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Orthodoxie russe

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Varia

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unautés orthodoxes moscovites

scovites, à la fin des années 2000, sont de l'Église en quête de « modernité reli- t être à la fois « marginales » et « cen- ntent un groupe minoritaire avec une parce qu'elles se trouvent à la pointe de tradition dans le changement social. En e les deux groupes en ce qui concerne la n individu/groupe représentent les deux

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odernidad religiosa, congregación, comuni- ca.

Jeanne V. Kormina

Russian Saint under Construction

Portraits and Icons of *Starets* Nikolay [1]

On October 24, 2002, Nikolay Gurianov, a village priest from Pskov oblast, passed away at the age of 93. Many important public figures came from Moscow, Pskov, and other places to participate in his burial service on the small island of Zalita, where Father Nikolay had served since 1958. Among those attending the burial ceremony were Evsevii, the Archbishop of Pskov and Velikie Luki; Eugeni Mikhaikov, the governor of Pskov; Archimandrite Tikhon Shevkunov, the influential superior of the Sretensky Monastery in Moscow; and two to three thousand other pilgrims. In his condolence speech, the governor of Pskov said: "Pskov is orphaned. For many years Father Nikolay consoled the suffering, helped the wayward, and put on the right track those who needed it. His deeds of starchestvo stand guard over the Orthodox faith and Pskov. The island of Zalita where he lived was one of the world centers of pilgrimage for the Orthodox believers. His repose happened in the period of the Assumption fast. There is a sign in his assumption that is not deciphered yet. We will believe that the immortal soul of the elder stays in the Kingdom of God henceforth. And we pray for it with faith, hope, and love" (News, 2002).

The governor's emotional funeral oration explains why the death of an elderly Orthodox priest attracted so many people. Since the mid-1990s, Father Nikolay was advertised, through word of mouth and in the media, as one of the elders (*starets*). According to many different groups of believers and sympathizers, a *starets* is an experienced priest and confessor, usually an elderly monk, who has many spiritual children living in different places who visit him regularly for confession and admonition. In addition, believers visit the *starets* to ask for his advice on complicated personal issues, because the elders are believed to have the gift of prophecy. Some even claim that the elders are living saints: "this is a special sort of sanctity which can be obtained by everybody, not necessarily by a person of the church title. The elder is a spiritual doctor who is also endowed with the gift of appeal, so-called charisma" (S. Plotnikov, 2006).

1. This study was carried out within the National Research University Higher School of Economics' Academic Fund Program in 2012-2013, research grant No. 11-01-0126.

Of course, there is no single method of identifying the Orthodox elders that would be shared by all believers and observers. Church discussions about the phenomena of *lzhestarchestvo* (pseudo-*starchestvo*) and *mladostarchestvo* (an oxymoron meaning "young-*starchestvo*") reveal that the term and institution of *starchestvo* is problematic even for the "official church," which consequently tried to define the "true" and the "false" *starets* among those to whom this title is attached (See N. Mitrokhin, 2004: 92-105). At the same time, these debates make it clear that this institution is a very important and characteristic part of religious life in contemporary Russia. The researchers who write about the elders also have quite different visions of this phenomenon. In his article about female monastic elders in the late 19th and early 20th century, Russian historian Oleg Kirichenko defines *starets* as a "person who, due to the will of God, entered upon the pass of spiritual teacher, healer of the souls and of physical ailments of the people, a person who received the gift of insight and healing from God" (O. Kirichenko, 2010: 173). Although this definition hardly can be taken as an academic one, it is quite revealing as it gives a quite correct impression of the way that pro-Orthodox intellectuals understand the institute of the elders. Opposing this view is the position expressed by Nikolay Mitrokhin, for whom "true" *startsy* are those who, like the elder Naum from Troitse-Sergieva lavra, deliberately create the network of their spiritual children to become the center of a kind of virtual parish (N. Mitrokhin, 2006). N. Mitrokhin claims that *startsy* are an alternative authority in the Russian Orthodox Church and, as such, are perceived by the Church hierarchy as a source of possible schisms and other challenges. Yet, in her recent book on the history of the Russian *starchestvo*, Irina Paert argues that from the very beginning the elders have served as a unifying force in Russian religious culture. As religious virtuosi who specialize in practicing *hesychast* spirituality [2], a "common theme" shared by both Orthodox and "heterodox" variants of Russian religious culture, they "traversed the camps of the Synodal church and that of its apostates" (I. Paert, 2010: 13). Also, according to I. Paert, the elders bridged the gap between the "high culture" and the religion of Russian peasants. The elders appear in I. Paert's book as a kind of Russian national heritage or containers of religious charisma, which is above all historical peripeteia.

Obviously, the differences in the characteristics of the institute of elders can be explained not only by the authors' various degrees of personal engagement with the subject or their theoretical frameworks, [3] but also by the diverse realities of practices and discourses that can be packed in the mental box with the title "the elder". In the following pages I will try to analyze the content of this box with the name "*starets* Nikolay Gurianov" attached to it.

2. Hesychasm is a mystical and ascetic tradition in the Eastern Orthodox Church that is associated with the practice of continual repetition of the Jesus prayer.

3. In fact, although different in many respects, the works on Russian starchestvo share the same essentialist approach to this social phenomenon.

In their edited volume on the anthropology of Christian pilgrimage, British anthropologists John Eade and Michael Sallnow suggest shifting analytical emphasis from "positivist, generic accounts of the features and functions of pilgrimage, and of the extrinsic characteristics of its focal shrines, towards an investigation of how the place of pilgrimage and the sacred powers of a shrine are constructed as varied and possibly conflicting representations by the different sectors of the cultic constituency, and indeed by those outside it as well" (J. Eade and M. Sallnow, 2000: 5). Following this research strategy, I will understand the sacredness, or charisma, of a holy place or a holy person as an ongoing process of ascribing meanings to it in the course of struggle between different groups of believers who seek to "control" the sacred place for the right to decide what meaning is correct. In this analysis I will focus on the diversity of meanings ascribed to the same person who, as all believers agree, is a saint, and study different "portraits" of this famous *starets* produced and promoted by several groups of believers. As it will be argued in the article, these groups support different strategies to articulate the legitimization and characteristics of the charisma embodied in *starets*. In the following pages I will analyze these tendencies using the example of N. Gurianov's "career of *starets*". First, I will outline the many meanings ascribed to the term *starchestvo*. Then, I will tell the three-stage "biography of *starets* Nikolay", focusing on the ways that his devotees articulate his charisma.

Charisma, the central concept of this article, is defined here as a special quality of a person, a kind of religious virtuosity, which "exists solely insofar as it is recognized by others" (R. Wallis, 1982: 26). As opposed to Max Weber, who suggested that charisma was a psychological characteristic of a personality, I will follow Roy Wallis in his constructivist approach to analysis of charisma. In his research of the religious career of the leader of the new religious movement Children of God, R. Wallis argues that "charisma is essentially a relationship born out of interaction between a leader and his followers" and sees "recognition and maintenance of charisma as an interactional process, in which each party secures status in an exchange of recognition, affection, and reinforcement of worth" (*Ibid.*: 26). However, in the case of Gurianov and many other male and female elders in contemporary Russian Orthodoxy, this interaction does not happen between the elder and his followers; instead, this is an autocommunication of the believers who interact with the image of *starets*. In other words, in contrast to Moses David, who actively participated in constructing his charisma and benefited from it in practice, Father Nikolay did not consciously participate in creation of his charisma. Believers ascribed his charisma to him on the grounds that his image, based on details of his biography and social position, fit perfectly into the category (or, rather, categories) of the "true Russian religiosity" existing in the imagination of his promoters.

My argumentation is based on data collected since the early 2000s, often with help of colleagues from the European University at St. Petersburg [4]. These materials are of two kinds. One part of the data appeared as the result of field research (participant observation, interviews and pictures) among pilgrims visiting the island of Zalita and inhabitants of the island. The other materials have been collected outside of the sacred place itself, in the sites where Orthodox people meet and exchange information. These sites are church shops and especially Orthodox fairs (*yarmarki*) where I bought more than a dozen books about Father Nikolay, from a 30-page booklet to a 600-page volume. The last site where I found data for my research is the Internet, in particular the websites of the nationalistic newspaper "Rus' Pravoslavnaya" (Orthodox Rus') and of the groups who struggle for Gurianov's canonization (http://zalit.ru/ and http://talabsk.ru/). A special part of my data is Orthodox documentary films, professional as well as amateur (although to tell the truth, the boundary between the two hardly exists as the quality of the "professional Orthodox documentary" is quite poor). These films play an important role in spreading information and maintaining the religious identities of its audience. Researchers of contemporary Orthodoxy find these films everywhere in the field; some of the films about N. Gurianov can be found on the Internet, while I borrowed others from my informants or bought them in the Orthodox shops and fairs.

The elders under construction

In 2007 and 2009, two collections of biographies of the elders who lived in the 20th century were published by one of the respected Orthodox publishing houses in Moscow. The first one included 115 male elders, while the second one included 70 female elders (S. Deviatova, 2007, 2009). The male compendium is divided into three parts to list "Greek elders" (23 monks, 4 of whom are canonized), "Optina elders" (6 monks, all of whom are canonized) and "Orthodox elders from Russia and some foreign countries". This last part of the collection demonstrates the considerable variety of those who can be called an "elder". Among those whose names are listed (alphabetically) there are 24 saints who differ both in terms of their social characteristics and in the sphere of their religious expertise, including Ioann of Kronstadt, the famous priest and charismatic preacher of the late 19th and early 20th century, and St. Ioann Maximovich of Shanghai and San Francisco (John the Wonderworker), an important figure in the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad. The rest of the list consists of monks and prelates of different ranks, from hieromonks ("black" priests) to archbishops, with the exception of 3 laymen and 2 "white" priests who had not taken a monastic vow, including N. Gurianov. A similar compendium of biographies of

4. My special thanks to Yulia Andreeva, Sergey Shtyrkov and Natalia Okasheva.

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the female elders has 70 names of mostly non-canonized women (only 10 are canonized, and 36 of the 70 elders are nuns, schema-nuns or hegumennesses). The most famous of them is Matrona of Moscow, who was the first to be canonized as a *staritsa* (in 2004). Most of the female elders are disabled people (they are either blind, paralyzed, or both, as in the case of Matrona of Moscow); none of them, of course, could serve as a spiritual father in a literal sense, that is, a priest who can perform the rite of confession for his spiritual children. In other words, the female variant of the elder alters the conception of the elder as an experienced confessor (and a priest by default). These volumes do not give the readers any clear idea of the characteristics of the elders, which could help to distinguish the "true" elder from the "pseudo-elder". Via these volumes, the editor, who collected all the information from already-published books, leaflets and Internet resources, sends the message that religious charisma 1) can be embodied by different types of people, irrespective of their age, gender, social status, position in the Church hierarchy, place of living, education, etc; 2) has not been interrupted by the atheist period in the Russian history; and 3) does not depend on the bureaucratic power of the Church, as usually *startsy* did not have high positions in the church hierarchy (if any) and their veneration was initiated by the people.

Remarkably, the high-ranking officials of the Russian Orthodox Church do not have a unified vision of *starchestvo* and how to address it. On the one hand, Metropolitan Juvenaly of Krutitsy and Kolomna, who served as a Chairman of the Canonization Commission of the Church between 1989 and 2011, used the word *starets* or *staritsa* literally in his official speeches as a respectful title for an elderly person. At the same time, in his critical words about the campaign for Grigory Rasputin's canonization, he put the same word in quotation marks, which points to the concept "the elder" attached to Rasputin and other suspicious figures of this kind (P. Juvenaly, 2004). On the other hand, the exceptional authority of *startsy* among believers was officially acknowledged (and artfully used) by the Patriarchate of Russian Orthodox church against the "INN jihad" organized by groups of Orthodox people who were expecting the end of the world at the turn of the 20th century (see A. Verkhovsky, 2003: 73-94; Mitrokhin, 2004: 229-230). These eschatological moods, typical for these liminal periods, were stirred up by the state's initiative to impose some new technologies (bar codes) and personal documents (individual tax numbers, or INN) in the late 1990s. Obsessed with apocalyptic and conspiratorial fears, many believers connected the INN with the system of total control that was expected from the Antichrist. They rejected the INN and refused to buy products with bar codes, as they believed that the number of the Beast is encoded in bar codes. In January 2001, the above-mentioned archimandrite Tikhon Shevkunov interviewed N. Gurianov about his position on the introduction of individual tax numbers and, although Father Nikolay said clearly that he did not understand at

all what he was asking about, his interviewer interpreted this answer as a hidden blessing to believers to accept individual tax numbers (T. Shevkunov, 2001). The interview was broadcasted on the Orthodox radio station "Radonezh" and transmitted via other Orthodox media, together with appeal to the Orthodox people by other respected *starets* Ioann Krest'jankin from the Pskovo-Pechersky monastery on the same topic, recorded on video camera also by T. Shevkunov. These messages played an important role in changing public opinion about individual tax numbers among Orthodox people, and averted a possible split in the Russian Orthodox Church [5]. The words of Father Ioann were cited in the Church's official document summarizing the results of the discussion on the INN that took place in Moscow Theological Academy (Final document, 2001). The same document describes how the dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and the heads of the Russian Federation's Ministry for Taxes and Levies started on the initiative of one more famous *starets* Kirill Pavlov from Troitse-Sergieva Lavra.

The fact that seemingly different opinions towards *starchestvo* coexist in the official discourse of the Church does not necessarily mean that there are pro-elders and contra-elders camps in the Church hierarchy; rather, this flexibility makes it possible to satisfy the demands of all believers, from the very liberal to the very radical. In other words, the Church elite's approach to *startsy* is quite instrumental, as this conception can be used successfully to manipulate believers, including those who share fundamentalist ideologies, or, in Stella Rock's words, have "militant piety" (S. Rock, 2002).

Indeed, the elders, either as living saints and wonderworkers or as spiritual advisers and seers, are an important part of the contemporary Russian Orthodox religious landscape. They make it homogeneous geographically as well as historically in the eyes of believers. According to widespread popular beliefs, *startsy* have strong personal connections with each other, sharing a certain kind of spiritual kinship. Some biographies of N. Gurianov relate that he moved to the island of Zalita from Lithuania where he had served before, with the blessing of *starets* Simeon Zhelnin (1869-1960), a monk from the Pskovo-Pechersky monastery [6]. T. Shevkunov also contributed to this image of strong mystic ties between *startsy* when, at the end of his interview with Father Nikolay about INN, he sent him special regards from *starets* Kirill Pavlov, although there is no evidence that Pavlov and Gurianov had ever met.

Folk imagination ascribes to the elders many special abilities, such as miraculous healing powers and even the ability to perform exorcism. However, more

5. In his message, Father Ioann did not say that apocalyptic times are not coming; on the contrary, he did believe that the end of the world would occur soon. However, he felt that the Church members' lack of obedience to the hierarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church was a sign of the end times, and that the introduction of the individual tax numbers was not a sign.

6. Simeon Zhelnin was canonized as locally venerated saint in Pskov eparchy in 2003.

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Becoming the elder

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often, pilgrims come to *starets* to ask for practical advice in difficult personal circumstances, especially related to family and social relations or health concerns. After receiving advice from the elder, one has to follow it strictly. This idea of obedience to the elder as a necessary condition for the relationship between him and his spiritual children refers to the period of monastery reform of Paisii Velichkovsky in the 18th century, when the elders were introduced to the monastery life as teachers for novices and experienced confessors for monks only. When transferred from the monastery culture to the secular life, the concept of strict obedience to the elder, which was discursively still important, predictably was neglected in practice. As another elder said, "your own will is for the bad, while obedience revives you" and concluded that "nobody has obedience nowadays" (Vitaly, 2010: 125). Speaking in riddles (or intentionally staying silent) in response to the questions of visitors is another identifying sign of *startsy*. To correctly interpret the reply of the elder, the believer has to become more careful about his or her spiritual life; again, trust as a form of obedience to the elder is necessary. For example, Father N. Gurianov once said to a nun that she would be asked in marriage and insisted that she should not reject the proposal. When she was appointed hegumenness some time later, it became clear to her what kind of marriage the elder had predicted (L. Iliunina, 2011: 148).

Although the repertoire of deeds ascribed to the elders is quite rich and diverse, the main quality which all of them share is embodiment of the sacred. Venerated as living saints, the elders are an important part of the Russian religious revitalization movement that began in the late Soviet period. The conception of eldership is a production of the social imagination of the 1990s, with its intensive search for historical continuities between some authentic Russia of the past and the post-Soviet Russia. The elders, according to this social myth, managed to preserve the grains of national identity, which was in desperate need at that uncertain time.

Becoming the elder

Post-Soviet religious revivalism was in many respects prepared and shaped by two movements among Soviet intellectuals dating back to the 1960s. One was a movement of religious seekers, consisting mostly of university lecturers and academicians who were looking for Orthodox-based spirituality outside of the Church which, as they believed, had been corrupted by its collaboration with the Soviet state. This circle of people was also the main channel for transmitting New Age ideas to the Soviet Union (see O. Chepurnaya, 2004). Another intellectual movement consisted of so-called Russian village prose writers, intellectuals who wrote fictional or factual accounts of the social realities of the Russian countryside in the post-Stalin era that were very popular among readers beginning in the 1960s (Y. M. Brudny, 2000). As Yitzhak Brudny argues in his book,

these writers' bestselling works created a nationalistic meta-narrative of an ideal Russian village as an embodiment of Russia's moral values, a "container" of tradition and spirituality, the ideal life which was lost due to Soviet agricultural experiments. So when religious seekers of the 1980s started looking for places where authentic religiosity was preserved, their attention was predictably drawn to modest priests and monks living in the neglected Russian countryside. [7]

Father N. Gurianov attracted the attention of the young Orthodox intelligentsia and neophytes from metropolitan bohemian circles beginning in the 1980s, as well as other priests and monk-priests of his generation, especially those living in remote villages [8]. It must be mentioned here that the Pskov region, as well as some other parts of Russia, was unintentionally promoted by the Soviet state as a representation of Russianness, for Soviet citizens as well as for foreign visitors. Since the 1960s the state organized excursions to Pskov region for foreign delegations. These trips included short visits to specially selected Orthodox churches including the Pskovo-Pechersky monastery [9] to demonstrate "religious freedom" in the USSR. At the same time, specialists in Russian architecture and icon-painting from Moscow and Leningrad started coming to Pskov to participate in expeditions on behalf of art museums and the Academy of Sciences, hunting for ancient Russian pieces of art and manuscripts or as restorers of old churches (S. Yamshchikov, 2003).

Unsurprisingly, almost half of the material for the first official documentary about the Orthodox Church called "*Khram*" (Temple), [10] made in 1987 in connection with the millennium celebration of the Christianization of Russia, was filmed in Pskov oblast. That film included a small episode with Father Nikolay sipping tea at a table in his small house. The film was shown several times on TV and an article with a small portrait of Father Nikolay was published in two million copies of the popular illustrated magazine "Sovetski ekran" (Soviet Screen). It is very possible that this film played a role in the popularization of the figure of Father Nikolay. As one Orthodox journalist remembers ten years later, "this 30 seconds staying with the bearer of love whom none in the audience

7. Astronomer S. A. Grib, the head of one of the religious-philosophic groups in Leningrad since the 1970s, used to visit N. Gurianov (Sergey Kozin, personal communication, April 2011).

8. In Pskov oblast, Orthodox believers from Moscow and other cities also visited monk-priest Ioann Krestiankin from the Pskovo-Pecherski monastery and Father Vassili Shvets who served in the village of Kamenny Konets.

9. Founded in the 15th century, the Pskovo-Pechersky monastery was the only one in the territory of the Russian Federation that was never closed. This was possible due the Treaty of Tartu, which was signed on February 2, 1920 ending the war between Estonia and Soviet Russia, which then acknowledged Estonia's independence. According to this Treaty, Estonia received Setoland with the towns of Izborsk and Petseri, where the monastery is located. After the Second World War, Estonia was annexed by the Soviet Union, when the state's political stance towards the Russian Orthodox church changed; the monastery managed to survive its Soviet period quite successfully.

10. The director of the film is Vladimir V. Diakonov.

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had ever chance to see before, remained in the heart of everybody for the rest of their lives" (V. Vinogradov, 2006). Interestingly, he was not yet called a *starets* in the article published in 1988, just a *sel'ski pravednik* (village righteous man) (Y. Tiurin, 1988).

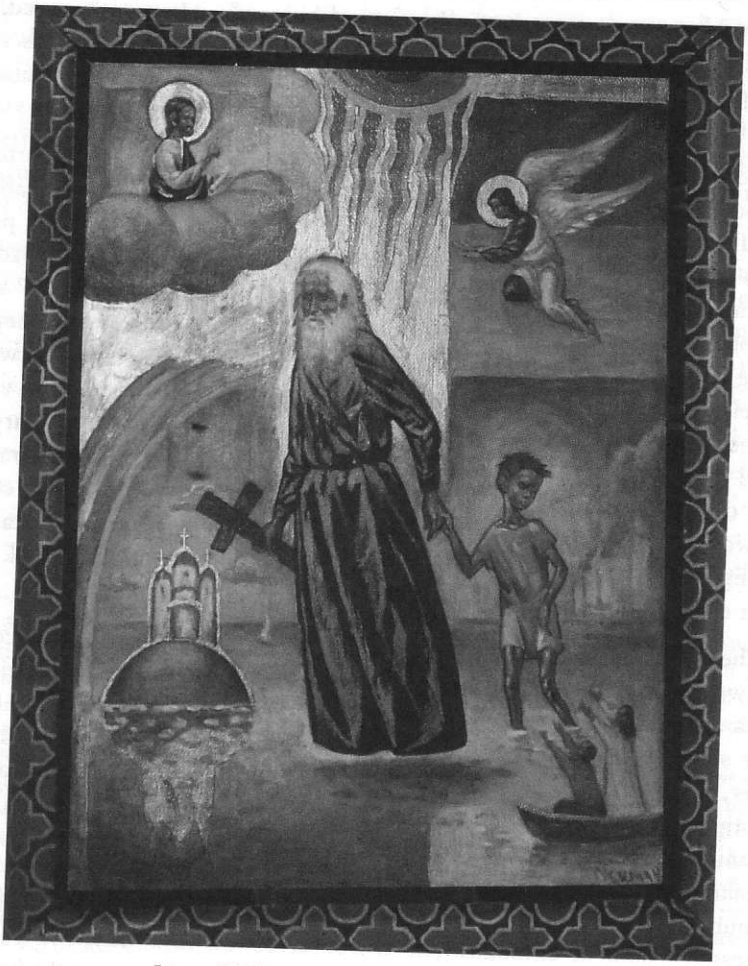
Father Nikolay was born to a peasant (or merchant, according to other versions of his biography) family in a village not far from the place where he is buried. In the late 1920s he finished pedagogical college in Leningrad and for some time worked as a teacher near Leningrad and in his native village. At the same time he continued to serve in a church as a sexton; in the 1930s, because of his religious activities he was exiled to Ukraine and later, according to some sources, to the Komi republic. In 1941 he found himself in Riga occupied by the German troops, where he received formal religious education in the courses run by the Pskov Orthodox mission and was ordained as a priest. Between 1942 and 1958 he served as a priest in Latvia and Lithuania. He never married, but he had not taken a monastic vow either and lived with his mother. As some biographers of N. Gurianov wrote, Father Nikolay moved from Lithuania to Pskov oblast to be closer to his native village.

The transformation of a modest village priest into a living saint started in the mid-1990s when pilgrims from all over the country and even from abroad started coming to the island individually and in groups organized by parish priests or lay religious activists. The mass media again played a crucial role in this transformation. In 1998, the Orthodox media-holding "Radonezh" made the documentary film "Why are we Orthodox?" which became very popular among believers. The copies of the film were disseminated via personal networks; I myself received a videocassette with this film from an acquaintance who visited N. Gurianov and venerated him as *starets*. Almost half of the documentary was filmed on the island of Zalita. One can watch an elderly grey-haired man in black cassock, tall and slim, who moves quickly from his house to the church followed by visitors who are almost running, sings church hymns and talks to the pilgrims about quite ordinary things: they should wear a cross, think more about eternal afterlife, confess their sins in the church, and rejoice.

The film states the sanctity of Father Nikolay in a quite peculiar yet convincing way. In the epilogue of the film, called "The Revelation of the Devil," we watch a woman standing in a crowd near the porch of Father Nikolay's house. As it soon becomes clear, she is possessed; when the elder appears, she (or, rather, the Devil in her) starts growling and shouting: "I hate the Orthodox! I hate them! This is the nastiest religion! All other religions are destined to Hell!" (meaning that the Orthodox religion is destined for paradise). Typically, in Russian (and Ukrainian) folk tradition, when his victim approaches the sacred (a church, a local shrine, etc.), the Devil starts speaking using the mouth of the possessed whom he embodies (C. Worobec, 2001). In a way, the possessed woman in the film legalizes the sanctity of the elder, in the eyes of the believers.

However, what is even more interesting in this episode is the reaction of Father Nikolay to the possessed woman: instead of beginning the exorcism process, he simply ignores her. So in this film he is represented as a "moderate" elder who does not support the extreme eschatological views that were widespread among Orthodox believers at that moment.

Indeed, memoirs and biographies of N. Gurianov describe him as the elder-comforter. According to them, he was not one of the "strict elders" who would make his spiritual children observe hard penance or submit to his *starets* (compare: N. Mitrokhim, 2006). On the contrary, he advised his visitors to live the routine life of a Christian believer in the secular world: that is, to continue her daily routines including professional and family obligations, to obey the Scripture to the best of her abilities, and worry about her personal salvation.



Icon of father Nikolay © Yulia Andreeva

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Yulia Andreeva

Line to the elder's house © Jeanne Kormina

His words "Don't give up" (*ne brosay*) to his visitors are typically interpreted as advice to continue their ordinary life instead of, say, escaping to the monastery [11]. Father Nikolay often said the same words to different people, but, as one believer from St. Petersburg wrote, "all received consolation in very different circumstances". She tells that when she visited Father Nikolay, many of her co-parishioners hoped that she would ask him their personal questions. She always took a notebook with her to write down their questions and his answers: "bless", "don't", "let her/him wait", "I will not tell", and "everything will be all right". However, his most typical reply was "let's pray". These simple short words, she recollects, "reached the soul of a person [to whom they were addressed – JK], entered his/her heart. Everything was put in the right place [as a result – JK]" (L. Iliunina, 2011: 187-188).

The characteristic words, a kind of slogan by N. Gurianov, according to his biographers, was the phrase ascribed to a famous elder of the Optina monastery Ambrose (1812-1891, canonized in 1988): "Where there is simplicity, there are a hundred Angels, but where there is cleverness, there are none." Father Nikolay's

11. Of course, different interpretations of this statement are possible, as can be seen from the memoirs of the director of one factory in St. Petersburg. The factory director understood Father Nikolay's words as a prediction that he would have difficult periods when he would be willing to give up his working obligations (L. Iliunina, 2011: 261-262).

motif of simplicity is developed by his biographers in two directions: (1) *simplicity as authenticity*, in which he is an authentic representative of the Russian people, the bearer of the national spiritual tradition; and (2) *pretended simplicity*, in which he is a *yurodivy*, a Holy Fool who pretends to be simple to hide his exceptionality, high church rank and some secret knowledge from the ignorant, but opens this wisdom to the restricted circle of chosen. The first direction, represented in the documentary "The temple," was formulated by the late Soviet religious seekers who partly inherited the light nationalistic discourse of the village prose movement. The "pretended simplicity" argument appeared in the late 1990s in circles of the Orthodox people of "militant piety" as it will be discussed later in the article.

Makers and promoters

As it has become clear in the story about the introduction of individual tax numbers, the *starets* can be a very powerful figure, although usually not a player himself, in the political games taking place in the contemporary Russian Orthodox Church and beyond in the society. Venerated as a living saint, he concentrates symbolic power that can be used by different parties and individuals in their own interests. It is not surprising that struggles of control over the *starets* happen between individuals, "lay professional believers", and representatives of the so-called *pritserkovnaya sreda* (a circle of people firmly entrenched in church life), as well as between groups of believers divided according to regional, political, social and other principles. More precisely, opposing parties fight for the right to transform the portrait of the elder into their own idea of the holy icon.

In 1996 or 1997 the village women who used to help Father Nikolay in his everyday routine were forced out by two newcomers, Valentina and Tatiana, who started to call themselves *keleinitsy* of the elder. The word *keleinik* is a derivation from the noun *kelia*, which means "monastic cell", a room in a monastery where a monk or a nun lives (presumably with this helper). A *keleinik* assists an elderly monk or nun who needs help because of his or her physical infirmity, or a servant and secretary of a busy church official who needs assistant to fulfill his functions. *Keleiniki* themselves often do not take a monastic vow, remaining lay brothers or sisters. Valentina and Tatiana, as well as other *keleiniki* of elders, did not only take care of Father Nikolay's modest household, as previous helpers did. Instead, the women, especially Tatiana, an Orthodox writer, pretended to control the "symbolic body" of the elder. According to publications of their opponents (including regional Orthodox intellectuals), Valentina and Tatiana harshly restricted access to Father Nikolay for pilgrims as well as for the local villagers. Moreover, they often took on the role of interpreting Father Nikolay's words, giving answers to questions that pilgrims asked the *starets*, giving blessings, and answering notes and letters addressed to him as if they themselves had somehow inherited his charisma.

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14. In the mid 1980s, Tatiana transla
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When the *starets* lives in a monastery, his veneration (and *keleiniki*) is more or less under the control of a superior. In the case of Nikolay Gurianov, nobody could really control the situation, partly because of the remoteness of his village (it was protected by the lake and by the lack of regular transportation to it). [12] As a result, a struggle for control over the *starets* began on the island of Zalita and beyond. The conflict rapidly spilled over church boundaries, or perhaps the boundaries were porous or the topic of *startsy* was highly significant in Russian society at that moment. In February 2001, one of the central Russian newspapers, *Izvestija* (the News), published an article about Nikolay Gurianov with the revealing title "Privatisation of the starets: a Prophet is incarcerated in his own country" (V. Emelianenko, 2001). The paper reported that the *keleinitsi* restricted his spiritual children's access to the *starets*, including those believers who lived on the island as well as pilgrims who came from different parts of Russia and abroad. The article also stated that the *keleinitsy* had created a business out of pilgrimage to the *starets*, charging people for their visits. "Izvestia" asked Patriarch Alexii to take the situation under his control and the newspaper promised to watch unfolding events closely because "the story of Father Nikolay transcends the inner church life; somehow it has to do with Russia as a whole" (V. Emelianenko, 2001: 1). The *keleinitsy* did not allow correspondents from this Moscow secular newspaper to meet Father Nikolay (which probably caused the accusatory tone of the article). They even employed guards to protect him from possible attacks by "Satanists" or simply from uninvited guests like journalists. [13]

Who are these powerful *keleinitsy*? Valentina came from St. Petersburg in the mid 1990s and, after some time, settled in Nikolay's house. Prior to that time she had already the experience of serving as *keleinitsa* to a venerated person in Leningrad oblast (Viazovsky, 2003). The second *keleinitsa*, Tatiana Groyan, came from Moscow. She is a professional philologist [14] and an active religious writer contributing to the right-wing Orthodox newspaper *Russkii vestnik* (Russian herald). She is also famous due to her biography of Grigory Rasputin, entitled *The Martyr for Christ and for the Tsar, Fool-for-Christ, Man of Prayer for the Holy Russia and her Regal Youth*. In her book *Nebesnyi angel* (*Heavenly Angel*, 2002, 2004) as well as in newspaper articles, radio speeches, and video

12. In the Soviet period the island had very good connection with Pskov by ferry, but between the beginning of the 1990s and the end of the 2000s there was no public transportation between the island and the mainland. To get to the island, one had to arrange crossing with the local fishermen.

13. In a July 2008 interview with the head of the Zalita island municipality, he explained that before the *keleinitsy* appeared, local villagers had already organized the guarding of Father Nikolay. They organized a kind of voluntary police (*narodnaya druzhina*, a Soviet institution), and village men guarded their priest from the possible attacks of "different [types of] madmen".

14. In the mid 1980s, Tatiana translated some literary works for children and youth from Russian into English for the bilingual editions of the publishing house Raduga.

recordings, Tatiana promoted the idea that N. Gurianov venerated the royal family before its canonization by the Russian Orthodox Church in 2000 and gave his blessing for the canonization of a "friend of the Tsarist family" G. Rasputin. In addition, she claimed that Father Nikolay was a hidden monk who took his monastic vow during the period of German occupation in Riga, and was possibly even a schema-bishop. In this case, his blessing for the canonization of Rasputin would seem more cogent to her and to people from her circle. In other words, Groyan and her supporters and collaborators developed the idea of the "pretended simplicity" of Father Nikolay, who would open the secret of his monastic vow and his high rank in the church hierarchy to his *keleinitsa* only.

Canonization of the last Russian emperor's family by the Russian Orthodox Church was one of the conditions for reconciliation with the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia who glorified them as martyrs in 1981 (Rousselet, 2011: 146). At the same time in the Russian Orthodox world this decision was perceived as (and, perhaps, was in fact) a concession of the Patriarchate to the radical groups of believers and to fundamentalist views that were widespread in the Russian Orthodox community and beyond (B. Knorre, 2006: 386-387). The probable cause of this strategy was a fear of schism, which could force liberal and conservative parts of the Orthodox hierarchs to look for grounds for compromise with supporters of this canonization. However, the decision did not fully satisfy them.

The debates around canonization of Nikolay II and his family focused on the category of sanctity ascribed to the new saints. The Russian Orthodox Church canonized them as passion-bearers (*strastoterptsy*), that is, as saints who were killed by their political opponents and who endured suffering and faced death in a Christ-like manner, a rank of sanctity peculiar to the Church (S. Rock, 2006: 260). Yet, some groups of believers insisted on canonization of Nikolay as a martyr, and in their understanding of his deed they went much further then the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia. For them, Nikolay was a "redeemer" (*iskupitel'*), who by his death expiated the sins of the Russian people in the same way as Jesus Christ did for all mankind. Although the Church described the veneration of the new saints as a heresy of *tsarebozhie* (veneration of Tsar as God), it failed to stop the activities of these Orthodox dissidents. One can find icons and other images where the Emperor is depicted as a redeemer in numerous places throughout the country,[15] including the remote island of Zalita. A monk from the Mirozhski monastery (Pskov), who was the pupil of one of the leading icon-painters in Russia and a gifted painter himself, painted the entrance gate to the cemetery on Zalita with images of Nikolay II as redeemer

15. In July 2009, I saw the icon of this kind in one of the churches in Sverdlovsk oblast. The icon, known as "Zealous sacrifice", depicts the head of Nikolay II in a Eucharist vessel. See also the story of a priest who strongly supports the icons and veneration of Nikolay II as redeemer in the recent article by K. Rousselet (2011: 155-156).

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16. Vsevolod Rozhnyatovsky, art hist
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17. Grand Duchess Elizabeth, a memb
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18. In 2000 or 2001 both *keleinitsy* cl
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19. Probably, this is the International
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20. This website is a member of the
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21. I prefer the neutral term "dissidents
by the pro-Orthodox historian Sergey Firs

with a circular halo around his head. Nikolay is depicted along with his son Prince Alexey, his wife, his four daughters, and Grigory Rasputin, who is holding the Eucharist vessel in his one hand and the cross in another. The gate's non-canonical images were commissioned by believers from Moscow who paid a high price for this work. [16] The bishop of Pskov imposed a penalty on the painter, but lacked the power to destroy the pictures, although some inscriptions on the frescos were removed. In 2010, the image of G. Rasputin was replaced by the canonically unquestionable icon of the new martyr Grand Duchess Elizabeth [17] (Skatova, 2010; Groyan, 2010).

After the death of Father Nikolay, Tatiana and her comrades took steps to "institutionalize" their group on the island. [18] With the financial help of a foundation based in Moscow [19] they bought several houses in the village including the house of the *starets*, which they started to call the *kelia* (monastic cell). They manufactured stamps with sayings such as "[with the] blessing of *kelia* of *starets* N. Gurianov", organized the "Society in blessed memory of N. Gurianov" with its own website at http://www.talabsk.ru [20] and set up the yearly conference "Nikolay's readings in blessed memory of the starets of the Russian soil, righteous (pravedny) N. Gurianov". Tatiana eventually left for Moscow and Valentina also vanished from the island, but the *kelia*, now a kind of museum, is still guarded by two or three men dressed in quasi-military uniform who come to live on the island for several months until new guards come to replace them. They look after the venerated grave of N. Gurianov and help to organize yearly commemorative ceremonies to him on the island.

The *kelia* of Nikolay attracts Orthodox people who share ideas of *tsarebozhie*, maintain apocalyptic beliefs, and can be characterized as Orthodox dissidents. [21] It has become a sort of junction in the network of this kind of believers.

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16. Vsevolod Rozhnyatovsky, art historian who worked in the 1990s in Mirozhsky monastery, personal communication, October 2011.

17. Grand Duchess Elizabeth, a member of the Romanov's family, was killed in Alapaevsk in 1918 and canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church in 1992. She was famous for her charity activities and the foundation of the Martha-Mary convent of mercy.

18. In 2000 or 2001 both *keleinitsy* claimed to be nuns and changed their names. Valentina became Ioanna, and Tatiana changed her name to Nikolaya, undoubtedly in honor of "her" *starets*. Tatiana Groyan now calls herself in her books and articles schema nun Nikolaya and continues to wear a nun's black clothing in public.

19. Probably, this is the International Foundation of Slavic Writing and Culture headed by right-wing politician Alexander Krutov. This foundation has a mansion in the center of Moscow where it hosts annual conferences in the honor of N. Gurianov, organized by T. Groyan. The same politician, a convinced monarchist by his views, is the chief editor of the journal "Russian house" and the author and presenter of the telecast "Russian house". In winter 2001, A. Krutov himself came to Zalita to shoot a film about Father Nikolay for his program.

20. This website is a member of the extremist community "Zhit' bez strakha iudeiska" [Life without fear of Jews].

21. I prefer the neutral term "dissidents" to the label "marginal persons" (*marginaly*) offered by the pro-Orthodox historian Sergey Firsov (S. Firsov, 2004).

Some of them came to the island to live there; others make long or short pilgrimages to this place from time to time. One of the dissidents who came to stay is Igor. In 2008 when my colleague and I did our fieldwork on the island, he was in his mid thirties and divorced. He first came to the island from Siberia in 1999 to meet Father Nikolay. Some years ago he moved to Zalita because, as he explained, his poor health did not allow him to be a manual worker any more, and because of his will to live closer to the sacred place. On the island he survived by selling milk from his two cows and dreamed of marrying a truly Orthodox woman who would like to build with him an ideal Orthodox patriarchal family. Igor was selling or giving away milk to the people concentrating around the *kelia* and the house of new *staritsa* (female-elder) Nila. Nila, who claimed to be a schema-nun, arrived to the island in the early 1990s after her retirement (she used to work in a hospital in St. Petersburg as a nurse). Now she has visions of Father Nikolay almost every night, and she writes poetry about these contacts. Two or three women, also newcomers, take care of her and live in the same house. This group of people, who have close connection with the "Orthodox fundamentalists" outside the island, claims its right to control the image of N. Gurianov as a hidden bishop who blessed the canonization of G. Rasputin.

Fight for the legacy

The death of the *starets* who attracted so many people to this remote island was a crucial point in developing his "career" as a saint, and was accompanied by the long-lasting struggle for the right to define his style of sanctity and characteristics of his charisma. It would be an oversimplification to analyse this competition as an opposition of the official church to "popular" Orthodoxy; in fact, all of the parties who competed for the saint had access to the church media and represented different elites in the "body" of the Russian Orthodox church. The competition itself took a form of "discursive wars" on Orthodox websites and in print. All the opponents in this competition agreed that Father Nikolay was an elder (a living saint) and all of them represented him as a *narodny* saint. The point for discussion was the concept of "*narodny* saint" and, of course, of the *narod*. If asked to translate this vague concept in English, they would offer several different equivalents. For the "zealots" or "Orthodox fundamentalists" who sided with T. Groyan, *narodny* would mean "ethnic" or "national"; moderate conservatives (local church authorities including episcope Evsevy) would use the word "popular"; and traditionalists (local lay Orthodox intellectuals) understand *narodny* as "folk", that is something related to folk culture. Each of the three groups promoted one of the following images of Father Nikolay (respectively): 1) a "national hero", a secret schema-monk, archpriest, and monarchist who blessed the canonization of Rasputin; 2) a modest righteous village man; or 3) the wonder-worker who had also the gift of some mystic knowledge.

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22. I. Izbortsev is the pen name of
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The image of Father Nikolay as a miracle-worker and visionary was first popularized by Igor Izbortsev, a professional writer and journalist from Pskov who was a representative of the regional lay Orthodox elite (one of most uncompromising opponents of T. Groyan in the press). He published numerous works about Father Nikolay in different Orthodox publishing houses, on the Internet, and in thick literary journals. One such journal was *Moskva* (Moscow), one of the three main Russian nationalist journals of the Soviet period that represented the conservative nationalism of that time and, to some extent, continued the tradition of the village prose literary movement (see Y. M. Brudny, 2000).[22] In his publications, I. Izbortsev created a poetic image of Father Nikolay as an "island of Orthodoxy" where authentic Russian (I would say "folk") religious culture has been preserved. His list of miracles varies from such traditional miracles as a successful search for a missing person with help of the special icon Mother of God "The Seeking of the Lost", deliverance from a smoking addiction, and recovery from cancer. In stories by I. Izbortsev, the elder resembles a wizard from a folk tale rather than an Orthodox priest. The most vivid evidence of that is the case of repentance of his cat Lipa for the sin of killing a bird. "Father took the case (of killing) seriously and explained in detail to the creature his fault and told him not to do this in the future. The cat screwed up his eyes, and moved his head guiltily as if he asked for pardon and repented his sin". According to Izbortsev, this cat never again ate a bird and defended one "trustful chiffchaff" that nestled in Father Nikolay's yard from the neighboring cats (Izbortsev, 2003). The story about the cat describes several qualities of charisma ascribed to Father Nikolay, including his wisdom and goodness to every creature. The cat appears on icons of the elder, and stories about Lipa are retold by different visitors to Father Nikolay and included in various publications. I observed situation when a pilgrim from St. Petersburg asked the local priest on Zalita how the cat is doing now. The annoyed response of the priest (Oh, no, they want to canonize a cat, this is ridiculous!) proved that this kind of question was not rare.[23]

Izbortsev and others represented Gurianov as a folk saint, that is, a person, either canonized or not, whom people visit or to whom people pray asking for help in hopeless cases such as recovery from incurable disease or escape from sure death (see an analogue in the Catholic tradition: R. Orsi, 1998). One can say that believers apply to the folk saints to contact to the world of wonder. Contemporary Orthodox believers, however, have a quite different conception of wonder from the traditional one. For them, the wonderwork of the *starets* is

22. I. Izbortsev is the pen name of this journalist, derived from the name of the village of Izborsk. Located in Pskov oblast, this is one of the most ancient towns in the Russian Federation. On the special decree of President Medvedev (07.07.2010), Izborsk celebrated its 1100th anniversary jubilee in 2012. In other words, the pen name of this writer describes his local patriotism and his "cultural nationalism".

23. According to some sources, the elder once even raised his cat from the dead.

connected to his or her gift of vision of the future. By knowing in advance the consequences of any decision the pilgrim makes now, the elder can give the right advice if asked. For example, a pilgrim comes to the elder not to ask for miraculous recovery, but to ask his advice or blessing (which means giving both permission and spiritual support) for the surgery. The aim of such advice from the elders is not to lead the believer into salvation; rather, the advice helps to put in order his or her everyday routine. The ability to perform "small miracles" makes Father Nikolay a contemporary folk saint in the eyes of Izbortsev and others.

The unquestionable reputation of Gurianov as a *narodny* elder is what drew the attention of the promoters of Rasputin. When putting Rasputin or Ioann the Terrible on the icons of this elder, they turn them into "folk saints" also and legitimize their attempts to canonize these figures. The paradox is that believers who actively support the idea of canonization of Rasputin do not see themselves as *narod*. They are the Orthodox *intelligentsiya* – writers, filmmakers, and journalists who are the same type of creative religious seekers who "opened" *starets* Nikolay in the late Soviet period. In their grand narrative of the secret history of the Russian people, these people describe N. Gurianov as one of the hidden heroes who created this history (T. Groyan, 2002; 2004). This portrait of the elder as a person of "pretended simplicity" after his death quickly turned into the icon where saint Nikolay of Zalita is displayed among such odious (from the Church's official point of view) figures as Rasputin and Ioann the Terrible. This kind of visual representation of the elder on the icons and in the "documentary" works very well as promotion of this particular image of Father Nikolay.

In the network of the Orthodox dissidents of this kind, the ability to legitimize a certain practice, idea, or narrative is not delegated to the official institution (the Church). Instead, something (including charisma of the elder) is considered to be "true", or legitimate, if it possesses characteristics that are prestigious, from the point of view of this group. These characteristics are (1) localization of the source of true information in the idealized monastic world; and (2) restricted access to the truth which can be found only in the Orthodox *samizdat* or other rare printed or video documents. In other words, the restriction of access to some knowledge provides it with the halo of credibility, while those who have access to it prove their status among the elite group in the Russian Orthodox world.

Among many reasons why the figure of Grigory Rasputin Novy (The New) [24] became so attractive for some believers, one is his peasant background. As S. Rock points out, in the works of his apologists, Rasputin is represented as a

24. Rasputin is a pseudonym of Grigory Novykh. His surname, Novykh, was transformed into his title The New (Novy).

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dered or misled by foreigners" (S. R
to him in the Vita, "the Man of God
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25. According to B. Knorre, *narod*
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26. As a result, Father Nikolay has b
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"good, simple, devout peasant – the embodiment of the Russian *narod* – slandered or misled by foreigners" (S. Rock, 2006: 262). The title T. Groyan ascribed to him in the Vita, "the Man of God" (*Chelovek Bozhy*), can be used as synonym for the Holy fool (*blazhenny*), that is a person of "pretended simplicity". This title Tatiana borrowed from the famous saint Alexios, "the Man of God", a popular hero of Russian traditional spiritual songs (S. A. Ivanov, 2006: 81-85). The title *starets* is also often added to the name of G. Rasputin by his apologists. T. Groyan even suggested that he took a monastic vow during his pilgrimage to the monasteries of the Holy Mount Athos (as a typical *starets* in Russia is still a monk). This way, T. Groyan and others try to legalize him as a "folk saint" who is not yet recognized by the church hierarchy but may be recognized in the future, as all venerated elders probably do. These persistent attempts to represent G. Rasputin as representative of a true Russian folk (*narod*) does not mean that he became or was at some point a folk saint, as some specialists in Russian Orthodox culture have claimed. With that argument, the researchers in fact simply repeat the logic of the promoters of the cult of G. Rasputin instead of trying to understand this logic (see S. Firsov, 2004; B. Knorre, 2006)[25]. There is no evidence of the veneration of Rasputin as a folk saint (that is, a miracle-worker), as far as I know.

Some years ago it seemed that the official Church lost the struggle over *starets* Nikolay to those believers, whom I call here "*kelia*-people".[26] However, since the name of Father Nikolay is regularly included in official biographical compendiums of the elders and a 600-page illustrated book about Gurianov entitled "The Servant of God" was published recently with the promising subtitle "Volume One", it seems that the Church is continuing its fight to claim him as a prospective saint (R. Kazantseva, 2011). The Church must be interested in the canonization of N. Gurianov for the same reasons as the *kelia*-people do: for his closeness to the people. However, in the publications provided by the official church in recent years, his "simplicity as authenticity" image, created by the local Orthodox writers in early 2000s, is modified greatly. Instead of a wonder-worker and visionary, the elder is represented here as a real person whose biography is well documented in photos and written archives. The volume "Servant of God" was published with the approval of the Publishing council of the Russian Orthodox Church and blessed by the local bishop Evsevy: that is, it presents an official variant of the biography of the elder. In this book, Father

25. According to B. Knorre, *narod* is opposed to the church hierarchy. However, this division oversimplifies the situation with the veneration of Raputin, or Ioann the Terrible, or the Tsar as martyr, which is the core of "folk religion" of *tsarebozhniki*. Many priests and some church hierarchs share or used to share the same ideas, as well as some powerful lay people in the Church who could not be called *narod*.

26. As a result, Father Nikolay has become a venerated saint in fundamentalist congregations such as the one led by Father Alexander Sukhov in Leningrad oblast, who was excommunicated by the Church in 2007.

Nikolay is depicted as a typical Russian priest, an ordinary righteous village man, one of those who kept Russian religiosity and spirituality uncorrupted during the Soviet period. This is another mode of his authenticity, which adds to and to some extent contradicts the "folk authenticity" version. According to this version, he is an exemplary representative of the Russian Orthodox people whose biography is similar to the life histories of his compatriots. Born to a village family, he visited a church in his childhood, than migrated to the city for a while to continue his education and to survive in the lean years. He did not give up going to the church and suffered for his faith in the 1930s, again as many others did. He became a priest and lived a quiet life in a remote location. In other words, Father Nikolay was described as a "true" Russian Orthodox person. As a role model for any priest and believer, his portrait was put on a cheap church booklet for the common people entitled "What to say to the priest during confession" (2010).

In this biography, the Church articulates its moderate position towards the charisma embodied in the elders, and in Father Nikolay in particular. He is described as a maker of small miracles that could be experienced by everyone who visited him during his life or who visits his grave now. According to this strategy of representing his charisma, N. Gurianov has the gift of consolation. As a pilgrim in the Orthodox documentary said, with a radiant smile: "I had a feeling that I had had a great need [to come to the elder – JK]. But when I came here [to the island – JK], it turned out that this was something insignificant," so she decided not to disturb the elder with her question. She received help from the elder without direct contact with him, as if his gift to console the people extended to the whole landscape of the island.

As we can see, different Orthodox elites promoted different images of N. Gurianov as a *narodny* saint. Depending of their version of the Russian *narod* – an ethnic group, the common people or some imagined peasants, or the bearers of the Russian folk culture – they offered different images of the ideal contemporary Russian saint, the elder. Although all of the groups agree that his simplicity is the main characteristic of his charisma, they differ in how they use this argument, either as evidence of his authenticity as a true representative of the Russian culture or as evidence of his ability to hide his true identity from all but the closest people.

Conclusion

Neither a passionate preacher nor a sophisticated religious writer, Father N. Gurianov was a voiceless hero, a blank screen onto which different religious groups could project their own images of the *starets*.[27] First introduced by

27. Compare with an analysis of the cult of Dominican monk Marcolino of Forli in the 14th century (Bornstein, 1997).

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28. There was gossip that Vladimir Pu
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religious seekers and "cultural nationalists" in the late Soviet period and promoted by the right-wing "Orthodox fundamentalists" in the late 1990s, the elder N. Gurianov has now been appropriated by the Russian Orthodox Church. Of course, even if the Church canonizes him as a pious person and an ideal priest in the near future, a group of Orthodox dissidents will probably continue to venerate Father Nikolay as a saint who blessed their efforts for canonization of G. Rasputin.

This process of contesting the sacred is an organic part of Orthodox Christianity as a lived religion. In post-Soviet Russia, as the society underwent rapid and crucial social changes, secular political elites and the broader public paid exceptional attention to the Orthodox elders as part of the process of looking for the "usable past". This past would become the foundation of a new national myth, which was greatly needed at that time. Not surprisingly, the most comforting variant of the national past for most people was its "cultural" variant as presented by the Orthodox religion, which started to be represented as the Russian national culture. In their search for the comforting shared past different Russian elites, including bohemian circles, the so-called *intelligentsiya*, and new business and political elites, turned their attention to the old, modest religious men and women whom they combined in the category of *startsy* created at that particular time.[28] These people were believed to live ascetic religious lives that were separate from all of the political intrigues of the Church, which was blamed by many for its collaboration with the Soviet (and later post-Soviet) state. In their remote parishes and monasteries, they represented, in the eyes of believers and sympathizers, a sort of ahistorical past, a national heritage, equal in its authenticity to the Russian song, fairy tale, or landscape.

Probably the only people who do not agree that Father Nikolay was a saint are the local inhabitants of the island, his former parishioners. They remember him as a good priest and a good neighbor whom they took care of when he became old, just as they would do to every member of their village community. For pilgrims and Orthodox writers of different sorts, the local fishermen and pensioners are part of the sacred landscape where the elder lived. One the one hand, the pilgrims believe that Father Nikolay's former neighbors are too simple to understand the greatness of his saintliness. On the other hand, in their simplicity they are close to him and probably are bearers of his charisma, just like other parts of the island's landscape.

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28. There was gossip that Vladimir Putin visited *starets* Ioann Krest'ankin in the Pskovo-Pechersky monastery to ask for blessing for his first presidency.

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Russian Saint under Construction
Portraits and Icons of *Starets* Nikolay

How to analyze the process of creation and promotion of a new type of saints, the so-called startsy (the elders), which emerged in the Russian Orthodox Church at the end of the 1990s? The debates about the "styles" of sanctity addressed by the term starets are supported by different groups of believers. These groups support different strategies to articulate the charisma embodied in starets in terms of its legitimization and characteristics. These tendencies are studied, using as an example the "career of starets" of the village priest from a remote island in the Pskovskoe lake that is located 30 km from the Russian-Estonian border.

Key words: Russian Orthodox Church, hagiography, religious practices, veneration of saints, pilgrimage, popular religion.

Un saint russe en cours de construction
Portraits et icônes du *starets* Nikolay

Comment analyser le processus de création et de promotion d'un nouveau type de saints, appelés startsy (les anciens), qui est apparu dans l'Église orthodoxe russe à la fin des années 1990 ? Les débats concernant les « styles » de sainteté contenus dans le terme starets sont cautionnés par différents groupes de croyants. Ces groupes

soutiennent différentes stratégies po
termes de légitimation et de caracté
comme exemple la « carrière de s
Pskovskoe qui se trouve à 30 km d

Mots-clés : église orthodoxe russe, l
saints, pèlerinage, religion populair

Santos rusos en construcción
Retratos e íconos del *starets* Nik

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de los años 1990? Distintos grupos
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de significados adscripto al término

Palabras clave: Iglesia ortodoxa rus
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ncernant les « styles » de sainteté contenus
différents groupes de croyants. Ces groupes

soutiennent différentes stratégies pour articuler le charisme incarné dans les starets en termes de légitimation et de caractéristiques. Ces tendances sont étudiées en utilisant comme exemple la « carrière de starets » d'un prêtre de village d'une île du lac Pskovskoe qui se trouve à 30 km de la frontière russo-estonienne.

Mots-clés : église orthodoxe russe, hagiographie, pratiques religieuses, vénération des saints, pèlerinage, religion populaire.

Santos rusos en construcción
Retratos e íconos del *starets* Nikolay

¿Cómo analizar el proceso de creación y promoción de un nuevo tipo de santos, lo llamados startsy (los ancianos), que emergieron en la Iglesia Ortodoxa Rusa a fines de los años 1990? Distintos grupos se han concentrado en debates sobre los "estilos" de santidad, relacionados con el término starets. Estos grupos sostienen distintas estrategias para articular el carisma encarnado en los starets en términos de su legitimación y características. Estas tendencias son estudiadas, usando como ejemplo la "carrera de starets", de los sacerdotes del pueblo de una remota isla del lago Pskovskoe, ubicado a 30 km. de la frontera de Rusia con Estonia. Primero se destacará el campo de significados adscripto al término starchestvo.

Palabras clave: Iglesia ortodoxa rusa, hagiografía, prácticas religiosas, veneración de los santos, peregrinaciones, religiosidad popular.