Vicious Barbarians, Slave Girls, and Mythologized Mountains

The Effects of Orientalist Discourse in Literature and Memoir on the Prosecution of the Great Caucasian War, 1817-1864

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4/15/2013

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A Note on Dates, Names, Translation, and Transliteration

Dates included in this thesis, to the best of my knowledge and abilities, follow New Style, Gregorian calendar notation. When my sources offered both, I included only the New Style dates. Those few works that published dates following the Julian calendar system without noting so are the only sources of Old Style dating in my thesis. Their unknown nature, unfortunately, prevents me from noting or correcting them. I apologize and take full responsibility for any inconsistencies.

In most instances, I follow the contemporary Library of Congress style for transliterating names and reproduced passages from the original Russian. In several cases, however, convention and previous authorship have popularized an older or different version of certain words. This frequently occurs with proper nouns and names. Thus, rather than Ermolov, I use the more recognizable Yermolov, and Alexander rather than Aleksandr. In some cases, the names themselves have been westernized in popular usage. As such, Tolstoy appears in my writing as Leo rather than his given Lev, and I study the influence of Tsar Nicholas rather than that of Tsar Nikolai.

Most of the works I analyze were ably translated by the scholars mentioned in the corresponding footnotes and bibliographic entries, but I have attempted my own translation of Fedor Fedorovich Tornau’s Memoirs of a Caucasian Officer. When citing these passages in the text, I provide my English translations with the original Russian in footnotes. I am grateful to my advisor, Professor David Shneer, for checking my translations, but all errors are of my own commission.
Finally, like all authors who write about the Conquest or the complex interactions between peoples on the Caucasian isthmus, I was faced with the difficult task of carrying on a coherent, digestible conversation concerning a panoply of peoples, places, and individuals. Where they are encapsulated by quotation marks, specific names receive scholarly treatment (my own or existing) and more thorough treatment. Elsewhere, I use terms like djigit, gortsy, mountaineer, Circassian, and occasionally native or indigenous person, in a casually synonymous fashion. I do this with full recognition that such light usage can and all too often has obscured important histories, individual identities and agency, and moral variances. I have made every effort to keep this thesis varied enough in diction to keep the readers’ attention and still maintain a genuine and complete respect for the uniqueness and interests of the peoples I describe.

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2/23/2013
In his 2010 contribution to a series of papers written for the United States Institute of Peace, political scientist Jason Lyall investigated the effects of ethnicity in counterinsurgency campaigns.¹ For his case study, Lyall selected the post-Soviet Russian Federation and its struggle against Chechen separatists. The aspect of the conflict that most interested Lyall for his project was the Russian counterinsurgency during the Second Chechen War, which began in August 1999 and, at the time of his article’s publication, was an ongoing conflict.²

According to Lyall, the Caucasus is a uniquely valuable environment in which to study violence. During his appearance on Yale University’s “The MacMillan Report,” Lyall cautiously and hesitantly labeled the region a “laboratory” in which he and other scholars might experiment and measure the accuracy of their models. He valued its relatively small geographic area, the incredible diversity of languages and cultures, and the broad spectrum of natural environments. Interestingly, Lyall even discussed the region’s various and diverse types of violence, a phenomenon he confidently ascribed to a corresponding multitude of ethnicities. His “experiments” focused on the efficacy of counterinsurgency tactics as executed by Russians and pro-Russian Chechens against Chechen insurgents.³ In particular, Lyall compared the results of “sweeping operations” (zachistki).⁴

Lyall describes a resistance led by a “prominent rebel commander” named Shamil, Chechens fleeing Russian bombardment, and fighters abandoning conventional warfare for

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guerilla tactics, a decision better suited to their smaller numbers and intimate familiarity with the terrain. All of this led ultimately to a much reduced but nevertheless fierce resistance “pinned…in Chechnya’s mountainous south.” To combat these intransigent mountain rebels, the Russian army conducted “armed house-by-house…checks” after blockading and isolating a target community. These sweeps would last for as much as a month and have “become synonymous with excesses by…Russian soldiers.” The Russian Army is infamous in the region for its “use of indiscriminate violence, forced disappearances (about 5,000 since 1999), and extrajudicial killings.”

Lyall posits that the genesis of many civil wars lies in the unresolved or ambiguous conclusion of a preceding conflict, and that by experimenting in his “lab,” he and others might learn more about civil wars, counterinsurgency conflicts, and multi-ethnic violence. I will lay the foundations for this by showing that the same issues Lyall finds defining the Second Chechen War also defined the Great Caucasian War (1817-1864) and the conflicts that led up to it. The sweeping operations, and more generally Lyall’s summary of the Second Chechen War, eerily echo Russian military efforts in the Caucasus more than 150 years earlier during Russia’s most concerted imperial conquest of the region. Though almost 200 years separate the 19th century surge of Russian involvement in the Caucasus and the Second Chechen War, the violence and nature of the conflict seem almost identical. The weapons are newer and more indiscriminately lethal, but the tactics and brutality—the palpable sense of vitriol and hatred—seem timeless and unchanged.

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5 Ibid., 1-3.
6 Ibid.
7 The Great Caucasian War is also sometimes known simply as the Caucasian War. I refer to it largely by the latter throughout this thesis.
On the heels of Catherine the Great’s historic expansion of the Russian empire, Alexander I and Nicholas I’s 19th century Russia was engaged in no fewer than three large-scale military campaigns, most notably the Napoleonic War of 1812. But the first half of the 19th century was also the apogee of Russian military involvement in the Caucasus, a war that engendered a legacy of violence, terror, and hatred that lasts to the present day. This thesis argues that in order to understand why the Russians executed this war in such a comprehensively violent fashion, one must first look at how they perceived their enemy.

I will demonstrate that orientalist thought, in which Russia’s enemies to the south were portrayed as uncivilized, hyper-sexualized, and uncontrollably violent, preconditioned successive generations of the officers and commanders responsible for waging the war to unreasonably fear, despise, and hate the peoples of the Caucasus. These emotions and evaluations were reinforced by the intense, internecine war that should have been far more simple, quickly executed, and much less costly in lives and resources for the numerically, technologically, and logistically better-equipped Russian armies. As a result of their interpretations of these peoples, Russian treatment of Caucasian peoples and the land itself was inordinately exploitative and violent.

Historian and scholar of Western Imperialism Susan Kent precedes and guides my methodology for the examination of literary and historical sources in conjunction to analyze their effects on each other and on colonial and imperial ventures. In tandem with American cultural historian Philip Deloria, the two parse a broadly utilitarian definition of culture as:

The word we use to describe the ways we think about (1) the transmission and transformation of meanings, (2) the practices that place those meanings in the

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8 I use the term orientalism to generally reference Edward Said’s critique of British and French studies of “the East,” though he excluded Russia’s long history of eastern studies, or vostokovedenie, when he discussed the consequences of Western discourse concerning “the Orient.” See Edward Said, Orientalism (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).
world, and (3) the full range of consequences surrounding those meanings: how they structure our senses of self, group, and world; how they both delimit and open up our possibilities; how they cross social, political, and other kinds of boundaries; how they take shape in human creations. 9

This definition hints at the potential real-world stakes involved in cultural production and suggests the areas of interest to this thesis. They augment this definition, suggesting scholars should conceive of the object (i.e. the culture) of a particular field of cultural studies—in this case Russian—as a series of “layers”: “physical place,” “social world,” “cultural field,” and most pertinently to my thesis, “As an imaginary [layer], a set of dreams and ideals that motivate people to believe, think, and act in certain ways.” 10 This last layer in particular provided the final catalyst in my conception of the ideas that shape this thesis. 11

My thesis proceeds from these understandings of culture to develop a causal relationship between thought and action. Kent and Deloria include Clifford Geertz’s characterization of the value of cultural studies to augment their own discussion, and while I can agree with his artful assertions about culture that “man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun,” I must disagree with his conclusion that the ultimate goal of cultural analysis is a “search [for] meaning.” 12 When fundamentally disparate cultures meet and interact, there are real and often bloody consequences that render Geertz’s search for meaning seem almost inconsequential in comparison.

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9 Philip Delorian and Susan Kent, Personal Correspondence, 12/12/12.
10 Delorian and Kent, Personal Correspondence.
My work picks up where literary orientalism left off and examines more closely the correlation between the presence of orientalist attitudes in primary source material and the Russian actions and decisions in this conflict. This investigation begins in part with the immortal Russian poet Alexander Pushkin and his seminal work “The Prisoner of the Caucasus” (1821-22), which in many ways “created” the Caucasus and its peoples in the popular imagination of 19th century Russia. I then examine author-soldiers Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Bestuzhev-Marlinsky, Mikhail Iurevich Lermontov and Leo Nikolaievich Tolstoy—who all fought in the Caucasus—and established their reputations not as military strategists, but as fictional authors writing during their service in the region about their experiences. These last authors bridge the gap between literary and historical analysis as all three served in the Russian military in the Caucasus during the first half of the 19th century and wrote about the conflict. Though they did not produce war memoirs per se, their fictive literary offerings were nevertheless based in real world experiences as military men who fought in the Caucasus and observed that brutal conflict first hand. In addition to this corpus of empirical fiction, I evaluate the writings of Russian officers who fought in the Caucasus, showing how their letters and memoirs were permeated with identical orientalist language. These officers, Aleksei Petrovich Yermolov, and to a lesser extent, Fedor Fedorovich Tornau, played major roles in developing diplomatic, strategic, and tactical decisions in the Caucasus. I then connect these diarists’ perceptions of the enemy and the land with their actual prosecution of the war. Thus this thesis demonstrates that how Russian officers conceived of the Caucasus and its peoples determined both the need and means to conquer them.

My thesis examines how the Russians who lived, visited, or fought there thought of the land, people, and culture, and demonstrates how those perceptions—many of them pre-formed
and non-empirical—contributed to and guided the formation of the strategic and tactical decisions these men made in the isthmus. By expanding the analysis of orientalist discourse from consequences in writing to consequences in real life for real people, this thesis increases the stakes in the debate over perceptions of “the other” and how nations commit and justify violence. Lyall’s studies of violence in the late 20th and early 21st centuries show that the Russian conquest of the Caucasus is not an historical event to be relegated to the margins of social consciousness and academic curiosity. The strained relations between Moscow and the various enclaves in the region today derive from a long history of terror and violence. Like Lyall, I study conflict in the “laboratory” of the Caucasian isthmus to improve our understanding of the origins and nature of multi-ethnic violence.

Studies of Russia’s conquest of the Caucasus date back to the early 20th century. John F. Baddeley, a British journalist and frequent visitor to Russia, conducted the first extensive, English language investigation of Russia’s Caucasian War in the late 1800s and early 1900s and published his conclusions in 1908. As the St. Petersburg correspondent for the London Standard, he used his privileged access to the archives and resources in Russia that had been heretofore “unexamined,” Baddeley meticulously constructed a monolithic, eponymous history of Russia’s conquest of the Caucasus. Although he relied almost entirely on Russian sources (a fact which he openly admits in his introduction to The Conquest and for which he makes a genuine effort at compensation in his discourse), Baddeley is credited to this day for an

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13 John Baddeley, The Russian Conquest of the Caucasus (Surrey, England: Curzon Press, 1999). And by “unexamined,” it is likely that Baddeley simply meant that Western European historians had not yet combed these archives.
otherwise objective, equitable treatment of the subject and widely cited in most contemporary scholarship on Russia’s involvement in the region.\textsuperscript{14}

Baddeley combed numerous archives and volumes of collected letters, notes, and diaries of generals and other officers, the Tsars/Tsarinas, and any others involved. His work enumerates casualties, troop numbers, supplies, miles marched, and the path of the Russians in and through the Caucasus in exhaustive detail. Baddeley detailed—painstakingly and chronologically—Russia’s involvement in the region as it pressed inexorably onward. He only minimally examined Russian perceptions of the Caucasus and the often brutal treatment of Caucasian people; moreover, he failed to significantly connect perceptions with conduct. The author documented Yermolov’s use of terror and overwhelming violence to instill obedience in the region, but largely looked no further than that commander’s inherent sense of duty to Russia and the constant pressure to achieve results for the Tsar as the driving forces that ultimately delivered victory and the isthmus to the Romanovs in the 19th century. In other words, Baddeley overlooked what more contemporary scholarship might have considered—what preconceived notions of “the enemy” Russian military officers had in their heads as they participated in the conquest of the Caucasus.

From Baddeley, historical scholarship in this area is drawn inexorably to the works of University of Tel Aviv historian Moshe Gammer and a contemporary generation of scholars interested in this liminal conflict. Gammer’s first book was praised for its analysis of multi-lingual archival analysis (i.e. Gammer is informed by more than just the Russian perspective and

\textsuperscript{14} See Moshe Gammer, \textit{Muslim Resistance to the Tsar: Shamil and the Conquest of Chechnia and Daghestan} (Portland: Frank Cass, 1994), xv for explicit praise by the foremost contemporary historian in the field of Russian-Caucasian interaction.
examined works in Turkish and Arabic). Following this work, Gammer went on to eventually publish *The Lone Wolf and the Bear: Three Centuries of Chechen Defiance of Russian Rule* and numerous journal articles concerning this clash of cultures. Gammer added to the field by drawing on correspondence among Caucasians, between Caucasians and Russians, and perhaps most significantly, by analyzing the political and religious material of the time from the Caucasian perspective. Gammer’s work turned Baddeley’s bi-polar conflict of military sovereignty into a multi-valent conflict for cultural, economic, and social independence.

Like Gammer, whose *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar* and *The Lone Wolf and the Bear* focused on the history behind Russia’s relations with specific peoples, Czech political scientist Emil Souleimanov’s *An Endless War: The Russian-Chechen Conflict in Perspective* is primarily interested in Russian interactions with Chechens. *Endless War* is useful for its demographic and anthropological perspective on the Chechens. His investigation of social norms and cultural idiosyncrasies provides a contemporary picture against which one may measure the similar descriptions provided by literary figures like Lermontov and Tolstoy. Souleimanov seems most interested in the cultural causes of the conflict, and even analyzes the brutality of Yermolov, but he ignores the cultural factors which this thesis argues pushed the Russians to treat with the Chechens as they did. Moreover, his focus is on Chechnya’s role in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia. Historian David Seely also investigates the genesis and unfolding of Russia’s long war

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15 Moshe Gammer, *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar*.
17 I use the term Caucasians as a catchall phrase for ease of communication. The region’s peoples are by no means a monolithic whole, and indeed the great diversity of the language, ethnicity, custom, and belief is a fundamental factor in both Russian perceptions of the region and the complexity of the ongoing conflict. This is a core issue in the investigation of this thesis and receives greater attention below.
with Chechnya.\textsuperscript{19} I find his work problematic in its time frame (1800-2000), and like Souleimanov, his overt focus on the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Still, his work contributes occasional insights into the macro-nature of Russian strategy, and both he and Souleimanov support my contention that the consequences of Russia’s long history in the region have not yet played out. Despite what I consider an occasionally myopic focus, these authors, bolstered by the work of a contemporary generation of historians, remind us that this struggle really is “endless.”\textsuperscript{20}

Literary scholars like Susan Layton and Peter Scotto analyzed how European and Russian orientalist perceptions of Asia—and specifically the Caucasus—shaped Russian interaction with the East.\textsuperscript{21} These scholars examined how descriptions of the people as fiery, wild, and savage, and of the land as a feminine conquest to be had and enjoyed by strong, virile Russian military officers, Tsars, and even vacationing aristocrats, shaped the language used to describe and relate Russia’s conquest of the Caucasus. Other works note the 19th century Russian preoccupation with Caucasian wives, slave girls, and debauched drunkenness.\textsuperscript{22} Such works focus on how orientalist perceptions manifested in the writings of Lermontov, Tolstoy, and other literary greats.

Historian David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye contributed to the field by lucidly differentiating Russian orientalism from classical Saidian orientalism. For him, the primary

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\textsuperscript{21} See Peter Scotto, “Prisoners of the Caucasus: Ideologies of Imperialism in Lermontov’s ‘Bela,’” \textit{PMLA} 107, no. 2 (1992): 246-260 or Susan Layton, \textit{Russian Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). The latter is considered by many literary scholars (e.g. David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye) to be the seminal work examining Russian orientalist discourse.

difference between Russian and French/English views of “the East” is the ancient, ambivalent relationship Russians shared with Asia. Despite often-desperate attempts to assume a Western, European identity, the 19th century slavophile movement, a national history inextricably meshed with Asia, and numerous “national minorities” whose ethnicity was decidedly non-Western, all instilled a certain sympathy and respect for “the Orient” in the Russian national consciousness.

It is thus between the established historical and literary scholarship that my argument cleaves. I add to the body of literary analysis by placing it firmly within a historical context and demonstrating that prejudicial thought did far more than guide the lexical selections of authors. By mediating between literary and historical scholarship, I argue that literary Russian orientalism informed more than simply the preconceptions of a generic Russian elite readership. I show that these images of the Caucasus directly informed the military and cultural interaction between the Russians and the indigenous population of the Caucasus and engendered an often draconian, exploitative, and exceedingly violent martial policy which characterizes the memory of that war in the national memories of Caucasian ethnicities to this day.

Aside from a succinct, almost joking reference to Russia’s convoluted medieval sense of identity and the almost mythological origins of a Slavic presence in the Caucasus, Baddeley begins his seminal history of Russia’s efforts to conquer the region in the 16th century. Appropriately, this episode of first contact likely occurred between some of Russia’s

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23 David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 8-11.
24 I adopt the 16th century as the start of Russia’s involvement in the Caucasus based on a distinction of what constitutes Russia. The early Rus are still poorly understood and documented, but they are the group commonly recognized as the rulers of an early proto-Russian state. Several Rus rulers made early attempts to extend their dominion to the south using their extensive knowledge of river navigation (most theories on the origins of the Rus
first Cossacks and the peoples in the northern Caucasus. It is possible the Dnieper Zaporozhtsi Cossacks first encountered a Caucasian tribe. This band of Cossacks, whose name meant “Those Who Live Beyond the Rapids” (za=beyond, porogi=rapids), was distinctive among Russian separatist movements, and certainly unique within the Cossack tradition. Styling themselves as “warrior monks,” the Zaporozhtsi were ostensibly an all-male order. They constructed and operated from an island fortress, the sietcha, and fought in fierce defense of the Orthodox religion. This self-appointed crusade led them against the much-maligned, Catholic Poles and the Muslim Turks and Ottomans alike. As such, it is possible that the Zaporozhtsi initiated in microcosm the fight between Orthodox Russians and (largely) Muslim Caucasian tribes in which this thesis is interested. Baddeley more definitively credits them at least with the creation of a Cossack-dominated liminal zone south and east of those regions controlled by Russia and Poland.

More likely, and Gammer, citing Tolstoy, agrees, the Cossacks to whom history should credit the establishment of regular relations between Russia and the people of the Caucasus were the Grebentsi, or Greben Cossacks. This band initially formed while fleeing the rule of Ivan III

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25 Baddeley seems less than convinced of the Zaporozhtsi’s masculine constitution. While their role as the “vanguard of the vanguard” and intense military and Orthodox dedication may have been particularly poorly suited to family life, no Cossack band living on the edges of the Russian Empire could be said to have an easy existence. Cossack women are famously strong and resilient, and their roles within Cossack society were far from comfortable or indulgent. Moreover, Russian Orthodoxy does not have Catholicism’s dogma or history of celibate, mono-gendered orders. This suggests that the Zaporozhtsi’s religious zealotry would not inherently push them to reject a life with women. On what is perhaps a less analytical level, celibacy and performing their own house work seems very out of character for the infamously non-domestic, amorous Cossacks.

26 After the 1054 East-West Schism between the Catholic and Orthodox churches (in Russian Orthodox tradition, the first Raskol) and the 1480 declaration of independence from Sarai (the traditional seat of Mongol power), Poles, who served as one of Europe’s greatest champions of Catholicism during the late middle ages, became Russia’s new sworn enemy.

27 Baddeley, *Conquest of the Caucasus*, 1-5.

Making their way down the Don and Volga Rivers, these fugitives eventually settled in their namesake hills near modern Grozny. During the reign of Ivan IV (r. 1547-1584), grandson of the ruler from whom their ancestors fled almost a century earlier, the Greben Cossacks sent a deputation to Moscow pleading for the Tsar’s forgiveness and inclusion under his reign. In a characteristically calculating move, Ivan granted their request on condition that they construct and defend a fort there at the confluence of the Sunzha.

Gammer distills two salient “historical facts” from this history, the first of which that serious Russian political interest in the region began with Ivan IV following his conquest of the Kazan (1552) and Astrakhan (1556) khanates. The historical and cultural significance of these conquests should not be overlooked nor underplayed; they marked the first concrete steps in reconquering the Eurasian steppe from the remnants of the Mongols. Ivan not only established precedent for Russian supremacy in the region by virtue of his conquest of these Mongol remnants, but also by marrying a Kabartay princess. This marriage gave him claim to Karbarda and the Northern Caucasus region. Perhaps more pertinent to the subject of this thesis, this wedding marked the first tsar of Russia marrying a Cherkess royal, the name from which Russians later derived the loaded term “Circassian.” Thus combining political marriage, military conquest, and the pragmatic pardon of the Greben Cossacks, Ivan the Terrible established a pervasive presence in the region and a foothold—ideological, political, military, dynastic, and

29 Greben=a comb or ridge, thus the Grebentsi were the “Cossacks of the Hills.”
30 Baddeley, Conquest of the Caucasus, 7-8.
31 Gammer, The Lone Wolf and the Bear, 9.
32 Though the psychological and cultural impacts of the “Mongol yoke” are still regularly debated, few doubt that the 1223/37-1480 period of Mongol dominion was in many ways a fundamentally formative period in Russian History. For a more conservative estimate on the impact of that conquest, see Janet Martin, Medieval Russia, 980-1584 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007). For a perspective which credits (or blames) much more of Russia’s national identity, history, and character on the Mongols’ brutality, see Charles Halperin, Russia and the Golden Horde: The Mongol Impact on Medieval Russian History (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985).
geographic—from which that ruler and his Romanov descendants would launch future campaigns.

The second facet that interests Gammer is recognition of the general trend that the Russian Empire often expanded in the footprints of the Cossacks. As those enterprising fugitives and criminals fled to the periphery of established Russian state control, they created living space by fire and blood. As they moved outward, the Russian monarchs followed behind to fill the power vacuum left in their wake. This process was often quite gradual. The Greben Cossacks expanded into the Caucasus with almost a century between the founding of Tioumen stanitsa (Cossack village) and their Sounzh fort and their move to the north bank of the Terek River in 1685.33 They were ultimately joined in this venture by the Terek Cossacks (terskie kozaki) in 1712. This geopolitical union of Cossack bands formed the prototype of what would ultimately grow into the Caucasian Line.34

The first and most influential Emperor of All the Russias, Peter I The Great (r. 1682-1725), oversaw this union and made the first official military forays into the Caucasus. Though Peter spent much of his early life and the first years of his reign marginalized and largely shunned by his domineering half-sister Sophia Miloslavskaya and her puppet-Tsar younger brother Ivan V, he did not spend that time idly. Instead, the industrious and talented young Romanov learned all he could about warfare. This empirical curiosity led him to create Russia’s

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33 A stanitsa is the Russian term used for Cossack villages/settlements.
famous imperial Life Guard regiments, its first navy, and reform the organization and training of Russia’s military from its antiquated medieval form into a contemporary, European-style army.³⁵

Peter’s involvement in the Caucasus was more instrumental than as a goal unto itself—it was not merely an imperial land grab. As historian and Peter biographer Robert Massie notes, the likely source of Peter’s desire to control the region was his interest in gaining a land route to the riches of India and South East Asia. Peter sent a former “Circassian moslem,” General Alexander Bekovich Cherkassy, with 4000 troops to negotiate Russia’s annexation of the Khivan Khanate.³⁶ Instead, General Cherkassy essentially invaded the khanate. For this crime, the Khan of Khiva had Cherkassy killed, skinned, and stuffed to be displayed in his capitol. Thus frustrated in his push southeast between the Caspian and Aral Seas by the Khan of Khiva’s duplicitous cunning, Peter had to look elsewhere along the Caspian littoral for an invasion point.³⁷ A 1722 invasion of the northern Caucasus near Enderi during Peter’s Persian Campaign proved similarly unsuccessful.

Ultimately, Peter’s greatest success in the Caucasus was his establishment of the Terek River as Russia’s southern border. He accomplished this with two tactics which would prove highly effective and imitable by later rulers: building forts to solidify control and advancing slowly by means of resettling Cossacks further and further into enemy territory. By resettling and uniting Cossack bands to the region, he created the Terek Family Cossacks (tersko-semeinie). This union solidified the Russian presence in the region and allowed the two

³⁵ For an exceedingly detailed examination of the Tsar’s life and reign, see: Robert Massie, *Peter the Great: His Life and World* (New York: Ballantine, 1980).
³⁶ Khiva is located in modern Uzbekistan near the border with Turkmenistan.
³⁷ Massie, *Peter the Great*, 842-44. This ill-fated expedition in Khiva is also the first time the Greben Cossacks contributed a cavalry detachment to an official state expedition. Gammer points out that this indicated that the southern Cossacks were finally and firmly within Russia’s fold (Gammer, 2006, 10).
composite Cossack armies (voiskas) to mutually support each other along the frontier. Ten years after Peter’s death, Empress Anna constructed Russia’s Caucasian capitol, Kyzlyar Fortress, in 1735 to hold and defend this border.\textsuperscript{38}

Aside from Anna’s contribution, the next big push into the region occurred under Catherine II the Great (r. 1762-1796). Baddeley credits this push to Catherine’s desire to protect the rule of a Little Karbarda “princeling,” while Gammer reduces the motive to a pragmatic effort to make good on Russia’s claim to the Karbardan throne. Regardless of the Empress’ motivations, imperial forces executed her will and constructed Mozdok Fortress. This fort, whose name means “dense forest,” was turned into a major garrison by 1770 with the installment of 350 families of Don Cossacks. Coupled with the resettlement of over 500 families of Volga Cossacks between the fort and the Greben Cossacks at the mouth of the Sounzha River, the Tsarina’s reinforcement greatly strengthened Russia’s presence in the region. This was a move the Ottoman Empire could not ignore and Catherine was soon embroiled in the Russo-Ottoman War of 1768-74. The indigenous population also contested this incursion, which led to a fourteen year conflict with the Kabartay—the clan to which Ivan IV wed the Russian throne—from 1765 to 1779.\textsuperscript{39}

In order to effectively fight these simultaneous wars against the Kabartay and Ottomans, Catherine’s favorite at the time, General Grigory Aleksandrovich Potemkin-Tavricheski, solidified what became the Caucasian Line. The Line was a string of Cossack settlements (stanitsi) and defensive forts stretching along Russia’s southern border and line of advance into the isthmus. This main Line was completed with General Suvorov’s bloody dispatch of the

\textsuperscript{38} Gammer, \textit{The Lone Wolf and the Bear}, 10.
\textsuperscript{39} Baddeley, \textit{Conquest of the Caucasus}, 14; Gammer, \textit{The Lone Wolf and the Bear}, 13.
Nogay nomads, who killed their women and children and fought practically to the last man on learning that the Empress was resettling them outside their normal range. A secondary Kuban Line supported the first, and the two laid a “solid foundation” from which the empire would launch future assaults. Having left his mark on the region, Suvorov returned to Russia in 1784, and a year later Count Paul Potemkin was named the first Viceroy of the Caucasus. Potemkin strengthened the line by reinforcing Kyzlyar and Mozdok Fortresses and building his viceregal capitol, Ekaterinograd.

Potemkin was also responsible for overseeing his cousin’s propaganda campaign against Sheikh Mansur and the Ghaznavat. Mansur is still a poorly understood figure, his background remains largely a mystery and apart from his role in organizing Muslim resistance against the Russian conquest, little is known about this shadowy warrior. Mansur’s Ghaznavat was a holy war against the invading infidels and was the first concerted attempt at unifying resistance in the region. Although Sheikh Mansur and his holy warriors achieved some measure of success and won several key battles, the movement ultimately proved unable to dislodge the Russians from the Caucasus. Count Pavel Sergeevich Potemkin played no small part in limiting Mansur’s success, and his propaganda campaign was a part of this. Gammer, citing Sharpudin Ahmadov, relates that the Viceroy distributed pamphlets ordering the mountaineers of Chechnya to disband and ignore the “false prophethood of this cheat.” Utilizing such pejorative descriptors as: “cheat,” “tramp,” “rebel,” “savage,” and “wild beast,” these propaganda pamphlets established a

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40 Gammer, The Lone Wolf and the Bear, 13-14; Baddeley, Conquest of the Caucasus, 43-45. Gammer notes that such savage efficiency in many ways characterized Catherine’s reign with her own subjects, and thus “one should not have expected a “softer” treatment of “Asiatics.”
41 Baddeley, Conquest of the Caucasus, 40.
42 Gammer, The Lone Wolf and the Bear, 17-20 investigates several versions of his biography, while Baddeley, The Conquest of the Caucasus, 47-49, is more comfortable offering one believable scenario and leaving the matter of Mansur’s biography largely unsettled.
detrimental tradition of conceiving of the Caucasus’ inhabitants that survives to this day.⁴³
Although many of his policies set the groundwork for eventual Russian dominance in the region, he was dismissed in 1787 for his role in covering up the murder of a local nobleman seeking asylum at Kyzlyar and stealing his royal treasury.⁴⁴

Catherine’s death in 1796 led to the brief and largely ineffectual reign of her son, Emperor Paul I. Likely sired by one of Catherine’s early favorites, Sergei Saltykov, Paul was the only “issue” of Catherine and her husband Emperor Peter III. Paul was marginalized as an heir and future Emperor almost from the beginning. As a child, the current Empress Elizabeth immediately separated him from his mother, and later he was kept at a distance as part of Catherine’s efforts to secure the throne for herself. Though he was included in meetings of state before the birth of his sons, his integration into imperial politics proved brief. Following his second marriage to Maria Fedorovna (née Sophia Dorothea of Württemberg) and the birth of their first son, the future Alexander I, Paul was again ignored by his mother in favor of his heir. This rejection and isolation must have infuriated and traumatized Paul, because on assuming the throne, he spent much of his five year reign reversing many of Catherine’s policies.⁴⁵

This general reversal of course from Catherine to Paul was reflected in the imperial policy in the Caucasus. The Empress was on the verge of invading Persia via the Caucasus and continuing her aggressive expansionist policy, but Paul immediately halted the invasion and ordered the armies to return to Russia when she died suddenly of a stroke. Baddeley notes that

⁴⁴ Baddeley, The Conquest of the Caucasus, 45-47.
⁴⁵ Ibid., 57. He even went so far as to exhume and scatter the bones of Catherine’s likely husband and life-long “favorite,” Grigory Potemkin.
along with the troop recall, Paul “put aside the galaxy of warriors and statesmen” who so ably assisted the Empress during her reign. Many of these men would remain unutilized and essentially disfavored through the remainder of Paul’s brief rule. Unfortunately for Emperor Paul, his efforts to extricate Russia from foreign conflicts failed miserably.

The turn of the 19th century was not a good time for non-interventionist national politics. With Napoleon’s rise came a subsequent increase in the interconnectedness of European politics. Martial engagement proved no exception, and Paul’s Russia was increasingly drawn into foreign and global disputes. Diplomacy and maneuvering between Russia and Europe’s other great powers of the time (France, England, and Prussia) led to a level of entanglement which Paul must have found frustrating. Again, Russia’s macro politico-military trends also held true in the Caucasus. Despite his interest in recalling the Persian invasion force and suspending expansion operations in the region, events forced Paul to a fateful decision

On 30 December, 1800, King Georgi XII of Georgia and Emperor Paul I of Russia signed a manifesto officially annexing Georgia to the Russian Empire. This act was the culmination of Russia’s Orthodox push into the Caucasus and perhaps the strongest basis on which later Emperors would act in the region. The work began with Peter I in 1722 and his efforts to protect “the Christian Prince Vakhtang” and gain a foothold in the region via the Christian kingdom in Georgia. Catherine developed Russia’s protectorate role with the 24 July, 1783 Treaty of Georgievsk, in which Erekle II “acknowledged himself a vassal of Russia.” The process was

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46 Ibid, 59-60.  
47 Massie, Peter the Great, 848.  
48 Baddeley, Conquest of the Caucasus, 21.
completed when Alexander I, Paul’s son and successor, confirmed his father’s acquisition in September, 1801.49

That landscape[

Where warlike raiders roam the hills
And a wild imagination

Lies in ambush in the empty silence.

--Pushkin’s description of the Caucasus in his “Dedication to N.N. Rayevsky”50

Susan Layton highlights an easily overlooked aspect of the Imperial war in the Caucasus: news of the conflict, details about casualties and costs, and details concerning the violence perpetrated in the name of conquest and civilization all remained state secrets.51 She notes that this phenomenon was especially pronounced in the 1820s when “[t]he total lack of anything approaching war correspondence” was allowed past the censors. This “paucity” of real news carried through the 1820s until 1856 and Imam Shamil’s defeat. Over the course of decades of warfare kept largely in the shadows of the public consciousness, literary informants grew ever more attractive to the growing reading public.52 Without an official voice informing them, the Russian people—at least those wealthy or educated—turned to the publications of veterans of the Caucasian campaigns as their primary sources of information.

49 Seely, Russo-Chechen Conflict, 24.
Although “fact-oriented writings” about the Caucasus its peoples were increasingly produced and disseminated over the course of the latter half of the 19th century, many still selected literary depictions as their sources of information. Layton notes that these texts were more entertaining, and such a trend occurred “just as common sense would predict.”\textsuperscript{53} That this trend conforms to common sense assumptions about a nation’s readership does not in any way detract from its fateful effects on the depictions of the war in the Caucasus or in how Russians perceived their enemies. Although Russia was alternately involved in any of several wars and conflicts throughout the early 19th century, the imperial presence in the Caucasus was in many ways their most prolonged and involved venture. As the other conflicts and tensions flared up and subsided over the first half of the 1800s, Russian officers and soldiers were consistently sent to the south in the seemingly unceasing conflict against the mountaineers. It should not seem surprising then, that the Russian predilection for gaining familiarity with the Caucasus via literary, not scholarly, sources was “particularly pronounced.”\textsuperscript{54} This social trend problematized Russia’s efforts to “know” the Caucasus and was fateful in contributing to the trends examined in this thesis.

Aside from reasonable questions about the veracity of the content, it is also noteworthy how the level of Russian literacy altered and exacerbated the consequences of this trend. As with many trappings of Western civilization, reading and education came late and gradually to tsarist Russia. Popular legend states that Ivan the Terrible received Russia’s first printing press, but that it went largely unused because most feared it was an implement of the devil. Under Tsar Alexis I, Russia saw its first privately operated printing press not under the direct control of the

\textsuperscript{53} Layton, \textit{Russian Literature and Empire}, 12. She comically asks the reader, “[w]here, after all, is the nation of readers who prefer scholarly monographs to pleasurable literature?” (Ibid.)

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
Orthodox Church. Like so many first attempts at reform, this venture failed. Patriarch Nikon, unhappy with the arrangement, tortured and killed the manager, Sylvester Medvedev, for banditry. A 1682 decree similarly limited the distribution of folk literature by forbidding the publication or dissemination of any work containing religious themes penned by anyone other than the Church.55 Because Orthodoxy was such an integral aspect of the lives of the people and their literature, this effectively halted all non-Church publication. Needless to say, such policies proved an insurmountable barrier to establishing any significant level of literacy in 17th and 18th century Russia.

Peter the Great was the first to seriously attempt the advance of education in his domain. He did so in part by severely limiting the powers of the Orthodox Church, especially over the monarch. In 1701 he issued a decree forbidding churchmen to “wield pen and ink.” He also wrested control of the printing presses from the church for state use. By 1720, several printing presses were producing his 1708 layman grammars, geometry primers, calendars, histories and other secular works in addition to the traditional hagiographical and liturgical publications. The number of books in print in Russia climbed from a paltry 8 in 1701 to 149 titles by 1724.56 Peter also founded the nation’s first newspaper, Vedomosti, which he designed to “keep his subjects abreast of the world” and first appeared in 1703. The Reforming Tsar also established an open public theater to increase public awareness.57 This combination of mass information by spoken and written word proved enduring and helped shape 19th century Russian impressions of the Caucasus.

56 Arutunyan, The Media in Russia, 59. Arutunyan cites Zhirkov, G.V., Istoria Tsenzury v Rossii Moscow: Aspekt Press (2001); Massie, Peter the Great, 404-05.
57 Massie, Peter the Great, 404-05, 775-77.
Peter’s establishment of the Table of Ranks and a merit-based system of mandatory government service for nobles was likely his most influential reform to affect Russian education and literacy. Begun in 1712 and carried out intermittently from that date, these efforts to productively employ the children of landowners were met with stiff resistance from the staunchly conservative nobility. Nevertheless, all sons of landowners were required to report for state service—military or bureaucratic—by the end of his reign. This in turn necessitated the establishment of professional and preparatory academies and mandatory education for Russia’s elites.\textsuperscript{58} Despite the revolutionary sweep these efforts, education—and thus largely literacy as well—was often limited to the intellectually or financially gifted few to attend his academies. Among this select group of young men was poet, author, and iconoclast Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin.

Pushkin was born in Moscow on June 6, 1799 to Sergei Lvovich Pushkin and Nadezhda Osipovna (née Gannibal).\textsuperscript{59} Despite a famously poor relationship with his parents and lackluster childhood, Pushkin displayed an early penchant for writing. In 1811 Tsar Alexander founded the Lycée, an elite preparatory school in Tsarskoe Selo, which offered a peerless, 6 year education for talented young nobles. Pushkin was accepted in the inaugural class, and though he displayed obvious talent, his instructors did not hold high hopes for his future productivity. After his graduation in 1817 he was made a collegiate assessor (10\textsuperscript{th} on the Table of Ranks). In this role, Pushkin seemed to bear out his professors’ fears and accomplished little as a bureaucrat. This was not the case with his writing; Pushkin produced \textit{Ruslan and Liudmilla} and numerous shorter

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[58]{Massie, \textit{Peter the Great}, 775-77.}
\footnotetext[59]{Nadezhda’s grandfather was a slave boy from Africa (probably Ethiopia) who was sold into Peter the Great’s service. The Tsar took the boy under his wings, gave him an education, and ultimately ennobled him as a General. By the time of his death, Abraham Gannibal—who took his surname from the famous Carthaginian—owned 800 souls and multiple estates. For more on this fascinating ancestor of Russia’s greatest poet, see: Hugh Barnes, \textit{The Stolen Prince: Gannibal, Adopted Son of Peter the Great, Great-Grandfather of Alexander Pushkin, and Europe’s First Black Intellectual} (New York: ECCO, 2006).}
\end{footnotes}
poems. Unfortunately for the young, carefree poet, he lacked the prudence and practiced self-
censorship vital to Russian authors. Unable to keep his political and ideological opinions out of
his work and following the wide popular reception of several such radical poems (e.g. “Ode to
Liberty,” “To Chaadayev,” and “The Country”), Pushkin finally drew the Tsar’s ire.

Pushkin’s literary daring earned him a sentence to internal exile. Though Tsar Alexander
originally considered Siberia or Solovki, influential friends interceded on his behalf and the poet
was sent to the Caucasus and Crimea instead. Susan Layton notes in her introduction to Russian
Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy that by this time
(1820), the Caucasus had earned the moniker “the southern Siberia” for its prominent utility as a
point of exile for those fallen from official grace. Pushkin ultimately served three years of exile
in the south before being transferred to Odessa and then, a year later, to house arrest in Pskov.
He would not be the last of Russia’s literary greats to serve such a sentence in the south.

Pushkin’s “The Prisoner of the Caucasus” (Kavkavsky Plennik) was the seminal work in
the field of Romantic depictions of Russia in the Caucasus. First published in 1821-1822, this
epic poem “created a literary vogue” in Russia. Falling firmly within the Russian romantic
tradition, “Prisoner” details the travails of a Russian officer who left home and court in a state of
jaded, dejected ennui. After his capture by “Circassians,” the prisoner observes the harsh,
independent life his captors lead. A girl from the village falls in love with and ultimately frees
the prisoner, but because of his rejection of her offers to elope, she drowns in the river across
which the prisoner escapes. Its adulation for thematic elements like captivating scenery, a
sense of almost primal freedom, and lovely, tragic heroines attracted audiences to the beauty of

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60 Pushkin, “Prisoner of the Caucasus,” all.
the Caucasus even as his depictions of male violence titillated the Russian aristocratic imagination.\textsuperscript{61}

Interestingly, this initial work did not solely engender characterizations of Caucasian peoples as barbarians in Russia’s popular imagination. In spite of their violence, Pushkin’s mountaineers and his depictions of the breathtaking, rugged scenery instead romanticized the region and its peoples. Layton summarizes the reputation the tribes acquired through Pushkin’s descriptions in terms of “martial heroism, charming folklore, a pleasingly ‘simple way of life,’ and generosity within their own communities.”\textsuperscript{62} Still, “The Prisoner of the Caucasus” established clear and entrenched precedence for depictions of Caucasian violence. This work, and those that followed in the tradition of writing about one’s Caucasian experience, enshrined the mountaineer’s martial potential in the Russian popular imagination.

Pushkin begins the narrative portion of his poem imagining the conversation of a group of Circassians, which wistfully recounts:

\begin{quote}
The raids when they carried all before them, the tricks their clever chieftains used to play, the vicious thrusts their swords delivered, their deadly aim as marksmen, the villages they burned to ashes, and the gentle touch of the dark-eyed girls they took captive.\textsuperscript{63}
\end{quote}

This expository passage effectively summarizes the male experience in the Caucasus as Pushkin perceived it. These “menfolk…sitting at ease in their doorways” are not engaged in any form of productive labor recognizable as such to Russian audiences.\textsuperscript{64} Rather, they reminisce about victories past and the pleasure they found in the commission of violence. Their fond musings evoke thoughts of blood, smoke, and conquest. These are not men of peaceful means, but are

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Layton, “A Russian Reverie,” 7.}
\footnote{Ibid.}
\footnote{Pushkin, “Prisoner of the Caucasus,” 133.}
\footnote{Ibid.}
\end{footnotes}
immediately depicted as a people who live by war. This passage sets the tone for the remainder of the poem.

For Pushkin, the martial character of his subjects was also in evidence during their celebrations. He describes the games held on feast days as starting peacefully enough:

But men that are born for war get tired of the monotony of peacetime, and often they mar the sporting activities of their freedom and leisure with crueler sports. Sometimes in the wild exuberance of Circassian festivities there’ll be a menacing flash of swords, and the heads of slaves will tumble to the dust to the youngsters’ rapturous applause.\(^6^5\)

Everyone—from the men gleefully slaughtering slaves to the children observing the spectacle—enjoys the display of violence in this scene. That celebrations on holy days could so organically incorporate death seemingly left its mark on Pushkin even as his depiction would have marked the imaginations of his readers.

Pushkin reinforces this fearsome, martial characterization later when he describes a typical Circassian man as being “festooned with weaponry; he takes pride and comfort in it. He carries a harness, a hand gun, a quiver, a Kuban-style bow, a lasso, a dagger, and a sabre—which he constantly keeps by him at work and at leisure.”\(^6^6\) This description explicitly delineates the many tools that made Circassians deadly enemies. The array of weapons, kept constantly at hand, became extensions of mountaineers’ bodies. Pushkin implies that such destructive weapons were the tools of the Circassian’s trade, and like any skilled craftsman, he was the master of each of his tools.

The poet also immortalized the instrumental utility of Caucasian horses. Following his impressive list of Circassian weapons, Pushkin noted that a mountaineer’s prized possession “is his mettlesome horse, reared among mountain herds, a terror to easy-going [C]ossacks, but to

\(^{6^5}\) *Ibid.*, 139.

\(^{6^6}\) *Ibid.*, 137.
him a loyal, longsuffering companion.”

On one hand, this passage would likely have struck a chord with his readers on the virtue of the horse’s overwhelming and inimical status to the famously stalwart and hearty Cossacks alone. That Circassian horses—without their well-armed riders—could inspire such an emotion in Russia’s border guards would have strongly reinforced the fearsome reputations of the men who could tame such “terrors.”

But Pushkin did not simply leave it to his readers to imagine Caucasian facility at horsemanship. His prisoner recalls watching for hours as a mounted Circassian rode “leaning forward in the saddle, his agile legs pressing down on the stirrups, at one with his steed, practicing early for war.” This passage explicitly connected man to horse, and then again that deadly amalgam to war. By so thoroughly blending these three elements, Pushkin effectively and fatefully linked the Caucasian mountaineer to conflict. He reinforced this notion when the men of the village prepare for a raid. The prisoner describes how:

The saddled horses seethed; all the men of the village were ready to go raiding; and the fierce horde of born fighters steamed down from the hills like a river and galloped along the banks of the Kuban to exact the rewards of violence.

Again, Pushkin blends rider and steed, and together, they comprise a “seething horde” with deadly aim. Individually capable of striking in an instant and dragging a bleeding, doomed captive away, the horsemen of Pushkin’s poem were a truly fearsome fighting force when banded together on a raid. Even the Russian audience safely isolated from the Caucasian front in Russia’s interior who read “Prisoner” must have known a moment of terror at reading this. One can only imagine the increased effect such depictions had on soldiers and officers leaving the relative comfort of the empire’s core for military service on its turbulent periphery.

\[67\text{ Ibid.}\]
\[68\text{ Ibid.}\]
\[69\text{ Ibid., 143.}\]
In the final layer of creating “the Circassian,” Pushkin describes the tactical chicanery that made the mountaineers so infamous. Following his recital of how a djigit—skilled and versatile fighters—might capture slaves by virtue of their superior skill with horse and lasso, Pushkin offers another reason to fear the raiders: their unique and determined capacity for silent murder. The author describes a Circassian using river flotsam to disguise his crossing of the river and approach to the line of wary, but nevertheless doomed Cossack guards. Though the unnamed Cossack victim is awake, on post, and vigilantly watching (in the right direction) for the Circassians to attack, the mountaineer rides the log in the current, cloaked in the darkness of night and his black equipment, and silently shoots his enemy from midstream. Though they had superior numbers, fortifications, a stronger position with firm ground, and the knowledge that attack from the river was all but a matter of time, the Cossacks in this poem almost seem to lose inevitably. Russian numerical and logistical superiority are rendered meretricious and ineffective by the superiority of the djigit’s tactical subterfuge and almost inhuman ability to strike anywhere and at any time.

Taken together, the various martial elements included in Pushkin’s “Prisoner of the Caucasus” paint a frightening picture of Caucasian mountaineers. He regales his readers with descriptions of talented, dedicated fighters literally “born for war.” These men knew the mountains, rivers, and forests of the Caucasus as the foreign invaders never would; even the Cossacks, who had lived for generations in close proximity to Pushkin’s “Circassians,” were incapable of out-mountainining the mountaineers in their home terrain. Then there were the weapons. Each raider carried a personal arsenal of both long and short range weapons and was intimately familiar and inimitably deadly with each. Armed to the teeth, a djigit could fight to

\[70 \textit{Ibid.}, 138.\]
the death without fear of running out of ammunition or of breaking a blade and suddenly finding himself unarmed. When one weapon was rendered unusable, the Circassian could carry on his violent mission with any of a number of equally deadly implements, and all of this while borne by a steed so wild, even born-in-the-saddle Cossacks found them to be “mettlesome…terror[s].”

Like the weapons, there was a distinct blend between man and horse, and the resulting combination made for a dangerous enemy. Pushkin completed this portrait and immortalized the Circassian raider in the Russian imagination with his depiction of mountaineer trickery. Their tactics rendered them invisible monsters attacking from the darkness and leaving no trace of their presence but the fallen Cossack and bloodied guard post. In the face of such a seemingly indomitable opponent, Russians leaving for service in the Caucasus after 1822 and the publication of “Prisoner” did so with a certain amount of anxiety.

It is this anxiety, instilled and reinforced by their conceptions of the enemy, helped inspire Russian fighting men to conceive of and commit their own stunningly violent, destructive acts. Service as a soldier, or worse, as a Cossack on the Line, must have seemed a hopeless, demoralizing duty. Leading these men in this task likely proved a challenge altogether different and far more daunting from the great patriotic effort to repulse Napoleon’s Grande Armée a scant decade earlier. From this perspective, the motivation to find and implement their own extreme measures, to respond in kind, seems at least understandable. Pushkin’s writings were not the only source to influence policy and leadership in the Caucasus, but the popularity of his work among the upper class—from whence the Russian officer corps was drawn—no doubt instilled the author’s impressions of the place and peoples in generations of young men who would later serve in these rugged environs. It seems unlikely that such inculcated notions would

71 Ibid.
not later shape how these men conceived of their enemies in the immediacy and heat of war. It is this assumption that this thesis seeks to support by finding the presence of such characterizations of the Caucasus and its peoples and connecting them with the decisions made about the war.

Another manner in which Pushkin’s seminal work shaped Russian conceptions of the peoples of the south was the way the author labeled his subjects. Layton relates that “The Prisoner” first popularized the term “Circassian” as one that “Russians applied to all Caucasian mountaineers.” He opens the body of the poem with the setting, Circassia, and quickly begins blending that name with the broader context of the Caucasus, the birthplace of the men in this opening scene. The next time these men are named in the text, they appear not as men “born and bred in the Caucasus,” but as Circassians.72

In a similar vein, Pushkin, and thus popular convention, used the terms Circassian and Chechen almost “interchangeably.” Layton points out that in a later work and personal correspondences following the publication of “Prisoner of the Caucasus,” Pushkin continued to use the word “Circassian” as an “all-purpose name.”73 In “Prisoner,” Pushkin demonstrates this interchangeability most clearly with “The Circassian Song,” in which the label in the title presumably equates to and references the “Chechen” who appears in the stanzas of the song.74 This habit of language was inherently detrimental to gaining true familiarity with the subjects in question and understanding them as individuals or distinct groups. Portraying a heterogeneous

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72 Ibid., 133.
74 Pushkin, “Prisoner of the Caucasus,” 143-44.
plurality in terms of a monolithic, homogenized singularity obscured the differences, thoughts, personalities, and capabilities of the composite parts.\textsuperscript{75}

Perhaps the most general and insidious label used to describe the various peoples of the isthmus was the term “Asiatic” or “Oriental.” This label was attractive precisely because of the entrenched use of the term in other authorship, especially works by prominent, non-Russian Romantic authors.\textsuperscript{76} The term facilitated discussion of the peoples of the Caucasus not only by grouping them under a single heading, but also throwing them in with the pool of “others” elsewhere along Russia’s southern and eastern borders. Layton points out that Russian authors used “Asiatic” in diametrical opposition to depictions of their “[E]uropeanized self.” Tellingly, she describes both in terms of invention, implying that in neither instance was the chosen label accurate or appropriate for describing Russia.\textsuperscript{77} Even more so than the geographically precise derivative names like Caucasian or Circassian, naming their enemies as “Asiatics” obscured any individual identity beneath the reputation associated with the label. Moreover, this language established a binary discourse in which Russian and Asiatic could just have easily been replaced by Right and Wrong, Good and Evil, or Civilized and Savage.\textsuperscript{78} Simply put, this established a mindset of \textit{svoi} versus \textit{chuzhoi}: self versus the other.

Another manifestation of this binary discourse was the distinction made between the “pacified” peoples of the Caucasus (those who lived under Russian suzerainty) and the


\textsuperscript{76} Said, \textit{Orientalism}, 118-19, lists Beckford, Byron, Moore, and Goethe, among others.

\textsuperscript{77} Susan Layton, “Eros and Empire in Literature about Georgia,” in \textit{Slavic Review} 51, no. 2 (Summer, 1992), 197.

\textsuperscript{78} See Said, \textit{Orientalism}, 36, 38-40, 57-58. Also, in his introduction, Said discusses the ancient roots of this East/West and superior/inferior dichotomy, tracing it back to at least ancient Greece, pp. 1-4.
“mountaineers,” or those who continued to fight and resist Russian dominion. Russian authors and commanders writing about the groups in the region often discussed the people in terms of their relationship to Russia, and the most fundamental aspect of any of these relationships was whether or not the men of that group would kill them given the chance. To demarcate those thought to be safe, Russians used the term “pacified.” Although such a label axiomatically marks a group as peaceful, the term is also derivative from the “pacification” campaigns—really retaliatory or “softening” raids—conducted against powerful or recalcitrant auls (villages). 79

This binary in particular obscures the subjects and the conditions under which the differentiation occurred. Some of the so-called “pacified” groups accepted the Russian presence voluntarily and welcomed their influence in the region. Georgia was annexed in 1801. On a smaller scale, groups like the Ossetes (sometimes, Ossetians) accepted Russian suzerainty as a band of people rather than a state. 80 These groups often lived in the Northern Caucasus, were Christian or even Orthodox, and were long accustomed to Cossack bands and the presence of the empire. Others among the “pacified” were conquered groups, the products of imperial pacification campaigns and more appropriately labeled as such. Russian officers and officials forced these groups into submission, either by military force, economic pressure, or a combination of the two.

Applying the common label “pacified” to these two demographic groups also erased the agency, choices, and histories that made them distinct peoples. Especially in light of Tsar Nicholas’ emphasis on Orthodoxy as the identity of good Russian subjects, the Georgians,

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79 These pacification campaigns are well documented in most histories of the war and many first-hand accounts, including Leo Tolstoy’s short story “The Raid.” The British used a similar system of punitive and preemptive attacks on the Kikuyu and other ethnic groups in Kenya during the infamous Mau Mau Revolt. Such attacks designed to weaken the indigenous will and capacity to fight were labeled “hammering” campaigns. See Caroline Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain’s Gulag in Kenya* (New York: MacMillan, 2005).

Ossetes, and other Christian/Orthodox subjects must have resented being grouped with conquered recalcitrants. Conversely, for the traumatized survivors of Russian pacifying campaigns—essentially conquered peoples—living under the Empire’s heel alongside willing collaborators would have been a terrible insult and a source of constant tension. Vengeance and personal honor were such integral aspects of individual identity to many groups at this time, which would likely have exacerbated these tensions. Similarly, naming a group “mountaineers” (i.e. resistors) obscured individual motivation and agency between groups. Some resisted for reasons of faith, some for economic reasons, some for culture, some out of pressure from peers or neighboring bands, but whatever their reasons, these djigit were prepared to offer their lives in pursuit of them. Granted, it was far simpler to discuss the various enclaves resisting the tsar’s armies in terms of a monolithic or heterogeneous whole. This ease also facilitated the use of orientalist and pejorative dichotomies that justified and helped drive the conquest.

Such pejorative and dehumanizing labeling is often some of the most striking and noticeable orientalist language in period sources—and also some of the most deleterious. The most blatant and seemingly oft imitated example is his characterization of a Circassian lying in ambush as a “wily brigand.”81 This moniker proved broadly detrimental to positive, equitable discourse about the region’s inhabitants. Although in this instance the man described is actually engaged in well-conceived criminal activity, the characterization is still problematic for the precedent it set and for its seemingly representative nature. That this “wily brigand” serves as Pushkin’s paragon of being Circassian established a tangibly definitive quality. Following the publication of “Prisoner of the Caucasus,” to be Circassian was to be a cunning criminal. There was little room under this paradigm for compassion, love, fear or any other actions or emotions.

81 Pushkin, “Prisoner of the Caucasus,” 137.
that otherwise define the human experience. Thus safely and comfortably compartmentalized under an umbrella name, the people of the Caucasus gained a monolithic reputation, indivisible and universally applied to all members, regardless of actual, individual identity. Like eponymous Mount Caucus, which lent its name to the people, mountains, and region that surrounded it, the peoples of the region lost their individuality in the great sweep of being “Circassian.”

Beyond the immediate scope of his poem’s effects on Russia’s popular imagination, “Prisoner of the Caucasus” established a clear precedent for debasing Caucasian peoples. There is a discernible trend among later works in which authors writing about the Caucasus’ inhabitants seem at times almost incapable of leaving a name unmodified by some pejorative, or at the very least titillating, descriptor. Such authorship could have taken shape out of “common sense” and economic interests. Bloody criminals made (and still make) for exciting subjects to capture popular attention. Moreover, such debased foci naturally fit in with the romantic norms so prevalent at the time. Romanticism’s anti-heroes turned convention on its head in lionizing otherwise despicable characters in popular literature. Bad men behaving selfishly or basely drew admiration from the romantic audience—“wily brigands” did not fall too far from this standard.

Another possible explanation for this trend was that portraying their enemies in such a clearly negative light simplified the inherently complex war. Had Pushkin’s sympathy and respect for the plight of the peoples he described been more pronounced and characterized his authorship, Russian audiences would have had to face more intimately the difficult realities of the war. Russia, not the Caucasus, was the aggressor in this conflict, and their imperial

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82 Mount Caucus is more commonly and contemporarily known as Mount Elbrus, which, at 18,510 feet above sea level, is Europe’s highest mountain.
expansion came at a high cost. By positioning his country against bands of “wily brigands,” Pushkin obscured this fact and made discussing the war morally palatable and entertaining.

Following his second term of internal exile and several bouts of serious illness, a battered Pushkin finally sought refuge in matrimony. On May 6, 1830 his engagement to Natalia Goncharova was announced, and on February 18, 1831 the two were married. Due to a cholera outbreak in St. Petersburg, the Imperial Court moved to the Pushkins’ new home town in Tsarskoe Selo. In this way Natalia’s beauty became known in court circles—even Tsar Nicholas grew enamored of her. In 1833 Nicholas promoted a surprised and suspicious Pushkin to the rank of Kammerjunker in what the poet perceived as an attempt to keep Natalia ensconced in society functions and near to her adoring male courtiers. Among these admirers was George D’Anthés, a member of the Imperial Horse Guards, royalist French émigré to Russia, possible homosexual partner with his adopted “father,” the Dutch ambassador to Russia, Baron van Heeckeren, and an extraordinarily wealthy playboy. D’Anthés openly pursued Goncharova, and rumors soon grew around the pair. Affairs reached such a state that Pushkin wrote an intentionally incendiary letter to D’Anthés’ father, which provoked the expected duel with the son. On January 27, 1837 D’Anthés shot Pushkin from ten paces, delivering a fatal blow. Two days later, Russia lost its greatest poet.83

The next author of note to write in the Caucasian experience tradition was also the first who served a military role there. Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Bestuzhev (1797-1837) was groomed for military service from a young age, and in the reign of Alexander I he attained the rank of Staff-Captain in the Life Guards Dragoons. His progress through the ranks halted in

1825 when he was sent to Yakutsk for participating in a conspiracy connected with the Decembrist Revolt that was Nicholas’ bloody inauguration to the throne. Four years later, Bestuzhev was sent to the Caucasus as a common soldier, where he served with distinction in numerous engagements and ultimately died in a mountaineer ambush in the forests near Adler Cape in 1837. Although he published numerous works throughout his career under the *Nome de plume* Marlinsky, “Ammalat Bek” (1831) was one of his first after the 1825 debacle and his exile to the Caucasus. Despite the decade between publication dates, Marlinsky’s Caucasian tale follows almost seamlessly with Pushkin’s seminal creation.

Like Pushkin before him, Marlinsky paid close attention to describing the raiment and weaponry of his Dagestani subjects. The author paints Ammalat Bek, nephew of the Shamkhal of Tarki, in vivid detail for his readers, relating the vitality of his youth, the richness of his garb, and the threatening incorporation of utilitarian martial accoutrements in place of more decorative royal possessions. Included in the impressive list of his wealth are a gun [musket], dagger, pistol, and saber. Though well dressed and comfortable in his wealth under Russian suzerainty, Ammalat Bek is still the paragon of the *djigit*. He proves this fact when he interrupts the games over which he is presiding to demonstrate with focused intensity and technical perfection the peak of a *djigit*’s skill. The Shamkhal’s nephew is talented in the arts of war, but the reader is immediately given cause to remember that his demonstration is still just a game with the introduction of another archetypal character.

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84 Aleksandr Bestuzhev-Marlinsky, trans. Thomas Shaw, “Ammalat Bek,” *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* 329, no. 53 (March, 1843). Hereafter, I cite Bestuzhev-Marlinsky’s work under just Marlinsky as that was the name which appeared on his works at the time of their original publication.
87 Ibid., 2-3.
Marlinsky’s Sultan Akhmet Khan of Avar is rendered as a more deadly, serious, and purposeful type of *djigit* than the wealthy dandy Ammalat Bek. Where Ammalat Bek is clean and brightly colorful, his garb etched in gold and silver decorations, and his “bright bay steed…[frets] like a whirlwind,” the Sultan and his entourage ride up in “dusty dress” on foam covered horses. The Sultan wears a linked-mail shirt, a helmet, and is garbed in “full warlike equipment.”

Taken together, Marlinsky’s descriptions of Akhmet Khan portray a man unconcerned with worldly wealth or comfort. His focus, talents, and person—the same martial skill that makes him and Ammalat Bek *djigiti*—are all directed at resisting the Russians. The author bolsters this reading when the Sultan defiantly rides through the stacked muskets of the Russian Army company, admits his responsibility for an infamous ambush at Bashli, and having cajoled the sullen on looking Dagestanis to fight with the company of dragoons, leaves two of his cohort to “keep alive the violent spirit among the Tatars.”

Gone are the horsemanship and weaponry displays for enjoyment and celebration. His actions are all business.

This descriptive dichotomy is not Marlinsky’s last depiction of Dagestani violence. Having instigated a battle between the people of Bouinaki and the Russian dragoons and fatally wounded the dragoon Captain, Akhmet Khan convinces Ammalat Bek to flee with him into the mountains of Avaria to escape prosecution and fight in the resistance. The fiery Sultan urges Ammalat to “justify himself” to the Russians “[w]ith lead and steel…The firing is begun….the sword is drawn.” Later, as the wounded Ammalat Bek and his mentor travel to the Avar khan’s village, they are met on the road by another horseman. Though the words of their greeting are

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88 Marlinsky places the Avar people within the larger hierarchy of Chechens: “[i]t seems that they are your countrymen…their dress is Tchetchna.” (Marlinsky, 1831, 10). Alternatively, contemporary sources name the Avars as Dagestan’s largest ethnic group. See Ferederick Coene, *The Caucasus: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 62.
90 Ibid., 4-7.
91 Ibid., 8-9.
cordial and according to custom, “[s]alam aleikom….aleikom [s]alam,” the strange rider is veiled for battle with his gun cocked while the Sultan’s party is similarly prepared for violence.\textsuperscript{92} These passages clearly portray the people of Dagestan as a generally violent race, and even more explicitly, the mountaineers of Dagestan as an especially terrifying force. In what was likely an under-perceived bit of irony among 19\textsuperscript{th} century Russian readers, this greeting delivered with such a tense undercurrent wishes peace to each speaker.

Perhaps most frightening of all to Marlinsky’s readers was the implication that this violent nature was somehow communicable or inspirational to the peoples of the Caucasus. Marlinsky follows orientalist convention in portraying Sultan Akhmet Khan as savagely violent, and it is in this savagery that Akhmet Khan converts Ammalat Bek from a pacified ruler into his violent double. Marlinsky prepares his readers for Sultans evangelical role when Akhmet Khan explains to the weary Ammalat Bek that one day:

\begin{quote}
Time will pass, tears will dry up; the thirst of vengeance will take place of grief for the dead; and then again Sultan Akhmet will be seen the prophet of plunder and of blood….I shall once more lead flying bands of avengers into the Russian limits.\textsuperscript{93}
\end{quote}

That this declaration comes from a Tatar likely rendered the Sultan’s claim to being a prophet all the more terrifying and realistic to Russian Orthodox readers. During the reign reactionary of Tsar Nicholas I, Orthodoxy was intrinsically tied to national identity and the prevailing notions of responsible citizenship. That Marlinsky in many ways couched his epic struggle in terms of Muslim versus Orthodox would have made the stakes personal and high for his aristocratic audience. Though most would likely never serve in the Caucasus, this text put their very

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 11.}
\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 12.}
\end{footnotes}
identities on the line and rendered all of literate, Orthodox Russia as philosophical co-combatants in the ideological struggle.⁹⁴

Later, when Ammalat Bek pleads with Akhmet Khan to let him die on the mountain, the Sultan stirs the young man’s spirit and revives him with the reminder that “[r]evenge on the Russians is a holy duty.” Henceforth, the young nephew of the Shamkhal pledges to “live for revenge” and strike as the Sultan would direct him.⁹⁵ This development would have seemed especially terrifying for those officers and policy makers responsible for conquering the Caucasus. A central element of the imperial strategy in the region was to coopt indigenous rulers and populations with bribes of wealth and position. Thus converted, those leaders and groups would weaken in their indolent wealth, cease to actively resist the Russian advance, and become further isolated from their less venal neighbors.⁹⁶ Marlinsky references this strategy explicitly when Sultan Akhmet Khan first encounters the dragoons and cries: “Away, brute….I am a Russian general.”⁹⁷ Before he stabs the dragoon Captain, he claims that the “Russian padisha gave me rank.”⁹⁸ By implication, Akhmet Khan is one of the many resistors the Russians bought out of the conflict. To see such a supposedly coopted, “pacified” personage break with his vows to sow death and disorder among a Russian unit called into question the efficacy of the bribery campaign. What was worse, this failed convert instead turned a previously subdued ruler into a lifelong enemy of the Tsar. Ultimately, this interaction had implications beyond one specific relationship and spoke to the tenuous nature of Russian dominance in the region.

⁹⁴ For more on the linkage between Orthodoxy and the state under Nicholas, see Nicholas Riasanovsky, Nicholas I and Official Nationality in Russia, 1825-1855 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969. This work receives fuller attention below.
⁹⁶ Though any general history of the Russian conquest of the Caucasus will describe this trend, see in particular Yermolov’s The Czar’s General: The Governor of Georgia and the War in Chechnya, Gammer’s The Lone Wolf and the Bear, or Baddeley’s The Conquest of the Caucasus for explicit mention of the tactic and its widespread use.
⁹⁸ Ibid., 8.
Marlinsky also reproduces the fundamental dichotomy of orientalist discourse in the contrast of dirty versus clean, untried versus world weary, and exhibitionism versus grim utility. In Chapter I, Ammalat Bek represents the bright and good in the Caucasus, while Akhmet Khan serves as his foil: a dark, violent, uncontrollable force. Although in this depiction Marlinsky contrasts two indigenous populations, rather than the West/East or Russian/Caucasian comparison one might expect of conventional orientalist discourse, the difference between the more and less civilized archetypes is obvious and fateful. The most striking arena in which Marlinsky accomplishes this division is in his portrayal of pacified and non-pacified Dagestanis.

Marlinsky separates civilized from primitive by differentiating between pacified Caucasian peoples and those who still resisted the empire’s efforts at conquest. The pacified Ammalat Bek retains those aspects of his culture that the romantic Russian imagination admired and valued: his freedom, martial prowess, and intimacy with the wild lands of the Caucasus. His favorable standing with the women gathered to observe the holiday demonstrations even receives attention from Marlinsky as the author carefully crafts an archetypal portrayal of his idea of a Circassian. It is only by contrasting Ammalat Bek with Sultan Akhmet Khan that the Shamkhal’s nephew initially appears as an imposter *djigit*, capable of many of the same feats but untested and uninterested in real battle.

Ammalat Bek does not play this role for long. In Chapter II, the Shamkhal’s nephew sheds his shell of indolent, youthful passivity and is born again, in the violent crucible of battle, as a warrior worthy of the “blood of the Emirs” and wholly dedicated to revenge against the Russians. That this metamorphosis from civilized to savage is accompanied by violence,

\[\text{Ibid.}, 2.\]

\[\text{Ibid.}, 14.\]
bloodshed, and flight to the mountains is no coincidence. Marlinsky draws a clear line between those who live under the Russian boot and those who resist, and those dedicated to resisting Russia’s civilizing efforts must themselves be inherently uncivilized. Although the dragoons organize and retaliate, scattering the village and killing “hundreds of brave mountaineers” in the process, their violence is at best an afterthought in Marlinsky’s account.\textsuperscript{101} \textit{Djigit} violence, no matter its relative impotence when compared to the mass destruction we learn the Russians wreak as the men flee, is the only violence in which Marlinsky is interested. By extension, Russian audiences too would have had little desire for exposure to the brutality of their own troops. More acceptable to their sense of moral self-importance by far, mythologized Caucasian violence supported their notions of a need to civilize the region at any cost. Moreover, such depictions made for titillating reading, which in turn further entrenched asymmetrical examination and justification of violence during the war.

Ammalat Bek and Akhmet Khan’s escape from the village to Avaria also mimics the divide between civilized and primitive in portraying the archetypal \textit{djigit} flight into the mountains. After stabbing the dragoon captain and hearing that the Russians were attacking, Akhmet Khan exhorts his host to return with him to his home settlement.\textsuperscript{102} On arriving at a mountaintop overlooking the village, the men hear musket shots from an inter-village conflict. Akhmet Khan explains to the nonplussed Ammalat Bek that “[w]ith us, these are everyday affairs…. [s]uch skirmishes cherish among us a warlike spirit and warlike habits.” Akhmet Khan even notes the “coolness of the women” as musket balls flew all around them.\textsuperscript{103}

\textsuperscript{101} \textit{Ibid.}, 9, 12.  
\textsuperscript{102} \textit{Ibid.}, 9.  
\textsuperscript{103} \textit{Ibid.}, 15.
These passages demonstrate the perception that the ontology of violence increases along with the elevation of the setting even as the level of civilization decreases. That the Sultan’s people wage open war over a “private quarrel” or the theft of a cow seems to be Marlinsky’s ultimate proof of their savagery. Even the transformed Ammalat Bek seems taken aback at this insensate violence. It resembles a game, with one side cheering as a member of the opposite is carried away in defeat, but unlike the holiday demonstrations from which Ammalat Bek and the Sultan fled previously, this was real violence, perpetrated against real “adversaries.” Such behavior almost unavoidably evokes comparison to animals falling on a carcass or fighting for scraps of food. It is the ultimate condemnation of the region’s peoples, and for Marlinsky’s audience, the fundamental reason the empire should press into the region.

Much like Marlinsky before him, Mikhail Iurevich Lermontov (1814-1841) got his start in the military in the Life Guards Regiment. In 1834, the year he received his commission as an officer in the Life Guards Hussars, he also made his first attempt at prose writing. This connection between Lermontov’s creative production and his service to the state would continue throughout his career and lamentably short life. Between 1834 and 1837, the wealthy young socialite served and wrote primarily in St. Petersburg. This interlude was interrupted in 1837 when Lermontov wrote “Death of a Poet,” an apologia and eulogy for Pushkin, who died in January of that year.¹⁰⁴ This poem so incensed Tsar Nicholas and the censors for its condemnation of the aristocracy (Lermontov dubbed them the “greedy hordes around the

throne,” “killers of freedom,” and “corruption’s friends”) that Lermontov was arrested and transferred to a dragoon regiment stationed in the Caucasus.105

Lermontov’s time in the Caucasus ended in 1838 after his aunt secured his pardon and a retransfer back to St. Petersburg. Though of limited duration, his travels along “the whole length of the Line, from Kizlyar to Taman” left quite an impression on the young creative, and he began work on A Hero of Our Time.106 Two years later, in 1840, Lermontov engaged in a duel by sword with the son of the French Ambassador to Russia and was again transferred to a Caucasian regiment. This second term of exile to the south saw Lermontov’s first real experiences in combat, and the author was twice recommended by superiors and twice denied by the Tsar for valorous commendations. These experiences provided the inspiration for his poem “Valerik,” a reflection of his experience in a bloody battle that took place near the river of that name.107 On 15 July, 1841, Lermontov died in a duel against an acquaintance from the military academy in Piatigorsk. That same summer, the second edition—complete with the Author’s Preface—of A Hero of Our Time was published. His most famous poem, “The Demon,” was also published posthumously. As with Marlinsky and Pushkin, there is a decade between the publication dates of Lermontov and Marlinsky’s major works. This gap does not prevent Lermontov’s poems and prose from fitting firmly within the established framework and precedent of Caucasian tales.

Lermontov was the epitome of a generation of youth who grew up enchanted by a constructed image of the Caucasus and its peoples. His earlier works were inspired by the poems and literature he read as a young noble and drew inspiration from his first period of exile. Both

105 Lermontov, “Death of a Poet.”
the story “Bela” and the poem “The Demon” were written in the 1830s and the editions analyzed in this thesis were not published until the year of his death. “The Demon” in particular was a life-long labor of love inspired in part by the poet’s fascination with Pushkin and his “Prisoner of the Caucasus.” 108 “Bela” too drew inspiration from the literary tradition of the Caucasian tale, but Lermontov’s own experience traveling through the region as an officer in exile helped shape that story as well. 109 These works periodically mimic the literary vogue in depicting Caucasian peoples as violent and uncivilized—“Bela” especially displays the fiery digit prominently—but Lermontov also contributed to the corpus of 19th century literature about the Caucasus with his expansion and entrenchment of perceptions about women and alcohol.

Lermontov begins “Bela” by establishing the authority and authenticity of Maxim Maximych, the tale’s Caucasian War expert. Captain Maxim Maximych is portrayed as an older officer of “about fifty” with a “swarthy expression.” In response to an apparently naïve question from the narrator, Maxim wryly remarks, “[y]ou won’t have been long in the Caucasus?”110 This scene takes place before readers move on to Maximych’s recollections of his time with Pechorin or the latter’s diary entries from “Taman” or the Piatigorsk spa tale, “Princess Mary.” In short, this meeting and Lermontov’s depiction of Maximych lead the book’s exposition and precede all action. The author carefully constructs Maximych’s identity as the narrator’s (and reader’s) guide to the Caucasus. His age, sun-burnt skin, rank, and apparent success in dealing with the mountain carters all assert that he knows his way around the land and people.

108 Kyril FitzLyon, “Introduction,” Narrative Poems by Alexander Pushkin and by Mikhail Lermontov (New York: Random House, 1983), xv. FitzLyon explains that Lermontov first began writing “The Devil” at 15 years of age and continued throughout most of his adult life. The poem went through eight revisions and took 12 years to write.
Another aspect of establishing Maximych’s authority comes in his role as a foil to the inexperienced narrator. The epistemological superiority of the Captain’s knowledge is demonstrated by his riding in a fully loaded cart pulled effectively by two pairs of oxen and laughs when the narrator of the tales asks why his much lighter cart—pulled by six oxen and a team of Ossete carters—is moving so slowly and laboriously up the steep mountain path. The narrator’s year traversing the region has ill prepared him for even the vagaries of travel. Readers are left to imagine on their own how less capable he must be of surviving battle. Maximych, on the other hand, has demonstrated his superior experience and the consequences thereof not only by hiring the right number of oxen and carters, but also implicitly by surviving to his current age and position.

This dichotomy between the young narrator and experienced veteran adds an instructive element and chilling realism to the story. The narrator presumably is one of dozens of young noblemen traveling to the Caucasus for service in the army. Many readers drew comparisons between Lermontov and the characters in his novel, a fact the author had to acknowledge in his “Author’s Preface” to the second edition of *A Hero of Our Time*. Whether the narrator (or later, Pechorin) specifically represents Lermontov is irrelevant to this thesis. These characters all clearly portray the archetype of the young Russian officer, and like Lermontov before them, an entire generation of Russian aristocrats read his works for a glimpse into their future. His stories did not just entertain bored courtiers and provide a brief respite from their affluent ennui, they instructed future officers about the “truth” of the Caucasus and taught them how to perceive and deal with the land and its peoples.

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112 Ibid., 3.
In “Bela,” Captain Maxim Maximych continues his role as experienced guide and informant and immediately berates and insults the various demographic groups living in the region. Maximych explains to the narrator that his carter problems derive from the carters’ very nature: “fearful rogues, these Asiatics are….dreadful scoundrels….they like to fleece travelers.” He rounds out the epithets and succinctly labels the Ossete carters as “villains.” This diatribe immediately follows Lermontov’s establishment of Maximych as a knowledgeable authority and thus inherits an empirical and metonymic ring of truth. The old Captain presumably understands the Ossetes and has labeled them fairly, at least in the narrator’s experience. This not only confirms Maximych’s role as informant, but sets the tone for depictions of mountaineers in the remainder of “Bela.” He completes his depiction of the indigenous Christians, the Ossetes and Georgians, with a final pronouncement that they are “stupid as they come” and “absolutely useless.” These epithets are all overtly negative and establish a disparaging image of non-Russian Christians. They are “rogues,” “scoundrels,” and “villains” and “absolutely useless.” They are of limited instrumental utility—to the narrator, Maximych, or the Russian army—and seemingly possess no redeeming qualities to which a respectable Russian reader might relate or admire. Tellingly, these debased Christians also lack traits that Russians should fear. This is not the case for Lermontov’s Muslim characters.

Moving from defining Caucasian Christians to characterizing the region’s Tatars, Lermontov switches to language and labels that are no more positive than those used previously to describe Ossetes and Georgians, but nevertheless demand a certain respect and serious consideration. Maximych denounces the Karbardans and Chechens as “robbers and vagabonds,”

113 Ibid., 6.
with an additional note that the Chechens especially are “cutthroats.”\textsuperscript{114} These epithets are far more sinister than labeling people as “rogues,” and Lermontov’s narrator adds to the list throughout the story. Circassians become “filthy tramp[s]” and “black-faced scoundrel[s]” with “thieving in their blood” who kill with stealth and dishonor by nature.\textsuperscript{115}

This imagery of “cutthroat robbers” gains a patina of veracity coming from Maximych, but his role as the source also lends a more serious cast to the labels. His status as an experienced soldier in the Caucasus, presumably having fought for years against the region’s inhabitants, makes him above all else a military expert. That Karbardans and Chechens stand out to this hardened veteran as unpredictable and violent would have had a sobering effect on Lermontov’s readers. If Captain Maxim Maximych holds the Chechens and Karbardians with fear and wary respect, so too should the narrator and hosts of young noble officers heading for service in the region. If Lermontov’s informant is to be believed, then the fiercely independent peoples fighting against the Russian incursion had grown, if anything, more violent and less civilized since Pushkin’s sojourn in the isthmus twenty years previous. But for the author and his audience all was not lost—the Caucasus were also known for their extraordinarily beautiful women and bountiful supply of alcohol.

Alcohol in the Caucasus was a singular joy for Russians of all castes. Lermontov’s “Princess Mary” details the life of wealthy Russians resting and recuperating at the famous Piatigorsk spa. In this environment, the narrator—now Pechorin—notes that life is disappointingly similar to the court life in the Capitol from which he was exiled: dandies gambling and complaining, women with lorgnettes obsessing over prospective husbands for

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 12, 33, 38, and 39.
friends and daughters, and a gross fixation on rank. He also cattily notes that “they drink (though not the waters).” An acquaintance of Pechorin’s, Private Grushnitsky, goes so far as to divide local society into two factions, “[those] who drink water in the morning … and the ones who drink wine in the evenings.” This divide extended beyond the confines of transplanted Russian aristocrats and their exile high society. In the concluding story of A Hero of Our Time, “The Fatalist,” an alcoholic Cossack overindulges in chikhir and murders a Russian officer. The Cossack, in every way a commoner, belies alcohol’s ubiquity among the common soldiers serving in the Caucasus. Alcohol was an integral part of life in the isthmus in Lermontov’s estimations, but the joys of Caucasian wines were not reserved for Cossack micro-vintners and spa patrons.

Captain Maximych again serves as Lermontov’s informant and introduces Pechorin and the narrator to the dangers of the Circassians’ relationship with alcohol. In the context of sharing a piece of hard earned wisdom with the narrator about the dangers of consuming alcohol in the Caucasus (death or court-martial), the Captain explains that alcohol also makes Circassians even more violent and deadly than normal. He relates that “once they get drunk on buza at a wedding or a funeral, it’s sheer murder.” That this happened at the residence of a “friendly chief” highlights the dramatic extent of alcohol’s effects on the indigenous population. Maximych reiterates this connection when he explains to Pechorin that “[t]hese Asiatics are all the same—they get their fill of buza, then out come the knives!” These passages implicitly enshrine alcoholism and a penchant for excess among the host of other defects attributed to “the

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116 Ibid., 71.
117 Ibid., 73-74.
118 Ibid., 154. Paul Foote’s note defines chikhir as “an unfermented Caucasian red wine.” (Ibid., 169, note 3)
119 Ibid., 10. Paul Foote’s note on buza defines it as a “kind of beer made from various grains.” (Ibid., 160, note 13)
120 Ibid., 17.
Circassian” in popular imagery. Worse still, Maxim Maximych connects the consumption of alcohol with the commission of violence. This association does not likely surprise the contemporary reader, nor does it seem unjustified. It is widely accepted that overconsumption of alcohol contributes to violence even today; it is hard to believe that Lermontov’s audience would have been unfamiliar with this causal relationship in their own times.

Whether intentionally or not, Lermontov’s depiction of *djigit* violence as a factor of alcohol consumption played a greater role than simply as social observation. The Circassians in the story profess various reasons to fight, many of which are recognizably human, if not entirely laudable. Lermontov’s rendition becomes problematic when the actual commission of violence occurs overwhelmingly under the influence of liquid intoxicants and is the factor that ultimately leads to the conflation of drunkenness and violence in “Bela.” From this vantage point, any act of physical resistance or demonstration of agency on the part of indigenous people is at least suspect, if not immediately dismissed as excessive, unjustified, and immoral. Maxim’s portrayal of Circassian violence as intimately connected with alcohol consumption characterized the military resistance to the Russian conquest as nothing more than fits of indiscriminate, *buzak*-fueled debauchery. Though it is unlikely Lermontov’s masterpiece was widely read in the Caucasus and thus did not inspire a justifiable outrage and rejection of this characterization in the indigenous population, it was widely-read in Russia. That the Empire’s nobility and officer corps could attribute the staunch Caucasian resistance to overindulgence and substance abuse must have made justifying the prolonged conflict much easier. Circassian alcoholism conveniently explained away problematic moral questions about responsibility for the conflict and the brutal nature of Russia’s conquest. Like any drunk, the Circassian had to be dealt with firmly and finally to have any appreciable impact on his besotted mind.
Susan Layton corroborated a linkage between a feminized land and Russian men’s self-perceptions in her examination of Russian treatment of Georgia and Georgian women.\textsuperscript{121} She writes that period literature displays “the systematic advancement of a metaphorical proposition about the land as a woman who must be protected \textit{and} dominated.”\textsuperscript{122} Although Layton’s argument focuses on Georgia and thus emphasizes protection in addition to domination, her analysis helps tease out the connection Pushkin and his literary successors engendered in Russian imaginations. She posits that such a “metaphorical proposition” relies on a dual image of the women and land as both inherently good and beautiful and also capable of great evil and harm. Such an ambivalent perspective allowed the creation of “an erotically charged cultural mythology about [Russian men] as powerful and rational “European” agents, uniquely capable of both protecting [the land] and keeping her wickedness in check.”\textsuperscript{123}

One can only imagine the delight of Lermontov’s readers that Russian officers not only carried the burden of conquering the Caucasus’ drunken men, but also their beautiful women. Following in his predecessor’s stead, Lermontov depicted the one-sided and ill-fated love between a Russian officer and a Caucasian beauty that Pushkin immortalized in “Prisoner of the Caucasus.” In his poem “The Demon,” the eponymous character “is not an entirely divine … supernatural figure. He is a man \textit{writ large}.”\textsuperscript{124} This “man \textit{writ large}” falls in love with a Georgian beauty, engineers the death of her betrothed, and woos the reluctant and grieving maiden in an effort to finally receive God’s pardon and a return to paradise.\textsuperscript{125} Possibly affected

\textsuperscript{122} Layton, “Eros and Empire,” 196.
\textsuperscript{123} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{124} FitzLyon, “Introduction,” xvi.
by “the sensual heat of high-noon days,” the Demon loves Tamara for her physical beauty and exotic charm. “The Novice” details another love for a Georgian maiden. In this tale, her beauty takes on a mystical bent: “but so/ deep was the darkness of her eyes/ so full of secrets to surmise.” Her bearing prompts the eponymous neophyte to compare her to a “poplar tree that stands/ and queens it over neighboring lands.” Taken together, these passages demonstrate two traits of Lermontov’s authorship and popular conceptions about women in the Caucasus: they were incredibly, almost indescribably beautiful, and they were conceived of and in many ways treated like the land itself by invading Russian officers.

The tragic heroine of “Bela” is the archetypal character of beautiful women of the Caucasus. She first appears in the text at a wedding, captivating Pechorin and the other men present with her skillful dancing and singing—and her good looks. Pechorin is “completely absorbed, his eyes never left her,” while Kazbich (the story’s villain) also has his “blazing eyes” fixed on the girl. Bela’s looks and charm stupefy both the foreigner and the djigit equally; her beauty transcends the religious, social, and cultural bounds which otherwise polarize Pechorin from Kazbich. The force of her beauty is so overpowering that in their various efforts to possess Bela, her brother disappears, her father is robbed and murdered, Kazbich is wounded and disappears, and the otherwise disinterested and manipulative antihero of the tale grows emaciated and grief stricken when she dies. Only a great beauty could cause so much misery and suffering for the sake of her love, and Bela clearly fits the part. Unfortunately, this beauty proves a curse for Bela and ultimately claims her life. The twice-kidnapped girl dies, stabbed in the

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130 Ibid., 20, 25, 37-38, 41.
back by Kazbich in his failed effort to take her from Pechorin. These passages demonstrate a clear connection in Caucasian romantic literature between a woman’s beauty and a man’s need to possess that beauty.

The literary treatment of this “Asian beauty” resembles that of owners treating chattel and not husbands their wives. In the story, Pechorin entices Bela’s brother Azamat to steal her from their father with Kazbich’s legendary horse, Karagyoz, as “bride-money.” This summary of “Bela” demonstrates on a multitude of levels that women were property to men and conceived of in a highly objectified sense. It is possible to dismiss this as an unfortunate but integral aspect of life for many women in the 19th century, but Bela’s objections to her treatment by Pechorin clue readers into his exceeding even these repressive norms. Bela declares her intentions to return to her village and vents to Maximych, “I’m not a slave, I’m a chief’s daughter.” Bela’s reaction strongly indicates that her Russian captor has in some way crossed the line from patriarchal spouse to slave owner. It is tempting to regard her kidnap and Pechorin’s aggressive, manipulative wooing as the problem, but if such an obvious answer is dismissed as a contemporary reading, what remains to offend is her literal captivity in the fort and later, Pechorin’s neglectful, disinterested performance of “husband.” An earlier fight between the two corroborates this reading: when Pechorin arrogantly tells Bela “[y]ou know very well you’ll

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131 Ibid., 38.
132 Ibid., 23.
133 Ibid., 18.
134 Ibid., 32.
135 Russian literature would certainly have us believe that Pechorin’s acquisition of Bela is perhaps unorthodox (Maxim Maximych objects, but quickly relents), but within Caucasian norms. That her brother steals her initially and later Kazbich repeats the performance strongly indicates that bride stealing is on some level normative. Whether this bears any real resemblance to period cultural tradition is irrelevant insofar as I am interested in how Russians saw the people of the Caucasus and their traditions. Thus, that Bela reacts to Pechorin’s mistreatment indicates Lermontov’s own doubts about Russian interpretations of indigenous custom. Pechorin, playing the role of the quintessential Russian officer, embodies and lives by this code that so concerns Lermontov and distresses his Bela.
be mine sooner or later,” she replies, “I’m your prisoner…your slave…of course you can make me do what you want.”

Bela experiences the ultimate objectification in the process of being “conquered” by Pechorin: he grows interested, steals her away, then all too soon, “she bores [him].”

Like any of his other possessions, Pechorin leaves her locked in his quarters to pursue another form of conquest—boar hunting—that catches his fancy.

This linkage between conquest and possession is justified in the text by a foreign understanding of indigenous cultural tradition. When Pechorin relates his plans to acquire Bela from her brother, Maxim Maximych questions his judgment. The antihero replies that “an uncivilized Circassian girl should be glad to have a nice husband like him, since, after all, according to their ways he would be her husband.” On hearing the suggestion that he return Bela to her father, Pechorin retorts that “if we give that old savage back his daughter, he’ll slit her throat or sell her.” These passages relate the Russian understanding of Circassian notions of marriage, in which possession and carnal knowledge, not a ceremony and vows, constitute matrimony. Though this was in all likelihood a gross misinterpretation of the actual beliefs, it still provided guidance and incentive to young noblemen. The image of gorgeous Tatar women free for the taking by virile, “civilized” officers was no doubt a high hope for many in the Russian Caucasian Corps. It also exemplified the professed Russian civilizing mission in microcosm: conquest of an “uncivilized Circassian” by an ostensibly “civilized” Russian officer.

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136 Lermontov, A Hero of Our Time, 22-23.
137 Ibid., 35.
138 Ibid., 19, 21.
139 For analysis on this trend, see Peter Scotto, “Prisoners of the Caucasus: Ideologies of Imperialism in Lermontov’s “Bella,”” PMLA 107, no. 2 (1992): 246-260; Antony Flew, “Tolstoy and the Meaning of Life,” Ethics 73, no. 2 (1963): 110-118. Philosopher Antony Flew corroborates the Russian expectation of “erotic involvement with [the Caucasus’] women,” and adds context and consequential significance to this passage, “in the Caucasus, desire backed by power can make its own rules.” Ibid., 252.
Lermontov’s masterpiece also reflects the connection between Russian domination of indigenous women and their homeland. In an overtly romantic introduction to “Princess Mary,” Pechorin falls under the sway of the Caucasus’ beauty, declaring that “[i]t’s a delight to live in a place like this. Every fibre [sic] of my body tingles with joy.”\footnote{Lermontov, A Hero of Our Time, 70.} The narrator in “Bella” regularly intersperses detailed descriptions of the scenery around him and expressions of his awe at the “glorious place” with such “splendid scenery” “so bright and gay one felt that one felt like staying and living there forever.”\footnote{Ibid., 5, 26, 27.} Although Lermontov and his narrators’ admiration for the beauty of the isthmus seem meaningful and genuine, such romantic passages are complicated by their authors’ roles in the region. Although Lermontov’s first sojourn more closely resembled a sight-seeing tour rather than a tour of duty, his final term of service was as a Russian officer heroically fighting Imam Shamil and the Chechen/Dagestani resistance. More importantly, Pechorin, Maxim Maximych, and the other nameless Russian servicemen in A Hero of Our Time are stationed in the Caucasus as fighting men. Read in this light, such glowing praise of the Caucasus closely resembles Pechorin’s initial fascination with Bela. And as with their ill-fated relationship, desire ultimately led to conquest and possession. Such an examination of the consequences of the conquest and a retrospective inventory of Russian thought and action is best exemplified by the final literary effort of one of Russia’s most beloved and influential novelists and social commentators, Leo Tolstoy.

Leo Nikolaevich Tolstoy (1828-1910) was born to Count Nikolai Ilyich Tolstoy and Mariya Nikolaevna (née Volkonskaya) on their now iconic estate, Yasnaya Polyana. He was the fourth of five children, and aside from losing his parents early in life, his childhood was relatively normal for an aristocratic youth of the time. Educated by tutors, he displayed “a gift
for languages and a fondness for literature,” though his time spent studying at Kazan University was “notably unsuccessful.” After deciding that a dissipated life spent gambling and womanizing was no longer satisfying, Tolstoy left Russia to join his brother Nikolai, an officer serving in the Caucasus. After reaching Starogladkovskaya, the town in which the Tolstoys were billeted, he applied to join his brother’s unit. On 3 January, 1852 the young volunteer was appointed Feierverker (bombardier) 4th Class, 4th Battery/20th Artillery Brigade. He later received a commission as an officer in 1854 when he was assigned to active duty as an ensign in the new war against Turkey. The time between his arrival at Starogladkovskaya and his departure for the Crimea provided him with combat experience that was “relentless, intense, and very dangerous,” but nevertheless inspirational for his later works about the war.\textsuperscript{142}

Tolstoy outgrew his youthful “moral disintegration” in the service, and by the 1860s and 70s had retired from the military and devoted himself to writing, estate management, marriage and fatherhood, and educating his serfs. The mid-1870s were characterized for Tolstoy by bouts of depression over the meaning of life, and by 1878, he had undergone what he considered a “conversion” experience. Following this turning point, he wrote and was refused publication for “Confession” in 1882. This work, followed by many others, was the beginning of Tolstoy’s devotion to “the propagation of his religious views.” This comprehensive moral philosophy—alive and known today as tolstostvo—expounded on topics as diverse as: monetary policy, philanthropy, poverty, vegetarianism, the evils of tobacco and alcohol, patriotism, military conscription, terrorism, and capital punishment. Unsurprisingly, the morality of war and a host of issues surrounding armed conflict also consumed the author.

Hadji Murat is very much a product of Tolstoy’s “conversion” literature and was the author’s final work.\(^\text{143}\) Though he largely abandoned his overt sermonizing style to craft this highly enjoyable narrative, the text retains Tolstoy’s critical tone and homilies about moral life to his readers. It is this pedagogical role and the author’s inherent attention to detail that led him to carefully research the characters and history of his tale. Pevear and Volokhonsky’s notes to the text point out several primary sources (personal correspondence and memoirs) that Tolstoy used to accurately convey a history of which he was not a part. For the remainder of the text he relied on his own experiences in the Caucasus as a young soldier and officer to guide and inform his writing.\(^\text{144}\) The veracity of his accounts is widely renowned, even among Chechens, who so often received less than equitable treatment in Russian literature. Contemporarily, Tolstoy “is seen almost an honorary Chechen.” The small Tolstoy Museum in Starogladkovskaya was the only Russian museum on Chechen-held territory not closed or destroyed during the Chechen Wars. His statue was similarly left unscathed.\(^\text{145}\) As further evidence of his self-appointed role as military historian and the accuracy of his accounts, Tolstoy’s “Sebastopol in December” earned him the moniker “the first war correspondent.”\(^\text{146}\)

More even than Marlinsky or Lermontov, Tolstoy’s writing serves as insight into the minds and rationale of the nobles, bureaucrats, and officers who shaped and persecuted the war in the Caucasus. Where the former were unwilling exiles, Tolstoy served in the Caucasus as a

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\(^{143}\) Leo Tolstoy, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, “Hadji Murat,” The Death of Ivan Ilyich and Other Stories (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009). The translators also provide an enormously helpful glossary of Caucasian mountaineer words from which I derive all my translations of the terms used in the text.

\(^{144}\) Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, “Notes: Hadji Murat,” The Death of Ivan Ilyich and Other Stories (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009), 497-500. The subjects of Tolstoy’s research include the writings of Vladimir Alexeevich Poltoratsky (1828-89), Franz Karlovich Klugenau (1791-1851), Mikhail Tarielovich Loris-Melikov (1825-88), Isif Ivanovich Karganov (no dates provided), and correspondence between Mikhail Semyonovich Vorontsov (1782-1856) and Alexander Ivanovich Chernyshov (1785-1857). There is also explicit reference in the notes to Tolstoy’s own diary, which strongly suggests the aged author took care to refresh his own memories.

\(^{145}\) Bartlett, Tolstoy: A Russian Life, 7.

\(^{146}\) Ibid., 115.
volunteer; Marlinsky and Lermontov died before leaving the isthmus, while Tolstoy lived long enough to question his participation in the war and how his government executed it. In her biography of Tolstoy, Rosamund Bartlett further corroborates the contrast between romantic accounts by Pushkin and Lermontov and Tolstoy’s own “highly realistic” accounts that bear the hint of a “nascent anti-militaristic stance.”

Tolstoy worked with archival material and an insider’s perspective afforded him by his privileged position as a member of an ancient and highly respected noble family and an author of unparalleled popularity at the time to craft *Hadji Murat*. By using historical materials and meticulous research to shape his critique of mid-19th century Russian society and politics, Tolstoy created a unique work that interrogates the psychology and causal linkage between Russian perceptions of Caucasian peoples and their commission of the war against them.

“Hadji Murat” is set in Chechnya in 1851. At this point in the Caucasian War, the Russians under Mikhail Semyonovich Vorontsov had implemented on a wide scale the systematic deforestation and *aul* destroying campaign that would ultimately brutalize the last Chechen and Dagestani resistance into defeat. Tolstoy’s archival research guided his outline of “the plan of Ermolov and Velyaminov” in a comically biting critique of Nicholas’s inflated sense of skill and self-importance. M.S. Vorontsov biographer Anthony Rhinelander corroborates Tolstoy’s research and conclusions in his own account of the war at this time. Vorontsov’s disastrous but expected failure to succeed in Nicholas’ ill-conceived Dargo campaign highlighted that tsar’s incompetence at martial strategic planning. Rhinelander notes that in an effort to save face and the conquest, Nicholas “declared himself satisfied…tacitly recognized his mistake and allowed Vorontsov henceforth to pursue the struggle against the highlanders in his own

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fashion.\textsuperscript{149} Although that tsar did not live to see it, Shamil surrendered in 1859, effectively ending concerted resistance to Russian domination. “Hadji Murat” serves as a recollection of Tolstoy’s own participation in these campaigns and an interrogation into the justification and commission of the final years of the Caucasian War.\textsuperscript{150}

Tolstoy depicts a Russian army convinced of its eventual victory, but nevertheless pervasively afraid of their enemy. When the advance scouts meet with Hadji Murat’s envoy to discuss his “coming over,” one soldier holds a broken conversation with the mountaineer. His comrades end his jocularity over the “nice talk” by pointing out that, had they met “face-to-face, he’d spill your guts for you.”\textsuperscript{151} This brusque reminder of their enemy’s deadly potential nods to Chechen stealth and efficacy at fighting in the forest. Whatever the Russian respect for mountaineer bravery, martial prowess, or their sense of wild freedom, to the common soldier fighting in the Caucasus in the mid-19\textsuperscript{th} century, they were still very much feral animals to fear in their own environment. This notion is corroborated when Prince Semyon Mikhailovich Vorontsov agrees to meet Hadji Murat and accept his pledge of allegiance to the Russian cause “at the place appointed for woodcutting.”\textsuperscript{152} Despite his numerical advantage—two companies on woodfelling duty and an escort, versus Hadji Murat and his five murids—Vorontsov’s fear of the naib’s (lieutenant’s) skill and reputation lead him to cautiously meet in a liminal zone where the Russian’s are progressively erasing the Chechen home advantage. Though the Russians had every seeming advantage, their fear drove them to disproportionate responses, which manifested itself in their strategy and tactics.

\textsuperscript{150} Nancy Dworsky, ““Hadji Murad”: A Summary and a Vision,” \textit{Novel: A Forum on Fiction} 8, no. 2 (1975), 140. “Tolstoy is, of course, not interested in military history for its own sake: he is interested in the morality of power.”
\textsuperscript{151} Tolstoy, “Hadji Murat,” 385.
\textsuperscript{152} \textit{Ibid.}, 389.
Tolstoy’s first nod to the brutality of the Russian campaign as he witnessed it in the early 1850s comes in the story’s exposition and is a recurring theme of the narrative. When the fugitive naib first appears, it is in an unnamed aul conversing with an old man about Russian actions in a nearby village. The old man curses the “Russian dogs” for burning the hay in Michitsky.  

Hay was a vital commodity in most Caucasian societies for feeding cattle and horses, and the mountainous terrain did not always lend itself to easy farming. Having survived decades of Russian military actions in the region, many communities were not in a comfortably stable setting that lent itself to effective agriculture. For the invaders to now target supplies like hay was an especially effective tactic for subjugating the stubborn resistance. As Tolstoy knew when he wrote this story over a half a century later, simply burning a community’s hay was not the worst of which the Russian army was capable.

Tolstoy recalls the total commitment to violence that characterized the final years of Russia’s conquest in the Caucasus with his rendition of the destruction of Sado’s aul. Sado, the man who sheltered Hadji Murat at the story’s beginning, flees to the mountains with his family at the Russians’ approach and returns after their retreat. Tolstoy notes that the soldiers were ordered to “burn grain, hay, and the saklyas (houses),” but added killing whatever livestock remained and looting the deserted village to their punitive actions. When Sado and the other Chechens return, they find Sado’s home and their aul totally destroyed:

the roof had fallen in, the door and posts…were burned down, and the inside was befouled….the apricot and cherry trees were broken and scorched, and, worst of all, the beehives had all been burned….The spring had been befouled, obviously on purpose, so that it was impossible to take water from it. The mosque was also befouled.

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153 Ibid., 377.  
154 Ibid., 448.  
155 Ibid., 450.
Such destruction was terrible enough, but the Russians’ worst crime was the murder of Sado’s young son, “the handsome boy with shining eyes,” who was “stabbed in the back with a bayonet.”\footnote{Ibid.}

Such wanton and complete destruction seems to exceed even the broad orders given to Butler and the raiding companies. The recurring act of “befouling” homes, wells, and holy places demonstrates the hatred and scorn Russian soldiers felt for their enemies. The all-eclipsing brutality of the Russian campaign is evident in that this raid is presumably representative in a conquest strategy that called for the systematic felling of Chechnya’s dense forests and destruction of Chechen villages. It was not in specific retaliation for a particular mountaineer raid, but was conducted “in fulfillment of these instructions from Nicholas…in January 1852.”\footnote{Ibid., 446.} The normalcy with which this attack is treated during and after the aul’s destruction by the Russian soldiers and officers adds a chilling testament to the equanimity with which they perpetrated such brutality.

Tolstoy introduces the eponymous character as “Shamil’s naib, famous for his exploits, who never rode out otherwise than with his guidon and an escort of dozens of murids.” Hadji Murat is dressed in the expected mountaineer garb: cherkeska, bashlyk and burka, armed with a rifle, pistol, and saber.\footnote{Ibid., 376-77.} His mount is repeatedly admired throughout the story, first by the Russian officer Butler, “a horse fancier,” and later by the Cossack escort from which the naib and his nukers (bodyguards) make their ill-fated escape at the story’s conclusion.\footnote{Ibid., 452, 481.} In short, he is the paragon of “mountaineer:” well dressed, well armed, and well mounted. Tolstoy’s
characterization of Hadji Murat immediately evokes the previous generations of authorship about the Caucasus and its highland resistance.

Readers might initially make a reasonable connection between less than admirable characters from earlier stories (e.g. Kazbich or Sultan Ahmet Khan) and Tolstoy’s subject, but Hadji Murat is a far more complex character. He represents Tolstoy’s understanding of the “real” mountaineers: proud, hard, martial men to be feared, but also highly spiritual, devoted to their families and people, and willing to live and die by their own strict moral code. Seen in this light, Hadji Murat is less a villain than the story’s hero and an exemplar of Tolstoy’s post-conversion morality. But more importantly than how Tolstoy viewed this historical figure is how his readers would perceive the man. Although the author often leaves Hadji Murat to charm readers with his personality and “childlike” smile, characters like Butler and Marya Dmitrievna—themselves portrayed as simple, admirable people—feel an instinctual affinity for the mountaineer. 160 Perhaps the most obvious trope used to cue readers into Hadji Murat’s worthiness is Tolstoy’s depiction of Prince Semyon Mikhailovich Vorontsov’s young stepson as the naib’s friend. 161 Bulka likes and trusts the mountaineer, enough to sit on his lap and protest at being removed, which strongly evokes biblical imagery of the lion and lamb. This analogy is one few Orthodox readers would have failed to appreciate.

Tolstoy left his readers with an ambivalent understanding of Hadji Murat and similarly shaded their perceptions of the people and polemic he represents. Tolstoy acknowledges the naib’s familiarity with and talent for committing violence, but he also outlines the code

160 David Herman explores Hadji Murat’s personality and psyche and his relationships with other characters in the novel and confirms an “averbal” affinity between Maria Dmitrievna and the work’s title character. David Herman, “Khadzhi Murat’s Silence,” Slavic Review 64, no. 1 (2005), 6-7.
according to which Hadji Murat takes violent action in revenge. Pevear and Volokhonsky’s notes reveal that for the sections of the story in which Hadji Murat shares his life story and motivations with the viceregal adjutant Mikhail Tarielovich Loris-Melikov (1825-88), “Tolstoy used Loris-Melikov’s actual transcript of his conversations with Hadji Murat.”\textsuperscript{162} This autobiographical conversation explains Hadji Murat’s duty to family, friends, and faith and his conflict between fulfilling his obligations to one over the other. It also explains, in the words of one of 19\textsuperscript{th} century Russia’s greatest enemies, why he fought the Empire. Half a century after Shamil’s defeat, Tolstoy’s research and memories created a narrative that conveyed what decades of romantic literature and one-dimensional analyses of their enemies could not: the mountaineers fought to defend their land and faith, their families, and their way of life.

Pushkin and his literary descendants dominated the “literary vogue” central to their compatriots’ understanding of the war on their southern border. Their visions of the Caucasian isthmus, the peoples who lived in the mountainous region, and the clash of cultures that accompanied Russia’s incursion into this insular, protected land not only documented their experiences but also informed and engendered similar images and preconceptions among their aristocratic audiences. Scholarship on the conquest underappreciated and grossly underestimated their influence over the historical developments, strategic and tactical decisions, and the home populace’s understanding of the war. Still, shaping the ideas that guided many of the younger, lower ranking officers in their daily prosecution of the war only addresses a portion of the impact that orientalist discourse had on the conquest. Such a pattern of thought and language also characterized the writings and perceptions of the strategists—the generals responsible for

\textsuperscript{162} Pevear and Volokhonsky, “Notes: Hadji Murat,” 498-99, note 12.
defeating the mountaineers and bringing glory and the path to Persia to the tsars. The most colorful, and arguably also the most influential, of these generals was Alexei Yermolov.

General of Infantry Alexei Petrovich Yermolov was born to a noble family on 4 June, 1774 and raised in Moscow. Before enrolling in Moscow State University’s boarding school program, he received an education at home from tutors. At this time in Russia it was customary for parents to enlist their children “at the time of their birth or infancy,” so that by the time they were old enough to serve actively, they would already have attained officer rank. By this loophole, Yermolov was a sergeant in the prestigious Life Guards at 14, a lieutenant at 17, and in 1793, after giving up his rank and billet in the Guards and serving a brief, unexciting tour in Moldavia against the Ottomans, entered the artillery and received the rank of captain of artillery. The captain was a scant 19 years old.163

Yermolov’s military career was periodically turbulent and occasionally borderline-treasonous, but more than anything else, it was long and spectacularly distinguished. According to Alexander Mikaberidze, former expert on international law for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, current professor of history at Louisiana Statue University at Shreveport, and the compiler and translator of Alexei Yermolov’s memoirs, the general was “a true legend….who overcame imperial disgrace and exile to command armies and conquer provinces.”164 From 1793 until early 1816, Yermolov dedicated himself to honorable service, seeking combat experience and promotions alike. While his martial skills were largely unimpeachable and his bravery recognized officially several times, his “brash” attitude and “independent character” earned him

163 Alexander Mikaberidze, “Introduction,” *The Czar’s General: The Memoirs of a Russian General in the Napoleonic Wars* (Welwyn Garden City, UK: Ravenhall Books, 2005), 10. The Life Guards regiments were the elite guard units to the tsar and both a proving ground and holding tank for Russia’s most aristocratic sons. Membership in this unit, originally founded by Peter the Great, was as close to a sinecure as military service got in imperial Russia.
a multitude of highly placed enemies. Thus his many promotions and advancements were often counter balanced by periods of official disgrace and punitive reassignment. Mikaberidze cites a conversation included in Alexander Yermolov’s biography of his illustrious ancestor that succinctly characterizes the General’s career in his own words: “I have either to retire or wait for war where I will be able to gain with my sword everything which I have lost.”\textsuperscript{165}

Following the general’s superior service in the war against Napoleon’s armies, Tsar Alexander I appointed Yermolov the commander-in-chief of Russian forces in Georgia, commander of the Independent Georgian Corps, and the Russian ambassador to Persia on April 21, 1816. These billets were an enormous responsibility in their own right, but his position at the crossroads of Russian political and military interests in the region also meant that Yermolov was responsible for “dealing with the north Caucasian mountaineers.”\textsuperscript{166} He served in this capacity for 11 years before the new tsar, Nicholas I, forced him to resign his post and then his commission in April and December, respectively, of 1827.\textsuperscript{167} Nicholas ultimately relented in 1831, restoring Yermolov’s commission and placing him on the State Council. When Russia entered the Crimean War (1853-56), the 79 year old general volunteered his services. In March 1856 Yermolov received news of the loss of Sebastopol, and “took it so close to heart that he suffered paralysis and partial loss of vision.” Yermolov never truly recovered from this shock.

\textsuperscript{166} \textit{Ibid.}, 23.
\textsuperscript{167} Nicholas’ dislike of Yermolov likely had several sources. When he dismissed the general in 1827, the tsar cited several of Yermolov’s professional shortcomings and failures in the south. The severity of his feelings is most often attributed to the rumors of Yermolov’s support for Constantine during the Decembrist Revolt that was Nicholas’ bloody welcome to the throne and to his memory of the general’s audacity at disagreeing with Alexander I over imprisoning officers who stumbled during the victorious Russian army’s entrance into Paris following their defeat of Napoleon. Nicholas, the autocrat of Russian autocrats, never seemed able to forget or forgive Yermolov’s independent spirit and critical tongue. See Mikaberidze’s biographical section on Yermolov for details of his relationship with Nicholas.
and he died April 23, 1861 after a long and unsuccessful battle with a resurgent fever he originally contracted in the Caucasus.\footnote{Ibid., 23-27.}

Yermolov’s descriptions of his war’s brutality and violence are often connected in his writings with orientalist descriptions of his enemies that justify or explain the general’s tactical and strategic decisions. In his commission of Russia’s conquest of the Caucasus, Yermolov diverged from his predecessors’ traditional preference for indirect rule and prosecuted a “strategy of systematic subjugation and expansion.” Yermolov biographer Aleksandr Kavtaradze cites a document from the Russian Central Military Historical Archive with convincing evidence of the general’s philosophy of conquest: “one execution can save hundreds of Russians from death and thousands of Muslims from treason.”\footnote{Aleksandr Kavtaridze, General A.P. Ermolov (Tyla: Priokskoe knihnoe izdatel’stvo, 1977), 76. He cites the Tsentralnyy gosudarstvennyy voenno-istoricheskiy arkhiv, BYA (likely, voenno-uchitenny arkhiv), f. 482, ed. Khr. 106, line 32. “\textit{odna kazn’ mogla cokhranit’ sotni russkikh ot gibeli i tuisiachi musl’man ot izmeni}.”} It was this philosophy and how the iconoclastic general carried out his war against the mountaineer resistance that first inspired the idea for this thesis.

Arriving in Tiflis (now Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia) on 22 October, Yermolov spent six months studying the country, its people, and the surrounding actors. In this time, he formulated and documented in his memoirs the initial impressions of the people that would guide his policy making for the next 11 years and earn him an immortal reputation in both Russia and the Caucasus. His assessments were largely bureaucratic in nature, dividing the districts in Georgia by their produce and wealth.\footnote{Alexander Yermolov, trans. Alexander Mikaberidze, “Governor of Georgia and War in Chechnya,” The Czar’s General: The Memoirs of a Russian General in the Napoleonic Wars (Welwyn Garden City, UK: Ravenhall Books, 2005), 222-23.} Although he praised the productive capacity of several regions under his control, when he described people—both individuals and groups—his language was less than positive. The Ossetians especially seem to have drawn his ire and are among the first in
his account to be described in overtly orientalist terms. Disparaging these recent converts to Orthodoxy, Yermolov expressed his hope that Christianity might cure them of their “brutal customs and inclinations to thievery.”\textsuperscript{171} This passage demonstrates the presence of two fundamental issues at stake in this thesis: the perception of indigenous custom as nothing more than violent banditry, and the role of identity—especially ethnic and religious identity—as a determining factor in the perceived level of civilization.

The significance of the religious identity of peoples in the Caucasus was intimately tied with the relationship between Orthodoxy and the State in imperial Russia. In his contribution to Edward Lazzerini and Daniel Brower’s \textit{Russia’s Orient}, historian Michael Khodarkovsky accents an interesting reciprocity to the relationship between Orthodox Russia and the various peoples it met on the periphery. He notes that “[t]he encounter with numerous non-Christian peoples crystalized Moscow’s self-image as an Orthodox Christian State.”\textsuperscript{172} Thus the Russians drew a heightened and distinct sense of self-identity in contrast to their southern neighbors on the basis of religious difference alone. This concept of self-definition provides the focus for Khodarkovsky’s essay. He proposes a “process of encounter, contact, and incorporation” as the formula by which this was accomplished.\textsuperscript{173} This was the basic system by which Russia—like many European empires of the time—not only gained territory, but also a stronger sense of self.

Unlike the Catholic Church in Rome, Russian Orthodoxy was uniquely tied and subordinated to the Russian state. What Tsar Alexis I began with the dismissal of Patriarch Nikon in 1667 and Peter I and Catherine II finished with the financial and bureaucratic crippling

\textsuperscript{171} Yermolov, “Governor of Georgia and War in Chechnya,” 222.
\textsuperscript{173} Khodarkovsky, “Ignoble Savages and Unfaithful Subjects,” 10.
of the institution was the utter subordination of the Orthodox Church to the tsarist government. This was certainly the case in the 19th century, even under such obsessively devout tsars as Alexander I and Nicholas I. Historian Nicholas Riasanovsky corroborates this in his seminal work *Nicholas I and Official Nationality in Russia*, positing that “[r]eligion was used to preach obedience to the emperor….Even the Church was effectively controlled by the state and generally did its bidding.”¹⁷⁴ During the reigns of Alexander and Nicholas, this marriage between the Church and State was very much an official, normalized aspect of imperial rule.

By virtue of this proximity, the Russian Orthodox Church often served not only as a key support mechanism for Russia’s tsars domestically, but abroad as well. Nicholas’ Minister of Education, Sergei Uvarov, published the first step in what became the policy of official nationality on April 2, 1833. He distilled this pedagogical program, which ultimately “reached beyond intellectual circles, lectures, and books” as the imperial cardinal rule for thirty years, from the three fundamental characteristics of the Russian people: “Orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationality.”¹⁷⁵ This “brief formula” dominated the Russian press and much of its other authorship, its intellectual and ideological debates, and even its foreign policy; it should not be forgotten, however, that it was first and foremost a *pedagogical instrument* to inculcate Russia’s noble youth with the appropriate values to prepare them for service to the tsars.

Also significant for the present discussion is Riasanovsky’s conclusion that the program was inextricably linked with Russian identity and defined how and why Nicholas ruled. For him, Orthodoxy was the “first principle of the government doctrine,” followed closely by

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¹⁷⁵ Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I and Official Nationality in Russia*, vii, 73.
subservience to the autocrat. Thus Riasanovsky explains that for Nicholas, “obedience was rated very high, originality very low.” This characterization of Nicholas’ rule helps explain his draconian response to continued and increasing recalcitrance on the part of his southern neighbors. In fateful conjunction with the despotism of the tsar’s rule, religious identity “indicated fundamental dividing lines” that afforded the emperor a simple, easily justified criterion by which he measured right and wrong, good and evil, and Russia and the enemy.

Thus Nicholas had the ideological basis—one rooted firmly in the very history and faith of Russia and two centuries of his family’s rule—to hold himself separate from and superior to the peoples of the Caucasus, to attempt their subjugation, and in the face of their resistance, punish them for their disobedience to God and his agent on earth, the Romanov Tsar. In turn, Yermolov’s service to “God’s agent” demanded that he punish those recalcitrant subjects under his control. As nominal converts and recidivist thieves, the Ossetes of Yermolov’s memoir must have seemed particularly culpable. Their obedience to the new governor was inconsistent at best, and as was so often the case throughout history, the only threat to God’s will on earth more dangerous than an infidel was a heretic. It is not surprising these people drew the ire of the “Czar’s general.”

Yermolov divided his descriptive memoir along geo-political lines of power, and having treated with the largely despicable but nevertheless pacified peoples “under our control,” he turned his pen to depicting the peoples caught between the two juggernauts of the Russian and Persian Empires. The first two groups to come under his scrutiny were the Zakubantsy, “a well-

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176 Ibid., 75, 83. See the first half of Chapter III for a fuller discussion of the link between this ideology and the Russian identity.
177 Ibid., 41.
178 Ibid., 84.
179 Riasanovsky explores the depth and virulence of Nicholas’ faith and that tsar’s perception that he was doing the work and “fighting the battle of God.” Ibid., 85.
known, martial and seldom quiet nation,” and the Kabardins, “the most courageous among the mountaineers…who often desperately resisted the Russians in bloody battles.”\(^\text{180}\) These initial descriptions are surprisingly benign, even positive, despite their overt references to these groups’ resistance to Russian interests in the region. This is probably a reflection of the period’s romantic paradox so prevalent among Russian officers of the time: they at once respected the martial character and devotion to freedom of the mountaineer while simultaneously prosecuting an imperialistic war to civilize and dominate them. General of Infantry Yermolov, similarly notorious for his fierce martial character and iconoclastic polemics with the Russian state, no doubt saw some of himself in these independent-minded, fierce warriors. This probable perception of shared attributes would more than explain his scorn for the various Georgian Christians living peaceably under his regency and thinly disguised sympathy and respect for the mountaineers.

Despite this empathy, identity again becomes the focus of Yermolov’s memoirs as he explains the genesis of the conflict. He notes in particular that the Karbardins “were pagans less than 100 years ago,” and due largely to Russian bureaucratic and clerical indifference, Islam was “allowed…to spread there.” This move proved fateful, as these people, whom Yermolov alleges were long allies of Russia, soon grew “hostile [and] unanimously resolved to defend their faith.”\(^\text{181}\) This passage magnifies the impact of religious affiliation on the nature of the conquest. Beyond discursive power structures in which Asian Christians were lesser men of faith than their “European” counterparts from Russia, this discussion casts the Karbardin’s religious identity as the genitive catalyst for the violence in the region. Yermolov reserves some blame for the incompetence of his predecessors, especially General Rtischev, who attempted a large-scale

\(^{180}\) Yermolov, “Governor of Georgia and War in Chechnya,” 226.

\(^{181}\) Ibid., 226-27.
conquest of the Karbardins by bribery. Though this tactic had a long history in the region and would see continued use, Yermolov acerbically derides Rtischev’s failure for selecting a “gang…of vagabonds” for his grand application of the technique. These men accepted their bribes, medals, and ranks, returned to Karbarda, and the “[r]aids, murders, and pillaging went on.”\textsuperscript{182}

Unlike the Karbardins, whose courage and historical relationship with Russia Yermolov could admire, the Chechens engendered nothing but vitriolic hatred in the general. He labels Chechens “the most evil of all the brigands attacking the Line” and Chechnya “the nest of all brigands.” The heavily forested land became a refuge for “the scum of any fleeing criminals,” who in turn served as the Chechens’ “accomplices…who were willing to participate in their pillages.”\textsuperscript{183} Yermolov’s memoir does not reveal any of the ambivalence that characterized his description of the various Georgian Christians or Karbardans—the Chechens and their “accomplices” were pure, irredeemable criminals in his mind. There is no mention of their martial prowess or courage, nor any admission of Russian complicity in the prolonged struggle. For Yermolov, Chechnya was nothing more than a land of “impassable woods” filled with dangerous criminals.

Having committed his conclusions about the character of the peoples under his nominal rule to the first pages of his memoir, Yermolov turned to diarizing his policies and actions in the Caucasus. He first discharged his duty as the Ambassador to Persia with a six-month diplomatic tour of that empire. During this absence, his acting deputy in Georgia died and the mountaineer resistance surged. On his return, he noted that “evil designs were afoot in Daghestan,” in which

\textsuperscript{182}Ibid., 227.  
\textsuperscript{183}Ibid., 228.
rulers from that nation, Avaria, and Chechnya were complicit. He notes that along the Line, “the Chechens committed most of the disturbances and brigandage.” In response to his fears of unrest in Daghestan and the very real attacks by the Chechens, Yermolov began preparations for an incursion into Chechnya and an advance to the Caucasian Line.\textsuperscript{184} This section highlights the connections in Yermolov’s mind between his perceptions of mountaineer resistance and his own strategic and tactical decisions.

His April 1818 expedition demonstrated the complexity of the military situation along the Line. A tour of the forts and Cossack stanitsi along the Line provided further evidence of the incompetence of his predecessors as revealed in the general state of disrepair in which he found the right of the Line.\textsuperscript{185} This infrastructural weakness was exacerbated in Yermolov’s estimation by a standing policy prohibiting the pursuit of raiders back across the Kuban River. Seeing that “nothing could be done to strengthen the [Line] and prevent the attacks,” Yermolov reversed this policy.\textsuperscript{186} On the surface this seems a sound strategic decision, but the general’s memoir betrays contributing factors to this choice.

Yermolov writes that Russian forces “tended to act cautiously” in combating the Zakubantsi raids because of their “close connection” with the Karbardans and Chechens. As a result,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{184} \textit{Ibid.}, 229-30.
\item \textsuperscript{185} His memoir mentions that some forts were too small to house the troops necessary for a real expedition and some were dangerously constructed entirely of wood. One—Fort St. Nikolas, which had been built by the same General Rtischev who engineered the laughably ineffective Karbardan good-will deputation—flooded each year with the Kuban so badly that water “poured through the windows into the barracks.” Due to the unacceptably high morbidity and death rates at this fort, Yermolov ordered its immediate destruction. (\textit{Ibid.}, 231)
\item \textsuperscript{186} \textit{Ibid.}, 231.
\end{itemize}
The locals knew about this restraint and committed their crimes with greater impudence; there were instances when returning from a raid, the locals halted as soon as they crossed the border and taunted our pursuing troops by parading their pillage in front of them.187

That the Russian Imperial Army felt compelled to “act cautiously” in pursuing and punishing raids on their forts and settlements is an enormous admission. Though he words it carefully and with restraint, Yermolov’s exploration of this policy and the justification behind it reveals the terrifying reputation with which they invested the mountaineers. It is even more striking that raiders could “impudently…parade their pillage” in front of their victims and leave unscathed. This speaks to the degree of fear the invading forces felt—it was, quite literally, debilitating. To fight this fear and the increasing brazenness with which the Zakubantsy conducted their raids, Yermolov abolished the policy of not pursuing beyond the Kuban, and instead mandated their pursuit. This reversal established, as he names it, “a permanent state of conflict with these people” in order to end their incessant, brazen brigandage. Tellingly, his account ends not with mention of the efficacy of this reversal, but with Yermolov’s hope that his men would not miss an opportunity to exact “vengeance.”188

Yermolov continues his memoirs with an account of his initial encampment at Chervlennaia—the crossing near the site that would become the terrible Fort Grozny—and his interactions with the remaining Chechen locals. On meeting with the “elders from all the major settlements,” Yermolov explained to them—and to posterity as well—that he was not there to:

punish them for old transgressions but rather to request that no crimes be committed in the future; that to show their consent, they must renew their old oath of obedience and return any prisoners they still held in captivity.189

Yermolov continues, explaining that the chief point of contention in the negotiations was over the release of Russian hostages, and that the “most notorious brigands” among the Chechens

187 Ibid.
188 Ibid.
189 Ibid., 232.
were “agitating against [the Russians].”\footnote{Ibid., 232-33.} An earlier passage betrays the double standard by which Yermolov operated when he made these demands: to assure the cooperation of the “peaceful” Chechen villagers, the general “took hostages from their villages.”\footnote{Ibid., 232.}

Yermolov’s description of his establishment of Fort Grozny in the summer of 1818 displays the hypocritical tendency his responses to mountaineer aggression often took. His dogged insistence on and seemingly equal Chechen resistance to returning prisoners highlights the importance of captive figures in the conflict. Although his memoir does not say so explicitly, Russian pride must have resented the capture and consequent enslavement of their soldiers and officers by savages and brigands. Yermolov’s pronounced affection for his troops and fierce loyalty to Russia would have magnified his reaction. Yet to combat this deplorable tactic, which often manifested as the capture of non-combatants and usually resulted in an indigenous form of slavery, Yermolov resorted to essentially the same crime. Similarly, Yermolov’s response to received intelligence about an imminent Chechen-Lezghin attack on a Russian convoy was to escort the supply train to the fort and then pursue the attacking forces. Colonel Vel’iaminov chased them to Achaga aul, where the Russian artillery “acted with great success,” and “[t]he villagers came out [of the aul] pleading for mercy.”\footnote{Ibid., 234-35.} Although in this instance Colonel Vel’iaminov “could not ignore their pleas” and stopped short of butchering all occupants of the village, this was not the standard by which Yermolov and his commanders normally operated. His memoir recounts his orders to Major General Pestel to attack another village, Beshly, and:

\begin{quote}
Even if the size of the town prevented us from razing it, we would still be able to inflict considerable damage with our artillery. We should then seize the moment to drive off the horses
\end{quote}

\footnote{Ibid., 234-35.}
and cattle since their loss would be more damaging as they constitute the principal wealth of the locals.\textsuperscript{193}

After taking Beshly and holding it for some time, Pestel’s unit was soon surrounded by “30,000 troops from Daghestan.” After fierce fighting inflicted “appalling losses” on the Dagestanis with their canister shot and artillery, Pestel retook the town, and per Yermolov’s orders, “eradicate[d] this old nest of robbers and traitors.”\textsuperscript{194}

The most explicit and horrifying description of the brutality of Russian punitive raids comes at the close of Yermolov’s memoirs in his recollection of the defeat of Dady Urt on the Terek River:

many of the inhabitants [of Dady Urt] killed their wives to avoid being captured….\[w\]e captured approximately 140 women and children who were spared by our soldiers…[h]owever, many more were massacred or died in their homes because of artillery and fires.\textsuperscript{195}

Yermolov follows this passage with mention that “[m]any women attacked our soldiers with daggers” and admits that in the “savage fighting…anyone with weapons in hand was slaughtered.”\textsuperscript{196} This renders his contention that the fires and explosions were responsible for the deaths of women and children highly unbelievable. It is interesting to note that Yermolov uses terms like “savage,” “massacre,” and “slaughtered” to describe the actions of his troops. Such terminology was usually reserved for entries about his enemies and not his own men. It is possible this indicates his evaluation that Dady Urt and the slaughter of people he traditionally viewed as non-combatants was far from the “civilized” warfare to which he aspired. Regardless of his martial preferences, the general’s troops massacred men, women, and children and completely wiped Dady Urt and its people from the hillsides of Chechnya. This battle and the

\textsuperscript{193} Ibid., 236.
\textsuperscript{194} Ibid., 238.
\textsuperscript{195} Ibid., 241.
\textsuperscript{196} Ibid.
pervasive mimicry of such tactics cast Russian raids in Chechnya and elsewhere in a genocidal cast.

Such accounts betray Russian employment of similar measures against those they officially categorized as deplorable. In their outrage at the regular capture of Russian prisoners, Russian commanders took “hostages” to ensure good behavior or leverage desperate communities. Out of fear of mountaineer raids, Russian commanders marched on Caucasian villages in punitive expeditions that rendered at least as much destruction as those to which they responded. Despite his hateful characterizations of the Chechens as “thieves” and “brigands,” Yermolov authorized the theft of horses and cattle on such a grand scale as to cripple indigenous economies and starve the resistance into submission.\(^{197}\) Yermolov confesses that after his army defeated Tramov, “[the] village was razed to the ground, some 2,000 horses and all the cattle were seized and the residents were only allowed to take their wives and children.”\(^{198}\) This account lends an ironic account to a future entry in which Yermolov ordered punitive expeditions against the Chechens “who were continuously engaged in brigandage, and especially the residents of Kachkalyk, who had seized our horses.”\(^{199}\) That the citizens of Tramov were allowed to escape with only their wives and children strongly suggests that Russian troops entering the city to burn it were afforded the opportunity to loot the abandoned homes before setting the fires. Though not as pervasively debilitating as the destruction and theft of livestock, looting is more personal and seems proof of Russian “brigandage.”


\(^{198}\) Yermolov, “Governor of Georgia and War in Chechnya,” 236.

Brutal, often merciless fighting and destructive punitive campaigns would characterize Russian strategy in the Caucasus for the next four decades until the defeat of Imam Shamil and the Chechen-Dagestani resistance in the Caucasian War. Yermolov’s memoir is replete with characterizations of Caucasian peoples as indolent drunks, savages, criminals, and brigands. It also contains his own euphemistic or unconscious admission of culpability in the same crimes that he so deplored in his enemies. Yermolov’s memoir consistently demonstrates the double standard by which Russian forces felt they had to operate in their “civilizing” mission in the south: to combat and end “mountaineer savagery,” the Russians became savages themselves.

General Yermolov was officially relieved of his duties in the Caucasus on April 9, 1827 by decree of the new emperor. General Ivan Paskevich replaced him, somewhat prematurely to Nicholas’ orders and without the prescribed diplomacy and tact such a replacement demanded. He did this with the support of the man Nicholas assigned to mediate the transition and reconcile the squabbling generals, Chief of Staff General Ivan Ivanovich Diebitch.200 In a coincidence rendered strangely common by the convoluted and extensive interrelationships of the Russian nobility that comprised the officer ranks, General Diebitch’s nephew is the final officer whose writings offer insight into the Russian prosecution of their war in the Caucasus, Baron Tornau.

Baron Fedor Fedorovich Tornau, nephew of Chief of Staff Diebitch, was born in 1810 to an artillery colonel and member of the Baltic Kurland Baron line. Like Pushkin, he was educated in the Lycée, where he received the best education Russia could offer at the time. On graduation, he entered the military, and received his commission in 1828. Despite his uncle’s efforts to shelter and sponsor him with service in Poland, Tornau desired more kinetic military

experience and requested a transfer to the Caucasus. In April 1832, Tornau arrived in Tiflis and began a twelve-year term of service in the Caucasus. Many of his early assignments were bureaucratic in nature; his education, literacy, and attention to detail—not to mention a highly ranked and strategically positioned uncle—all lent themselves to keeping Tornau safely ensconced in an office. However, these same characteristics and the young officer’s discerning eye also recommended him for a special reconnaissance mission. In 1835, Baron Tornau dressed in the accoutrements of a Circassian and, along with his indigenous guides, traveled incognito along the Black Sea coast to reconnoiter that shoreline for his state. These travels provided the young man with extensive interaction with the indigenous populations along the Left Flank and the experiences and materials to compose his memoir.  

Tornau’s memoir only partially reflects this thesis’ argument that Russians described their enemies using the orientalist lingua franca that characterized European discussion of those people they encountered at the peripheries of their empires. At first mention, Tornau describes “Circassians” who lived under nominal Russian control. Later, “Circassians” is used to identify the Cossacks’ enemies in their protracted, internecine war. In the first instance, their state of subjectivity, and presumably the subsequent resentment Tornau only marginally disguises in his description of their character, both seem likely causes for his use of the inclusive if not entirely precise label “Circassian.” Though of course labeling each distinct group in a region famous for its diversity and multitude of tiny, insular communities of unique peoples and

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202 Tornau, Vospominaniia Kavkavskovo Ofitsera, 1.
languages is an enormous undertaking, it does not seem likely that facility of conversation was Tornau’s criterion for giving groups their names in the face of his precision in the preceding sentence. Rather, his “Circassians” would immediately fall under the same analytical category Pushkin created for his “Circassians.” Serving long after Pushkin’s work became wildly popular among the nobility, Tornau’s labeling scheme evoked immediate associations and connotations of his enemies’ violence based on literary tradition; it legitimized his enemies and made them worthy of his enmity. In the second instance, however, Tornau delineates the aggressors in a complex conflict in binary terms: Cossacks against Circassians.

In the early sections of his memoir, Tornau lists three peoples living near his fortress at Prochniy Okop (the “Rugged Trench,” a fortress in the line of the Kuban River cordon). His description of the enemy is unique among first-hand accounts of the conquest in that he takes care to list these groups as distinct entities, even in the violent context of their relationship with the Russians. More often, in both popular literature and personal writings of this time, identifying the enemies of Russia required but one, expansive label onto which the authors could then hang charged descriptors like “violent,” “savage,” “bestial,” and “merciless.” These familiar catch-all terms, Abrek (which in contemporary Russian is synonymous with bandit or thief, though originally it referenced people who lived along the Abrek River), highlander/mountaineer, Circassian, and of course, Tatar, all make appearances in Tornau’s memoir. Based on this nuance, one could even say that Tornau was progressive for his time and the body politic he represented. His attention to specificity in describing ethnic groups serves as a valuable contrast against which Tornau’s otherwise pervasive use of orientalist discourse seems even more significant and widespread.

203 Ibid.
Tornau corroborated the violent, warlike reputation of peoples of the Caucasus early in the second portion of his memoir. In describing the groups living around Prochniy Okop, he listed the Abadzekhs, Shapsugs, and Natukhais—all of whom “devote themselves to permanent, merciless war” with the Russians. Tornau dispatches his interest in the differences among locals as quickly as he introduces it; nearby, other, undistinguished “Circassians” (those without individual identity or group designations) accepted Russian suzerainty only because it preserved their access to village pastures. Reading the memoir, one can sense Tornau’s scorn for such meek, self-interested allies, though the “Circassians’” undoubted resentment at their position also impresses itself on readers. Of greater concern to his readers, particularly his comrades in the Caucasian Corps, was the determination of these enemies who waged this “permanent, merciless war.” Tornau relates that the raids were so relentless that “[t]oday Cossacks can kill a party of Abreks to the last man, and tomorrow a different band sneaks into our domain almost on the very path of their dead comrades.” The frequency of such attacks would have worn down the most determined defense; more significantly, they would have caused enormous psychological harm. Living in constant fear of attack could not have been easy to survive without sustaining significant psychological trauma. Tornau also betrays the Russians’ dogged dispatch of such raiding parties. Despite their exhaustion, the Cossacks in this passage were winning the war of attrition.

The sustained anxiety was even more detrimental and invasive in the face of *djigit* unpredictability, stealth, and determination. Tornau wrote that “[t]he mountaineer raids on our borders increased and with such insolent character that the Cossacks could not, in the end, find

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204 *Ibid.*, 2. “posvyativ sebya na postoyannuyu, besposchadnuyu voinvu s name”
205 *Ibid.*, “Sevodnia kazakam udayatsia perebit partiyu abrekov do poslednevo cheloveka, a zavtra drugaia whaika probiraetcia nashi predelui pochti po sledam svoikh pogibshikh tovarishei.”
safety in their own villages.”206 In every sense of the word, the mountaineers terrorized Cossack settlements, outposts, and forts. To be deprived of all safe havens, even of one’s home, must have been an enormous emotional blow for the Cossacks. Their roles as border guards and advance wave civilizers already lent a harsh and dangerous cast to their everyday lives. That they could not even relax their vigilance in the villages for fear of murder, kidnap, or loss of the livestock that made their existence possible undoubtedly contributed to the vehemence of the conflict. As Tornau noted:

The engagements of our line Cossacks with the mountaineers were ruthless: both sides fought under the influence of personal feelings of hatred and revenge for dead brothers, for stolen property, and kidnapped wives and children.207

No matter the ferocity or reciprocal savagery of the Cossacks’ retaliation, nothing in Tornau’s experience served to curb the incessant attacks. Russian inability to aggressively cope with the mountaineer onslaught while living or serving in a foreign land, surrounded by a population that was temporarily subdued at best and openly hostile at worst, created a psychological environment of fear and helplessness. That the Russians perceived themselves as victims of such a brutal campaign in many ways outstripped the reality of the losses incurred, but this only served to further mythologize the mountaineer raid.

Describing these devastating attacks on Cossack settlements and Russian camps, Tornau listed the crimes for which the Caucasian resistance became infamous. The raiders would descend from the mountains and break through the Line. Once past the forts and Cossack sentry posts, they “burned Russian [almost exclusively Cossack] homes, stole horses and cattle, killed

206 Ibid., 3. “Nabegi gortsev na nashi granitsui umnozhilis’ i prinyali stol’ derzkiy kharaker, chto kazaki ne nakhodili, nakonets, bezopasnosti posredi svoikh stanitz.”
207 Ibid., 16. “Skhvatki nashikh lineinuikh kazakov s gortsami buili besposchadnui: obe storonui dralis’ pod vlianiem chuvstva lichnoi nenavisti i mschenia za ubituiikh brat’ev, za razgrablennoe imuschestvo, za pokhischennuikh zhyon i detei.”
every man they met, and kidnapped children and women.” Tornau recounted that the fighting was carried out:

With all the ferocity of a blood feud. Neither the Cossacks nor the Cherkess [Circassians] requested or offered mercy. There was no means, no ruse, no perfidious deception considered impermissible for Circassians when it came to killing Russians.208

At first glance, these tactics seem like open commissions of total war. For Tornau, such behavior was intrinsically warlike and almost identical in nature to the punitive raids carried out on Caucasian auls the Russian army under Yermolov and Vorontsov, but he viewed it through an alien cultural lens and inevitably misunderstood the full importance and implications of the raids. To the indigenous population, such tactics were an ancient way of life in which “pillaging provided the economic base” in the isolated and rugged Caucasian isthmus.209

The “pillaging” Layton references is the Caucasian cultural phenomena of *djigitirovka*. Marlinsky describes it as a “horse race accompanied by various trials of boldness and strength….an imitation of Asiatic combat.”210 Lermontov’s Maxim Maximych is less kind, describing a *djigit* display as “some filthy tramp on a miserable broken-down hack ready to show off and play the fool to amuse the company.”211 In essence, it is the almost-ritualized form of banditry which canonized bravery, skill with the horse, sword, musket, and knife, and the acquisition of property—human and object alike—by cunning, stealth, and violence. Layton’s assessment that the mountaineers lived by their income from such banditry is borne out in primary sources. Even the uncharitable Yermolov, a fierce detractor of mountaineers and

208 Tornau, Vospominaniiia Kavkavskovo Ofitsera, 2. “zhgli russkie doma, ugonyali skot i loshadei, ubivali kazhdovo vstrechnovo, zakhvativali detei i zhenschin” “so vem ozhestocheniem krovnoi narodnoi vrazhd. Hi kazaki, ni cherkesi nikogda ne prosily i ne davali poschadi. Ne bulo ni sredstva, ni khitrosti, ni verolomnovo obmana, schitavshikhcya nedozvolennemu dlya cherkesa, kogda delo shlo ubit russkovo”
especially Chechens, admitted that lack of productive options drove the *djigit* to seek “a means of subsistence through pillage and brigandage.”\(^{212}\)

Tornau’s understanding of such behavior as intrinsically *warlike* is problematized both by the traditional nature and diverse purposes of such violence. Posterity cannot take his analysis at face value, for while *djigit* raids served with deadly efficacy as the indigenous population’s main venue of resistance to the Russian presence, they were at the same time a fundamental means of subsistence and a way of life. Regardless of the intent behind such raids, from his vantage point, Tornau’s anxiety and revulsion no doubt seemed well warranted; living in constant fear of an attack by men of this martial caliber must have strained nerves of even the most stalwart and stoic of Russian soldiers.

It was this strain and the perception that each fort or *stanitsa* in the Line was alone and surrounded by bloodthirsty enemies that precipitated the brutal tactics by which the conquest was gradually effected. Tornau noted that “[t]his type of war demanded special caution and eternal readiness to repel the enemy,” and that such vigilance “pushed our border guard forces to their limits.”\(^{213}\) This passage openly recognizes the continuous effort and enormous cost to the weary defenders to secure Russian communities from mountaineer attacks. By Tornau’s own admission, the results were less than perfect and at best established a siege-like stagnated conflict in which neither side gained the advantage and both suffered losses of attrition. For the empire to make any headway in conquering the resistance, they had to venture outside their fortifications. Tornau, and the commanders his voice represents, recognized this necessity.

\(^{212}\) Yermolov, *The Czar’s General*, 228.

\(^{213}\) Tornau, *Vospominaniia Kavkavskovo Ofitsera*, 3. “Podobno roda boina trebovala osoboi ostorozhnosti i vechnoi gotovnosti k otrazheniyu nepriatelia na vcem protiazhenii nashei kordonnoi lini”
To break this stalemate and the indigenous population’s will to resist, Russian officers contemplated and utilized tactics designed to overwhelm even their seemingly indomitable enemies. Tornau’s memoir conveys the desperation of the situation and the seemingly inevitable choice to become more monstrous than the raiders they feared. In keeping with official nationality and his own devotion, Tsar Nicholas frequently exhorted his troops to “be humane in war, especially in their dealings with the population of occupied territories….Christian principles were not to be forgotten even in combat.”

Tornau’s memoir suggests the empire failed in initial efforts to carry out a more Christian, moral war in the Caucasus, as he states, “On our side, the government tried to pacify the mountaineers, depriving them of the ability to harm us.”

This statement has twofold ideological significance in this conflict. On a level widely recognizable to Western intellectualism, this is a predicate for justifying the war as a whole and specifically the Russians’ morally ambiguous tactical decisions. If peaceful means—that is, those measures used to “pacify” recalcitrant communities—failed, then the empire was left with little choice but to act more stringently. Such paternalistic evaluations of their cause and characterizations of the peoples of the Caucasus as their disobedient children echo the orientalist discourse Said analyzed.

That “pacification” measures often consisted of hostage taking, confiscation or destruction of livestock, appropriating grain and hay stores, and even attacking villages preemptively somewhat complicates this reading. That said, such measures were indeed kind compared to the wholesale brutality of retaliatory raids like that on Dady Urt, which Yermolov describes in his memoir. As a result of this failure to “pacify” the mountaineers, Tornau notes that:

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214 Riasanovsky, Nicholas I and Official Nationality in Russia, 85-86.
215 Tornau, Vospominaniia Kavkaskovo Ofitsera, 16. “S nashei storonui pravitel’stvo staralos’ usmirit’ gortsev, otnimaia y nikh sposobui vredit nam”
216 For more on the parent-children relationship that so strongly characterized the reign of Nicholas and his connection with his subject, see Riasanovsky, Official Nationality in Russia, esp. 125-140.
The only means to stop, if slightly, the rapacious endeavors of the mountaineers, consist, undoubtedly, in offensive operations and punitive raids on their auls. Only concern for their own families and herds, supported by constant alertness on our part could distract from our borders their indefatigable craving for plunder and military action.217

In the end, Tornau and the other officers who drafted and executed military policy in the isthmus surrendered to what was, in their view, the inevitable application of devastating and overwhelming force. In the perception of these men, their battle-hardened Cossack guards were “exhausted,” as were their gentle Christian half-measures and alternate options. In the end, Nicholas’ dream of acquiring the Caucasus with one great, decisive battle was shattered, and his military commanders on the ground had to implement their more pragmatic plans for the conquest. In consequence, these officers instituted the woodfelling campaigns and systematic raids on villages that would inspire and then crush Imam Shamil’s resistance.218 He was the last of Russia’s great 19th century enemies and his capture and surrender signaled the end of widespread and effective resistance to Russia’s advance.219

Defining strict relationships of causality—or more simply, ascribing blame—in any conflict is a complicated and delicate task. All too often, answering the seemingly simple questions of who started the fighting or who is to blame for underlying iniquities proves illusive


218 Thomas Barrett succinctly summarizes the strategy of the Russian army that “destroyed villages, clear-cut forests, burned fields and gardens, killed resisters, and pushed many people farther south and farther into the mountains.” Barret, “Crossing Boundaries,” 237.

219 For more on Shamil’s war with Russia and superior discussion on the details of the war, see Baddeley, Conquest of the Caucasus; Gammer, The Lone Wolf and the Bear; and Gammer, Muslim Resistance to the Tsar: Shamil and the Conquest of Chechnya and Daghestan.
or impossible. In attempting a similar task in the context of Russia’s prolonged, painful conquest of the Caucasian isthmus, this thesis can really only conclusively demonstrate that both sides genuinely feared the other and each fought with a fierce determination to survive the clash of the Orthodox juggernaut with the independent enclaves of Transcaucasia.

This clash of cultures is largely non-unique from others throughout history in which conflicting values and the dogged pursuit of self-interest superseded the involved parties’ capacity for empathy and mutual respect. The cultural diversity, historical traditions of independence, and burgeoning role of Islam in the Caucasus all made the indigenous population particularly antagonistic to invasion by strongly Orthodox Russian imperial troops. The coincidence of these factors with romantic literature and the militaristic nationalism of Russia made the 19th century conquest one strongly charged with polemical language: differences were easy to find and disparage in the other. Last, but certainly not least, politics on the world stage and the rise of high imperialism across Europe increased the stakes of the conflict in this relatively tiny part of the globe. Though the Russians were busy fighting village by village in Chechnya and Dagestan, their efforts were part of a larger war to gain and hold advantage over the Ottoman Empire and in relation to the powers of Western Europe. These and a host of other contributing factors resulted in the conquest as we know it. Trying to piece together a comprehensive picture of the conflict is, to say the least, intimidating.

Still, this thesis examined several key factors that help explain why the conflict manifested as it did. From the early part of the century and the works of Yermolov and Pushkin, through the intervening decades to Tolstoy’s term of service and his retrospective on the end of the Caucasian War, literature about the conquest by Russian officers as well as those officers’ own memoirs demonstrates the pervasive use of orientalist language to describe their enemies.
As authors reached out to a desperately curious Russian audience and soldiers recounted their experiences in war, men like Marlinsky and Lermontov enshrined images of saber-wielding *djigiti* in the hearts and minds of their readers. Many of these readers were the young men who would ultimately serve in the Caucasus as officers prosecuting the same war. Like Lermontov and Dmitri Olenin in Tolstoy’s “The Cossacks,” aristocratic youth flocked to the Caucasus with specific expectations for the land, war, and women. Also like Olenin, as officers, these men made decisions that shaped their experience of the war. It is not surprising or unexpected that some would then shape “their” war to reflect such expectations and preconceived notions. Whether they did this knowingly or subconsciously in the confusion of war feels irrelevant when examined next to the consequences.

Through all their characterizations of the Caucasian peoples and the mountaineer resistance as savagely sub-human, the men who waged the war for Russia took on many of these same characteristics they projected on their enemies. Yermolov spared few opportunities to curse the Chechens for being thieves and brigands, and yet he spent eleven years conducting punitive raids and stealing or driving off the livestock by which the natives lived. He wrote of the debilitating fear in which Russians held their enemies, then promised in his most famous quotation that:

> The terror of my name should guard our frontiers more potently than chains of fortresses, that my word should be for the native a law more inevitable than death. Condescension in the eyes of Asiatics is a sign of weakness, and out of pure humanity I am inexorably severe.

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220 Leo Tolstoy, trans. David McDuff, “The Cossacks,” *The Cossacks and Other Stories* (New York: Penguin, 2006). “The Cossacks” is a coming of age story in which a disenchanted young noble from St Peterburg requests service in the Caucasus. He comes to respect the genuine, simple Cossacks, their martial prowess, and the strength of their mountaineer enemies. It is also one of Tolstoy’s first critiques of the war as it mentions brutal details of Russian/Cossack raids on the *auls* and the bestial nature of man in war.

Tornau decried the unrelenting “insolence” and savagery of Caucasian raids, but when reading Yermolov’s description of the Russian raid on Dady Urt, it is hard to imagine greater destruction or cruelty. Tornau’s memoir offers an apparent attempt at objectivity when he admits that “both sides” fought this war like a blood feud. Presumably then, all were culpable in the employment of the merciless tactics that cast their shadow over his account of the war.

In a fascinating and evocative development, The New York Times’ Ellen Barry reported on March 16, 2013 that Russian president Vladimir Putin resurrected the Cossacks as a non-police law enforcement body. As part of his developing “conservative, nationalist ideology… Cossacks have emerged as a kind of mascot.” Barry explains that “on Russia’s southern flank, the Cossack revival is more than an idea.” The government in Stavropol did more than grant the Cossack regiment increasing powers of law enforcement, it also asked them to “stem an influx of ethnic minorities, mainly Muslims from the Caucasus.” The head of security for the Terek Cossack Army, Staff Captain Vadim Stadnikov, told Barry that the Cossacks’ familiarity and history of cohabitation with “them” makes the Cossacks especially well suited to the job. He added that “[t]hey respect strength here.”

The remainder of the article is replete with language sharply dividing Slavic Russians from the influx of foreigners, expressions of consternation about the changing ethnic composition of steppe cities, and fear of Caucasian youth “behaving too freely.” One man likened the influx of Muslims to a man cuckolding and slapping you during his visit; another compared the influx of foreigners and their cultural differences to a metastasized cancer. Irrespective of the analogy, in each case the solution to the crisis are Cossack guard patrols.

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Russians living on the nation’s periphery turn to these legend-made-flesh because of their history and reputation. Advocates of this process in Stavropol point out that such measures work because, even among a foreign Muslim population, there is a seemingly universal recognition of this history and an understanding that the Cossacks are not bound by law and can mete out their own harsh punishments without fear of official censure.

Barry contextualizes her article with a reference to Tolstoy’s “The Cossacks,” noting that he:

Set it near present-day Stavropol, where the Terek River divided the Muslim-populated mountains from the steppes, which were Cossack country. In a scene taught to generations of schoolchildren, a young Cossack spots a Chechen swimming across the Terek disguised as a log and shoots him.”

Tolstoy clearly drew this imagery from Pushkin’s “The Prisoner of the Caucasus,” though he chose instead to author a Russian victory to portray the callous violence of which the Cossacks were equally culpable. Just as clearly, Barry’s article highlights the universal popularity and pedagogical utility of these stories to “generations of schoolchildren.” Finally, this text reveals the persistent significance of physical and cultural divides along Russia’s southern borders. Barry notes that “[t]he notion of an ethnic dividing line is widely accepted today,” but that demographic shifts on the steppe are increasingly challenging the predominance of Russia’s southern Slavs. This tension between peoples, faiths, and cultures periodically lays quiescent, but the need for a divide—that symbolic river dividing light from dark—will survive as long as long as liminal peoples fear the other side. Barry interviewed Chieftain of the Romanov Cossacks Boris Pronin about the need for the Cossacks as an additional line of defense in this timeless conflict, and his response was telling and significant:

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224 Ibid.
If a person has a cancer and metastasis has begun, if a professional doctor doesn’t take care of this metastasis, he will die….It is the same with society. If there is already metastatic cancer on the territory of Stavropol region, one has to take appropriate preventive measures.

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\[^{225}\text{ibid.}\]


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