

# Sacred or Secular?: 'Memorial', the Russian Orthodox Church, and the Contested Commemoration of Soviet Repressions

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## **Sacred or Secular? 'Memorial', the Russian Orthodox Church, and the Contested Commemoration of Soviet Repressions**

Zuzanna Bogumił, Dominique Moran & Elly Harrowell

IN THIS ARTICLE WE ARGUE THAT TO UNDERSTAND THE contemporary form of Gulag memory in the Russian Federation it is necessary to focus on the late perestroika and early post-Soviet periods as a critical moment of social and cultural change when the 'nation's lens' on its past altered radically, and collective, post-Soviet memory of Stalinist repressions started to take form (Hochschild 2010, p. 87). Nevertheless, the Gulag past had been discussed in some social circles earlier, during Khrushchev's Thaw, when the process of prisoner rehabilitation started (Adler 1993, 2004; Smith 1996; Sherbakova 1998). The following 30 years 'were marked by inconsistent moves that revealed as much as they obscured' (Etkind 2009, p. 634). Thus, it was only at the end of the 1980s that 'new revelations documented the processes, institutes, and personalities of terror with unprecedented detail' (Etkind 2009, p. 645). In the absence of a coherent notion of post-Soviet identity, many interest groups sought to narrate the past in their own way (Forest & Johnson 2002, p. 528), and to imbue it with new significance and meaning.

As we will show in this article, the specificity of the collective memory of Soviet repressions is that it crystallised through a process of memorialisation of significant Gulag sites. We focus, however, only on memory projects led by the 'Memorial' Society and the Russian Orthodox Church because, as we will show, these organisations assumed a leading role in shaping the collective memory of Soviet repressions through the ways in which they marked Gulag sites for commemoration. Initially, during the anti-Communist protests of the late Soviet period, they had jointly proclaimed their slogans: democratic messages mostly voiced by 'Memorial', and nationalistic messages expressed by the Russian Orthodox Church (Barner-Barry 1999, p. 101). However, when they began independently to form their own interpretations of the past and to erect their monuments in significant sites of Soviet repression, their paths increasingly began to diverge. Although the framing of their interpretations of the past was fixed by the mid-1990s, over time one dominant visual narrative has emerged, and today, we argue, one visual language of memorialisation has taken precedence, with implications not only for how the Gulag period is remembered in Russia, but also for the contested contemporary interpretations of the Soviet and particularly the Stalin eras (Oushakine 2007; Nikolayenko 2008; Shlapentokh & Bondartsova 2009). These commemorations take place in the absence of any 'official' state public commemoration policy for the repressions. As Anstett (2011) notes, there has been a lack of direct sustainable government intervention, either federal, regional,<sup>1</sup> or local, in the field of national heritage, aimed at preserving the emblematic sites of the Gulag, and Russia still lacks a national museum to the Gulag.

The article unfolds as follows. First, we discuss the notion of collective memory, and the connection between landscape and memory. Next, we give some background to the two memory actors, 'Memorial' and the Russian Orthodox Church, before briefly discussing the methodology used to generate the data presented in the article, and focusing on the four sites of memory themselves. The sites of memory selected for study here are: the Solovetskii Islands—widely considered to be the

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<sup>1</sup> An exception is the Pokayanie Foundation in Syktyvkar, sponsored by the government of the Komi Republic. One of its projects is described later in this article. For more about memory projects founded by the Pokayanie Foundation, see Bogumił (2012b)

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first Soviet prison camp; Ekaterinburg—the place of the murder of the Russian royal family, considered by many to herald the later events of the Soviet twentieth century; Magadan, the capital of the most notorious Gulag camp region of Kolyma; and Butovo, a place of mass executions located near Moscow and called the 'Russian Golgotha' by the Russian Orthodox Church.<sup>2</sup> By the end of perestroika each of these sites had become an arena of intense commemorative activity by both the Russian Orthodox Church and 'Memorial'. Their actions at each site in the mid–late 1990s clearly show that both actors tried to deploy these sites as vehicles for their own interpretations of history, in order to support the creation of collective memory in a particular way.

Virtually every consideration of the concept of collective memory begins with reference to the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs—as Misztal puts it, 'his assertion that every group develops a memory of its own past that highlights its unique identity is still the starting point for all research in the field' (Misztal 2003, p. 51). Halbwachs' key concepts—that collective memory is constitutive of group identity; that memories are acquired and evoked socially, not individually; and that collective memories are rooted in the present, and continually recalled and remade according to the needs of the present (Halbwachs 1992)—are central to our understanding of collective memory. However, for our study Halbwachs' most important work is his 1941 *La topographie légendaire des évangiles en terre sainte*, in which he described the dynamic relationship between collective memory and place. He explored how spaces in Jerusalem had been overlain with layers of memory by Jews, Romans, Christians and Muslims, all of whom have used the landscape, buildings, paths and other elements of the cultural landscape as parts of their frameworks of remembering (Halbwachs 1941), and argued that Jerusalem began to be transformed by Christians in accordance with their religious ideas long after the events critical to Christianity took place there. Therefore, sacred sites commemorate not just the facts which may be historically verifiable, but the beliefs which are connected with these places. In Jerusalem the majority of these are related to the 'supernatural' acts of Christ, around which Christian beliefs were formed. Halbwachs shows that the holy places of Christianity derive from Jewish memories, whose material markers, however, were removed from these spaces (Halbwachs 1941, p. 184). In other words, the meaning these places hold is a product of the adaptation of the heritage of the past, with current beliefs based on the material traces of ancient beliefs.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the actions of groups of believers who are involved in the process of commemoration have a key influence on the perception of these places (Halbwachs 1941, p. 205). Thus, places in the cultural landscape are especially attractive components of a framework of collective memory by virtue of their perceived stability. What better way to underpin a community's claim to a specific, unbroken lineage than by linking it to the 'material milieu that surrounds us'? (Connerton 1989, p. 37).

In this article, we are concerned with the ways in which 'Memorial' and the Orthodox Church inscribed their interpretations into Gulag sites in order to legitimise their position and role in society. Our research traces its theoretical roots to the study by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), of the

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<sup>2</sup> According to Christian belief, Golgotha, also known as Calvary, in Jerusalem, is the site where the crucifixion of Jesus took place. Although the exact site is still disputed, the area is a destination for thousands of pilgrims each year. The development of Christian 'messianism' led to the term Golgotha becoming a rhetorical figure willingly used by different national groups (Russians, but also Poles and Serbians) to describe the exceptionality of their fate and suffering in different historical moments

<sup>3</sup> Stefan Czarnowski, another scholar inspired by Durkheimian thought, comes to very similar conclusions while analysing the meaning of Hercules monuments. Czarnowski shows how the cult of Hercules and its representations emerge from a basis of earlier beliefs and representations of different gods (Czarnowski 1956a, pp. 139–60). Compare also what Czarnowski writes about the cult of Saint Patrick in Ireland (Czarnowski 1956b)

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construction of tradition (and by extension social memory). This influential work sought to demonstrate that much of what is currently presented as age-old 'tradition' is, in fact, a relatively recent invention, created to increase social cohesion and cement group membership, to legitimise the authority of governing institutions, and to ensure group members share the same belief systems and norms of behaviour (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983). Hobsbawm and Ranger point to the processes and materials used to construct new traditions, and they highlight the fact that a tradition itself may become the site and symbol of discord, a battleground where group identity is negotiated and tested (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983). This observation has been developed and tested by numerous scholars of memorialisation (Gillis 1994; Johnson 1995, 2002; Forest & Johnson 2002), and is also particularly pertinent for our study of collective memory in the Gulag cultural landscape. Mitchell has likened such investigations to an 'archaeology of power', that uses the diverse traces inscribed in the cultural landscape—but especially around commemorative sites such as memorials and statues—to piece together a picture of the way a dominant force in a given society wanted people to remember, and to forget (Mitchell 2003, p. 446). However, sites have different social importance, so to understand conflict in memorialisation, it is important to look at the site itself, and not just at its social actors. As Friedland and Hecht argue 'in the geographer's gaze, historical events may have taken place in multiple locations, but in the cultures of sacred place, those same historical moments all happened in that place. The ancestors whose lives and actions constituted human society are all buried there'. Since identities are realised in space and in place, these sites have to be 'able to control the periphery, to neutralise the periphery and other claimants of the center'; they must be 'sacred' places (Friedland & Hecht 2006, p. 19), in which not just any event took place, but an event which 'in the mind of the rememberer—should have been different' (Landres & Stier 2006, p. 4; emphasis in original). As we will show in this article, the material form of a monument, even if it is a natural stone, cannot be treated as neutral because it 'entails an opportunity cost insofar as the imagination of a particular alternative past necessarily implies the exclusion (or forgetting) of other imagined pasts' (Landres & Stier 2006, p. 4).

In this article, therefore, we take a lead from Forest and Johnson (2002) in focusing on particular elements of the cultural landscape that have been constructed with the explicit aim of promoting a particular type of collective memory of Soviet repressions, unpacking both the visual imagery and symbolism used in these commemorative spaces, and its placement in and relationship with other elements of the environment (Crampton 2001; Johnson 2002; Till 2008). Recalling Renan's prescient statement in a lecture at the Sorbonne in 1882 that 'the essence of a nation is not only that individuals have many things in common, but also that they have all forgotten many things' (Renan 1991, p. 128), we seek to investigate the processes whereby certain memories are commemorated in certain ways, and not others. The successful development of sites of memory can be ascribed to the social power and cultural capital of the person or group pushing for commemoration (Jordan 2006), with controversy and contestation around this process arising when power relations are in flux (Forest & Johnson 2002). We do not argue here that an entirely 'invented' collective memory or tradition can be imposed on people from above; as Misztal points out 'people tend to reject any vision of the past which contradicts their recollection and sense of truth' (Misztal 2003, p. 60). Viewing collective memory solely as the prerogative of ruling elites, who impose it onto the 'passive' masses from on high, is seen by many theorists as a reductive, and unrealistic approach which negates the power of the everyday experience (Misztal 2003; Olick 2003; Irwin-Zarecka 2007; Rolston 2010). We also acknowledge that the four sites of memory chosen for investigation in this article by no means represent a comprehensive study of Gulag memorialisation. By restricting our analysis to such monuments and memorialisations—those Schudson would see as 'self-consciously framed acts of commemoration' (Schudson 1997, p. 3), we do not seek in any way to devalue the

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countless other, private and personal places in which quotidian expressions of collective memory of the Gulag crystallise in space. We do, however, seek to engage critically with the activities of the 'Memorial' Society and the Russian Orthodox Church, in the late 1980s and mid-late 1990s, in order to shed light on the nature of Gulag memorialisation in contemporary Russia, and to trace the ways in which these two 'memory actors' sought to create sites of memory to further their own interpretations of Gulag history.

The data presented in the article reflect two processes of parallel data generation, intended to access the discourses surrounding the development of four specific memory sites in the Russian Federation in the late 1980s and early 1990s. These debates have been traced through local newspaper reporting in the various sites, and through consultation of documents held in the local archives of the 'Memorial' Society. Repeated visits to the sites themselves, and observation of both the memorials erected at these sites, including temporary exhibitions and visitors' 'interpretation panels', and the memory practices associated with them, have been supplemented with semi-structured interviews with local stakeholders. Fieldwork took place in the late 2000s, with newspaper sources pertaining to the early 1990s, and more recent interview material enabling reflection on the developments in the intervening decade.

### **Memory actors—the 'Memorial' Society and the Russian Orthodox Church**

As White (1995) noted, the 'Memorial' Society was one of the most important organisations of the perestroika period, presenting a significant challenge to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union through a focus on history and symbolism. As Venyamin Iofe, one of the leaders of 'Memorial' claimed, "'Memorial' was created specifically for the work in this area—as an organisation whose mission is to deliver Russia from the world of the Gulag, in which it resides to this day, whose language it speaks, by whose standards it lives, and whose values it adopts' (Iofe 2002, p. 113). Founded in 1989, according to its charter, 'Memorial' aims to promote mature civil society and democracy based on the rule of law and thus to prevent a return to totalitarianism; to assist formation of public consciousness based on the values of democracy and law; to firmly establish human rights in practical politics and in public life; and to promote the revelation of the 'truth' about the historical past and perpetuate the memory of the victims of political repression exercised by totalitarian regimes (Adler 1993, 2004; Smith 1996). Active in political work, some 'Memorial' members held positions of authority at local and republic level, and by the end of the Soviet period the society enjoyed great social confidence and support. As one interviewee said 'in 1989 nearly everybody was a "Memorial" member'.<sup>4</sup>

The main aim of the counter-history offered by 'Memorial' in the Soviet era was to contest the dominant discourse of the USSR. For a long time 'Memorial' produced a discourse of opposition, which became an instrument of criticism of, and struggle with, Soviet power, with 'Memorial' campaigning for transparency of information about the victims of repression. 'Memorial' wanted to create a new language that would describe the essence of the Gulag experience and use it as a tool for societal transformation. Hence from the very beginning 'Memorial' paid close attention to dates and symbols. 'They were supposed to constitute a secular collection of holidays and symbols of the new civic society built on the worked-through Gulag history' (Bogumił 2012a, p 77).

By the end of the 1990s, 'Memorial' had lost the political and social significance it had enjoyed at the time of perestroika, and today its activity may be defined as 'dissidence'. Its aims are still to ensure

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with a member of the 'Memorial' Society, who actively participated in the events of 1988–1990, Syktyvkar, 18 August 2007

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that victims of Soviet repressions are commemorated, but also, as its charter makes clear, to support democracy and human rights and to assist in the formation of public consciousness around these matters. It is arguably this ongoing contestation which has recently brought 'Memorial' into tension with the contemporary Russian state, and has led to a widely held perception of 'Memorial' as an anti-Putin movement.

By contrast, from a weak position of mere toleration by the Soviet atheist regime, in the 1990s the Russian Orthodox Church assumed a position of considerable power, arguably reclaiming Orthodoxy's pre-revolutionary position of primacy amongst religious faiths, and proximity to state power. Numerous scholars have traced the resurgence in religious observance in Russia post-1991, and describe the reinvigoration of the Russian Orthodox Church as a significant factor in the formation of Russian national identity in the post-Soviet period, as the Church arguably became a 'safe haven' in the context of turbulent social, economic and political circumstances (Greeley 1994; Davis 1996; Krindatch 2004). As Knox has argued, however, 'the great paradox of Russia's post-Soviet religious renaissance was the transition of the Moscow Patriarchate from a suppressed institution ... to an institution which directs considerable effort to suppressing other religious bodies by discouraging religious pluralism and enjoying state-sanctioned privileges in a secular country' (Knox 2005, p. 1). The 1997 Law 'On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations',<sup>5</sup> rather than encouraging religious tolerance and pluralism, served to cement the Russian Orthodox Church's centrality to postSoviet political, social and cultural development, through its various official and unofficial interventions in 'civil society'.

It is fascinating that one means which connected the Church's past and present and helped in 'reshaping ... the relationships between church and state and, most significantly, between church and society' was the canonisation process of the new Russian martyrs (Orlov & Kotzer 1998, p. 159). In contrast to 'Memorial', the Russian Orthodox Church has offered a mythico-religious interpretation of Gulag history, with reference to biblical prophecy. It interprets the period of Soviet repression as a time of persecution of the faith, and views those who managed to maintain their faith, dying a martyr's death, as the foundation upon which the modern Russian Orthodox Church was reborn (Bogumił 2012a, p. 82). This idea was very bluntly expressed by Igumen Damanskin, member of the Synod Commission on Canonisation of New Russian Saints, who claimed that at the beginning of the twentieth century 'Christians stopped perceiving their lives as a walk to God; they were starting to live only with people, being interested in how they were perceived by people—relatives, friends and leaders. ... That is why God brought "teplokhladnii" [lukewarm] Christians back to Him through martyrdom' (Damanskin (Orlovsky) 2011, p. 128).

A pervasive discourse of 'New Russian Martyrdom' (Orlov & Kotzer 1998; Kahla 2010; Bogumił 2011), espoused by the Russian Orthodox Church, ostensibly refers to victims of the political repressions who were persecuted for their faith, but as we will show, has increasingly been invoked to describe victims of repression more generally, whose religious beliefs are unknown. Essentially, whilst 'Memorial' campaigns for transparency of records about victims of repression, and for full disclosure of information as a means of engendering a heightened public consciousness of the grisly reality of Russia's past, by deploying the 'New Russian Martyr' narrative, the Russian Orthodox Church arguably seeks to interpret the repressions as a mass martyrdom upon which the resurgent Church is founded (Bogumił 2012b). As Garrard and Garrard argue, the new martyrs not only allowed the

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<sup>5</sup> This law redefined the state's relationship with religion and was signed by President Boris Yel'tsin on 26 September 1997, available at: <http://www2.stetson.edu/~psteeves/relnews/freedomofconscienceeng.html>, accessed 31 July 2015.

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resurrection of the Russian Orthodox Church but also enabled its union with the Russian Orthodox Churches Outside Russia and with the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, because they shared many of the same 'new martyrs' and their canonisation became a pretext for dialogue (Garrard & Garrard 2008, pp. 194–96).

In the light of the lack of government willingness to commemorate the victims of political repressions, which in turn creates a vacuum of coherent secular commemorative language, the Russian Orthodox Church has grown in stature as an actor shaping collective memory. Whilst 'Memorial' has taken 20 years to draw up an initial list of more than 2.5 million victims (Rachinskii & Roginskii 2007),<sup>6</sup> between the Millennium of Baptism of Russia (1988) up to 2009, the Russian Orthodox Church has canonised 1,770 new martyrs, confessors and other sainted persons (Kahla 2010, p. 196), creating sites of their cult (both topographic sites such as Butovo, Ekaterinburg, Katyn, and also icons or celebration dates). As the burial sites for more than one million individual victims are still unknown, their families experience what is called the missing grave syndrome or homeless dead; they desperately need a place to mourn for the dead. Thus, the Orthodox Church creates symbolic, 'sacred' sites where people may come to mourn,<sup>7</sup> but also as Dorman (2010) argues it has 'appropriated' some sites of repression, by building permanent signs of religious devotion (crosses, shrines and chapels). These spaces become ritualised areas for the production of collective memory (Rousselet 2007), for families lacking a known burial place for their relations, where mourning rituals may be performed (Bogumił 2012b, pp. 115–16).

This critical difference in the perception of the past means that both 'Memorial' and the Russian Orthodox Church had very different agendas as memory actors for the shaping of collective memory, in terms of the aspects of history that they wanted to see commemorated, and precisely how they wanted to see that memorialisation take shape and influence collective memory. Therefore they have had very different ideas for the shaping of meaning of sites of memory, attempting to impose upon these sites their own meanings and significations. In certain cases, 'Memorial' and the Russian Orthodox Church have come directly into conflict over the nature of memorialisation at specific sites of memory, and it is these processes that we trace in the following sections of the article.

### **The Solovetskii Islands—between sites of memory of zeks<sup>8</sup> and martyrs**

The Solovetskii Islands are undoubtedly amongst the most significant sites of Gulag history in Russia, a status they owe to Alexander Solzhenitsyn who claimed that the islands were the mother of the Gulag system. Although later research has shown that labour camps were being established by the Bolsheviks from the beginning of the Revolution, the popular assumption that 'on Solovki, Gulag history began' has taken root, and with good reason (Applebaum 2003, p. 27). Created in 1923, the Solovetskii Lager' Osobogo Naznacheniya [SLON Solovetskii Special Purpose Camp] became a testing ground for camp development. SLON history is also very well known, thanks to the survival of

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<sup>6</sup> Arsenii Roginskii stresses that the difficulty of finding the places of executions in 1937 resulted in the absence of documents and the fragmentation of information (there are personal data for the murdered individual, and a date of execution, but the existing documents do not reveal the location of the actual shooting). Moreover, not all materials are available from the archives. As Roginskii emphasises 'Memorial' knows only between 20% and 25% of the places of mass shootings in the years 1937–1938. However, the places of execution in the early 1920s, or the civil war, are shrouded in even greater mystery, and to determine their location is effectively impossible. (Lecture by Roginskii during a conference organised by the 'Memorial' Society to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the outbreak of the Great Terror in Medvedzegorsk in relation to the International Memory Days in Sandarmokh, 4 August 2007.)

<sup>7</sup> One such site is the Solovetskii cross in front of the Solovetskii Monastery in Moscow, discussed later.

<sup>8</sup> Zaklyuchennii—camp prisoners.

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documents from which it may be reconstructed. This history is very dynamic and has its own internal drama (Applebaum 2003; Robson 2004), acted out by well known figures, such as Paul Florensky, or Maksim Gorky, who enrich the narrative. Moreover, the Gulag period was only one of the tragic stages in the rich history of this archipelago, and therefore the Solovki Special Purpose Camp can also be read in a broader historical context. Finally, the location of the islands on the White Sea in the northernmost point of Russia, their magnificent natural environment and cultural remnants, as well as the fact that over the centuries their history has intertwined with the country's history, ensure that Solovki has taken on an aura of enchantment, and is widely used by historians as the miniature stage not only of Gulag history, but also of Russian history (Robson 2004).

The existence of this popular assumption that on Solovki, Gulag history began, allows us better to understand the Gulag memorialisation process. It influenced the memory actions of both the 'Memorial' Society members and representatives of the Orthodox Church, for whom the Solovetskii Islands have become an important element of memory infrastructure. In consequence the most significant memory projects located in the European part of the Russian Federation are semantically linked with Solovki. Just as the Solovetskii Special Purpose Camp system itself spread throughout the Soviet Union to form the Gulag, many monuments and commemorative signs in this part of the Russian Federation are either associated with the Solovetskii Islands, or physically originated there, as in the case of the Solovetskii stones used by the 'Memorial' Society, and the Solovetskii crosses used by the Russian Orthodox Church, to mark out memory sites which these actors perceive as significant.

The creation of the Solovetskii Islands' cultural landscape of memory, its sites of memory, was already underway by the perestroika period. Local and national newspapers published information about the history of SLON (Bogumił 2010a). The first 'Memory Days' organised by the Solovetskii Museum and members of the Moscow and Leningrad 'Memorial' Societies, which took place in June 1989, attracted former prisoners, their families, members of the 'Memorial' Society and other people interested in the repressive past of their country (Bogumił 2012b). The most important event was the unveiling of the Monument to the Solovetskii Prisoners (Chukhin 1989), and a collective mourning. The monument took the form of a boulder from Solovki and it was placed at the location where the prisoners accused in the so-called 'Kremlin conspiracy' were shot in 1929 (see Figure 1).<sup>9</sup> The 'Solovetskii Stone' was intended to be only a temporary marker of memory, which in time should have been replaced with a much larger and more artistic memorial complex. However, this temporary 'spontaneous shrine', whose role was to 'commemorate deceased individuals and simultaneously suggest an attitude toward a related public issue' (Santino 2004, p. 365), recalling the memory of forgotten victims, quickly became an important marker of memory subsequently used by 'Memorial' to denote sites of memory. However, arguably the Solovetskii stones would not have become such important memory markers of the Gulag had not one of the boulders been placed on Lubyanka Square in Moscow.

The idea of bringing a Solovetskii stone to Moscow's Lubyanka Square to commemorate the victims of political repressions was another spontaneous act. In 1987, when the notion of erecting a monument to the victims of Soviet repression first emerged, the form and site were by no means fixed (Smith 1996). Even if, from the outset, 'Memorial' had wanted to place the monument on

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<sup>9</sup> The case number 747-1 concerned a prisoner rising and mass escape to Finland. In consequence 36 prisoners were executed and 15 received longer sentences.

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Lubyanka Square,<sup>10</sup> the fact that the monument was a Solovetskii stone was an impulsive decision. 'Memorial' had wanted to organise a competition to design the new monument (Smith 1996, pp. 153–60). However, this all took time and money, and additional procedural problems meant that a 'temporary memory marker' was erected instead, to immediately start to honour the memory of Soviet victims, and at the same time to mark a memorial site where people could meet and remember the dead. Thus, as Mikhail Butorin, who at that time worked in the 'Sovest' Association in Arkhangel'sk, recalls, when members of 'Memorial' in Moscow learned that 'Sovest' intended to erect a Solovetskii stone for victims of the repression in Arkhangel'sk, and that an expedition to the islands was planned for that purpose, Moscow 'Memorial' asked 'Sovest' to choose another Solovetskii boulder, which could be situated at Lubyanka Square and which could facilitate mourning (Butorin 2000). The apparently neutral form of the monument was, at the time, its great advantage. A natural stone was seen as uncontroversial, and was therefore an 'ideal' form for a spontaneous shrine. As Santino argues, it demands the personal involvement of visitors, and forces them to be active interpreters of the past, rather than bystanders (Santino 2004).

The Solovetskii stones in Moscow and in Arkhangel'sk were unveiled on 30 October 1990, an important date for Russian dissidents. In October 1974, when political prisoners held in camps in Mordovia, Perm and Vladimirsk had organised a hunger strike, Andrei Sakharov announced at a press conference in Moscow that 30 October would be the 'Day of Political Prisoners, the Day of Struggle and Freedom'. In subsequent years, political prisoners held in camps organised further hunger strikes and protests (Grabinova 2007) on this date because it had no prior association with any other important political or historical event. In 1991, 30 October became an official national holiday, but was renamed 'The Day of Victims of Political Repressions'.<sup>11</sup>

In this way, 'Memorial' as a memory actor, Solovki as a specific historical site and the Solovetskii stones as a sign of memory are connected. The Solovetskii stones started to play an important role, not only because they were 'spontaneous shrines', around which it was possible to collect, to grieve and to perform memory rituals, but also because they were perceived almost as 'witnesses' to specific historical events. These sentiments were clearly expressed in the inscription on the plinth of the stone in Lubyanka Square: 'This stone was brought by the "Memorial" Society from the territory of the Solovetskii Special Purpose Camp, and erected to commemorate the victims of the totalitarian regime'. Thus, the Solovetskii stones became important material relics of the repressive Soviet past. People who have not experienced the repressions and who, sometimes for the first time in their lives, heard about the tragedy, could touch a historical relic. This materiality of the monument, undoubtedly, had a great impact on the people's perception of the past at that time.

Being a kind of 'spontaneous shrine', the stones have quickly become symbols of contestation with a state which does not respect its citizens (Iofe 2002, p. 113). This meaning was already assigned by 1990, when the Solovetskii stone was unveiled in Lubyanka Square, and was later repeatedly emphasised by members of 'Memorial'. It also became typical of 'Memorial's' memory markers. As Irina Flige, then representative of the 'Memorial' Society in St Petersburg, explained in 2006, back in 1990 'Memorial' had decided to build a monument to victims of political repression on Troitsky

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<sup>10</sup> The square is the site of the headquarters and prison of the KGB, and since 1958, of the statue of Felix Dzerzhinsky, founder of the Soviet security service

<sup>11</sup> Inna Grabinova (2007) writes about this holiday. Official recognition of the holiday was embraced by society more widely; however, not all members of 'Memorial' are in favour of the new name, because, as Irina Flige explained in an interview, the government has changed the original meaning of the holiday. It is no longer a Day of Struggle and Freedom, but a Day of the Victims of the Repressions (interview with Irina Flige, representative of Memorial Society in St Petersburg, Medvedzegorsk, 7 August 2007).

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Square in St Petersburg, and the plinth for the future monument was erected, but the monument was unveiled only in September 2002. The members of 'Memorial' had been fundraising and waiting for an auspicious moment to bring a Solovetskii boulder to St Petersburg because, as she explained:

*It was important to us, where the stone is from. It was important not only that the stone was from Solovki, but also from a particular place ... Sekirnaya Hill is a symbol of sacrifice.<sup>12</sup> It is like a cemetery. ... Golgotha Mount also has a narrow and specific meaning.<sup>13</sup> Savvatievo is the most meaningful place. ... These are people who died in the political opposition, because from 1923 to 1925 this place was called the 'political hermitage'. There the real enemies of Soviet power were imprisoned; there the most severe hunger strike against the political regime took place. Therefore this memory sign is complex. Thus, the stone is from there.<sup>14</sup>*

Today, there are Solovetskii stones in Moscow, Arkhangel'sk, St Petersburg and on Solovki. Together they form a kind of matrix, semantically related one to another as memory markers; linked together not only by the provenance of the stones themselves, but also by the role they play in the interpretation of the repressions constructed by 'Memorial'. The stones bear witness to the Russian authorities' destruction of their own citizens for 'disloyalty' (Bogumił 2012a, pp. 78–80). The power of these monuments originates from their nature as members of the small group of monuments erected in the late Soviet and early post-Soviet periods, which refer to the past, but which do not have the 'monumental scale and messages of the Tsarist and Soviet traditions'. Thus, they are meaningful enough to support a viable civic tradition (Forest & Johnson 2002, p. 541). When these monuments were erected in the late 1980s and early 1990s their meaning was evident; they were honouring the dead and helping society come to terms with past repressions.<sup>15</sup> However, the problem with these spontaneous shrines was that as signs of memory they acted only temporarily. Thus, when political attitudes in Russia towards the Soviet repressions changed, the social impact of the stones also changed. The 'neutral' and universal nature of the stone monuments, which was the initial strength of the Solovetskii boulders monuments in the early 1990s, became their weakness, exactly because viewers imposed their own interpretations upon these monuments. Thus, when another memory actor, the Russian Orthodox Church, began to offer alternative, very specific and visually appealing ways of commemorating the Gulag, the 'Memorial' memory markers arguably began to lose their impact. The Orthodox Church started to interpret Gulag history intensively at the end of the 1980s, and, in parallel with 'Memorial', very quickly became interested in commemorating the Gulag past on the Solovetskii Islands. When the Russian Orthodox Church returned to the Solovetskii Islands in 1990, the Bishop of Murmansk and Arkhangel'sk, Panteleimon said in an interview for *Severnaya Pravda* that the Church's main objective was to restore both the monastery, and Solovki's status as a major religious and pilgrimage centre (Mozgovoi 1990). As Solovetskii Special Purpose Camp became a place of exile and death for many bishops, clergy, and Orthodox believers, camp history started to play an important role in the process of the restoration

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<sup>12</sup> Sekirnaya Gora ('Pole-axe Hill') is one of the highest points on the main island of Solovetskii. In the orthodox chapel on the top of the hill, prisoners were detained in the chapel building during the period of SLON and its slopes served as a place of execution

<sup>13</sup> Golgotha Mount (Gora Golgofa) is the highest hill on Anzer Island, the second largest island of the Archipelago. In the orthodox chapel on the top of this hill there was a camp hospital, where many prisoners died

<sup>14</sup> For a history of the erection of this monument on Troitsky Square in St Petersburg, see Bogumił (2012b). Interview with Irina Flige, representative of the Memorial Society in St Petersburg, Solovetskii Islands, 10 August 2007.

<sup>15</sup> On the politics of the dead bodies see Paperno (2001, pp. 89–118).

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of the monastery on Solovki. This was clearly expressed by the Archbishop of Lviv and Galician, Augustin:

*I believe that every Orthodox person necessarily should find the opportunity to be on Solovki. ... The Solovetskii New Martyrs and Confessors were like the early Christians, like those who in Rome and other places of the Roman Empire who died because of persecution. Many have accepted martyrdom with gratitude, because in such a way they could testify about their faith and love for the Lord. During the persecution of the Christians, Rome was like a second Golgotha, and the Solovetskii Golgotha may be perceived in the history of Christianity as a third one. Certainly, for the Orthodox Russians, Solovki is the national Golgotha. (Osipenko 2007, p. 255)*

Even though during the reconstruction of the monastery many relics of the former camp, such as bars, barbed wire, or prisoner graffiti were removed, the memory of those who perished on Solovki defending the Orthodox faith is preserved and encoded in numerous crosses erected on the Archipelago. The importance of these memory signs for the Orthodox Church is evidenced by the fact that, during his first visit to Solovki in 1992, the patriarch, Aleksii II blessed the Solovetskii cross, which was erected in a very symbolic site, at the foot of the stairs leading to the top of Sekirnaya Hill, where a powerful Gulag legend maintains that prisoners were killed by being thrown down these stairs. As the sculptor explained at interview in 2007:

*The idea of this cross appeared when I learned how to make crosses. I measured the crosses on the Solovki, and especially on Anzer Island. ... According to existing description there was a 9-metre high cross. ... We searched for it. ... We found that cross in a very poor condition. It had fallen down and was overgrown. ... Some pieces of wood could be seen. And there was the writing, 'Tsar Glory, Jesus Christ'. ... It was the old alphabet, the old technique. ... I was shocked that the Church was so dishonoured, forgotten, forsaken. ... I wanted to make a copy of this cross and to put it somewhere so that it lived a new life. When we heard what happened here [at Sekirnaya Hill] with us and our relatives, we had to fix it. I suggested ... to the governor of the monastery that I could make a cross, and that we put it in a place where people were killed. At the bottom, where they actually met their end.<sup>16</sup>*

Thus, a replica of the Anzer cross was erected at the foot of the steps leading to Sekirnaya Hill (see Figure 2). The size of the cross on Anzer Island, and its location at one of the island's highest points, ensured that it served as a significant sign for the residents of the archipelago. While blessing its replica at the foot of Sekirnaya Hill, Aleksii II stressed that the lives of the so-called 'New Holy Martyrs' should serve as an example for future generations (Bogumił 2010b, 2011). The Solovetskii cross was intended to show believers the direction of their further spiritual development, just as its prototype on Anzer indicated a way home to the fishermen at sea.<sup>17</sup>

In this way the tradition of Solovetskii crosses, of which there were many standing on the archipelago before the Revolution,<sup>18</sup> was renewed by the Russian Orthodox Church, and the crosses themselves quickly became important signs of memory articulating the Russian Orthodox 'New

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with Georgii Kozhokar, who works in the monastery's carpentry workshop making the Solovetskii crosses, Solovetskii Islands, 9 August 2007

<sup>17</sup> For the history and meaning of other Solovetskii crosses located on the Archipelago and dedicated to the victims of repressions, see Bogumił (2012b).

<sup>18</sup> Up to the closure of the monastery in 1920 on the Solovetskii Islands, there were about 3,000 crosses (Kopylova 2001)

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Martyrdom' narrative (Bogumił 2010a, 2010b, 2011). Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, Solovetskii crosses have followed Solovetskii stones in leaving the islands in order to mark significant sites of memory for the Russian Orthodox Church. The first cross was erected in front of the Solovetskii Monastery in Moscow, denoting a place where people can come and pray for relatives deceased in Solovki or at other Gulag sites.<sup>19</sup> Another, the biggest Solovetskii cross, was erected in front of the Church of the New Russian Martyrs and Confessors at the Butovo mass graves near Moscow, to mark one of the most significant sites of Soviet repression, thus raising the importance of this new sacred place (see Figure 3).

### **Butovo—site of memory of new Russian martyrs**

Butovo's status as an important symbol of Soviet repression reflects the fact that from the mid-1930s to the early 1950s it was the site of the greatest number of mass shootings near to Moscow (Shantsev 2007). During the Great Terror 20,761 people were executed there (Shantsev 2007, p. 144). The first monument to denote a site of memory was erected here by 'Memorial', in the form of a gravestone, placed next to the public road running beside the mass graves (see Figure 4). However, since the mid-1990s, when control of Butovo was handed over to the Orthodox Church, the site has steadily taken on the appearance of an Orthodox site of memory. The territory of the mass graves was first fenced off, like a conventional Russian cemetery, and the main entrance to the enclosed area was moved away from the main road, so that visitors now enter from an alternative road. As a result the 'Memorial' monument is now at the periphery of the cemetery, marginalising both the monument, and its impact on visitors. A new Orthodox chapel was built just beyond the new entrance, and the mass graves were marked with mounds, and with some single Orthodox crosses. The names of the victims were inscribed on a plaque at the end of the cemetery. On the other side of the public road a large Orthodox Church dedicated to the New Russian Martyrs and Confessors was built, next to which, in 2007 (the 70th anniversary of the Great Terror), a large Solovetskii cross was erected.

The transportation of this cross from Solovki to Butovo, and its erection next to the Orthodox Church carried a very symbolic meaning in terms of the use of this site to further a particular interpretation of Gulag history and commemoration of the 'New Russian Martyrs'. As the exhibition prepared for the occasion by the Solovetskii Monastery informed visitors:

*Butovo and Solovki are associated not only by enormity of the evil that took place there; these places are invisibly bound together by the fate of the New Russian Martyrs. Many SLON prisoners, who miraculously survived the camp tortures were again arrested in 1937–1938. They sacrificed their lives to God on Butovsky training ground. A similar fate was experienced by many other prisoners of the Gulag<sup>20</sup>*

To recall the past, the cross travelled to Moscow in a religious 'procession', the so-called *Krestnyi khod*. Initially, it was transported by sea, and later via the Belomor Canal and the Moscow River. The cross's journey was effectively a pilgrimage recalling the 'stations of the cross' the stages of the crucifixion of Christ. It stopped for prayer at significant Gulag history sites such as former *lagernyi punkty* [transitional camps], the Sandarmokh cemetery, the burial place of the victims of the mass political repressions in Karelia,<sup>21</sup> sites 'where new Russian martyrs and confessors have fulfilled their

<sup>19</sup> *Pravoslavnyi tserkovnyi kalendar'* (2002, p. 166). Calendar purchased at the Church's shop at Butovo.

<sup>20</sup> From the text of the exhibition 'Krestnyi Put'—Solovki—Butovo' displayed at the Solovetskii Monastery, August 2007.

<sup>21</sup> On Sandarmokh and the first memory days which took place there in October 1997 see Merridale (2001, pp. 1–20)

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dedication, and defended the faith and truth, in the former camps and places marked with the blood and tears of murdered innocents'.<sup>22</sup>

The Krestnyi khod was broadcast by major TV stations and was the most high profile media event of the 70th anniversary of the Great Terror. The pilgrimage expressed sorrow for past 'sins', and its role was to purify the nation from the mistakes of the past. It was dedicated to the zeks who had built with their own hands the canals along which the cross travelled, and the lagernye punkty where there were breaks for prayers. The krestnyi khod can be perceived as a kind of anti-behaviour (with the meaning given to that term by Boris Uspenskii).<sup>23</sup> Its goal was to purify the nation by application of reversed meanings. The cross travelled by water instead of by land; and upstream not down. Krestnyi khod not only linked the two 'Russian Golgothas', Solovki and Butovo, but also gave shape to the subsequent Russian Orthodox memorialisation of the Gulag (Bogumił 2012b). This idea was fully expressed in the symbolism of the Solovetskii cross set in Butovo. As the sculptor of the cross explained in an interview:

*For the first time we made a cross consisting of three different types of wood; ... like the cross of Christ. ... Moreover, the cross in Butovo has two sides. The front symbolises the victory of the Orthodox Church, the Holy Church, with the angels, the Archangel; ... these are unearthly objects. On the back there is the earthly Church, the Church which struggles with sin. I presented crosses there which symbolise that Butovo is a cemetery; ... that is why the back has the crosses. I presented there the Crown of Thorns. ... And there is another element—the thorns are interspersed with barbed wire. This was the instrument of murder of the New Russian Martyrs and Confessors of the twentieth century. On the front of the cross ... in the centre, is the Crown of Christ. This is his crown. I filled it with New Martyrs. This is their participation in the victory.*<sup>24</sup>

A year after the erection of the Solovetskii cross at Butovo, a corresponding cross was erected on the road leading to the mass graves at the top of Sekirnaya Hill on the Solovetskii Islands. The front of this cross carries the same symbolism as the back of the Butovo cross. In this way, the two Solovetskii crosses, one at Butovo and one on Sekirnaya Hill, form a kind of axis connecting the two 'Russian Golgothas'. This connection is made not only on the basis of the historical significance of both places (as mass graves for mass shootings) but on the basis of the symbolism of crosses which facilitates dialogue between these two places. The inscriptions on the cross on Sekirnaya Hill indicate both the repression that took place on Solovki in general, and on that site, the most deadly place of the archipelago, in particular. The placement of the same inscriptions on the reverse side of the cross in Butovo seems to explain that the system developed at Solovki spread all over the country, culminating in the Great Terror, of which Butovo is a site-symbol. But the repressions which took place in the earthly world are overshadowed by the symbolism of the front of the cross. In this way the cross at Butovo commemorates the repression, but above all is witness to Christ's victory over death and evil; a victory in which the new Russian martyrs participate.

Finally, it is worth noting that the importance of Butovo and Solovetskii Islands in the history of new Russian martyrdom is also expressed in the official icon of the New Russian Martyrs and Confessors

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<sup>22</sup> From the text of the exhibition 'Krestnyi Put'—Solovki—Butovo' displayed at the Solovetskii Monastery, August 2007.

<sup>23</sup> Uspenskii writes about the meaning of anti-behaviour for Russian culture in analysis of the reforms of Tsar Peter the Great. He shows that the aim of reforms was to invert the traditional precepts, such that the process of construction of the new society could begin (Uspenskii 1998).

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Georgii Kozhokar, who works in the monastery's carpentry workshop making the Solovetskii crosses, Solovetskii Islands, 9 August 2007

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(Khala 2010). On both sides of the icon there are smaller icons which represent scenes of individual martyrdom (on the right side) and scenes of mass martyrdom (on the left side). The Solovetskii Islands are located at the top while Butovo closes the scenes of mass martyrdom. Both places are thus linked not only geographically (through the crosses erected on mass graves in Sekirnaya Hill on Solovetskii Islands and Butovo), but also mystically, in the icon, of which the original is in the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow, with copies in many local Orthodox churches so that every Orthodox believer can pray to God through the intercession of the new martyrs. Amongst the new martyrs commemorated in the icon is Tsar Nicholas II, murdered in Ekaterinburg.

### **Ekaterinburg—site of memory of the Russian royal family or 'gateway to the Gulag'?**

The Tsar's assassination in July 1918 in the basement of the Ipatiev House is widely perceived in Russian society as the beginning of Russia's 'suffering' of the twentieth century. The impact of the execution of the last Russian emperor on the nation's history was clearly expressed by one interviewee, a resident of Kolyma engaged in erecting Orthodox crosses on the territory of the former Sevvostlag camp cemeteries, in 2008:

*In March 1917, when the Tsar abdicated, they celebrated a great victory. But, three years passed and in March 1921, half of those who celebrated were no longer living, and the half that still survived, were without wealth, without a country. ... As stated in the Bible, four generations will bear responsibility for the sins of their ancestors. The next generation was the one developing Kolyma and all the other places far away. ... It is evidence of what? That Russia should repent for the murder of the Tsar and the royal family.*<sup>25</sup>

The Tsar's assassination in Ekaterinburg ensured that this city has become an important site of memory. In the early 1990s, as in other parts of the country, local Ekaterinburg newspapers started to discuss the construction of monuments which would commemorate the victims of Soviet repressions. The erection of three different monuments was envisaged. First was the *Khram na Krovi* (Church on the Spilled Blood), which was planned to be built at the location of the murder of the Tsar and his family. Second was a memorial to the victims of political repressions located at the so-called '12 km down the Moscow road' site where between 30 and 50 mass executions of more than 20,000 people took place. The last monument was 'Mask Europe-Asia' designed by sculptor Ernst Neizvestnii (Pastuchova 1995; Kutozov 1996), which was planned to be built on the border between European Russia and Siberia as a kind of 'Gateway to the Gulag'. This monument was part of a wider memory complex, a triptych named 'The Russian Triangle of Suffering and Redemption', consisting of three masks standing at significant sites of the history of the Soviet repressions, in Ekaterinburg, Vorkuta and Magadan. Of the three monuments planned in Ekaterinburg, only the first two, *Khram na Krovi* and the Memorial Complex to Victims of Political Repressions at '12 km down the Moscow road' were built. Despite the efforts of the Ekaterinburg 'Memorial', Neizvestnii's Masks monument was not erected, due to the strong opposition of the Orthodox Church.

The idea behind 'The Russian Triangle of Suffering and Redemption' resulted from Neizvestnii's participation in a conference organised by Moscow State University in 1989, where he delivered a lecture on Art and Society.<sup>26</sup> The lecture made a great impression on the audience, and representatives of various cities asked Neizvestnii to build monuments in their towns. The sculptor chose only three cities: Ekaterinburg, place of execution of Tsar Nicholas II; and Vorkuta and

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<sup>25</sup> Interview with Vladimir Naiman, who erects crosses at his own expense on the territory of the former lager cemeteries in Kolyma region, Debin, 8 July 2008

<sup>26</sup> See Leoig (1998, pp. 67–71)

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Magadan, two of the most notorious Gulag sites in the USSR, and decided to link them via these monuments, which due to their symbolism would be in constant dialogue and thus contribute to the transformation of Soviet society. The meaning of this triptych stimulated the local 'Memorial' representatives of Vorkuta, Magadan and Ekaterinburg; they engaged intensively in their construction, and perceived these monuments to be an appropriate means to effect societal change.

All three monuments took the form of masks. The Vorkuta Mask resembled an island located on the river bank. It faces across the river towards the site where the first coal mine and special purpose camp, Rudnik, were located (see Figure 5). The Mask of Sorrows in Magadan gazes sadly towards the Kolyma gates, where ships docked to allow prisoners to disembark (see Figure 6). In Ekaterinburg, two masks were planned, with European and Asian-featured faces gazing in opposite directions (see Figure 7). The rear 'interiors' of the masks were to be in opposition to their calm exteriors; filled with crosses engulfed by eternal fire, which were 'embracing the European victims and Asian victims and in such a way presenting the scale of our tragedy and our pain' (Andreev 1990). In a newspaper article stored in the 'Memorial' archive in Ekaterinburg, the director of the Ekaterinburg Artists Association explained the symbolism of this monument in the following way:

*These masks literally came to us from antiquity. We all are the victims of a thoughtless idea. ... The monument should reflect eternal mourning for people innocently killed, and should change us like a panikhida<sup>27</sup> in the Orthodox church, like Bach's music, like a Greek tragedy.<sup>28</sup>*

According to the agreement between 'Memorial', the city authorities and Ernst Neizvestnii, the Mask monument should have been unveiled during the City Day in 1991.<sup>29</sup> However, by 1993 the monument had still not been erected. From the outset there were problems with funding for the construction of the monument, but it was the protest by the Russian Orthodox Bishop of Ekaterinburg and Kurgan, Melkhisedek, against the monument which had the greatest impact. In his letter to the city authorities, the bishop claimed that the spiritual dimension of the monument was very problematic. Monuments commemorating the dead, he argued, are the most important cultural phenomena because they embody the spiritual and cultural traditions of the nation. Thus, these monuments must express the nation's spirit and not just the artist's vision. The bishop asked whose cultural traditions were being expressed in Ernst Neizvestnii's Ekaterinburg monument, and argued that the monument offended various religious feelings, not only those of the Russian Orthodox Church. He was convinced that the only appropriate sign of memory was an Orthodox church, chapel or cross, particularly in a place such as Ekaterinburg, where Tsar Nicholas II and his family were killed.<sup>30</sup>

The bishop's arguments were picked up by representatives and members of different organisations who also joined the protest; they were discussed in detail in the local press in 1993.<sup>31</sup> A member of the Ekaterinburg City Council claimed that the masks were empty signs, and that the only adequate way to commemorate the victims of repressions was through the Khram na Krovi. The representative of the Organisation of the Victims of Political Repressions in Ekaterinburg argued that

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<sup>27</sup> A memorial service.

<sup>28</sup> Ilya Gintsei, 'Komu on nuzhen, etot pamyatnik?', a newspaper article from Vechernii Ekaterinburg, cut from the newspaper by Anna Pastukhova, representative of the Memorial Society in Ekaterinburg, and archived in her private archive alongside information on the erection of the Ernst Neizvestnii monument

<sup>29</sup> 'Memorial' Archive, Ekaterinburg, Agreement Number 156. RSFSR, Sverdlovskii Gorodskii Sovet Narodnikh Deputatov Iсполnitel'nii Komitet; Reshenie ot 15.05.1990, nr 156, 'O sooruzhenii v g. Sverdlovskoe pamyatnika zhertvam repressii'. The document is archived in Anna Pastukhova's private archive

<sup>30</sup> Melkhisedek, 'Narodnom nas delat' pamyat'', Glagol, March 1993

<sup>31</sup> Dialogi u monumenta', Glagol, March 1993.

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the proposed location of the Mask monument was also problematic, because the nearby Palace of Youth (Dvoretz Molodezhi) was a site which 'emanates optimism and hope for the future'.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, there was already a monument 12 kilometres down the Moscow road, so, it was asked, why was another necessary, especially one so expensive? Another added that the monument was too generic—it could be erected anywhere in the world 'in Taiwan, Indonesia or Germany' but not in Russia.<sup>33</sup> The size of the monument also provoked doubts. An art expert claimed that the monument was huge and reflected the nation's obsession with gigantism. Others also argued that the money for the monument should be given to people who needed it and not spent on this 'gigantic monster' (Pinaeva 1993, p. 3) of 'the unknown Michaelangelo' (Perevalov 1993, p. 4).

Supporters of the Mask monument questioned why the Orthodox Church should be concerned about the spiritual representation of the Mask monument at all, when many memorials of the 'Great Patriotic War' had no religious meaning.<sup>34</sup> A journalist from Vechernii Ekaterinburg even questioned the basis of the bishop's rights to talk about the religious feelings of people of other faiths, asking why should Khram na Krovi, which reflected the values of only one religious group, be better than the Mask monument which would reflect the ideas of different groups? Why could both monuments not be erected (Andreev 1993)? Another supporter claimed that the city authorities should provide the money for the Mask monument because 'the authorities conducted the terror in 1930s, so it is the authorities which should erect the monument of sorrows' (Matafonova 1993). However, the protest of the Russian Orthodox community prevailed, and the 'Mask Europe-Asia' monument was not erected.

#### **Magadan—site of memory of Soviet utopian consciousness or another site of new martyrs?**

In Magadan, the fate of Ernst Neizvestnii's Mask of Sorrows was rather different. As one employee of the Magadan Cultural Centre explained in an interview in 2008:

*For years in the city there were only so-called 'on duty' monuments: statues of Lenin and representations of the Communist Party. No other monuments were built, because nobody wanted to stay all his life in Magadan. In general, people wanted to live here for some time, earn some money and then move to the central parts of USSR. Therefore, they did not pay attention to monuments as determinants of cultural identity.*<sup>35</sup>

However, at the end of the 1980s, the situation changed, with people growing attached to this region, and choosing to stay; some because they had an emotional attachment to place, others because they could not envisage living anywhere else. As one of the residents of the town of Debin claimed in 2008: 'we are voluntary zeks; we cannot leave this place; we cannot even go to Magadan; we have no money'.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, discussions about a memorial for the victims of the Gulag in

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<sup>32</sup> This is the reported opinion of G. Gassel'blad, representative of the Ekaterinburg Association for Victims of Political Repression, 'Dialogi u monumenta', Glagol, March 1993, p. 2. There was discussion of the meaning of the monument in the local newspapers. Glagol gathered the opinions of representatives of the regional administration, and various social and artistic organisations, and published them under the title 'Dialogi u monumenta'

<sup>33</sup> This is the reported opinion of Yu. Lipatnikov, representative of the Russian union movement, 'Russian Soyuz', Glagol, March 1993, p. 4. This is also from the collection of opinions gathered by Glagol (see footnote 32)

<sup>34</sup> B. Yakov, 'Maski my vas ne znaem', Oblastnaya Molod'ezhnaya Gazeta, 1993. This article, cut from the newspaper by Anna Pastukhova, representative of the Memorial Society in Ekaterinburg, is archived in her private archive alongside information on the erection of the Ernst Neizvestnii monument.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with the moderator working in the House of Culture in Magadan, Magadan, 16 July 2008

<sup>36</sup> Interview with an inhabitant of Debin village, Kolyma, 8 July 2008.

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Magadan developed in conjunction with debates about other monuments to be erected in the city (Bogumił 2012b, pp. 279–82). The idea was to create a network of monuments which expressed the identity of the inhabitants of Kolyma. The proposed 'Mask of Sorrows', however, provoked the most heated discussions.

The sculptor claimed that the 'Mask of Sorrows' was a death mask reflecting the character of its era. Since the left side of the brain is responsible for memory, there are masks on the left side of the face which imitate human tears. Masks also symbolise the community of prisoners, reflecting their different ages, nationalities, characters and attitudes towards the reality which surrounded them, as well as their different ways of experiencing pain (Raizman 1999). On the back of the mask is a cross with a figure of a man; however, the crucified man does not accept the cross, instead he is pictured breaking away from it, therefore this representation is not a symbol of victimhood or reconciliation, but rather a symbol of anger and refusal to accept a fate of slavery (Raizman 1999). It is this allegedly profane use of Christian symbolism that caused a storm around Ernst Neizvestnii's monument, and for which he was strongly criticised.

It was argued that the 'Mask of Sorrows' was blasphemous, and that it offended the religious feelings of Russian Orthodox believers.<sup>37</sup> Vechernii Magadan quoted the argument of the Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy and Theology of the Russian Orthodox University in Moscow, one of the opponents of the monument, who stated that in the Christian culture a body stretched on the cross is associated with Christ, who accepts its suffering. But Neizvestnii's Mask sculpture symbolised not sacrifice or reconciliation, but revolt; the crucified man resembled Prometheus rather than Christ. The monument to victims of Bolshevism was thus imbued with the idea of Bolshevism itself and reflected the apotheosis of hate.<sup>38</sup> The man with outstretched arms seemed ready to kill anyone who used force to enslave him (Raizman 1999).

The allegation of the profane use of Christian symbolism in the Mask monument provoked the Russian Orthodox community in Magadan to start a petition of opponents of the monument, in an attempt to convince the city authorities to halt its construction. Their main argument was that the Mask monument did not correspond to the Russian Orthodox faith, and that it therefore contradicted the spirit of the Russian nation.<sup>39</sup> Their petition also included a letter from the Bishop of Ekaterinburg, which in turn contained a detailed explanation of the whole controversy. It was once again stressed that since the Mask memorialised the dead, it should be in line with the cultural traditions of the nation, and should form an integral part of national identity formation. Ernst Neizvestnii's Mask of Sorrows, they argued, did not express the values of the nation, so future generations would learn nothing about the Russian nation from looking at this monument.<sup>40</sup>

The aesthetics of the monument were also criticised.<sup>41</sup> The protests of the Russian Orthodox Church emphasised that the memorial should produce positive feelings in the viewer, and express deeper meanings, but that the Mask of Sorrows was instead hiding the truth; that it suggested hypocrisy, deceit, two-facedness,<sup>42</sup> and was therefore unsuitable for this kind of memorialisation. The Mask,

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<sup>37</sup> 'Krest bez Khrista', Vechernii Magadan, 12 January 1996.

<sup>38</sup> 'Krest bez Khrista', Vechernii Magadan, 12 January 1996.

<sup>39</sup> 'Nerastorzhimaya chast' narodnogo dukh'', Vechernii Magadan, 30 April 1993

<sup>40</sup> 'Nerastorzhimaya chast' narodnogo dukh'', Vechernii Magadan, 30 April 1993

<sup>41</sup> 'Nerastorzhimaya chast' narodnogo dukh'', Vechernii Magadan, 30 April 1993

<sup>42</sup> "Maska" vzhlyad c dukhovnoi strany', Vechernii Magadan, 10 February 1995.

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they argued, was nothing more than a violation of a thousand years of Orthodox Christianity and Russian tradition.<sup>43</sup>

The Russian Orthodox Church asked who the monument was for—the living, or the dead? If for the dead, it argued that people sentenced to imprisonment in Magadan were members of 'traditional culture', claiming therefore that they were mostly brought up 'in the Orthodox faith', and that the monument should therefore empathise with their situation and consider whether they would like be buried under 'Ernst's cross' or whether they 'would rather prefer to lie in the open air'.<sup>44</sup> If the monument was for the living, then it was deemed useless, because they argued that respect to the dead could only be learned through education, and not through this monument. Just as in Ekaterinburg, the Mask's opponents again claimed that the only appropriate monument was the Russian Orthodox chapel, or the cross, and that such a symbol should be erected, rather than the Mask.<sup>45</sup>

The Mask of Sorrows' supporters explained that the cross in the Mask had nothing to do with Christianity; that it was simply a tool of torture.<sup>46</sup> Their explanation emphasised that not all secular art must necessarily move away from God; that secular art may carry a deeper Biblical message. For them the significance of the monument lay in the contrast—the gap between the dispassionate and indifferent gaze of the Mask, and the utter tragedy conveyed by the whole composition (Shalirnov 1996). This aesthetic was very significant; the Mask was not only a memorial to the victims, but its form and its message also demonstrated the intellectual and moral mediocrity of those who developed the Gulag (Medovoi 1996). It was emphasised that the monument was not an idol, but a symbol, which expressed memory, and that people should honour this symbol. Moreover, it was also a symbol of faith in the democratic future of Russia (Raizman 1999), with the monument itself commemorating victims of other totalitarian states which adopted Marxist ideology.<sup>47</sup> Ernst Neizvestnii wrote about the message of the monuments as follows:

*I see what happened in the Soviet Union as an anthropological crime against humankind in general, it is not the tragedy of an individual social group, this is not the tragedy of an individual nation, not even the tragedy of Russia, but it is like the disaster in Germany, like fascism. (Neizvestnii 1989, p. 70)*

The Mask was therefore a sign of an inclination towards 'utopian consciousness' which may lead to a disaster comparable to those that took place in the twentieth century. Despite the vehement criticism of the Russian Orthodox Church, the Mask of Sorrows was unveiled in Magadan during commemorations of the Day of Victims of Political Repressions, organised specially for this occasion, in June 1996. As Miron Etlis, the representative of 'Memorial' in Magadan, asked in an interview in 2008: 'how did we manage to do it [unveil the monument] during the Yel'tsin era? It is a secret of political manoeuvring'.<sup>48</sup> It was also possible because of the specificity of the identity situation of Kolyma inhabitants at that time. The debate about monuments in Magadan's newspapers at the beginning of the 1990s had a great impact on Kolyma inhabitants, and meant that the Mask became an important marker of local identity.

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<sup>43</sup> Tsenarii pod nazvaniem "Monument", *Vechernii Magadan*, 24 March 1995

<sup>44</sup> *Krest bez Khrista'*, *Vechernii Magadan*, 12 January 1996

<sup>45</sup> *Komu vse eto nuzhno?*, *Vechernii Magadan*, 23 April 1993

<sup>46</sup> *Komu vse eto nuzhno?*, *Vechernii Magadan*, 23 April 1993

<sup>47</sup> See Leoig (1998, p. 67).

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Miron Etlis, representative of the Memorial Society in Magadan and former prisoner in Kolyma, Magadan, 12 July 2008

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### **The pre-eminence of the Russian Orthodox Church in the twenty-first century**

By the beginning of the twenty-first century, the status of Gulag memory in Kolyma, as in all of Russia, had changed (Bogumił 2012a). The economic crisis and political changes of the mid-late 1990s arguably derailed the process of cultural change, and the 1997 Law 'On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Association'<sup>49</sup> strengthened the Russian Orthodox Church's position in society, and its impact on the shape of collective memory of the Gulag. In consequence, crosses or memory chapels are today erected not only by representatives of the Russian Orthodox church, but also increasingly often by some 'Memorial' members. Even if members of St Petersburg or Moscow 'Memorial' are opposed to confessional signs of memory, claiming that they impose a particular understanding of the past, members of other 'Memorial' branches state that these are universal symbols, which express their meaning unambiguously. As a representative of 'Youth Memorial', who organises river rafting tours on the 'memory rivers' in Perm' region, and who erects memorials to Gulag victims, claimed at interview in 2008:

*I do not really like the confessional character of memorials. In the 1930s and 1940s many people in the Soviet Union were atheists, and yet to commemorate them I erect the cross. ... But the cross, as is shown in our European tradition, not only the Russian tradition, indicates that a place is a memorial ... it catches the attention and indicates that the place honours the memory of a person. So, I usually erect crosses. The Catholic one as well [as the Orthodox].<sup>50</sup>*

The best example of this 'turn' towards religious representation, in which Russian Orthodox symbolism has become the dominant visual language of remembrance of the Gulag, is perhaps the monument to the Victims of Political Repressions erected by the Pokayanie Foundation in Syktyvkar, in the Komi Republic (see Figure 8). Pokayanie was founded by the members of Syktyvkar 'Memorial' Society, and is the only non-government organisation which both has its roots in the 'Memorial' movement and is supported from the Republic's budget. The Republic authorities gave special funds for the erection of the monument, unveiled in 2001 in one of the city's squares. Rather than an 'artistic vision' like the Mask monument, it takes the shape of an Orthodox chapel. The metal relief on the central back wall, which represents the 'night arrest' of a Gulag victim, re-emphasises the intertwining of Christian iconography within Gulag memorialisation; the relief depicts a man who was a dedicated Communist, signified by the hammer and sickle badge held by a child in its outstretched hand. The man was evidently rewarded by the authorities who also caused his death. The whole scene recalls Christ's crucifixion, with women standing next to the cross, Mary his mother and Mary Magdalen, here his wife. The man himself seems to accept his fate humbly and his gaze, directed at the hammer and sickle, reflects contrition and remorse for his sins. In contrast to the Mask of Sorrow in Magadan, the way the Syktyvkar monument uses the religious representations does not seem to violate the Orthodox faith and the monument was willingly consecrated by an Orthodox priest. Mikhail Rogachev, a representative of the Pokayanie Foundation, explained why they chose this form for the monument: 'The idea was to point out that the history of the Gulag took place on Orthodox soil'.<sup>51</sup> He stressed, however, that the chapel commemorates all the dead, not just Orthodox believers. He also pointed out that on 30 October, priests of different confessions

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<sup>49</sup> This law redefined the state's relationship with religion and was signed by President Boris Yel'tsin on 26 September 1997, available at: <http://www2.stetson.edu/~psteeves/relnews/freedomofconscienceeng.html>, accessed 31 July 2015.

<sup>50</sup> Interview with Robert Latypov, representative of Youth Memorial, a branch of the Memorial Society in Perm, and organiser of canoe trips on 'memory rivers', Perm, 28 July 2008.

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Mikhail Rogachev, representative of the Pokayanie Foundation, member of the Memorial Society in Syktyvkar, historian and editor of 'memory' books Pokayanie, Syktyvkar, 22 September 2007

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come to the chapel to celebrate the Day of Victims of Political Repressions, and others of different faiths pray outside. Rogachev believes that the chapel is a 'shared' marker of memory. However, the question still arises over whether this cooperation will be harmonious. Will the Syktyvkar chapel remain a shared sign of memory when the Gulag becomes part of the cultural memory, and its only material relics are stones and Orthodox crosses and chapels? Will today's broad understanding of the meaning of this memory sign, always remain inclusive? The examples of Ekaterinburg and Magadan call the 'unifying' nature of these religious markers into question. Is it really possible that a site imbued with the religious iconography of one group can become a common site of memory?

### **Discussion: sacred or secular?**

As the post-Soviet period has progressed, the Russian people have confronted the various aspects of the legacy of the Soviet period in general, and of the repressions in particular. Despite the passage of time, public attitudes toward Stalin and the mass repressions remain deeply contradictory, with a kaleidoscope of opinions ranging from the 'harmless' nostalgia for the sense of predictability and security of the Soviet era, to a complex relationship between Soviet nostalgia and Russian nationalism, and to the more controversial 'rehabilitation' of Stalin as a national hero and the marginalisation of the Stalinist repressions as part of the retelling of Soviet history in what is arguably a new era of political repression (Khrushcheva 2005; Oushakine 2007; Nikolayenko 2008). Shlapentokh and Bondartseva argue that this ongoing crystallisation of attitudes is a powerful indicator that at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Russia still 'does not have an ideology that can unite the majority of the elite and the masses' (Shlapentokh & Bondartseva 2009, p. 302). In this foment of opinion, the memorialisation of the repressions, through sites of memory, provides a tangible example of these debates being played out both in public debate in the press, and in the cultural landscape, in ways which are intended to influence collective memory and inform opinion and interpretation of the significance of the repressions; opinion which in turn has the potential to shape contemporary social and political developments in the Russian Federation.

Dorman argues that the rising number of New Russian Martyr canonisations has accompanied 'a progressive and discreet transfer of responsibility for commemorative affairs from the state to the Orthodox Church' (Dorman 2010, p. 436), resulting in the dominance of a particular kind of memory of the repressions, that identifies and reifies, amongst millions of victims, those who died for their Orthodox faith. At sites such as Butovo, she argues, the new martyrs are overrepresented, and religious commemoration dominates any secular remembrance. Our own study of the Butovo site demonstrates the specific ways in which secular commemoration has been marginalised not only through the rearrangement of the site (which minimised the impact of the 'Memorial' stone), but also in the discourses which surrounded the Orthodox memorial, in which the thousands of Butovo victims are subsumed within the narrative of the 'New Martyrs'. Although at Butovo around 1,000 victims were certainly murdered for their religious beliefs, these killings represent a fraction of the total number of deaths, which stands at over 20,000.

Elsewhere, our evidence from Ekaterinburg and Magadan demonstrates that at these sites, the Russian Orthodox Church actively led opposition to secular commemoration of the repression, stating very clearly that commemoration of the dead had to reflect the 'cultural traditions of the nation', insisting that these cultural traditions were coterminous with the values of the Orthodox Church, and that this relationship was essential to ensure the appropriate development of national identity, a process to take place through the shaping of collective memory at these sites of memory. In Magadan, the Russian Orthodox Church explicitly appropriated all Gulag victims as 'believers', claiming that since they were of 'traditional culture', they had been brought up 'in the Orthodox

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faith'—a narrative which is one small step away from describing all of Magadan's victims of repression as martyrs for the Orthodox faith.

As the Russian Orthodox Church's 'appropriation' of the memory of the repression gathers speed, in the absence of any other coordinated form of memorialisation, alternative forms of commemoration at sites of memory are increasingly marginalised, or eliminated altogether, as secular organisations adopt the dominant visual lexicon of remembrance. The form of the new monument in Syktyvkar suggests that the turn towards recognisably Orthodox markers of memory, and towards an Orthodox interpretation of history, along with the terminology of the 'New Russian Martyrs', has become increasingly evident in Russia. Although at the end of the Soviet and beginning of the post-Soviet periods, members of 'Memorial' sought to articulate a secular, commemorative lexicon via the erection of non-religious memorials at significant sites of memory, they have not managed to create a coherent commemorative language. This is because, as Russian scholar Alexander Etkind noted, there was at that time 'no serious philosophical debate in Russia, either secular, or religious, which would focus upon the problem of guilt, memory and identity of a society that had gone through mass terror' (Etkind 2004, pp. 51–2). Elsewhere, such debates, such as that of Holocaust memory, involved the participation of philosophers, artists, writers and witnesses to the events, and led to the construction of the material texture of memory. In consequence, even if 'Memorial' wanted to make Gulag memory a means to transform society, the memories of the repressions have a different shape and function in Russia than Holocaust memory has in the West (Forest & Johnson 2002, pp. 539–43; Bogumił 2012b).

There is also the problem of the monuments erected by 'Memorial'. The Society mostly erected monuments in the form of Solovetskii stone or tombstones, which 'do not visually represent the struggle of prisoners, the uprisings in the camps, hearings and tortures, violence and opposition, the hardships, ideology and other matters' specific for this situation. Crosses and tombstones could commemorate death, but not necessarily this particular one that has come as the result of a criminal regime. Therefore, these monuments 'do not blame, do not protest and do not explain the past' (Etkind 2004, pp. 68, 70). In other words, memory projects created by 'Memorial' are not the key to finding an answer to the essential questions: how was this possible? How do we move on from this? Hence, a return to traditional, recognisable markers of memory is widely visible in Russia. The Orthodox perception of the past guarantees a sense of continuation with the past, is rooted in the national culture and therefore is easy to understand by the majority of society. That is why today even some representatives of 'Memorial' choose Orthodox iconography to mark sites of memory.<sup>52</sup> Thus, whether intentionally or not, they lend weight to the Orthodox interpretation of Gulag history in terms of its influence on collective memory, and, through facilitation of the sedimentation of this interpretation in the visible cultural landscape, enable the continued semantic connection between commemoration of victims of the repression with the Russian Orthodox narrative of the 'New Russian Martyrs'. This 'turn' towards Orthodox signs of memory is a slow, but pervasive process, which arguably has a significant impact both on the collective memory of the Gulag in Russia, as it becomes ever more deeply rooted in Russian Orthodox retellings of history, and in contemporary 'rehabilitation' of the Soviet and Stalin period.

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<sup>52</sup> Interestingly, the representatives of 'Memorial' in St Petersburg and Moscow are opposed to the erection of Orthodox memory markers claiming that such commemorative signs are a kind of appropriation of the sites of memory common to different religious groups, but they support, for instance, the Polish Consul in the erection of Catholic crosses on sites recognised as places of Polish martyrdom. This conflict between sacred and secular commemoration also has geopolitical undertones.

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