

Articles of Faith: The Media Response to Maria Devi Khristos

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After lifting their prohibitions on independent religious organizations, the countries of the former Soviet Union have found themselves facing an unanticipated problem: the appearance of home-grown 'cults'. In November of 1993, one such group, the Great White Brotherhood of Maria Devi Khristos, brought public life to a near standstill in Kiev, Ukraine, as the country prepared itself for the mass suicide of 144,000 cultists. In reality, the sect turned out to be much smaller than earlier assumed, and its members had not been planning to end their lives. The present study demonstrates that a poor understanding of the Brotherhood's doctrine led to media-spawned hysteria. Yet despite the repeated failures of the media to understand the Brotherhood's plans, close examination of Maria Devi's writings and articles in the post-Soviet press reveals that the Great White Brotherhood and the reporters who covered them shared a common discourse and common assumptions about the power of the supernatural and the dangers of technology. © 1995 Academic Press Limited

Introduction

In a year that saw political violence in Moscow and the rapid economic deterioration of all the former Soviet republics, one of the most curious news items in the Slavic region of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was an event that failed to occur: on 14 November 1993, in Kiev, the end of the world did not take place.¹ Instead of the anticipated throngs of white-garbed cultists, the only crowds on Kiev's streets that day were the members of Ukraine's 'special forces' (OMON) and disappointed journalists from all around the world.² Four days earlier, the leaders of the 'Great White Brotherhood' had been arrested along with 60 of their followers for creating a disturbance at St. Sophia Cathedral. Though a number of journalists were careful to point out that the cult could still pose a threat in the future,³ the siege mentality that had gripped Kiev finally began to subside.⁴

By this time, stories of the cult had spread from the margins of post-Soviet journalism to respected central newspapers such as *Izvestiia* and *Rossiiskie vesti*, and even beyond the borders of the former USSR; the arrest of the self-styled 'Mother of the World' was reported in *The New York Times* and *Le Figaro*.⁵ Perhaps it should come as no surprise that a threat so easily subdued caused such a media sensation. Certainly, the plans of a woman calling herself 'Jesus-Maria' to be crucified in downtown Kiev were bound to attract attention. Nor should we discount the possibility that the cult's program, with its apocalyptic rhetoric and promises of salvation, might strike a chord in a region with a long tradition of schismatic movements. As the philosopher Nikolai Berdiaev argued decades ago, messianism and eschatology are central to the 'Russian idea'.⁶

The public fascination with the White Brotherhood, however, also fits into the context of recent Russian and Ukrainian popular culture. For the past several years, as much attention has been paid in the post-Soviet mass media to non-events as to events: the famines and riots that annually failed to materialize, the rumoured plans to sell Lenin's body at a Western auction, and the sale of the mythical 'red mercury' to equally mythical buyers.⁷ At the same time, truly landmark events appeared anti-climactic: the previously unthinkable announcement of the formal dissolution of the Soviet Union was, on the whole, greeted with indifference.

As much a comedy of errors as a post-totalitarian tragedy, the rise and fall of Maria Devi Khristos, the self-proclaimed final incarnation of God on earth, was nonetheless a significant event in the former Soviet Union. Certainly, any fringe movement that attracts either several hundred or several thousand followers⁸ can be considered indicative of social or cultural problems, no matter what country is involved; all the more tempting, then, to look at the appearance of a syncretic suicide cult in formerly-atheist Russia and Ukraine as a sign of cultural crisis. I do not mean to argue that no lessons can be drawn from the case of the 'White Brotherhood'; on the contrary, I have not refrained from offering an analysis of my own elsewhere.⁹ Yet, as provocative as the cult of Maria Devi may be, the attempts to describe and analyse the 'White Brotherhood' in the post-Soviet mass media provide at least as much stimulating material for the cultural critic as does the cult's own literature. For at the same time that most of the articles examined below treat the cult's doctrine with ironic disdain, the majority of them nonetheless share common points of reference with the very Cultists they ridicule as 'naive' or 'gullible'. Though the awkward prose of the cult's ideologues stands in sharp contrast to the pithy style of most of the journalists who reported on the Maria Devi phenomenon, the cultists, the journalists, and even the self-appointed spokesmen of the Russian Orthodox faith nevertheless speak the same language. In fact if we set aside the cultists' somewhat disconcerting fondness for exclamation points, the accusations that the journalists and the cult's leaders hurl at each other appear, at times, almost identical. Though, as we shall see, a large part of the hysteria surrounding the White Brotherhood can be traced to journalists' misunderstanding of cult doctrine, an equal role was played by their willingness to accept certain basic premises shared by the Brotherhood's leaders. Both parties express a tacit belief in the ability of their enemies to employ brainwashing techniques, mass-hypnosis, and extrasensory weaponry, and both parties often display an almost child-like awe of technologies they poorly comprehend.¹⁰ The effect of these shared beliefs was compounded by the willingness of some journalists not only to believe key elements of the 'Brotherhood's' hyperbolic rhetoric, but to match the cult's farfetched claims with sensationalist assertions of their own. While it would be a gross exaggeration to claim that the post-Soviet media invented Maria Devi (her 'prophet', Iuoann Swami, deserves at least partial credit for that), both sides unwittingly colluded in the Creation of a common discourse. Though the 'Great White Brotherhood' has apparently failed in its mission to lead the way to heaven, it nonetheless can provide some insight into the less-than-perfect world the cultists hoped to leave behind.

The Gospel According to Maria Devi

The roots of the cult apparently go back to 1990, but it was not until the middle of 1993 that the media began paying close attention to the 'Great White Brotherhood'. Considering the recent influx of Protestant missionaries, American televangelists, scientologists, and followers of the Reverend Moon, the occasional white-robed cultist in the streets or the metro drew relatively little attention. As any recent visitor to the former Soviet Union can attest, Western Christian missionaries seem to have reached everywhere in the Slavic region of the CIS.¹¹ New religious movements have also sensed opportunity in the post-Soviet chaos.¹² Moon's followers have set up youth summer camps outside Moscow that one of my acquaintances planned to attend. According to a faculty member of Tomsk State University, the Unification Church also funded a small study abroad program for Tomsk University students. Colourful posters exhorting Muscovites to read '*Bkhagavad-Gita kak ona est*' (*The Bhagavad Gita As It Is*)

graced almost all the metro cars in the capital, thanks to the Society for Krishna Consciousness.¹³ In July 1993, pressure from the Russian Orthodox church, as well as wounded national pride, prompted an attempt by the Supreme Soviet to ban foreign missionaries on Russian territory.

Thus initially the cult of Maria Devi was merely one among many, and failed to attract much more media attention than the Krishnas or the followers of Reverend Moon. But as 24 November 1993 drew nearer, the 'Brotherhood' stepped up its activities considerably, spreading the word of the coming Day of Judgment in the most unlikely places. In Moscow, pictures of Maria Devi were plastered on every metro car, though most of them were quickly defaced with caricatures, Stars of David, and obscenities. Nor did the 'Brothers' content themselves with proselytizing in the metro or the Arbat (where various fringe groups have been active for several years now); on two occasions in the spring of 1993, performances I attended at the Bolshoi Theatre were preceded by the incomprehensible harangues of a young woman carrying Maria Devi's portrait. She was met with jeers and laughter, and led off the stage each time, but the fact that she was able to get on stage more than once is in itself surprising.¹⁴ All over Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus, millions of people had become acquainted with the image of this young, unsmiling woman, who placidly gazed straight out of the photograph, the middle and index fingers of her right hand pointed upwards.¹⁵ From a distance her white robe, shawl, and headdress, along with her jewelry and headband, gave her a vaguely eastern look, but upon closer examination, her shepherd's staff, crucifix, and decidedly Slavic features revealed the truth: this was not just another imported commodity. It was only a matter of time before her face began to appear on the pages of newspapers as well.

The 'Great White Brotherhood' was founded by Iurii Andreevich Krivonogov, a Ph.D. in 'technical sciences' who was born in the Voronezh Oblast' in 1941.¹⁶ Like everything else associated with the movement, Krivonogov's background varies depending on the author of the given article. Oleg Karmaza writes in *Komsomol'skaia pravda* that, before turning to more spiritual matters, Krivonogov worked as a milling-machine operator and a technician, never staying in one place for more than a year; other sources, particularly in the months preceding the Kiev incidents, have Krivonogov working in a top-secret artificial-intelligence laboratory, a claim whose significance is discussed below.¹⁷ At some point in the 1980s, Krivonogov took an interest in mysticism; his studies of esoteric texts eventually led Krivonogov to the conclusion that he was 'Adam and the Sun', and prompted him to abandon his family.¹⁸ In 1990, Krivonogov founded and officially registered the 'Atma Institute of the Soul', under whose auspices he would print his first newspaper, *Atma*.¹⁹ Presumably it was after the founding of his Institute that Krivonogov took the name 'Iuoann Swami'.

While demonstrating his 'faith-healing' techniques and lecturing on psychic phenomena in a Donetsk 'Palace of Youth', Krivonogov met Marina Tsvigun, a married, 30 year-old woman whose biography up to that point reads like a portrait of late Soviet society in miniature. In her official autobiography, Tsvigun describes herself as the daughter of an engineer and a school teacher, a journalism graduate of Kiev State University who went on to work in print and broadcast journalism, 'openly fighting with the mafia, lawlessness, and the party nomenklatura'. She eventually became a People's Deputy as a member of the democratic bloc, only to 'leave the sotsium' after discovering that she was truly the Lord Maria Devi Khristos.²⁰ Like most autobiographies, Tsvigun's passes over some of the less flattering details: according to one report, her degree was received through a correspondence course; besides her work as a security

guard and café waitress, and much of her career was spent as a functionary of the Communist Youth League and instructor for the local communist party committees.²¹

Her life was irrevocably changed two weeks after her 30th birthday, when Tsvigun 'left this world (with the help of a crisis that was created especially for Me by Jesus Christ'.²² In an interview with *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, Tsvigun's mother, Svetlana Andreevna Matsko, retells her daughter's story in more mundane terms:

It all started after she was saved from death. Marina was having an abortion, and the doctors overdid it with the anaesthesia. They gave her too large a dose . . . they started to bring her out of a state of clinical death. Then she suddenly raised her arms and started talking about God. The doctors thought she was crazy.²³

Tsvigun refers only to an operation, and claims that, after her spirit travelled to the 'Heavenly Sphere' and returned to her 'former biomass', her first words were, 'I am the Messiah!²⁴ Thus 11 April 1990 became the 'Day of the Great Explanation of the Planetary Logos of Jesus Christ into the body of the Mother of the World (Mother of God) Maria Devi Khristos'.²⁵ Tsvigun claims the next weeks brought a host of miracles, but her mother recalls that they were filled with visits to psychiatrists, all of whom felt Tsvigun was insane.²⁶ Soon after meeting Krivonogov, Tsvigun ran away with him, eventually cutting off all contact with her mother, husband, and son.²⁷

The Brotherhood's official literature states that Tsvigun and Krivonogov travelled around the world, visiting Egypt, India, Yugoslavia, Western Europe, and Israel.²⁸ In Jerusalem she is reported to have met with Baptist minister Charles Kopp, who quickly concluded that Tsvigun was 'far from any form of Christianity known to me'.²⁹ Exactly how Krivonogov and Tsvigun managed to gather their following is unclear, though several reports from the months preceding the panic in Kiev told that young people were approached by cultists in high schools, institutes, universities, and clubs.³⁰ All the reports tell a story that is already familiar, if not a cliché, in the West: a young man or woman meets a cultist, decides to attend a prayer meeting, and soon abandons his or her parents or spouse in favour of a new 'family'.³¹ The new members are taught to consider their biological parents merely the 'parents of the body', while the cult's leaders are their true mother and father.³² Attempts by biological parents to bring their children back were usually unsuccessful. In both Ukraine and Belarus, anxious parents banded together to try to bring both media and government attention to their plight.³³

A mix of Eastern Orthodox Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Theosophy, and the Kabbalah, the cult's actual doctrine of 'Iusmalos' was, for the most part, given scant attention in the post-Soviet mass media.³⁴ Such an omission is not surprising; the official materials published by the Brotherhood are densely written, and display the omnivorous syncretism of many 'New Age' movements: chakras, gematria, the Divine Sophia, karma, and even music theory find their places in Krivonogov's and Tsvigun's tortured syntax; it takes time and patience to follow the many leaps of faith and logic one might encounter in a single paragraph.³⁵ Judging from the variety of materials published by the Brotherhood, one suspects that the cult's leaders were also aware that their tracts provided difficult reading: in addition to such off-putting essays as 'The Kabbalistic Aspect of the Divine-Cosmic' and 'Consuming the Ergergor'³⁶ the newspapers and pamphlets of 'Iusmalos' also contained simple mantras that cultists could recite in perpetuity.³⁷ Since the present study is concerned primarily with the media response to Maria Devi, only those aspects of her doctrine that have a direct bearing on the cult's public image are treated in this article.³⁸ In the public consciousness, only one aspect of

the Brotherhood's doctrine mattered: that the end of the world was near, and would be heralded by public suicide. And it was this aspect that was so grossly misinterpreted.

Using *Revelation* as their point of departure, Tsvigun and Krivonogov claimed that, since 1 June 1991, the 'program' of 'Iusmalos' had been 'activated', and would last exactly 1260 'biblical' days, during which time Maria Devi would cover the world with her divine radiance called 'Fokhat'.³⁹ Maria Devi is the 'Woman Clothed in the Sun' mentioned in *Revelation*, the incarnation of both the male and female aspects of God, and the embodiment of all three aspects of the divine 'family': God the Father, God the Son, and God the Mother.⁴⁰ Since the world has already fallen into the hands of the Antichrist Emmanuel, Maria Devi must walk the earth unrecognized; but on 24 November, 1993 (the birthday of Krivonogov's ex-wife, according to Karmaza)⁴¹, she will crucify herself in Kiev, the 'New Jerusalem'.⁴²

Mass (Media) Hysteria

The panic that ensued in Kiev in November 1993, however, was not sparked by concern for the fate of one lone eccentric who planned to die on the cross. While such an act is in itself alarming, it was not Maria Devi's plans *per se* that had the public so worried. Rather, journalists and public officials had become convinced that Maria Devi's followers intended to join her in death.⁴³ Article after article sounded the alarm that all the members of the Brotherhood would commit self-immolation in order to be transported to heaven. Yet nowhere in the handbook of official 'Iusmalos' doctrine, the collection of Maria Devi's poetry, five issues of *Iusmalos*, or the numerous pamphlets I examined could I find any reference to mass suicide; the only death that appeared to be necessary was that of the Lord God herself.⁴⁴ As Sergei Kisilev reported in an August, 1994 issue of *Literaturnaia gazeta*, Krivonogov and Tsvigun had no intention of calling on their followers to commit collective suicide.⁴⁵ This was not the first time that the press mis-represented the cult's admittedly confusing doctrine, but it was by far the most serious lapse.

How is it possible to see a program of mass suicide where no such act is mentioned? Certainly, the very idea of the apocalypse implies widespread death and destruction, and Tsvigun does not mince words when she describes the fate that awaits the human race: earthquakes, floods, and no small amount of fire. This cataclysm, however, is to smite the non-believers; those who have accepted Maria Devi Khristos as the final incarnation of God are to be spared such torments. Indeed, this would only stand to reason; apocalyptic sects are compelling precisely because they purport to offer the only possible escape from impending catastrophe.⁴⁶ The members of the Brotherhood could expect to survive Maria Devi's suicide, whereupon they would be taken to heaven after her resurrection three days later.⁴⁷

The misunderstanding is far more complex than that, however. It is based on a flawed comprehension of the cult's admittedly vague language. The bombastic rhetoric of Tsvigun and Krivonogov takes on a different character when cited in the context of a relatively rational newspaper article. Stanislav Prokopchuk's exegesis of Maria Devi's writing in the 4 November issue of *Trud* provides a particularly clear case in point. Reporting from Kiev, Prokopchuk writes that the culmination of Krivonogov's plans will be the 'sacrifice of thousands of *iusmoliane* (cultists) and Maria Devi Khristos herself'. He cites the 'local press' in Kiev, which in turn 'cites authoritative sources' that remain unnamed. He supports this interpretation with a quote that is apparently from the works of Krivonogov or Tsvigun: 'The Lord will call their souls to himself, and they, like balloons, will rise up above the sinful world'.⁴⁸ If one already accepts the

proposition that the cultists are preparing for death by fire, the preceding quote offers no contradiction to this belief. Conversely, if we challenge the notion that the cult was bent on suicide, this quote offers no solid support for such a view.

Upon closer examination of the writings of Tsvigun and Krivonogov, however, it becomes understandable that a nodding acquaintance with their doctrine could lead to the belief that they were advocating suicide by self-immolation.⁴⁹ Though a number of symbols play an important role in 'Iusmalos', two of the most central images are light and fire. As mentioned above, Maria Devi is considered to be a 'battery' that generates a divine radiation called 'Fokhat'. While this energy is beneficent for the cultists, it can be deadly for the non-believer: members of the Brotherhood are themselves transmitters of Fokhat, and if they stay long in one place, the radiation they emit is considered to be fatal to all bystanders.⁵⁰ The 'program' of 'Iusmalos' calls for the total 'Fokhatization' of the planet. After the resurrection of Maria Devi, the inconsequential parts of the 49 aspects of the physical and spiritual 'body' fall away, 'purified by Fire and Light', leaving only a completely 'Fokhatized' being.⁵¹ These newly-transformed 'planetary Logoi' leave behind the 'World of Matter' to enter the 'World of Fire (Fokhat)'.⁵² It is this rhetoric of fire and purification, combined with the repeated references to Maria Devi's suicide and the end of the world, that most probably leads to the belief that the Great White Brotherhood was intent on mass suicide.⁵³ Certainly, Tsvigun's written addresses to her followers did not help matters; her admonition, 'Do you want to enter the Sphere of Fire, My Son? But don't burn yourself!' appears sinister in the light of her purported plans,⁵⁴ but, when taken out of the context of suicide by fire, Tsvigun's words become nothing more than a bit of 'motherly' metaphysical advice.

The insistence on interpreting Tsvigun's and Krivonogov's statements as evidence of a plot to commit group suicide was only exacerbated by another error in interpretation: most reports grossly over-estimated the size of the White Brotherhood. Karmaza estimated that the Brotherhood consisted of 10,000 members; Vyzhutovich, writing two weeks after the arrest of Tsvigun and Krivonogov, gives an estimate of 15 to 20 thousand, with 3500 in Ukraine, while Prokopchuk, writing when Kiev was still expecting the worst, refers to estimates that 60,000 cultists had already reached the Ukrainian capital; Kolpakov writes that the Ukrainian Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs had estimated that 60–70,000 people would be coming to Kiev.⁵⁵ The number that appeared most often, however, was still higher. As Kolomayets wrote in *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 'the cult leaders have estimated that more than 144,000 members could assemble to witness the suicide of Maria Devi Khristos'.⁵⁶ Ignatov rounds the figure off: 'Some 150,000 cult members . . . are expected to arrive in the city', while Prokopchuk anticipates somewhere between 144 and 150 thousand.⁵⁷ Once again, a lack of understanding of the cult's doctrine played a large part in the panic. Both Krivonogov and Tsvigun constantly refer to the 144,000 'holy' members of the cult who will join them in heaven; this number, however, is immediately suspect: quite conveniently for a religion that puts so much faith in numerology, '144,000' is the same as '12 × 12'. The number 12 could refer to the twelve signs of the zodiac, the twelve tribes of Israel, and Christ's twelve apostles; all of these references have a role in the eclectic philosophy of 'Iusmalos'. Most likely, Krivonogov and Tsvigun took this number from *Revelation*, the source of much of their imagery: 'And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel' (*Revelation 7:4*). Yet this figure was taken seriously by newspaper reporters, most likely because the number sounds so precise.⁵⁸ Nonetheless, a figure that

sounded like the result of a census was actually closer to an enrolment target. The number of cultists arrested in Kiev was around eight hundred, and one would assume that far more cultists would have been detained if the Brotherhood's membership had been anywhere near that large.⁵⁹

Certainly, the blithe acceptance of such a high figure on the part of most journalists leaves them open to charges of sensationalism: the prospect of 144,000 suicidal cultists laying siege to the Ukrainian capital makes a far more compelling story than anything that actually came to pass. Indeed, the tone of Oleg Karmaza's article, written on the day of the re-scheduled 'end of the world', is one of undeniable disappointment, however self-deprecating it may have been: on 14 November, journalists from around the world (in greater numbers than during the Chernobyl disaster, according to Karmaza) found themselves wandering the streets of Kiev, vainly snapping pictures of anyone in a white raincoat or jacket.⁶⁰ While the desire to sell more papers or make a name for oneself almost certainly played a role, viewing the Maria Devi phenomenon as a mass-media plot would mean falling victim to the same conspiratorial mind-set that characterized the cultists and, to a lesser extent, the journalists themselves. For if there was anything 'infectious' about the White Brotherhood, it was the cult's discourse; like the White Brotherhood, the cult's critics were more than willing to assume that 'dark forces' were secretly working toward mysterious ends.⁶¹ At the same time that the journalists marvelled at young people's capacity to accept the doctrine of 'Iusmalos,' the majority of the reporters who covered the phenomenon proved only scarcely less prepared to suspend their disbelief.

'Zombification' and 'Coding': The Brainwashing Debate Comes to the ex-USSR

In general, the media coverage of Maria Devi Khristos put forward two contradictory positions simultaneously: though the leaders of the White Brotherhood were almost universally denounced as charlatans, many of the reporters writing on the cult assumed that Krivonogov and/or Tsvigun must truly possess supernatural powers. That those commentators who purported to speak on behalf of Russian Orthodoxy would associate the cult with the powers of Satan should come as no surprise, but the secular media's approach is, at least initially, more difficult to comprehend.⁶² Again, one cannot avoid the issue of sensationalism: given the recent upsurge in interest in the supernatural, it can be safely assumed that a story combining public disturbance, alleged kidnapping, and psychic powers would capture a large readership. Though most of the headlines dealing with the cult were either ironic or merely informative, a number of them suggested Satanism or 'evil forces': 'The Black Faces of the White Brotherhood' and 'Predators in White Clothes' (Aleksiev); 'Satanic Tribe—Who Is Behind the Monks' Murder?';⁶³ 'Kidnappers of Souls' and 'The Flight of the Black Angel, or Souls for Sale—Free Admission';⁶⁴ 'White Brotherhood, or black magic?' (Kolomayets);⁶⁵ 'The Pestilent Wave', 'Victims of Psychic Violence'; 'Let us Save Our Children from the Spiritual Plague'.⁶⁶ While none of these articles suggests that 'Iusmalos' might actually be right, many journalists nonetheless tacitly accepted a basic tenet of the cult's own propaganda: that the Great White Brotherhood is more than a purely sociological phenomenon. Thus the same journalists who expressed wry scepticism regarding the coming apocalypse quite casually referred to the hypnotic abilities and psychic powers wielded by Krivonogov.

To give the journalists their due, they were clearly not the first to assume that Krivonogov's powers of persuasion might be superhuman.⁶⁷ A number of sources quote

a dossier supposedly compiled by the Ukrainian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), whose description of Krivonogov is less than flattering.⁶⁸

Krivonogov is characterized as vain and cruel. All his commands must be carried out without question. He is a master of bioenergetics ('bioenergetika') [and] hypnosis, which he uses to neutralize a person's will and make him obedient and incapable of resistance. His program for controlling his congregation is based on the modelling ('modelirovanie') and coding ('kodirowanie') of his selected victim(s) to make them into 'zombies' ('zombi'), which happens during their 'christening' or 'initiation' into the 'Great White Brotherhood'.⁶⁹

Certainly, charges of hypnosis and brainwashing (the English equivalent of 'coding' or 'modeling') are commonplace among opponents of cults in the West, but it is nonetheless noteworthy that the MVD levels these charges without expressing the slightest doubt of either their veracity or their possibility. By and large, the journalists reporting on the story follow the MVD's lead, never questioning whether such phenomena can truly occur. Indeed, the complex of newly-imported (and often distorted) foreign words used to describe the cult's alleged brainwashing of its members almost function as an incantation no less mystifying than Krivonogov's doctrine of *Fokhat* and *ergergor*: 'kodirowanie, modelirovanie, bioenergetika . . .' Like Krivonogov's writing, the accusations of brainwashing are peppered with vague, 'technical' terms whose obscurity veils their content in the aura of pseudo-science.

If one believes the portrait of him painted by post-Soviet journalists, Krivonogov is a demonic figure who rivals Rasputin;⁷⁰ if one looks at these characterizations more sceptically, they suggest that the authors, the government, and perhaps the readership have a remarkable capacity to suspend disbelief. Even as late as 25 November, two weeks after even Aleksandr Shipkin suggests in *Rossiiskie vesti* that the rumours of 'zombification' were unfounded,⁷¹ Oleg Aksenov reports that the leaders of Kiev's Internal Security Administration (UVD) had asked Krivonogov and Tsvigun to 'unhypnotize the youths they had stupefied'.⁷² A number of journalists refer to 'rumours' and 'allegations' of Krivonogov's powers without expressing an opinion;⁷³ others, however, appear more willing to accept the alleged brainwashing as, if not fact, at least probable. Kapeliushnikov and Zinets report in *Izvestiia* that 'doctors presume that the sect's members have undergone coding, but don't know how to bring them out of this state'. Therefore, the militia has turned to 'Ukrainian psychics and healers' for help.⁷⁴ Kisina casually writes that it is 'well-known' that Krivonogov 'is a master of hypnosis', and that one cannot rule out the possibility that the accusation of 'coding' might be well-founded.⁷⁵ Alekseev, Burbyga and Grigor'ev report that 'people who study bioenergetics' are certain that, thanks to the unwavering belief of his followers, 'Krivonogov is receiving a powerful energy charge', which he uses in his sermons and rites. The other 'secret of his power', according to 'specialists' from the Ukrainian Psychology Institute, is 'a powerful form of hypnosis—psychocoding.'

While these allegations are not as lurid as the accounts presented in the religious press, it is only the pseudo-scientific framework that differentiates these reports from the tales of Satanism recounted in *Danilovskii listok* and *Pravoslavnaia Moskva*.⁷⁶ If the authors in the religious press place their faith (and ground their fears) in a combination of Russian Orthodoxy and 'New Age' metaphysics (a rather 'unorthodox' Orthodoxy that is perhaps closer to the syncretism of 'Iusmalos' than its proponents would like to admit), their secular counterparts fan the flames of hysteria through a naive awe before a 'technology' that differs from magic only in its vocabulary. Krivonogov's biography,

which according to some sources includes classified work in the defence industry, provides a perfect sounding board for post-Soviet anxiety about technology. Soviet citizens were long accustomed to the fact that a significant number of scientists and engineers worked for the defence industry in institutes and factories whose nature was so systematically classified that they were known only by their post-office box numbers (hence the Soviet shorthand, 'working in a box'). According to Alekseev (and Burbyga and Grigor'ev), unofficial sources report that Krivonogov had worked as an 'engineer-computer scientist' in a laboratory specializing in 'psychotronic weaponry'. Alekseev cites unspecified press reports that confirm that such research started in the USSR and the US in the 1960s. Though Alekseev possesses no proof that such weapons were produced, this lack of information appears not to bother him: 'Where there's smoke', he writes, 'there's fire'. Alekseev, Burbyga and Grigor'ev see a direct link between Krivonogov's alleged weapons research and his activities in the White Brotherhood: 'Perhaps it was [in the laboratory] that Krivonogov learned to 'zombify' people, to turn them into obedient robots'.⁷⁷ Such a sensationalist approach is, of course, particularly ironic when one recalls that the 'brainwashing' debate in the United States has its roots in the experience of Western POW's in communist reeducation camps.⁷⁸

Alekseev's line of reasoning is taken to its extreme when it is recast by Lapikura (and later Shipkin) on the pages of *Rossiiskie vesti*: in his article 'White Brotherhood: zombies or fanatics?' Lapikura has the young Krivonogov working in an artificial intelligence laboratory in the Cybernetics Institute of the Ukrainian SSR. Lapikura's interpretation of the 'artificial intelligence' connection speaks for itself:

According to reliable data (and in accord with the extreme care with which these experiments were surrounded for so many years), the laboratory was dedicated not only to the creation of electronic intelligence, but also to the transformation of natural, human intelligence into artificial intelligence.⁷⁹

Lapikura's analysis would without a doubt puzzle artificial intelligence researchers the world over, for he could not make such claims if he truly understood the nature of artificial intelligence. Instead, for Lapikura artificial intelligence is merely one more phrase to conjure by, a mysterious totem not unlike a magic wand. Indeed, Lapikura's article implicitly situates magic and science within a single continuum. Initially, this effect is achieved through a standard metaphor: the man in charge of Krivonogov's laboratory had, 'as a computer scientist, let the genie out of the bottle'. Lapikura then goes on to present Krivonogov's later mystical activities as merely the continuation of his 'scientific' research: 'After finishing work on his topic [artificial intelligence], Yuri Krivonogov could no longer stop himself', and, with the unwitting help of Ukrainian authorities, transformed his research into the officially-registered 'Atma' Institute and the Great White Brotherhood.

Contagious Discourse

Lapikura's leap from artificial intelligence to 'zombification' is, in itself, a decidedly 'New Age' approach to science and the mind: the association between radically diverse phenomena is based on word play or linguistic similarity, rather than on any scientific principle.⁸⁰ And it is in the frequent accusations of 'zombification' and 'coding', as well as in the tendency to treat science, religion, and mysticism as merely a verbal repertoire from which one may 'mix and match', that we see, if not necessarily the 'infection' of journalistic discourse with the language of 'Iusmalos', evidence that the mass media and

the leaders of the cult turn to the same sources to frame their arguments. One need look no further than one of the Brotherhood's ubiquitous pamphlets (also reprinted in the cult's newspaper) to find an argument that should by now be familiar:

Today [the Antichrist's] servants are . . . subjecting thousands of naive people to his influence with the help of their television and radio programs under the name '700 Club', 'In Touch', 'Emmanuel' and so on, coding you with their treacherous *touch*.⁸¹

Here it is not Maria Devi's followers who are naive, but those who support her rivals and enemies. It is they who are engaged in 'coding', not the Brotherhood. As Nikiforov notes, it is the cultists who first levelled the charge of 'coding',⁸² but the mass media apparently found the term just as convenient as did the leaders of the Brotherhood. Even the accusation that the cult controls its members through drugs is turned on its head by Tsvigun and Krivonogov: in the same article, Tsvigun asserts that Russian Orthodox priests have tainted the Eucharist by 'for some time now (!) adding a special *psychotropic* element, making the parishioners into weak-willed slaves of the Satanists'.⁸³ Both Maria Devi and her critics are more than willing to see everyday phenomena as evidence of sinister plots: Lapikura muses aloud about the real significance of an artificial intelligence laboratory, the writers for *Pravoslavnaia Moskva* see Satanic meaning hidden behind the cult's imagery and an indirect reference to the devil in the term 'Devi', and one parents' committee sees 'under the mask of this religion one of the forms of destruction of our nation, our state'.⁸⁴ Perhaps the difference between these fears and the pronouncements of Krivonogov and Tsvigun, who believe that the Antichrist is enslaving people through American food and the hidden inclusion of the number '666' on Czechoslovakian bus passes, is one of degree rather than kind.⁸⁵

Indeed, Maria Devi Khristos and the reporters who covered her story have even more in common than their rhetoric: as mentioned above, Tsvigun herself had been a journalist, among other things, before making her 'career move' into divinity. The significance of this fact was not lost on her former brethren in the press. Lapikura, in a statement probably no more verifiable than his allegations regarding artificial intelligence, refers to Tsvigun as a 'talented' journalist,⁸⁶ but the frequent jibes at Tsvigun's less-than-flawless writing style at times resemble one of the innumerable polemics that fill the pages of post-Soviet newspapers. In one of the less alarmist treatments of the cult, Igruev finds that her style bears the traces of Theosophy, the Jehovah's Witnesses, and Western science fiction.⁸⁷ Though he lets her poetry speak for itself, Igruev analyzes the flaws in her prose at great length, taking her to task for her poor orthography, incomprehensible syntax, and passion for capital letters. Igruev treats Tsvigun with the condescension a journalist might have for a less-talented colleague: 'Well, this [bad style] happens with beginners'.⁸⁸

Perhaps it is no accident that Tsvigun and Krivonogov nursed a special contempt for journalists (as well as Tsvigun's other former colleagues, politicians), and that the cult's materials tend to equate the newspaper profession with the oldest profession.⁸⁸ Like many public figures under attack in the press, Tsvigun blames the media for 'slandering' her church; so outraged was she by her depiction in the press (and by Karmaza's 'Komsomol'skaia boginia' in particular) that she addressed the journalists of the CIS ('the fourth echelon of power') in a separate pamphlet in June 1993.⁹⁰ Her attack on journalists has much in common with her harangues against priests and politicians, for in each case she is not above name-calling as she threatens her enemies with eternal damnation: the journalists who slander her church are 'servants of Satan', 'cowardly

carion-eaters' and 'mercenary, communist party rats, who sat out the Brezhnev and *perestroika* years in moldy chairs'.⁹¹ The Mother of the World's attack on journalists, however, contains a different note from her other addresses: that of wounded professional pride. Though she is quick to inform her critics that any slander against 'M. Tsvigun' is pointless, since this woman ended her secular existence when Christ was 'explanted' into her body in 1990, she nonetheless devotes two paragraphs to Tsvigun's 'posthumous rehabilitation':

By the way, unlike mercenary journalists, M. Tsvigun—a journalist with ten years' experience (and also a member of the Union of Journalists of the former USSR)—never looked with lying eyes, like you do, and did not look into the mouths of those who stood higher on the social ladder! Instead, she openly exposed all sorts of filth and criminal scum before her people! And she was always responsible for *every* word she said on the radio, for *every* line she printed in the newspaper!⁹²

For someone who claims to have made a complete break with her past life, Maria Devi is undeniably defensive about a career that is theoretically irrelevant. And yet perhaps her earlier journalistic career is a sore spot not only because Maria Devi is still Marina Tsvigun, but because her change in profession was less radical than either she or her critics believed. Even after becoming the final incarnation of God on earth, Tsvigun still understood the power of the printed word, and clearly preferred it to making public appearances. Choosing to preach in pamphlets and newsletters rather than on the street corners or on public squares, Tsvigun essentially changed her place of employment rather than her occupation: her last assignment was to a newspaper with the odd-sounding name of 'Iusmalos'.

The Great White Brotherhood of Maria Devi Khristos was fundamentally a textual phenomenon. Tsvigun's claims to have a six-figure following were patently false, yet what the Brotherhood lacked in members it more than made up in sheer volume of printed material: according to Vyzhutovich, the print run for Tsvigun's autobiography alone was 500,000 copies. The autobiography was a relatively late publication of the Brotherhood; it was preceded by a short brochure that was glued to windows and walls all over the Russian and Ukrainian capitals. Maria Devi's followers travelled throughout the 'promised land' of the ex-USSR, spreading the word wherever they went. Yet if one sets aside questions of motivation and doctrine, the White Brothers' frantic activity amounts to a massive campaign to distribute newsprint. Hence the irony that the official publications of the Brotherhood should share common concerns and a common language with the journalists who attacked it: in its own way, the Great White Brotherhood had created a mirror image of the often sensationalist post-Soviet print media. Both the journalists and the cultists regaled their readers with stories of brainwashing, conspiracies, and impending disaster; the basic assumptions common to each group (that brainwashing is possible, or that conspiracies exist) were questioned only rarely. It was this shared belief system that allowed the Brotherhood to portray itself (and be portrayed) as a force to be reckoned with. Yet the Great White Brotherhood was, in the final analysis, a paper tiger, and the armageddon of which it warned was never anything more than a war of words.

Notes

- 1 The author would like to acknowledge the following people for their aid in finding materials related to the Great White Brotherhood: Karen Evans-Romaine, Jann LaCoss, Georgii Lipkin,

- Eleonora Lipkina, Inga Pagava, Catherine Sevchenko, and Alina Zasukhina. I am particularly grateful to Il'ia Nikiforov for sharing both his press clippings and his unpublished article on Maria Devi. All translations from foreign languages are my own.
- 2 Oleg Karmaza, 'Reportazh s kontsa sveta', *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 16 November 1993, p. 1.
 - 3 Georgii Alekseev, 'Chernye liki "belyx brat'ev"', *Shchit i mech*, 25 November 1993, p. 9; Karamaza, 'Reportazh', p. 3; Ol'ga Musafirova, 'I eto—eshche ne konets sveta!' *Komsomol'skaia pravda* 13 November, 1993, p. 1; Grigorii Nesmianovich, 'Armageddon poka ne nastupil, no Kiev uzhe "triset"', *Krasnaia zvezda*, 3 November 1993, p. 2; Viktor Smirnov, 'Brat'ia, apostoly . . . i propavshie deti', *Rossiiskie vesti*, 10 November 1993; 'Zatrimano lidera "Bilogo bratstva"', *Svoboda. Ukrainian daily*, 16 November 1993, p. 5.
 - 4 Though I use the word 'cult' throughout this article, I am aware that many prefer the term 'new religious movements' (NRMs) in order to avoid the word's negative baggage. I feel, however, that the term is appropriate to the present study precisely because I am focusing on the demonization of the Great White Brotherhood in the post-Soviet press; Most of the journalists reporting on the phenomenon used either the term 'cult' ('cul't') or 'sect' ('sekta').
 - 5 'Ukraine Seizes Chiefs of End-of-the-World Cult', *The New York Times* 12 November 1993, p. A9; V. de. V., 'Apocalypse Now en Ukraine. Des centaines de fanatiques de la Grande Fraternité blanche, qui attendait hier la fin du monde, ont échappé de peu au suicide collectif', *Le Figaro*, 14 November 1993, p. 30-B.
 - 6 'By their metaphysical nature and their calling', writes Berdiaev, 'the Russian people are a people of the end'. Berdiaev also asserts that messianism is stronger in the Russian Orthodox Church than in Western Christianity (Nikolai Berdiaev, *Russkaia ideia*, in M. A. Maslin (ed.) *O Rossii i russkoi filosofskoi kul'ture. Filosofii russkogo posleoktiabr'skogo zarubezh'ia*, Moscow, Nauka 1990, pp. 214–216.) An eschatological focus characterizes not only the numerous sectarian movements (such as the Flagellants) that have appeared in Russia over the centuries; it can also be found in the writings of philosophers such as Dostoevsky. For an excellent historical overview of the eschatological motif in Russian culture, see David M. Bethea, *The Shape of the Apocalypse in Modern Russian Fiction*, Princeton, Princeton University Press 1989, especially pp. 12–31.
 - 7 The furor over 'red mercury', a substance supposedly used in the manufacture of nuclear weapons, was not limited to the CIS. For Western speculations on the existence and purpose of 'red mercury', see Bob Blumenthal, 'The red menace', *Barron's*, 1 March 1993, p. 20; Adl Ignatius, 'Red mercury is hot, but the question is: What exactly is it?' *Wall Street Journal*, 6 December 1993, p. A-1; Peter Maass, 'Fake Element Rouses E. Europe', *Washington Post*, 7 March 1992, p. A-4; Carol J. Williams, 'Mysterious "Red Mercury"—another hazardous soviet leftover?' *Los Angeles Times*, 13 January 1992, p. A-4; and Andy Zipser, 'Nuclear shell game?' *Barron's*, 15 February 1993, p. 15.
 - 8 The wide disparity in estimates of the cult's size is treated below.
 - 9 Eliot Borenstein, 'Maria Devi Khristos: a post-soviet cult without personality', *Mind & Human Interaction* 5: 3 (1994), pp. 110–123.
 - 10 It is important to note that the discussion of the media response, though limited mostly to print media, is not confined to the newspapers that are widely considered to be purveyors of 'yellow' journalism. Of the 75 articles and pamphlets consulted for the present study (a number that does not include the publications of the 'Brotherhood' itself), clippings from such papers make up the minority.
 - 11 American Christian programs such as 'The 700 Club' and 'The Hour of Power' are broadcast throughout the region, and Billy Graham's 1992 visit to Russia was heralded on Moscow billboards, buses, and metro cars by countless posters of Graham asking the question, 'Pochemu?' ('Why?').
 - 12 For an overview of the status of new religious movements in the old Soviet Union, see Oxana Antic, 'The Spread of Modern Cults in the USSR', in Sabrina Petra Ramet (ed.), *Religious Policy in the Soviet Union*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 252–270.
 - 13 Sabrina Petra Ramet cites an article in *Moscow Magazine* claiming that the number of Krishna followers in the USSR grew from 3000 to 100,000 between 1988 and 1990 ('Religious Policy in the Era of Gorbachev', in Sabrina Petra Ramet (ed.), *Religious Policy in the Soviet Union*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p. 31). Whether or not the numbers are accurate, the Krishna movement has certainly become much more visible in the past decade. For a history of the Krishnas in the USSR, see Antic, pp. 260–268.

- 14 Two other visitors to the Bolshoi reported similar experiences on two separate occasions.
- 15 The irony that citizens of these newly-separated countries shared Maria Devi's portrait as a common referent was not lost on CIS commentators. 'A man from Kiev travels to, say Moscow, sees [Maria Devi's] colour photo pasted on a subway car or on a shop window, and it's as though he never left the Ukrainian capital' (Sergei Kisilev, "'Belaia goriachka'. Pochemu chekisty ne mogut naiti shtab "Belogo Bratstva", *Novaia ezhdnevnaia gazeta* 10 November 1993).
- 16 On this, at least, my sources tend to agree, since almost all are relying on excerpts from a document described as a 'Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs dossier' (Georgii Alekseev, 'Khishchniki v belykh odezhdakh, ili Kuda izchezaiut nashi deti?' *Shchit i mech*, 8 July 1993, p. 8; Nikolai Burbyga and Aleksei Grigor'ev, 'Otets nebesnyi i 'Mater' Mira' pokhishchait detei, sovershaiut finansovye afery v psevdoreligioznoi sekte "Beloe bratstvo", *Izvestiia* 29 July 1993).
- 17 Oleg Karmaza, 'Komsomol'skaia boginia', *Komsomol'skaia pravda* 26 June 1993, p. 6; Valerii Lapikura, "'Beloe bratstvo": zombi ili fanatiki', *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, 9 November 1993, p. 5.
- 18 Karmaza, 'Komsomol'skaia boginia', p. 5.
- 19 According to Karmaza, Krivonogov's staff initially consisted of only one person: himself ('Komsomol'skaia boginia', p. 6). Alekseev claims that the institute was founded by Krivonogov and Marina Tsvigun, the future Maria Devi ('Khishchniki v belykh odezhdakh, ili Kuda izchezaiut nashi deti?' p. 8). Considering the testimony of Tsvigun's mother, Alekseev's version is less likely; when Tsvigun met Krivonogov, the latter had already begun his occult lecture circuit (Aleksandr Marsiuk, 'A mama zhdet svoiu boginiu . . .', *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 10 November 1993, p. 2).
- 20 *Ia Esm' Liubov'! Sbornik Bozhestvennoi poezii*. Iusmalos, 1993, p. 128.
- 21 Karmaza, 'Komsomol'skaia boginia', p. 6.
- 22 *Uchenie MARI DEVI KHRISTOS*. (*Nauka o Svete i ego transformatsii. Osnovnye formuly*). Iusmalos, 1993, p. 71.
- 23 Marsiuk, 'A mama zhdet svoiu boginiu . . .' p. 2.
- 24 *Uchenie MARI DEVI KHRISTOS*, pp. 16, 77.
- 25 *Uchenie MARI DEVI KHRISTOS*, p. 76. Both Tsvigun and Krivonogov tend to capitalize almost any noun they consider important and always capitalize every single letter in the name 'Maria Devi Khristos.'
- 26 *Uchenie MARI DEVI KHRISTOS*, p. 77; Marsiuk, 'A mama zhdet svoiu boginiu . . .' p. 2.
- 27 Marsiuk, 'A mama zhdet svoiu boginiu . . .' p. 2.
- 28 *Stupaite za mnoi, deti moi!* Tyumen, 1993, p. 1.
- 29 ITAR-TASS, 'Kstati', *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 16 November 1993, p. 3.
- 30 See, for example, the articles by Zinaida Kisina in *Sovetskaia Belarusia* ('Pokhittiteli dush', 20 May 1993, p. 3; 'Vtoroe prishestvie', 13-15 July, p. 2) as well as Larisa Alimamedova's interview with a former member of the Brotherhood ('la byl sredi "Belykh brat'ev". Ispoved' molodogo cheloveka, kotoromu udalos' vyrvat'sia iz kapkana iusmolian', *Trud*, 13 November 1993, pp. 1, 7).
- 31 Variations on this story are recounted by Alekseev ('Khishchniki v belykh odezhdakh, ili Kuda izchezaiut nashi deti?' p. 8; 'Khishchniki v belykh odezhdakh, ili patriarkh sbezhal, no apostol ostalsia', *Shchit i mech* 22 July 1993, p. 8), Burbyga and Grigor'ev, Karmaza ('Komsomol'skaia boginia', p. 6), Kisina ('Pokhittiteli', p. 3; 'Vtoroe prishestvie', pp. 2,2,2), Marta Kolomayets ('White Brotherhood, or black magic?' *The Ukrainian Weekly* 7 November 1993), Aleksandr Kolpakov ('Velikoe Beloe b. . .: Rozhdennye pol'zat' raspolzlis', *Moskovskii komsomolets*, 19 November 1993, p. 27), and Valerii Vyzhutovich ('Epidemiia 'Belogo bratstva'. Istoriia bolezni.' *Izvestiia* 26 November 1993). Most sources assert that the majority of 'brothers' and 'sisters' are young; Alekseev claims that they are between 12 and 30-years-old ('Chernye lik', p. 1), while Karmaza states that there are 'no adults' in the Great White Brotherhood ('Komsomol'skaia boginia', p. 6). Nevertheless, Krivonogov refers to the beating of an elderly 'sister' (*IUSMALOS* 8, p. 4), and Lapikura refers to the suicide of a 40-year-old male cultist ('Beloe bratstvo: zombi ili fanatiki', p. 5).
- 32 Kisina, 'Vtoroe prishestvie', 13 July 1993, p. 2.
- 33 In Ukraine, parents formed a committee called 'Poryatunok' ('Relief') (Kolomayets, 'White Brotherhood'). A similar organization was formed in Belarus, apparently independently: a 'parents' committee' called 'Ratavanie'.

- 34 The word IUSMALOS is an acronym formed from the first letters of Iuoann Swami's name ('IU'-Iuoann; 'S'-Svami), along with parts of the name 'Maria Devi Khristos' (*IUSMALOS* 8, p. 2). Members of the Brotherhood are often referred to as 'iusmoliane', an untranslatable neologism based on the word 'IUSMALOS'.
- 35 Though the full teachings of the cult are said to be contained in *Uchenie MARI DEVI KHRISTOS*, every issue of the Brotherhood's newspaper *IUSMALOS* contains articles that briefly summarize the cult's doctrine, at the same time providing examples of Tsvigun's and Krivonogov's eclectic writing style.
- 36 'Ergegor' is an 'energy field, created through the active and directed emanations of the peel of earth'. The 'consumption' ('pozhiranie') of ergegor takes place when ordinary ergegor is replaced by the stronger energies of Maria Devi's divine radiation (*Uchenie MARI DEVI KHRISTOS*, p. 12).
- 37 Tsvigun and Krivonogov recommend that such prayers be recited by the faithful when they are being tortured or incarcerated. Tsvigun offers the following mantra as an example: 'LORD MARIA DEVI KHRISTOS, let there be light!/LORD MARIA DEVI KHRISTOS, Send me light!/LORD MARIA DEVI KHRISTOS, Defend me with Your Light! . . .' Tsvigun exhorts her followers to 'repeat this, My Child, constantly, and you will be transfigured, and I will Raise you up to My Eternal Oasis of Light and All-Bliss and Eternal Life!' (*Ia Esm' Liubov'* p. 127).
- 38 For a more detailed discussion of the doctrine of 'IUSMALOS', see Borenstein, pp. 115–119.
- 39 *Uchenie MARI DEVI KHRISTOS*, 8. 'Fokhat', or, as it is usually transliterated in Theosophical writings, 'fohat', is apparently a direct borrowing from Blavatsky. Blavatsky herself calls 'fohat' the 'Buddhist active energy' that is the 'aggregate of all the spiritual creative ideations above, and of all the electro-dynamic and creative forces below, in Heaven and on Earth' (H. P. Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, Wheaton, Illinois, The Theosophical Publishing House 1964–1978, Volume III: 423; Volume X:, pp. 334; emphasis in the original). For more on 'Fokhat', see Borenstein, pp. 115–118.
- 40 *IUSMALOS* 8, 1–2.
- 41 Karmaza, 'Komsomol'skaia boginia', p. 6.
- 42 This 'New Jerusalem' is at the heart of the 'promised land': the Slavic region of the CIS, now the center of Satanism (*IUSMALOS* 8, pp. 1–2).
- 43 The panic over the cultists' possible mass suicide has, of course, its parallels in the West; Anson Shupe, David Bromley and Edward Breschel note that the collective suicide of the Peoples Temple in Jonestown has led to persistent 'suicide cult' folklore ('The Peoples Temple, the Apocalypse at Jonestown and the Anti-Cult Movement', Rebecca Moore and Fielding McGehee III (eds), *New Religious Movements, Mass Suicide, and Peoples Temple: Scholarly Perspectives on a Tragedy*, Lewiston, Edwin Mellen Press 1989, pp. 153–178).
- 44 Tsvigun's articles usually referred only to her own death, but Krivonogov asserts on more than one occasion that both he and Maria Devi will die (*IUSMALOS* 11, p. 7).
- 45 Sergei Kisilev, 'Delo Devi Mari Khristos zhivet i pobezhdaet; A ee uchenie, sootvetsvenno, vechno, potomu chto ono pravil'no', *Literaturnaia gazeta* 17 August 1994, p. 13. Apparently, the Ukrainian prosecutors have reached a similar conclusion; when the trial of Tsvigun and Krivonogov began on 1 March 1995, the only charge even vaguely resembling incitement to suicide is the attempt to damage the health of citizens in the name of religion' (Associated Press, 'Ukrainian Domsday Cult Leaders Go on Trial', 1 March 1995).
- 46 See, for example, Krivonogov's article, 'This is Interesting!' (Eto—interesno!) in the eleventh issue of *IUSMALOS*. Here Krivonogov once again appeals to non-believers to support the 'program' of the cultists: 'For without their light you will perish! . . . He who . . . does not deny God, only he will be saved!' (*IUSMALOS* 11, p. 7; emphasis in the original).
- 47 This time frame is discussed by Krivonogov in, among other places, *IUSMALOS* 4, and is also mentioned by Kolomayets, 'White Brotherhood'.
- 48 Stanislav Prokopchuk, 'Shabash fal'shivikh prorokov. Sviatotatstvuiushchie sektanty iz "belogo bratstva" uzhe neskol'ko dnei beschinstvuiut na ulitsakh Kieva', *Trud*, 4 November 1993, p. 6.
- 49 Certainly, the repeated references by Krivonogov and Tsvigun to the cult's enemies, as well as the proclamations that the cultists are prepared for martyrdom, are reasonable cause for alarm. But even the references to death are mere rhetorical flourishes, devoid of the lengthy metaphysical explanations to which Krivonogov is prone. At one point, Krivonogov tells his followers that members of a rival cult, the Center of Our Lady, will try to kill them, but that their 'blood is needed for the salvation of the sinful Earth' (*IUSMALOS* 4). In his article 'Why

- do you believe in the Lord?' ('Pochemu vy verite Gospodu?'), Krivonogov writes that only his 'children' are prepared 'to answer the Last Call of the Living God, forward! . . . To the Light! . . . to death!. When he describes the Day of Judgment in detail, however, Krivonogov insists that the apocalypse will be sparked by 'the murder of the two Saints of the Lord: Maria Devi Khristos and Iuoaann Swami'. Their deaths will wipe away the remaining sins of the cultists, allowing them to be transfigured (*IUSMALOS* 4). In the eleventh issue of *IUSMALOS*, Krivonogov categorically states that the 144,000 cultists will ascend alive . . . into the New Heaven' (*IUSMALOS* 11, p. 7; emphasis in the original).
- 50 Hence Krivonogov, in his instructions to his followers on how to behave in prisons and mental hospitals, writes that anyone who incarcerates a member of the Great White Brotherhood is only hastening his own demise (*IUSMALOS* 8, p. 7).
- 51 *Uchenie MARI I DEVI KHRISTOS*, p. 26.
- 52 *Uchenie MARI I DEVI KHRISTOS*, p. 29.
- 53 Without a doubt the recent deaths of the followers of David Koresh in Waco, Texas, played a role in the mass hysteria. More than one commentator offered ominous predictions that the events in Kiev could result in a higher death toll than in Waco.
- 54 *Uchenie MARI I DEVI KHRISTOS*, p. 56.
- 55 Karmaza, 'Komsomol'skaia boginia', p. 6; Vyzhutovich, 'Epidemiia', Prokopchuk, p. 6; Kolpakov.
- 56 Kolomayets, 'White Brotherhood'.
- 57 Vlad. Ignatov, 'The end of the world: Maria Devi prepares to be crucified—and the Kiev police prepare for mass disturbances', *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press* 45.44 (1993), p. 26; Prokopchuk, p. 6.
- 58 There were, of course, some exceptions; Andrei Igruev's unusually calm treatment of the cult contains the observation that the figure '144,000' should be familiar to anyone who has encountered a Jehovah's Witness (Andrei Igruev, 'Maria Devi Khristos: Zhizn' i tvorchestvo. Zhizn'kak tvorchestvo', *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 12 July 1993, p. 7).
- 59 Within the two weeks following the arrests, Oleg Aksenov ('V Kieve kholodno i spokoino', *Shhit i mech*, 25 November 1993, p. 9), E Sosipatrova ('Konets sveta ne proizoshel', *Russia & CIS Today: Media News and Features Digest*, 15 November 1993, p. 21), and Vyzhutovich ('Epidemiia') all estimate that approximately 800 cultists were arrested. Andrei Borodin and Sergei Kisilyov ('End of the World Postponed.—Leaders of White Brotherhood Arrested in Kiev', *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press* 45.46 (1993), p. 27) and Starozhitskaia ('Zaderzhany 700 chlenov 'Belogo bratstva'. Konets sveta otmeniaetsia . . .', *Izvestiia*, 13 November 1993, p. 1), writing immediately after the arrest, estimate that 700 were detained.
- 60 Karmaza, 'Reportazh', pp. 1,3.
- 61 See, for example, the metaphors commonly used in connection with the White Brotherhood: the cult was said to have 'tentacles' ('shchupal'tsy') which were alleged to have spread around the world (Alekseev, 'Chernye liki', p. 8). Alekseev also refers to the cult's 'sticky web' ('lipkaia pautina') ('Khishchniki v belykh odezhдах, ili patriakh sbezhal, no apostol ostalsia', p. 8); 'lipuchaia pautina' ('Chernye liki,' p. 8), and calls the Brotherhood an 'infectious mold' ('zaraznaia plesen') ('Khishchniki v belykh odezhдах, ili Kuda izchezaiut nashi deti?' p. 8).
- 62 In the months preceding the Kiev incidents, two anonymous pamphlets appeared in Russia as editions of the *Danilovskii listok*, published by the 'Izdatel'stvo Sviato-Danilova monastyria': *Chernyi sled 'Belogo bratstva'* ('The black trail of the 'White Brotherhood') and *O deiatel'nosti 'Belogo bratstva'* ('On the activities of the 'White Brotherhood'). Another pamphlet appeared in St. Petersburg without any attribution at all: *Ugolovniki v belykh balakhonakh. Mariia Devi i 'velioe beloe bratstvo'* ('Criminals in white robes. Maria Devi and the 'Great White Brotherhood'). The newspaper *Pravoslavnaia Moskva* (Orthodox Moscow) also published an anonymous article on the cult entitled 'Komsomol'skoe ekho. Razmyshleniia o 'Belom bratstve' ('The Komsomol echo. Thoughts on the "White Brotherhood"'). In his analysis of the Russian Orthodox Church's response to Maria Devi, Il'ia Nikiforov criticizes the authors of these pamphlets and articles for publishing anonymously, presuming to speak on behalf of the Church, and for their 'ignorance', 'false information', and 'tendentiousness' (Il'ia Nikiforov, 'Sovremennoe sektantstvo i bor'ba s nim (Po povodu deiatel'nosti 'Belogo bratstva'i 'Bogorodichnogo Tsentra'),' Unpublished manuscript, pp. 2–3). On 12 June, 1993, the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, Aleksii II, denounced both the White Brotherhood and the Center of Our

- Lady in somewhat more measured terms (“Vozzvanie Patriarkha Moskovskogo i Vseia Rusi Aleksiiia II i Sviashchennogo Sinoda Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi”).
- 63 Dmitry Gerasimov, ‘Satanic tribe—who is behind the monk’s murder?’ *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press* 45.18 (1993), p. 26. This article, which appeared in *Pravda* on 5 May, 1993, provoked an international scandal by linking the murder of Russian Orthodox monks to the alleged practice of human sacrifice among Hasidim. Though focusing on the threat posed by ‘secret societies’, the author also warns of the danger posed by cults such as the Great White Brotherhood, which ‘are believed to use narcotics, hypnosis and other means to influence young people’s still-developing psyches’.
- 64 Kisina, ‘Pokhititeli dush’; Zinaida Kisnia, ‘Polet chernogo angela, ili Dusha na torgakh— vkhod svobodnyi’, *Sovetskaia Belarusia*, 3 April 1993, p. 3. While the latter article does not mention the White Brotherhood specifically, it is the first in a series of articles Kisina wrote about cults. In her later articles (‘Konets sveta otmen’iaets’ia’, ‘Vtoroe prishestvie’, and ‘Zhivogo Boga razyskivaet miliciia’), she deals mainly with Maria Devi.
- 65 Kolomayets, ‘White Brotherhood’. Though Kolomayets’ articles appeared in *The Ukrainian Weekly* instead of the former Soviet Union, there is little to distinguish them from their Ukrainian and Russian counterparts. In the above-mentioned article, she refers to the 144,000 members of Brotherhood as an ‘estimate’ on the part of the cult’s leaders, and notes that Krivonogov ‘allegedly . . . has the power to hypnotize his followers into stealing . . .’
- 66 Svetlana Kolsovskaia, ‘Chumnaia volna’, *Smena* 3 (1994), pp. 20–36; Anna Politkovskaia and Mariia Meshchaninova, ‘Zhervy psikhicheskogo nasiliia’, *Moskovskii obozrevatel’* 28 August 1993, p. 71; ‘Ratavanie’ (Parents’ Committee), ‘Spasem detei ot dukhovnoi chumy’, *Sovetskaia Belarusia*, 5 May 1993, p. 3.
- 67 Here one must note that almost all discussions of ‘psychic violence’ focus on Krivonogov, who was widely seen as a Svengali figure, controlling Tsvigun. Alimamedova is one of the few exceptions (‘la byl sredi “Belykh brat’ev,” ’ p. 7). As the case of the White Brotherhood goes to trial, it appears likely that Tsvigun herself will make a similar argument in her own defense: *Literaturnaia gazeta* reported in August, 1994 that Tsvigun plans to lead the Brotherhood without Krivonogov, who she claims manipulated her (Kisilev, ‘Delo devi Marii Khristos . . .’ p. 13).
- 68 According to Alimamedova (p. 7), the Ukrainian MVD refers to Krivonogov as a ‘sex maniac’.
- 69 Alekseev, ‘Khishchniki v belykh odezhdakh, ili Kuda izchezaiut nashi deti?’ p. 8). Smirnov and Aleksandr Shipkin (‘Lzheproroki v Kieve’, *Rossiiskie vesti*, 13 November 1993) also quote this dossier.
- 70 Speculation as to Krivonogov’s powers and ‘evil genius’ had, by November, become so outlandish that some journalists wondered if the apparent defeat of the cult was all part of the plan: Alekseev wonders if Krivonogov’s arrest was ‘too easy’: perhaps Krivonogov had something to gain from his arrest (‘Chernye liki’, p. 8). Kolpakov reports that, upon the arrest of the cult’s leaders, some were worried that the man and woman arrested were merely ‘doubles’ of Tsvigun and Krivonogov, but those fears were laid to rest upon the arrival of Tsvigun’s ex-husband at the militia headquarters.
- 71 Shipkin reports that, according to the psychiatrists who examined the cultists during their incarceration, ‘most of [the cultists] are absolutely healthy people’. Shipkin also notes that ‘specialists’ consider a diagnosis of ‘zombification’ nigh unto impossible to make. Nonetheless, Shipkin immediately goes on to repeat Lapikura’s speculation of a link between ‘zombification’ and Krivonogov’s work with artificial intelligence (see below). A calmer note was struck by Vyzhutovich, who, after quoting one group of expert psychologists about the potential treatment of ‘zombified’ cultists, quotes another psychiatrist as saying that ‘contemporary psychiatry’ does not recognize ‘coding’ and ‘zombification’ as a valid diagnosis (‘Epidemiia’). Karmaza reports that, despite rumours of brainwashing, those who have left the sect say that no force was employed on them (‘Reportazh’, p. 3). Alimamedova’s interview with a former cultist confirms that the leaders of the Brotherhood imposed strict discipline and baffling rules upon their followers, but includes no reference to hypnosis, drugs, or force (pp. 1,7).
- 72 Aksenov, ‘V Kieve kholodno i spokoino’, p. 9.
- 73 Such rumours are reported by Prokopchuk (p. 6), V. de V. (p. 30-B), Kolomayets (‘White Brotherhood’), Ignatov (p. 26), and Karmaza (‘Reportazh,’ p. 3).
- 74 Kapeliushnikov and Zinets, p. 6.
- 75 Kisina, ‘Konets sveta’, p. 3; Kisinia, ‘Vtoroe prishestvie’, 13 July 1993, p. 2.

- 76 As Nikifirov notes, the authors of the two anti-Maria Devi editions of *Danilovskii listok* not only make a number of factual errors, but rely on 'New Age' concepts that are antithetical to mainstream Russian Orthodoxy (pp. 3–5, 29–31). In *Chernyi sled 'Belogo bratstva'*, the authors assert that the Brotherhood's crimes should interest all those around the world who are battling 'ultra-brain control' ('ul'tramozogovyi kontrol' nad liud'mi') (3). During their initiation, new members are supposedly subjected to 'extrasensory efforts with the help of an upside-down cross', after which a cross with 'Kabbalistic signs' places a 'code ('kod') on the zone of the so-called 'third eye' or 'agni-chakra'. According to specialists in psychotronics ('psikhotronika'), such an effect can 'code a person, turning him into a zombie, a biorobot obedient to the will of others' (pp. 3–4). In *O deiatel'nosti 'Belogo bratsva'*, the authors explain that the third eye is responsible for telepathy, clairvoyance, and channelling (p. 3). The authors of the article 'Komsomol'skoe ekho' suggest that the cult is actually a thinly-disguised form of Satanism; they support their argument through false etymology based on the word 'devi', and through allusions to the possible Satanic significance of the cult's five-pointed star. The harshest condemnation comes from the authors of *Ugolovniki v belykh balakhonakh*, who claim that the cultists are brainwashed with the help of a narcotic (p. 1), and who cite anonymous sources for allegations that the cult killed a 15-year-old girl through crucifixion and traffics in blood and internal organs on the foreign market (p. 3). The brochure's author condemns the Brotherhood as a Masonic-funded cult of Russophobes, who are 'generously fed' by the 'world-wide plutocracy' (p. 3).
- 77 Alekseev, 'Khishchniki v belykh odezhdakh, ili Kuda izchezaiut nashi deti?' p. 8; Burbyga and Grigor'ev.
- 78 The 'brainwashing' controversy was inaugurated by Edward Hunter, who introduced the term in his study of Chinese 'thought reform techniques' (*Brainwashing: The Story of the Men Who Defied It*, New York, Norton 1956). The term was appropriated by the anti-cult movement in order to describe alleged coercive indoctrination techniques. The debate continues to the present day, although a number of convincing studies have found flaws in the brainwashing model. For more on this debate, see David G. Bromley and James Richardson (eds), *The Brainwashing/Deprogramming Controversy: Sociological, Psychological, Legal, and Historical Perspectives*, New York, Edwin Mellen Press 1983; David Bromley and Thomas Robbins, 'Research on new religious movements: a bibliography', *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 83 (1993), pp. 107–125; Thomas W. Keiser and Jacqueline L. Keiser, *The Anatomy of Illusion: Religious Cults and Destructive Persuasion*, Springfield, Charles C. Thomas 1987; James T. Richardson, 'The psychology of induction: a review and interpretation', in Marc Galanter (ed.), *Cults and New Religious Movements*, Washington, American Psychiatric Association 1989, pp. 11–238; Anson D. Shupe, Jr, Roger Spielmann, and Sam Stigall, 'Deprogramming: The new exorcism', in James T. Richardson (ed.), *Conversion Careers: In and Out of the New Religions*, Beverly Hills, Sage 1978, 145–160.
- 79 Lapikura, 'Beloe bratstvo: zombi ili fanatiki?' 5.
- 80 The approach to science displayed by both Maria Devi and her detractors would apparently fit with Françoise Champion's recent study on the role of scientific discourse in new esoteric movements. Among the various ways in which such movements express their faith in the alliance between science and religion is to reinterpret scientific ideas in a 'para-scientific' fashion, appropriating them for use in their esoteric vocabulary (Françoise Champion, 'La croyance en l'alliance de la science et de la religion dans les nouveaux courants mystiques et esoteriques', *Archives de Sciences sociales des Religions*, 92 (1993), pp. 205–222).
- 81 *IUSMALOS*, p. 1; emphasis in the original.
- 82 Nikiforov, p. 31.
- 83 *IUSMALOS* 8, p. 1; emphasis and exclamation point in the original. For allegations of drug use on the part of the White Brotherhood, see Alekseev, 'Chernye liki', p. 8; Gerasimov, p. 26; *Ugolovniki v belykh balakhonakh*, p. 1; V. de. V., p. 30–B.
- 84 Lapikura, p. 5; 'Komsomol'skoe ekho', p. 2; Alekseev, 'Khishchniki v belykh odezhdakh, ili patriarkh shezhal, no apostol ostalsia', p. 8.
- 85 *IUSMALOS* 11, p. 3; *Uchenie MARI DEVI KHRISTOS*, p. 23.
- 86 Lapikura, p. 5.
- 87 The influence of Theosophy is particularly pronounced. Blavatsky, the founder of Theosophy, claimed to be receiving her teachings from a 'Great White Brotherhood' of mysterious

Mahatmas (Maria Carlson, *'No Religion Higher Than Truth': A History of the Theosophical Movement in Russia, 1875–1922*, Princeton, Princeton University Press 1993, p. 31).

88 Igruev, p. 5.

89 IUSMALOS 11, p. 3.

90 IUSMALOS 11, p. 3; *Slovo Boga Zhivogo MARIJ DEVI KHRISTOS k zhurnalistam SNG (chetvertomu eshelonu 'vlasti')*. IUSMALOS, July 1993.

91 *Slovo Boga Zhivogo*, pp. 1–2.

92 *Slovo Boga Zhivogo*, p. 2; emphasis in the original.

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