



*International Conference*

# RELIGION AND WAR IN UKRAINE

The Political,  
the Public, and  
the Possible

March 14th-16th, 2024

Telus 134 - Telus International Centre  
University of Alberta  
11104 87 Ave NW - Edmonton

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Session: Transnational Dynamics of the Religious  
Landscape, Part II

11:00AM MST, March 16, 2024

## **Endangered Community Archives and Applied Anthropology in Times of War**

Tatiana Vagramenko, senior postdoctoral researcher at University College Cork

The study provides ethnographic reflections on the lives of community archives during wartime in Ukraine, focusing on their role as tangible repositories of historical memory, particularly vulnerable amidst Russia's military aggression. I follow the story of several archives belonging to minority religious communities in Ukraine. Given their minority status and sometimes lack of official registration with state authorities, these communities fight on their own to protect their historical legacy, archives, their prayer houses and, at times, their very lives. The archives in the focus of this research were either relocated, smuggled, destroyed, stolen or, conversely, opened after several decades of being concealed from outsiders' eyes. What unite them all is their shared history deeply rooted in the Soviet past, a time marked by suppression, secrecy, and control. This legacy of secrecy and survival continues to shape the fate of these communities and their archives today.

The ongoing war bears the ghosts of the Soviet past, profoundly impacting the religious landscape in Ukraine and across the former Soviet region. Russia's aggression since 2014, with its major escalation since February 2022, ruptured post-Soviet religious alliances, fostering new identities and moral dilemmas. As most Protestant movements formed during the Soviet period, wartime disintegration prompts a painful reassessment of historical identities and memory. The process of rescuing, revising and re-narrating community archives reflects how historical narrative serves as a vital tool for processing the enduring Soviet legacy and navigating both historical and contemporary traumas of wartime Ukraine.

Tatiana Vagramenko is a social anthropologist and a religious studies scholar. She is currently a senior postdoctoral researcher at University College Cork and a principal investigator of the SFI-IRC Pathway-funded project "History Declassified: The KGB and the Religious Underground in Soviet Ukraine." Her work focuses on the anthropology of religion in post-Soviet Ukraine and Russia and the complex history of the entanglement of religion with the Soviet secret police and its legacy in the post-communist context. She is a co-editor, with James Kapaló, of *Hidden Galleries: Material Religion in the Secret Police Archives in Central and Eastern Europe* (2020, Lit Verlag) and, with Nadezhda Beliakova, of *The Lives of Soviet Secret Agents: Religion and Police Surveillance in the USSR* (2024, Lexington Books). She received her PhD in anthropology from the National University of Ireland Maynooth.

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