

Finding Bazorkin in the Caucasus: A Journey from Anthropology to Literature

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SUMMARY This essay chronicles a journey through the Caucasus toward the end of the second Russo-Chechen war. It focuses in particular on the discovery of a little-known Soviet-era work of historical fiction by the Ingush author Idris Bazorkin (1910-1991). In introducing Bazorkin to the Anglophone reader, I examine the intertextual linkages between his fiction and indigenous Ingush traditions and thereby reveal the thematic and generic range of Ingush literary modernity. By yoking together literary and ethnographic approaches that are often severed from each other, Bazorkin suggests an alternative conception of the relationship between literature and anthropology. Through its writing method as well as its critical analysis, this essay introduces Bazorkin's anthropology of literature. [anthropology of literature, colonialism, ethnographic writing, folklore, historical fiction, indigenous aesthetics, Ingush culture, literature and experience, postcolonial pastoral, the Caucasus]

Across the annals of travel literature past and present, the Caucasus is known for the premium local inhabitants place on hospitality. It was not, however, a desire to conform to stereotypes that led a young student at Grozny University by the name of Timur to give me, in the summer of 2004, a gift I never asked for or expected and to place me in a debt it has taken over a decade to discharge. It was my first trip to the Caucasus. The second Russo-Chechen war (1999–2009) had only just begun to yield to an unstable peace. Russian conscripts were still being sent to the front, often against their wills. My destination was Grozny, but my American citizenship meant that there was no direct or legal way for me to enter that warravaged city that had only a few years earlier been reduced to rubble.

I opted to stay in a nearby and much safer city: Nalchik, the multiethnic capital of the Republic of Kabardino-Balkaria, which shares a border with western Chechnya. After passing several days with Chechen refugees at a boarding house in Nalchik, I decided to try to get a little closer to my goal. I said goodbye to my landlady and purchased a bus ticket for Nazran, the capital of the Republic of Ingushetia.

For most of the Soviet period, Ingushetia joined together with Chechnya to form the Republic of Checheno-Ingushetia. The two territories were divided in 1992, following the declaration of the independent Republic of

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Ichkeriia (Chechnya) by the newly elected Chechen President Jowhar Dudaev.¹ In contradistinction to their energetic Chechen counterparts,

Ingush politicians pursued a policy of amelioration as they cooperated with the Russian administration.

Chechens and Ingush speak similar languages and belong to the same ethnic group, known as Vainakh, a term that simply means “our people” in both languages.² They share in common a cosmology, a pantheon of pagan deities that merges syncretically with Islamic rituals, and a history of intense persecution by, and confrontation with, imperial rule. Even though Nazran was not Grozny, the large number of Chechen refugees who resided here during the war made my visit worthwhile. In addition to Nalchik’s refugee population, an larger number of Chechens resided in the tent camps (palatki) that encircled Nazran all the way to the Chechen border.³

I had come to the Caucasus to speak with Chechens: to interview them, to hear of their suffering and their plights, and to find out what I, an American whose only relevant expertise was in Russian literature, could do to help them in their plight. The young Ingush student who sat down next to me on the bus that was to take me from Nalchik to Nazran was not, however, interested in lamenting his people’s tribulations. He smiled politely in response to my inquiries, but, beyond nodding absent-mindedly and telling me that he studied engineering at Grozny University, he kept silent.

I told him I was a student of Russian literature, travelling through the Caucasus. He declined to ask the obvious questions that so many others posed: What I was doing there and why? When he noticed that I was holding a blank notebook in my lap, he asked if he could write in it. I handed it to him, expecting I would never get it back. Instead, he wrote a message and returned the notebook to me immediately. The message read in Russian: “My name is Timur. This is my number. Call me before you leave Nazran. I have something to give you.” Beneath these words, Timur wrote a number. When I asked him what he planned to give me, he didn’t respond. It dawned on me that Timur might have good reasons for not wanting his words to be overheard. Frustrated into silence, I abandoned my attempts to draw him into conversation and simply waved goodbye when we arrived in Nazran and went our separate ways.

I spent my first night in Ingushetia in a shelter near the Nazran bus station. The shelter was in the basement of a local Ingush businessman who had opened his home to Chechen women from Grozny. Having fled Grozny for Nazran, these women had been living for the past few years at the shelter, nurturing among themselves memories of what they had left behind. The following night, I moved to a tent camp on the Chechen border. This camp was known, perhaps half in jest, as Sputnik (traveler), a term most famously associated with Soviet explorations into space.⁴ I spent the night with a refugee family who drove me to their abandoned home in Grozny the following day. Observing street after street of rubble was as devastating as it was unforgettable.

In the early 2000s, those who had lost their minds from Russian bombing campaigns roamed through the ruins of Grozny, unable to recognize their former acquaintances. A night in the tent camp plus a day travelling through Grozny hiding in the back seat of my host’s car, viewing the

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aftermath of war through the hood of the winter coat that covered my eyes, had taken its toll. It was time to go home. I made my way back to the Nazran bus station, from which I called Timur, not expecting that he would

answer the phone.

“Yes?” said a young male voice on the other end of the line after the first ring.

“Timur?” My question was followed by silence. “This is Rebecca,” I said. Then, realizing that he never asked for my name, I added, “You told me to call you before I left Nazran. You said you have something to give me.”

“Yes,” he said immediately. “Wait ten minutes. I’ll be there soon.”

I sat down and began waiting. How could he possibly arrive within ten minutes? The bus station was far from Nazran’s center. I closed my eyes and began counting. Before five minutes had passed, someone was tapping on my shoulders. I opened my eyes and looked up. It was Timur, holding a big black plastic bag in his right hand. He set the bag down beside me, smiled politely, and walked away. I shouted after him, “Thank you!” and waited for him to turn around. I wanted to prolong our acquaintance and to figure out why he was entrusting the contents of this black bag to me for safekeeping. I waited in vain. I never saw Timur again. The only token I have of the generosity of this Ingush student—indeed, of our ever having crossed paths—are the six volumes he gave me on that day. The author, Idris Bazorkin, was unknown to me. Printed with red binding and gilded in faux gold, these volumes had been reissued by the Ingushetia-based publisher Serdalo (Chechen and Ingush for “heart”) three years prior to my arrival in Nazran.

Grateful for Timur’s gift but skeptical of its value, I allowed weeks to pass after my return to the United States before I removed the plastic wrapping from the six volume set. At long last, I cracked the bindings and started reading about this author whose name I had been oblivious to during my first sojourn in the Caucasus. I learned that his magnum opus was a two-volume historical novel called *Iz t’my vekov* (2001–2002[1968]), roughly translatable as “From the Darkness of Ages.”⁵ My intensive introduction to Russian literature at the University of California, Berkeley, where I had graduated a few years earlier, had entirely omitted the non-Slavic writers of the former Soviet Union, notwithstanding their substantial contributions to world literature. While Ukrainian writers like Gogol were treated as internal to the Russian literary canon, Russophone writers from the Caucasus, Central Asia, and other Islamic regions of the former Russian empire were consistently marginalized. Because this division cuts through a single language and correlates to cultural and religious differences, its bias is quite apparent. The marginalization of Russophone writers like Bazorkin is evidenced by the absence of any sustained scholarly discussion of his oeuvre in a language other than Russian.⁶ Along with introducing Bazorkin to an Anglophone audience, I hope here to expand existing canons of Soviet literature beyond European Russia’s familiar geographies.

When I finally entered into Bazorkin’s narrative my ignorance concerning the minority writers of the former Soviet Union yielded to astonishment, and my daily routine ground to a halt. I passed the entirety of the following 88 *Anthropology and Humanism* Volume 41, Number 1 week immersed in the text. I commiserated with the young lovers Kaloi and Zoru, and endured the pain of their separation. I observed with anguish as the village elder’s wife connived to prevent their marriage. In her efforts to obstruct the young couple’s love, she even attempted to seduce Kaloi, the

rival to her son.

I had not read a book with the same intensity since I was 16 and hospitalized and confined to my bed due to a broken femur. Those weeks of intense hospital reading exposed me to worlds I had never seen before and have rarely seen since: the pastoral novels of Thomas Hardy and George Eliot, the urban squalor of Dostoevsky, and the golden pastures of Leo Tolstoy. In the decade that has transpired since my encounter with Bazorkin, no novel has touched me as much as this one did.

Although he never revealed his last name, Timur did leave an email address. Immediately after finishing the novel, I wrote to thank him for his gift and to let him know that I had discovered its importance after I returned to the United States. My outpourings of gratitude were greeted with a silence that evoked his blank stare on the bus to Nazran. Did he fear something bad would happen if he responded? Did he ever receive my messages? Did he even care? I will never know.

My inaugural encounter with Bazorkin both reiterates and refracts a widespread Caucasus phenomenon that might be described as “hospitality morality.”⁷ Hospitality morality views the guest as a moral compass of one’s own cultivation. Hospitality morality permeates Bazorkin’s fiction.⁸ As a principle of conduct, it is manifest in the village elder’s insistence on feeding guests who arrive demanding the return of their land. Hospitality morality is also evident in the general-major’s display of hospitality to his fellow mountaineers after he has entered the service of the tsar, which is to say the camp of the enemy. It guides how mountaineers treat their neighbors, how they expect to be treated by others, and how they treat themselves.

As glorious as its ethics may seem in certain respect for governing human relations, hospitality morality comes with limitations. Hospitality morality is concerned with display. It generates an affectation of welcome rather than genuine interest in the other for himself or herself. The village elder’s hospitality toward his guests in Bazorkin’s story reveals that hospitality morality can coexist with contempt: it is not always altruistic and is more concerned with the host’s reputation than with the best interests of the guest. Unlike his fictional counterparts, my benefactor Timur was indifferent to display and uninterested in elevating himself. He did not linger over his generosity or make a point of showing me how much he was helping me. Rather, he gave me what I did not ask for and disappeared before I could express my thanks. Under difficult political conditions and without any desire to obtain something in return, without recourse to his own words, but by drawing on the words of another, Timur brought to life a perspective that could only be conveyed in the form of a novel. He purchased a complete set of the writings of Ingushetia’s greatest writer, handed it to me, and walked away.

I will never know what Timur wished me to do with his gift. He never answered my questions. Perhaps, without articulating a specific wish, he

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simply trusted that Bazorkin’s imagination would perform the necessary labor for an interested scholar like myself. Knowing I was a student of literature, Timur discerned that I would be impacted by Bazorkin’s narrative. Perhaps Timur believed that the writer whose works he gave to me for safekeeping on my journey back home belonged to world literature and not just

to the Ingush people. Perhaps he wished for Bazorkin to journey across the same ocean I would soon traverse. Only now, at a remove of a decade, has the gift I received under mysterious circumstances during my first journey to the Caucasus approached the other shore.

Recreating Deportation Memories

Idris Murtuzovich Bazorkin, the novelist whose works Timur had entrusted to me, was born in 1910 in the village from which he took his name, Bazorkino, in northern Ossetia. After the Ingush inhabitants of this region were deported in 1944, Ossetians were resettled in the abandoned Ingush homes, which laid a foundation for future conflicts in the decades to come, including one that was to contribute to his death. When he was deported along with every other Ingush and Chechen man and woman, child and elder, able-bodied and disabled, to Central Asia at the age of 34, however, Bazorkino was still by and large an Ingush village. Many of the deported died along the way. The deportation was justified on the pretext, provided by Lavrenti Beria and disseminated by Joseph Stalin, that the mountaineers had planned to side with the Germans during World War II.

Although the organizers of the deportation were operating on empty speculation, they were right to suspect that the Germans desired this Sovietoccupied land. When Hitler's armies invaded the Soviet Union in August 1942, lured by the prospect of oil, Hitler "diverted divisions away from the battle for Stalingrad and towards the Caucasus" (de Waal 2010:170). When some Chechens rose up against the Soviet state in 1941, some welcomed the invading troops in the hopes that they would recognize their political autonomy. When it became apparent that Hitler had no such intentions, and that they would face the same oppression under German rule as they had under Soviet dispensation, the rebels lost any interest in collaboration with the invaders (Jansen 2010:93). Although no one from the Caucasus is known to have collaborated with the Nazis, Chechens, Ingush, and other neighboring peoples were punished preemptively by the Soviet authorities for an action that never occurred and an intention that was never demonstrated. Subject as he was to the canons of Soviet censorship, Bazorkin never wrote directly about his people's deportation, which kept the Ingush in exile in Central Asia for 13 years. Had he lived to witness the deluge of deportation narratives that followed the break up of the Soviet Union, Bazorkin might have shared his memories of 1944, but such topics were forbidden during the years that he was actively writing.⁹ Instead of dwelling on the intricacies of Soviet politics, Bazorkin looks backwards in time, before Soviet rule, to the beginnings of the Ingush encounter with colonialism and modernity. He cultivated his backward gaze in the aftermath of socialist realism, as new aesthetic possibilities were coming into view, and the precolonial past was a new literary terrain offering an alternative to drab Soviet banalities.

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Soon after the publication of his novel, Bazorkin recounted the fieldwork in the mountains of Ingushetia that was to lay the ethnographic foundation for the world he was to evoke in fiction. Having finished his university education in 1933, Bazorkin spent the next few years traveling through the auls (villages) of mountainous Ingushetia. "I lived in the towers and homes of the mountaineers," Bazorkin (2001) recollected soon after his novel was published.

“I sat at their fireplaces, listened to their astonishing legends, and became acquainted with people of many different characters and cultures” (187). As he explored a world that was both native and foreign, Bazorkin transcribed the life stories of the mountaineers who crossed his path. He delighted in the mountain panoramas he had witnessed during his fieldwork and grieved over the austere lives of those who inhabited Ingushetia’s rocky cliffs.

Along with his fieldwork, decades of historical research into Ingush pasts enabled Bazorkin to compose the most significant historical novel in the literatures of the Caucasus. The distinguished archaeologist Evgenii Krupnov, who specialized in the ancient history of Chechnya and Ingushetia, was one of the first to articulate the importance of Bazorkin’s achievement. Soon after the publication of Bazorkin’s novel, Krupnov wrote, “I have never encountered such a work on a local theme, written so lucidly, and conveying such a profound knowledge of the life ways [zhizn’ i byt] of the people described. [Bazorkin’s novel] is genuinely epic in all respects [podlinnoe epicheskoe polotno] (cited in Patiev 2000:112). As Krupnov perceived, Bazorkin’s ethnographic and historical preparation made possible his literary achievement. In using indigenous folk culture to create a modern epic, Bazorkin outlined a future for modern Ingush literature.

Although the seeds for his novel were sown over the course of many mountainous journeys during the 1930s, Bazorkin only began composing the first draft of what was to become his magnum opus in 1965. Not by coincidence, 1965 is precisely 100 years after the scene that opens the book. In this chapter, the Ossetian General-Major Musa Kundukhov (1818–1889), acting on behalf of the Russian administration while presenting himself as a Muslim and a friend to the mountaineers, organizes their deportation to Ottoman territories.¹⁰ For Bazorkin’s Ingush audience, the events of 1865 would have conjured memories of their 20th century deportation, in which their neighbors also featured as perpetrators. (The contemporary relevance of the novel’s nineteenth century setting is reinforced by its precise dating 100 years prior to the time of Bazorkin’s writing.)

Kundukhov ultimately shifted his allegiance from the Russian tsar to the Ottomans and rose to the rank of pasha, serving with “distinction in the Ottoman wars against the Russians” after he deserted the tsar (Khodarkovsky 2011:4). Neither when he was working for the Russians nor for the Ottomans did Kundukhov have the mountaineers’ best interests at heart. As Bazorkin demonstrates, Kundukhov lied to gullible mountaineers without compunction. He promised that on their arrival in Turkey they would receive land the Ottoman sultan never intended to give. Kundukhov

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additionally lured the immigrants with the prospect of livelihoods they never obtained. Faced with starvation and homelessness, many of the muhajirun (migrants) died soon after their arrival in Ottoman lands.¹¹

Oblivious to what awaited them, the mountaineers of Chechnya and Ingushetia, like their Circassian counterparts to the west, embarked on the long journey to a fabled Ottoman land. Kundukhov falsely promised them that they would recover the livelihoods that had been taken from them when the tsarist regime appropriated their land and distributed it to the Cossacks. This migration to Ottoman lands, conducted under false premises

and with false promises, hastened the death of Kaloi's parents. The disjuncture between expectations and actuality that occasioned these migrations forms the background to the tragic fate of Bazorkin's protagonist. Kaloi was raised as an orphan, just like the semimythical hero for whom he was named. When the nineteenth century migration is narrated from the vantage point of the twentieth century deportation, Bazorkin's weaving together of literature and history appears as canny as his merger of an ethnographic narrative with epic literary form.

Having discussed how Bazorkin uses history to extend the possibilities of Ingush fiction, I will now turn to his incorporation of Ingush folklore into his postcolonial pastoral.

The Writer as Ethnographer

Among Bazorkin's Soviet contemporaries, only the Abkhaz writer Bagrat Shinkuba (1917–2004) displayed comparable literary acumen in his chronicle of the mass migrations of the mountaineers to Ottoman territories (Shinkuba 1976). Published a decade after Bazorkin's magnum opus, Shinkuba's *The Last of the Departed* (1974) tells of a tsarist-era deportation that contributed to the extermination of the now-extinct Ubykh of the northwest Caucasus. Neither Bazorkin's nor Shinkuba's narrative of exile and displacement has received its due within the canons of world literature.

Thirteen years of forced exile in Kazakhstan intervened between Bazorkin's fieldwork and the composition of his magnum opus. These tragic deportations also, however, had some unexpected results. For Bazorkin, they intensified his desire to craft a historical narrative that could memorialize his people's peculiar destiny. When he set about drafting the novel, Bazorkin (2001) recalled, "I wrote all the time, living in the mountains, where my heroes had once lived. I followed in their steps, I breathed in their air, I listened to the speech of their rivers, and I rested in the shade of their trees. Everywhere around me, I felt surrounded by their invisible presence [nezrimoe prisutstvie]" (188). In these memories, we encounter the writer as ethnographer, and we learn how Bazorkin's fieldwork is foundational to his aesthetic achievements.

Bazorkin signed the first volume of his novel from the village of Jarakh, from 16 August 1965 to 10 February 1967, which is almost exactly a century after the events in his novel. The road along which Turs (Kaloi's father) traveled on his way to Ottoman lands winds through this same Jarakh.

Kaloi was born by a rock on the outskirts of Jarakh—a rock that merges

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mythology and history—during the course of his father's ill-fated journey.

As a historical site, Jarakh is less remote from history than Egi, the mythical village where most of the novel's action unfolds. Jarakh's historicity enabled Bazorkin to convincingly evoke a world he had known only from a distance, as an ethnographer, and through academic study. As Thomas Hardy said of the Wessex country that provided the setting for his fictions, Bazorkin's Ingushetia is "a partly-real, partly dream-country" through which the mountaineers' encounter with modernity and colonialism unfolded over the course of the long nineteenth century.¹² The Marxist critic Raymond Williams (1973) claimed in his classic work, *The Country and the City*, that Hardy's fictional world is borne from the effort to "describe and value a way of life with which he was closely yet uncertainly connected" (200). This

oscillation between alienation and belonging describes the trajectory of Bazorkin's novel. Just as his invocation of nineteenth century history in a twentieth century text places conventional narratives of colonial conquest in new perspectives, so does Bazorkin's use of Ingush folklore inflect a highly politicized past with the aura of magic.

Beyond making visible the precolonial pasts in Ingushetia's present, Bazorkin memorialized Ingush history. He crafted narratives for a readership that, in the aftermath of its near-annihilation in 1944, was hungry for narratives of its pasts in order to envision a possible future. Bazorkin's novel furnished narratives of social cohesion for a people whose social worlds had been irrevocably torn apart. Given this solemn mandate, Bazorkin's resistance to nostalgia is striking. Instead, with a meticulousness that recalls Hardy's Wessex woodlanders, Bazorkin narrates the attempted seduction of Kaloi and the coercion to which his beloved was subjected. Even as she endeavors to seduce Kaloi, the village elder's wife is engaged in a long-term love affair with the village mullah, Hasan Hajji.¹³ Hasan Hajji is the actual father of her son Chaborz, not her husband, the village elder. In a dark twist of fate, Chaborz marries Kaloi's beloved. Mirroring the novelistic fascination with social distinctions from Balzac and Zola to Dostoevsky, class and status trump character and integrity.

Given Bazorkin's moving evocation of events from times past, it is easy to forget that his narrative was composed as recently as the 1960s. For European Russia, the 1960s was the era of village prose (*derevenskaia proza*), a literary movement that has been described as "the most aesthetically coherent and ideologically important body of published literature" to appear between the death of Stalin and the beginning of glasnost (Parth_e 1992:ix-x).¹⁴ Among its many accomplishments, village prose broke with the canons of Soviet socialist realism to create a space for rural voices. In contrast to the indigenizing aesthetics of Bazorkin and his fellow writers from the Caucasus, however, village prose writers often appropriated or were appropriated by Russian nationalistic discourse.¹⁵ Writers from this school did little to expand the cultural repertoire of Russian literature or to move its canon beyond ethnic Russia.

Although the village prose aesthetic parallels Bazorkin's literary voice, more local ethnographic precedents set him apart from the dominant trends of Soviet literature during the 1960s. Nearly a century prior to the

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publication of Bazorkin's novel, the Georgian writer Aleksandre Qazbegi (1848–1890) chronicled the plight of the Chechen mountaineers in his Georgian short stories.¹⁶ Qazbegi's stories were widely translated into Russian and were rendered into Chechen in 1961, just four years before Bazorkin began composing his novel. Qazbegi and Bazorkin construct parallel biographies for their protagonists as they traverse a long history of colonialization and subsequent deportation. Qazbegi's 1881 short story "Eliso" opens amid the same deportation to Ottoman territories that inaugurates Bazorkin's novel. Anzor Cherbizh, the Chechen protagonist of this story, served in the army of the anticolonial fighter Imam Shamil (1797–1871) before migrating to Ottoman territory. Analogously, Bazorkin introduces Khambor, who befriends Kaloi's father Turs on his journey to Ottoman lands and had connections with Shamil's army. Khambor tells Turs of how his sons fought

with Shamil—who here is simply called the imam—against the *giaours* (Christian infidels) (Bazorkin 2001–2002[1968]:67).

Although his debts to prior regional writers are profound, Bazorkin was the first author to memorialize Ingush mountaineers from a resolutely historical perspective. Qazbegi's "Xevis Beri Gocha," a novella set in the seventeenth century, tells of a Georgian mountaineer who kills his son in a fit of rage.¹⁷ Although it is an early and important work of historical fiction, Qazbegi's limited knowledge of mountaineer ways of life contrasts with Bazorkin's more deeply textured evocations. Moreover, although Qazbegi's inclusion of Chechen protagonists, for example in "Eliso" and in the novella *The Parricide* (Mamis mkleveli, 1881), marks a departure from past precedents, these characters appear monodimensional when compared with Bazorkin's multifaceted characters. Bazorkin immerses his readers in life worlds as temporally distant as they are geographically proximate for his Ingush and Chechen readers.

Thanks to its powerful evocation of a world on the brink of extinction, Bazorkin's novel became a classic as soon as it was written. First and foremost a historical novel, this work is also a repository of the memories and traditions of the Ingush people. As a pastoral, it is unique in that it bears the burden of a traumatic history. A recent monograph by Liliia Kharsieva (2007), the first book-length study of Bazorkin's work in any language, demonstrates Bazorkin's debts to Ingush culture in detail.¹⁸ Reading Bazorkin's work as an exemplification of Ingush culture and concentrating on its "spiritual-moral [dukhovno-nravstvennie] foundations," Kharsieva emphasizes the connections between Bazorkin's text and traditional Ingush values such as respect for elders (135–38), hospitality (139–41), and love of festivities (149–55). For Kharsieva, *Kaloi* is a "paradigm [obrazets] of the ideal [Ingush] cultural hero" (53).

Kharsieva's approach improves on previous Bazorkin scholarship, which was restricted to the excavation of the author's biography.¹⁹ At the same time, although she sheds light on Bazorkin's debts to traditional Ingush culture, she does not discuss his transvaluation of this culture through a modernist prism. As important as Bazorkin's engagement with his local environment is his contribution to world literature, to literary modernity, and to the pastoral genre. With respect to its place in world literature,

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Bazorkin's aesthetic bears comparison with the indigenizing aesthetics of Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe, who draw on Yoruba and Igbo legends and folklore in their evocations of modern African life.

Transvaluing Folkloric Intertexts

Of as much importance for Bazorkin's literary world as the precedents in neighboring written literatures are the folkloric traditions on which Bazorkin draws.²⁰ Most important among these are the stories pertaining to *Kaloi* and his rival *Soska Solsa*, the most powerful god in the *Ortskhoy* pantheon that predominates in *Vainakh* folklore. The cliffs of *Soska Solsa* frequently feature as a setting for the most climactic episodes in *Kaloi* and *Zoru*'s passionate love. The *Ortskhoy* are *narts*, members of the semidivine, prehistoric giants, from whom Ingush, Chechens, and other Caucasus peoples are said to descend. The legends surrounding the figure of the Ingush *nart* *Soska Solsa*, who is equivalent to the Ossetian *Soslan*, has been deemed one channel

through which ancient Iranian folklore intermingled with traditions native to the Caucasus (Lajoie 2012). Pointing to the diverse origins of the Scythian and Alanic tribes from whom the Ossetians descend, other scholars have connected the nart legends to the Celtic tales of King Arthur and suggested that these stories reached Europe “during the declining days of the Roman Empire” (Mair 1999).²¹ However these genealogies are regarded, Bazorkin’s magical world of woodland deities coexisting with mortal humans evokes the transvaluation of indigeneous belief systems that transpired across much of the colonized and industrialized world during the nineteenth century.

In 1871, the Ingush ethnographer Chakh Akhriev (1850–1914) translated into Russian the story of the conflict between Kaloi and Soska Solsa. Akhriev’s (1871) folkloric account bears more than a passing resemblance to the conflict between Kaloi and the clan of the village elder. Like Bazorkin, Akhriev straddled two cultures, Ingush and Russian. Translating concepts and experiences from one culture into the other was his life’s work.²² Akhriev’s version was published in *Sbornik svedenii o kavkazskikh gortsakh* (Compendium of Research on the Caucasus Mountaineers), the primary venue for ethnographic material about the Caucasus and a major point of reference for the native ethnographers who were the first in their families to read Russian.²³ Given the prominence of the venue in which it appeared, Akhriev’s version is a likely source for Bazorkin, although Bazorkin would also certainly have been exposed to oral versions of this story during his fieldwork in the mountains of Ingushetia prior to the deportation.

Like his mythical namesake, Bazorkin’s Kaloi of Egi is renowned for his strength. When the mythical Kaloi, whose full name is Kaloi-Kant, drives his sheep into a cavern, he bars the entrance with a flat stone that takes 60 men of average strength to dislodge. Kaloi-Kant easily dislodges the stone. One day, Seska Solsa decides to raid Kaloi’s cave. First, he sends his sister to seduce Kaloi and to weaken his ability to defend himself. Seska Solsa’s sister is the mythical counterpart to the village elder’s wife in Bazorkin’s *Gould Finding Bazorkin in the Caucasus* 95

narrative, who seduces Kaloi in order to facilitate her son’s marriage, except that she is more successful than the village elder’s wife in her attempts at seduction.²⁴ On her third attempt, she finally overcomes Kaloi-Kant’s resistance and intoxicates him with lust. As John Baddeley (1854–1940), a British historian and explorer of the Caucasus, recounts in his rendering of this legend: “The more time Kaloi-Kant spent with Solsa’s sister, the more his strength wilted. He could no longer jam the stone close up to the cavern entry; day by day, indeed, the opening widened so that after ten days a man could easily make entrance” (1940:253).²⁵

Soon after his sister seduces Kaloi-Kant, Seska Solsa takes advantage of the weakened position of his enemy. He gathers together the Ortskhoy clan, and together they enter Kaloi-Kant’s cavern. They find Kaloi-Kant asleep on the knees of Solsa’s sister and bind him with a rope. The Ortskhoy collectively slaughter Kaloi’s favorite goat and refuse to share with him even a bone from the body. Solsa’s sister however is overcome by pity and surrenders the bone to Kaloi. Kaloi does with the bone what he alone can do: he makes a flute and plays a plaintive melody. This melody is recognized by

Kaloi's family, who recognize it as a signal of distress. Kaloi's family hurries to his rescue.

At this point, the head of the Ingush pantheon intervenes to avoid the shedding of blood. He redirects the course of the Terek River such that Kaloi-Kant and his brothers, along with Solsa's sister, end up on one bank, while the Ortskhoy, along with Seksa Solsa and half of Kaloi's sheep, end up on the other. This division of goods is eased by the fact that the sheep now in the Ortskhoy's possession function as Kaloi's bride price (kalym) for Solsa's sister. In a final expression of guileless rage that anticipates the novel, the mythical Kaloi-Kant picks up a long flat stone and thrusts it in the ground. The Ortskhoys respond by doing the same. After this show of force, both sides are satisfied. Kaloi marries Solsa's sister and returns to his native village.

Somewhat later, the mythical Kaloi tests his strength again by erecting three huge rocks on the top of a mountain. So powerful that, according to Akhriev, it could not have been made by human hands, this fortification protects Kaloi-Kant to end of his days. Bazorkin's Kaloi is not as lucky as his namesake, but it is telling that the second Kaloi is, according to his father's proclamation, born "under the rock which our hero [bogaty] Kaloi Kant and his enemy the Kabardian prince threw at each other" (Bazorkin 2001–2002[1968]:68) Through such folkloric intertexts, Bazorkin uncovers a politics of orature and an aesthetics for indigenous literary representation. When he incorporates Ingush folklore into his Soviet narrative, Bazorkin historicizes the mythical Kaloi. He transposes the Ortskhoys, who are essentially deified narts, into Kabardians, a people from the northwest Caucasus who, like many peoples of the plains, were more accommodating to colonial rule than were the Ingush or the Chechens.²⁶ The Kabardians, a major feudal power in precolonial times, ruled as far east as the frontiers of Daghestan; their superior socioeconomic status no doubt motivated their depiction in Bazorkin's text. In transposing myth into history, Bazorkin intensifies the class tensions that are muted, although still palpable, in the mythical nart cycle. In Bazorkin's rendering, the Kabardian who is Kaloi's enemy is a prince (Chaborz, son of the village elder's wife) with access to infinitely greater material resources than the impoverished hero. Born into historical time under a mythical rock to an impoverished family that was destined to bear the brunt of Russia's colonizing project, the fictional Kaloi's ominous fate is inscribed in his name.

Bazorkin's historical novel traverses an unprecedentedly broad temporal ambit as it merges the mythical age of the narts with the twilight of colonial rule during the second half of the nineteenth century. Congruously with this temporal expansion, the novel traverses the space between historical fiction and the postcolonial pastoral. Bazorkin uses ethnographic techniques to move beyond the genre conventions of realist fiction, while his indigenizing aesthetics and folkloric allusions complicate his relation to Soviet realism. Composed in what Raymond Williams called "that border country so many of us have been living in: between custom and education, between work and ideas, between love of place and an experience of change," Bazorkin's imaginary geography sheds new light on Soviet modernization projects (Williams 1973:197). He views the Soviet experiment from the perspective of mountaineers

for whom these technological innovations were bittersweet at best and genocidal at worst.²⁷ By introducing an imaginary world to postcolonial literature, Bazorkin cultivates an alternative account of colonial modernity while resisting nostalgia for forms of life that had been irrevocably replaced. In his groundbreaking typology of the literary imagination, Wolfgang Iser aimed to replace the reductive binary between fiction and nonfiction on the one hand and falsehood and factuality on the other with a triadic system. Iser's system foregrounds the imagination and takes seriously its contribution to constructing reality. According to Iser's system, rather than "representing an already existing world," works of literature "generate acts of the imagination in which readers place before the mind's eye worlds that do not yet exist" (Thomas 2008:625). In order to clarify this point, Iser distinguishes between two kind of perception: *Wahrnehmung* (the perception of what exists) and *Vorstellung* (the perception of what is imagined).²⁸ Both ways of seeing, Iser contends, have real world implications. Bazorkin's *Egi* transpires amid Iser's *Vorstellung*. Irreducible to an actually existing geography yet wholly at home within the imagination, *Egi* is a cipher for Ingush history and anthropology as well as for Ingush literature.

At the time of Bazorkin's writing, centralized state bureaucracies, government-enforced atheism, and a coercively enforced if at times passively invoked "brotherhood of peoples" were gradually infiltrating the infrastructure of Soviet life. Keenly aware of how little could be gained from rejecting these realities in full, Bazorkin instead chronicled the worlds that preceded them. With an infectious enthusiasm and a profound love for the strange, the awkward, for everything that could not be assimilated into the aesthetic canons of Soviet realism, Bazorkin portrays a world wherein the clichés of Soviet existence could only fall flat. "The person who stares for a long time sees a great deal," Bazorkin declares. Thinking beyond the visual, Bazorkin references a mode of perceiving that is more attuned to the flow of time than the perceptual mode that dominates Soviet socialist realism: "the Gould Finding Bazorkin in the Caucasus 97 person who listens speaks with that time" (cited in Kharsieva 2007:3) These appeals to the temporality of seeing and listening effectively distill Bazorkin's method.

Through listening and seeing, and by cultivating ethnographic acuity, Bazorkin gave life to Ingush pasts and made it possible to build a new Ingush literature from the wreckage of nearly two centuries of war. When Ingush literature attains the recognition it deserves, Bazorkin will be remembered as the founder of this literature, who pioneered a new literary style that brought together the diverse methods of ethnography, literature, and history into a coherent and profoundly moving whole.

Notes

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1. In spelling the name of the Chechen president as Jawhar rather than Dzhokhar, I follow Arabic orthographic conventions and to underscore the meaning of his name, derived from *jawhar*, "jewel."

2. For a discussion of these distinctions, see Gould (2007). The fluidity of Chechen/Ingush ethnic boundaries is revealed perhaps most fully in Chakh Akhriev's

- essay discussed below. Although dealing primarily with Ingush folklore, Akhriev entitled his essay “From Chechen Legends” rather than “From Ingush Legends.”
3. These events are recounted in greater detail in Gould (2005).
 4. Sputnik was the name for the first artificial Earth satellite, which was created by the Soviet space program and launched into the air in 4 October 1957.
 5. I reserve discussion of this multivalent title for another context. Among other issues, the implication concerning the “darkness” of Ingush life worlds appears to internalize Soviet prejudices that are in fact entirely absent from the narrative itself.
 6. For recent endeavors to complicate this picture, see Hausbacher (2009), Platt (2012) and Caffee (2013).
 7. For further reflections on this theme, see Gould (2012:158).
 8. For further reflections on idioms of exchange in the Caucasus, see Grant (2009).
 9. Many notable narratives are collected in the three volumes edited by S. I. Alieva (1993). An account of the deportation of the Bazorkin family by Idris Bazorkin’s daughter Aza is included in the second volume of this series, pp. 107–144. For a memoir of the deportation by a scholar whose life overlapped with Bazorkin’s and yet who lived a few years longer, see Desheriev (1995).
 10. For further on Musa Kundukhov as a historical figure, including discussion of his important and still untranslated memoirs, see Ganich (2008).
 11. For an excellent recent account of these deportations from the perspective of Northwest (Circassian) history, see Richmond (2013), esp. pp. 76–97.
 12. For Hardy’s description of Wessex County, see his 1912 Preface to *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), in Hardy (1967), p. 9.
 13. An episode from their love affair has appeared in my translation as “Evening Prayers” in *The Russia Reader* (see Gould 2010).
 14. On this movement, also see Hosking (1973).
 15. See Parth_e (1992:81–98).
 16. For a translation into English, see Qazbegi (2015). Qazbegi’s stories have also been translated into Chechen in Kazbegi (1961).
 17. See Qazbegi (2015:87–188).
 18. Future references to this work are given parenthetically.
 19. I refer to the important biographical research of Iakub Patiev, recorded most notably in Patiev (2000), but also incorporated into the introduction to Bazorkin’s 98 *Anthropology and Humanism* Volume 41, Number 1 *Collected Works* (2001–2002). Also see the memoir by Bazorkin’s daughter Aza Bazorkin, *Vospominaniia ob Ottse* (2001).
 20. These stories form part of the broader corpus of nart sagas that are most fully attested in the west Caucasus, where the Alanic state reigned during the medieval period. For two excellent translations of the nart cycle, see Colarusso (2002) and Hunt (2012). Compared to the west Caucasus versions, Chechen and Ingush nart sagas are regarded as peripheral and atypical.
 21. Mair (1999), a commentary on Scott Littleton and Linda Malcor, *From Scythia to Camelot: A Radical Reassessment of the Legends of King* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2000).
 22. The best study of Akhriev known to me is Semenov (1928).
 23. For a discussion of this periodical, see Jersild (2003), 104ff.
 24. The episode has been translated in Bazorkin (2010).
 25. Baddeley’s account is based on Akhriev’s version.
 26. In a footnote to his version of the legend, Akhriev reflects on the historicity of this rock, specifically linking it to the Orskhoy and not to the Kabardians. He notes

that while the rock said to have been erected by Kaloi-Kant was torn down by Russian troops in 1856 (nine years prior to the opening of Bazorkin's novel), the rock said to have been erected by the Ortskhoy was still standing at the time of his writing (1871). Akhriev further adds that this second rock is located "on the left bank of the Terek, near the Jarakh fortress," which is precisely where Dolly stops to give birth to her son (1871:46).

27. Among the scholarly studies of the mountaineer experience of tsarist and Soviet rule, none to my knowledge focus primarily on literature. For important historical and anthropological accounts, see the contributions in Voell and Kaliszewska (2015) and Grant (2011). For work based on literary sources, see Gould (2016).

28. The distinction is elaborated in Iser (1976).

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