

REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLES OF THE CAUCASUS IN 20TH CENTURY

RUSSIAN LITERATURE AND CINEMATOGRAPHY

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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For centuries, Russian writers have stressed the important role the Caucasus played in the Russian Empire. In the last few decades, much attention has been directed at the Caucasians in literary works and movies as a result of the two Chechen wars.

This thesis addresses the evolution of the Caucasian theme in Russian literature beginning from the 18th century with a focus on the contemporary representation of the peoples of Caucasus, mainly Chechens, in three works: a Soviet-era movie by Leonid Gaidai, *Kidnapping, Caucasian Style* (1966); Vladimir Makanin's story, *Captive of the Caucasus* (1994) and Viktor Pelevin's story, *Papakhi na bashniakh* (1995). The central research question is to what degree contemporary authors have transformed the image of the Caucasians compared to the Romantic period. Of particular interest is the issue of Russia's self-representation in these works.

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To the memory of my cousin who served in Russia's war with Afghanistan.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The artistic image of the Caucasus in the Russian literature can be traced back to the times of Mikhail Lomonosov and Gavriil Derzhavin. Since the 18th century, Russia has been fascinated by this mountainous and “free-spirited” region and has constantly desired to annex it. Recently, much attention has been focused on the Caucasian region, in particular Chechnia and its people, as well as its relationship with the Russian Federation. The two Chechen wars [1994-1996 and 1999-2000] increased misunderstanding, fear and anxiety of the Russian population towards the people of the Caucasus. However, the Chechens and other ethnic groups of the Caucasus have endured a centuries-old struggle to repel the Russian forces that came to subjugate them and regain their independence when unsuccessful. The inhabitants of the Caucasus viewed Russia as an intruder who wanted to take what was and still is not theirs.

This thesis, *Representation of the Peoples of the Caucasus in 20th Century Russian Literature and Cinematography*, addresses the theme of the Caucasus in three works: a Soviet-era movie by Leonid Gaidai, *Kidnapping, Caucasian Style* (*Кавказская Пленница, или Новые Приключения Шурика*), 1966, Vladimir Makanin’s story, *Captive of the Caucasus* (*Кавказский Пленный*), 1994, and Viktor Pelevin’s story, *Papakhi na Bashniakh* (*Папахи на Башнях*), 1995. Prior to examining these three works, we will present a review of the Caucasian theme in the Russian literature of the 18th and 19th centuries which, in turn, will provide a starting point from which to evaluate the evolution of this theme.

These three works were chosen with the following reasoning in mind. A film was selected to represent Soviet Russia's perspective towards the peoples of the Caucasus due to the fact that cinema was the most important medium for educating the masses during that era. It was Leonid Gaidai's status as a preeminent director that led to the selection of *Kidnapping, Caucasian Style* (1966), in particular. By the end of the 20th century, Russia has become one of the most "reading" nations in the world and books have become affordable to everybody. For our thesis, we have included Vladimir Makanin (older generation) and Viktor Pelevin (younger generation), the two most popular and famous writers of the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century within their respective literary movements.

Our thesis discusses the commonalities and differences in the initial three works mentioned above in regards to the contemporary representation of the Caucasus and treatment of the Chechens, especially taking into consideration that Makanin's story was written months before the start of the First Chechen War and Pelevin's story was created one year after the war broke out. The central research question that will be answered in this thesis is: Has there been a shift in the representation of the Chechens in contemporary literature versus the 18th-19th centuries and the Soviet-era [where Leonid Gaidai is just one example] based on the above-cited works? How does such a shift, if any, compare to differences between the Classicism and Romanticism, and the Soviet era regarding this theme? The analysis of the depiction of the Chechens is especially interesting since the majority of literary works on the subject are saturated with cultural stereotyping and prejudice.

While pursuing the goal of comparing the presentation of the peoples of the Caucasus in contemporary Russian literature, this thesis also examines the following questions:

- 1) How have historical interactions between Russia and the Caucasus affected the current works?
- 2) What is Russia's self-representation? Has it undergone the evolution?
- 3) How are the peoples of the Caucasus, especially the Chechens, portrayed in the 20th century Russian literature and cinematography?
- 4) How do the contemporary authors transform the heritage of the 18th and 19th century depiction of the Caucasus?

Before answering these questions in Chapters II, III, IV, and V, we will give an overview of the history of the Russian-Caucasian relationship, as well as the literary legacy of the 18th and 19th centuries regarding this theme.

Relationship between Russia and the Caucasus over the Last Five Centuries

The Caucasus has been an alluring territory for the Russian Empire since as early as the 12th century in regards to the land and its people. According to Alla Iazkova (2004), Russian Tsars, fascinated not only by the splendor of the region but also by the beauty of the Caucasian women, occasionally married daughters of the Caucasian Princes [Prince Iziaslav Mstislavovich (1154); Tsar Ivan the Terrible (1561)]. Boris Godunov (16th century) and later, Peter the Great (17th-18th century), viewed the Caucasian region

as a platform for conquering Persia. Peter I began to populate the conquered Caucasian lands with the serfs and the Cossacks who could defend themselves in case of attacks. In the second half of the 18th century, Catherine II continued ambitious plans of the Russian Empire in terms of expanding its territories. Under the reign of Alexander I, the Caucasian War [1817-1864] broke out and Alexei Ermolov was appointed chief commander. Ermolov was one of the most famous and popular people of the first half of the 19th century. He achieved such glory and respect of the Russian people due to his military talent and erudition illustrated in the three wars with Napoleon and in multiple Caucasian campaigns. Not only the Tsar looked up at him but also poets sought his friendship: Pushkin wanted to be Alexei Ermolov's biographer and historian, Zhukovskii and Griboedov glorified him in their works.

Being extremely patriotic, the general despised mountaineers and "all non-Russian peoples, but the Chechens were ranked right at the top of his racial scale of loathing" (Jaimoukha, 2005, p. 41). Considering the fact that the Emperor did not put a stop to Ermolov's cruelty in enslaving the peoples of the Caucasus, raping women and demolishing whole villages, it is no surprise that Alexander I also supported Ermolov's direct hatred towards the mountaineers, a hatred Ermolov had no difficulty putting into words:

Ниже по течению Терека живут чеченцы, самые злейшие из разбойников, нападающие на линию. Общество их весьма малоллюдно, но чрезвычайно умножилось в последние несколько лет, ибо принимались дружественно злодеи всех прочих народов, оставляющие землю свою по каким-либо преступлениям. Здесь находили они сообщников, тотчас готовых или отмщевать за них, или участвовать в разбоях [...]. Чечню можно справедливо назвать гнездом всех разбойников. (Ugrumov, 2002, p. 371)

Downstream of the Terek the Chechens live, the most evil of the bandits, attacking the line. Their society is very poorly populated, but has extremely multiplied in the last few years, since they adopted friendly villains from all other nations, leaving their land open for all types of crime. Here, they found allies, ready to take revenge for them, or participate in the robbery [...]. Chechnia can fairly be called a den of thieves¹.

Even after the annexation of the Northern Caucasus at the end of the Caucasian War, this region has still been one of the most troublesome regions of Russia for almost two centuries. In the end of the 20th century, Chechnia wanted to become an independent state and leave the Russian Federation. The two Chechen Wars broke out and took the lives of many civilians. These wars were followed by a number of terrorist attacks on both territories [the recent one in January 2011 in Domodedovo airport] performed by Muslims. After the 9/11 attack in New York, both the Russian government and the Chechens began playing their game with the “new rules”. Vladimir Putin [the second Russian president, 2000-2008] took advantage of the opportunity to equate Chechnia’s actions within Russia and international terrorism in general.

To gain an understanding of Russia’s recent experiences, an abbreviated list of Chechen attacks on Russia will be presented. In the article “*Terror’s new depths*”, published in the Economist in 2004, a comprehensive list of terrorist attacks by Chechens from 1995 to 2004 is given. Some of them are: hospital hostage siege in Budennovsk in June 1995; apartment block bombings in Moscow in September 1999; theatre siege in Moscow in October 2002; suicide bombing at open-air music festival in Moscow in July 2003; suicide bomb in Moscow in December 2003; metro train bomb in Moscow in

¹ This and all subsequent translations from Russian are mine, unless otherwise is indicated.

February 2004; suicide bombing near Metro station in Moscow in August 2004; school siege in Beslan, North Ossetia in September 2004. Terrorist attacks have continued beyond those listed here. Nevertheless, reading through the list, one can feel the horror, anxiety and concern of all Russian people towards the “free-spirited” people of the Caucasus. What will happen next? When will it end? Is the region today still viewed in the same romantic light as it used to be for Russians many centuries ago or is it the “den of thieves” as General Ermolov referred to it?

It should be said that the above presents a Russian perspective on the violence that has and is occurring. However, the point to be remembered is despite all of the offenses perpetuated against each other between the Russian Empire and the inhabitants of the Caucasus in the past; it is the violence and wars of the 1990s and the continued terrorist attacks that most directly inform contemporary Russia’s perception of the Caucasus and its peoples.

Caucasus in the Light of Russian Classicism

The theme of the Caucasus became prominent in Russian literature in the time of Russian Classicism. In his ode, *On the day of the ascension to the throne of all Russia of her majesty the sovereign empress Elisaveta Petrovna, in the year 1748*, Lomonosov presents the Caucasus as an indispensable part of Great Russia; the latter “extends her legs over the steppe” and “counts the prosperity around her, resting with her elbow on the Caucasus”. The mountainous region is depicted as Russia’s support that gives it

assurance in its pose. Lomonosov personifies Russia and as Harsha Ram (2003) notices, portrays the country “as a human colossus straddling her own territory and surveying the horizontal expanse that she commands (p. 76). Ram also suggests that for Lomonosov “[t]he distinction between ethnic Russia and its borderlands [was] clearly less important” (p. 77).

According to Boris Vinogradov (1974), “on the crossing of themes, under the liaison of *ideino-tematicheskie* currents: glorification of the great Russia and exaltation of patriotic actions by Peter I, begins the theme of the Caucasus in Russian literature; the theme that was given national significance.” (p. 12)

The Caucasus was not always presented with glorifying and adoring passion. As Vinogradov (1974) states, some odes refer to the Caucasus in a tone of parody [*Dushenka* by Ippolit Bogdanovich (1783) or *Oda v gromko-nezhnom-nelepo-novom vkuse* by Aleksandr Sumarokov (1802)]. He goes on to point out that Sumarokov deviates from the traditions of Classicism and, in addressing Pegasus, orders him to kick the Caucasus, and by doing so, the halo of the elevated is eliminated:

Сафи́ро-храбро-му́дро-ногий,
Лазу́рно-бу́рный ко́нь Пега́с!
С па́рнасской своро́ти доро́ги
И пры́скачи ко́ мне на ча́с.
И́ль, да́в в Ка́вказ то́лчок но́гами
И ви́хро-бу́рными кры́лами
Ра́ссекши во́здух, пры́лети.

According to Dmitrii Blagoi (1947), Sumarokov “was fighting against ceremonial elation [and] fulminatory pathos of Lomonosov’s odes”. In 1779, Mikhail Kheraskov devoted his poem *Rossiada* to the Russian victory over the people of Kazan, “the last

remaining serious bulwark of the Golden Horde” (Vinogradov, 1974, p. 14). Here,

Caucasus is portrayed as the place of death:

В пещерах внутренних Кавказских льдистых гор,
Куда не досягал отважный смертных взор,
Где мразы вечный свод призрачный составляют,
И солнечных лучей паденье притупляют;
Где молния мертва, где цепенеет гром,
Изсечен изо льда стоит обширный дом:
Там бури, тамо хлад, там вьюги непогоды,
Там царствует зима, снедающая годы.

In this poem, the reader faces a very depressing and even repulsive image of the Caucasus. It is covered with ice; there is not enough sunlight; it is always cold since winter rules in this land.

Gavriil Derzhavin, another representative of Russian Classicism, continued to write “relatively traditional Lomonosovian odes throughout his life, preserving the older tradition primarily for the theme of military victory” (Ram, 2003, p. 84). In *Na Vozvrashchenie Grafa Zubova iz Persii* (1797), the Caucasus is both “the horror and the beauty of nature”. Derzhavin’s descriptions are based on reality; whereas, Lomonosov’s images are high flown. For Derzhavin, who also legitimizes the conquest of the Caucasus, the region can be both beautiful and scary because of the might of virgin nature:

О юный вождь! сверша походы,
Прошел ты с воинством Кавказ,
Зрел ужасы, красы природы:
Как, с ребр там страшных гор лиясь,
Ревут в мрак бездн сердиты реки;
Как с чел их с грохотом снега
Падут, лежавши целы веки;
Как серны, вниз склонив рога,

Зрят в мгле спокойно под собою
Рожденье молний и громов.

By stressing the beauty of the Caucasus, Derzhavin expanded the frames in which the region was depicted earlier by his fellow Classicists. In his poetry, the Caucasus became not only a solely national objective but also an artistic image (Vinogradov, 1974, p. 21). Ram (2003) also supports this point by stressing that “[i]t was Derzhavin who first intuited the natural sublimity of the Caucasus as a subjective experience that is felt through and beyond its picturesque value” and adds that “Celebrating the Caucasus [...] as the aesthetic fusion of horror and beauty, Derzhavin was also able to draw the more sobering lesson that self-mastery is a greater accomplishment than foreign conquest” (p. 120).

Caucasus in the Light of Russian Romanticism

After the annexation of eastern Georgia to Russia in 1801, exploration of the Caucasus comes to a new level. People began travelling extensively to the Caucasus writing travelogues, poems and notes devoted to this exotic southern region. In his book *Kavkaz v Russkoi literature pervoi poloviny XIX veka* (1982), Agil Gadzhiev underscores that the majority of authors were not so much interested in the ethnography of the region and the people who inhabited it, but rather they were intrigued by a “new romantic hero – Captive, European, who by fate and chance happened to be far away from his countrymen in the Caucasian region” (p. 11).

In his poems *Prisoner of the Caucasus* (1821), *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* (1823) and *The Gypsies* (1824), Pushkin established for the first time the romantic image of the beauty of Circassian women and laid the foundation of the romantic depiction of the Caucasian nature. It should be noted that Pushkin, as opposed to Gadzhiev's remark, draws readers' attention to the highlanders' traditions, their way of life, clothing and their songs. The scenes in his poems are full of details and have very specific descriptions.

According to Ram (1999), Pushkin's works depict "the Russian hero as prisoner rather than aggressor, a somewhat passive hostage [like Shurik in Gaidai's film *Kidnapping, Caucasian Style* (1966) or Rubakhin in Mukanin's story *The Captive of the Caucasus* (1994)] to the spectacle of imperial violence played out between the Russian state and the colonized peoples of the south" (p. 9). He goes on by pointing out that the captive can fully identify himself neither with the highlanders nor with the Russian state and thus occupies "a place of radical if ambiguous alienation, one that cannot be subsumed by the legitimating narratives of imperial war" (p. 10). This observation has been just as valid in the image of a Russian soldier in the wars with Chechnia in the 1990s as it was in Pushkin's day.

According to Katya Hokanson (2008), by the end of the 19th century "Russia's presence in the Caucasus became more entrenched, [and] literary works began to explore the experience of those who 'encountered' the Caucasus not briefly, but at length, and not civilians, but as members of the military, representatives of the Russian Empire" (p.170). As a result, the policy of Russia in the Caucasus was questioned more openly. Bestuzhev-Marlinskii accepted the fact that the Caucasus had to be annexed to Russia for its own

good, but did not acknowledge the cruelty of the methods employed by the Russian Tsar. By choosing positive images of the region and its people, he wanted to evoke sympathy in a Russian reader for Russian colonization of the region. In his story, *Ammalat-bek* (1831), Bestuzhev-Marlinskii provided readers with a romanticized description of the wilderness in the Caucasus and the military skill exhibited by Russian soldiers who fought there. In one scene, Russian soldiers are showing their abilities with daggers and swords by using them to decapitate bullocks. Here, the writer admires the raw brutality of killing and thus, perhaps, unknowingly, puts both Caucasians and Russians on the same barbaric level: “in legitimizing murder, war in effect set loose the ‘orient’ within” (Layton, 1994, p. 129).

In his assessment of the Caucasus, Bestuzhev-Marlinskii chooses a stereotypical point of view, “where the natives are sunk in sensual indolence, oblivious to time and impervious to European schemes to transform them” (Layton, 1994, p. 116), and by the end of the story the writer chooses to present Ammalat-Bek fighting the Russians and dying. Thus, the writer legitimizes the conquest of the Caucasus and presents the reader with the typical solution to the conflict between the savage and the civilized. Bestuzhev-Marlinskii illustrates an example where a Caucasian is to be punished which, according to Layton (1994), is “a gripping fictive demonstration of the view that wildness is destined to be eradicated, if not properly mastered and contained” (p. 119).

Mikhail Lermontov also treated the acute issue of colonizer vs. colonized in his works, *Hero of Our Time* (1840), *The Prisoner of the Caucasus* (1821), *Izmail-Bei* (1832), *Hadji-Abrek* (1834) and *Mtsyri* (1839). For Lermontov, the Caucasus is, first of

all, the region where freedom is born and where freedom-loving people live. He showed the Caucasians as people who would never condone tyranny and slavery and juxtaposed them to the Russian inactive youth who were wasting their lives in high-society salons.

The people of the Caucasus, as portrayed by Lermontov, are also notable for their cruelty and vindictiveness. It should be pointed out that although Lermontov chooses to depict this natural side of Caucasian character, there is nothing repulsive in it; he depicts them with understanding: all the cruel actions performed by the Caucasian characters are motivated by either their traditions or blood revenge.

Gadzhiev (1982) notes that Lermontov's Caucasian characters are very different from those of Bestuzhev-Marlinskii (p. 141). They are more romantic and are presented with fewer negative traits. The critic further comments on the value of the holistic approach to the recognition and appreciation of the peoples of the Caucasus: "the writer [Lermontov] urged not to idealize the inhabitants of this region and, going to the opposite extreme, not to smear them. The Caucasians, as all other people, have positive and negative traits; one should be able to understand them" (p. 141). Thus, Lermontov attempted to change the common stereotypical perspective of looking at the Orient.

We will conclude this overview of the Caucasus in the Russian literature of the 18th and 19th centuries with Lev Tolstoy and his anti-imperialist novel *Hadji Murat* (1896) where he attempts to reassess the War in the Caucasus. In contrast to his earlier praise of Russian colonialism and the emperor, Tolstoy deglamorizes and even belittles Nicholas I, under whom the conquest of the Caucasus was completed, stating that he is incapable of making his own decisions regarding the Caucasus. The author no longer

legitimizes the empire but rather deconstructs it. In his work, the highlanders stand together with the Russian people in this war and should act against the Russian ruling class. The Russian hero is portrayed more as a prisoner than an aggressor. He is trapped by the violent plans of the imperial Russian government. Tolstoy depicts the other side of history and challenges the superiority of Russia over the Orient, which is also pointed out by Susan Layton (1994):

Hadji Murat now confidently imagined the ‘other’ side of history, while illuminating how previous Russian writers of literature and history had denied the tribes a voice. [...] *Hadji Murat* upgraded the orality of the tribes and the Russian peasantry, while devaluing the written word as a tool of dehumanizing state structures. (p. 264)

We should also stress the fact that in the works of these romantic authors, we can see the evolution of the theme of the Caucasus. If in the beginning of the 19th century the East was presented with excessive exotic images, later they tended to include a more realistic portrayal of the actual events. Gadzhiev (1982) also observes that the Russian literature of the romantic period did not consist entirely of bright and exotic images of the Caucasian people (p. 18). Representatives of the conservative Romanticism [G. Gerakov, M. Sobolev, P. Zubov, A. Pisarev, and P. Shalikov] supported the openly violent conquest of the Caucasus. Trying to justify the policy of the Russian Empire in the region, these writers and poets deglamorized the highlanders by depicting them as bloodthirsty savages. This portrayal was completely opposite to that of Pushkin, Lermontov or Tolstoy: “Chechen, half-naked, covered in rags, with a rag on her head instead of a blanket, barefoot, with callous hands, is nothing like an untidy creature,

crushed with housework” (N. Paul in *Kavkazskie kartinki* as cited in Gadzhiev, 1982, p. 22).

Vissarion Belinskii (1838) also underscored the existence of a double nature of the Caucasus and complained that readers have been presented with only one stereotypical side of the story, which in turn is trivial:

Кавказ интересуе́т всех и дико́ю красо́тою свое́й первобы́тной приро́ды и ди́кими нра́вами сво́их оби́тателей [...]. Если де́ло и́дет о Ка́вказе, то ни́когда не и́щите в пове́сти ни́чего ти́хого, ве́село́го или за́бавно́го: пове́сть обы́кновенно на́чинае́тся гро́мкими фра́зами, а о́канчи́вается ре́знёю, пре́дательством, о́тцеуби́йством. Ко́нечно, все э́то бы́вает в жи́зни, и на Ка́вказе бо́льше, не́жели где-ни́будь; но ве́дь э́то то́лько *одна* сто́рона жи́зни го́рцев: за́чем же *отвле́кать* то́лько одну́ е́е? Оно́, ко́нечно, э́ффектно, но о́дно да о́дно -- во́ля ва́ша -- на́скучает.

The Caucasus interests everybody with the wild beauty of its primeval nature and wild manners of its inhabitants. [...] If the case goes to the Caucasus, you will never look for anything quiet, funny or fun in the story: the story usually begins with loud phrases, and ends with massacre, betrayal, patricide. Of course, all this happens in life, and in the Caucasus, more than anywhere, but this is the only *one* side of highlanders' life: Why should we *portray* only one side? It is, of course, spectacular, but one and only one thing – say what you may – becomes boring.

Thus, in Chapter I we have shown the evolution of the theme of the Caucasus in Russian literature of the 18th and 19th centuries and the treatment of both the Russians and Caucasians. Thompson (2000) mentions that Russian colonial literature tended to “emphasize the real or alleged brutalities the conquered once imposed on the Russians” (p. 63). Although Russian writers gradually came to the point of realistically evaluating the position of Russia in the Caucasus, none of them, except for Lev Tolstoy, dared to openly criticize the Tsarist policy. Together these texts created a platform for our present study of representation of the peoples of the Caucasus in the Soviet period movie industry and in contemporary Russian literature.

CHAPTER II

LEONID GAIDAI AND HIS MOVIE *KIDNAPPING, CAUCASIAN STYLE* (*КАВКАЗСКАЯ ПЛЕННИЦА ИЛИ ДРУГИЕ ПРИКЛЮЧЕНИЯ ШУРИКА*)

In his book *The Politics of the Soviet Cinema: 1917-1929* (1979), Richard Taylor claims that “[b]y 1917 the cinema was already the principal form of entertainment for the urban masses and the industry was gathering strength all the time” (p. 15). The Bolsheviks recognized that the cinema had a mass appeal in pre-revolutionary Russia. As such, it could serve as a visual medium for conveying the revolutionary message to a largely illiterate and uneducated population. After the 1917 Revolution, the cinema continued to function as a propaganda vehicle: “The new government needed to educate the population, not merely in a general sense of cultural or intellectual enlightenment, but for the specific political purpose of winning their hearts and minds” (Taylor, 1979, p. 42).

Birgit Beumers (1999) supports this statement saying that the Soviet period movie industry was often, if not always, used for propaganda reasons, and its purpose was to create and reflect the artificial reality which was always portrayed in bright colors with much enthusiasm and joy:

Film-makers of the 1920s discovered its potential to construct a different reality, to build through montage the perfect utopia, and thus made it open to abuse for the purpose of constructing a myth instead of a true identity. It existed to raise the spirit of the people, to set moral standards, to show ‘reality’ in positive and radiant colors, or to depict the path to the ‘bright future’. In the 1930s, the creation of such a perfect reality on screen was linked to the concept of entertainment, so that cinema would attract the masses. (p.891)

Under Stalin (1924-1953), Russians began to get rid of all non-Russian members of the government aggressively. They viewed themselves as “the elder brothers in the Soviet family, and more egalitarian rhetoric began to give way to the unabashed celebration of Russian culture as the common, progressive [...] heritage of all Soviet people” (Michaels, 2004, p. 57). During these years, cinema stressed the image of a dominated Orient and Russian supremacy in the Caucasus. Soviet films, such as *Turksib* (1929), highlighted the idea that without any help from Russia, barbaric and uneducated Asia could not be rescued from its backwardness.

The post-Stalin period, Michaels (2004) continues, was no less problematic towards the peoples of the Caucasus: “Russian political and cultural domination continued without apology, but not without limitations” (p. 58). This position goes well along with Fyodor Dostoevsky’s words in his *A Writer’s Diary* (1876) about Russia’s duty in Asia: “Our mission, our civilizing mission in Asia will encourage our spirit and draw us on; the movement needs only to be started.”

In contrast to Dostoevsky who had hopes in Asia and believed that Russians could benefit from its annexation and education and, by doing so, could surpass Europe, early Soviet-era films did not stress the mutual advantage that both the Caucasus and Russia could achieve together, but rather emphasized Russian dominance and supremacy.

In her book *Pop culture Russia!: media, arts, and lifestyle* (2005), Birgit Beumers states that in the early 1950s cinema “turned to the comic genre, which moved individual (personal) happiness into the foreground” (p. 77). Eldar Riazanov’s *Carnival Night* (1956), for instance, is a vivid example of the movies of that period which parodied

“Soviet bureaucracy and officialdom” (p. 77). Here, we see a progression from simple, linear plots to movies which questioned the effectiveness of the Soviet system; a significant development considering the severity of punishment the Soviet state frequently exercised upon its critics. Furthermore, by parodying the Soviet bureaucracy and officialdom, filmmakers were shedding light on the Soviet system while simultaneously providing a brief escape in the form of entertainment.

Andrew Horton (1993), in his turn, underscores the fact that although there was a number of realistic Soviet movies, the majority of them inverted reality and portrayed the characters as well as the situation in a very grotesque light:

Here authors do whatever they choose with their subjects as if they are made of chewing gum. In the experimental atmosphere of film, nobody pays attention to the mixture of times and places, to the fact that some characters appear in medieval costumes in modern circumstances [...] (p. 95)

This change in the direction of the Soviet cinema also affected the portrayal of the Caucasus. Soviet directors came up with diverse depiction of different ethnic groups. Unlike *Turksib* (1929), which shows the illiterate and archaic USSR’s periphery, *White Sun of the Desert* (1970), for instance, “suggests ambivalence in the relationships between colonizer and colonized” and “offers countervailing positive images of Central Asians” (Michaels, 2004, p. 60).

A Soviet director, Leonid Gaidai, enjoyed and loved by millions of Russian people, approached the theme of the Caucasus and explored the meaning of Russianness in his movie of 1966, *Kidnapping, Caucasian Style* (*Кавказская Пленница, или Новые Приключения Шурика*). As Beumers (2005) notices, Gaidai’s popularity came to him “because [his movies] replaced the coherent linear plots of earlier Soviet films with an

episodic and fragmented world that corresponded more to reality than the varnished fairy tales of Stalin's cinema" (p. 77). In her article "*Cinemarket, or the Russian film in 'Mission Possible'*" (1999), Beumers provides a list of the five most popular Soviet movies, among which Gaidai's movie was in fourth place according to number of viewers (p. 872).

Aleksandr Prokhorov (2003) also supports Beumers' view about the phenomenal success of Gaidai's movies by saying that they "owed [it] to the visual style of his humor, with its stark contrasts to the verbal instantiations of official Soviet ideology within narrative-driven Soviet cinema" (p. 456). The author further explains the uniqueness of Leonid Gaidai in Russian movie industry:

Gaidai privileged key elements of physical comedy, such as the primacy of visual over verbal humor, an exhibitionistic enlargement of the human body as a comic attraction, the transition from a still image to a moving picture as a visual attraction, and, most important, a chain of loosely connected sight gags (which became his signature structure) over a coherent and cohesive narrative. (p. 456)

Despite his widespread popularity in Russia, Leonid Gaidai as a director and his film *Kidnapping, Caucasian Style* (1966) failed to achieve any significant amount of recognition and praise among western viewers. According to Paula Michaels (2004), the cultural specificity of Soviet humor has made his work less acceptable to foreign audiences (p. 61). This movie touches on some controversial issues of national identity and the relation between the West and the East. Here, Tolstoy's story *A Prisoner in the Caucasus* (1872) is transformed in such a way that it becomes a romantic comedy that, at first sight, does not offer any serious interpretations of the ethnic tensions. This work by

Gaidai was part of a trend discussed by Charles King (2008) in *The ghost of freedom: a history of the Caucasus*:

While comedy and adventure were important trends in portrayals of the Soviet Caucasus, they were not the dominant ones in the region itself. If there is a unifying thread in the development of art, literature, and the imagination in the Caucasus after 1945, it is the escape into abstraction and high art on the one hand, and into the past on the other. (p. 207)

Leonid Gaidai sets his movie in the Caucasus but the time period is different from Tolstoy's. The action takes place in Soviet times. Shurik, who the viewer knows from previous movies by Gaidai, is a frivolous Russian student who sets off to the Caucasus to write down the folk culture of this region: traditions, legends and toasts. In the first scene, Shurik appears on a donkey, which implies the Caucasus as a place that is far behind in progress, as is usually the way the region is portrayed in literary works. Along the road, Shurik meets Nina, a Caucasian girl, and they both head towards the city. The narration at the beginning of the movie informs us that Shurik intentionally omits the details of where in the Caucasus this story takes place since he firmly believes that this situation can happen in any region of the Caucasus and he would not want to introduce any bias towards one region over another. Bruce Grant (2009) underlines the point that there was an evident reason for leaving the location to viewers' imagination: "the Armenians liked to think he [Saakhov] was playing a Georgian, and the Georgians liked to think he was playing an Azerbaijani" (p. 119). Thus, everyone enjoyed laughing at their neighbors. Additionally, Grant (2009) highlights the fact that the practice of naming the Caucasians has been transformed over the decades: "In the tradition established by Pushkin, who glossed all the Caucasus as Circassian, and the more liberal Tolstoy, who called everyone

a Tatar, the by then massive and scrupulous Soviet ethnographic corpus is sidestepped to striking advantage” (p. 120).

The ambiguity of the location not only reflects Gaidai’s intention to make the viewers laugh at their neighbors, but can also be politically infused: a desire not to hurt everybody’s feelings in a pan-Soviet period. The idea of pan-Sovietism and the notion that all peoples are brothers eliminated the need to name the exact destination of a Russian student Shurik. The fact that Leonid Gaidai chooses alcohol and toasts for Shurik’s research is an ample example of social typecasting. The director picked one of the most beloved traditions performed by the Caucasians and represented it in a very comical way. Alexander Prokhorov (2003) underscores the fact that before Gaidai’s movies, alcohol appeared on the screen “only as a sign of villainy and bourgeois decadence” (p. 462) and stresses Gaidai’s approach to this topic:

Treating alcoholism and crime as implied comic themes rather than foibles to be satirized represented a major departure from the sanitized mass culture of the Stalin era: traditional comic vice devoid of moral censure returned as an attribute of central characters in Gaidai’s work. (p. 462)

Despite this rather satirical representation of the Caucasian customs, the people of the mountainous region are portrayed as very hospitable hosts who know how to greet all the tourists, especially those interested in the ethnographic features of the region, and introduce them to their way of life. Caucasians invite guests of the region to join them in wine tasting and are always ready to share traditions of the region itself. We can assume that this custom of drinking alcohol made Soviet viewers closer to the peoples of the Caucasus, since as Prokhorov (2003) mentions “[m]illions of Russian viewers flocked to

the movies to share the vicarious pleasures of drinking with ViNiMor [Vitsin, Nikulin, and Morgunov], the three most famous Russian alcoholics” (p. 463).

While Shurik is fully emerged in wine tasting and writing down all the toasts, Nina visits her uncle, Dzhabrail, who introduces her to a Caucasian party official, Saakhov. Saakhov is fascinated by the beauty of the girl and wants to make her his wife. He invites Nina to an opening ceremony of the new Wedding Palace where she cuts the ribbon. Saakhov introduces her as a “new woman of the Caucasus”. Indeed, Nina is not a typical Caucasian woman, and according to Bruce Grant (2009), she is “a far cry from the archetype of backward women of the Caucasus and Central Asia whom Soviet planners labored so intensely to emancipate in the 1920s and 1930s” (p.119).

Meanwhile, Shurik, being very drunk, interrupts the ceremony asking everybody to speak slowly so that he can write down the speech, and as a result, is taken to the police. Saakhov helps him to go out. Later, Nina’s uncle negotiates with Saakhov upon the price of the bride. According to Maria Pupsheva et al. (2002), Saakhov wants neither to court Nina, nor to kidnap her since he is afraid of losing his importance and seriousness (p. 169). What he is ready to do is pay for the girl and let others do their work. As a result, both Saakhov and Dzhabrail come to the conclusion that the latter will get 20 sheep, a new refrigerator, and a paid vacation to Siberia. This depiction of the Caucasian tradition where a groom should pay a dowry for his would-be wife is directly the reverse of an old Russian tradition, though almost nonexistent today, where it was the bride who should have a dowry. By this inclusion of a Caucasian tradition, Gaidai indirectly implies that the Caucasians are backwards in comparison to Russians.

Dzhabrail, Nina's uncle, knowing that Nina will not agree to marry a man she does not love and has known only for several days, hires the three comic people who pretend to be Caucasians to kidnap Nina: Balbes (Nikulin), Byvalyi (Morgunov), and Trus (Vitsyn). It should be noted that Gaidai uses the fairy-tale number three, so familiar to the Russian viewers from childhood. Additionally, as Alexander Prokhorov (2003) states, the appearance of criminals in the movies symbolizes "the emergence of new, less repressive cultural values" (p. 462). He also points out that "[t]he three clown-like slapstick characters, whose major distinction was the grotesque incongruity of their bodily sizes and heights, captivated Soviet mass audiences for an entire decade" (p. 462).

They fail to kidnap the girl, and Dzhabrail has nothing to do than to ask Shurik to help the three criminals. The uncle plays on Shurik's ethnographic obsession and explains that Nina should be kidnapped according to the Caucasian tradition. Once again, though very indirectly and obscurely, Gaidai shows an old Caucasian tradition where two young people could not be married if the family decided otherwise; yet another tradition that has not kept pace with the development of Russian civilization. By incorporating an interethnic relationship within the plot, Gaidai highlights some of the complex issues associated with integrating two cultures into one society. This is accomplished in a very comic way, the seriousness of which cannot be seen in the first sight.

The moment Shurik finds out that Nina is to be married he becomes heartbroken since he is already in love with her. Nina's uncle explains that in accordance with the tradition, the girl will behave aggressively to show that she does not want to marry and will ask Shurik to set her free. The young student is very naïve and believes every word

without having doubts in what Dzhabrail has to say. Shurik almost echoes a fairy-tale character, Ivan the Fool, in this interpretation of the Caucasian story. Here, Gaidai portrays Russians as very simple and inexperienced, not to say child-like and gullible; whereas, Caucasians are very smart, sagacious and are well adapted to seeing opportunities to benefit from any situation.

After helping to steal Nina, Shurik finds out from her aunt that this kidnapping is against Nina's will. Finding where she is kept, he attempts to help her escape but Saakhov calls the ambulance telling them that Shurik is an alcoholic and has hallucinations. A Russian student who is desperately in love with a Caucasian girl (the inverse of the relationship found in Pushkin's story) is brought to the asylum from where he subsequently escapes. He meets his friend, Edik, with whom he got acquainted on the road to the town in the beginning of the movie. Not surprisingly, it is a Russian, Edik, who collaborates with Shurik and helps Nina to escape. Although Edik's nationality could be questioned since it is not directly specified in the movie, he does not have any accent and is dressed very fashionably.

Nina, Shurik and Edik go to Saakhov's house and inform him that he will be judged "according to the law of the mountains". Saakhov is terrified and begs for Soviet justice instead. The film ends with the scene of Nina and Shurik leaving the city in two separate ways: Shurik on the donkey and Nina on a minibus. Despite being madly in love with Nina, Shurik does not choose to go the same way Nina does. They leave town taking two different roads, which, in fact, emphasizes the point that the two nations have separate ways to go and cannot be blended together.

Although some critics refuse to accept this movie as an adaptation, Paula Michales (2004) touches on some issues of resemblance to Tolstoy's short story. Gaidai borrows the image of an Oriental woman from Tolstoy, but here, he transforms it. Nina is very assertive and confident in what she wants: she is referred to by other characters as "sportsmenka, komsomolka, krasavitsa". Although she is Muslim in her upbringing, she has a Russian name and speaks without any accent. Contrary to other Caucasians, she is very fashionable: wears nice urban clothes and a hair-style that was very common in the Russia of 1960s-1970s. Thus, Nina has distinctive features that belong to both Russia and the Caucasus. As Paula Michaels (2004) points out, in Gaidai's representation of the Caucasian society, the boundaries between the two peoples are "fluid and permeable" (p. 66). She also stresses the fact that Russian directors questioned Russian identity and offered positive images of Asians:

There are positive and negative characters on both sides of the ethnic divide and a network of interconnections. As in the USSR of the 1960s, ethnicity plays an important role in the definition of identity, but it is only one factor. This identity exists within the broader context of a pan-Soviet culture in which Russians were clearly no longer the uncontested conquerors and bearers of civilization. Russification and Sovietization are clearly evident, but the grip of Soviet power and its Russian leadership is by no means firm. (p. 67)

Contrary to Tolstoy's story, a Caucasian girl becomes captive in this film. She is kidnapped according to the plan made by her uncle and his friend who wants to marry the girl. In both works, however, there is an attempt to run away. Additionally, the relationship between the Russian man and the Caucasian woman are an integral part of the captive's escape and lack an erotic feature. What is also interesting is the fact that Leonid Gaidai does not mute the Caucasians; they can speak for themselves "and in

doing so have greater dimensionality and agency than one finds in the Tolstoy story” (Michaels, 2004, p. 65).

Although Gaidai’s movie is very humorous and optimistic, it exhibits a full set of stereotypes about the Caucasians. At times, they are presented as barbaric and even dangerous to some extent [tradition of stealing a bride]. They consider the rule of the mountains as a prevailing one. In regards to the band of three Caucasian criminals hired to kidnap Nina, it should be stressed that one of them, Trus (Vitsyn), is depicted as a very feminine figure. It echoes with a very stereotypical portrayal of the Caucasus, on the whole. Prokhorov (2003) also underscores the previous statement by saying that “Morgunov treats Vitsyn not only as his helper but also as his bitch, and in Gaidai’s later films Vitsyn responds to him in a submissive, stereotypically ‘feminine’ voice” (p. 462). Nevertheless, according to Paula Michaels (2004), “[t]he trio’s gags and impersonations of a native tongue, as well as the silliness of their image in alien garb, are milked to the hilt for their comic value” (p. 65). The alcoholism and crime connected with these three comic characters provided Russian viewers with many jokes. That is why none of the stereotypes depicted by Leonid Gaidai repulse the viewer.

Contrary to Tolstoy’s story where Russians and Tartars occupy two opposite camps, in Gaidai’s comedy we do not see such a distinct differentiation. Although Shurik’s clash with the three Caucasian criminals can perhaps call to mind the fight between Self and Others, his folkloric character erased all the serious interpretation and discouraged critical analysis. Shurik himself is a passive hostage in this town somewhere

in the Caucasus. He is trapped mentally by the beauty of the Caucasian [by origin] girl and physically by the three pretending to be Caucasian bandits.

Additionally, being a Caucasian girl, Nina does not look like one and her friendship with Shurik is not exotic. In fact, she has much more knowledge of camping and it is her who teaches Shurik how to use a sleeping bag. Shurik is very clumsy and falls from the cliff to the river being inside the sleeping bag. Untypical of Caucasian women, Nina, a brave and sport-like beauty, has no trouble rescuing him. Just as in the film *White Sun of the Desert* (1970), where the main character attempts to reform the women, Gaidai follows the Soviet trend and “remodels” the females of the Caucasus by inculcating Soviet values within them.

The Soviet director parodies both Pushkin and Tolstoy and transforms their works into a series of jokes. We can firmly state that Gaidai underscores the fact that Russia is no longer the conqueror and savior of the Caucasus and that Sovietization influenced the way people treat each other.

Gaidai’s work has many layers of interpretation which add to its controversiality. He experimented with the stereotypical representation of the peoples of the Caucasus, added unconventional comic effects and illustrated, for the first time, a funny and easy-going relationship between Caucasians and Russians based on mutual respect. Prokhorov (2003) also points out the fact that “true to folkloric conventions, Gaidai’s narratives allow no ideological maturation, psychological depth, or even melodramatic moralism” (p. 468).

Although Leonid Gaidai stresses the non-existence of boundaries between the two nations (partly due to the cinema trend of the late Soviet period), in our opinion, when one peels away the outer comic layer of the movie, there remains a serious differentiation between the Russians and the Caucasians illustrated by the subtle use of contrast throughout the movie, including the depiction of traditions. We can question whether the subtle distinctions between the two cultures were an intentional artistic touch on Gaidai's part or if they appeared in the movie due to an almost subconscious influence of both Russia's long history with this region and the literary heritage associated with it. Whichever the case may be, the film illustrates ways in which the Caucasus and Russia are cultural mirror images of each other and as such, merging into a unified society will not be as easy as it seems at first glance.

CHAPTER III

VLADIMIR MAKANIN AND HIS ANTIWAR STORY

THE CAPTIVE OF THE CAUCASUS (КАВКАЗСКИЙ ПЛЕННЫЙ)

Long live the indestructible friendship of
the peoples of the Soviet Union.
(Makanin, 2005, p. 34)

Vladimir Makanin, born in 1937 in the Ural region, is one of the best-known authors of the former literary group, known as *sorokaletnie*, - Russian prose writers who, at the end of the 70s - beginning of the 80s, sought to establish themselves as respected writers despite being highly neglected by critics and readers. These writers came from various backgrounds, and as Norman Schneidman (2004) mentions, had “varied thematic, artistic, social and political interests” (p. 52). During a time when authors and artists, in general, had to conform to the publication requirements of the Soviet regime or conceal their craft, the members of the *sorokaletnie* often focused their works on “urban *byt* (everyday life), failed marriages, and the moral compromises and mid-life crises of male *neudachniki* (failures)” (Cornwell & Christian, 1998, p. 528). Among such writers were Alexander Prokhanov, Leonid Borodin, and Boris Ekimov. Their works were rarely printed in magazines and when published, they were met with little enthusiasm. Vladimir Makanin was the most prominent representative of this literary group who survived the final decades of the Soviet regime. His first novel, *Straight Line* (*Прямая линия*) was published in 1965. Makanin used his educational background [he was a graduate of the department of Mathematics of Moscow State University] to show the immense work of mathematicians in the military scientific laboratory when there were no computers. This

book was well received by critics because it had a different perspective on the romantic image of 1950s-1960s in Russia; not the one we are used to with the songs around the fire by the guitar while camping, which was presented, for instance, in Leonid Gaidai's film *Kidnapping, Caucasian Style* (1966). Despite being acknowledged by the critics, his prose did not receive much attention until after the 1980s by which time he had published 13 books. It was later when critics noticed this bright and promising author and paid tribute to his works.

According to Shneidman (2004), Makanin always “avoided subjects of political significance, and shunned involvement in the internal conflicts of the Soviet writers’ community. He was neither openly pro-Soviet, nor anti-Soviet, but he valued highly his personal freedom and integrity.” (p.73) After the Perestroika period, Makanin began to enjoy fame and received many awards, among which are Russian Booker Prize (1993), German Pushkin Prize of Alfred Topfer (1998), State Prize of the Russian Federation (1999) and Italian Premio Penne (2001).

In 1994 just months before the First Chechen War, Makanin wrote his story *The Captive of the Caucasus* (Кавказский Пленный) which parallels to Pushkin's classical treatment of the Caucasus. While it was Makanin's first story set in the mountains of the Caucasus, it was followed by several novels set in the same region. The story is told primarily from the perspective of a Russian soldier, Rubakhin, who, along with his partner, Vovka, is heading back to a station in a valley in the Caucasus to request help at a canyon pass the Chechens have blocked off. The Chechens want weapons and will not let the Russians pass until they get them. On their way, the two soldiers come upon Lance

Corporal Boiarkov who apparently had drunk himself to sleep (perhaps on purpose) and was shot at close range by a Chechen patrol, most likely young boys, anxious to experience their first kill. By choosing this scene, Makanin opens his narration with the image of cruel and blood-thirsty Chechens who cannot overcome their nature and wait to kill someone. After burying their comrade, Rubakhin and Vovka continue walking to the station, with one more thing to report.

Lieutenant-Colonel Gurov is on his veranda of his wooden house, drowsily relaxing after dinner with his guest, Alibek, while waiting for tea. When Rubakhin and Vovka arrive and present their request for help at the canyon pass, Gurov reacts with annoyance and a sense of futility to the situation presented by the soldiers:

Резко повысив голос, он выкрикивает, никакой подмоги кому бы то ни было, какая, к чертям, подмога! Ему даже смешно слушать, чтобы он направил куда-то своих солдат выручать грузовики, который по своей дурачности влипли в ущелье!..

Suddenly raising his voice he shouts at them that nobody will be receiving reinforcements, for Christ's sake what do they take him for! He will be sending none of his soldiers out to rescue trucks up shit creek as a result of their own stupidity! (p. 14)

He views this problem as something that he does not have to deal with. It is not his problem and he treats it as a mistake on the Russian soldiers' part. Gurov then orders the soldiers to take a big pile of sand by the entrance of the garden and spread it out on all the paths. Here, Rubakhin dutifully sets to work with Vovka. Thus, Vladimir Makanin illustrates how seniors use the soldiers who are lower in their military rank in the Russian army. The two soldiers do not even object since they understand that it is an unspoken rule to provide an "unpaid soldierly labor" to seniors and their households.

After a while, Vovka jumps over the fence to try his luck at obtaining drinks for him and his comrade from a young woman with a baby who lives in a house next to Gurov's yard. He finds out that the woman was raped by the Chechens. Once again, Makanin discourages any slight possibility of viewing the Chechens in a good light. While Vovka uses his charm to seduce the woman, Gurov's wife brings food out to Rubakhin, still at work in the garden, and asks where the other soldier is. Rubakhin makes an excuse for Vovka and enthusiastically eats both helpings of food. Vovka, meanwhile, talks the woman into going to the store to purchase port for them. Vovka accompanies her to the store and discovers that the senior lieutenant is conducting a raid to capture and disarm the Chechens. He goes back and wakes up Rubakhin with the news, saying that they should integrate themselves into this operation.

Rubakhin and Vovka sneak away from Gurov's residence and make their way to the senior lieutenant's troops. The senior lieutenant looks at Vovka and rejects him (he does not work with anyone else but his elite troops that he knows well) but does not even stop to look at Rubakhin who fits right into the group with his physical stature. During the operation to disarm the Chechens, Rubakhin captures a teenage Chechen and marches him back to the base. Rubakhin is struck by the beauty of his captive, who has big brown eyes- slightly slanted, hair down to his shoulders and soft skin:

Он глянул на пойманного: лицо удивило. Во-первых, молодостью, хотя такие юнцы, лет шестнадцати семнадцати, среди боевиков бывали нередко. Правильные черты, нежная кожа. Чем-то еще поразило его лицо кавказца, но чем? Он не успел понять.

He glanced at his captive's face, and was surprised. Firstly by how young he was, although it was not uncommon to find youngsters of sixteen or seventeen among the fighters. He had regular features and his skin was soft, but there was

something else about the Caucasian's face. What? He had no time to think about it. (p. 28)

Vovka shows up at the base (in time for dinner) and makes up a story about how Lieutenant-Colonel Gurov ordered Rubakhin and Vovka to return with the captive to use in an exchange. In reality, they plan to offer the captive to his people at the canyon, hoping that in return, the Chechens will let them pass. Again, during the conversation with the soldiers, we see through Rubakhin eyes how captured he is by his captive:

Скулы и лицо вспыхнули, отчего еще больше стало видно, что он красив. Длинные, до плеч, темные волосы почти сходились в овал. Складка губ. Тонкий, в нитку, нос. Карие глаза заставляли особенно задержаться на них, большие, вразлет и чуть враскос.

His face [Chechen's] and his cheekbones flushed, which only made it even more obvious how beautiful he was, with his dark, shoulder-length hair an oval frame for his face, with the set of his lips, and his straight, slender nose. Rubakhin's gaze was arrested by his large hazel eyes, wide set and with a slight oriental slant. (p.31)

During their journey to this passage, Rubakhin takes one more notice of his captive's beauty and, to Rubakhin's own surprise, notices an unexpected attraction. He sleeps next to the young Chechen by a fire in order to be aware if he tries to escape. When the boy puts his head on Rubakhin's shoulder, Rubakhin is confronted with more of these feelings of attraction and sensuality:

Но вот тепло тела, а с ним и ток чувственности (тоже отдельными волнами) стали пробиваться, перетекая волна за волной через прислоненное плечо юноши в плечо Рубахина. Да нет же. Парень спит. Парень просто спит, подумал Рубахин, гоня наваждение. И тут же напрягся и весь одеревенел, такой силы заряд тепла и неожиданной нежности пробился в эту минуту ему в плечо; в притихшую душу.

But now the warmth of his body, and with it a current of sensuality, in separate waves, began to reach Rubakhin, flowing through, wave after wave, from the boy's shoulder into his own. No, of course that wasn't. The lad was asleep. He was simply sleeping, Rubakhin told himself, wrestling with temptation. He

suddenly tensed as a great charge of warmth and unexpected tenderness passed through his shoulder and into his tremulous heart. (p. 38)

In the morning, Rubakhin insists the boy wear his own wool socks, serves him tea with sugar and takes more care in his comfort. They continue their journey and see two separate bands of the Chechens approaching from two opposite sides. The two Russians with their captive hide behind a rock. They immediately become concerned about the young boy and whether he will yell out for help which would inevitably lead to Rubakhin and Vovka being shot. Rubakhin puts one arm around his captive and holds him close. He hears the boy trying to say something and, unsure of whether his intent is to call for help or say something, he strangles the young Chechen. Afterwards, when the Chechens have passed, Rubakhin and Vovka find a place to dig a grave and bury their dead captive.

Both soldiers return to the canyon pass and are asked by the sergeant major if there would be any help. Upon hearing the bad news that there would not be any help, he asks if they at least were able to capture a prisoner. Rubakhin keeps the situation with the captive to himself and responds with a “no.” The story ends at this canyon pass with the Russians stuck without a way to move forward and Rubakhin reflecting upon the mountains, his time in the Caucasus, and feelings he had for his young Chechen captive.

In *The Captive of the Caucasus*, Makanin draws readers’ attention to the Chechen War and the Russian military policy in the region. Several aspects of the story convey a sense of apathy on behalf of the Russian government for its troops in the Caucasus. Primary among these is that Colonel Gurov, in order to buy food and provisions for his troops, is forced to sell and exchange weapons with the Chechens. Makanin calls attention to the preposterous nature of this arrangement where the weapons that Chechens

receive from the Russians in exchange for food (to keep the Russian soldiers from starving) are used for killing or injuring Russians. Perhaps, Makanin is using the Colonel's shortsighted and negligent decision to engage in these transactions to call into question Russia's rationale for its involvement in the Caucasus. Gurov is not concerned about the long-term consequences; he is focused on the immediate well-being of his soldiers. He is not to be blamed as it is the war and the related circumstances that make him do what he is doing at this point:

С возрастом человеку все тяжелее даются перемены, но взамен становишься более снисходителен к людским слабостям. Это и равновесит. Он должен накормить также и самого себя. Жизнь продолжается, и подполковник Гуров помогает ей продолжаться, вот и весь ответ. Обменивая оружие, он не думает о последствиях. При чем здесь он?.. Жизнь сама собой переменилась в сторону всевозможных обменов (меняй, что хочешь, на что хочешь), и Гуров тоже менял.

As a man grows older he grows more resistant to change but, in compensation, more tolerant of human weakness. It keeps him on an even keel. He had himself to feed, come to that. Life was moving on, and Lieutenant-Colonel Gurov was giving it a helping hand, no more than that. Bartering weapons with the local fighters, he gave no thought to the use they would make of them. What was that to do with him? Life had moved on into a world of dealing (trade anything you like for anything you like) and Gurov was dealing. (p. 24)

Makanin also reveals the inner relationships within the military; he shows how people who have power use their subordinates. The Colonel acts like a typical man in power, taking advantage over the soldiers who have to help him and his wife around the house.

One of the central themes in the story is that of the conflict between East and West. Makanin approaches this topic from two different perspectives, indirectly letting readers choose for themselves what Russia is: West or East. Harvey Pekar (1996)

explains that “Makanin's works are allegorical, and it's difficult to discern where he stands on specific issues - possibly because he wants to provoke readers into asking questions rather than providing them with answers.” The first perspective is presented by a Chechen named Alibek. When Gurov is negotiating for provisions with Alibek, whom he respects and knows for a long time [it already seems quite disturbing since they are two opposite parties in this war], the latter says that Europe is not far away and that the Chechens and the Russians need to organize a military campaign against Europe:

А говорят они, поход на Европу надо делать. Пора опять идти туда. [...] А что? Европа и есть Европа. Старики говорят, куда русские, туда и мы и чего мы друг в дружку стреляем? [...] Не так уж она далеко. Время от времени ходить в Европу надо. Старики говорят, что сразу у нас мир станет. И жизнь как жизнь станет.

They are saying it is time for another campaign against Europe. It is time to fight there again. [...] Why not? Europe is only Europe. The old men say, where the Russians go we should go too, and how is it we are shooting at each other? [...] It's not far away. Every now and again you need to invade Europe. The old men say it will immediately bring peace to us and life will get back to normal. (p. 19)

Obviously, the Chechen does not view Russia as part of the West. He thinks that Russia and the Caucasus should act as one whole against the West. The West is presented as a modern world opposed to the Caucasus with constant wars, blood revenge and the idea of spiritual and physical freedom. The West sets examples to other nations; that is why Alibek states that one has to go to Europe to have or even to earn a life.

In contrast to the Chechen's attitude, Makanin displays a Russian soldier's view of where Russia belongs. While thinking about how he dealt with provisions by bribing officials earlier, Rubakhin says: “This is the Orient, you know!” (p. 23) This phrase is associated with the movie by Vladimir Motyl, *White Sun of the Desert* (1970), where the

main character indicates that: “Vostok-delo tonkoe!” Here, Russia is presented as the West that faces Eastern traditions, ideologies, and the Eastern way of life that is a confusing riddle to Russia: “Grey, moss-covered gorges, the poor, grubby little huts of these mountain people, moulded like birds’ nests” (p. 50).

This highlights the continued absence of literary works that give Russians an inside appreciation of Chechen culture and values. We can conclude that Russia’s ongoing fascination with conquering the Caucasus that first appeared in the literary works of Pushkin, Lermontov and Tolstoy is reinscribed again but the contemporary version is quite different from romanticism.

Not only does Makanin invert Pushkin’s plot but he also transforms love. The captive is not a Russian; he is a highlander. The figure of the “Oriental woman” from Pushkin reappears in the form of a male youth, resulting in a homoerotic attraction between Rubakhin and his male prisoner:

Скосив глаза, он [Рубахин] только и видел бегущую вдали воду ручья и, на фоне прыгающей воды, профиль юноши, нежный, чистый, с неожиданно припухлой нижней губой, капризно выпятившейся, как у молоденькой женщины.

Squinting sideways he [Rubakhin] could see only the water of the stream flowing in the distance, and against that background of leaping water, the profile of the boy, soft, pure, with his unexpectedly full lower lip pouting sulkily as if he were a girl. (p. 33)

We can see a similar dynamic in the relationship between Colonel Verkhovskii and Ammalat-Bek in Bestuzhev-Marlinskii’s story (1831) with the exception being the lack of a homoerotic dimension. The Colonel takes Ammalat-Bek under his wing and treats him as a close friend, perhaps even as a son.

Makanin subtly develops the attraction between Rubakhin and the teenage Chechen. When Rubakhin first captures the young boy, he notices the captive's regular features and soft skin but there is something in the Caucasian's face that surprises him and he cannot figure it out. On their journey with the captive, they stop at the side of a stream for a drink and after Rubakhin and Vovka drink, Rubakhin notices his prisoner putting his face down in the water to drink despite still having his hands tied behind his back. Trying to wipe the water off of the captive's chin, Rubakhin's hand trembled: "His skin was so soft that the soldier's hand jerked back" (p. 32). Their eyes meet and Rubakhin looks away, embarrassed by the thoughts he has towards the young Chechen. At night, Rubakhin sleeps next to the prisoner and fights within himself against the sexual feelings that repeatedly come to surface. He tries to overcome the confusion in his feelings with which he is perplexed. Makanin's inversion of love (compared to Pushkin), can be interpreted as a statement about how war changes not only the usual routine of life, but also love and relationships. Everything seems to be upside down.

Beauty, and how it relates to the Caucasus, is a central, recurring theme in this work by Vladimir Makanin. Rubakhin is allured by the beauty of his prisoner, as well as by the beauty of the region. Throughout the story, Vladimir Makanin echoes Dostoevsky's proclamation in *The Idiot*, that beauty will save the world such as in this narrative from Rubakhin's perspective:

Возможно, в этом смысле красота и спасет мир. Она нет-нет и появляется как знак. Не давая человеку сойти с пути. (Шагая от него неподалеку. С присмотром.) Заставляя насторожиться, красота заставляет помнить.

Perhaps beauty is already saving the world, a reminder from another place, which keeps a man on the right path (walking not far away, admonishing him). Keeping him on his toes, beauty also keeps him mindful. (p. 13)

As we see, beauty in Makanin's work is closely connected with remembrance.

The main character misses his past, but he has nothing to do but focus on the present and keep up with it.

Although the author points out that beauty unsettles the logic of war, he still chooses to change his perspective at the end of the story: he concludes that it will not save the world. On the large scale, wars have been fought over beauty; where the beauty of the Caucasus is just one example. On an individual level, beauty captures people. Rubakhin has already served his time in the Caucasus but every time having packed his suitcase, he stays – he has been a captive for a long time. He does understand it and constantly questions himself: “The mountains. The mountains. The mountains. For how many years their majesty, their mute grandeur had given him no peace. What was it their beauty was trying to tell him? Why had it called to him?” (p. 51).

The beginning of the story includes several references to the power of beauty to serve as a reminder, a way to sharpen the mind. We come to see Rubakhin as someone who perceives this beauty and perhaps, as a result, is not a hardened, mean-spirited soldier. We see, however, that this dimension of Rubakhin, his ability to perceive beauty, does not guide him out of the moral climax of the story without killing a young teenage Chechen boy he had taken captive. The focus on physical beauty within the story as the backdrop to the ugly reality of armed conflict highlights the tragedy perpetrated by Rubakhin. Shneidman (2004) also stresses the fact that: “[e]xternal beauty can attract,

entice, and enchant, but it will not save the world, because physical beauty is seldom tantamount to the beauty of action. It can sooth the human spirit, and bring out the good in people, but it can also devastate and destroy” (p.74).

Returning to the theme of beauty in the story, Makanin shows that by seeking to subjugate the Caucasian region because of its beauty and appeal, Russia becomes its prisoner, its captive. In *The Captive of the Caucasus*, everyone is stuck in the Caucasus against their will. Both Russians and Chechens are equally trapped as highlighted by the exchange between the Russian Colonel Gurov and the Chechen Alibek over tea:

“И чего ты упрямисься, Алибек!.. Ты ж, если со стороны глянуть, пленный. Все ж таки не забывай, где ты находишься. Ты у меня сидишь.” [...] Алибек смеется. “Какой я пленный... Это ты здесь пленный! [...] Он пленный. Ты пленный. И вообще каждый твой солдат пленный! [...] А я как раз не пленный.”

“Why are you being so pig-headed, Alibek! To an outsider you could seem to be our captive. You need to remember where you are: right in the middle of my territory.” [...] Alibek laughs. “What sort of a captive am I? It is you who are the captive here. [...] He is the captive. You are the captive. Every last one of your soldiers is the captive. [...] But I, I am not a captive” (p. 18).

According to Harvey Pekar (1996), “Makanin's protagonists are isolated and struggling with social, psychological, spiritual and political problems.” Rubakhin does not see the point in this never-ending war; here, he stands along with Tolstoy's characters, who also expose the uselessness of war. This worries him and he can only voice it while walking very fast as it doesn't feel right to him to openly question the validity of war while at war:

“...если по-настоящему, какие мы враги, мы свои люди. Ведь были же друзья! Разве нет?” горячился и даже как бы настаивал Рубахин, пряча в привычные (в советские) слова смущавшее его чувство. [...] “Я такой же человек, как ты. А ты такое же человек, как я. Зачем нам воевать?”

“...how can we be enemies? We are all one family. For heaven’s sake, we were friends only recently, weren’t we?” he asked agitatedly, even insistently, hiding the feeling, which was unsettling him behind hackneyed (Soviet) utterance.[...] “I am just the same kind of human being as you, and you are the same as me. So why should we fight each other?” (p. 34).

Vladimir Makanin voices the irony of this problem in the title of the story *The Captive of the Caucasus* (*Кавказский пленный*). The author had the choice of two words in Russian for the word “captive”: *plennyi* (пленный) and *plennik* (пленник), both of which have a shared meaning of “captive in the physical sense”. Additionally, *plennik* (пленник) can refer to someone who is under the spell of something or someone. Interestingly, Pushkin, Lermontov and Tolstoy use *plennik* which, with its second meaning, enhances their portrayal of the Caucasus as an exotic and romantic region, capable of enchanting all who venture there. Makanin, however, breaks with this romantic tradition by using *plennyi* which puts an emphasis on the physical nature of captivity in his story while not completely denying the ability of the Caucasus to captivate mentally and emotionally. Ziolkowski (2005) comments on the phenomenon of captivity as well: it “operates not simply on the political and the romantic level, but also through the landscape itself...The ultimate captor ... is in fact the Caucasus itself” (p. 111).

Regarding Makanin’s work, in Chapter III, we have illustrated how captive Russians are in the Caucasus, a region they think they have almost conquered. Even though their military campaigns, despite many challenges, show a degree of success in the mountainous region, the inner state of the soldiers tells quite a different story. Vladimir Makanin begins his narration with a scene of a dead Russian soldier and

finishes it with the killing of a young Chechen. There are no conquerors in this war. There are only deaths of thousands of people that do not solve the issue of whether Caucasus should be left alone by Russia forever or be annexed with other consequences.

CHAPTER IV

VIKTOR PELEVIN AND HIS STORY *PAPAKHI NA BASHNIAKH*

(ПАПАХИ НА БАШНЯХ)

In this part of our thesis, we will examine Viktor Pelevin's work, *Papakhi na Bashniakh*, which depicts a parody of historical events that took place during the Chechen War in the first years of post-Soviet Russia. The Russian title of the story, *Papakhi na Bashniakh*, makes a synecdochical reference to the traditional circular wool hat worn by men from the Caucasus to represent the Chechens who (in the story) are guarding the captured towers of the Kremlin. As one of the brightest and the most vivid examples of the Russian postmodernist movement, Pelevin attempts to construct an artificial universe in his texts which are, as noted by Sally Dalton-Brown (1997), "comic-book reflections of the world" (p.227). As such, Pelevin employs a predominantly visual mode of narrative to present his irony-laden view of Soviet history and Russian literature where the human race is portrayed as confused and hopeless. While it is Dalton-Brown's position that "Pelevin's postmodernism does not allow any conclusions; the terror of the void (of which 'reality' may ultimately consist) and the echo of ludic laughter coexist in his prose of provocative possibility and amusing finality" (p.233), *Papakhi na Bashniakh* does allow us to make one general observation: none of the characters or groups within the story escape Pelevin's ridicule and criticism (or as it was often expressed, criticism through ridicule), the technique widely used by Leonid Gaidai in his films.

According to Dalton-Brown (1997), postmodernism began in the 1970s and became a “referent for the post-glasnost’ paradoxical condition of despairing and confined freedom” (p.218). The paradox Dalton-Brown refers to hinges around how one defines freedom. It is true that Russians enjoyed freedom from the oppressive Soviet regime but that alone does not miraculously provide all levels of Russian society with the organization, understanding and means required to actually operate a truly free country. Postmodernist literature, thus, “is fragmented, self-referential, endlessly skeptical, even chaotic, a game played within hyper reality...” (p.218).

Such postmodernist writers as Liudmila Petrushevskaja, Oleg Ermakov and Viktor Pelevin, the most essential representatives of this movement, depict terrifying images of post Soviet Russia in their works. Their prose is saturated with the need to satirize the existing reality, undermine the work of the Russian government, question the validity of facts covered by Russian media, and search for the essence of life, in general. It should be noted that “satire, however, is not directed particularly at political targets, but rather at hyper reality, namely, literary hyper realities...” (p.219). Razvan Ungureanu in his article “*Russian Imperial Presence in Literature*” (2007) states that the above-mentioned authors “deconstruct the Soviet empire by portraying a Russian society in shambles” and also notes that “while criticizing life under the Soviet regime, these postglasnost writers also suggest, perhaps involuntary, that an empire incapable of offering a decent lifestyle to its own citizens represents a failure and must cease to exist”.

To be able to better understand Pelevin’s story *Papakhi na Bashniakh* dealing with the Chechen conflict in the 1990s, one must keep in mind the complicated

relationship between Russia and Chechnia going back at least 150 years as well as Shamil Basaev's background. After the long Caucasian war, Russians finally defeated Chechnia and it was annexed in 1870s. In 1936, Joseph Stalin declared it to be the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic which was abolished later due to its rebellion and collaboration with the Germans during WWII. In 1957, Nikita Khrushchev, first Soviet secretary, restored their republic again. After the collapse of the USSR in December 1991, Chechnia was the only former Soviet republic that did not want to sign a treaty with Russia which would grant them a certain amount of autonomy and tax privileges in return for being one of Russia's federal subjects. According to Poddar, Patke, and Jensen (2008), Chechen general Dudaev declared Chechen independence in 1991 but several years later, in 1994, "Russia invaded Chechnia under the pretext that 'Chechen bandits' had plundered the property of peaceful Russians across the border" (p.415). Whether these accusations were true or not, the fact is that in 1991, Chechnia "produced 12% of the entire Soviet GDP" (Poddar et al., 2008). The scene was set for another battle in the ongoing struggle between Russia and Chechnia.

At this point, we turn our focus to Shamil Basay, the leader of the Chechen terrorist movement, who was named after Imam Shamil, the leader of Chechen forces in the Russian conquest of the Caucasus in 1817-1864. It makes one wonder whether the stories of the great 19th century resistance leader were told to little Basaev by his parents and, furthermore, it might also indicate Chechens' admiration of their defiance against Russian colonialism. Furthermore, some sources mention that Basaev's family was killed by Russians two weeks before his 1995 campaign in the city of Budennovsk ("*Biografia*

Shamilia Basaeva: Poklonnik Ruzvelta I Che Guevary”, 2004), while other sources claim that it is a rumor started to gain sympathy on his behalf (“*Kratkaia Istoriia Zhizni Shamilia Basaeva*”, 2005). Thus, Shamil Basaev is surrounded by the circle of violence from his birth, circumstances which have often proved to be excellent breeding grounds for hatred—hatred of Russians in this case.

Having the necessary background in the Russian-Chechen relationship, we can now begin to analyze Pelevin’s work, *Papakhi na Bashniakh*, in its historical framework with the focus on representation of the Chechens as well as Russians themselves. The First Post-Soviet Chechen War began in 1994. In a year, Shamil Basaev and his people captured the city of Budennovsk in the Stavropolskii region. Although the events parodied in Pelevin’s work predated the 9/11 attack, they did occur just several years after the first World Trade Center bombing in 1993, before terrorism became a constant concern on the international stage. It is important to keep in mind that while many events and characters within the story resemble historical events, this work by Pelevin cannot be relied upon to reconstruct those historical events.

The author begins his narration with the following description:

Но самое интересное, что стоит какому-нибудь *реальному жизненному событию* полностью уложиться в рамки гомеровского сюжета, как сознание напрочь *отказывается узнавать его в случившемся* и настойчиво пытается увидеть на его место что-то иное.

But the most interesting fact is that as soon as some *real life event* completely fits within the frames of Homeric plot, our mind utterly *refuses to recognize* its presence there and stubbornly tries to see something else on its place.

Not only does he suggest that people try to apply any event to a Homeric frame, but also what is being guarded is actually “emptiness” and people do not always know

that it is a fortress that they are defending. Sally Dalton-Brown (1997) also supports this idea by stating that “Russian culture finds itself desiring to invent new forms of cultural wholeness” (p. 220). Thus, in his work, Pelevin illustrates that the Caucasian conflict is just an expected continuation of the post-Soviet chaos with the society’s confusion and madness, and that is his general topic.

Viktor Pelevin bases his story on real events that happened, as was mentioned above, in 1995 when Shamil Basaev and his people captured the city of Budennovsk in Stavropolskii region in their attempt to make the Russian government and president Boris Eltsin, in particular, cease their military actions in Chechnia. The author creates a different setting, though: here, Shamil Basaev and 200 of his people take over *the Kremlin* with 20 hostages. In this sense, Pelevin goes further in depicting what Chechens could really do if they wanted: not only can they capture any city, but also control the core of the Russian government. It is deliberately that the author uses the Kremlin location in his story. In 1995, Basaev took over the city administration hall of Budennovsk and subsequently relocated with those hostages to the central hospital. The parallels between these historical events and Pelevin’s story are obvious to those who are familiar with the history.

In Pelevin’s artificial reality, the captors wait the first two days for the official powers, Federal Security Service (FSS), to appear in the Kremlin, but the chief officers are accompanying the president in his official visit to Greenland at the time; as if there is any pressing need for the Russian president to visit this country. In Pelevin’s account of the events, the rumors about the situation spread slowly, mainly by taxi-drivers. One such

taxi-driver happens to be driving an FSS officer and takes the opportunity to enlighten his passenger. As a result of this information, the FSS calls CNN to confirm whether the Kremlin was indeed attacked. This is an example of how Pelevin mocks and undermines the reputation of the Federal Security Service. Thus, the author emphasizes the groundlessness and unpreparedness of all the military forces as well as governmental agencies. Pelevin spits in the face of the government security agency. He may have included this to draw attention to the many varied media representations of the war and the real hostage situation in Budennovsk in 1995. Harsha Ram (1999) calls this war a media war. In the story, having the FSS call CNN to find out what is happening may also be interpreted as an acknowledgment by Pelevin of the important role played by media in presenting the reality of the war in contrast to the propaganda offered by the government.

He depicts the Chechen being involved in weapon trafficking, as well as in the shooting of an Adidas advertisement where the slogan “Adidas – bitter joy of the victory” is used. This slogan is usually associated with the victory of Russian people in WWII, but here the author attacks the mythologization of Russian history, and WWII in particular, its over-glorification and exaggeration.

Seeing the need for more hostages, Basaev welcomes anyone who wants to become his hostage of their own free will. In a matter of hours, the Kremlin becomes crowded with Russian elites: singers, TV hosts, magicians, and deputies: “The competition was strong [in Russian version: cruel], and it ended up with fights.” The FSS, in its turn, does not want to directly confront the arising problem but knows it has to do something. Out of desperation, a colonel decides to hang a gigantic poster of the

Russian president's frowning face on the building facing the Kremlin. Surely, Basaev and his people would not be able to avoid feeling remorse upon seeing such a harsh recrimination of their actions. Unfortunately (for the well-intentioned colonel, especially) this tactic does not work. Next, Russians switch off the supply of water and electricity as well as the sewage system. But after an article appears in the newspaper about the cruel and inhuman treatment of the Chechens by the Russian people, they switch it on again. Thus, none of the measures taken is of much value. These are all examples of Pelevin's mockery of both Russians and the Chechens: the absurdity of what Russians are doing and at the same time the parody of the Chechen campaign. In the case of the latter, the author portrays them as puffed-up characters that confiscate Mercedes cars from other mountaineers to come to Moscow; the cars have flashing police-style lights which contribute to the success of the campaign:

Успеху операции способствовало то, что большая часть машин, как этого требует горский обычай, была с мигалками.

To the success of the operation contributed that fact that the majority of the cars, in accordance with the highlanders' traditions, were with flashing lights.

Originally, highlanders did not have cars. For centuries, they have had donkeys (as portrayed in Gaidai's film), horses or pack mules. Here, Viktor Pelevin plays with the Caucasian heritage and transforms it pointing out that this is actually the tradition, and not the Caucasians' whim, that dictates having the flashing lights on the car. The author does not take sides; he portrays with irony the undersides of both nations, the technique so beloved by Leonid Gaidai.

In the meanwhile, the Kremlin becomes a very popular zone where those “lucky enough” to be hostages are well entertained. Seeing that his people are being enticed by the vices of the society such as women and alcohol which can be found within the Kremlin, Shamil Basaev understands that he is no longer in control of the situation. When he wants to stop all this disorder - filming of the advertisement, in particular, - and lock the captives in the Kremlin, he is told that “this place is not Budennovsk and one has to mind what they say; otherwise, they will have to pay for it”. Besides, a producer of one of the TV channels tells him:

Господин эээ...Басаев. Простите, что беспокою, - вы, я знаю, человек занятый. Но, понимаете...Мы вложили большие деньги, очень большие, а на территории вертится черт знает кто. Нельзя ли ожесточить режим пропуска? У нас здесь ведь цвет культуры – только представьте, что сюда возьмут и проникнут какие-нибудь, э-э-э...террористы...

Mister... hmm...Basaev. Sorry for bothering you – I know that you are a very busy person. But you understand...We have invested big money, very big money into this affair, but you can find all kinds of people on the territory. Can't we just harden the regulations of who can come in? Here there are the best of the best – imagine that some...hmm...terrorists will take and enter.

Shamil Basaev, here, is not treated with the proper respect he probably feels he deserves for being the terrorist he is. Pelevin also reveals his opinion of the news media by showing the TV producer's obsession with staging his news production as if he were a movie director rather than an objective journalist. To the producer, Basaev is a pawn, although an important one, in the game of achieving the highest possible ratings.

Finally, Basaev comes to the conclusion that he has to leave; he calls the FSS and requests cars and 5 million dollars to be able to give bribes to the road police on the way to the Northern Caucasus. Thus, nothing escapes Pelevin's eye: not even the corruption

of the Russian police system. Leaving the city, Basaev shouts: “Woe to you, Babylon, a solid city!” Here, Pelevin casts Basaev as an Old Testament prophet leaving a city that rejects him with the irony being that he has held people captive.

As stated earlier, the Russian-Chechen conflict, as portrayed by both Vladimir Makanin and Viktor Pelevin, is just one of many manifestations of the general confusion and disturbances in post-USSR chaos. Within that chaos, it is not unreasonable to imagine that the Russian people would welcome any opportunity for entertainment to take the mind off of the uncertainty of the future. Many celebrity characters in the story, if not all of them, have a counterpart in real life. Some of them include Viktor Temnolishchev, who surrenders himself to Basaev in the story, and who is supposed to be Victor Chernomyrdin - a representative of the official authority leading negotiations with the Chechens in 1995. The author uses the most popular singers of the 1990s in his story: Larry Analbesov (Garry Alibasov in real life) and his music band “Gy-Gy” (“Na-Na”), Polip Kherberov (Filipp Kirkorov), Stepanida Razina (Alla Pugacheva) and “Bozhii Byk” (“Bozhia korovka”, popular in 1994). Matvei Ganopolskii – the TV news anchor in the story - is the real name of the anchor man on the radio “Echo of Moscow” in 1995. However, the real-life counterparts were not involved as hostages in the historical events that are parodied in the story.

Pelevin’s inclusion of celebrities in his story and the role they play can be interpreted in several ways. First, on a general level, he could be commenting on Russia’s obsession with celebrities following the collapse of the USSR. Second, when the celebrities in the story voluntarily become hostages to a Chechen military leader who has

captured the Kremlin, Pelevin is mocking the tendency celebrities have of seeking publicity. Third, the media portrays the celebrities as altruistic, self-sacrificing saviors of the people when in fact they have turned the whole situation to their advantage.

In regards to his representation of the Caucasian people, Pelevin is quite obvious, clear and exact in their depiction. He follows the path of the fathers of Russian literature - Pushkin, Lermontov – in dehumanizing and even demonizing the Chechens:

Все они – или почти все, - рискуя жизнью, собрались здесь, добровольно сдались *выродкам, которые давно потеряли право называться людьми.*

All of them – or almost all of them – risking their lives, met here, have voluntarily surrendered to the *degenerates* who *lost the right to be called people* a long time ago.

By taking such dehumanization to the extreme, however, the author could also be parodying the way Chechens have been traditionally depicted as villains in Russian literature. This once again demonstrates Pelevin’s common tactic of simultaneously criticizing both the Russian and the Chechen figures in the story. As another example of this tactic, the author’s portrayal of the relationship between the Russian TV journalists/celebrities and Basaev, the Chechen terrorist, is equally critical of both. The journalists and celebrities are depicted as superficial, self-centered, attention-seeking individuals and yet Basaev, who manages to capture the Kremlin, is powerless to regain control once they set up their operations.

Viktor Pelevin also presents the Chechens as a new [at that time] Russian class of people; thus, making sure the reader will view them in a negative light. The so-called “new Russians” were people who succeeded in making money in a short period of time in 1990s by fraud and other unlawful actions during the chaotic times following the break-

up of the Soviet Union (this time period being a recurring theme in Pelevin's works).

Pelevin ridicules the self-importance and superiority that new Russians derive from their money and possessions and thus shows the low esteem he holds for them and their achievements:

Каждый боец батальона был гладко-выбрит и одет в ярко-малиновый пиджак (они были наскоро сшиты из крашенных свекольным соком мешков), а вокруг шеи имел толстую унитазную цепь, покрашенную золотой краской, - эти цепи, как показало расследование, были в спешном порядке произведены в одном из грозненских бюро ритуальных услуг.

Every member of the squad was smoothly shaven and dressed up in a bright crimson jacket (they [jackets] were hastily sewed from the sacks colored in beet juice), and had a thick toilet chain painted golden around his neck, - these chains, as the investigation showed, had been made in a hurry in one of the mortuaries in Grozny [the capital of the Chechen Republic].

Finally, Pelevin claims that the reader can understand everything about the myth of the assault, but nothing is clear about the people who defended the "fortress". We cannot say that all these singers and elite, on the whole, did defend it, but who, then? As with Pelevin's many works, this story does not provide the reader with an answer. On the contrary, the author, being skeptical, states that Russia and its development do not belong to reality; it is not to be understood right after the events took place. Everything is kept secret by the government and only after several decades can a Russian person question the validity of information that was presented in the media and find out the truth about what happened:

Похоже, что события, происходящие с Россией, подчиняются какой-то логике Лобачевского и их *смысл* – если он есть – *открывается только с больших временных дистанций*...история России есть некое четвертое измерение ее хронологии и только при взгляде из этого четвертого измерения все необъяснимые скачки, зигзаги и содрогания ее бытия сливаются в ясную, четкую и прямую как стрела линию.

It is likely that all the events that are happening in Russia comply with some logic of Lobachevski and their *meaning* – if there is a meaning – *opens only from huge time distance*...the history of Russia is some kind of a fourth dimension of its chronology, and only looking from this fourth dimension all the necessary leaps, zigzags and shudders of its being are merged into a clear, distinct and straight as an arrow line.

Viktor Pelevin points out at the fact that the history of Russia is a very complicated issue and none can be easily interpreted, especially, after the occurrence of the event. Time should pass, truth will be revealed and only then can people begin contemplating about what happened. This echoes the Chechen War and its misrepresentation in Russian mass media.

Pelevin also uses the same technique of irony and parody as does Leonid Gaidai, but unlike the famous director, Pelevin's myth of the Caucasus is transformed in a very radical way. In Pushkin's, Lermontov's, Tolstoy's and Makanin's stories these were the Russians who occupied the region of the Caucasus; in Pelevin's story the situation is the opposite. The Chechens invade Russia. If Tolstoy and Makanin raise questions on Russia's role in the Caucasus, Pelevin vividly illustrates to what extreme extent the relationship between Russian and Chechnia can develop, with Chechens taking over the core of Russia, the Kremlin. Although he shows a very stereotypical image of the Caucasians, he does not, for a second, give credit to Russians. In fact, he goes further in his representation of the Russians than did Pushkin, Lermontov or Makanin; he openly belittles the Russian government the same way Lev Tolstoy did a century ago with Nicholas I. For Pelevin, both people are under a magnifying glass.

At first glance, the story, *Papakhi na Bashniakh*, can seem a very comical representation of the real events which happened in the city of Budennovsk, but like

Gaidai's film, *Kidnapping, Caucasian Style*, this story has more serious levels of interpretation. Both parties, in fact, are captured in this big game played by the two governments.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Do you know the land where folks are crying?
Where puffs of smoke are near and far?
Where craft with bombs are flying?
Where bombs make people dying?
This land is called 'Chechnia'.
All homes are ruined there.
There beats front-line thunder.
There is hell everywhere,
And frozen people hunger.
This land is called 'Chechnia'.
(Khizar Akhmadov, as cited in Jaimoukha, 2005,
p. 215)

Over the decades, the Russians have imposed a negative image of the peoples of the Caucasus where highlanders were portrayed as villains, blood-thirsty, barbaric people governed by the rule of the mountains. Although some positive character traits such as love of freedom, respect for elders and traditions were depicted, the main trend was to portray these people in a negative light to justify the Russian military campaigns in the Caucasus. According to Bruce Grant (2009), “[t]ales come to an end, and the Caucasus hero almost always expires once his or her central function – the recognition of Russian goodness – is accomplished” (p. 108).

The Influence of the Historical Interactions between Russia and the Caucasus on the
Current Works

In his book *The Chechens* (2005), Amjad Jaimoukha claims that “[i]t is the endless propagation of such stereotypes that is partially responsible for the perpetuation of the Chechen-Russian antagonism” (p. 146). He further goes on saying that “[it] is very dangerous when a whole nation is reduced to a finite number of defining sayings, even in the disguise of ‘great literature’” (p. 146). It is much easier to fit the image of a highlander in the already existing paradigm without having to change anything than to create a new model of assessing both Russians and Caucasians. One wonders whether the chaotic transformation of the Russian national identity following the collapse of the Soviet Union gave Russian authors of the 1990s the courage that was necessary to openly evaluate both sides of the Russian-Chechen story, showing the ridiculous nature of some of the decisions and, what is more important for our thesis, portraying Russia’s self-destruction in this chaos that Russia created in the Russo-Caucasian game. Contemporary writers, such as Vladimir Makanin (older generation) and Viktor Pelevin (younger generation), attempt to explore a different perspective on the Russian-Chechen relationship even though “[t]he Tatar-Mongol legacy is still a heavy load on the Russian psyche” (Jaimoukha, 2005, p. 9).

Russia's Self-Representation

Grant Bruce (2009) supports our view of the changing place of the Russians in the Caucasus: “the prisoner tale is a chronicle not of activity but of passivity, not of aggression but of humility, not of glorified sovereignty but of stories submission. The Russian is not a captor but captive” (p. 95). In Leonid Gaidai’s comedy film *Kidnapping, Caucasian Style* (1966), Russia occupies a different niche compared to the one in Makanin’s and Pelevin’s stories. Even though Gaidai implies that there is no common way that these two nations can develop together and act as a united whole, we still see that there is no tension between them. They are friendly neighbors who are thriving due to their symbiosis. Russian people can go to the Caucasus and enjoy the sea, the sun and the mountains since it is the best Soviet vacation place. Caucasians, in turn, benefit from the Russians coming and spending money as tourists investing in their economy or rather in the households of those who rent out rooms or apartments by the Black Sea. The relationship between the two peoples is based on mutual respect. Thus, Russia is presented as a valued partner who is not threatening the Caucasus. In fact, Gaidai does not show any single moment when Russians are envious of what Caucasians have in their region. No conquerors, no winners, no wars.

Vladimir Makanin in his story, *The Captive of the Caucasus* (1994), makes a focus on the Orientalized representation of Russia. For him, everyone and everything that is located in this region is seduced, and as a result, captured by the beauty of the region. He places greater emphasis on a realistic evaluation of the situation of the Russian troops

in the Caucasus. They are almost abandoned by the Russian government and have to negotiate with the highlanders to survive. Makanin illustrates the beginning chaos that surrounds the Russian troops which will be further stressed by Pelevin: in order to get provisions, Russians have to exchange their weapons for them, the weapons that will be used to kill them. In this sense, Makanin's assessment is close to Lev Tolstoy who openly criticizes the Russian Emperor and his policy in the Caucasus in *Hadji Murat* (1896), a novel that was written over a century ago. Unlike Viktor Pelevin, Makanin does give specific answers to the questions that the readers have. His magnifying mirror is directed towards Russians, not the Caucasians, which is immediately seen from the title of the story.

For Viktor Pelevin, the pendulum swings all the time from Russians to Chechens and back. In his story, *Papakhi na Bashniakh* (1995), nobody is Orientalized anymore; nobody is a conqueror. All of this stereotyping is in the past. What matters is the created chaos where the two nations try to coexist. While reading Pelevin's story, one cannot but wonder why he depicts this complicated relationship between the Russians and the Chechens in such an absurd way. For him, both peoples are subject to mockery and ridicule. They are captured in his story just as well as in Makanin's but it is the post-Soviet arena that makes them captive: the vagueness of what is going to happen after the collapse of the USSR, and the inability to see a bright future. Viktor Pelevin changes the position of the Russians and the Chechens in his story. He illustrates that now it is time for the Chechens to try to conquer Russia. He deliberately chooses Moscow for the location of the Chechen troops. In reality, Moscow, home for all Russian governmental

agencies, is already captured by the Caucasians, but this captivity is mental, not physical. Russian government has had to deal with the Chechens for decades, always anticipating the Caucasians' next step in this adult power game. In Pelevin's story, the Caucasus has attempted to enslave Russia physically but did not succeed.

Representation of the Peoples of the Caucasus

Although both Pelevin and Makanin are quite direct in their depiction of the Chechens, their individual style of doing so is different. Pelevin demonizes the Chechens. He goes to the extreme by stating that they are just pawns in a game ruled by the Russian mass media that uses them just to achieve the highest possible ratings. They are not treated with the proper respect, and even are humiliated in the story by being compared to the new Russians. It should be stressed again that even though Pelevin's attitude towards the Chechens is quite stereotypical and absurd at times, he puts Russians on the same scales and ridicules them none the less.

We can thus state that since the 18th century, the representation of the peoples of the Caucasus has drastically changed. They transformed from being exotic, fascinating and unfamiliar people with barbarous and cruel traits to being friendly neighbors, hospitable and eager to help, as illustrated in Leonid Gaidai's film. Thirty years after the movie, *Kidnapping, Caucasian Style*, was produced, Makanin returns to Tolstoy's interpretation of the uselessness of the war and the presentation of the flaws of the Russian government who does not act reasonably. Viktor Pelevin, in his turn, presents

Russia in the post-Soviet confusion and disorder. To show how everything is upside down, he switches the stereotypical positions of the Russians and the Chechens.

In addition, we have also seen an evolution of how the authors refer to the peoples of the Caucasus. While Pushkin presented the Circassians to his readers, Tolstoy called them the Tartars, and yet 20th century writers have a split perspective. Leonid Gaidai does not give highlanders any names, as he states, the situation depicted in his movie can happen in any region in the Caucasus. In part, it is due to the Soviet policy which treated all the nations as friends of the Soviet Union. Pan-Sovietism thrived in the 1950s-1960s. After the first Chechen War and the multiple terrorist attacks so “promoted” in mass media by the Russian president, any Muslim has become a Chechen for a Russian. The term *Chechen* has a very negative connotation and is associated with terrorists in the contemporary world which affects the readers’ perception at once.

Transformation of the Heritage of the 18th and 19th Century Depiction of the Caucasus

Although much was said about the transformation in the representation of both the Russians and the Chechens in the 20th century Russian literature and cinematography, we still have to point out that while Pelevin borrows the same *portrayal* of the Chechens by the writers of the 18th century, Vladimir Makanin borrows *the plot*. He places his characters in the natural setting of the Caucasus, unlike Pelevin who creates an absolutely artificial reality, but makes the captive a highlander and not a Russian. Makanin also transforms the 18th century portrayal of exotic love. The reader is faced with the

homosexual relationship or rather tension between the Russian soldier and the Caucasian captive. Makanin's inversion of love (compared to Pushkin), can be interpreted as a statement about how war changes not only the usual routine of life, but also love and relationships.

We have also seen a strong contrast between the main Caucasian characters in both stories and the film. Pelevin's choice of the name, Shamil Basaev, recalls to the minds of the Russian readers the historical figure by the same name. Basaev is best-known to Russians as a terrorist leader who took hostages, killed people and committed terrorists acts. Instantly, it makes the reader revengeful and vindictive. Makanin, on the other hand, chooses a young Caucasian boy with whom the reader sympathizes. We feel guilty about taking the Chechen captive and then killing him. It does not seem right to the reader. In this sense, the author highlights the absurdity of war that makes all generations take weapons in their hands.

Unlike the Caucasian characters in the works of both Makanin and Pelevin which evoke strong emotions on the part of Russian readers, Saakhov, the antagonist in Gaidai's film, is a very mild character who does not provoke any serious reaction. Even though he is a Party authority and considers himself to be very important, he is not portrayed as a person who has power in his hands and knows how to use it.

We can firmly state that Gaidai's movie illustrates the lifestyle of the Caucasians in full range. They are shown from an inside perspective. For Leonid Gaidai, it is more important to concentrate on the customs of this region and show how close these people could be to Russians with their drinking and toasting habits. Unlike the cinema, both

literary works do not give full credit to the peoples of the Caucasus; the Chechens are still not able to voice their own cultural values to the Russian people. The ethnographic heritage of the Chechens is not the highest priority for the writers. For Makanin, the focus is on the emotions of the Russian soldier in the Caucasus and the inevitability of the cruel war that will continue regardless of what the individual people might think. Pelevin's technique is to present almost a holocaust Russia; he does not need to concentrate on traditions, beliefs or the emotional condition of both peoples. He is more interested in presenting the overall disorder of the Russian-Chechen relations.

In our thesis, we have explored the evolution of the theme of the Caucasus in Russian literature beginning from the 18th century and showed what development it underwent. In particular, we addressed the issue of Russia's self-representation and illustrated that by the end of the 20th century the position of both nations is changing place. Nobody is a conqueror; everyone is a victim of the policy implemented by both governments, a policy that in post-Soviet Russia seems to be illogical and ineffective.

To better understand the representation of both Russians and the peoples of the Caucasus, mainly Chechens, it is essential to make a comparative analysis of both Russian and Chechen literary and cinematic works. As a further line of study, it would be appropriate to examine the Chechen literary heritage and investigate how they represent both the Russians and themselves.

We would like to conclude our thesis with the Anthem of the Chechen Republic which is called *Death or Freedom* to give these people credit for who they really are, the credit so much ignored by Russian literature. Regarding the 1990 revision of the Chechen

Republic's national anthem, Lema Usmanov (1999) states: "In the title of the Anthem itself and in its text, one can see the nature of the Chechen people and the sanctity of their national tradition, which are united by such words underlined in the text as God, People, Native land, Freedom, Dignity, Honor and Nobility".

We were born at night, when the she-wolf whelped.
In the morning, as lions howl, we were given our names.
In eagles' nests, our Mothers nursed us,
To tame a stallion, our Fathers taught us.

We were devoted to our Mothers, to people and the Native land,
And if they will need us – we'll respond courageously,
We grew up free, together with the mountain eagles,
Difficulties and obstacles we overcame with dignity.

Granite rocks will sooner fuse like lead,
Than we lose our Nobility in life and struggle.
The Earth will sooner be breached in boiling sun,
Than we appear before the world; losing our honor.

Never will we appear submissive before anyone,
Death or Freedom – we can choose only one way.
Our sisters cure our wounds by their songs,
The eyes of the beloved arouse us to the feat of arms.

If hunger gets us down – we'll gnaw the roots.
If thirst harasses us – we'll drink the grass dew.
We were born at night, when the she-wolf whelped.
God, Nation, and the Native land – We devote ourselves only to their service.

APPENDIX
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