peasant, and the radical. Two tones are evident in reporters' portrayals of the Doukhobors: sympathy and criticism. Reporters who viewed Doukhobor women sympathetically portrayed them as strong, capable, feminine "sisters" to Canadian women; critical portrayals framed them as peculiar and unassimilable "strangers."⁸ Journalists rarely portrayed Doukhobor-Canadian women as "sisters" to Canadian women; even then, their "sisterhood" was more as "distant female cousins" than close kin. Most often, Doukhobor-Canadian women were portrayed as "strangers." This predominance is not entirely unexpected since the media is predisposed to select stories about that which is unusual and anomalous.⁹ With this predisposition in mind, the existence of reports which framed Doukhobor-Canadian women as "sisters" suggests that their similarity to Canadian women is actually what journalists expected readers to find surprising.

Writers can frame their subjects in a certain way using vocabulary and syntax to advantage. Critical readers can "decode" what is written to understand the author's meaning and the nuances or biases which may be located "between the lines." Photographers also frame their subjects in a certain light, but "decoding" the message is more challenging. Since this paper is focused on the creation of Doukhobor-Canadian women's public image, it is worth considering the way in which the audience processes visual images.

The way in which visual images are interpreted is difficult to measure and is not well understood.¹⁰ Part of the difficulty in understanding the mechanics of how an image is "read" is that while our understanding of language is guided by

7 Maxwell McCombs and Sheldon Gilbert, "News Influence on Our Pictures of the World," in *Perspectives on Media Effects*, ed. Jennings Bryant and Dolf Zillman (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1986), 4; Paul Rutherford, *The Making of the Canadian Media* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd., 1978), 124-5; Gaye Tuchman, *Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 1.

8 The sister/stranger frame for analysis is proposed by Marlene Epp, Franca Iacovetta, and Frances Swyripa in *Sisters or Strangers?: Immigrant, Ethnic, and Racialized Women in Canadian History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

9 Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947), 345, and Gans, *Deciding What's News*, 40.

10 This case is made by David Domke, David Perlmutter, and Meg Spratt in "The Primes of Our Times? An Examination of the 'Power' of Visual Images," *Journalism* 3, no. 2 (2002): 132-3, and in Victor Burgin, "Art, Common Sense and Photography," in *Visual Culture: The Reader*, ed. Jessica Enas and Stuart Hall (London: Sage Publications, 1999), 41.

the rules of word definition and order, our “reading” of images does not rely on a parallel “grammar.”¹¹ The brain processes visual images differently than verbally conveyed information. Verbally communicated information must be processed “serially” (one word at a time), but visual information is not delivered in an ordered way. The eye quickly perceives the totality of the information encoded in the image and “sees” what words alone may not adequately convey.¹² In this respect, the image can reveal information more efficiently than a verbal description can. The image is restricted, however, to depicting “what is” and cannot easily qualify with negation, or with conditional, past, or future tenses.¹³ That imagery is limited in this way is sometimes overlooked because the impact of “what is” (or what *appears* to be) is powerful.

The power of visual images lies in their memorability, their capacity to serve as icons perceived as representative of specific events or issues, their aesthetic impression, their power to move the viewer to an emotional reaction, and their potential to affect politics through impact on public opinion. Experts qualify this final effect, however, explaining that imagery may “persuade” viewers to alter their preconceived opinions, but the viewers’ pre-existing beliefs, values, and understanding considerably affects the way in which viewers assimilate new visual information.¹⁴ In other words, a visual image of a group of Doukhobor women harnessed to the plow, engaged in domestic labours, or standing undressed in protest is likely to be more memorable, moving, and iconic than a verbal description of them engaged in the same activities. The opinion a viewer may form of the image presented relates significantly, however, to the opinion the viewer had of the Doukhobors prior to viewing the image in question. Someone who has never heard of the Doukhobors may interpret such images differently than someone who has heard of the Doukhobors before, or who has met them first hand.

It is difficult to know with certainty exactly how the Canadian public viewed images of Doukhobor women in the twentieth century, nor can one determine exactly how the public interpreted the press reports presented to them. One can, however, examine the way in which images and news stories were presented to the public and infer from the content or tone of media portrayals what interpretation journalists may have intended their audience to make. Though an evaluation of the images presented in the news does not yield a perfect reflection of public opinion of the Doukhobors, it does yield important clues concerning the information on which public opinion was based.

11 Sol Worth, *Studying Visual Communication*, ed. Larry Gross (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1981), 180.

12 Doris A. Graber, “Say It With Pictures,” *Annals, AAPSS* 546 (July 1996): 86.

13 Worth, *Studying Visual Communication*, 178.

14 Domke, et al., “The Primes of Our Times?” 133-4, 147-8.

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The *en masse* immigration of nearly 8,000 Doukhobors to Canada in 1899 was newsworthy. Canada's adoption of these Russian sectarians, whose non-conformist religious beliefs and practices had put them at odds with Russian authorities and forced them to seek refuge in a country that would permit them greater religious and political freedom, was both controversial and exciting. Accounts of the Doukhobors' difficulties in Russia, of their unusual characteristics, and of their suitability as immigrant settlers had been vigorously debated in government and in the press. The public's curiosity about these "peculiar people" had been aroused well before the Doukhobors arrived.¹⁵ Canadians sought hearty, healthy, self-sufficient immigrants to settle the Northwest at the turn of the century; some feared that the Doukhobors would prove less than desirable settlers, given rumours of their troubles in Russia and the stresses of their long journey from Russia to Canada.¹⁶

Certain aspects of the Doukhobors' appearance impressed those who first greeted them on the docks of Saint John, N.B., and Halifax, N.S., in January of 1899. The Doukhobors were described in glowing tones to the Canadian public who could not see the Doukhobors first-hand. Sympathetic reporters emphasized the Doukhobors' fitness for labour, hearty build, cleanliness, good health, religious piety, the courteous conduct of adults and children alike, the effects of their hardships in Russia, and their potential for full Canadianization.¹⁷

Reporters commented specifically on the Doukhobors' physical appearance, especially on the size, structure, and strength of their bodies. A Halifax paper reported that the Doukhobors were "of the purest Russian type, large and strong, men and women both being of magnificent physique ... characterized by broad, square shoulders, heavy limbs, and a massive build generally."¹⁸ The *Globe* described the Doukhobors as "large and unusually powerfully-built" and illustrated this point by describing how easily they handled their baggage.¹⁹

15 The Doukhobors were first referred to as "A Peculiar People" by Aylmer Maude, *A Peculiar People: The Doukhobors* (London: A. Constable, 1905), who had assisted in the negotiations between the Doukhobors and the Canadian government prior to Doukhobors immigration.

16 L.A. Sulerzhitsky, *To America with the Doukhobors*, trans. Michael Kalmakoff (Regina: Canadian Research Centre, University of Regina, 1982), 89.

17 See Joseph Elkinton, *The Doukhobors: Their History in Russia, Their Migration to Canada* (Philadelphia: Ferris & Leach, 1903), 190; John Philip Stoochnoff, *Doukhobors as They Are* (Penticton, B.C.: n.p., 1961), 67; and Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 25-6. For similar commentary, see "Doukhobors at St. John: Landing from the Vessel and Embarking the Trains for the West," *Globe* (24 January 1899), 1-2; "Doukhobors Go West: A Globe Correspondent's Trip with the Russian Immigrants," *Globe* (28 January 1899), 22; and Sulerzhitsky, *To America with the Doukhobors*, 88.

18 As cited in Elkinton, *The Doukhobors*, 190. Also cited in Stoochnoff, *Doukhobors as They Are*, 67, and Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 25-6.

19 "Doukhobors at St. John," 1-2; "Doukhobors Go West"; and Sulerzhitsky, *To America with the Doukhobors*, 88.

The Doukhobors, men and women alike, were “handsome,” “healthy-looking,” a “fine-looking lot of people, with honest faces and stalwart frames,” who were likely to become “a credit to the Dominion.”²⁰

Canada’s immigration boom under the Liberal Minister of the Interior Clifford Sifton’s administration excited those Canadians who wished to see the Northwest’s agricultural potential maximized. Many Canadians were concerned, however, that the immigrants Sifton was allowing into the country could not be readily assimilated. Sifton argued that any “honest and law-abiding” immigrant who “will go on the land and make a living for himself and family” was a “desirable settler.”²¹ From Sifton’s perspective, newcomers’ physical strength and agricultural experience were preconditions for their successful resettlement on the prairies; but his critics were concerned that physical strength and agricultural experience were insufficient standards for the selection of new immigrants. Conservative Member of Parliament Edward Prior argued, for example, that Canadians wanted “people with whom our young folks can associate and assimilate.” In Prior’s view, the Doukhobors fell short of that mark. “They are physically strong,” Prior admitted, but “we want a little more than that.”²²

Those who wished to frame the Doukhobors in a favourable light in 1899 had to demonstrate that they were physically capable and experienced farmers, worthy of the charity that had been extended to them. They also had to demonstrate that the Doukhobors had the potential to integrate with their Canadian neighbours by framing their activities and attributes as compatible with Canadian habits and values. If sympathizers wanted to elicit public support for Doukhobor immigration, they had to account for the newcomers’ unusual characteristics while showing how the Doukhobors fit into the Canadian way-of-life.

The Doukhobors brought few assets with them from Russia, and their modest savings went towards funding their trans-Atlantic passage.²³ Once established on their land, the Doukhobors worked hard to become financially self-sufficient. As young, able-bodied Doukhobor men went out in search of waged labour, Doukhobor women took responsibility for homemaking. During their first year in Canada, this meant, quite literally, building their families’

20 “Clean Bill of Health: The Doukhobors on the Lake Huron Leave Halifax for St. John,” *Globe* (23 January 1899), 1, and “The Doukhobors,” *Globe* (28 January 1899), 1.

21 *Debates of the House of Commons, 1899* (Ottawa: S. E. Dawson, 1899), 6859.

22 *Debates, 1899*, 6837.

23 The Doukhobors were also financially and materially assisted by Russian author Leo Tolstoy, members of the Society of Friends (Quakers) who had taken an interest in their situation, and by the government of Canada, which put the sum of money it otherwise paid immigration agents towards providing for the Doukhobors through their first Canadian winter and financing their agricultural start-up.

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homes and setting up village infrastructure. While their male counterparts worked for local farmers or as labourers on the railway, the Doukhobor women constructed over ninety separate villages.²⁴

The women's labour impressed Doukhobor sympathizer and Quaker Joseph Elkinton. The Society of Friends (Quakers) had offered the Doukhobors significant financial, material, and moral support throughout their immigration, and had represented the Doukhobors as worthy of the Canadian government's aid. It is not surprising, therefore, that Elkinton highlighted the Doukhobors' positive qualities. In his book, *The Doukhobors*, Elkinton emphasized Doukhobor women's resourcefulness and willingness to work hard to provide for their families. He noted that the Doukhobors were in a remote location, far from potential suppliers. They had limited financial resources and owned few tools.²⁵ Despite these challenges, Doukhobor women built homes for their families that were, in Elkinton's assessment, "a marvel of ingenuity" and showcased their "superior abilities."²⁶

Doukhobor women's fitness for hard work also attracted the attention of *Globe* correspondent "Lally Bernard" (Mary Agnes FitzGibbon).²⁷ In the latter half of the nineteenth century, when political figures owned many of Canada's newspapers and Canadian news magnates ran for politics, the news and newspaper subscribers were partisan in character.²⁸ It is worth pointing out that the *Globe*, founded by George Brown in 1844, had firm roots in the Liberal party tradition. Given that it was the Liberal party and, more specifically, Clifford Sifton, who made Doukhobor immigration possible, the *Globe's* initial enthusiasm for the Doukhobor newcomers must be viewed critically.

FitzGibbon was socially and professionally connected to Toronto's social elite and related to a prominent member of the Liberal party (Liberal Member of

24 Elkinton, *The Doukhobors*, 99.

25 Ibid.; University of British Columbia, Jim Hamm fonds (hereafter Hamm fonds), Carl Tracie, interviewed by Jim Hamm, "The Spirit Wrestlers," transcript, 97; Maude, *A Peculiar People*, 180-1.

26 Elkinton, *The Doukhobors*, 217.

27 The pen name, "Lally Bernard," is derived from Mary Agnes Fitzgibbon's own and her mother's maiden names. FitzGibbon circulated among Ontario's elite. She received a private education, married the son of the Hon. Gerald and Lady Louise FitzGibbon, resided for a brief period with her stepfather, Conservative-turned-Liberal politician D'Alton McCarthy, and was formally presented to the King and Queen at St. James Palace in 1902. She held membership and office in multiple women's professional clubs in Canada and England, including the Canadian Women's Press Club, the Victoria League, the woman's branch of the Tariff Reform League, the woman's branch of the Imperial Federation League, the Women's Canadian Club, the Ladies' Empire Club, and the Canadian Authors' Club. Henry James Morgan, ed., *The Canadian Men and Women of the Time: A Hand-Book of Canadian Biography of Living Characters*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: William Briggs, 1912), 399.

28 Rutherford, *The Making of the Canadian Media*, 31 and 57. Rutherford provides a digest of the politically affiliated newspapers founded during this period on pages 48 to 52.

Parliament D'Alton McCarthy was FitzGibbon's step-father). Her sympathy for the Doukhobor women may reflect a sense of *noblesse oblige*, but it is consistent with the journalistic style adopted by FitzGibbon's female colleagues who were often assigned to undertake domestic travel writing. These travelogues were intended to provide urban readers with a positive impression of Canada's countryside and were designed to foster nationalistic pride and unity.²⁹ As a special correspondent to the *Globe*, FitzGibbon published at least 13 articles describing her visits to Doukhobor communities in Saskatchewan, which commented on the Doukhobors' progress in western Canada between 1899 and 1901.³⁰ Her articles ran in the Saturday edition of the *Globe* and qualified as "soft" news pieces, meant to inform and entertain the weekend readership.³¹

FitzGibbon highlighted the women's physical strength, resourcefulness, and attention to aesthetic quality in her reports. During her first visits to the Doukhobor settlements in 1899, FitzGibbon had an opportunity to assess their construction skills, as the women worked to set up their homes. She explained that the women hauled the large logs needed for construction themselves, using a simple cart with two wooden wheels. Where large logs could not be found, the women wove willow branches together as a replacement. FitzGibbon reported that the women plastered the walls of their homes using their hands instead of tools, producing a result that was "as smooth a surface as if the trowel of a first-rate plasterer had been at work." The deftness of the women's con-

29 Sandra Gabriele, "Gendered Mobility, the Nation, and the Woman's Page: Exploring the Mobile Practices of the Canadian Lady Journalist, 1888–1895," *Journalism* 7, no. 2 (2006): 176, 185–7, 191.

30 These include: "With the Doukhobors" (9 September 1899), 5–6; "Doukhobor Men and Women: A Visit to the Homes of the New Settlers in the Northwest" (30 September 1899), 5; "Doukhobors at Home: A Trip Through their Settlements in the Northwest" (7 October 1899), 8; "Among Doukhobors: The Globe's Correspondent Visits the Southern Colony" (14 October 1899), 9; "With the Doukhobors: The Globe's Correspondent Pays a Visit to the Southern Colony" (28 October 1899), 17; "With the Doukhobors: Further Glimpses of the New Northwestern Settlers" (4 November 1899), 10; "Work for Doukhobors: National Council of Women to Find Employment for Them, The Means of Enabling the Doukhobor Immigrants to Assist Themselves During Winter Months" (22 November 1899), 5; "Doukhobor Colonies: Where the New Settlers in the West are Located: Some Phases of Doukhobor History" (25 November 1899), 6; "Progress of Doukhobors ... Doukhobors Spreading their Money Freely" (24 November 1900), 5, 9; "Among the Doukhobors: Doukhobors have some Idea of Cooking" (1 December 1900), 5; "Doukhobors at Home: Pleasant Experiences Amid the New Western Settlers" (8 December 1900), 9, 13; "Doukhobor Schools: Question of Educating our New Western Settlers" (12 January 1901), 12; "Story of the Doukhoborts: How and Why they Came to Settle in Canada" (6 July 1901), 14.

31 Gans points out that newspapers print "soft" news or "interesting stories" to counterbalance the heavy "hard" news items that make the front page. Gans classifies "soft" news into six types: people stories, role reversals, human-interest stories, exposé anecdotes, hero stories, and "gee-whiz" stories. *Deciding What's News*, 156. "Lally Bernard's" stories about the Doukhobors might be classified as people, human-interest, or "gee-whiz" stories.

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struction impressed Fitzgibbon, who felt that the Doukhobors had "already proved their adaptability in utilizing to the best advantage the raw products of the earth as no Anglo-Saxon could attempt to do."³²

Sympathizers such as Elkinton and FitzGibbon, who wished to portray the Doukhobors in a positive light, had to emphasize the Doukhobors' strengths, both in the literal and figurative sense, without making them appear too foreign. Their peculiar characteristics had to be accounted for and explained as being of some benefit to Canada's welfare and as being somehow compatible with the Canadian way-of-life. Judging from the tone of Elkinton's and FitzGibbon's assessments, the physical capability which Doukhobor women demonstrated in their home building activities was, at the turn of the twentieth century, remarkable. While the women's efforts were worthy of admiration, they may not have been compatible with late nineteenth-century Canadian expectations of feminine behaviour. In a pointed effort to draw a connection between the Doukhobor women's physical strength and their femininity, FitzGibbon labelled the house building as "homemaking," suggesting that since the Doukhobor women had "already proved themselves 'home makers' in the truest sense of the word" they were "especially adapted to act as pioneers of civilization in our far western country."³³

It was more difficult for sympathizers to characterize Doukhobor women as "pioneers of civilization" when, having completed the construction of their homes, they harnessed themselves to their ploughs in the spring of 1899. Harvesting a crop in the fall would help to support their families through their first full winter in Canada. The main handicap to this enterprise was that they lacked livestock. A village of over a hundred people owned, if lucky, a pair of oxen or a team of horses.³⁴ Overtaxed by the labour required for hauling and transportation, the animals could not also be used to plough the fields.

In a remarkable demonstration of their physical strength, personal determination, and cooperative spirit, some of the women decided to pull the ploughs themselves. Eli Popoff, Doukhobor historian and ethnographer conversant with Doukhobor oral history and collective memory, reports that some of the women elders remembered an old tradition in which young Russian women hitched themselves to a plough to start the first furrows in a new field as a gesture of respect to the earth, in the hope that the land would prove fruitful. The women drew from this tradition and turned Saskatchewan soil using their own strength to accomplish the task. According to Popoff, the idea was welcomed by the women, desperate to feed their families.³⁵

32 Bernard, "With the Doukhobors," *Globe* (9 September 1899), 5-6.

33 Bernard, "Work for Doukhobors," *Globe* (22 November 1899), 5.

34 Bernard, "With the Doukhobors," *Globe* (9 September 1899), 5-6.

35 Eli A. Popoff, *Stories from Doukhobor History* (Grand Forks, B.C.: Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ, 1992), 136.

The women's efforts greatly boosted the welfare of the entire Doukhobor group. While the men undertook waged jobs to build equity, women built homes and provided food. Because the women were able to feed their families, the money the men earned could be applied to other needs. The women's effort also served to define and reinforce the Doukhobors' unique identity, and, thus, had a significant psychological impact on the group. Working together to construct their homes and plough their fields demonstrated the efficacy and practicality of two Doukhobor precepts: cooperation and hard work.³⁶ The importance of this contribution continues to be recognized within the Doukhobor community, as women's plough pulling is commemorated and re-enacted on special anniversaries.³⁷

The image of Doukhobor women harnessed to ploughs was, however, problematic at the end of the nineteenth century. Some outsiders may have been impressed by their strength and determination, and Canadians who wondered whether the Doukhobors would be able to make unbroken soil productive may have had their fears allayed on viewing the lengths to which the Doukhobor women would go to put the land to seed. But the image of women harnessed to ploughs disturbed those who believed that Canadian women belonged in the home, not in the harness. FitzGibbon was amused by "the horrified expression" she saw on the faces of Canadian women when they heard about the Doukhobor women's activities.³⁸ The public eye, trained on anecdotes and photographs of Doukhobor women replacing oxen or horses, perceived them as backward, unfeminine, and, ultimately, un-Canadian.³⁹

36 The Doukhobors summarize these concepts with the oft-repeated slogan "Toil and Peaceful Life."

37 Tracie, "Toil and Peaceful Life" 61. Images of the original event were reproduced in Koozma J. Tarasoff, *A Pictorial History of the Doukhobors* (Saskatoon, Sask.: Modern Press, 1969), 78, and Koozma J. Tarasoff, *Plakun Trava: The Doukhobors* (Grand Forks, BC: Mir Publication Society, 1982), 53. Popoff relates the story in "Turning the Sod by Woman Power," *Stories from Doukhobor History*, 135-7. In 1955 eighteen women from Verigin, Sask., re-enacted this event in traditional costume. "Doukhobors Take Part in Pion-Era Festival," *Inquirer* 2, no. 8 (19 September 1955): 21-2. An image of this re-enactment is featured in Tarasoff, *A Pictorial History of the Doukhobors*, 241. The event was portrayed in Anne J. Plotnikoff, "Historical Pageant: The Story of the Doukhobors" (Grand Forks, B.C.: Iskra Publications, 1987), 27, a play performed in 1987. Women's plough-pulling was made into a contest in the annual Doukhobor Sports Day sponsored by the Doukhobor Cultural Association (a photo of the 1975 contest can be found in Tarasoff, *Plakun Trava*, 188). The event is also depicted in "Doukhoborets Tot," an image designed by John Kalmakov to commemorate the Burning of Arms centenary in 1995.

38 Bernard, "Progress of Doukhobors."

39 *Qu'Appelle Progress* (22 June 1899), 1; Elkinton, *The Doukhobors*, 101; "Yorkton Enterprise," *Edmonton Bulletin* (15 May 1899), 1. Reflecting on the women's plough-pulling, *Le Manitoba* expressed concern that the Doukhobors "tiennent à leurs coutumes et ne montrent nul désir d'adopter les idées canadiennes." "Chez nous et autour de nous," *Le Manitoba (Le Métis)* (3 May 1899), 3.

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Doukhobor sympathizers sensitive to Canadians' call for immigrants who were more than "beasts of burden"⁴⁰ had to find a way to reconcile the women's unusual physical activity with Canadian expectations for feminine conduct. FitzGibbon attempted to soften the image by crediting their "innate dignity" and "uncomplaining, untiring patience" for giving them the strength "to endure to the end trials that their magnificent physique could not alone have enabled them to withstand."⁴¹ FitzGibbon explained that Doukhobor women "are not in the habit of drawing ploughs or of building houses, but, like many others of their sex, they are capable of rising to the occasion, and this was one of the occasions when they distinguished themselves."⁴² FitzGibbon argued that the women believed their families' welfare depended on their willingness to perform this difficult labour. The women pulled the plough in order to feed their families and built their homes in order to ensure their families' comfort. Framing these activities as nurturing and highlighting the women's "dignity" and "patience" made it easier to reconcile the unusual physical activities with late nineteenth-century Canadian definitions of femininity.

Throughout their first year in Canada, much public attention was paid to the size, structure, and strength of the Doukhobor women's bodies. Those who sought to frame Doukhobor women in a more "feminine" light took advantage of the fact that the women were also able to do very delicate work with their hands. Elkinton pointed out that besides house construction and farm labour, the women were also capable textile and needleworkers.⁴³ "The women are all capital tailoresses," FitzGibbon reported, and their handiwork impressed Canadian women who hired them as seamstresses.⁴⁴ Doukhobor women were able to provide their husbands with dark Western-style suits that allowed them to circulate in society without appearing too foreign.⁴⁵ In FitzGibbon's opinion, the men were "far better dressed than any other men of their class."⁴⁶

Not only could the Doukhobor women sew adeptly, but their handiwork was also admired for its use of colour, attention to detail, superb skill, and ingenuity. Their "prettily-woven patterns" were expertly designed and executed.⁴⁷

40 *Debates*, 1899, 8523.

41 Bernard, "With the Doukhobors," *Globe* (9 September 1899), 5-6.

42 Bernard, "Doukhobor Men and Women."

43 Elkinton, *The Doukhobors*, 102-3.

44 Bernard, "Doukhobor Men and Women"; also "Women's Art Exhibition," *Globe* (13 October 1903), 5, and "Doukhobor Embroidery," *Globe* (3 September 1906), 5.

45 Dorothy K. Burnham, *Unlike the Lilies: Doukhobor Textile Traditions in Canada*. (Toronto: Royal Ontario Museum, 1986), 34.

46 Bernard, "With the Doukhobors," *Globe* (4 November 1899), 10.

47 Bernard, "Doukhobor Men and Women" and "With the Doukhobors," *Globe* (28 October 1899), 17.

Elkinton claimed that Doukhobor linens were “exquisitely fine” and “the wonder and delight of all observant visitors.”⁴⁸ Doukhobor women also knit proficiently. As an indication of their ability and industriousness, FitzGibbon claimed that she had sometimes seen them “with their loads of flour on their backs and the knitting in their hands.” “The click of their knitting needles is ceaseless,” FitzGibbon reported, and “their spinning wheels and looms are never idle.”⁴⁹

The needlework served a practical purpose, as Doukhobor women produced their families’ clothing and linens with their own hands. Sewing, knitting, weaving, and needlepoint also constituted an important form of entertainment. Having completed farm and housework, Doukhobor women gathered together to work on their projects, telling stories, singing hymns, or making a game of their work by competing to see who could knit the fastest.⁵⁰ Their handiwork also generated income, as Doukhobor seamstresses hired out or brought work home for pay.⁵¹ Most significantly, Doukhobor women’s ability with needle and textile provided sympathizers with a marketable image: the image of Doukhobor women using their hands to produce clothing, linens, or colourful rugs was feminine and practical; it fit in with Canadians’ understanding of appropriate “women’s work”; it was an image with which many middle-class Canadian women identified. As Doukhobor sympathizer Victoria Hayward put it, “there is great sisterhood in spinning and weaving, in embroidery, in rug-making, and in home-making everywhere.”⁵² The women pulling the plough were “strangers”; the women weaving, sewing, embroidering, and knitting were potential “sisters.”

In the Doukhobors’ case, however, “women’s work” was as much in the fields as it was in the home. The collectivization of labour in Doukhobor villages, such that individuals worked for the welfare of the whole community rather than for the welfare of their family alone, along with the division of labour — both between the genders and among the women — meant that while women had dominion over the household, they were also able to contribute significantly to the community’s welfare in the fields. The women divided household chores on a rotational basis, such that a few women were assigned

48 Elkinton, *The Doukhobors*, 102-3.

49 Bernard, “Work for Doukhobors” and “Story of the Doukhoborts.” This is likely exaggeration on FitzGibbon’s part. Whether exaggeration or reality, FitzGibbon’s intention in sharing these anecdotes appears to have been to impress her readers with the Doukhobor women’s industriousness.

50 Burnham, *Unlike the Lilies*, 69-70; also, Hamm fonds, Ann Popoff, interviewed by Jim Hamm, “The Spirit Wrestlers,” transcript, 645.

51 See Bernard, “Work for Doukhobors.”

52 Victoria Hayward, *Romantic Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan Company of Canada, 1922), 229.

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each week to the tasks of cooking and cleaning in the home, freeing the rest of the women to garden or perform fieldwork.⁵³

To some observers, the Doukhobor woman's life seemed hard. "Better to die at once than marry [a] Doukhobor man. Doukhobor women work just like slaves," one reporter wrote. The reporter noted that the women continued to work in the fields well into the evening. "To a Canadian woman," the reporter surmised, the Doukhobor woman's lot in life "would surely be worse than death."⁵⁴ To others, however, the Doukhobor woman's life seemed pastoral and idyllic. She worked hard, but she seemed to enjoy herself. One observer indicated that the women seemed happy; they laughed and sang on their way to work as though they were on their way to "a frolic."⁵⁵ "What is wrong with models of industry, hospitality, cleanliness, politeness, and physical strength like these?" Murray J. Gibbon asked rhetorically in the *Queen's Quarterly* in 1920.⁵⁶

In addition to strength, early twentieth-century descriptions of Doukhobor "sisters'" bodies emphasized the natural simplicity of the spirit which animated them. FitzGibbon granted that Doukhobor women were not as beautiful as Ukrainian women, but added, diplomatically, that the Doukhobors' "nobility of carriage and directness of glance" had "a beauty all its own." She suggested that the women's faces told "of life seen at its worst."⁵⁷ Though writers commended the women for their hand-embroidered headscarves and colourful skirts and blouses, Doukhobor women were not perceived as fashionable.⁵⁸ Victoria Hayward explained that Doukhobor women had "none of the accessories of dress which the average woman deems necessary if she is to feel and

53 After 1899 field work no longer meant building homes or ploughing fields: the women only undertook these tasks during their first year in Canada, as necessity demanded exceptional effort on their part. Peter Verigin, "The Truth About the Doukhobors," *The Independent* 75 (3 July 1913): 24; C. B. Sissons, "What Can We Do With the Doukhobors?" *Canadian Forum* 4 (July 1924): 299; "A Vegetarian Colony," *Literary Digest* 67 (20 November 1920): 101.

54 C.I.S., "A Day Among the Doukhobors," *Canadian Magazine* 26 (January 1906): 282-4.

55 As cited in Murray J. Gibbon, "The Foreign Born," *Queen's Quarterly* 27 (April-June 1920): 344.

56 Ibid., 341. Gibbon was an advocate of Canada's ethnic minorities. In 1938 he penned *Canadian Mosaic*, a study of the cultural roots of Canada's ethnic groups. Some credit Gibbon for coining the phrase "Canadian mosaic" because of the title of his influential book (the book was awarded the Governor-General's Literary Award for non-fiction in 1938). *Tribute to a Nation Builder: An Appreciation of Dr. John Murray Gibbon* (Composers Authors and Publishers Association of Canada, 1946), 19, and W. Stewart Wallace, *The Macmillan Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: Macmillan, 1963), 263. Gibbon himself points out, however, that he had heard the term on two previous occasions. *Canadian Mosaic: The Making of a Northern Nation* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1938), viii-ix.

57 Bernard, "Work for Doukhobors."

58 "Doukhobors at St. John," 1-2; Bernard, "Story of the Doukhoborts"; "Doukhobors Are A Great Fire Hazard," *Globe and Mail* (25 June 1952), 20.

act at ease.”⁵⁹ Rather, the Doukhobor woman, with her “closely cropped head and bare feet,” took a greater interest in her domestic chores and garden: “she is a product of nature, she takes it for granted you love the things of the earth as every true woman should.”⁶⁰ Hayward defended their traditional appearance, declaring:

The moment you meet the Doukhobor woman — strapping, athletic, alert and graceful — you find yourself looking at the strong face and hands and you say to yourself, “Here is a life that counts, there is a woman who can *do* something, not one who plays at it, inquiring of the fashion books what she shall wear when going a-hoeing.”⁶¹

Photographs published in the Canadian press in the first quarter of the twentieth century also emphasized Doukhobor women’s natural simplicity, and portrayed them as conservative, traditional, and pastoral. A family photo was used in the *Globe* in 1909 to illustrate that Doukhobor men wore “western” fashions more readily than the women, implying that Doukhobor women were more backward and resistant to assimilation than their male counterparts.⁶² As Dorothy Burnham suggests that it was not until 1910 that women were able to make themselves new clothes,⁶³ their traditional dress in the 1909 photo says more about their time and resources than it does about their resistance to assimilation. Making clothes for the men who worked away from home in the public sphere was a greater priority than clothing for the women and children who remained at home. The women prioritized their husbands’ needs over their own, which reinforced the impression that Doukhobor women were more culturally conservative than Doukhobor men.

Craftsman magazine published a series of photos in 1907 as part of the article “The Doukhobors of Canada — A Community of Siberian Exiles Which is Being Brought to Great Financial Prosperity by a Russian Captain of Industry.” These images are notable because, while the article is not focused exclusively on Doukhobor women, the accompanying photographs are. They depicted “women, the workers” spinning, weaving, embroidering, sifting grain, beating flax, wearing headscarves, and sitting down to break-

59 Victoria Hayward, “The Doukhobors: A Community Race in Canada,” *Canadian Magazine* 51 (October 1918): 462.

60 Ibid., 462-3. Peter “Lordly” Verigin required that his female followers wear their hair short, believing that short hair was more hygienic and its management less time consuming. University of British Columbia, Christian Community of Universal Brotherhood Papers, 1919-34, d. ms. 24, “Doukhobor Answer to the Veterans Resolution of Feb. 13th 1919,” 17 February 1919, Brilliant British Columbia.

61 Hayward, “The Doukhobors,” 463.

62 *The Globe* (20 March 1909), 28.

63 Burnham, *Unlike the Lilies*, 60.

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fast.⁶⁴ The formula of this montage was repeated in a 1918 article in *Canadian Magazine*, which showed women with cucumbers, husking beans, beating mustard seed, at dinner time, spinning flax, knitting, and using a spinning wheel.⁶⁵ *Canadian Magazine* published a second montage in 1920. These photographs showed women sifting millet, twisting flax, mangling, cutting bread, and drying apples.⁶⁶

These images portrayed the women in traditional peasant dress, barefoot, working cooperatively, engaged in old-world agricultural pursuits. The tasks were either blatantly feminine, in the case of spinning, knitting, embroidery, food preparation, and gardening, or within the range of what most Canadians could imagine agricultural women — especially stalwart Eastern European women — doing. Where the author or photographer commented on the images, the tone reflects admiration, whimsy, and sympathy. The women in these photographs were "sisters."

Doukhobor sympathizers, such as Joseph Elkinton, Mary Agnes FitzGibbon, John Murray Gibbon, and Victoria Hayward, worked to present Doukhobor women in a positive light in the first quarter of the twentieth century, highlighting their superior needle and textile skills, illustrating the "romance" of their peasant simplicity, and casting their unusual displays of physical strength as proof of their desire to provide for their families. By the middle of the twentieth century, the images of traditionally clothed women's bodies harnessed to the plough and engaged in farm and household labour were completely eclipsed by another image that was much harder to frame positively: that of the nude.

Nudity was practiced by a small, zealous sect of the Doukhobor population, the Sons of Freedom. Throughout the twentieth century, Sons of Freedom employed a variety of tactics to draw attention to their cause, including speech-making, letter writing, postering, protesting, and parading. The Freedomites also used arson, setting fire to their own possessions as a demonstration of their freedom from material possessions, or setting fire to other Doukhobors' belongings in an effort to shame those who had, in the Freedomites' opinion, strayed from the true faith. Some members of the Sons of Freedom sect went so far as to target government and corporate buildings and infrastructure with explosives. Dealing with the depredations perpetrated by this minority cost British Columbian and Canadian taxpayers millions of dollars in legal, reconstructive,

64 Katherine Louise Smith, "The Doukhobors of Canada — A Community of Siberian Exiles Which is Being Brought to Great Financial Prosperity by a Russian Captain of Industry," *Craftsman* 12 (April 1907): 64-79.

65 Hayward, "The Doukhobors," 457-6.

66 Edith S. Watson, "Illustrating Homely Industries of Doukhobors Settled in British Columbia," *Canadian Magazine* 56 (December 1920): 129-36. See also Hayward, *Romantic Canada*, 225-34.

and rehabilitative expenses. Neither Canadian authorities nor non-Freedomite Doukhobors approved of the Sons of Freedom's activities.

Beginning in 1903 the Sons of Freedom used nudity to express their discontent, to demonstrate their rejection of materialism, to identify themselves with the innocence and sinlessness of Adam and Eve before their fall from grace, and to vent their frustration with government and legal authorities. They stripped during religious services; during political or social meetings hosted by their own community or by non-Freedomite Doukhobors; while their own homes or the homes of their neighbours burned to the ground; while setting fire to other buildings; while on marches and parades; during public protests; when confronted by reporters, government authorities, or law enforcement officers; in court and in jail. Sons of Freedom defended their use of nudity, explaining that removing one's clothing indicated sincerity and humility before God.⁶⁷ Generally, the Canadian press ignored or belittled the religious context for the Freedomites' nudity, emphasizing instead its use as a form of protest and its ridiculousness.⁶⁸

If the Freedomites' tactics were designed to attract attention to their plight, they were successful. In 1952 John P. Zubek and Patricia Anne Solberg began their study of the situation, *Doukhobors at War*, by admitting that "every Canadian who can twirl a radio dial to tune in the news bulletins hears new tales of atrocities: arson, dynamiting, vandalism and nude parades."⁶⁹ It is not surprising that the Canadian and international press took an interest in a group of people who periodically burnt down their own homes and removed their clothing in public.⁷⁰ "If there were just some way in which we could obtain early and reliable information about when and where our Doukhobor strip-parades were taking place," Bruce West of the *Globe and Mail* argued, "it would undoubtedly be a boon to the tourist industry."⁷¹ Though West was teasing, the Sons of Freedom nude demonstrations did, in fact, attract a sort of tourist following.⁷²

67 Eli A. Popoff, comp., trans., and ed., "Summarized Report: Joint Doukhobor Research Committee, Symposium Meetings, 1974–1982" (Grand Forks, B.C.: n.p., 1997), 65; Hamm fonds, "The Spirit Wrestlers," transcript, 26.

68 "Canada: Taming the Spirit Wrestlers," *Time* 87 (11 February 1966): 32; "Strip-Down Strike: By Unclad Tactics, Dukhoborts Still Worry British Columbia," *Literary Digest* 123 (26 June 1937): 31; "Doukhobor Story," *Globe and Mail* (13 October 1953), 6; "Women Strip as Doukhobors Consider Move," *Globe and Mail* (10 March 1958), 14.

69 John P. Zubek and Patricia Anne Solberg, *Doukhobors at War* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1952), 1.

70 Bruce West, "Birthday Buffs," *Globe and Mail* (29 June 1966), 35.

71 Ibid.

72 Bruce Larsen, "Nude Freedomites Parade After Krestova Meeting: Leadership Battle Apparently Fails to Materialize," *Vancouver Province* (1 June 1953); "The Doukhobors: 'Top Tourist Attraction'," *Calgary Herald* (10 September 1953); and Hazel O'Neil, *Doukhobor Daze* (Sidney, B.C.: Gray's Publishing Ltd., 1962), 54.

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Photographer Jane Sloan explains that the sight of a group of naked men and women excited some onlookers. Sloan admits there were men who asked her to sell some of the nude photos she had taken.⁷³ Saturated as today's popular media is with images of partially or fully nude men and women, the prospect of viewing naked religious fanatics might not seem all that exciting. In the middle of the twentieth century, however, images of nudity were not so commonplace, and the prospect of seeing people without their clothes on roused public interest.

Increasingly, the Sons of Freedom became "best known" for their nude protests.⁷⁴ Unfortunately, the media often failed to distinguish between the Sons of Freedom minority, who participated in nude protests, and the Doukhobor majority who did not. Some reporters clarified that "most Doukhobors are indeed quiet, industrious and law-abiding people, who take off their clothes only when they are going to bed or preparing to take a bath."⁷⁵ Most reporters did not make this distinction, however, and the whole Doukhobor group came to be associated with nudity. The *Literary Digest* admitted in 1932 that "*the Doukhobors*" were "associated in the Canadian mind with nude parades, anti-educational demonstrations and school burnings."⁷⁶ In 1940 *Time* magazine announced that "*the Dukhobors [sic]*" were "best known for their tendency to shuck off their clothes and parade naked through startled towns on the Canadian prairies."⁷⁷ Even as late as 1979 the *Globe and Mail* surmised that "naked women singing Russian hymns while burning down a home is the image many people have of *the Doukhobors*, a troubled religious sect now undergoing a fiery resurgence of religious and political struggle in the West Kootenay and Boundary country of southeastern British Columbia."⁷⁸ By using "Doukhobor" rather than "Sons of Freedom," or even "Sons of Freedom Doukhobors," the press did little to change that image.⁷⁹

That the boundary between these two groups was blurred in the public eye did not sit well with the majority of Doukhobors. "When Canadians hear the expression 'Doukhobor' they often first think of the Sons of Freedom because of the stigma endured by all Doukhobors for the actions of that radical element," *de facto* Orthodox Doukhobor leader J.J. Verigin, Jr.,

73 Hamm fonds, Jane Sloan, interviewed by Jim Hamm, "The Spirit Wrestlers," transcript, 562.

74 "British Columbia: Trouble in Kootenay," *Time* 50 (8 September 1947): 14.

75 West, "Birthday Buffs."

76 "Doukhobors on Parade," *Literary Digest* 113 (4 June 1932): 17-18.

77 "Spirit Wrestlers" (Book Review), *Time* 36 (11 November 1940): 82.

78 "The Doukhobors: They're at it Once More in the Kootenays," *Globe and Mail* (17 January 1979), 9.

79 I have italicized "Doukhobors" and "the Doukhobors" in this paragraph to highlight instances where the Doukhobor name was used rather than the more specific "Sons of Freedom" or "Sons of Freedom Doukhobors."

explains.⁸⁰ His father, Honorary Chairman of the Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ, John J. Verigin, Sr., repeatedly condemned the Freedomites' actions during his leadership, arguing that the radical actions of the minority faction had severely damaged the image of all Canadian Doukhobors.⁸¹ Even some journalists noted the Doukhobors' embarrassment, pointing out that the overuse of the image of naked Freedomite women had an unfair and negative impact on the image of the whole Doukhobor group.⁸²

While both male and female Sons of Freedom participated in nude demonstrations, women were pictured and described far more frequently in the Canadian press than men. These images, printed in Canadian and international newspapers, magazines, and books, showed women in partial and full undress from behind, though occasionally profile or frontal images were printed as well. It is possible that images of naked women had more impact than those of naked men. Where top-half photographs were published from a profile or frontal perspective, topless women were more interesting and provocative than topless men, and, thus, were more marketable.⁸³ This is consistent with broader journalism trends: while images of totally nude women were occasionally printed in the news media in the mid twentieth century, images portraying male genitalia remained taboo.⁸⁴

It is also possible that women removed their clothing more frequently than men. Some evidence suggests that male Freedomites were more likely to remove their clothing for a female photographer or reporter, while female Freedomites were more likely to undress in front of a male audience.⁸⁵ As most photographers, reporters, government officials, and police officers working in

80 Hamm fonds, J.J. Verigin, Jr., interviewed by Jim Hamm, "The Spirit Wrestlers," transcript, 489. The Doukhobors split into three main groups after their immigration to Canada: the Sons of Freedom, the Independents, and the Orthodox. The Independents adopted Canadian habits and values more quickly than their counterparts, and rejected the principle of hereditary leadership. The Orthodox preserved the principle of hereditary leadership.

81 For example, see "Symposium Number 43 (16 September 1979)" in Popoff, "Summarized Report: Joint Doukhobor Research Committee, Symposium Meetings, 1974–1982." The Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ is the organizational body for the Orthodox Doukhobor faction.

82 J. E. Belliveau, "Sons of Freedom: A Report on Canada's Bomb-Throwing, Clothes-Shedding Doukhobors," *Commonweal* 69 (13 March 1959): 622, and Markin, "Know Me For What I Am."

83 Simma Holt, author of *Terror in the Name of God*, suggests that her publisher pressured her to print pictures of young Sons of Freedom women in the nude. Hamm fonds, Simma Holt, interview by Jim Hamm, "The Spirit Wrestlers," transcript, 106.

84 Gans, *Deciding What's News*, 244.

85 Both Jane Sloan and Simma Holt claim that Doukhobor men stripped when they arrived on the scene. Hamm fonds, Jane Sloan and Simma Holt, interviews by Jim Hamm, "The Spirit Wrestlers," transcript, 563 and 109.

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the middle of the twentieth century were male, it is possible that women simply undressed more frequently than men because the audience was usually male.

Sons of Freedom women were seen to be, in general, more "aggressive," "vocal," and "radical" than Freedomite men.⁸⁶ Hugh Herbison, a Quaker who took a special interest in the Sons of Freedom at mid-century and acted as a negotiator between the Sons of Freedom and British Columbia's provincial government, reflects that the Freedomite women appeared to provide much of the "emotional power" behind protest demonstrations. Herbison accounts for this by explaining that the women had long taken responsibility for village affairs in the absence of men, who undertook waged labour outside of the home.⁸⁷ Harry Hawthorne, chair of the Doukhobor Research Committee, reported in 1952 that Doukhobor women had far fewer contacts with non-Doukhobor society than Doukhobor men. As such, the women had become "more assertive and aggressive, more hostile to other Canadians and condemnatory in their judgments, and more stubbornly conservative in their opposition to the changes which nevertheless continue to affect their lives."⁸⁸ According to George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic, authors of *The Doukhobors*, the elderly, the strongly religious, and the women were the most likely to cling "to the ideal of Doukhoborism as an exclusive, messianic religion," and most likely to fight against assimilation with Canadian society.⁸⁹

Though Sons of Freedom women used nudity and arson in their protests, there is little evidence to suggest that they participated in the more extreme "black work" allegedly undertaken by some Sons of Freedom.⁹⁰ This work was, apparently, a job for Freedomite men, who were portrayed in the press as dangerous terrorists because of this activity.⁹¹ Though both Freedomite men and woman were portrayed negatively in Canadian newspapers and magazines, the "black work" which was perpetrated by male Sons of Freedom was covert; even the police had difficulty catching the perpetrators in the act. The press could only print photographs of the property that had been destroyed and the men thought to have done it. The connection between the crime and the suspect was implied. Nude protests, which usually involved women, were public by design. Women who participated in nude protests were caught on camera, doing

86 Hamm fonds, Bob Mullock, interview by Jim Hamm, "The Spirit Wrestlers," transcript, 121.

87 Hamm fonds, Hugh Herbison, interview by Jim Hamm, "The Spirit Wrestlers," transcript, 187.

88 Harry B. Hawthorn, "The Contemporary Picture," in *The Doukhobors of British Columbia*, ed. Harry B. Hawthorn (Vancouver: University of British Columbia and J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1955), 15.

89 Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors*, 309.

90 "Black work" refers to the destruction of public property using arson or explosives.

91 For example, see "Over 800 Years in Sentences: 'Official Bomber' Sherstobitoff Gets 14 Years; 93 Sentenced; Other Terms Range From 1 1/2 to 7 Years For Conspiracy, Arson and Dynamiting," *Nelson Daily News* (7 July 1950), 1.

what they were accused of doing. Images of women caught in the act likely had a greater impact on public opinion than images of men juxtaposed with images of the crimes they were accused of committing. Whether because women stripped more frequently than men or because the media preferred to print photographs of Freedomite women, the prevailing image of Doukhobor nudity was female.

The photographs printed in the press and published in polemics left little to the imagination: by the middle of the twentieth century, anyone who wished to see what a Sons of Freedom woman looked like beneath her clothes could view the images for him or herself. As if this photographic evidence was not damning enough, writers also went to great lengths to describe Doukhobor women's bodies in unflattering detail, as they had done throughout the century. Doukhobor women had been described as "squat of figure, and stolid of feature."⁹² They "seem to develop to a remarkable size," the *Globe and Mail* noted in 1913.⁹³ Clyde Gilmour informed *Maclean's Magazine* readers in 1947 that the women's "contours call to mind an old Doukhobor cradle prayer" which called on God to "send her plumpness and beauty will come of itself." Not many Doukhobor women "could be called pretty by Canadian standards," Gilmour concluded.⁹⁴

One of the most expressive and least flattering descriptions of Doukhobor women is found in *Doukhobor Daze*, former teacher Hazel O'Neil's 1962 anecdotal account of her work among the Doukhobors in the 1930s. "Nearly all the Doukhobor women are very well upholstered in all sections," O'Neil writes:

Obesity seems to be a criterion of beauty, and even the young women make no attempt to control their tendency to fatness, nor even to mould it into curves. They are all soft and ploppy; and everything, fore and aft, jiggles as they walk. Even their full blouses and voluminous skirts do not conceal the quiverings and lurchings of these regions of their anatomies.⁹⁵

One of these skirts, O'Neil claimed, "spread out, would make a tent almost large enough to shelter a good-sized revival meeting."⁹⁶

Equally critical assessments emerged in the descriptions of the Sons of Freedom women who paraded nude. Spokeswoman "Big Fanny" Storgeoff⁹⁷ was one of the few nude women identified in the press in articles focused on

92 C.I.S., "A Day Among the Doukhobors," *Canadian Magazine* 26 (January 1906): 282.

93 "A Summer Among the Doukhobors," *Globe* (30 August 1913), 12.

94 Clyde Gilmour, "Mike's Paradise," *Maclean's Magazine* 60 (1 September 1947): 71.

95 O'Neil, *Doukhobor Daze*, 12.

96 *Ibid.*, 12, 34, 107.

97 Also spelled Storgoff in some press reports.

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the Freedomites' march to and encampment at Agassiz, B.C., in 1962.⁹⁸ That she was called "Big Fanny" — the latter part of which refers to the English translation and abbreviation of her name (Florence) and not to her backside — should have made the matter clear enough. In case the point was missed, however, some reporters felt it necessary to provide clarification. Simma Holt explained that Storgeoff was known as "Big Fanny" because of "the two hundred and fifty pounds spread grossly over a five-foot nine-inch body, which she readily exposed in protests."⁹⁹ *Maclean's* referred to "Big Fanny" as a "280-pound matriarch"; *Time* labelled her as a "240-lb. stripper." *The Columbian* diplomatically described Storgeoff as "buxom."¹⁰⁰

That some Doukhobor women were as homely, overweight, or naked as reporters implied is beside the point. The point is that descriptions of the Doukhobor women's size and shape overshadowed other possible descriptions concerning their religiosity, their passion, their intelligence, their capacity for leadership, or their role as wives and mothers. The women's ability to undertake challenging physical tasks, as well as meticulous handiwork, earned them some respect among sympathizers who marveled at their strength and their attention to detail; and some Canadians may have been prepared to overlook the Doukhobor women's strangeness in light of their impressive practicality, fitness, and artistry. Doukhobor women could take pride in the fact that they or their predecessors had the strength and determination to pull a plough in place of horses or oxen during their first year in Canada. They could take pride in their reputation for fine handiwork and in images of them engaged in producing or wearing it. The image of heavy, unattractive, and unclothed Doukhobor women created, however, a negative impression among Canadians in general, and was embarrassing for the Doukhobor women who suffered ridicule and discrimination as a result of these portrayals.

Canadians viewed the Doukhobors as "perhaps the most interesting of all the peculiar people we have assembled in Western Canada."¹⁰¹ The Doukhobors attracted public attention because they were so different from other Canadian

98 The march began 2 September 1962. Close to 800 members of the Sons of Freedom group decided to leave the interior of British Columbia for Agassiz, where approximately 100 Sons of Freedom Doukhobor men were incarcerated. The Sons of Freedom intended to draw attention to their situation and demand the release of their incarcerated brethren. After a brief stop outside of Agassiz, the march continued to Vancouver on 16 January 1963, after which many Sons of Freedom returned to Agassiz and set up camp close to Mountain Prison, the federal penitentiary where their compatriots were serving time. Tarasoff, *Pictorial History of the Doukhobors*, 174-5; Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 271-2.

99 Holt, *Terror in the Name of God*, 271.

100 "The Vanishing Sons of Freedom," *Maclean's Magazine* 77, no. 21 (2 November 1964): 49; "Canada: Taming the Spirit Wrestlers," *Time* 87 (11 February 1966): 32; and "Big Fanny's story nothing but 'bilge'," *Columbian* (5 November 1963).

101 Sissons, "What Can We Do With the Doukhobors?" 298.

immigrants and, especially, different from mainstream Canadian society. Doukhobor men were ethnically distinctive, but their behaviour did not generally contravene Canadian conventions with regard to gender roles. Doukhobor women, however, were both ethnically distinctive and behaviourally distinctive. Much of their behaviour challenged Canadians' view of woman's place in society: the tasks she could perform, the role she could play in her community, and the way she should present herself in public. Doukhobor women, whether simple, strong, capable, hard-working, and artistic *or* pitiable, pathetic, dour, ugly, fat, stubborn, and backward bore the brunt of public scrutiny.

The public's ability to view the Doukhobor population objectively was limited by the media's narrow focus. Through a trick of synecdoche, the image of the whole Doukhobor population was defined by the one part which the media chose to amplify. Incidents which occurred briefly or episodically defined Doukhobor identity for the public, while the majority of regular Doukhobor activities received limited coverage. The minority Sons of Freedom Doukhobors came to represent the non-Freedomite Doukhobor majority, because Freedomite activity attracted significant public attention and careless reporters failed to distinguish between the two factions. Images of Doukhobor women prevailed over images of Doukhobor men or of men and women together, because women seemed to differ more dramatically from their Canadian counterparts than men did. Women's bodies — how they looked and how they performed — served as explanations for who Doukhobor women were, what their role was within the Doukhobor community, and what role they might play in Canadian society if properly assimilated.

Doukhobors have attempted to rehabilitate the image of Doukhobor-Canadian women by emphasizing the positive; they have worked hard to overcome the negative. In books aimed at a Doukhobor audience, a few Doukhobor authors have attempted to present Doukhobor women in a more flattering, more contextualized, light.¹⁰² In these accounts, Doukhobor women are portrayed as martyrs and heroes, religious and community leaders, dutiful mothers and wives, adept cooks and providers. While these efforts may rehabilitate some of the community's past humiliation from within, they have little impact beyond the community.

The public image of Doukhobor-Canadian women remains, therefore, narrowly framed: a one-dimensional portrait based on the women's three-dimensional frame. Canadian journalists had the opportunity to significantly

102 For example, see *Tanya* (Grand Forks, B.C.: Mir Publication Society, 1975); *Katya: A Canadian Doukhobor* (Leningrad: TITUL and Len Art, 1991); Annooshka's *Siberian Love* (Grand Forks, B.C.: n.p., 2005), and selections from Popoff, *Stories from Doukhobor History*; Vi Plotnikoff, *Head Cook at Weddings and Funerals* (Vancouver: Polestar Press, 1994); Tarasoff, *A Pictorial History of the Doukhobors*, and Tarasoff, *Plakun Trava*. See also Barnes, "Doukhobor Women in the Twentieth Century," 13-39.

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shape and influence public opinion over the course of the twentieth century. Reporters, it might be suggested, should have taken a more sensitive approach to the portrayal of the Doukhobors in general, and of the Doukhobor women in particular. The media's power is mediated, however, by the reading, listening, and viewing public; the power of the press is limited by what the audience will buy. That the Canadian public was prepared to "buy" the image of heavy-set naked women holding their clothes in their hands as they watched their homes burn to the ground says as much about the Canadian citizen as it does about the media. If the predominant image of the Doukhobor-Canadian woman in the twentieth century is a negative one, it reflects both what the media was prepared to print and what the Canadian audience was prepared to believe.

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