

BETWEEN HEROISM AND SAINTHOOD: THE VENERATION OF NEW MARTYRS IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIA

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Abstract

This thesis explores the dynamics of veneration and commemoration of new martyrs in contemporary Russia. Through a comparative analysis of two case studies – the new martyrs and confessors of Russia canonized in 2000 and soldier Yevgeny Rodionov who was not beatified, but is actively venerated by many as a folk saint – the present research seeks to identify what features secure the popularity of a saint in modern society and what notion of martyrdom the popular image of martyr-warrior Yevgeny conveys. I argue that popular veneration of Yevgeny that combines both the religious practices of saint's worship and the secular practices of a national hero commemoration can be explained through the peculiar conception of martyrdom the saint's hagiographic narratives construct, which modern believers find intelligible, relatable, and worthy of imitation. This conception departs from more conventional images of martyrdom, like the one represented by the case of new martyrs and confessors of Russia, in several respects: in the way it construes martyr's agency and its significance in the act; in the way it conceptualizes martyrdom on a temporal level – as an outcome of a momentary decision, rather than a lengthy Christian discipleship; and finally, in the way it envisions the purposeful aspect of martyrdom – as a strategic sacrifice for collective, rather than as an act of witnessing for God. Such shift reflects an image of 'active' or 'militant' martyrdom that is accepted and actively promoted by the nationalistic segment of contemporary Orthodox believers.

Keywords: new martyrs, popular veneration, politics of memory, moral project.

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Introduction

The tidal wave of religious revival that hit Russia after the collapse of the Soviet regime brought about not only popular interest in Orthodoxy and resurrection of religious practices in contemporary society, but also the need to reestablish the continuity of religious tradition. Religious practices, perceived by many as archaic, need to be fit into the dynamics of modern life, while the modernity itself is to be fit into the transcendental narrative frame dictated by the religious tradition. To say this is not to suggest that the two are mutually incompatible or temporally disjunct – after all, the secular Soviet mode of thinking, which limited the definition of religion to the belief in supernatural beings, attempted to eradicate only this aspect of spirituality while appropriating other types of practices pertaining to the religious mode of living and thinking (Luehrmann 2011: 6). Modernity and tradition is more of a rhetorically constructed opposition, used both in the modernist and in the traditionalist discourses to signify two different, but only seemingly conflicting, vectors of development. The rhetoric of rupture not only allows making a distinction between secular and religious, which are constructed as an antithesis of each other (Asad 2003), but it also gives Orthodoxy a chance to engage into the discourses of spiritual revival and celebrate a new beginning, which is legitimated by the inherited tradition, but at the same time purified from the sins of past generations. However, for this legitimization to occur rhetoric of continuity is needed to bridge the imaginary gap and stress the succession between old and modern Orthodoxy.

One of the strategies chosen by the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) to reinstate continuity was the production of new saints – the creation of images that simultaneously embody the canonical churchly ideals and possess features making them closer and more relatable to modern society (Kormina and Shtyrkov 2011). Hagiographical narratives, that can

function both in a past-oriented descriptive modes and future-directed prescriptive ones, help to reinstate the continuity between the past, the present and the projections of future (Jensen 2010). The quite diverse and yet careful selection of the persons chosen for beatification – from the famous historical and cultural figures to the royal family of the last tsar Nikolas II and the clergymen repressed under the Soviet regime, reflects not only a desire to reinstate continuity, but also an attempt to implement a certain moral project seeking to redefine who can be considered a righteous person and what kind of life contemporary believers should seek to imitate. Such a project can be implemented through the creation of what Humphrey (1997: 34) calls “moral exemplars” – individual role models, which establish a precedent and provide an ostensive guidance on how to behave in a particular situation. The fact that recent canonizations triggered a whole range of different reactions in the society – from the heated debates for and against canonization of certain figures to the utter indifference to the glorification of others – suggests that it is worth examining not only what kind of moral project certain actors are trying to design, but which projects are accepted or rejected by different communities and why.

The religious revival that brought back the ideal of symphonic unity of orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationality coincided with a steady rise of nationalistic and militaristic views in modern Russian society (Turunen 2007). The church became an active propagator of patriotic upbringing, Orthodox military-patriotic clubs providing army-style intensive physical training both for the youth and for adults functioning on the bases of a church becoming a common phenomenon. The modern Orthodox nationalists felt a grim need in their own new heroes whose example would inspire reverence and imitation. Figure 1 presents an iconic image of one such hero of our times whose canonization as a martyr is actively advocated for by many nationalistically-oriented Orthodox activists. It is Yevgeny Rodionov,



Figure 1. An Icon of Yevgeny Rodionov

Source: <http://phtiziatr.ru/nnews/obcshestvo/184/?nnew=1569>

a Russian soldier who was taken hostage and killed in Chechnya in 1996 for refusing to take off his cross and convert to Islam. The inscription on the cross put on Yevgeny's grave in the small village cemetery in Satino-Russkoye reads: "Here lies a Russian soldier Yevgeny Rodionov, who was defending his fatherland and did not abjure Christ, executed near Bamut on May 23, 1996." This thesis will explore how a nineteen year old soldier, who did not regularly go to church or observe any of the Orthodox rites, became the saint in camouflage and the 21 century symbol of Orthodoxy and Russian nationalism. The construction of the image of the new martyr helps to fit modernity into the sacred temporal frame of the apocalyptic battle between God and Satan (Fenster cited in Hardin and Stewart 2003). Secular politics and phenomena of contemporary social life, when incorporated into religious discourse, result in the merging of the historical time with the biblical time (Naumescu 2011), thus producing a new framework for making sense of the events of modern history, like the Chechen war.

Yevgeny's fame and his popular veneration far surpass that of many canonized martyrs. For instance, the new martyrs and confessors of Russia – more than three hundred

clergymen and lay believers who became victims of the Soviet repressions and were beatified in 2000, still remain unknown and unvenerated by the broader society. This suggests that there are some peculiarities in the way martyrdom, heroism and sainthood are conceptualized in Yevgeny's case, which make this 'moral project' successful and which prompt certain segments of Russian believers choose this role model over other alternatives actively promoted by the church. This thesis will explore how the image of Yevgeny as a martyr is constructed and what vision of martyrdom such an image harbors.

The first chapter will discuss the problem of intermingling of religious and nationalist domains in modernity, which is crucial for explaining the popularity of the soldier Yevgeny, who represents both loyalty to the Orthodox faith and to the Russian nation. This chapter will also give an overview of the evolution of the Christian concept of martyrdom, particularly the problem of locating agency in martyrdom and the conceptualization of suffering in terms of activity and passivity. The second chapter will examine the shape popular and institutional practices of martyrs' veneration take on in modern Russia. Through a comparative analysis of the cases of Yevgeny Rodionov and the new martyrs and confessors of Russia the chapter will try to explain what features secure the popularity of a saint in contemporary Russian society and what type of martyrdom the modern Orthodox nationalists embrace. The third chapter will discuss how the image of Yevgeny as a martyr, which combines both religious saintly and secular heroic features, transforms the understanding of martyrdom itself. I will argue that Yevgeny's martyrdom departs from the idea of martyrdom as it is envisioned in the case of the new martyrs and confessors of Russia and in some traditional theological discourses in several respects: in the way it imagines martyr's agency and its significance in the act; in the way it conceptualizes martyrdom on a temporal level; and finally, in the way it envisions the purposeful aspect of martyrdom. I will argue that such shift results in the emergence of an image of 'active' or 'heroic' martyrdom, which is more comprehensible and suitable to the

present-day militaristically-oriented Orthodox nationalists. The chapter will conclude by examining how the secular nationalist and religious elements collide in the practices of commemoration and veneration of Yevgeny blurring the boundaries between heroism and sainthood in the representations of the martyr-warrior's image.

Chapter 1: Religion, Militarism, and Martyrdom in Modernity

1.1. Religion and Nationalism in Modernity

Though the problem of religious resurgence and nationalism in Russia receives broad scholarly attention, most researchers working on the topic tend to explain the growing dominance of Orthodox Christianity as a result of a profound political and ideological crisis and a search for a new unifying national idea (see e.g. Burges 2009; Dubin 1998; Dunlop 1990; Gerasimov 2005; Jackson 1999; Knox 2006; Rock 2002). The fall of the Soviet system and the communist ideology that was the glue sustaining the state and the national unity for more than half a century, certainly played its role in generating mass sense of uncertainty and insecurity, which made many people more apt to turn to the church for solution. Indeed, democratic reforms helped the Russian Orthodox Church regain its legitimacy and come out from underground, while the new state's policy directed at creating a new ethical subject (Muehlebach 2012) helped to popularize Orthodoxy entrusting it with the authority to produce new models of virtue, but this alone cannot fully explain the phenomenon of modern Russian religiosity that varies broadly from milder forms of so-called 'irregular believers' – people viewing Orthodoxy as part of their identity but poorly familiar with religious doctrine and ritual practices (Kormina and Shtyrkov 2011) to the more extreme forms of rigorous piousness and radical eschatologism. I believe that the Orthodox fundamentalism, which bears a close resemblance to the so-called fundamentalist religious movements in the United States and in many other countries, cannot be viewed as a mere by-product of a political project aiming at creating a new national ideology; rather it should be studied in the context of the global rise of religious fundamentalism and nationalism around the world often stirred by

the challenges of modernity (Asad 2003; Juergensmeyer 2008; Marty and Appleby 1995; Taylor 2006; Walters 2007).

One potential explanation for the easy combinability of faith and nationalism is the similarity in the way ethnic and religious imaginary communities construct themselves through assumed, naturalized (related to blood and territory) and symbolized (myth-based) genealogies (Hervieu-Léger: 2000: 157). Agadjanian and Roudometof (2005: 7) propose viewing religion as a “genre of identity” – one of many ways of symbolically expressing and constituting a collective identity. The fragmentation of identities by modernity as well as dissolution of religious traditions within a fragmented mass of symbols and values shift the boundaries between ethnic and religious entities resulting in their overlapping and even superimposing over one another. Religious tradition is in a constant flux, reshaping, transforming and reinventing itself, while still preserving its appeal to the past in order to legitimize its claim over the present and the future (Hervieu-Léger 2000). Religious tradition cannot be simply contrasted to modernity or measured against it, for as Talal Asad (2003: 59) pointed out modernity itself is always in the making – it is a set of moral and political projects, developmental vectors a community accepts. In contemporary Russia these vectors often curiously combine the Western libertarian principles with a promise to preserve and reinforce the values of the ‘traditional’ Russian way of life. As Agadjanian and Roudometof (2005: 6) put it “being “traditional” and “archaic” *now* means to be accepted as such and to be offered a certain functional niche.” Another central functional niche of what Keane (2013: 159) calls “the moral narrative of modernity” is occupied by secularism, which is presented as not simply ethical, but compulsory, failing to be a proper secular subject being perceived as something that might present a threat to others. In Russia, where religion and politics have always been closely intertwined, the narrative of modernity seems to incorporate both the secular – conceived as rational and pragmatic and contrasted to the blind fanaticism of

Islamists, and the religious in the form of Orthodoxy – understood as the repository of traditional values and morality and opposed to the amoral Western consumerist life style.

Hervieu-Léger (2000: 29) maintains that one characteristic feature of religiosity in modernity is a breach in the link between beliefs and practices that can be manifested both in beliefs taking on a new shape and being expressed in new practices, as well as in the dissociation of traditional practices from their original dogmatic meaning, their reappropriation and refunctioning. In the case of the neo-martyrs' worship both processes take place, mutually generating each other: on the one hand new practices of veneration of martyrs often bordering on secular forms of heroes' commemoration appear, on the other – these forms by producing new contexts and meanings contribute to the transformation and expansion of the concept of martyrdom itself. Following the framework proposed by Hervieu-Léger (2000: 161), I am going to view ethnic and religious components of the practices of Yevgeny's veneration as mutually reinforcing, constituting a dual process of “the ethno-symbolic homogenization of traditional religious (confessional) identities and ... the neo-religious recharging of ethnic identities,” both processes becoming the vehicle enabling the propagation of the martyr-soldier's moral project.

1.2. Martyrdom as Testimony

Martyrdom in the literal translation from Greek means ‘testimony’ or ‘witness’; it can be viewed as a communicative act and as such it is always susceptible to interpretation (Jensen 2010). In its phenomenology martyrdom is “one of the most literal acts possible, both as an action and in terms of its end product, that is, a dead body” (Lambek 2007: 27); however, when it comes to the retrospective reading of the event, things get murkier. The judgment about martyrdom, which always occurs retrospectively, is often a result of speculations about the motives and intentions of those who can no longer speak for themselves. As Verdery (1999: 28) has demonstrated in her insightful analysis of the parading

of dead bodies in post-socialist Europe, corpses can function as symbols, signifiers that can be endowed with different meanings, while their materiality allows creating the illusion of concreteness and univocacy. The act of martyrdom is the first step in symbolical and, one can argue, physical – the relics of martyrs being perceived by Christians as “the *membra Christi* par excellence” (Brown 1981: 72) – resignification of a body, but it is far from being the last one. Martyrs’ relics and shrines are what Keane (2008: 114) calls semiotic forms; it is their material manifestation that makes them available and interpretable to the public; however there is no guarantee that the interpretations they produce will be identical. Such semantic flexibility makes martyrs a very instrumental mediator for memory and an excellent tool for history-making and remaking, for their immanent testimony, when put in different contexts, can acquire new meanings and connotations.

As Peter Brown’s (1981: 38) discussion of the history of emergence of the cult of saints in Latin Christianity demonstrates, the corporeal nature of these semiotic forms allows certain actors to step in and become the mediators controlling access to the holy patrons, while also trying to claim monopoly over the interpretations of these powerful cultural symbols, which occurs not only through the physical control of sacred space, but also through the fabrication of hagiographic narratives – another type of semiotic forms that can be filled with different contents. For a martyr to become a popularly accepted role model he has to be both distant enough to inspire admiration, and close and intelligible enough for his testimony to be imitable. For this reason the bureaucratic process of canonization, which presents a well-run mechanism of memory-making, has to be constantly adjusted to the demands of the historical epoch. Thus, new criteria for the recognition of martyrological testimonies emerge, often very specific and applicable only to a particular historical context, as in the case of new martyrs and confessors of Russia.

The peculiarity of a Christian martyrological testimony is that, allegedly, it always has one similar message and requires interpretation only on the level of status, but not content; the tricky part is recognizing a communicative act itself. For if Jesus was the primary martyr, then his followers who choose to imitate him do not bear their own testimony, they simply ‘perform the Scriptures’ (Lash cited in Jensen 2010) this way “extending” themselves as subjects and continuing Christ’s work of witness (Asad 2000: 36). Hence, the problem of decoding the message of this ‘communicative act’ does not arise because the witnessing of all Christian martyrs are just multiple variations of reenactment of one proto-message. At the same time each singular act of performance is very important for it expands the witnessing repertoire in terms of form, creating typologies of the way God’s providence works, which, in turn, themselves become the bases for recognizing new testimonies as such (Jensen 2010: 44). For instance, the martyrological reading of Yevgeny Rodionov’s story became possible precisely because it possesses a number of features that easily fit into the typical structure of the narrative of martyrdom, making the dead soldier’s act look like a statement, even though finding out his real motives and intentions is impossible at this point.

Smith (1997: 117) provides an account of how the early Christian concept of martyrdom, which often viewed suffering for Christ as an end in itself and the only sure way of getting to heaven, in the twelfth century underwent a transformation and substantial reconfiguration of ends to means relationship, making righteous life (as church defined it), not death the main indicator of piety. Jensen (2010: 5, 14) maintains that martyrdom in the conventional Christian understanding is not the end goal in itself, but rather an outcome of discipleship and witness, for in certain circumstances it becomes the only way of remaining faithful to oneself and one’s creed; violent death is the consequence of the witness, not the content of it. In this sense the act of testimony becomes a form of expressing one’s Christian identity and negating alternative ways of “describing one’s self by means of (for example)

security, pleasure, power, action, nationhood, ethnicity or honor” (Jensen 2010: 2). For example St. Augustine, although maintaining that the final individual act of choice can be described as spontaneous, also stresses that it should be prepared by a long ‘corrective’ process of teaching – *disciplina* (Brown quoted in Asad 1993: 34). As opposed to the modern conception of self-justifiable choices existing *sui generis*, the Medieval Christian discourse treats righteous deeds as an outcome of virtuous desire cultivated through bodily and spiritual discipline (Asad 1993: 126). In this regard momentary motives and choices behind the act of self-sacrifice is not a common framework for thinking about martyrdom in the theological discourses, because the testimonial act of suffering is part of a Christian habitus, an outcome of being who one essentially is and remaining true to one’s self (Asad 2000: 38). While many modern discourses consider spontaneity to be an expression of one’s true nature as opposed to other types of representational “outer” behaviors, the Christian “disciplinary program” directed at spiritual perfection implies consistency of “outer behavior” and “inner motive,” making piousness reflected in everyday observance of religious regulations the only means of authenticating one’s faith and motives (Asad 1993: 64).

Even when imagined as part of a path of discipleship, martyrdom still has a demarcating aspect to it – it signals a passage to a new stage. In this context Lambek’s conceptualization of sacrifice as a beginning can be helpful. Lambek (2007: 21) distinguishes between origins, that signify an emergence of something out of nothing, and beginnings, that are multiple and that always “emerge against what precedes them.” As opposed to origins, which are events created by extra-human forces, beginnings, argues Lambek, are actions and as such require an intentional agent. For Lambek (2007: 23, 32) sacrifice, that “draws a line in blood between ‘before’ and ‘after’” is a “materialization of intention and a consummation of resolution,” a combination of “the ethical consequentiality of judgment with the decisiveness of choice.” He describes sacrifice as an ultimate expression

of ‘determination,’ – something that oscillated between “free agency and inevitable coercion” (Lambek 2007: 26).

Asad (2007) when addressing the phenomenon of modern society’s obsession with motives and intentions, convincingly argues that it is an outcome of the modern liberal thought’s tendency of distinguishing between morally good and morally evil ways of dying and killing; in this context intentions become crucial, because assessing an agent’s motive is the only way of drawing the line between the two. The conscience of an individual believer, his moods and motivations replace discipline as an index of true faith in modern Christianity (Asad 1993). Since the act of Yevgeny (who did not lead a righteous life) can hardly be ascribed to Christian habitus, it is precisely for this reason that the assessment of his motives becomes central for acknowledging him as a martyr. Yevgeny came to Chechnya to serve his country as a soldier; can it be possible that in his death his only motive was to serve God? A Christian martyr is “a citizen of the heavenly kingdom” supposedly having only secondary allegiance to all other forms of authority, including statehood (Jensen 2010: 107). The problem with Yevgeny’s ‘testimony,’ if one decides to view it as such, is that it is impossible to say if it was one asserting his loyalty to Christ or to the nation – the two have merged together turning the soldier’s act into a mimesis of Orthodoxy and nation – an embodiment of the Russian nationalist ideal. Jensen (2010: 37) observes that whenever martyrdom transforms into an ideal there always emerges a tendency to “localize and tribalize” it, claiming that “the martyr is one who dies for *us*, i.e. for what we already are as a people or a nation, not for some ideal or possibility which all people everywhere may be invited to imitate.” As Verdery (1999) demonstrates sometimes such localizing claim over what a martyr represent (whatever it might be) is even made through the physical movement of a dead body in space. As for the resent-day Orthodox nationalists, trying to distinguish whether Yevgeny died for faith or for

his country is not so essential, because either way it was self-sacrifice for collective to which they imagine belonging.

1.3. The Transformation of the Concept of Martyrdom

Since martyrdom is a form of communication, then witnessing requires a presence of communicative intent and hence, agency. Martyrdom, as it is conceived in the traditional Christian discourses, does harbor an implied idea of agency – a choice of discipleship a person makes – but this agency is rarely emphasized; on the contrary, martyrdom is often described in terms of passivity: it is “not an assertion of the self through action, but rather a suffering act which refuses that assertion,” for a martyr refuses to do anything except for submitting himself to the will of God (Jensen 2010: 14, 123). Martyrdom is a path of ‘loyal resistance’ that occurs through suffering rather than through action, it is an “action by means of submission” (Lambek 2007: 31), which is simultaneously a critique of the earthly world and the human order and an acceptance of it for it was created by God (Jensen 2010: 108, 112). Jensen stresses that Christ’s witnesses themselves are never the provocateurs of conflict for “they are sent out as sheep amongst wolves and are to be innocent as doves” (Mt. 10.16 quoted in Jensen 2010).

The early Christian martyrologists do not feel the need to stress martyr’s agency, because they understand suffering and the way it is embraced and subjectively experienced by a devoted Christian as already a type of action. However, such an interpretation becomes problematic in the modern liberal world that construes pain as an opposite of action, suffering being something that “progressive agency aims to eliminate” (Asad 2000:30). Asad (2000) proposes a different framework on how one can locate agency in pain, arguing that suffering itself can be seen as a type of action, a subjective process of structuring an experience. In such a reading martyrdom is active, not only because a martyr chooses to suffer (a position of a sacrifice offerer already evokes a strong idea of agency (Lambek 2007: 28), but also because

he is the one who suffers, *lives* the experience, openness to pain being “part of the structure of martyrs’ agency as Christians” (Asad 2000: 46). At the same time the idea of martyr’s individual agency is also partially undermined in Christian martyrological discourses, for when he or she endures pain that goes far beyond the human limits, he does it not through his strength alone, but through the grace granted to him by God (Brown 1981: 79).

Lambek (2007: 31) argues that in sacrifice action and passion co-exist in a dialectical relationship: “it is not dying in a simple, passive sense, or killing in a simple, active sense”; a martyr does not just passively accept death, because he transforms it into life, into a new beginning (Lienhardt cited in Lambek). In the Biblical narrative both the martyrs and their persecutors come across as mere instruments of God’s providence executing the divine plan; Christ’s sacrifice on the cross “instituted not a form of slaying, but of dying only” (Saint Augustine cited in Smith 1997: 92). This suggests that the traditional Christian conception of martyrdom conveys an almost positive image of suffering that as witnessing has a generative and transformative power, pain becoming a moral necessity and a way of exercising virtue (Asad 2000: 47).

Building on Charles Taylor’s theory of identity as authenticity and truthfulness to self, Jensen (2010: 17) argues that the notion of martyrdom is rejected by many contemporary societies as “inauthentic and destructive form of identity.” Humility in the form of self-abasement as Asad (1993: 167) puts it “is no longer admired in “normal” Christianity” coming to be associated with the forms of personality disorders. Indeed, to many members of contemporary Russian society the ‘passive’ type of martyrdom that has as its goal solely a discipleship to Christ might seem incomprehensible and deprived of purpose and meaning. This also suggests that the principles of the secularist moral narrative of modernity, which presents Medieval theological thinking and practices as its main historical ‘Other’ (Keane 2013), equally influences the believers’ perception of religion in modernity: the Orthodox

activists adhering to anti-modern and anti-globalist views, are themselves not exempt from the influences of the modern Western libertarian discourses. They try reclaiming the space of religion in the moral narrative of modernity by adjusting the doctrine to certain secular liberal standards and values, while continuing to negate others.

Christian identity does not simply rest on identification with the victim as such, but with the victim that is vindicated (Jensen 2010: 85). In the traditional Christian conception the act of willful suffering of a believer already conveys meaning and this way contains a vindication in itself (Jensen 2010: 111). However, to the modern results-oriented and obsessed with efficiency audience, the distant perspective of vindication in the heavenly court does not seem too appealing, they prefer to envision vindication in terms of more immediate, ‘here and now’ results. Asad (1993: 136) points out that the Medieval Christian notion of discipline was never connected to strategy. However, in some contemporary discourses “martyrdom as a vocation” (Smith 1997: 12), and self-sacrifice as a way of living, come to be substituted by a strategic sacrifice of something less significant in order to secure the victorious endgame. Discussing the history of religious suicide in the colonial Islamic Asia Dale (1988: 47) describes how the strategy of suicide terror that initially sought to bring maximum destruction to the enemies, when proved unsuccessful against the military power of the Europeans, transformed into the concept of ‘private jihad’— acts of violence motivated not so much by elaborate strategic considerations and understanding of how a particular act can contribute to the successfulness of the ‘global’ or ‘national’ jihad, but committed with the goal of attaining paradise. In Yevgeny’s hagiographic narratives a reverse shift occurs: from an act of personal testimony to God, martyrdom turns into a strategic self-sacrifice for collective, thus breaking away from the stigma of fanaticism that modernist discourses associate with the Islamist martyrdom. When conceptualized as sacrifice for collective

martyrdom both reinforces continuity and social cohesion making each member of the community a direct beneficiary of the ‘gift’ and also provides an ethical model of loyalty.

Chapter 2: The Making of the New Martyrs

2.1. Methodology

All ethnographic data presented in this thesis is an outcome of the month-long field work I conducted in April 2013 in Moscow and in Satino-Russkoye, the village where the grave of Yevgeny Rodionov – that has become a pilgrimage site for many Orthodox believers – is located. Yevgeny's grave in Satino-Russkoye located near the church of God's Ascension was a strategic site for exploring some of the material and symbolic forms of veneration and commemoration of the soldier-martyr as well as the controversies they cause, for this 'sacred' space is a subject of a constant contestation by different actors, causing endless tensions between the dean and the parish of the local church and the pilgrims visiting the site. I have conducted a set of extensive ethnographic interviews with Father Dmitri – the dean of the Church of God's Ascension, and some of his parish members with the goal of finding out why they see Yevgeny as a problematic candidate for sainthood and why they oppose his veneration. I also visited Yevgeny's mother Lubov Rodionova residing in a nearby village – Kurilovo, who is in charge of taking care of Yevgeny's grave and who participates in the organization of Yevgeny's commemoration day held yearly in Satino-Russkoye cemetery on May 23. The purpose of the ethnographic interviews, combined with participant-observation method when possible, was to capture the existing practices of veneration and commemoration of Yevgeny, which include both the mystical forms of veneration of him as a folk saint and more secularized glorification of the soldier as a national hero.

My field research in Moscow was centered around the Butovo memorial complex built up at the site of the mass burial of the victims of Soviet repressions, many of which have been canonized as new martyrs and confessors of Russia in 2000. The complex functions both as a

place of worship and as a museum and center for historical research. My main goals behind the interviews with the staff members of the Butovo memorial complex were to explore the strategies employed by the ROC to promote the glorification of new martyrs as well as to grasp the scale and nature of their veneration in contemporary Russia. During my stay in Moscow I also have conducted several ethnographic interviews with the members of the Orthodox Military-Patriotic club “Volunteer in the name of great martyr Dmitri of Solunski” who follow the churchly politics of canonization with big interest, because as a club with a military orientation, they are engaged in an active search of moral exemplars that would best meet their needs and standards.

One-on-one semi-structured ethnographic interviews that help produce an insightful understanding of informants’ attitude to the problem and their personal motifs allowed grasping more accurately the full spectrum of reasons behind the campaign for canonization of Yevgeny as a new martyr as well as counter-arguments against it, this method also helped finding out how particular actors understand the meaning of sainthood and how they personally relate to Yevgeny’s image as a hero or as a martyr (Bernard 1995). The names of all informants are changed to protect their anonymity, except for the public figures - the sculptor Andrei Korobzov who created the monument devoted to the warrior Yevgeny and Lubov Rodionova who is my main informant and the central figure of this narration. To complement and contextualize the data collected in course of the ethnographic fieldwork the discourse analysis strategy was employed: I examined a number of Orthodox nationalist web-forums and web-sites devoted to Yevgeny Rodionov in order to get a more comprehensive account of what type of groups promote the reverence of Yevgeny and what kind of image of the soldier as a potential role model they are trying to produce (Tonkiss 1988; Ruiz Ruiz 2009).

2.2. Martyr-Warrior Yevgeny Rodionov

About sixty kilometers away from Moscow lies a tiny village called Satino-Russkoye where a small picturesque Church of the God's Ascension dating back to the fifteenth century is located. Adjacent to the church lies the local cemetery, the population of which far exceeds the living population of Satino-Russkoye that at the time of 2005 census constituted 28 people. Several years ago an exciting event happened in the life of the church's parish – it gained its own saint. In 2004 the former dean of the church Timopheyy Uljanov, who was arrested during the Soviet regime and perished in a labor camp, by the decision of the Holy Synod was ranked among the new martyrs and confessors of Russia canonized during the Hierarch's Council of the Russian Orthodox Church in August 2000. However, it was not father Timopheyy who turned Satino-Russkoye into a site of pilgrimage attracting visitors not just from all over Russia, but from all around the globe. The man who brought this out-of-the-way village an international fame lies in the local cemetery adjacent to the church; his name is Yevgeny Rodionov. Unlike father Timopheyy, Yevgeny did not spend his life, which turned out to be very short, in prayers and divine services and his sainthood has never been acknowledged by the ROC, yet to the thousands of believers he was destined to become the new symbol of Russian Orthodoxy and nationalism.

The story of Yevgeny's earthly life is a very short and simple one: he was born in 1977; when he turned eighteen he was called to the army and soon deployed in Chechnya where he was captured alongside with three fellow soldiers by the Chechen militants during an attack on their block-post; after one hundred days of captivity he was executed on his nineteenth birthday. The history of Yevgeny's posthumous existence is more complex and seems to be far from being finished. Yevgeny Rodionov could have shared the fate of thousands of other young boys thrown into the mist of the Chechen conflict and forgotten by everyone after their death if it was not for a little metal cross – quite an uncommon adornment

for the young people of that time – that Yevgeny had been wearing permanently since he was eleven years old and that played a fatal role in his tragic fate. After a hundred days of brutal torture and a refusal to provide a close relative's address, so that a ransom demand could be sent, Yevgeny was given a choice: to take off his cross and convert to Islam or to die. Yevgeny chose the cross and for that was beheaded on May 23 1996; all of his three comrades shared his lamentable fate, but none of them became so known and venerated by the Russian people as Zhenya Rodionov – the boy who chose the cross.

Yevgeny's story would have never gone viral and the circumstances of his death would have never become known if it was not for the courageous deed of his mother who bravely went to Chechnya to search for her son and single-handedly managed to do what the entire Russian army could not or did not want to do at the moment – find out what happened to Yevgeny. When Lubov Rodionova received a telegram claiming that her son was a deserter, she refused to believe it and went to Chechnya to find out what happened for herself. There she was met by Yevgeny's commanding officer who reluctantly admitted that the conclusion about desertion was too hasty, that the soldiers must have been taken hostage and that there was nothing he can do for them. This is how Lubov's personal purgatory started. Rodionova sold her apartment – the only property she had and started the searching. She walked almost the entire Chechnya going from village to village, often without any escort, trying to find out anything about the location of her son. She managed to personally meet with almost every militant leader wanted by the Russian army; after one such meeting her companion – a father who was also looking for his son was shot dead, Lubov herself was brutally beaten but miraculously survived the traumas that were barely compatible with life (Smirnov 2012). Even when it became clear that her son was no longer alive, Lubov continued the search determined to bring Zhenya back no matter what. The strength of spirit and the boundless love (her name in Russian means precisely this – 'love') this woman has

demonstrated touched many people, her deed being perceived by many as one worthy of that of her son's. Lubov personifies both the Soviet image of the strong Mother(land) and the biblical image of all-loving Mother of God – the two powerful archetypes that are as significant for the contemporary Russian national consciousness as the cross itself.

The history of her finding Yevgeny's remains can easily compete with any history of miraculous discovery of a saint's relics. When Lubov finally got in contact with the man who captured and killed her son, he put three equally unfeasible as it seemed at the time conditions on which he would agree to show her the site of the burial: a \$4000 ransom for all four bodies; the demining of the Bamut territory; and the release of three Chechen militants held in Russian prisons (Smirnov 2012). Lubov managed to do all of this, and her informer finally revealed the place. Lubov with few volunteers had to dig up the bodies in the middle of the night in complete darkness; it was when she was about to completely lose faith that she saw the blinking of a metal cross - that was Zhenya. The story, however, did not end with this. When the bodies were brought to Russia for the medical examination it turned out that Yevgeny's head was missing. Distressed and exhausted with no escort and no money left to pay to the local informers, Lubov returned to Chechnya. She confronted directly the person who showed her the burial site, accusing him of fraud. He did not try to deny; instead he went somewhere and then brought back several pieces of a scalp – in accordance with a Chechen superstition, the scalps are broken and buried separately to ensure that the victims will not haunt their tormentors after death (Smirnov 2012). Yevgeny's remains were finally brought home on 20 November, the day of memory of the Melitinski martyrs – Roman Christian legionnaires beheaded in the third century for refusing to give up Christianity. Yevgeny was buried in Satino-Russkoye's cemetery next to the church of God's Ascension named in the honor of a holiday celebrated by Orthodox people on May 23 – the day of birth and death of Yevgeny Rodionov.

When Yevgeny's story got into the press, the glorification of his deed began. First he was venerated as a national hero who chose not to betray his motherland and his nation; later the spiritual aspect of his deed came to be more accentuated and an active campaign for the canonization of Yevgeny began. In the beginning it were Orthodox Church activists who played a major role in the popularization of Yevgeny's story and the spread of religious reading of his deed; the church that was at the time still struggling to establish authority in a 'godless' and 'morally-corrupt' society saw a chance to make use of Yevgeny's story and create a new role model for the Russian society, proving that there are people to whom Orthodoxy still matters, and matters a lot. The nationalist segment of the church saw in Yevgeny even more: an embodied "mimesis" of Orthodoxy and nationhood, a man to whom to betray his faith was to betray his nation and vice versa, and even more importantly, a man who withstood and betrayed neither. To them sanctifying Yevgeny meant sanctifying the entire Russian nation and sacralizing their own struggle for its preservation and purification. One of the initiators of the campaign for Yevgeny's beatification was Alexander Shargunov, a head of the committee for Spiritual Revival of Fatherland and the dean of St. Nilolas church in Moscow where Yevgeny's cross has been kept for some time among other relics. In 2004 the Synodal Commission for Canonization held a special investigation, but Yevgeny was denied canonization. The main reason for rejection was the lack of evidence confirming the circumstances of his death and the absence of reliable proofs that Yevgeny led a conscious churchly life (Maximov 2004). As the secretary of the Synodal Commission put it "canonization is not giving away rewards to everyone who has suffered," also adding that the Russian Orthodox Church has never canonized those who have been killed in war just to "inspire the army and raise the soldierly spirit" (Maximov 2004). Many immediately saw in this decision a hidden political motivation and concluded that the real reasons for rejection in canonization were the ROC's fears that it would impair the already complicated Christian-

Muslim relations in Russia (Loginov, n.a.). This aspect did not escape the attention of the martyr-warrior's worshipers who denounced the churchly authorities hindering the sanctification of Yevgeny as "bureaucrats in the cassocks" (Loginov, n.a.). Others – Lubov Rodionova among them – claimed that there was no need for an official churchly canonization at this point, because Yevgeny had already been glorified by "people's church" and became a folk saint.

Indeed the popular veneration of Yevgeny Rodionov in Russia reached quite a serious scale: several chapels have been built in his name, his icons can be found in many churches and his unofficial hagiographies can be bought right from the parish shops. Yevgeny's grave in Satino-Russkoye became a site of pilgrimage (the amount of pilgrims coming on his commemoration day reaching twelve thousands people). The question of his canonization still practically divides the church: many clergymen insist that Yevgeny's deed is worthy of sainthood. They continue to keep his images in their churches and keep serving liturgies at his grave; there are regular claims about miracles and secretion of myrrh by Yevgeny's icons. Despite the absence of positive decision regarding the canonization, at first there had not been active resistance to the veneration of Yevgeny by the ROC or an explicit condemnation of such practices; a book titled "The New Martyr for Christ Warrior Yevgeny Rodionov" published in 1997 by the order of Alexander Shargunov even received the blessing of the Patriarch Alexis II. However, as the popular veneration of Yevgeny continued to bloom, a certain cooling in attitude towards the 'folk saint' could be sensed in the higher echelons of the churchly circles: the secretary of the Synodal Commission Maximov asserted that what is happening at the cemetery on Yevgeny's commemoration day resembles sectarianism, while the priest who reported secretion of myrrh by Yevgeny's icon in a small church attached to the Oncological hospital in Pemza (Yevgeny's birth place) received a reprimand for making a hasty conclusion and keeping the image of an uncannonized person in the church, was

demoted, and was ordered to put the icon away (Maximov 2004). This tendency seems to be connected not so much to the problematic of accepting Yevgeny's figure as a saint, as to the churchly attempt to institutionalize and unify the existing popular practices. Many of the soldier's venerators are 'nevozerkovlennye' people – a term applied to Orthodox believers who do not lead an active churchly life and are not closely familiar with Orthodox doctrine and ritual practice; in the light of the recent scandals over excessive richness and indecent behavior of clergyman and growing public criticism of ROC for close relationship with Putin's regime, the churchly officials' reluctance to canonize Yevgeny are seen as a further proof of the dead soldier's truthfulness and proximity to common people.

2.3. The Folk Saint and Popular Veneration

The tensions existing between the clergy of the Church of the God's Ascension and the pilgrims visiting the soldier's grave at the parochial cemetery reveal the complex relationship between the institutional and the popular forms of Orthodox practices as well as attempts to contest the sacred space. The young dean of the church Father Dmitri, who fully supports the position of the Synodal Commission and claims to not personally feel any obeisance towards the alleged saint, maintains that it is impossible to speak about popular veneration of Yevgeny, because people who visit the grave are "very far from the church":

the services are held here [at the grave], but to be honest, the day of Yevgeny's memory coincides with the Whitsun ['Troiza'] and almost none of those who came even entered the church. Moreover, last year during the fast they were giving away kasha with tinned stew meat. Then, one priest comes from Ukraine – I will not mention any names – he behaves oddly here, serves a liturgy during the night without following the service book ['chinovnik'], which is an absolute violation of all churchly rules... one needs an order from archbishop to be able to hold such a service, and a priest has no right to serve a divine liturgy; this is some kind of licence.

Clearly, for Father Dmitri, who himself is a graduate of the police academy and not completely alien to the army culture, the main problem with the commemoration of Yevgeny

is not that a figure of a military man was chosen for the veneration, but that this veneration does not go in line with official churchly procedures:

...of course, whoever wants will paint an icon, there is no way to prohibit them, but such icons should not be in the churches. No canons, no akathists or icons can be created prior to canonization – this is part of canonization, part of faith. And if a person starts doing such things without permission, then it is a violation of the churchly discipline, it is just fundamentally wrong.

The very thing that makes Yevgeny so popular among the Orthodox nationalists – the fact that he died both for his faith and for his country, makes more moderate Orthodox people view him with caution, the impossibility of unambiguous interpretation of his act becoming another strong argument against canonization. Thus, Father Dmitri speculates that the refusal to take off the cross could be a mere expression of contempt and hate towards the enemies, reluctance to follow any of their orders. Everyone familiar with the chronicles of the Chechen war knows that taking off the cross and converting to Islam could not have possibly been the only requirement put before Yevgeny by his captors – choosing to stay alive would have meant for him agreeing to fight on the Chechen side and passing the ‘loyalty test’ by executing his fellow captured soldiers; in this context the statement that Yevgeny suffered exclusively for Christ sounds highly ambiguous. This alongside with the absence of any evidence for churchly or conscious spiritual life of the soldier makes many Orthodox believers see him as a war hero, but not as a saint or martyr; “he could not act in the name of Christ without being pious” as father Dmitri put it. Interestingly, despite this all, even father Dmitri tries to restrain from making any finite judgments about Yevgeny: “Maybe this man is saint, I do not know, I have no idea... God knows better... I see people who come, there are different people ... This all somehow passes us by, we are just living, trying to save our souls and till the churchly order comes will not venerate him.” Another thing that passes the parish of the local church by, and this seems to be a source of disappointment for the dean, is the potential financial benefit a stream of pilgrims could have brought to the parish. Showing me

the church that despite all restoration efforts is still in quite a detrimental state, Father Dmitri stressed that the collapsing ceiling is another proof that the “so-called pilgrims” have nothing to do with religion – none of them bothered to leave a donation. As Lubov Rodionova confessed she indeed deliberately avoids visiting the Church of the God’s Ascension and this goes back to the uneasy personal relations she had with the previous dean. When Lubov returned home with her son’s body, completely moneyless, to the apartment that no longer belonged to her, the priest refused to serve the liturgy without payment; only when Lubov gathered the necessary sum from her neighbors was the service eventually held.

2.4. The Epoch of New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia

During the 2000 archbishops’ council the decision was made to canonize the clergymen and lay Christians who were victims of the Stalinist repressions; in 2013 the list included more than 300 people. The talks about canonization started when awareness of the scale of Soviet repressions came about. In the early 1990s the Butovo polygon, used by the People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs (PCIA) as a site of mass burials during the 1930 - 1950 cleansings, was discovered. According to the preliminary most modest estimates the ditches of the Butovo polygon host the remains of from seventy to ninety thousands people, many of them clergymen (The Butovo Polygon, n.a.: 33). According to the statistics of the Governmental Commission on the Rehabilitation of Victims of Political Repressions, between 1937 and 1938 at least 106.800 priests had been executed (Zubov cited in Christensen 2012). The building of the Butovo memorial complex became one of ROC’s largest projects during the last two decades.

In 1997 the “Regional Public Foundation in Memory of the New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia” was established. On this site, that Patriarch Alexis II called the Russian Golgotha, a church devoted to the new martyrs and confessors of Russia was built. The main part of the church is located underground – a symbolic tribute to the victims of Butovo whose

bodies still rest in the ditches of the polygon. The church curiously combines the elements of a religious temple and a museum. The Butovo complex still does not have a separate building for a museum, so part of the exposition – the victims’ personal items found during the diggings – are placed right in the church. Alexander, the restless and enthusiastic staff member of the memorial complex, who volunteers to conduct free guiding tours to the pilgrims and victims’ relatives visiting the polygon, told me that he does not think the exposition will ever be removed from the church: it is in the right place “because these things belonged to those who suffered for faith and many of them have been canonized.” These lay memorabilia fit organically into the sacred space of the church because the project of new martyrs and confessors of Russia in its universal scale sought not just to glorify the outstanding Christian disciples of the twentieth century, but to sanctify and this way reappropriate the entire epoch, that in the imagination of many modern believers falls outside of the religious continuum as times of shameful apostasy.

The semiotic space of the church is organized in such a way as to represent the chronicles of the Butovo tragedy. The icons of the new martyrs are arranged in accordance with the dates of their executions creating a full calendar cycle. As it has already been stated, the creation of the cult of neo-martyrs was not only a moral project aimed at producing a new model of sanctity and virtue; it was equally aimed at restoring the continuity and reinstating religious transmission. “It is time to make a moral choice: are we the successors and continuators of the Holy Rus or of the bloody theomachists?” asked Orthodox historian Vladimir Lavrov (Labrov 2013: n.a.). The Synodal Commission maintains that the new martyrs and confessors of Russia are venerated not because of their tormenting death, but because through their lives they managed to preserve and pass on the Orthodox faith; they saved Orthodoxy for the contemporary Russian people. The creation of new saints was meant to provide an effect of lived presence of sanctity in our lives for the direct blood relatives of

these saints are walking among the modern Russians. On the rhetorical level the deed of the new martyrs and the confessors of Russia is often compared to that of the early Christians who managed to preserve and spread Christianity despite the Roman persecutions. Some, Alexander among them, even claim that the ordeal the new martyrs had to endure was much harder than that of the early Christians who could just “start believing literally an hour before death,” declare themselves Christians, be martyred and this way join the rank of saints. The new martyrs, Alexander emphasizes, had to live for decades in unbearable conditions, dooming themselves and their families to starvation and persecution: “and yet they lived, and it is not for the fact that they died a violent death that we sanctify them, but precisely because they lived.” Alexander’s discussion of the deed of new martyrs shows that the moral model exemplified by these saints is that of a lengthy and humble discipleship, rather than immediate glory achieved through opportunistic heroism.

Often very little is known about lives of the canonized new martyrs, sometimes, like in Timiphey Uljanov’s case, there is not even a photograph left – all that is known about him is the years of service as a priest, the date of arrest, a few laconic quotes found in the PCIA protocols and the date of death. But since unlike Yevgeny most of the people canonized during the 2000 council were clergymen, the question of whether they led a conscious churchly life did not arise. However, when it comes to the interpretation of the cause of their suffering, it is no less ambiguous than in Yevgeny’s case. Unlike Yevgeny, who was explicitly demanded to reject Orthodoxy and convert, the clergymen who were repressed during the Soviet regime that officially proclaimed a freedom of consciousness were formally arrested for anti-Soviet activities, not for their faith. One of the criteria for canonization was a refusal to plead guilty in the charges of anti-Soviet propaganda. The Synodal Commission interpreted this as a sign that a person suffered not for his political convictions or activities, but for Christ; it was also seen as a proof of strength of spirit – thousands of people broke in

the face of threats and tortures and slandered themselves admitting to crimes they never committed. Not everyone agrees with such criteria: “Did not they by their lives, by their words do what they were accused of – carried out anti-Soviet activities and tried to undermine the authority of the state, because they could not see all this and remain silent?”, asks Alexander, who thinks that whether a person admitted his guilt or not should not be a deciding factor. Another canonization criteria that Alexander sees as problematic is whether a person collaborated with the investigation or not. It is important to the church that a person ranked among the saints does not have a history of slandering other people or giving away any names. This criterion is also imperfect, Alexander thinks, since it forces the commission for canonization to “blindly follow the lead of the Soviet investigators and trust their argument,” while it is well known that the information in the protocols was often distorted and falsified.

To understand why Yevgeny came to be more popular than the new martyrs despite the fact that he was not officially sanctified, one needs to attend closely to the politics of memory involved. Yevgeny’s narrative possesses a transcendental purity that locates the evil outside the nation. In his story the enemy is clear and well-defined – the Chechen militants, ‘the others’ – while in the case of the new martyrs the enemy is to be found within the nation. There is no unequivocal perception of the new martyrs in the society because there is still no unequivocal assessment of the PCIA’s activities and the Soviet regime, even among the Orthodox nationalists. Thus, Michael, my informant from an Orthodox Military-Patriotic club “Volunteer in the name of great martyr St. Dmitri of Solunski,” at first claimed that the members venerate the new martyrs alongside other saints, but later when he saw a booklet from the Butovo polygon in my bag confessed that he does not like how the entire Butovo case is being blown out of proportion, “presenting the PCIA as some kind of monstrous organization with torture dungeons.” He believes that many of the arrests during 1937 – 38

were well grounded because the people who had been executed – “were either the rusophobes or the enemies of the Russian people like the Jews” and they needed to be “cleaned.” “The PCIA was simply doing its job, and it was doing it well,” he concluded. In this case the very thing that was meant to boost the veneration of the new martyrs – their closeness and direct blood connection to the living generation, turned out to have an opposite side – not only the relatives of the saints, but also of their murderers are still living among us; Michael’s own grand-grandfather used to work for the PCIA. Yevgeny’s case might seem ambiguous to that segment of society that considers Chechen war to be a dirty war fought over someone else’s financial interests, but to the nationalists the integrity of the entire country was at stake during that war, which makes Yevgeny the defender of the entire country. Moreover, the symbolism of Yevgeny’s position as frontier guard fits perfectly into the present-day debates about the influx of immigrants that becomes very heated among the nationalistic circles.

Agadjanian and Roudometof (2005: 6) argue that traditional religious response to globality is notable for a combination of global and particularistic impulses – a tendency toward unification and standardization of practices mixed with an emphasis on particular localities and specific identities. One example of such politics can be the Butovo project with its massive canonization, which was directed precisely at the creation of one type of moral exemplar in multiple faces providing personal connections to multiple localities. The downfall of this tactic was that the new martyrs came to be perceived as one gestalt image, which subsumed and dissolved the personalities of its individual representatives. When discussing the peculiarities of saints’ veneration in modern Russia, Rock argues that the veneration of the new martyrs failed because the believers were unable to establish personal connections with these new saints of whose lives almost no trace was left; apart from the several outstanding representatives they remained a faceless mass resting in the Butovo ditches (Rock 2011). Indeed, despite all efforts of the ROC Butovo martyrs remained unknown and unvenerated by

the masses. In February 2011 a special document designed to promote the preservation of memory about the deed of the new martyrs was approved by the Bishops' Council. Among the measures proposed in the document were dedication of churches to the new martyrs and confessors of Russia, organization of special services on sites of their service, death or burial, promotion of the study of their life histories in Orthodox seminaries, inclusion of their names into official churchly calendars and liturgical texts (Rock 2011). Such measure did achieve some success, but mostly in spreading awareness about the new martyrs in general and not the veneration of its particular representatives. Alexander believes that the obscurity of the newly canonized saints is a natural process and fame will come with time:

I can confirm that these saints are becoming more and more popular. First of all, thanks to the fact that practically – if we speak about the Moscow eparchy – practically every church, every other or every third church has its own saint – a new martyr or a confessor. And when having their own saint, people start trying to find out more about this period and about other saints, they come here, they baptize in honor of those new saints... So there is no reason to be frustrated about this, this all is very natural, very normal.

The example of Timophei Uljanov, the canonized dean of the church of God's Ascension, however, shows that the direct connection of a saint to a certain site does not guarantee him or her proper veneration, even on the local level. The only icon of Timophei Uljanov hangs forgotten, trapped in the back part of the church separated from the rest of the temple; the worshipers are not allowed to go there for fear that the ceiling might collapse. When I asked Father Dmitri if any efforts were made to spread the word about Timophei Uljanov, like making calendars with his image or publishing and spreading his hagiographies, he replied that there is no point in it: "who will need it? Me, Father Timophei¹ maybe, and who else?"

In some other cases personal connection to a saint indeed sparked interest in newly canonized martyrs among some people; it also helped reveal a contradiction in the churchly policies that undermined the faith in the sainthood of new martyrs in the broader society.

¹ Father Timophei is the archbishop of the Troizky Church located in the nearby town; his churchly name is the tribute to Timophei Uljanov – naming clergymen in honor of new martyrs is part of ROC's official strategy for preserving the memory of the newly canonized saints.

Some vigilant Orthodox believers noticed that from the 2013 version of the Orthodox calendar issued by the Moscow Patriarchy, where all saints venerated by the ROC are listed, several dozen of names of the new martyrs are missing. Worried relatives and worshippers of the omitted saints demanded an explanation, but no official comments from the Synodal Commission have been given. Different versions as to what details from the past of the saints could have been discovered that would make the latter fall out of grace emerged; many interpreted the saints' exclusion from the churchly calendar as 'de-canonization.' This saintly cleansing even touched some of the few celebrities among the new martyrs, thus, the scandal over the alleged de-canonization got heated after it became known that the hallows of confessor Vasiliy Kineshensky broadly venerated in Ivanovo have been withdrawn from the local monastery by the order of Moscow Patriarchy and taken in an unknown direction right after the saint's name disappeared from the calendar. Once again, no explanation from the ROC has been provided; instead of the exempted relics, the hallows of another newly canonized martyr, Vladimir Lezhnevski were given to the monastery, but the local parish did not welcome such an exchange of saints and still remains perplexed as to what happened to the relics of their dearly loved patron (Luchenko 2013). Such obscurity and inconsistency of churchly politics only further exacerbates the skepticism towards the new saints widely spread among many priests and parish members. "What kind of church is it that sanctifies today and dethrones tomorrow? What kind of saints are those? They are no saints at all," says Alexander trying to imitate the mood among the common people caused by these policies. The two churches located in Butovo continue to venerate all 331 saints that were on the original list saying every name during the service on the ground that no official decree ordering them to suspend the veneration of any of the saints has been issued. Alexander hopes that this will not happen, since it will create a lot of confusion in ritual practices: icons of those saints have already been painted, bishops have been named in their honor. Because the Butovo martyrs

have been canonized altogether in a large group, not all saints have their personal icons made; very often the saints who died on the same day are grouped together on one image. Showing one such icon that contains both the saints that are still on the calendar and those who have been removed, Alexander asks “what are we supposed to do with this icon now, paint those people over?” The saints disappearing from the calendar like ‘undesirable’ people from the group photograph with Stalin not only undermines the credibility in sainthood of the new martyrs among the people, but also makes many suspect that a lot of behind-the-scene politics is involved in the decisions of who can be granted canonization. The moral project of new martyrs and confessors of Russia proves to be not so well-orchestrated as it might appear, its model of sanctity being revised and retrospectively edited. This attempt to reduce the public visibility of certain saints through removing them from the calendar is another example of manipulation and resignification of dead bodies (Verdery 1999).

2.5. The Popular Saint and the Popular Faith

It is not only because little material traces of the Butovo martyrs’ existence is left (very few photographs, no memoirs, no relics, just a common grave) that the majority of Russian society found it hard to relate to them. For example, not much was left after Yevgeny either – Rodionov’s family was too poor to own a camera, so very few adult images of Yevgeny exist. The problem with the moral project of Butovo martyrs is that it is exclusively past-oriented and does not provide an adequate model after which contemporary believers can shape their lives. As Alexander explained to me Butovo martyrs were glorified not for how they died but for how they lived, and it is precisely this element of their lives that is incomprehensible to a considerable part of the modern Russian society. While many Russians identify themselves as Orthodox, few of them attend the church and observe religious rites (Agadjanian and Roudometof 2005: 15; Knox 2005); it is easier for them to relate to Yevgeny who had a common life than to the priests and lay believers of the early twentieth century who spent

their lives in prayers and religious services. Smith (1997: 14) argues that the principle of inverted optics is at work during the perception of martyrs – “the more distant they are, the more attractive they appear.” Yevgeny’s example shows that, on the contrary, ability to relate to a saint can sometimes become a basis of his popularity. As Yevgeny’s mother Lubov put it: “it is like he has been here just yesterday and he is relatable, he is very relatable – a simple rural guy... there are no complications, not twists in his fate.” Although Yevgeny’s sacrifice is not something an average person could find easily imitable, other episodes of his life present in his hagiographic narratives that reveal his humanness – his love of life, nature, and every day joys, his idyllic relationship with his mother and his friends – seem relatable to ordinary people; he offers a path to salvation that does not require rigorous discipline and asceticism, which were central to the lives of the new martyrs and confessors of Russia. To many Yevgeny’s example is a proof that it is possible to be Orthodox without leading a pious life in the churchly understanding; martyr death becomes a kind of a shortcut to heaven: one does not have to observe all religious prescriptions, all that is needed is to make the right choice when it comes to it – a type of martyrdom that can be found in the early history of Christianity, which knows multiple examples of momentary conversions, as well as in some contemporary Jihadist discourses. The quote of the priest Timophei Selski that is often used on the web-sites glorifying Rodionov says:

It is hard to serve one’s fatherland when it is governed by traitors. And yet such service is capable of bringing about a wondrous moral transformation in a person. Several such examples are provided to us by a Chechen war when captured Russian guys refused to convert to Islam and became martyrs for Christ, although in their peaceful life, it seems, they were not very pious... and yet they precessed us with all our knowledge in ecclesiology. What brought them momentarily on a peak of sainthood? Of course, it was a special divine grace that was granted to them not in response to something spiritual, but to the qualities of their souls – Russian loyalty and duty, diligence of a serviceman who does not try to hide in a civic life (Selski cited in Chernomorskiy 2013).

In this statement the author tries to equate what he sees as traditional intrinsic qualities of a Russian soul to sainthood. In this context Orthodoxy itself comes to be seen as one of these

intrinsic qualities of the Russian soul: “Faith is intrinsic to a Russian man, it sleeps, but in a certain moment awakens. We can live and win only with faith,” writes priest Dmitri Dudko (Dudko 1999).

As testimony martyrdom also has a missionary aspect to it – it is an act of proclaiming the gospel and of encouraging other people to imitate the path of Christ (Jensen 2010: 4). Acknowledging the didactical power of Yevgeny’s story, Orthodox writer and nationalist Nikolai Koniaev claims that Yevgeny “showed the highest possible example of preaching that a man can give”:

The canonization of Yevgeni Rodionov, his glorification and veneration are needed not by him, but by ourselves. They are needed so that we could have one more chance to raise children in Orthodoxy, in a sacrificial spirit, with a readiness to self-sacrifice. Yevgeny Rodionov is a ray of light for many our contemporaries. Not everyone can read the books of the fathers of the church, not everyone understands the intricacies of Orthodoxy and sees all its depth. But the spiritual deed of Yevgeny Rodionov serves and will continue to serve many people as a doorway into Orthodoxy. Not everyone is capable of following the example of the saint fathers and have a similar spiritual life, we, the modern people, are weak in many ways but God opens the doors for salvation to us too. It turned out, that even a not very religious boy, that does not observe all fasts and does not know all the prayers can become a saint and glorify the name of God if he has the true faith (Konjaev 2010).

The type of religiosity constructed in such discourses is built around the idea of “true faith” that does not necessarily require familiarity with Orthodox doctrines and practices, but that emerges by itself concomitant to the Russian national identity. According to Koniaev, not only can the Russian soul give birth to such courageous saintly acts, but it also possesses a seer’s gift to recognize sainthood, and hence, an authoritative power to validate it (Konjaev 2010). An uncontested proof of the soldier’s sainthood, maintains Koniaev, is the fact that Russian people’s soul immediately recognized a saint in him: “none praised or glorified Yevgeny Rodionov, and yet the people’s soul recognized a saint in him right away, it is impossible to deceive the people’s soul”(Konjaev 2010). Carlyle argues that hero-worship is as important as the heroism itself, for to be able to recognize the hero one has to be of heroic

mind himself (Carlyle cited in Todorova 2009: 187). The Russian nationalists applied the same principle to sainthood, claiming that their ability to recognize and revere the true saint is evidence of them themselves possessing a divine sparkle. The beauty of such fragmented and momentous conceptualization of sacrifice is that it gives those who proclaim Yevgeny to be their role model a credit of heroism, for through identifying with Yevgeny they can without any immediate efforts make a claim on his courage, bravery and moral strength, that they will also gladly demonstrate if it comes to making the final choice; however, the chances are that for many of them it will never come to it.

This chapter explored two competing moral projects seeking to reinforce the continuity of religious tradition through the establishment of new models of sanctity. The cult of saints and martyrs has been an essential part of the Christian culture of memory for centuries (Brown 1981), but the complex bureaucratic mechanism created for its maintenance sometimes lacks flexibility to meet the needs of modern society, which can be exemplified by its failure to include Yevgeny into the pantheon of saints. Alongside with the absence of evidence of the soldier's spiritual life and inability of establishing the exact circumstances of his death, one of the arguments against the canonization of Yevgeny presented by the secretary of the Synodal Commission Maximov (2004) was that the epoch of the new martyrs has ended in the 1970s and that it cannot be extended. Maximov was subsequently heavily criticized by the angered Yevgeny's worshippers who interpreted the statement as a claim that there is no room for sanctity in modern Russia. The point Maximov was actually trying to make was that the new martyrs and confessors of Russia are a unique category of saints, for which special criteria for sanctification were designed, which means that Yevgeny, who lived and died in different times and under different circumstances, must be treated as a separate case. This reasoning reveals the major contradiction of the project of new martyrs and confessors of Russia, which was directed at the creation of continuity between the past, the

present and the future, but instead ended up producing a closed and temporally bounded category of saints. The historical unprecedentedness of the deed committed by the new martyrs could have become a means of marking a new beginning, a new epoch even, turning them into the 'new' first saints, but the same historical specificity that made them stand out from their predecessors also separated them from their modern and potential future successors, making them a matter of the past, even if not too distant. Yevgeny, on the other hand, is a more universal exemplar, which has its analogues in Christian history, as it will be demonstrated in the following chapter, but at the same time is applicable to the present situation and probably most recent future.

Chapter 3: The Transformation of the Concept of Martyrdom in Modernity

3.1. The Biblical and the Secular Typologies

Yevgeny's story possesses a number of features that ensure its easy compatibility with a canonic hagiographic narrative frame. On the one hand, although the ROC does not have a tradition of canonizing soldiers who died at war, it does have an entire pantheon of saints-warriors and defenders of Rus' – starting from the ancient warrior Ilya Muromets to the eighteenth century naval commander Fyodor Ushakov. The stocky and physically strong Yevgeny, a village dweller, gravitates more towards the folkloristic image of Ilya Muromets, embodying the idea of hero-warrior and defender of common people. The image of a young saint is also not unprecedented in Christian Orthodoxy. For example, the Church of the God's Ascension in Satino-Russkoye has an icon of a young martyr – Saint Boniface – who like Yevgeny never led a righteous life, but redeemed himself through suffering for Christ. In Eastern Orthodox Church Boniface is considered to be a patron of drunkards and fornicators – the sins commonly ascribed to contemporary youth, of which Yevgeny as a young man was suspected by the Synodal Commission.

The biblical archetypes are not the only ones at play in Yevgeny's story – folkloristic and more recent secular heroic typologies equally find their way into the hagiographic readings of the soldier's narrative, creating an amalgamation of different styles and cultural traditions and bringing in new dimensions into the concept of martyrdom. The Soviet cult of the army with its tradition of quasi-religious sacralization of soldiers and war heroes helps explaining why many members of contemporary Russian society do not find the iconic image of a man with a gun counterintuitive. There are many features that make Yevgeny highly relevant and relatable to the contemporary Russian society: a simple guy from an extremely

poor, but honest family, he had to start working very early in order to support his mother. Behind the Chechen separatists who appear as the villains in Yevgeny and Lubov's story hides another enemy, even more treacherous and foul – the state that betrayed and abandoned first Yevgeny, then his mother. "One can get used to the cruelty of the Chechen militants, but to the low acts of one's own people – never," writes Lubov (Rodionova cited in Smirnov 2012: 10). "Now, years later I don't even know who I hate more – those who took Zhenya's life or those who betrayed him and left him to tortures and humiliation," she admits (Rodionova cited in Dubova 2006: n.a.). To many Russian people who equally feel let down by the state, but still keep living and working for its benefit, sacralizing Yevgeny's sacrifice is a form of making sense of their own lives; as poet Pavlov (2009: 23) puts it in his poem "From Cross to Cross" devoted to Yevgeny's deed: "betrayed by everyone he betrayed neither his friends, nor Russia, nor faith."

Yevgeny, who as God's miracle appeared in the midst of a bloody and lucrative war, universal moral fall and depravity, became for many a symbol of triumph of Orthodoxy and spiritual purity that can prevail even in the darkest of times. "Now almost everything separates us, but Zhenya unites," writes Lubov acknowledging the symbolic power the image of her son acquired among Russian people (Rodionova cited in Smirnova 2012: 17). Yevgeny is also very relevant to the conditions of modern Russia perceived by many fundamentalists as demonic times of an amoral market economy, corruption of traditional values, attacks on the Orthodox Church, and spiritual disease (Agadjanian and Roudometof 2005: 17). Martyrs, like Christ, through their bloody sacrifice purify the society from its sins and give hope that the evils and temptations of modernity can be overcome and a way to salvation found.

3.2. Towards the Conception of Militant Martyrdom

Yevgeny's hagiographic narratives and the discourse of his worshipers construct a conception of martyrdom that seems to differ significantly from the one represented in more

traditional Christian theological discourses. The self-sacrificial death for Christ, from a way to crown a righteous life and demonstrate loyalty to one's faith, transforms into a means of fighting one's enemy, even if indirectly, and becoming both a saint and a hero. This is a type of 'active' martyrdom, in which the 'conventional' Christian understanding of sacrifice as humble and submissive acceptance of suffering comes to be replaced by a more 'strategic,' militant understanding of self-sacrifice as a means of achieving final victory. As it has been discussed in the previous chapters, agency, although present in the traditional Christian martyrological discourses, functions there in a very limited mode. For example, many Christian theologians stress that the suffering cannot be sought deliberately or in any way be self-inflicted; it is not just the martyr who chooses to suffer, but it is also the providence that chooses one for the martyr's fate (Jensen 2010). Such fatalism harbored in the idea of complete submissiveness to the will of God is not something modern Orthodox nationalists propagating active struggle can accept. Because pain as it has been discussed in chapter 1 came so be stigmatized in the modern Western philosophical thought as evil, its endurance being associated with passivity and failure to counteract it (Asad 2000), the action-oriented modern Orthodox nationalists, who often adhere to the ideas of active as opposed to fatalistic eschatologism, feel the need to bring agency back into the martyrological narrative. The agency, which is often emphatically stressed in Yevgeny's hagiographic narratives, is not the one that triumphs through passivity and endorsement of suffering; rather it is the one that manages to persist despite it: Yevgeny does not choose to suffer – he chooses not to escape suffering at the cost of betraying his faith and his country. The negative perception of suffering and love and will to life that are often emphasized in Yevgeny's narratives increase the value of his sacrifice and the scale of his heroism and courage.

Yevgeny's 'hagiographers' deliberately try to emphasize the martyr's agency, intentionality and consciousness of his choices: Yevgeny chose to go to the army without

trying to evade service – a common practice for young men in modern Russia; he asked to be deployed to the frontline together with his comrades-in-arms; he chose to die, but not take off his cross. When construed exclusively in terms of series of choices martyrdom becomes to more and more resemble the secular idea of noble heroism conceived as a constant struggle of a hero to exercise his will against the upheavals of merciless fate. For the pious Christians who understand suffering differently and for whom self-sacrifice is part of their habitus, martyrdom is simply a continuation of their discipleship and hence, although an important, but not a transitive or groundbreaking moment that needs to be described in terms of final choice. Jensen (2010: 114) argues that a martyr does not understand himself as the self in time, but as a self promised by God and existing ‘out of time’; hence martyrdom is not a single decision that could have been an outcome of an internal struggle, but a natural act of being consonant with who one is. However, for Yevgeny, who can hardly be described as a righteous man, suffering had a transformative meaning: it turned a common guy into a saint. For this reason it is very important for the soldier’s venerators’ to stress that Yevgeny was not merely a victim of external circumstances, but that it was he who made the final decision – who chose the cross over life, God over Satan, and through this choice momentarily rose up to heaven. This emphasis on a singular choice reflects a shift in the temporal imagination of sainthood and righteousness, which from a wearisome continuum of Christian discipleship become a matter of a one-time momentary choice. The performative act of sacrifice lies a new beginning (Lambek 2007: 30), which is rooted in Yevgeny’s *inter vivos* identity for, as his narratives stress, he was a kind and faithful person, but which also catalyzes a transformation, marks the end of Yeveny’s life as a human and his birth as a saint.

Yevgeny, who went to Chechnya as a soldier determined to fight, was hardly “a sheep among wolves”, passively waiting to embrace his pitiful lot. What makes Yevgeny so attractive to the present day Orthodox nationalists is that he represents not so much

victimhood as militant virtue, “the spirit of active heroism” (Zerubavel 1994: 75) signifying unconditional readiness to fight the enemy not only with the word, but with the deed – which is the arterial part of the ideology of many militaristically-minded Orthodox nationalists. As Zerubavel (1994) has demonstrated in his insightful analysis of the case of Israeli commemoration of the fall of Masada in A.D. 73, the process of producing collective memory and historical continuity has as much to do with the selection of particular events as it has with choosing the frame through which these events are to be interpreted; thus, Yevgeny’s death that could otherwise be perceived as a tragic, but useless sacrifice, transforms into the narrative of militant heroism. Smith (1997: 23) traces the Christian conception of martyrdom back to the classical ideal of noble death for the sake of preserving honor, Socrates being the first “secular saint”. Although the Christian concept of martyrdom has evolved considerably since that time, the narrative of Yevgeny’s martyrdom, the way it is represented by his worshipers, echoes strongly the antique conception with its masculinized ideas of dignity, courage, and military duty. Smith (1997: 316) argues that in the modern era Saint Augustine’s definition of martyrdom in terms of the cause, not the punishment, acquires a new secularized dimension of active heroism that is opposed to passive victimhood. Bruno Bettelheim’s description of horrors of Dachau shows how in the times of mass murder when suffering becomes common and universal new criteria are needed to make a person stand out as a cult figure: “Since all prisoners were exposed to severe treatment, those who died because of it, though perhaps martyrs to political or religious convictions, were not considered heroes by other prisoners. Only those who suffered for their efforts to protect other prisoners were accepted as heroes” (Bettelheim quoted in Smith 1997: 316).

Discussing the problem of popularity and obscurity of secular and religious martyrs Smith (1997:10) observes that “for the chronicler to record, for society to react, and for history to award the martyr’s laurels, publicity and choice are central to martyrdom.” The

choice, Smith maintains, must be simple and immediate: “conform or die” (Smith 1997:11). Indeed, Yevgeny, as one of his worshipers observed, was put before “clear, self-evident, and sharpened as the blade of a sword choice” (Yuriev 1999); it is in this ultimate choice – death for faith and motherland rather than life in disgrace, that this new martyr’s agency is most prominently asserted. In contrast, the Butovo martyrs lack this explicitness and sharpness of the choice: the official reason for their arrest was political and none in the PCIA ever asked them to denounce Orthodoxy; moreover, it is very unlikely that the latter would have protected the arrested from conviction on political grounds. Implicitly many of them were making a choice similar to Yevgeny’s every day that they chose to remain clergymen knowing well that this would eventually unavoidably lead to an arrest. However, the humble and quiet priests and nuns, who did not participate in the civil war, and most of whom were not even involved in the anti-revolutionary activities they were charged with, who shyly kept trying to prove their innocence to their persecutors and then followed submissively to the place of their execution quietly praying for the salvation of their murderers’ souls, is not an image that modern militaristically-minded Orthodox nationalists find appealing. Such an image contradicts the modern understanding of selves as acting subjects that associates the removal of ability to act with the removal of dignity (Jensen 2010: 125). Furthermore, the testimony for God as it is construed in Christianity becomes hard to differentiate from the “fatalistic acceptance of suffering” (Smith 1997: 312). The fact that the clergymen were executed in large numbers and the inevitability of their punishment took away the aspect of heroic individualism from their suffering, making their death a tragedy but not an act of witnessing in the eyes of some people. Just like Hitler who by the systematic mass killings of Jews “murdered Jewish martyrdom itself” (Fackenheim cited in Smith 1997: 310), the universal and yet covert and de-publicized Soviet repressions diminished the value of life

(and hence the sacrifice) and undermined the significance of the witness of the executed clergymen who “had no more to say about their death than cockroaches” (Smith 1997: 311).

The new martyrs and confessors of Russia many of whom have not been executed but slowly died from starvation and exhaustion in labor camps lack not only the sharpness of the choice, but also the intensity of suffering, which is crucial for the Christian imagination with its tradition of reenacting martyr’s passions (Brown 1981: 82). Yevgeny, who endured one hundred days of brutal tortures and was eventually decapitated, is better equipped to capture the believers’ imagination, violent dismemberment and reintegration of a body being a very powerful image for the Christian mind (Brown 1981: 80). It is no accident that many of Yevgeny’s worshippers are obsessed with trying to discover the video record of the soldier’s execution. A lot of videos documenting violent tortures and murders of Russian soldiers by the Chechens exist and circulate around the Internet; Lubov claims that a man figuring on one such recording can be her son, but this cannot be confirmed because the victim’s face is not discernable in the video, so as far as the Synodal Commission for Canonization is concerned no authentic video of Yevgeny’s death exists (Maximov 2004).

The Butovo martyrs never became heroes and role models for modern nationalists because their sacrifice bore an exclusively spiritual purpose, and thus lacked the active component in the pragmatic sense: they did not attempt to fight the godless Soviet regime; instead they passively agreed to be removed from the world in which they could no longer remain true to their Christian identities. The modern audience used to a more instrumental and strategic understanding of sacrifice might perceive the type of sacrifice described above as demoted in terms of means and ends. The fact that Yevgeny was a soldier and all his actions also had a pragmatic aspect to it – resisting the militants, not taking their side – restores the consistency of means and ends in such a way that they become comprehensible to the modern audience. On the other hand, the spiritual aspect of the deed allows endowing with the greater

symbolic meaning something that from exclusively pragmatic point of view could be seen as a useless death, making Yevgeny a failure, not a hero. Thus, some skeptics within the nationalist circles caustically remark that one does not need to be very smart to get taken hostage and that Yevgeny did not save anyone or kill any of the enemies and hence, there are no reasons to glorify him. Spiritual and symbolic significance of Yevgeny's choice helps to draw attention from the fact that as a soldier Yevgeny failed to contribute much to the war. Another aspect that might push away the contemporary nationalistic audience from the new martyrs and confessors of Russia is lack of certainty about the unbreakability of their spirit. Although non-collaboration with the PCIA was one of the major criteria for canonization, there are some cases of beatification of people who were known to slander other priests and parish members, but later repent of their sins. Yevgeny's story is more clear and transparent in this sense; it presents an example of unshakable comradeship: all of the four captured soldiers died together and none of them agreed to turn against his own people.

3.3. Sacred Heroism and Heroic Sainthood: Forms of Memory in

Modernity

Hervieu-Léger (2000) argues that blending of sacred and profane domains is a form of collective memory peculiar to modernity that incorporates the symbolic capital of the religious tradition as well as the profane elements of modern history and culture. The forms of popular veneration of Yevgeny Rodionov in post-communist Russia lie on the borderline between the traditional Eastern Orthodox folk and churchly practices of reverence of saints and the secular forms of immortalization of the deeds of national heroes. The memory day of Yevgeny, celebrated yearly on May 23 in Satino-Russkoye, involves a mixture of different religious and nationalist groups competing for public space. It attracts both the stream of priests willing to serve a divine liturgy on the martyr's grave and pilgrims seeking an

intercession of the saint, as well as Chechen, Afghan and even World War II veterans and current military staff willing to honor the memory of the hero. The sounds of the liturgical chants sung on the grave are muffled by the old and modern military songs sometimes performed live by amateur bands, sometimes transmitted through the speakers. A field-kitchen offers all guests a modest army meal – soldiers’ kasha with tinned stew meat; Lubov Rodionova is always there trying to pay attention to every guest and make sure everyone gets some hot tea. When asked what type of public she thinks prevails – pilgrims or soldiers, she said that there are plenty of both and always a lot of children, but then added that probably there are more military man, and they are the most important to her.

Sometimes the transience between the religious and the secular in the commemoration of Yevgeny emerges as a direct outcome of the absence of positive decision about canonization and impossibility of open glorification of Yevgeny as a saint. Thus, a church devoted to Yevgeny that was built in Kharkov, Ukraine in 2008 is formally named *the Church of the Icon of Mother of God “Recovery of the Dead” in honor of the deed of faith of warrior Yevgeny Rodionov*. Lubov Rodionova admitted that she does not like such tricks: “There is veneration of his great deed here, but there is also some kind of craftiness. And craftiness in a given situation is an unthinkable thing, unthinkable.” The absence of canonization however did not prevent the Kharkov church from displaying the icon of martyr Yevgeny in the church and listing it among the temple’s relics. Apart from the written hagiographies the churchly forge shop of saints also employs other means for creating exemplars and maintaining their memory: akathists, iconography, shrines. Several unofficial versions of akathists – hymns devoted to Yevgeny written by the sympathizing priests are circulating on the Internet, multiple icons of the martyr-soldier exist, some of them openly displayed in churches. However, the absence of official canonization brings in a lot of ambiguity into the perception of these material forms of Yevgeny’s veneration.

Keane (2008: 124) in his study of religious practice focuses on its materiality and regards it as “inherently prone to impurity and heterogeneity”; he suggests viewing religious practices as semiotic forms, which are public entities that can retain a certain degree of autonomy from religious dogma, function across contexts, transform and accumulate new features. Through its ability to catalyze new inferences and interpretations religious practices harbor a transformational potential in themselves, the final outcome of which can transcend the initial goals of intentional actors (Keane 2008: 124). This becomes particularly visible when one explores the practices of production of Yevgeny’s icons, in which the hybridism of secular and profane elements becomes particularly manifest. The iconic images of Yevgeny Rodionov, which often blur the boundaries between the image of a saint and that of a hero, exist in multiple variations and can be found in many churches, depending on the views of a church’s dean.



Figure 2. The Icon of Martyr Yevgeny in the Church of the Icon of Mother of God “Recovery of the Dead” in Kharkov. Source: <http://rodionovchurch.com/img/base/16.jpg>

Some images try to reproduce the classical Byzantine icon style, like the icon located in Kharkov's church built in Yevgeny's memory represented on Figure 2. In this image Yevgeny is depicted in accordance with the Byzantine canons of martyrs' representation wearing a red robe symbolizing passions and sufferings and holding a cross in his right hand – the symbol of martyrdom. The only element that brings in dissonance into the image and gives away the icon's recent origins is the modern military camouflage uniform; however covered by the martyr's red robe, in which some believers claim Yevgeny appeared to them in dreams, it looks less kitschy. Other images one encounters are more eclectic. In some the elements of realistic portraitist techniques seem to prevail over the iconic canons, as can be seen in Figures 3 and 4.



Figure 3
Source : <http://drakula.org/bookking/17052010.shtml>

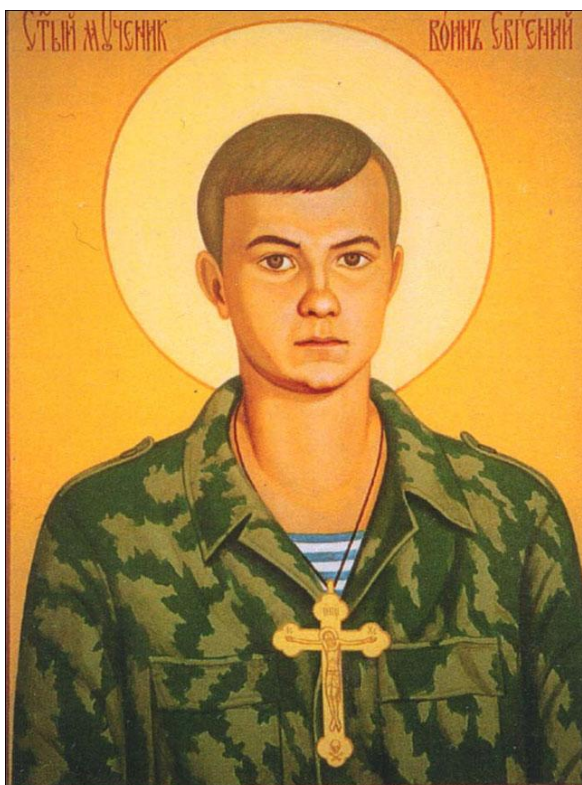


Figure 4
Source : <http://www.baltinfo.ru/2010/06/28/Ikonu-vgeniya-Rodionova-ubrali-iz-peterburgskogo-khrama-150362>

While in Figure 3 the saint still holds a cross as befits a martyr, in Figure 4 a cross is hung around Yevgeny's neck – a clear allusion to *the cross*, the one Yevgeny refused to take off.

In this case the authors' desire to convey a particular message violates not only the genre laws, but also the reality: the big golden cross resembling the one commonly worn by priests bears little resemblance to the small metal cross Yevgeny used to wear always hidden under the shirt. As Keane (2008: 114) observes, any cultural phenomenon, including religion is public in its nature, which means that it depends on its categories being recognizable to other people. The complexities of canonical iconistic symbolism often become reduced or omitted because the products with Yevgeny's images are oriented towards a particular type of audience – mainly people vaguely familiar with the doctrine and canons, therefore some images only retain the symbolic features that for sure will communicate to this audience, like the cross and the halo, which are often depicted in an overly emphasized, almost grotesque form, as Figure 4 illustrates.

Another effect the images executed in a more portraitist style achieve through the more realistic depiction of Yevgeny's appearance, featuring his blondish hair and white skin color, is the emphasized expression of the saint's ethnic Russian origin, that cannot be clearly distinguished on the images that try to make Yevgeny look more like an ancient saint (as in Figures 2 and 5). As demonstrated by Figures 5 and 6, some images in addition to modern military uniform depict the saint fully armed and all set for the battle. Although it is not uncommon in the tradition of Russian icons to portray martyrs with weapons, unlike the ancient armaments like swords or spears, the modern weapons just like the uniform make the images look highly eclectic. This perceived eclecticism in modern icon-painting is the outcome of the gap in the continuity of religious practices suspended after the revolution; an attempt to make a Kalashnikov rifle fit harmonically into the ancient-style religious image is an attempt to re-establish continuity through fitting modernity into the unified narrative of the history of Orthodox Rus.

In the Figure 6 Yevgeny is depicted against a mountainous landscape. In this case in addition to its conventional symbolic meaning in the Orthodox iconography - spiritual rising – the bluish mountains in the background perform another function evoking the image of Caucasian hilly landscapes. While in the Figure 6 we see a painting executed in the exclusively realist portrait style, but preserving the essential symbolic elements of a martyr's icon with a halo and a cross held in the right hand, Figure 5 presents an image that attempts to mimic the traditional Byzantine color spectrum and technique but fails to preserve the crucial symbolic element – instead of a cross the saint is holding the strap supporting the rifle. This shift in iconistic imagery illustrates the transformation of the concept of martyrdom, from the one representing passive victimhood to the one stressing militaristic virtue and active heroism.



Figure 5. Source : <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/jurnal/print35081.htm>



Figure 6. Source : <http://artnow.ru/ru/gallery/200/4902/picture/0.html>

Quite often Yevgeny's photograph made during the military oath is reproduced on his unofficial hagiographies and other churchly literature devoted to his life. Popular veneration of Yevgeny is also expressed in the creation of poems, songs, plays, and statues in his honor.

Most of the songs and poems about Yevgeny are simple and unpretentious, written in the genre of military poetry. Often the saintly image of Yevgeny is introduced through the usage of Churchly- Slavonic vocabulary that when mixed with the colloquial and sometimes coarse language of soldierly poetry creates an effect of stylistic eclectics. A line from a song written by a young poet Maxim Vastianov and performed by a popular singer Alexander Marshall called “A Ballade about Yevgeny Rodionov” runs:

From now on the icons have their own saint in camouflage,
 From now on God’s Army has its own frontier guard,
 And who of us, fainthearted, will respond to the foe:
 “You can only take my cross off along with my head”?

The assertion that “God’s army” now has its own frontier guard can be read not only as an allusion to Yevgeny’s earthly position (as it was probably intended by the author) but also in a metaphorical sense: the acknowledgement of Yevgeny as a martyr can significantly redraw the boundaries of who can be considered saint, Yevgeny becoming a guard of the new heavenly frontier as a model against which all subsequent candidates into “God’s Army” will be assessed.

Religious motifs of sainthood, although faint, are also noticeable in the statue of Yevgeny executed by a young sculptor Andrei Korobzov mainly in the social realism style. Andrei says that through Yevgeny his first meeting with God occurred. When he started working on the sculpture, he also started going to church and observing Orthodox rites. Despite his interest in religion, Andrei claims that he was trying to make the sculpture of a hero, not that of a saint. The stature was conceived as an aggregative image of a Russian soldier and a representation of moral strength. As Figure 7 demonstrates Yevgeny is depicted with tight hands, defeated physically, but not morally; there is no hate or aggression in his eyes, his inward look is directed at God, “he is still on earth but if you look closer – he is in heaven,” – explains Andrei, who believes that some power greater than himself was at work



Figure 7. Andrei Korobzov and Lubov Rodionova near the sculpture of Yevgeny Rodionov.

Source: <http://pravoslav-voin.info/voin/561-pochitanie-voina-muchenika-evgeniya-rastet-v.html>

during the creation of the sculpture. Andrei did not mould a cross, instead he pressed it into the soldier's chest: "I decided that the cross should be like this, so that none can take it off – it is in his soul," – he concludes. Andrei gave the miniature of the statue to the church devoted to Yevgeny in Kharkov where it was sanctified and put into the temple museum; he is also planning to mount a full-size bronze copy of the sculpture near the church devoted to Yevgeny that will be built in Pereslavl-Zalessky.

The secular forms of commemoration of Yevgeny often involve religious imagery of sainthood that in their representation become indistinguishable from the soldier's heroic image. Recently the Russian Orthodox Militia "The Holy Rus" established a "Yevgeny Rodionov" fund devoted to giving justice to all Russian warriors who died for faith and motherland but were abandoned and forgotten by the state. The goals of the fund include: awarding Yevgeny the title of Hero of Russia; canonizing him as a martyr; establishing a

national military award “Saint Warrior Yevgeny” to be given for courage; creating monuments to Yevgeny and naming schools, streets and built-up areas in his honor; placing portraits of ‘Christ’s Warriors’ with a description of their deeds in every school and university (Otrakovskiy 2013). The description of the fund mission is concluded by the following statement: “The image of the Christ’s Warrior is a symbol of courage, duty, honor, service and self-sacrifice that is so necessary not only to the youth, but also to us, the adults!” (Otrakovskiy 2013). This quote illustrates that for the “Holy Rus” a martyr is first of all a warrior of Christ, an active hero, rather than a passive victim. Interestingly, even in the form of address to Yevgeny the Orthodox Militia promotes is not “martyr” or “saint,” but “warrior Yevgeny.” In 2013 “The Holy Rus” filed an official request to the Moscow prefecture asking to replace the Friedrich Engels’ monument situated near the Church of Christ the Savior in Moscow by the memorial devoted to the warrior Yevgeny and renaming of Lusinovskaya street named in honor of “terrorist and revolutionary” Lusik Licinian into the street “Warrior Yevgeny” (Otrakovski 2013).

The way Lubov Rodionova is trying to commemorate her son also seems to oscillate between the perception of him as a hero and as a saint. All of Lubov’s present life is devoted to the organization of trips to Chechnya during which she delivers presents to the soldiers and packages with humanitarian aid, assistance to the crippled soldiers in their postwar life and preservation of memory about her son. Lubov, who has been a member of communist party for twenty five years, only gained faith in God after she discovered the body of her son and learned about his deed. She remembers how when she first saw him wearing a cross as a little boy she felt ashamed and was worried that other children would ridicule him, so she pressured him very hard to take it off, but Yevgeny refused. Religious ideals of Orthodoxy in Lubov’s understanding are curiously intertwined with the ideals that were cultivated during the Soviet era – duty, dignity, honor and courage – ‘muzhestvo.’ The Russian word ‘muzhestvo’ has a

common root and is concordant with the word ‘manliness’ – another thing, Lubov believes, modern Russian men are starting to lose alongside with the other moral guiding lines of the communist past. During each trip to Chechnya Lubov brings a box of copper crosses that she gives away to the soldiers. But this can hardly be interpreted as a missionary activity, rather she puts the crosses on the soldiers’ neck with a motherly care for them to have a reminder of Yevgeny’s deed in the moment they need the strength of spirit. Lubov admits that she herself is not a ‘vozerkovlenniy’ person: she does not go to church often and does not observe all the regulations, but she claims she does have faith in God. Her apartment is all hanged with Yevgeny’s icons people from different parts of the world – Serbia, Cyprus, Montenegro, Greece – sent her as presents, but it is clear that to her Zhenya is first of all a hero, for sainthood is a category that is simply incomprehensible to her:

I never feel awkward when people talk about the act, his deed, and this is a great deed, because he is a hero and he has a state award, but when it comes to churchly affairs I begin feeling very uncomfortable... I don’t understand and when I don’t understand I am trying to keep away from that...

When Lubov once confessed to a priest that she feels very awkward whenever people start talking about her son’s sainthood, he replied that “a candle that was lit by God should not be put under the table,” and she seems to have accepted this principle. Lubov is not interested in the official canonization of her son by the Orthodox Church: “people call him the folk saint and this status – it is the highest possible, because we do not simply honor saints or heroes – I personally do not see any difference – I am not a very religious person, to me “whoever is light is saint.””² To Lubov folk veneration of her son is first of all an acknowledgment of his heroism, not sainthood; she said that soldiers and veterans who come to Yevgeny’s grave are much more important to her than priests and pilgrims, because they can understand better the true importance of his sacrifice that the broader Russian society convinced that the Chechen

² A line from a popular Russian XX century rock son “The Golden City” performed by Boris Grebenshekov

war was a dirty war fought exclusively for the government's economic interests in this rich with oil resources province, fails to see:

Zhenya died – I cannot bear to hear it, when people say that he died for Christ. I cannot agree with this, because he did not become a traitor either. That was only the first step, the second would be shooting your own people... I am convinced that Zhenya and his friends – they died for the ideals, and they had them – childish, pure... they died for their motherland, not for an oil pipe! They did not know that there was some kind of fuss about the oil pipe – they were the frontier guards, they were sent there to protect, to not let the evil pass and they, full of faith that they are carrying out an important mission, they fulfilled it.

Not only active heroism becomes the subject of reverence, but the veneration itself has to be active, Lubov maintains. One has to not only pay respect and commemorate, but has to carry on the torch and continue the struggle that was started by one's idol: "glorification, veneration – it is always an action, just like love, or labor, or virtue," says Lubov who is trying to live her own life as if it was a continuation of her son's. However, Lubov's ideas of how the struggle Yevgeny was part of should be continued do not coincide with that of either Orthodox or political activists. When contacted by Yevgeny's worshipers who ask for her blessing for the building of a new church in Yevgeny's name, she often shyly tries to convince them to spend the money on something that would bring more use – like buying wheel chairs for crippled soldiers; needless to say her arguments mainly remain unheeded. Lubov was also contacted by the representatives of every major political party who, aware of the respect and authority she has among many Russians, were eager to get her as a member of their organization. To each of them Lubov gives the same answer: she will happily join their party if they agree to join her on her next trip to Chechnya. All of them have so far declined the offer politely.

Lubov's accounts and statements are often contradictory, for she is still struggling to reconcile the close to her image of dearly loved son with the instilling pride, but at the same time more distant one, that of a hero, and with the rather alien to her idea of a saint. Lubov remembers how she was offended when the Russian military commanders, to whom she

turned for help when she was looking for Yevgeny, kept referring to him as “your son.” Hoping to make the officials acknowledge at least some kind of responsibility over Yevgeny’s fate she once replied “stop calling him my son; he was my son till he turned eighteen, now he is also your soldier” (Rodionova quoted in Smirnov 2012: 74). Now she observes with pain that as Yevgeny’s image comes to be appropriated by different groups, she feels like he is becoming less of her son (Lubov Rodionova quoted in Smirnov 2012: 74). Lubov, who has strong political convictions, understands the didactic power the image of her son possesses and seems to have a moral project of her own. She addresses other mothers, urging them to raise ‘real men’ and not to try to hide their boys from the army; the ideals Lubov believes in and wants to propagate are that of courage, dignity, and duty (Rodionova cited in Smirnov 2012). Although she often says how much she admires her son’s strength of spirit – she likes to underline that her misfortunes in Chechnya are nothing in comparison to what Yevgeny had to endure – sometimes, nostalgic for the Soviet times when everyone shared the heroic ideals and sacrificial spirit, she cannot help but complain about how low the moral standards in modern society should be if “a person commits not even a great deed, but simply an act worthy of respect,” and it causes such reaction that people even talk about canonization (Rodionova quoted in Smirnov 2012:17). Lubov has very high expectations of people that she equally applies to herself and in accordance with which she apparently had raised her son – Yevgeny was an outcome of someone else’s ethical project long before he himself became one. As a patriot Lubov is proud that Yevgeny continues to serve his country by being an exemplar and role model for the modern Russian youth, but as a mother she keeps wondering why it had to be *her* son:

God just sends us such examples, but many times I thought “I wish this example was not with me and not with him.” Then I immediately asked God to forgive me: “What am I saying? Would this have been easier on some other mother?”

While Lubov is making efforts to reconcile the image of her son with that of a hero, it is unlikely that she would ever fully embrace the image of Yevgeny as a saint. It is not only the heightened bureaucratization and formalism of the canonization process that she does not like (“I don’t see any sense in this stupid word ‘canonization,’ glorification – it goes through the heart, but canonization – ok, they will put a stamp on it, and so what?”), the thing that terrifies her most in the perspective of official canonization is the Christian practice of dismembering saints’ bodies and transforming them into relics. After everything Lubov had to go through to bring the body of her son home, even a thought of someone attempting to encroach on his remains appalls her:

I have been looking for him for so long, putting his remains together bone by bone... Do you think I would ever allow anyone to dig him up and put him apart by pieces? I have a very negative attitude to the relics... How can one, if he respects, how can he put someone apart by pieces? This is a body! And God did not just create soul, but a body too... This is just a business for some people and I will never let them make use of my son this way while I am alive... I would want everyone to leave Zhenya alone!

Gravely concerned about the fate that awaits her son’s grave and his remains when she is dead and can no longer take care of it, Lubov even tried writing to the president’s administration requesting the recognition of Yevgeny’s grave as a military burial site, which would make it the responsibility of the local municipality to take care of it. And again, just like back in Chechnya when she was left alone to search for Yevgeny’s body and then ransom it by pieces, the state, which took him away as a soldier, replied that Yevgeny’s grave is just “the grave of her son” and the municipality has no business guarding it.

Concluding Remarks

This thesis has examined how the sacred and the profane elements collide together in the saintly and heroic imagery of martyr-warrior Yevgeny. Such collision in itself is not new, strong ethno-nationalistic elements being a crucial part of the Russian Orthodox tradition from the moment of its inception (Agadjanian and Roudometof 2005; Knox 2005). There is little use in trying to make a straightforward distinction between sacred and secular, or religion and nationalism, which are both, as Charles Taylor puts it, transcendental horizons of significance (Taylor cited in Jensen 2010). Instead, this research sought to explore what vectors different moral projects often involving a combination of religious and nationalistic elements in different proportions take on in modernity and to what type of project contemporary Russian society seems to be most responsive. The existing popular forms of veneration of Yevgeny Rodionov show that whether perceived as a saint or as a hero, the ‘holly warrior’ is accepted as a plausible role model by many members of modern Russian society and particularly willingly by its nationalistic part. This suggests that this moral project has some special features that make it stand out from alternative role models, like that of the new martyrs and confessors of Russia, for example.

One explanation as to why Yevgeny’s story is more relevant to the modern society than those of ancient saints and even not-so-old new martyrs and confessors of Russia is that he embodies the spirit of the times. Caught between two fires – the external enemies encroaching on the Russian ‘authentic’ way of life and the internal one – the ‘treacherous’ state, which fails to adequately protect the latter, Yevgeny represents the ambivalent situation, in which many nationalistically and patriotically minded believers find themselves today. Yevgeny gives contemporary believers a hope that even in the ominous modern condition

one still can preserve dignity and spiritual purity and attain salvation. However, timeliness is not the only reason as to why this martyr-warrior became so popular. My contention is that the success of the given moral projects can be explained through the peculiar conceptualization of martyrdom and heroism it offers. Firstly, it is appealing to the present-day audience because of the way it presents individual agency in an accentuated manner that goes in line with the modern Western image of a liberal agent. Unlike earlier Christian martyrological discourses that see suffering as a type of action, modern liberal thought views pain and passion-bearing in exclusively negative and passive terms, associating it with a failure to counteract it (Asad 2000). The agency redeemed in Yevgeny's narratives helps constructing an image of 'active' martyrdom that can be incorporated into a narrative framework of militant heroism ideologically close to the modern Orthodox nationalists. The way Yevgeny's hagiographic narratives imagine heroism or sainthood temporally – as a result of momentary decision, but not a life-long commitment – also make his role model appealing to the present-day believers who are often alien to the churchly practices and regulations and see faith as a private matter (Knox 2005), and I would add a rather occasional one. Finally, the way sacrifice is envisioned in Yevgeny's deed – not as a goal in itself, but as a strategic move, capable of bringing immediate pragmatic result, even if not for the martyr himself, make the act of self-sacrifice more meaningful and justifiable to the contemporary results-oriented audience. While the acknowledgment of Yevgeny as a saint has a potential to sacralize the image of a soldier, the image of Yevgeny as a martyr helps normalize the notion of martyrdom that even in the minds of Orthodox believers in contemporary Russia unavoidably evokes the horrifying images of the Islamist suicide-terror. All these aspects together help explain why Yevgeny became a more relatable and acceptable role model for the modern society than the Butovo martyrs, who are perceived by many as irrelevant – the

heroes of the past representing an anachronistic, unintelligible, and unattainable to the modern Orthodox people type of sainthood.

Unlike the new martyrs and confessors of Russia, which was a carefully designed and institutionally implemented project, the neo-martyr Yevgeny is the project in the making, which does not have one author and which includes multiple contested readings and interpretations. In this regard he strongly resembles the moral exemplars described by Humphrey (1997: 37), which are subjective and individual role-models and which depend entirely on the agency of their disciples who “transform words/acts from merely having happened to something that is an exemplar.” Another aspect that facilitates the promotion of Yevgeny’s ethical project is its physical locatedness, corporeality being the central aspect of the Christian cult of saints (Brown 1981). While the remains of the new martyrs and confessors of Russia are lost forever, buried somewhere in the ditches of the Butovo polygon mixed with the bones of other victims and hence, leaving no promise of miraculous reintegration, Yevgeny’s grave, which attracts multiple visitors, plays an important role in the promotion of this folk saint. Another proof that a dead body itself, once signified, becomes as crucial for the maintenance and spread of an ethical project as the idea behind it, are the numeral instances of unauthorized diggings in the Butovo polygon with the goal of discovering the incorruptible relics of new martyrs (Luchenko 2013). In this context Lubov Rodionova’s concern that the talks about Yevgeny’s sainthood might prompt some tomb raiders to vandalize her son’s grave does not seem that ungrounded.

Unfortunately, the temporal and geographical limitations of this research did not allow for the creation of a more complete and elaborate portrait of Yevgeny’s worshipers and admirers. One of potential directions for the future development of this research can be identifying variations and divergences within this moral project and tracing which features of the soldier’s story different communities and actors find important to stress. Considering that

Yevgeny's fame went far beyond the borders of Russia, him being known and venerated as a saint in Serbia, Greece, Montenegro and Cyprus, a comparative analysis of different case-studies can reveal how many different, often conflicting meanings a dead body can host, and how these meanings reflect what kind of moral project a certain community is trying to implement. Perhaps even more important than the study of differences in perception of Yevgeny in different Eastern Orthodox communities can be the exploration of the similarities, which will allow to judge whether this new symbol of modern Orthodoxy has a potential to contribute to the consolidation of the emerging in the global age transnational Orthodox community and help the Eastern Orthodoxy overcome its traditional rootedness in locality and territorial national identity (Yelensky 2005: 166).

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