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Doukhobor Survival: Maintained Through Persecution and Conflict

Lisa Marie Rude
May 13th, 2005

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with honors from the department of Sociology of Carroll College, Helena Montana.
This thesis for honors recognition has been approved for the Department of *Sociology*.

_Elizabeth E. Clark_  
Director  
_May 6, 2005_

_Loren Gardner_  
Reader  
_May 5, 2005_

_D. E. [Signature]_  
Reader  
_May 5, 2005_
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Abstract

This thesis examines the 19th and 20th century struggles of the Doukhobors as they journeyed from Czarist Russia to Canada. Due to their religious beliefs and sense of social justice, the Doukhobors were forced to migrate numerous times within Russia before they relocated to their (not so) promised land in Canada. Their struggle will be analyzed through two viewpoints historically, using Marxist Humanist and Conflict theory, and culturally, using Indigenous Standpoint theory. The thesis will attempt to answer the following questions: “What historical factors led to the Doukhobors’ cultural development and ability to sustain despite fierce conflict from the external government structure (Russia and Canada)?” and “To what extent do Conflict and Marxist Humanist theories explain the Doukhobor experiences?” The research finds evidence to suggest that Marxist Humanist theory most accurately explains the Doukhobors’ internal cultural cohesion, while Conflict theory best describes their ability to survive under external pressure.
I. Introduction and Methods

An overview including a brief history of the Doukhobors plus the presenter’s methodology.

History abounds with stories of oppressed and persecuted religious groups moving to new lands in order to prosper, from the Jews in ancient Egypt fleeing for the holy land, to the Puritans in England traveling across the Atlantic for the new world, to the modern day Palestinian/Israeli conflict in which everyone wants to go home. These conflicts not only illustrate the human drive for cultural independence but also begin to highlight the reasons behind the flights themselves. For persecution to occur an outside group has to perceive the inside group as different. Conflict was a driving force behind many of these moves. According to sociologist Max Weber governments as well as groups in power generate the idea from within, that other groups are inherently different from the power groups. Most notably the power group is political. Soon, through the common experience of being told they are different, the out group may internalize the perspective of the power group and begin to think of themselves as different. This feeling of being different comes from the outside. The resulting social action is always negative (Weber 1978).

In 1899 when the Doukhobor’s pacifist religious and social beliefs threatened the Czarist government many Doukhobors relocated to Canada. This move did not create the “promised land” they had anticipated. The Canadian government and the Doukhobors conflicted over the Doukhobors’ citizenship rights almost from the beginning, which eventually led to their being forced off
their land and ultimately resulted in the internment and forced education of hundreds of Doukhobor children.

This thesis describes the Doukhobors’ history, religion, and social beliefs. The thesis then analyzes their experiences through the lenses of two sociological theories. The first theory is Marxist Humanism, a perspective that combines the unique elements of Marxist theory on the subordination of the lower classes by the ruling class and the humanist perspective in which people are examined within the context of their own surroundings and environment. The second theory is George Simmel’s Conflict theory, which argues that when a group is pushed or threatened from the outside it will become more cohesive as a unit. Finally, the thesis will examine the Doukhobors through the Indigenous Standpoint theory, which proposes the idea that ethnic or cultural groups have to be examined from their own perspective. The thesis follows the Indigenous Standpoint model because it looks at the Doukhobors’ history from their perspective.

This thesis then poses the following questions: 1. What theoretical and historical factors lead to the Doukhobor’s cultural development and ability to continue despite fierce conflict from the outside government structures (Russia and Canada)?; and 2. To what extent do Conflict and Marxist Humanist theories explain the Doukhobor experiences?

II. History

A brief overview of the Doukhobors origins and history from the 1700’s to the early part the new Millennium (2000).

For the last two centuries the Doukhobors have been drifters on two continents as well as through the spiritual world. The Russian Orthodox Church
once referred to the Doukhobors as unable to overcome the Holy Spirit within and thereby anointed them “spirit wrestlers” (Woodcock 1977). The Doukhobors adopted the name; changing it to mean that they were fighting the Holy Spirit outside their bodies, because they control their souls, not the Holy Spirit.

The Doukhobors were part of the Enthusiastic Movement, not unlike the Quakers. The Enthusiastic Movement supported the idea that God lived within the human being and did not exist separately, as in heaven. Therefore, the Doukhobors’ belief system ran counter to the foundational teachings of Orthodox Christianity, which stated that God lives outside the human body. It was a clash between the sacred and the mortal. The Orthodox Church feels that the Holy Spirit tries to control a person from outside their body, by dictating morality and temptation, whereas the Doukhobors believe that they can control their lives and thereby resist temptation. They believe that they are in control of their own morality and that they will atone for their sins on earth and not in the after life.

However, history proves that in addition to God and the Holy Spirit, the Doukhobors have to fight with those who feel they own God’s power, most notably governments. In their homeland of Russia the Doukhobors were forced to migrate farther and farther away from civilization to avoid the interference of the Czar’s government. They endured many different types of hardships but their disagreements with the Russian government only strengthened their sense of solidarity and cultural heritage. However, the Czar insisted that all citizens, including the Doukhobors, participate in military service, per Russian law. This forced them to leave their homeland in search of a place where they could practice
their tenets of pacifism and worship freely. From a short list of options the Doukhobors chose Canada. However, this choice also became problematic for similar reasons. Like Russia, the Canadian government wanted their male citizens to participate in military service. As a result of the Doukhobors refusal to do so, the Canadian government demanded they relinquish their land and forced the young Doukhobor men into military service. In response, the Doukhobors began to protest within their cultural norms. They formed the “Freedomites” or “The Sons of Freedom” (SOF), a group of men, women, and children who protested in Canadian towns by marching through the town center naked and by burning abandoned buildings and barns.

By the 1950’s, in order to curb these protests, the frustrated Canadian government systematically rounded up Doukhobor children and moved them away from their families to “state schools.”\(^1\) These “schools,” as the British Columbian government dubbed them, were little more than institutions designed to teach the Doukhobor religion and language out of the next generation. In some situations the children had their religion beaten out of them by other students to the point of causing both physical and emotional damage that continues to cause mistrust into the new Millennium (Schuster 2001).

III. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

*Analysis of Marxist Humanist, Conflict and Indigenous Standpoint theories including reviews and analysis of research.*

For three hundred years the Doukhobors have been unable to find true peace in any century. In Russia the Doukhobors encountered mistrust and

\(^1\) The Doukhobors, as well as unofficial Canadian government documents, refer to them as interment camps similar to those Native American children were forced into in 19\(^{th}\) and 20\(^{th}\) century America.
persecution. When they were finally able to leave Russia for Canada they found their new homeland to be just as discriminating as their former one. In order to discuss how these events unfolded, I will analyze historical events according to two sociological theories, Conflict and Marxist Humanist theories, in relation to explaining both the Doukhobors' cultural development including their unique ability to adapt even when confronted with fierce conflict from the outside government structures, and finally, how Conflict and Marxist Humanist theories explain this adoption and cultural development.

**Literature Review** Beginning with the Doukhobors' relationships with the Russian and Canadian governments, there is a significant amount of literature to explain the development of their culture. Most sources can agree that the "spirit wrestlers" movement grew in southern Russia in the late 1700's after a schism occurred with the Russian Orthodox Church. The source of the contention between the two groups was that the Doukhobors believed that the Holy Spirit is felt within a person and is not a controlling force from without. The Doukhobor's have pacifist views and believe that people atone for their sins while on earth. Many researchers [Nicholas Breyfogle (1995), Koozma Tarasoff (1995), George Woodcock (1977), and Ivan Avakumovic (1968), John Zubek (1952), Patricia Solburg (1952), and Joseph Elkinton (1903)] agree that this separation of the Doukhobors and Orthodox Church in Russia is the beginning of the Doukhobors' history. In fact they all agree on the Russian history of the Doukhobors.

Dissention among the historians occurs when they discuss the Doukhobors' response to their situation. Tarasoff (1995) argues that it is their
mythology as well as their religious beliefs that have motivated the Doukhobors for the past 300 years. As Elkinton (1903) points out, their religion continually evolved, and they have maintained their values throughout the years. Tarasoff (1995) and Elkinton (1903) make the same point that it is their religion that has kept the culture going and flourishing throughout the Doukhobors’ struggles. Elkinton (1903) further elaborates that the Doukhobors conflicted with the Czarist government in Russia by refusing to be part of the military; additionally, this reorganization around pacifism pulled many serfs from the land and into the religion. The same general agreement about the Doukhobors origins and Russian history is not carried over into their Canadian history. The Canadian history of the Doukhobors is muddled due to conflicting reports on exactly what happened between the government and the Doukhobors upon their arrival in Canada.

The prevailing theory among Doukhobor scholars holds that the government rescinded on its promises that the land would belong to the Doukhobors after the mandatory three years settlement time had passed. Tarasoff (1995) maintains that religious differences kept the Doukhobors and the Canadian government from getting along. Zubek and Solburg (1955) agree that it was the Doukhobors’ unwillingness to conform to the laws of the Canadian government. The Doukhobors wanted to continue living as pacifist communalists. The Canadian government wanted to cement their control of the western part of the country and needed soldiers to accomplish that. Woodcock (1977) and Avakumovic (1968) particularly agree with Zubek and Solburg (1955). They also see a communication breakdown but Woodcock (1977) and Avakumovic (1968)
add that the Doukhobors were part of the problem because of their stubbornness and their unwillingness to participate in parts of the agreement. Many of these existing theories have merit; however, other theorists think that the Canadian government was at fault, because they wanted to break the contract with the Doukhobors.

**Theories and Theorists** Marxist Humanist and Conflict theories work well to explain the cultural and political evolution of the Doukhobors when they are examined through the lens of Indigenous Standpoint.

**Dennis Foley - Indigenous Standpoint**

A model of Indigenous Standpoint can be found in Dennis Foley’s (2003) article *Indigenous Epistemology and Indigenous Standpoint Theory*. The article primarily centers on the indigenous peoples of Australia, but the theory laid out in the article is broad enough that it can be applied to the Doukhobors. Foley’s (2003) position is that an ethnic or cultural group will create its own way of looking at the world and becomes hard-pressed to change from that position. They see the world through their construction of reality, whether it is a particular creation story or culturally developed worldview (Foley 2003). The world is viewed and sometimes judged through the groups’ own cultural perspective.

The provided history has been presented from a Doukhobor perspective. The history examines the Doukhobors through their own background and framework. Analyzing them through their own worldview allows for greater cultural understanding according to Foley (2003). This fits the Indigenous Standpoint lens.
Alan Spector – Marxist Humanist Theory

Alan Spector (2002) states that Marxist theory overlaps humanist sociology because Marxism creates a forum for humanist ideas. Marxism, in its purest form, allows for open discord and debate. It also portrays every human being as individual and unique. Marxist construction implies that a communal structure is necessary for further human development. Finally Spector points out that Marxism is also about suspending the oppressive nature of authoritarian governments to allow the people access to free and open dialogue (2002). This freeing of people from oppression relates Marxism to humanist thought.

Humanism stresses the need for personal power over oppressive forces. It states that the individual is more important than the collective. Individual power is to be valued and respected as a viable member within society (Spector 2002). Humanism contends that states need more from individuals than individuals need from governments.

A combination of Marxism and humanism emphasizes the importance of human agency and subjectivity, rather than state control and authority. It is this openness, individualism, and communal nature that link Marxism to the Doukhobors. Humanism applies to the Doukhobors in that they believe a person is in charge of his/her own destiny here on earth and should seek redemption for the soul now.

George Simmel-Conflict theory

A certain amount of discord, inner divergence and outer controversy is organically tied up with the very elements that ultimately hold the group together . . . hostilities prevent
boundaries within the group from gradually disappearing . . .
(Coser 1956).

Like Marx in his theories on class conflict, George Simmel theorized that
groups engaged in conflict with an outside force or "out-group" will strengthen
their group's core values and try to solidify the "in-group." The book The
Functions of Social Conflict by Lewis Coser (1956) breaks down Simmel's
various arguments as well as his theories and elaborates on each aspect of group
conflict. He asserts that group conflict is necessary to maintaining group
solidarity. He claims that individual preferences and idiosyncrasies have no
relevance when studying group relations (Coser 1956). Simmel suggests that
groups define themselves by fighting with other groups. External conflict will
indeed strengthen internal cohesion (Coser 1956), external pushes force groups to
redefine or strengthen their own ideology. This is effective in keeping the group
together because it reminds group members who they are and what it is that they
stand for. People working against a common enemy will "call up emotional ties"
and create a shared worldview.

IV. Russian History

This section is a comprehensive in-depth analysis of the Doukhobors
origins and their travels through and their exodus from Russia.

Doukhobor Origins  The Doukhobors are of Russian origin, mostly the
southern part near the Caucasus Mountains and the Sea of Azov (Zubek, Solberg
1952). They first appeared in the territory between the Black Sea and the Sea of
Azov (Elkinton 1903). They tended to live in the territories of Transcaucasia,
Tiflis, Kars, and Elizabetpol where Nicolas I moved them in the early 1800's
This settlement began in the Milky Waters region of the Caucasus (Elkinton 1903). They first emerged under the name Ikonobors meaning “Image Wrestlers.” They were recognized first by Empress Anne who referred to them as a “weed” that had sprung “up in not one but many places” (quoted in Woodcock 1977).

Despite their belief that “all men are created equal,” the Doukhobors did historically follow the leadership of one individual, man or woman. Their leaders were endowed with an even greater amount of the “spirit of Christ” than regular humans (Woodcock 1977). From 1865 to 1885 their leader was Luker’ia Vasilyevna Kalmykova who led over 20,000 Doukhobors in the Caucasus. She ruled autocratically for 20 years.

Belief Structures and Daily Life  The Doukhobors formed as splinter group from the Orthodox Church of Holy Mother Russia after the Great Schism. Although the Doukhobors emerged after the Great Schism they did not develop as a result of it (Woodcock 1977). It is ironic that such a conflict would birth a faction destined to be defined by conflict for almost 300 years. They became a new sect, along with the Mennonites and Quakers. The Doukhobors began to believe that all persons who have conquered their inner personal passions have become one with Christ (Zubek, Solberg 1952). This was a belief structure that developed as a result of the Great Schism, and the splitting of the church. ² Much as the Quakers believe in the “inner light,” the Doukhobors believe that the

² The Great Schism that resulted in the creation of the Doukhobors as well as many other religions such as the Mennonites, was the split in the Catholic Church between western (Roman) and eastern (orthodox) churches around 1054. Many years of different leadership and philosophical views led to the split.
ultimate authority of “truth” could be found within the human being (Murray n.d.). If all men are equal to one another than no one person can tell another how to be spiritual or to teach the Lord’s ways (Woodcock 1977). Everyone is Christ; therefore, it is wrong to kill other people because killing them would be killing Christ all over again. As a result of their beliefs, the Doukhobors became pacifists and refused to participate in wars or in military training (Zubek, Solberg 1952).

The Doukhobors characteristically were from indentured servant stock and were illiterate. They never had their religion written down; it was entirely oral. The earliest Doukhobors made a living farming and herding cattle (Zubek, Solberg 1952). They had a strong belief in work. While efficient farmers, as they were pushed further into isolation, they found it difficult to farm grain at 5,000-foot elevation and devoted themselves to herding. They were so successful that they became well-to-do and developed a great love of and respect for the land (Zubek, Solberg 1952). With excellent skills in handiwork added to their herding and farming, the Doukhobors accumulated an extraordinary amount of money from parish collection donations to the point where they could control or have influence over some of the border governments (Elkinton 1903). This prosperity did not last long in Russia’s political climate. Even in isolation they continued to be a threat with the accumulation of more wealth. They were hardworking, industrious, frugal, and prosperous. They paid their taxes on time. They had their own educational system. The only issue that the government had with the Doukhobors was over military training.
Sources of Conflict: External and Internal

*External Pressures*  
The Doukhobors' adaptation of Orthodox Christianity angered not only the Orthodox Church but also the Czarist government. The church hierarchy labeled them "Doukhobors," as it was felt they were wrestling against the Holy Spirit within. However, the Doukhobors perceived the name to mean "those who fight not with fists but are armed with the spirit of truth" (Woodcock 1977). This name became symbolic of their pacifism. Simmel's Conflict theory can explain that the adoption of the name "Doukhobor" was a way of culturally defying those who opposed them. They drew strength from a name that another group perceived as demeaning.

As a group the Doukhobors continued to anger the church by forgoing many of the sacraments such as marriage, funerals, organized church services, and formal prayer. They also upset religious authorities, who feared that Doukhobor doctrine could threaten the Orthodox Church's favor with the monarchy. Eventually their doctrine did get them noticed and resulted in their eventual persecution by both the Church and the government (Zubek, Solberg 1952). The government and Church began to push against the Doukhobors, moved them farther and farther away from civilization and deeper into the mountains. Again Conflict theory explains how the Doukhobors managed to survive even though the government forced changes upon the Doukhobors. This pressure created increased solidarity within Doukhobor culture. It helped to sharpen their definitions. Conflicts with the government over military service reinforced group solidarity and forced the Doukhobors to re-affirm themselves as a unit. It was the
solidification from the inside that caused the Doukhobors to stay so strong and face their particular foes.

One of the many ways the Doukhobors survived was the result of government pressure. The Doukhobors were pushed, by law, to the frontier land of east Russia. All persons who were of the faith were forced to move to the frontier. This meant that throughout Russia serfs, who were literally bound to the land they worked and the masters that they worked for could be released from their bondage should they embrace the freedom offered by the Doukhobor way of life (Woodcock 1977). As one could expect, many peasants declared themselves to be Doukhobors in order to become free, although they may not have been devout. They joined to be free of servitude (Zubek, Solberg 1952).

The cultural melting of different people from all over Russia also helped keep the Doukhobor faith from being crushed by the government. Marxist Humanist and Conflict theories both explain how the forced movement and the addition of serfs benefited the Doukhobors culturally. The pressure of being moved, again, reinforced the Doukhobors drive to stay together and maintain their group status. The addition of serfs also forced to the Doukhobors to stay together. They caused the Doukhobors to reinforce their history and religion by explaining it to so many new converts. Additionally the serfs brought different farming and herding skills to the group, which continued to increase the skill level of the whole group as well as their wealth.

Both the Russian government and the border Doukhobors had fights with the Kurds. The Kurds made border raids for Doukhobor cattle. The Kurds would
steal the cattle and the Doukhobors would be upset (Zubek, Solberg 1952). The Doukhobors would retaliate by burning down an empty Kurd barn or by taking back their cattle. This back-and-forth with the Kurds encouraged greater hunting and farming skills among the Doukhobors.

*Internal Pressures*  The death of Kalmykova in 1886 brought the first major split in the Doukhobors’ history (Woodcock 1977). Peter Vasilovich Vergin and Kalmykova’s brother Michael Gubanov were both thought to be her successors. This internal conflict ran deep into the heart of Doukhobor culture. They had been fighting the Russian as well as Kurdish governments for so long that they were unable to solve their own internal conflict without a split.

Simmel says that it is possible for groups to become centralized to the point that any dissenting opinion is considered “heresy” and therefore inexcusable. A lack of solidarity among group members over one particular issue could mean the issue is important enough for the group to “fight about among themselves” (Coser 1956).

The people had come to depend on Kalmykova’s leadership so much that a questioning began to play out among them. The split was the small party giving in to the outside group, and the large party’s reaction and desperate attempt to keep the Doukhobors together (Breyfogle 1995).

The people sided with Vergin, who was born into a ruling family. His birth was portrayed as supernatural. The people believed he was chosen through divine intervention to lead. He was regarded as different and as a natural born leader his whole life. The people who sided with Vergin formed the “Large Party”
(Woodcock 1977). Meanwhile, the government, authorities, and civil leaders, as well as the educated Doukhobors who began to question Vergin’s divinity sided with Gubanov. This group was known as the “Small Party” (Woodcock 1977).

When military training was introduced to the Doukhobor settlement in the Caucasus, Gubanov’s group complied with the government and began their required time with the military. Vergin’s group was reluctant. Vergin and his brothers and some young men refused outright. Many villagers refused to submit to the government. Finally the Czar sent officers to demand their compliance. When Vergin refused to submit, he was exiled to the Kola Peninsula in Siberia, as a result of administrative order (Zubek, Solberg 1952). The government’s actions only encouraged support for Vergin, the large party, and traditional Doukhobor ways of life.

Many considered Vergin to be their leader and followed his teachings; while he was gone the people lacked focused leadership. Vergin did communicate with his followers through letters and sent his teaching back. Leo Tolstoy became impressed with Vergin and the Doukhobors. Tolstoy distributed pamphlets and began to take up a collection for the Doukhobors in the Caucasus. It was around this time that Vergin and his followers began to develop the idea of the “promised land” because of the persecution over their beliefs. Vergin wanted “some place where we could live and work peacefully” (Breyfogle 1995).

Simmel’s notion of internal arguments posed by “out-groups” could fit well with the Doukhobors aversion to guns and the split of the small and large parties. When Kalmikova died, a rift was created among the people. This “in
group fighting” caused pressure on the group as a whole instead of their leader. The fighting may also have allowed for the government to gain some influence over the small party.

The Doukhobors were finally given permission by the Czar to leave Russia and find a new place to live. It is believed that the Czar finally decided to give them their freedom because of a petition that his mother, the Dowager Empress, had been given during her tour of the Caucasus (Zubek, Solberg 1952). The Doukhobors wanted out of Russia.

**Opportunities offered by Canada** First the Doukhobors needed money and a place to live. Travel money was supplied by English Quakers. Canada and Cyprus were chosen as possible homesteads. The people wanted to go to Canada; however, Cyprus was closer (Zubek, Solberg 1952).

Arthur St. John, an English Quaker and Doukhobor sympathizer, was sent to Cyprus to talk to their government officials. There was a group of Doukhobors assembled at the harbor waiting to enter Cyprus. The Cypriot government wanted $5 a head as insurance that the Doukhobors would arrive and stay (Zubek, Solberg 1952). St. John paid the money to get the waiting group in the harbor.

An advanced group led by Aylmer Maude traveled to Canada with two Doukhobor families and non-Doukhobor Russian Prince Hilkoff for political influence. Because immigration was down 15% from 1891-1895, Canada was ready to accept large numbers of immigrants willing to farm their western frontier (Breyfogle 1995). It was expensive for the Doukhobors to travel and there was no guarantee of a full return on their money or of their political sovereignty.
Canada was desperate for people to cultivate their western frontier. They had passed numbers legislation to make homesteading viable (Zubek, Solberg 1952). The Homestead Law was part of the Dominion Land Act of 1872. It guaranteed a free quarter section of land to the head of a family (or male of 18 years) who applied for homestead and paid a $10 deposit (Woodcock 1977). The law assumed that those applying would seek citizenship if they were not already citizens. These were the conditions for citizenship:

- Live on the land for six months out of the year.
- Beautify the land by farming it and building a home.
- Set forth a plan on farming.
- Prove to agent that all conditions had been met.
- Meet all of the above for three years.

All of these conditions had to be met in order for the homesteader to keep the land after three years (Woodcock 1977). The original document was amended for the Mennonites who had immigrated to Canada thirty years prior. In order to accommodate the Mennonites’ communal lifestyle, the parliament had amended the Dominion Land Act of 1872 Homestead Law by adding the Hamlet Clause.

The Hamlet Clause to the Homestead Law stated that twenty families may live together in a group as long as they work their quarter section of land to an agent’s satisfaction. The act was again amended in May of 1898 to include co-op farming by special license. All plots of land still needed individual attention (Woodcock 1977). This second amendment was perfect for the Doukhobors. They could farm communally and still have land in their own names. Three-quarters of
a million acres of land were set aside for the Doukhobors in the Northwest Territories and part of Saskatchewan, about 100 acres per person (Zubek, Solberg 1952). There were three major blocks: Yorkton, Rosthem, and Thunder Hill (Woodcock 1977). Deputy Minister James A. Smart, head of the immigration department, met the first boat of Doukhobors at Halifax Harbor on the shores of Lake Huron in September 1898 (Zubek, Solberg 1952). He was there to welcome them and explain all the conditions of their immigration.

**Russian Lessons** The Doukhobors learned a few lessons in Russia. They knew how to be rural agriculturalists (farmers). They became experts at communal methods of living and farming. They were skilled farmers and herders and had a structured way of life (Woodcock 1977). Also, the Russian governments’ restrictions had forced the Doukhobors to define again and again who they were and what they could do.

Unfortunately these lessons came at a cost. The Doukhobors had never known primacy (ability to put their own group interests first, and outside groups second). They had always retreated when a new group pushed in on them. They always expected to be on the move. Persecution by the Russians had planted in the Doukhobors the seeds of distrust of other groups and people unlike themselves but mostly they distrusted government (Woodcock 1977). They were wary of the government and any organization associated with it. The Doukhobors saw only hostility in the actions of others. They resisted change and had always been able to repel outside forces that threatened them (Zubek, Solberg 1952). These were the feelings that accompanied them that September day at the Halifax harbor.
The “insider-outsider” portion of Indigenous Standpoint theory states that any action has to come from within the group. The Doukhobors made the choice to move out of Russia and then to Canada. In Russia the Doukhobors were constantly being persecuted and pushed to new lands. They consistently wondered “what will happen to us next?” This anxiety had the effect of strengthening their core values so that they would be able to move and keep up the traditions that had always bound them together.

**V. Canadian History**

Assisted by Tolstoy, as well as with funding from English and American Quakers, 7,400 Doukhobors sailed to Canada in 1898-1899. Many of them settled in Saskatchewan. They were granted the right to live as a community under Canadian immigration laws (Woodcock 2003). Peter Vergin joined his followers in 1902.

**Sources of Conflict**

*External* Initially, the migration appeared to be successful, but after three years in Saskatchewan, the Doukhobors were denied citizenship when they refused to take the Canadian oath of loyalty, because as it had been in Russia, the oath would force them to join the military (Woodcock, 1977). As a result of this refusal, their homesteading rights and privileges were revoked. They began to see themselves as reliving their Russian history. It was the same push effect that the Russian government had used.

Peter led his landless followers to Southern British Columbia where he purchased land and began another colony of about 6,000 (Doukhobor 1998). This
first wave of followers settled in 1908. They were referred to as “Freedomites” by
the local government and people (MacQueen 2002). “Freedomites” gave way to
“Sons of Freedom” (SOF) around 1910. The SOF was a reactionary group that
protested against the government and for the Doukhobor way of life. Every time
the local authorities would restrict the Doukhobors, the SOF would burn a
building or march naked through the streets. These protests also illustrated to the
younger generations what it meant to be Doukhobor.

During the 1930’s the effects of the Depression combined with other
financial and emotional misfortunes led to the destruction of the community. The
land was drying up and farming became difficult, and much of the Doukhobors’
land had to be sold back to the government so that families could feed themselves
and each other (Doukhobor 1998). Land had always been a source of pride for the
Doukhobors and having to give it up for food, which they had always been able to
grow or raise themselves, was devastating.

It was also around this time that Peter Vergin died, leaving his son, Peter
Vergin, Jr. to lead the fledgling community. By 1939 the remaining Doukhobor
land passed back to the Canadian government (Doukhobors 1998). A land dispute
was to become another source of conflict between the government and the
Doukhobors in years to come. Having to forfeit their land to the government
because they could no longer afford it wasn’t a choice that the Doukhobors
wanted to make and felt that they should be able to buy their own land back. The
government saw the land as government property and therefore theirs to control.
From the beginning of their settlement the Doukhobors had been allowed to educate their children as they saw fit. The children were taught their religion, their history, the Russian language, and reading and writing (Schuster 2001). By the 1950’s the Canadian government was insisting on taking over the children’s education.

When the Doukhobors moved to Canada they found themselves in conflict with both the Canadian government but also their Canadian neighbors. First the government wanted them to join the army and they refused. As it has in Russia, this argument caused the Doukhobors to re-identify with their pacifist ideology; however, in Canada they began also to protest against the government. The Doukhobors protest involved walking naked through the nearest town or burning down barns, theirs and their neighbors, as well as abandoned buildings. This protesting only added fuel to the governments’ fire that the Doukhobors should become assimilated into mainstream Canadian society and as a result the violence escalated.

*Internment* At the time W.A.C. Bennett (who was becoming increasingly intolerant of the Doukhobors, particularly the SOF) was running the B.C. government. The SOF had been protesting interference in their rights as a religious group (Doukhobor 1998). They were insistent that the B.C. government grant them these rights. This meant their abstaining from military service. Bennett wanted the SOF to stop burning abandoned barns and protesting naked in the city streets, but above all else he wanted their children in school (Doukhobor 1998). Bennett was worried that the children were learning what he saw as destructive
behaviors from their parents, and he saw the non-violent activism of the SOF as a potential problem (Doukhobor 1998).

These conflicts with the B.C government also increased the Doukhobors’ desire to educate their children. When the government and local school districts would press for Doukhobor children to go to public school, the Doukhobors would increase the intensity and consistency of their children’s education. They would also try to assert what it was to be Doukhobor by increasing their protests. The push against the government by the Doukhobors and the governments push against the Doukhobor way of life fits exactly with Simmel’s Conflict theory. The two groups retaliated against each other each time something happened, and as a result, the Doukhobors continued to define who they were and what they believed. They also reinforced the Doukhobor beliefs among their children through increased education.

The arguments over education also helped cultural solidify the Doukhobors. They were reinforcing their beliefs within their children; the children were included in protesting and were treated as individual human beings. Foley’s Marxist humanist approach confirms that this individualizing of children along with the traditional education created a more concrete cultural awareness among the Doukhobors.

In 1953 the W.A.C. Bennett Social Credit government formulated a plan to force the Doukhobors to put their children in school (Doukhobors 1998). The government imposed “mandatory secular education” upon the SOF’s children (Schuster 2001). Under the cloak of darkness the Royal Canadian Mounted Police
(RCMP) swooped down on the Doukhobor villages and carried their children away to the New Denver interment camp or “boarding school.” New Denver, deep in the scenic Selkirk Mountains, was at one time British Columbia’s most famous tuberculosis sanatorium as well as an interment camp for Japanese-Canadians during World War II (MacQueen 2002). The children were housed and educated under court order for ten years (Doukhobors 1998). More then 150 children were taken from their homes and bused to the New Denver facility (Schuster 2001). The hardships faced by the children at New Denver are still felt today.

They slept in bleak barracks-like dormitories. Corporal punishment was regularly administered. Allegations of sexual and physical abuse still persist today (MacQueen 2002). There were no holidays. Family visits were limited to one hour every other Sunday and could be conducted only through the wire mesh fencing that the children themselves had erected (MacQueen 2002). They were allowed to hug and kiss their parents only through the fence and if any male were caught in the act he would be whipped (Schuster 2001). Many children stayed as long as six years, until they were fifteen (MacQueen 2002). They would be beaten for speaking Russian to each other instead of English. However many never were able to learn English because none of the teachers spoke Russian (Schuster 2001). By 1959 when the SOF protests had settled down, the damage had already been done to the children and the “school” was closed. In 1977 survivors began the legal process of getting compensation and a simple apology from the government. They are still awaiting the apology.
At the time of “internment” the Doukhobors felt so outraged that the protesting swelled to such a level that many protesters were placed under house arrest. Simmel argues that these “back and forth” between the groups are necessary for true “in-group” growth. It had just that effect. Every time the Canadian government tried to quell the Doukhobors, they found new ways of stating what it was to be a Doukhobor.

VI. Conclusion

Born out of conflict, the Doukhobors are a people who have always struggled against the ruling governments of every nation they have encountered, but through it all they have survived. The Russians’ pushing them farther and farther into the mountains taught them to be better herders as well as efficient farmers. The move to Canada quieted many of the fears that some Doukhobors had about their culture and religion. They were happy to have a place of their own at first. Their fights with the Canadian government and the subsequent internment of Doukhobor children helped crystallize in many Doukhobor minds who and what they were and, most importantly, why they are pacifists. As of 2000 the Doukhobors number 30,000 across Canada, and most belong to the Orthodox Doukhobors or the United Spiritual Communities of Christ (USCC) (Schuster 2001). Peter Vergin’s great-grandson John J. Vergin now heads the USCC (Doukhobors 1998). These two forums bring out the best of Doukhobor culture and heritage, not only to Doukhobor descendents but also to the Canadian people. The Doukhobors also count 2,000 in Naples and 6,000 in
Russia among their numbers. The Canadian Doukhobors have their own church still respect their ancestor’s way of life.

Through Marxist Humanist and Conflict theories and using the lens of Indigenous Standpoint we are better able to understand the Doukhobors struggles and eventual outcome. Marxist Humanism explains the Doukhobor culture because their belief system says they are the only ones who decide their fate and everything they do must be done on this Earth. Conflict theory helps explain not only why the Doukhobors found themselves in so many disagreements with the ruling government but also how that conflict kept them alive and thriving for centuries.

The Doukhobors are a proud and creative people; their cultural traditions have survived though many years of conflict and, like the people who created them, have endured.
Bibliography


