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**Martyrdom and Memory in
Eastern Europe**

Guest editors:

Uilleam Blacker & Julie Fedor

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Soviet and Post-Soviet Varieties of Martyrdom and Memory¹

Uilleam Blacker and Julie Fedor

In this special issue, we explore the narratives of martyrdom connected to the history and memory of twentieth-century violence in Eastern Europe. The archetypal figure of the martyr offers a powerful vehicle for remembering the dead, and a potent tool for making and remaking identity, and especially for cultivating national myths. The language and imagery of martyrdom has long been a central part of the memory cultures of Eastern Europe, but in recent decades in particular it has undergone a striking revival. Religiously inflected narratives of the past involving claims to martyrdom have become increasingly prominent throughout the region, from the Russian Orthodox Church's "new martyrdom" discourse on the Soviet persecution of religion to the stories of national sacrifice presented at museums such as the Lonts'kyi Prison museum in Ukraine or the Museum of the Warsaw Uprising in Poland, through to the recent mass canonization of Armenian genocide victims. Images of martyrdom have proliferated especially since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, where they are being used to underpin territorial

¹ We gratefully acknowledge support provided by the CEELBAS Research Networks Scheme; the Humanities in the European Research Area Joint Research Programme; Darwin College, Cambridge; and the Australian Research Council's Discovery Early Career Research Awards (DECRA) funding scheme (project DE150100838). The views expressed herein are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of the abovelisted bodies.

claims,² calls for retribution,³ and new national myths.⁴ The contributors to this special issue examine a range of manifestations of this mode of remembering in Soviet and post-Soviet space. Our focus is on the distinctive forms which these martyrdom narratives take, and the ways in which these in turn are used to frame and shape identities.

Martyrdom is a key node within a cluster of semantically rich and interlinked concepts—victimhood, sacrifice, persecution—all of which can be used to mount compelling claims to legitimacy and authority, especially in the absence of alternative channels for political expression. To identify a martyr is to enable sacralization. As Katerina Clark has written, “Martyrdom has always been a primary mode of vindication”.⁵ The figure of the martyr—as a single individual, embodying and personifying a cause or a collective—can exert a strong hold over imaginations and emotions. Stories of martyrdom can offer consolation in the face of untimely death and catastrophe; vindication, entitlement, and a sense of righteousness; and they also have unique mobilizing force. The notion of martyrdom can activate complexes of intense emotions linked to the notion of persecution, and here in particular this discourse can create fertile soil for radical othering and dehumanization.

² The back cover of one recent Russian history of Crimea, for example, proclaims that “The blood of our soldiers, fallen during the Russo-Turkish, Crimean, Civil and Great Patriotic Wars, has been shed on every meter of Crimean soil”; *Istoriia Kryma* (Moscow: OLMA Media Grupp and Rossiiskoe voenno-istoricheskoe obshchestvo, 2015).

³ See for example this text on Novorossiiia: “Amidst the roaring of mortars, the burning cities, to the screams of the Odessan martyrs, to the moans of the wounded in Mariupol’ and Slaviansk, the young state of Novorossiiia is being born”; “Chtoby ni ot kogo ne zaviset”, *Veteran*, no. 19, 20 May 2014.

⁴ See the *Terra Dignitas* initiative to memorialize the victims of the February 2014 Maidan shootings, known as the “Heavenly Hundred”; Alya Shandra, “Kyiv City Council Launches Open Online Vote for Projects Commemorating Heaven’s Hundred”, *Euromaidan Press*, 6 April 2015; and “Podcast: Catherine Wanner, War, Grief and Rage: Popular Commemorations of the Maidan”, 6 April 2015, <http://www.reesblog.pitt.edu/podcast-catherine-wanner-war-grief-and-rage-popular-commemorations-of-the-maidan/> (accessed 30 November 2015).

⁵ Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000), 179.

The tendency to cast the dead as martyrs is not, of course, an exclusively “East European” phenomenon. The martyrdom paradigm offers one of the most pervasive and enduring of the narratives that humans have created to make sense of life and death. The Christian tradition is unimaginable without it, and as Joyce E. Salisbury has argued, many present-day beliefs and “indeed simple habits of mind” can be traced to the formative influence of the stories and imagery drawn from accounts of violence against the early Christian martyrs.⁶ Salisbury writes that “the influence of the accounts of this ancient violence extended far beyond the creation of new converts... this torture and persecution caused people to see the world as a struggle of good against evil that continues to haunt our cultural memories.”⁷ The categories and archetypes associated with martyrdom are among the central building blocks of the symbolic and moral universe shared in common across the Western world.

Yet while martyrdom as a discursive formation continues to exert a pervasive influence on Western cultures, the forms which it takes have largely been reconstituted, secularized, and sanitized. We can make out clear traces of the traditions of martyrdom in the modern languages of humanitarianism and human rights,⁸ and of nationalism, with its claims to the right to call upon soldiers to sacrifice their lives in the name of the nation.⁹ Yet these are for the most part no longer couched in the idiom of martyrdom,¹⁰ which now has an archaic ring to it in English.

⁶ Joyce E. Salisbury, *Blood of Martyrs: The Impact and Memory of Ancient Violence* (London: Routledge, 2004), vi.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁸ See Stephen Hopgood, *The Endtimes of Human Rights*, where he argues that “At the heart of this [modern humanitarian activism] was the suffering innocent, a secular version of Christ”. On the 17th-century shift in Protestant polemic from “martyrology to humanitarianism” see D. J. B. Trim, “Interventions in Early Modern Europe”, in *Humanitarian Intervention: A History*, ed. Brendan Simms and D. J. B. Trim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 38–39.

⁹ See for example Carolyn Marvin and David W. Ingle, *Blood Sacrifice and the Nation: Totem Rituals and the American Flag* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

¹⁰ The canonization of the Martyrs of the Spanish Civil War is one notable recent exception.

By contrast, in socialist and post-socialist space we find that martyrdom often takes a number of quite distinctive forms, comprising different mixes of religious and secular language, often mobilizing different sets of emotions, and serving a range of different political and ideological ends. These varieties of martyrdom are in part the products of long-standing cultural traditions in which suffering is not only romanticized and sacralized as a crucible of national identity, but often also valorized as something of inherent value in its own right. The Soviet cult of revolutionary martyrdom with its pantheon of secular saints,¹¹ and the heroic histories of anti-Soviet dissent, are also strands of these traditions. But perhaps most importantly, the specific forms which the martyrdom paradigm takes in this region have to do with the protracted and tortuous process of remembering and mourning the unacknowledged victims of successive waves of violence experienced in this part of the world in the twentieth century. The decades-long attempted suppression and repression of these memories on the part of socialist regimes in the region have meant that, as Uilleam Blacker and Alexander Etkind put it, “Uncounted or misrepresented, the dead do not lie in peace... Mourning for these dead is often difficult, complex, and incomplete.”¹²

The resulting crisis of mourning and remembrance faced by the post-socialist world is comparable in some respects to the watershed experience of the Great War in Western Europe. Seminal histories of memory and mourning such as Jay Winter’s *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (1998), Paul Fussell’s *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975), and George L. Mosse’s *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (1990), focused on British,

¹¹ On which see Elena Gapova, “Stradanie i poisk smysla: ‘moral’nye revoliutsii’ Svetlany Aleksievich”, *Neprikosnovennyi zapas* 99, 1 (2015), www.nlo-books.ru/node/5953 (accessed 9 June 2015); and Adrienne M. Harris, “Memorializations of a Martyr and her Mutilated Bodies: Public Monuments to Soviet War Hero Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya, 1942 to the Present”, *Journal of War & Culture Studies* 5, no. 1 (2012): 73-90.

¹² Uilleam Blacker and Alexander Etkind, “Introduction”, in *Memory and Theory in Eastern Europe*, ed. Uilleam Blacker, Alexander Etkind, and Julie Fedor (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 14.

French, and German cultural responses to the unprecedented “encounter with mass death” during the Great War.¹³ The scale and nature of the human loss, including enormous numbers of missing people and graves, placed a heavy burden on the old rituals and other practices surrounding mourning, which were no longer adequate to the task of making sense of these deaths.¹⁴ The new rituals and practices that emerged in the aftermath of this encounter with mass-scale mechanized and anonymized killing included the tomb of the Unknown Soldier— sites which offered a surrogate grave, and consolation, and simultaneously becoming sites where, in Mosse’s phrase, the nation came to “worship itself”.¹⁵

While they have received less attention to date, the magnitude and nature of the violent deaths experienced in Eastern Europe in the twentieth century present challenges of comparable significance, novelty, and complexity. Indeed the difficulties here are arguably greater. Soldiers killed in the trenches on the Great War’s Western Front may have died in new and horrifying ways but there were established military traditions for commemorating and mourning deaths in combat which could be employed here. No such conventions exist when it comes to deaths occurring in the course of such complex situations as genocide, state-run terror campaigns, inter-ethnic violence, state-contrived famine or massacres of prisoners-of-war. As Alexander Etkind puts it in relation to one specific

¹³ See in particular “Introduction: A Different Kind of War” in George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

¹⁴ On which see *ANZAC Remembered: Selected Writings by K. S. Inglis* (Melbourne: University of Melbourne, Department of History, 1998).

¹⁵ Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers*, 35 and passim. Benedict Anderson has famously argued that “No more arresting emblems of the modern culture of nationalism exist than cenotaphs and tombs of Unknown Soldiers. The public ceremonial reverence accorded these monuments precisely *because* they are either deliberately empty of no one knows who lies inside them, has no true precedents in earlier times”; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised ed. (London and New York: Verso, 2006), 9. Significantly, as Kenneth Inglis has pointed out, “in neither of the two nations with the most men to mourn, Russia and Germany, was the tomb of an unknown soldier created”; K. S. Inglis, “Entombing Unknown Soldiers: From London and Paris to Baghdad”, *History and Memory*, 5, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 1993): 8.

case, “the very nature of the Soviet terror makes it difficult to comprehend, remember, and memorialize”.¹⁶ These words also have a wider resonance for various mnemonic discourses across the region. Particularly notable in this regard is the status of the Holocaust. In Western Europe and North America, Holocaust memory is perhaps the most pervasive and well-developed paradigm of memory of any event of the 20th century, and is considered, though it displays significant internal variation, a model of coming to terms with a difficult past. The meaning of the millions of deaths that occurred during the Holocaust is, however, far less stable in Eastern European societies where the paradigm comes into contact with complex interfering factors, such as competing victimhoods, complexes of guilt over Nazi collaboration, co-participation in atrocities, or the trauma of the witness.¹⁷

The situation with regard to remembering and interpreting the deaths of victims of Soviet terror or the Holocaust is further complicated by the long period of several intervening decades of suspended and repressed mourning, by long-standing taboos, and by ongoing bitter conflicts over the basic facts of the historical record, together with the need to craft national histories for the region’s newly independent states. It is not surprising, then, that we should find a tendency to fall back on the paradigm of martyrdom which offers a familiar, reassuring, and often politically convenient way of representing and making sense of violent death.¹⁸ Yet at the same time, there are important ways in which the martyrdom paradigm is inadequate or ill-suited to this task.

¹⁶ Alexander Etkind, *Warped Mourning: Stories of the Undead in the Land of the Unburied* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), 11.

¹⁷ A survey of Holocaust memory in Eastern Europe can be found in the volume *Bringing the Dark Past to Light: The Reception of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Europe*, ed. John-Paul Himka, Joanna Beata Michlic (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2013).

¹⁸ We see these representations as linked to mourning, following Philippe Ariès who has described the ways in which the mourning ritual serves to “contain” the loss of death and to do so by “re-presenting” the death; Ariès cited in Peter Homans, “Introduction”, in *Symbolic Loss: The Ambiguity of Mourning and Memory at Century’s End*, ed. Peter Homans (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 4.

In this introductory essay, we sketch out several distinctive features of the varieties of martyrdom and memory in Soviet and post-Soviet space. First, we note the fact that quite often the term martyrdom is used in unexpected ways here to refer to deaths that would not qualify as martyrdom under the standard definitions. It is conventionally the case that for a death to be characterized as martyrdom, it should involve the individual in question making the choice to die.¹⁹ Under this criterion, the vast majority of deaths as a result of state campaigns of terror and mass killing would of course be disqualified, and yet in many cases this has not prevented the widespread claiming of these victims as martyrs.

Can martyrdom be involuntary? As Jay Winter discusses in his essay in this issue, this is a question that has previously been debated at length by Jewish thinkers in connection to the Holocaust. Some of the current debates on Soviet state terror revisit the same set of issues and in some cases reach similar solutions. Like Shimon Huberband, the Polish rabbi, historian, and writer who, as Jay Winter's essay explains, argued for an inclusive definition of Jewish martyrdom at the hands of the Nazis involving a shift of focus away from how a victim died to how he or she lived, so too, for example, the Russian historian Aleksei Beglov has suggested that our understanding of the "new martyrs", that is, the clergy and laity of the Russian Orthodox Church who suffered as a result of Soviet state repressions, should be based on attention to the victims' everyday lives rather than to the circumstances of their execution and death. Beglov points out that unlike traditional martyrs, the "new martyrs" were "not witnesses, but victims", given that "[i]n the overwhelming majority of cases nobody offered them the chance to preserve their life at the cost of renouncing their faith."²⁰

One powerful and original voice in the discussion over "new martyrdom" in Russia is the theologian and cultural theorist Anna Shmaina-Velikanova, who has called for a radical expansion of the

¹⁹ See further Margaret Cormack, "Introduction", in *Sacrificing the Self: Perspectives in Martyrdom and Religion*, ed. Margaret Cormack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), xii.

²⁰ Aleksei Beglov, "Zhizn' vo Khriste", www.bogoslov.ru, 23 November 2010, www.bogoslov.ru/text/1249558.html (accessed 3 November 2015).

category so as to include non-believers and all gulag victims who died “for no reason” (*prosto tak*).²¹ In this way Shmaina-Velikanova refashions the martyrdom paradigm in an attempt to resist the temptation to seek easy answers to the questions posed by past catastrophes.²² But more often, in contemporary East European martyrdom narratives, the involuntary nature of the deaths is elided, or rejected. When it comes to the case of ethnically targeted terror campaigns, identifying as a member of a particular national group is recast as an act of volition. The historian Andrzej Nowak, for example, in his defense of the Polish martyrological paradigm and its application to NKVD terror campaigns against Poles, has asserted that:

[T]hey died... because they were Poles... For Poland, Polishness, was obstructing the realization of the two mighty great powers' plans for imperial expansion... And either we remember that role as an obstacle to two of the most criminal systems in 20th-century history, or we agree with the thesis that there is no role here, there is only the absurdity of the crime and the victim. The Poles who died en masse at the hands of the NKVD did not interpret their Polishness as absurd. They were attached to it, *they chose it voluntarily*. If we don't interpret our Polishness as absurd, as a hump that can already be sawn off, then we ought not to forget those 150 thousand victims [emphasis added – UB & JF].²³

The vigorous debates that have taken place in Poland over the validity of the national martyrdom paradigm contrast quite sharply with the general tendency across the region. More often, the status

²¹ See further A. I. Shmaina-Velikanova, “Neischislmyi sonm muchenikov”, undated, available at: http://www.damian.ru/Actualn_tema/shmaina/Shmaina_Velik_ru.html and Yu. Balakshina, “Voiti v nasledie tekhn, kto otdal zhizn' za Khrista”, 4 February 2012, *Preobrazhenskoe sodruzhestvo malykh pravoslavnykh bratstv*, <http://www.psmb.ru/aktualnye-temy/usvoen-li-cerkovju-ves-opyt-novomuchenikov/statja/voiti-v-nasledie-tekhn-kto-otdal-zhizn-za-khrista/> (both accessed 3 November 2015).

²² She notes: “We like looking at icons—there we see the martyr not in blood, not in filth, but in Glory. We also like looking at monuments of great scholars and poets killed for resistance, because in this way we build prophets' tombs... But we don't look at ... the ones who died for no reason”; Shmaina-Velikanova, “Neischislmyi sonm muchenikov”.

²³ Andrzej Nowak, *Strachy i lachy. Przemiany polskiej pamięci 1982-2012* (Kraków: Biały Kruk, 2012), 273.

of a particular group of victims of terror as martyrs is simply asserted, even when, or perhaps especially when, as Uilleam Blacker discusses in his contribution, this means avoiding the complexities and ambiguities of the events in question.

Other distinctive aspects complicating the remembrance of 20th-century deaths by violence in Eastern Europe as martyrdom have to do with the factors of anonymity and scale. Conventionally the martyrdom paradigm derives its power from the drama of the individual fate, around which stories can be woven, and imaginations and emotions engaged and mobilized. Yet in this case we are dealing most often with the phenomenon of anonymous mass death, where victims are counted in the millions, as Aleksandr Cherkasov from the “Memorial” Society puts it, “[b]y numbers of zeroes, not as individuals”.²⁴ This has bearing on how the martyrdom framework is applied and adapted, especially when it comes to the case of state terror campaigns, where anonymization of the victims was not incidental but integral to the atrocities in question. It was the result of systematic and deliberate measures that were taken with the express purpose of ensuring that, as Irina Flige puts it, the memory of these events and their victims would be “objectless” or “non-material” (*bespredmetna*). Flige writes that,

The arrests and executions of '37 were accompanied by a mute anonymity [*glukhaia neizvestnost'*]. Cars without number plates. A muteness of buildings—no signs, no addresses. An absence of written testimonies on the fate of the arrested. Arrest as disappearance, as death; but an unknown death, without a date, without a place, without a body, without a funeral, without a grave.²⁵

Indeed, the secrecy surrounding the execution and burial sites was taken to such lengths that even the chekists guarding the Butovo mass grave site on the outskirts of Moscow, for example, for decades

²⁴ “Reabilitatsiia repressirovannykh ili reabilitatsiia repressii—chto vybiraiut rossiiane?”, *Kul'turnyi shok*, 1 November 2014, <http://echo.msk.ru/programs/kulshok/1427774-echo/> (accessed 3 November 2015).

²⁵ Irina Flige, “Sovremennoe istoricheskoe znanie o Bol'shom terrore I publichnaia pamiat' o nem zametno razoshlis'”, in *Gorbachevskie chteniia. Grazhdanskoe obshchestvo: nastoiashchee i budushchee. 1937-2007: pamiat' i otvetstvennost'*, ed. O. M. Zdravomyslova (Moscow: Gorbachev-Fond, 2007), 132.

after the killings had no clear idea what they were guarding or why.²⁶ Some contemporary Russian memory projects place at their center precisely this anonymity and non-materiality, borrowing from the Great War cenotaph model and making reference to “the unknown martyr”, representing the most abject, anonymous masses of victims of the gulag,²⁷ or “the unknown *zek*”.²⁸

The corrupting effects of the unspoken compact between state and society under late socialism to keep silent about this history and never to mention the names of the victims were for some commentators such as poet and philosopher Ol’ga Sedakova among the most destructive consequences of these events.²⁹ Key civic memory initiatives in Russia today such as the annual Return of the Names event³⁰ and the Final Address project³¹ are aimed at restoring the individual names of the victims as a crucial step in building a new civil society. But significantly, a strong resistance to concretizing and individualizing the victims of Soviet terror remains a characteristic feature of the Russian state’s handling of this memory.³²

²⁶ L. A. Golovkova et al (eds), *Butovskii poligon. 1937-1938 gg. Kniga Pamiati zhertv politicheskikh repressii. Vypusk 8.* (Moscow: Izd. “Al’zo”, 2004), 157.

²⁷ Shmaina-Velikanova, “Neischislimy sonm muchenikov”.

²⁸ Grigorii Pomerants, “Mogila neizvestnogo zeka”, in Zdravomyslova (ed.), *Gorbachevskie chteniia*, 229.

²⁹ See her comments on this subject in “Zachem pominat’ usopshikh?”, *Radio Sloboda*, 6 December 2013, www.svoboda.org/media/video/25182088.html.

³⁰ <http://www.october29.ru/> (accessed 3 November 2015).

³¹ The Final Address is a civil society project launched in December 2013 and aimed at erecting small memorial plaques to individual victims on residential buildings in Russian cities; see Anna Narinskaia and Grigorii Revzin, ‘Proekt “Poslednii adres”: nuzhno li otdeliat’ zhertv gosudarstvennogo terrora ot palachei i udastsia li dogovorit’sia s vlastiami’, *Dozhd’*, 18 December 2013, http://tvrain.ru/teleshov/narinskaja_i_revzin/narinskaja_i_revzin_proekt_poslednij_adres_nuzhno_li_otdeljat_zhertv_gosudarstvennogo_terrora_ot_palachei_i_udastsia_li_dogovoritsja_s_vlastjami-359102/?video (accessed 15 October 2015). According to Arsenii Roginskii, the Final Address plaques represent the first time that the concrete words “was shot” have been used in a memorial of this kind in Russia, as opposed to phrases like “innocently perished” which leave the precise circumstances unspecified; cited in Kirill Mikhailov, “Tochka nevozvrata”, *Novoe vremia*, no. 42, 15 December 2014, www.newtimes.ru/articles/detail/91561/ (accessed 3 November 2015).

³² This applies even more so to the memory of the perpetrators; on this issue see “Aleksandr Daniel’: Peizazh pamiati o sovetskom gosudarstvennom terrore”, *Portal Prava Cheloveka v Rossii*, 22 June 2015; Konstantin Eggert, “Pamiatnik

Thus, astoundingly, even though successive Russian presidents have recognized Soviet responsibility for the Katyn massacres, today the Russian judicial system continues to refuse to rehabilitate the victims of the Katyn massacre on the grounds that there is no firm proof that the individuals in question were sentenced and executed. For “Memorial” historian Aleksandr Gur’ianov, this can be read as reflecting a fundamental unwillingness on the part of the current state to move this history out of the realm of anonymity.³³

The reluctance on the part of the Soviet state and some of its successors to remember individual victims in the context of unimaginably vast waves of mass killing (or their indeed aggressive determination to forget these events) has been the focus of the efforts of numerous civil society and cultural actors both in Russia and in other post-Soviet states. Indeed, outside Russia, as is the case in Ukraine or the Baltic states, for example, the victims of Soviet state terror are often remembered and mourned in a nationalized idiom of martyrdom at the hands of foreign occupiers: the Lithuanian Mausoleum of Anti-Soviet Partisans and Victims of Stalinism, which employs various symbols of martyrdom including a metallic stylized crown of thorns, or the Lonts’kyi Prison Museum in L’viv, which relies on similar imagery and rhetoric, are two prominent examples of this.³⁴ This kind of externalization is obviously much harder to justify in the Russian case. Nevertheless, attempts are being made in Russia, too, to nationalize victims through the discourse of martyrdom. As Kathy Rousselet has shown, the new martyrdom discourse draws connections between martyrs killed in wars and martyrs killed during the Great Terror, describing both as part of the same

zhertvam politicheskikh repressii: dilemma Vladimira Putina”, *Deutsche Welle*, Russian translation at inosmi.ru, 16 January 2015, <http://inosmi.ru/russia/20150116/225591193.html> (accessed 3 November 2015).

³³ Aleksandr Gur’ianov, “Katyn’. Problema sostavleniia knig pamiati i reabilitatsiia zhertv”, “Memorial” seminar, Moscow, 15 May 2015, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=blgWbnQSKoQ> (accessed 3 November 2015).

³⁴ See Yekaterina Makhotina, “Vil’nius. Mesta pamiati yevropeiskoi istorii”, *Neprikosnovennyi zapas* 4(90) (2013), <http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2013/4/19m-pr.html> (accessed 22 November 2015). On the Lonts’kyi museum see Uilleam Blacker’s article in this issue.

spiritual struggle in the service of a Russia in the state of combat.³⁵ Thus, during a recent visit to Noril'sk, Patriarch Kirill proclaimed the church's new martyrs of the twentieth century to be "our national heroes".³⁶

Another distinctive feature of martyrdom discourses in Russia in particular concerns the sometimes paradoxical ways in which they can be turned to the advantage of the state. This variety of martyrdom entails reversing the positions of victim and perpetrator, and is aimed at legitimizing the state's use of violence against its citizens by casting the agents of the authoritarian state itself as martyrs, persecuted and unjustly maligned. Thus in the Soviet official narrative the chekist was a kind of inverted martyr, whose sacrifice consisted precisely of taking on the terrible but necessary role of executioner in the name of defending the revolution. In the post-Soviet period, martyrdom narratives have also been woven around the fate of the KGB as the doomed but courageous last defenders of the state in the lead-up to the Soviet collapse.³⁷

Most recently, we can see examples of this authoritarian martyrdom discourse in the so-called "Anti-Maidan" narratives of the revolution and war in Ukraine. Like all revolutions and like all wars, the events in Ukraine have been accompanied by the emergence of competing cults of martyrdom around the dead. Remembrance of the "Heavenly Hundred", the victims of the February 2014 massacre on the Maidan, has formed the powerful centerpiece of a new version of Ukrainian national identity linked to the narration of these events as a Revolution of Dignity. This is reflected in the constant

³⁵ Kathy Rousselet, "The Church in the Service of the Fatherland", *Europe-Asia Studies*, 67, no. 1 (January 2015): 52-53. For an overview of positions within the Church on the issue of the Soviet past, see Zh. V. Kormina and S. A. Shtyrkov, "Pravoslavnye versii sovetskogo proshlogo: politika pamiati v ritualakh kommemoratsii", in *Antropologiya sotsial'nykh peremen*, ed. E. M. Guchinova and G. A. Komarova (Moscow: Rossiiskaia politicheskaia entsiklopediia, 2011), 389-413.

³⁶ Cited in "Patriarkh pochtil pamiat' muchenikov 'Noril'skoi Golgofy'", *News.ru*, 17 September 2015, http://www.newsru.com/religy/17sep2015/patriarch_norilsk.html (accessed 1 November 2015).

³⁷ On chekist claims to martyrdom, see Julie Fedor, *Russia and the Cult of State Security: The Chekist Tradition, from Lenin to Putin* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011).

presence of the Heavenly Hundred as a rhetorical figure in Ukrainian public and political debates, but also in a major project for renovating the public space of central Kyiv, discussed in Uilleam Blacker's chapter, which will permanently and prominently incorporate memory of the victims of the Maidan shootings at the very symbolic heart of the country. In turn, the Russian state and the Anti-Maidan movement has put forward its own narrative of the conflict. This narrative also centers on claims to martyrdom, but on the part of the Berkut riot police, the Odessan victims of 2 May, and the Russian diaspora in Ukraine and elsewhere in post-Soviet space. For the Anti-Maidan, the *berkutovets* was the heroic and unjustly slandered defender of the lawful order against the forces of US-sponsored revolutionary chaos and mayhem. The *berkutovtsy* who were killed on the Maidan have been claimed as "holy sufferers" who sacrificed their lives in order to enable Crimea's reunification with Russia.³⁸ Here then we are dealing with a martyrdom story which serves to disguise and legitimize armed aggression.

In Ukraine, the war has led to a rise in militaristic rhetoric in public discourse, and this is often linked to historical instances of national martyrdom. Ukraine's Institute of National Memory, which has been revitalized and given new leadership since the Maidan, was instrumental in instituting a new national holiday, the Day of the Defender of Ukraine, on 14 October, which replaces the Day of the Defender of the Fatherland (23 February), which was a essentially continuation of Soviet Army and Navy Day. The new holiday was chosen in response to Russian military aggression, and in a deliberate attempt to distance Ukrainian memory discourse from Soviet practice: 14 October is the Feast of the Veil of Our Lady, which was

³⁸ See for example, N. Andrievskaia, "Krym-2015: My vse 'Berkut'!", *My vse—'Berkut'* website, 18 February 2015, <http://myvse-berkut.su/archives/484#more-484>; Viktor Zeiskii, "Rekviem po Berkutu—avtor naiden!", *Proza.ru*, 2014, <http://www.proza.ru/2014/02/27/1889>; "Boitsy Berkuta, postradavshie v Kieve, poluchat ot Rossii material'nuiu pomoshch'", *Korrespondent.net*, 16 April 2014, <http://korrespondent.net/ukraine/politics/3350476-boitsy-berkuta-pos-tradavshye-v-kyeve-poluchat-ot-rossyy-materyalnuui-pomosch>; "V chest' ukrainskogo 'Berkuta' predlozhili nazvat' ulitsu v Moskve", *lenta.ru*, 17 December 2013, <http://lenta.ru/news/2013/12/17/berkut/> (all accessed 3 November 2015).

a traditional Cossack holiday and is still the official Day of Ukrainian Cossackdom. The date also happens to have been used, partly because of its pre-existing significance, to mark the symbolic founding of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) in 1942, and this association features prominently in the Institute's argumentation for the establishment of the new tradition.³⁹ In the context of the new holiday, the Institute has also recently begun to promote the idea of Ukraine as an "army-nation" (*narod-viis'ko*) that has constantly been engaged in a fight for survival "from the Cossack era to the ATO" (i.e. the "anti-terrorist operation" against separatists and Russian forces in the Donbas).⁴⁰ The Institute explicitly draws parallels between past struggles and the present in its activities, combining energetic initiatives to rehabilitate Ukraine's nationalist martyrs of the Second World War with oral history projects on the current war.⁴¹

The resurgence in the focus on struggle and sacrifice for the nation in Ukraine has potential implications for wider political relations in Eastern Europe, however. With the victory of the Law and Justice party in the 2015 parliamentary elections in Poland, the patriotic memory politics for which this party is well known is likely to experience a resurgence at state level in Poland, and clashes over the revitalized celebration of Ukrainian nationalist heroes from the Second World War are likely. The wartime activities of the OUN (Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists) and UPA included a campaign of ethnic cleansing and mass murder of Polish civilians in the regions Volhynia and Galicia in 1943, which led in turn to smaller scale but still significant retaliatory violence on the part of Polish forces

³⁹ "Metodychni materialy ukrains'koho instytutu natsional'noi pam'iaty shchodo vidznachennia 14 zhovtnia", *Ukrains'kyi Instytut Natsional'noi Pamiati*, 2015, <http://www.memory.gov.ua/news/metodichni-materiali-ukrainskogo-institut-u-natsionalnoi-pam-yati-shchodo-vidznachennya-14-zhovt> (accessed 24 November 2015).

⁴⁰ Volodymyr Viatrovych, "Ukraintsi—narod-viis'ko: zakhody 12-14.10 do Dnia zakhyznyka Ukrainy", *Ukrains'ka pravda*, 11 October 2015, <http://blogs.pravda.com.ua/authors/viatrovych/561a6adcac233/> (accessed 24 November 2015).

⁴¹ For the rationale behind the new holiday see the Institute of National Memory website: <http://www.memory.gov.ua/news/metodichni-materiali-ukrainskog-o-institutu-natsionalnoi-pam-yati-shchodo-vidznachennya-14-zhovt> (accessed 24 November 2015).

against Ukrainian civilians. The recognition of the victims of this violence, or lack thereof, continues to be a bone of contention between the two countries, and forceful statements from the new Polish president, Andrzej Duda, and other prominent politicians on the topic, combined with the dominant historical politics in Ukraine at the moment, point to the likelihood that this contentiousness may well continue to escalate.⁴² This is only one element of a potential return to national martyrology in Poland, and the most significant instance of this kind of thinking may come as a result of the appointment in November 2015 of Antoni Macierewicz as Polish Defense Minister: since 2010, Macierewicz has been head of a parliamentary investigation into the 2010 Smolensk air crash that killed Polish President Lech Kaczyński and his entourage while on their way to commemorate the Katyn massacres. Macierewicz's commission has consistently worked towards the theory that the catastrophe was caused deliberately, which has helped fuel popular theories in Poland over the involvement of the Russian state. The appointment of Macierewicz at a time of heightened tension over Russia's military aggression in Eastern Europe could, then, see martyrological thinking play a crucial role in the course of relations between Poland and Russia in the near future.

Another, perhaps less predictable consequence of current events for the development of martyrology in the region relates to recent Russian casualties: on the one hand, the Russian troops killed in this conflict go unrecognized, buried quietly and forgotten; on the other, the state seems to be cultivating the image of a different kind of martyr—the special operations soldier killed in the course of covert operations, and a figure who has been at the fore of Russia's recent actions abroad. Over the past year there have been some tentative attempts to grope towards a new symbolic language for commemorating these semi-secret deaths in Russia. There are two new additions to the official Russian calendar which are significant in

⁴² Tadeusz Isakowicz-Zaleski, "Andrzej Duda krytykuje gloryfikacji UPA na Ukrainie", *Onet wiadomości*, 17 May 2015, <http://wiadomosci.onet.pl/kraj/andrzej-duda-krytykuje-gloryfikacje-upa-na-ukrainie/2hg37k> (accessed 24 November 2015).

this context. In February 2015 Putin proclaimed a new annual “Special Operations Day”, to be marked on the anniversary of the Crimean operation (earlier, in September 2014, one Duma deputy had proposed instituting a new “Polite People Day”, to be celebrated on Putin’s birthday).⁴³ Also, in 2014, the Day of the Unknown Soldier (3 December) was inaugurated in Russia with the aim of, to quote the Defense Ministry, “paying the tribute of memory once more to all those who perished on fronts and whose names have never been successfully established”.⁴⁴ In another example, a new memorial is currently being planned for the prominent Poklonnaia gora memorial complex in Moscow in honor of soldiers fallen in “local conflicts” and Cold War proxy wars.⁴⁵ We might read these new developments as attempts to handle the new reality of undeclared hybrid war and the particular demands that it makes of soldiers and their families. These state initiatives seem tentatively to be aimed at fostering the emergence of a new kind of martyr, whose martyrdom lies precisely in renouncing his right to a name and to an individual grave.

As we hope to have shown in this brief introduction to the topic and its historical and contemporary resonances, the concepts of martyrdom and cultural memory in Eastern Europe have long been interlinked in complex, often convoluted ways, and continue to play an important role in the fast-moving social, cultural and political processes at work in the region today. The papers presented in this special issue aim to unpick some of these complexities in more detail in relation to Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and the Baltic states.

⁴³ “Putin Establishes New ‘Polite People’ Day in Russia”, *Moscow Times*, 27 February 2015.

⁴⁴ “V Rossii v pervye otmetiat Den’ Neizvestnogo soldata”, *Polit.ru*, 3 December 2014, <http://polit.ru/news/2014/12/03/unknown/> (accessed 24 November 2015).

⁴⁵ Igor’ Plugatarev, “Pamiati ne vernuvshikhsia s kholodnoi voiny”, *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, supplement to *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 25 April 2014, http://nvo.ng.ru/nvo/2014-04-25/14_monuments.html?id_user=Y (accessed 24 November 2015).

This special issue arose out of a workshop held in Cambridge in December 2013, and opens with the keynote address delivered to that workshop by one of the world's leading thinkers on remembrance and mourning, Jay Winter. In this introductory essay, Jay Winter provides a global survey of cultures of martyrdom. Focusing on attitudes to the Holocaust in Western Europe, Eastern Europe, and among Jews more widely, Winter makes the compelling and perhaps provocative case for recognizing an ever-increasing divergence between Eastern and Western memory cultures, in which attitudes towards martyrdom are a central defining feature. Jay Winter's contribution also emphasizes the destructive effects of the martyrdom paradigm and the ways in which it precludes reconciliation, reminding us that

when martyrdom enters the equation, there is not enough symbolic space for both communities of victims to enter into national narratives of loss. The language of martyrdom apparently creates a zero sum game: only one set of martyrs can be commemorated at a time.

As Jay Winter puts it in his essay, "languages of martyrdom frame memory and history in very different ways". The remaining articles in the special issue explore different examples of these languages of martyrdom in Ukraine (Uilleam Blacker and Iryna Starovoyt), Russia (Sander Brouwer and Maria Mälksoo), and Belarus (Simon Lewis).

Uilleam Blacker's article traces change and continuity in Ukrainian martyrological traditions, paying particular attention to how martyrdom is inscribed in public space. Blacker argues that these traditions have their roots in the literary paradigm of national martyrdom developed by Ukrainian Romantic nationalist writers in the mid 19th century, and that they continue to hold sway in contemporary Ukraine, in the context of the lives lost during the Maidan protests and the war in the Donbas. Blacker also identifies the different, sometimes conflicting ways in which the martyrological tradition has been manifest in Ukraine and explores the potential for martyrological memory paradigms to exclude important elements of the past from public commemoration.

Sander Brouwer also examines deeply ingrained martyrological ideas, this time in relation to Russia, in his analysis of Karen Shakhnazarov's 2012 film *White Tiger*, explored here as a reflection on Russian narratives of martyrdom aimed at endowing Russian history with transcendent meaning, partly as an antidote to the problems of the present and as a means of sublimating trauma and loss. Brouwer shows how one prevalent narrative of Russian martyrdom takes a distinctive cyclical form, based on the notion of a mystical and eternally recurring struggle between the Russian Empire and its foes, a struggle which periodically demands martyrs in the cause of restoring the Empire. Esoteric as it is, this is a narrative that should be taken seriously; it resonates in particular with the broader popular narrative of Russian martyrdom in the liberation of Eastern Europe from fascism, a discourse that frequently blends into neo-imperialist rhetoric.⁴⁶

While Blacker and Brouwer focus on culture as the locus of martyrology, in the next article in the issue Maria Mälksoo takes the discussion of discourses of martyrdom onto the plane of International Relations, examining how these inflected Russia's relations with its neighbors, particularly the Baltic states, during the Medvedev presidency. Mälksoo explores the official emphasis on Russian victimhood as an example of mimesis, arguing that this emphasis, which is aimed at "normalizing" the country as an actor in international politics, is also resistant to and subversive of the hegemonic European discourse that it imitates, since this mimesis has for the most part comprised symbolic actions emptied of any substance. In the Russian case, the shift towards a "modern" memory politics focused on the victims of Soviet terror has not gone along with any real commitment to protecting individual human rights or pursuing transitional justice.

In the last two papers in the issue, Iryna Starovoyt and Simon Lewis both grapple with issues surrounding the remembrance of anonymous mass martyrdom. Starovoyt examines the ways in which the Holodomor, the artificial famine of 1932-33 that killed millions

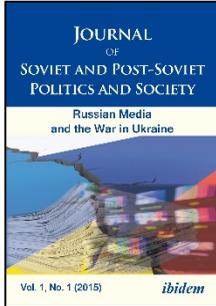
⁴⁶ See for example Aleksandr Prokhanov's declaration that Ukraine and Poland owe their existence as nations to this act of martyrdom; Aleksandr Prokhanov, "Zabyli o Pobede?", *Argumenty i fakty* (Moscow), no. 1, 21 January 2015.

in Soviet Ukraine, is remembered in post-war Ukrainian literature and cinema. Her panoramic tour of Ukrainian culture of this period convincingly demonstrates the extent to which that culture is soaked in ideas and images of martyrdom in relation to the Holodomor, but also provides an acute analysis of the difficulties of representing and commemorating mass death and exploring its meanings in conditions of political oppression and censorship. Simon Lewis traces the notion of collective mass martyrdom back to the late Soviet period in his study of Belarusian literature and memorials. Focusing in particular on commemoration of the destruction of the village of Khatyn by the Nazis in 1943, Lewis provides an in-depth study of the various ways in which the tragedy has been invoked in Belarusian culture both pre- and post-1991, examining the complex dynamics through which cultural representations negotiate official commemorative discourses.

The papers in this special issue cover mnemonic phenomena as diverse as poetry and political decrees, and span half a dozen countries. We have also included a series of essays on the historiography and memory of one of the region's most famous martyr figures, Stepan Bandera; reviews of several new publications in East European memory studies; and a report on a conference on "The Political Cult of the Dead in Ukraine" that recently took place in Munich. All of these testify to the high level of interest in contemporary martyrological memory practice and discourse in the region. We hope that this special issue will provoke further research on this important topic in memory studies, both within our focus region and beyond it.

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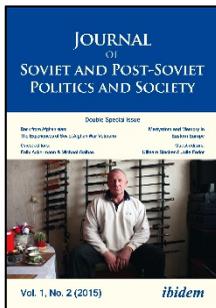
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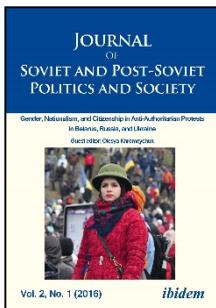
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