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Depiction of Imprisoned Women in Russian Literature

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DEPICTION OF IMPRISONED WOMEN IN RUSSIAN LITERATURE

By

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ABSTRACT

The theme of abuse, often sexual abuse, of imprisoned women in Russian literature can be observed throughout literary history, yet is rarely the focus of the work in question. When comparing literary depictions of the imprisonment of female characters, and nonfictional accounts of Russian women, the scope and frequency of the abuse of prosecuted women becomes clear. Narratives of imprisoned women from Leo Tolstoy's novel *Resurrection* (1899) to Guzel Yakhina's novel *Zuleikha Opens Her Eyes* (2015) contain similar themes. Younger generations of Russian authors are still commenting on the same suffering of female prisoners raised over 100 years ago. My thesis will explore the depiction of imprisoned women in fictional as well as nonfictional works as it has evolved through Russian literary history. I will analyze Leo Tolstoy's *Resurrection* (1899), Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* (1973), Varlam Shalamov's *Kolyma Stories* (1970-76), Evgenia Ginzburg's memoirs *Journey into the Whirlwind* (1967) and *Within the Whirlwind* (1979), and Guzel Yakhina's *Zuleikha Opens Her Eyes* (2015). A significant portion of my analysis will focus on the abuse, often sexual, of women imprisoned in the Soviet Gulag under Stalin.

The issue of psychological trauma of imprisoned women under the Stalinist regime needs further investigation. To stop the violence in modern Russian and Western societies we have to be aware of the atrocities and crimes against women in the last century. I investigate the overlooked accounts of women incarcerated under Stalin, and analyze the sexual abuses specifically inflicted upon female prisoners that were prevalent in camp life. I will examine how Soviet women, proclaimed by the Communist ideology equal to men and protected by the Soviet society, were treated and sexually abused within the Soviet prison system. Furthermore, analysis

of pre-Soviet imprisoned women and continuation of the theme by contemporary Russian authors outlines the history of suffering and abuse still being talked about today.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Depictions of imprisoned women in Russian literature contain themes of suffering, abuse, strength, personal identity, and overcoming psychological trauma. In this analysis I will explore the similarities in depictions of female prisoners in fictional and nonfictional works such as; Leo Tolstoy's *Resurrection* (1899), Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* (1973), Varlam Shalamov's *Kolyma Stories* (1970-76), Evgenia Ginzburg's memoirs *Journey into the Whirlwind* (1967) and *Within the Whirlwind* (1979), and Guzel Yakhina's *Zuleikha Opens Her Eyes* (2015). The majority of my commentary will focus on women imprisoned in the Gulag under Stalin's purges. Common to many depictions of imprisoned women, specifically in the Soviet prison system, is the description of sexual abuse. The goal of this analysis is to shed light upon the abuse of women in the Soviet prison system, and to ensure the existence of a historical account of their experiences. There is a hole in the historical record regarding the sexual abuse of female prisoners in the Soviet prison system, I aim to begin to fill this gap using the few descriptions of their suffering found in literature of the era.

Female prisoners suffered the same horrific living conditions, physical labor, and mistreatment as men but, because of their gender were also subject to frequent sexual abuse by those in power, such as prison and camp guards. "Once in the Gulag, they were subjected to particular kinds of sexual enslavement and violence that the men did not have to endure. However, women's experiences as forced laborers- brutal hours, harsh cold, poor shelter, insufficient nourishment- were very much like the men's. The Gulag was an equal-opportunity institution" (Gregory, x). Thus, the often overlooked sexual assault of female prisoners is present in most depictions of imprisoned women in Russian literature, but rarely the topic of

analysis. I aim to not only analyze the depiction of imprisoned women and the suffering they endured in prison in camp but to highlight the frequency of sexual assault and abuse inflicted upon innocent women.

There is a great deal of literature on victims of the Gulag. For instance, in their essay “Russia and the Soviet Union from the Nineteenth to the Twenty-First Century”, Sarah Badcock and Judith Pallot describe the Gulag camp system, “reproduced by violence, fear and degrading treatments that no prisoner, political or criminal, could avoid” (Badcock and Pallot, 294). Men and women suffered the horrific conditions of the Gulag, but in my thesis I will focus on the abuse and degradation specific to female prisoners. In her essay, “A Communist Woman in the Gulag: Gender, Ideology, and Limit-experience in Ginzburg and Budznska” Anna Artwinska states, “The question of differences between female and male experiences of gulag imprisonment has been one of the leitmotifs of the ‘camp and Gulag literature’ from the beginning- the first notes from ‘a world apart’ informed about the suffering of imprisoned women by virtue of their gender, but also about the different treatment they received from other prisoners and the guards...In analyzing the phenomenon of Soviet gulags, a gendered approach is useful” (1, Artwinska).

The 2013 book *Women of the Gulag: Portraits of Five Remarkable Lives* by Professor Paul R. Gregory is accompanied by the 2017 documentary by Marianna Yarovskaya, *Women of the Gulag*. Gregory explains, “*Women of the Gulag* is based on an often overlooked point: most of Stalin’s victims were quite ordinary people” (Gregory, vii). Providing historical information about the gulag system, both the book and documentary chronicle the lives of five innocent women imprisoned under Stalin and the horrors they endured. As Gregory describes, the mass imprisonment of innocent people under Stalin resulted in the arrest of thousands of women for

the alleged crimes of their husbands, their tragic stories echo the themes observed in depictions of female prisoners throughout Russian literary history.

Methodology

Using comparative literary analysis I will explore the different depictions of imprisoned women in Soviet Russia, showing the similarity in themes and accounts found in both fictional and nonfictional portrayals of the suffering and violence. My choice to compare different genres is due to the lack of material or narratives describing the abuse of women imprisoned in the Soviet Gulags. The description of sexual assault by male authors in fictional works provides evidence of the frequency and normalcy of the abuse depicted by women in their accounts of their own suffering. Narratives containing themes of abuse and violence by male authors cannot provide insight into the psychological suffering of female prisoners or understand in full the horror these women endured, but can elaborate on the reality they faced. By comparing the abuse observed by male authors in both fiction and nonfiction with the accounts of female prisoners themselves one can develop a greater understanding of the horrific suffering these women faced.

Beginning with a brief exploration of the depiction of female prisoners in the Russian Empire, such as Katusha Maslova in Leo Tolstoy's novel *Resurrection*, and historical overview of Siberian exile I will examine the similarities between the experiences of women in pre-Soviet and Soviet prisons. Tolstoy's fictional portrayal of an imprisoned woman provides strength and inspiration to female prisoners such as Evgenia Ginzburg. Throughout her memoirs, Ginzburg makes reference to Tolstoy's novel drawing inspiration from his heroine. Furthermore, I will analyze the abuse of women in Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* and Varlam Shalamov's *Kolyma Tales*. These works, based on the lived experiences of the authors, depict

the physical, verbal, and sexual abuse of imprisoned women from the perspective of male prisoners. Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Varlam Shalamov observed the same abuses described in the testimonies of female survivors themselves. The themes of violence and abuse portrayed by these authors are observed in greater detail in my analysis of the memoirs of Evgenia Ginzburg, *Journey into the Whirlwind* and *Within the Whirlwind*. Ginzburg's work is one of the most significant contributions to my discussion of the abuse of women in prison and camp. Her memoirs chronicle her 18-year sentence from her arrest to her exile, describing in great detail the horrific suffering endured by herself and other imprisoned women. Within her memoirs Ginzburg depicts many instances of sexual abuse against female prisoners, commenting on the frequency of rape within the Soviet prison system. The sexual abuse witnessed by Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Varlam Shalamov can be seen in the firsthand experiences Ginzburg retells in her work.

Evgenia Ginzburg also depicts the mental suffering and psychological trauma experienced by female prisoners, describing her thoughts and feelings throughout her sentence. Her exploration into the ways in which women maintained their humanity under horrific conditions provides insight into the psychological impact of imprisonment, and strength of female prisoners such as herself. Ginzburg draws strength from literature, inspired by figures such as Katusha Maslova. Finally, I analyze the employment of these themes in Guzel Yakhina's debut novel *Zuleikha Opens Her Eyes*. Written in 2015 Yakhina's work shows that younger generations of Russian women writers are continuing the discussion of the abuse of imprisoned women and the strength it took for them to persevere. Yakhina's historical fiction novel depicts a Tatar peasant woman, Zuleikha, the suffering she endured when sentenced to Siberian exile, and her moral awakening the resulted from her persecution.

CHAPTER TWO

IMPRISONED WOMEN PRIOR TO THE SOVIET GULAG SYSTEM

In the Russian Empire, Siberian exile and labor was a common punishment. In their essay “Russia and the Soviet Union from the Nineteenth to the Twenty-First Century”, Sarah Badcock and Judith Pallot write, “Prisoner exile has been used in Russian since the sixteenth century, but its character and purpose has changed over time; it has been used as a means for settling empty lands, securing frontiers, mobilizing labour and natural resources, incapacitating and exacting retribution against offenders, and of social regulation” (Badcock and Pallot, 273). Depictions of women and imprisonment prior to the Soviet Gulag system were often narratives in which women followed male prisoners into exile. Jailers and guards in Tsarist prisons used less brutality in their treatment of prisoners than those in Soviet prisons. Within the Soviet prison system abuse and violence was systematic and widespread.

Fictional works such as Tolstoy’s novel *Resurrection*, feature women in prison and camp prerevolution. Katusha Maslova is imprisoned for a crime she did not commit. Nekhlyudov, who knew Katusha as his Aunts’ ward in childhood, sits on the jury of a case trying a prostitute for allegedly poisoning and robbing a man who beat her, and realizes the defendant is Maslova. Nekhlyudov learns that after the night he spent with Katusha she got pregnant and was forced to leave his Aunts’ estate and resorted to a life of prostitution.

Seeing the impact of his actions on Katusha, Nekhlyudov attempts to prove her innocence, and when she is arrested he tries to have her sentence repealed. Maslova’s defense attorney appeals to the jury explaining the events that resulted in her prostitution but is unsuccessful. He comments on the ways in which men take advantage of women to satisfy their

own sexual needs, and may ruin the course of a woman's life without consequence.

Nekhlyudov's guilt leads him to follow Maslova to Siberia when she is exiled.

Tolstoy describes the unfortunate guilty verdict of Maslova's case, as well as her reaction in prison when sentenced to penal servitude. "Maslova, still crying, began greedily to inhale the tobacco smoke. 'Penal servitude', she muttered, blowing out the smoke, sobbing" (Tolstoy, 96-97). Innocent of the crime she is imprisoned for, Maslova is devastated by the sentence. She has no choice but to endure the suffering and horrific conditions to which she is subjected, but she must also endure the psychological torment of knowing she is innocent. Thus she has to not only accept her tragic fate, but accept the irrationality of her imprisonment as well.

Furthermore, Tolstoy depicts the suffering specific to female prisoners as Maslova and others make their journey to exile. "The journey to Perm had been very trying to Maslova, both physically and morally: physically, because of the overcrowding, the dirt, and the disgusting vermin which gave her no peace; morally, because of the equally disgusting men. The men, giving her no rest. Among the women prisoners and the men prisoners, jailers, and convoy soldiers, the habit of a kind of cynical debauchery was so firmly established that unless a female prisoner was willing to utilize her womanhood she had to be constantly on her guard" (Tolstoy, 320). Female prisoners were subject to the same abuse as men, but because of their gender suffered frequent sexual harassment and abuse. Tolstoy explains that female prisoners were sexually abused by male prisoners, jailers, and soldiers, and had to protect themselves at all times. The frequency of sexual abuse of imprisoned women will be further discussed in the following chapters, but Tolstoy's description of Maslova's experience conveys the same theme.

Tolstoy also states, "To be continually in a state of fear and strife was very trying, and Maslova was specially exposed to attacks, her appearance being attractive and her past known to

everyone. The resolute resistance with which she now met the importunities of all the men seemed offensive to them, and awakened another feeling, that of ill-will, towards her” (Tolstoy, 320). Known to her fellow prisoners and jailers as a prostitute, Katusha is especially vulnerable to sexual assault. Not only is she attractive, but her strength when resisting the advances of the men around her leads them to resent her. Thus, Tolstoy explains how attractive women were more susceptible to sexual abuses, and women who refused to submit became targets of the offended men.

Maslova’s imprisonment and penal servitude lead to her moral awakening. “‘Forgive me,’ she said, so low that he could hardly hear her...She loved him, and thought that by uniting herself to him she would be spoiling his life. By going with Simonson she thought she would be setting Nekhlyudov free, and she felt glad that she had done what she meant to do, and yet suffered at parting from him” (Tolstoy, 385). Following Maslova to Siberia, Nekhlyudov wants to marry her, not only to repent for his actions but because he truly loves her. Prior to her imprisonment, Katusha’s view of life is cynical, she works as a prostitute, drinks excessively, and sees little beauty in her life. Her suffering and relationship with Nekhlyudov help her change internally, resulting in her moral awakening. She falls in love with an Englishman in exile and understands that by marrying Nekhlyudov she would be trapping him in his sin for which she forgives him. By forgiving Nekhlyudov she absolves him of the burden of repentance and sets him free, no longer blaming him for the course her life has taken. In prison and exile Katusha grows from a cynical woman resenting those who have wronged her, blaming them for her suffering into a woman capable of forgiveness claiming responsibility for her own fate.

Prior to *Resurrection*, most accounts of women and imprisonment featured women following men into exile. Tolstoy’s novel presents the opposite, the novel portrays the theme of

sexual abuse of imprisoned women. His depiction of Katusha Maslova's suffering and moral growth portrays the same experiences of other imprisoned women in Russian literature. Thus, his work provides insight into the experiences of female prisoners prior to the Soviet Gulag system.

Princess Tarakanova was arrested in 1755 by Alexei Grigoryevich Orlov. "After Pugachev, Catherine was in no mood to take any risks with pretenders and now she faced a very different case: 'Princess Elizabeth,' a slender twenty-year-old with an Italianate profile, alabaster skin and grey eyes, claimed to be the daughter of Empress Elizaveta and the Night Emperor. No one ever discovered her true identity... Catherine demanded in gangsterish tones that the Ragusans hand Elizabeth over. If not, 'one can toss a few bombs into the town.' Even better, Scarface should just 'capture her without noise.' Orlov-Chesmensky courted the ersatz princess. She believed she was gulling him, but when she came on board his flagship, greeted as the 'empress,' the 'villain' was arrested and sent to Petersburg where she was imprisoned in the Peter and Paul fortress" (222, Montefiore). Hers is a well-known story of female imprisonment, Princess Tarakanova was arrested for pretending to be Catherine the Great. Many artists have produced depictions of the Princess in prison, such as the famous painting *Princess Tarakanova* (1864) by Konstantin Flavitsky. The history of the imprisonment of women in Russia includes her story and the imagery it produced.

Thus, prior to the Soviet Gulags, stories of female prisoners or women in exile depict the strength and resilience of women. Evgenia Ginzburg endures imprisonment inspired by literature, to be further discussed in Chapter Three. Tolstoy's novel *Resurrection* is mentioned throughout her memoirs furthermore, she references Princess Tarakanova in her poetry. The

suffering, strength, and growth of these women not only provide inspiration for future imprisoned women, but their behaviors and experiences can be observed within them as well.

CHAPTER THREE

WOMEN IN THE GULAG IN ALEXANDER SOLZHENITSYN'S *GULAG ARCHIPELAGO* AND VARLAM SHALAMOV'S *KOLYMA TALES*

Women in prison are depicted in the works of Russian authors Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Varlam Shalamov. Their accounts of life in the labor camp provide insight into the frequent and violent sexual assault of female prisoners. Both authors were imprisoned in the Gulag system under Article 58 of the Soviet Penal Code, suspicion of counter-revolutionary activity. Solzhenitsyn was arrested in 1945 serving time in several labor camps. His sentence ended in 1953 and he was sent in exile for life in Birlik, Kazakhstan, but in 1956 he was exonerated and freed from exile. *The Gulag Archipelago* was written over the span of 9 years, from 1958 to 1967, but not published until 1973. The work provides a history of the Gulag system and description of life therein based on historical evidence, interviews with prisoners, and Solzhenitsyn's own experience in camp. Also writing about life in the Gulag, Shalamov was first arrested in 1929, he served three separate sentences, and was released for the last time in 1951. Shalamov served his second sentence of five years in Kolyma, a region of Siberia containing the most notorious labor camps. After he was released, Shalamov wrote his collection of short stories, *Kolyma Stories*. The stories are based on Shalamov's own personal experiences, and fictionalized accounts of stories he heard from fellow prisoners while in Kolyma. Translations of his work were published in the West in 1966, but like Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* they were not published in the Soviet Union. Both works comment on the abuse of women in prison and camps, as observed by the authors during their own imprisonment.

Solzhenitsyn offers a brief chapter specifically focused on women in his novel *The Gulag*

Archipelago, titled “Women in camp”. He explains that in prison the experience of men and women was equal or possibly easier for female prisoners, and women tended to accept the reality of their situation quickly and adapt. But, “In camp it was the opposite- everything was harder for the women than us men” (Solzhenitsyn, 232). In prison, Solzhenitsyn observed strength in the female inmates, whom on a whole he believes handled the situation better than the men. In prison women were not subject to physical labor, or intermixed with male inmates. Yet, when transferred to camp, he explains that the life of a female prisoner became significantly harder than that of a man and continues on to describe the frequent and violent sexual abuse inflicted upon the women in camp. In the labor camp were no longer protected from male prisoners or guards who were then in the position to easily take advantage of the incarcerated women. “In the camp both the naked women were examined like merchandise... now recollect with amusement how the male trusties stood on either side of a narrow corridor and passed the newly arrived women through the corridor naked, not all at once, but one at a time. And then the trusties decided among themselves who got whom” (Solzhenitsyn, 232). The women in camp would be “propositioned” by trusties (privileged male prisoners), meaning they were to receive warm food and comfort in return for sex. Solzhenitsyn further explains, “Impatient trusties demanded ‘payment’ right after the potatoes, while those more restrained escorted their dates home and explained the future” (Solzhenitsyn, 233). Often only after receiving warm meals or other comforts from the trusties were the women told they were expected to sleep with them in return. Being their prisoners, these women could not reject the man’s advances. Solzhenitsyn implies that it was better for the women to submit to the trusties and provide sex because without this they were left to fend for themselves among the male prisoners.

Explaining the psychological torment these relationships with trusties had on the female

prisoners, Solzhenitsyn states, “For some of them, from the beginning to the end, this step was less bearable than death. Others would bridle, hesitate, be embarrassed” (Solzhenitsyn, 233). Camps for political prisoners were mainly populated by those imprisoned under Article 58 of Soviet Penal Code for suspicion of counter-revolutionary activity, as Solzhenitsyn himself was. Women imprisoned under Article 58 had a harder time accepting the reality of the transactional relationships with male trustees, and submitting to sex. As Solzhenitsyn explains, this was incredibly difficult for these women emotionally as well as physically, and for some the worst possible outcome of their incarceration. The trustees abuse of their power over female prisoners not only hurt them in the obvious form of rape, but the psychological effects of these relationships caused further harm to the women in camp. Realizing they had no other option, the women must confront the idea that in camp they are nothing more than the property of the men in charge, to be used to satisfy their sexual needs with little to no means of avoiding this fate. Yet, “And what of it if you loved someone out in freedom and wanted to remain true to him? What profit is there in the fidelity of a female corpse? ‘*When you get back to freedom- who is going to need you?*’ Those were the words which kept ringing eternally through the women’s barracks” (Solzhenitsyn, 233). The extreme physical toll life in camp took on female prisoners meant that upon their release, they would not only look worn and broken, but Solzhenitsyn explains that often times malnourishment and hard labor resulted in the woman’s inability to have children. Thus, female prisoners were left wondering what their lives would look like upon their release, and who would wait for or learn to love a “female corpse”. Confronted with their own physical degradation or loss of the ability to reproduce Solzhenitsyn again exhibits how women in camp were not only subject to physical abuse, but psychological as well.

Expanding on the sexual abuse of women in camp, Solzhenitsyn states, “Obvious old age

and obvious ugliness were the only defenses for a woman there- nothing else. Attractiveness was a curse. Such a woman had a constant stream of visitors on her bunk and was constantly surrounded. They propositioned her and threatened her with beatings and knives- and she had no hope of being able to stand up against it but only to be smart about whom she gave in to” (Solzhenitsyn, 234). Solzhenitsyn describes the abuse women in camp suffered at the hands of their captors. Especially that of more attractive women who were constantly assaulted and threatened in their own beds. The power prison and camp guards held over these women meant, as Solzhenitsyn writes, they had no power to stop these assaults for they were threatened with violence and feared for their lives. “According to the statistics of the twenties there was one woman serving time of every six or seven men. After the decrees of the thirties and forties the proportion of women to men rose substantially- but still not sufficiently for women not to be valued, particularly the attractive ones” (Solzhenitsyn, 232).

In *My First Death*, Shalamov describes the death of a beautiful woman named Anna Pavlovna in a Kolyma camp. “A woman lay supine at this man’s feet. Her fur coat was open, her brightly colored dress was creased. A black crumpled shawl was lying by her head. The shawl had been trodden into the snow, as had her blond hair, which seemed almost white in the moonlight. Her thin blond hair, which seemed almost white in the moonlight. Her thin throat was open, and dark oval stains showed on the right and left of her neck. Her face was white, bloodless, and when I had taken a good look, I recognized Anna Pavlovna, the secretary to the chief of our mine” (Shalamov, 108). This woman raped to death, Shalamov shows how the guard had no regard for this woman’s life. Not only did he assault her in the freezing snow, but choked her to death while doing so. “Now she was lying there dead, strangled by the fingers of the man in military uniform who was looking around him with a wild, bewildered gaze”

(Shalamov,108). Shalamov writes that this woman was “Our brigade loved Anna”, stating that she was well liked by the prisoners for she understood them and treated them as humans. The guard’s reaction to the corpse of the woman he killed is that of confusion. Shalamov explains that this specific guard had a history of brutality, thus one can infer that in taking advantage of this woman he used an excessive amount of force, killing her even though this was not his intention. This story depicts the violent environment of labor camps, Anna was a well-liked secretary working at the camp, not a prisoner. Yet she was still subject to the same abuse inflicted upon imprisoned women. Anna’s death is yet another situation in which a guard feels entitled, and assaults a woman knowing there will be no repercussions for his actions.

Not only did guards sexually abuse women, forcibly entering their huts and proceeding to take advantage of them, but they preyed on the vulnerability of female prisoners to achieve their goals. In Shalamov’s short story, *Lida*, he depicts the situation of a woman named Lida, whose camp husband had passed away, and she was refused her boss’s orders to live with him. “But the girl refused to live with her boss... the girl was trying to get into the hospital so as to escape harassment” (Shalomov, 344). Shalamov explains how if a boss wanted a female prisoner to live with them, to be used for sex, it was almost impossible for the woman to escape her fate. The boss’s ability to order a prisoner to live in his home gave most women no choice but to submit to sexual abuse for an indiscriminate amount of time. This story highlights the inability to consent to sex or to even control one’s own life experienced by women in camp. Though, Lida was approved to work in the hospital, and avoided harassment, Shalamov uses this narrative to inform his readers of sexual assault within the camps, and the almost complete inability of the victims to reject these advances. Furthermore, he writes, “The boss who had brought Lida rushed into the hospital to protest... The lieutenant went off, cursing, and vanished forever from

Lida's life" (Shalamov, 344-5). Shalamov provides a brief account of the boss's reaction to the loss of Lida. The guards hostile protestations, and anger at the reassignment of the women he hoped to "own" allow the readers to understand the scope of this type of sexual abuse. The boss is taken aback by the denial of his "property", suggesting that a woman escaping harassment was an uncommon occurrence that those in power were unaccustomed to. Shalamov provides insight into the mindset of those in positions of power in the Gulag, presenting the idea the women in the camps were viewed as property and those with power over them believed they had the absolute right to access their "property". The boss's reaction shows readers that sexual assault was a normal occurrence in labor camps, and the difficulty facing female prisoners when attempting to avoid this abuse.

Shalamov also provides some commentary on the treatment of female prisoners by the male prisoners. In *The Spade Artist*, "I told him off because of Nina, who was pregnant. 'She was asking for it' said Shvetsov. 'What can you do about it? I grew up in the camps. I was a boy when I was put in prison. As for all the women I've had, believe it or not, I've lost count. And you know what? I never ever slept with any of them in a bed'" (Shalamov, 566). Shalamov depicts a likable former prisoner, who got Nina, a kitchen server pregnant. Though, it is not explicitly stated that these instances were not consensual, or that of abuse, Shalamov depicts the arrogance and pride taken in the acquisition of women amongst some male prisoners. The former prisoner explains that "she was asking for it", thus Shalamov allows the readers to question of the legitimacy of his statement and understand the views of male prisoners towards women.

The frequency of sexual assault against women in the Gulag resulted in unwanted pregnancies amongst women in camp. Assuming that Nina's sexual encounter with Shvetsov

was not that of consent, not only was she sexually abused, but got pregnant. Thus, creating more hardship for not just the mother, but the child who will be born into the camp, and taken from the mother after birth, if it is to survive. Often times pregnant women in camp were not in the physical condition to carry a child, resulting in the death of both mother and child. These women were left with no choice carry their child in the harsh conditions of the labor camp. Then the pregnancy was made even more difficult for these women were left to deal with the psychological torture of carrying their rapist's baby. Furthering the cycle of abuse these women had no choice but to endure.

Also writing about pregnancy within the camps, Solzhenitsyn states, "And these issues of whether to give birth or not, which were difficult enough for any woman at all, were still more confused for a woman camp inmate. And what would happen to the child subsequently?" (Solzhenitsyn, 237). Just as Shalamov described in his story *The Spade Artist*, Solzhenitsyn also comments on the issues that arise when a woman is pregnant at camp. He describes how even if the baby was the product of a consensual sex, female prisoners were left to question the life they would be subjecting their child to. Expanding on the long-term effects of rape in the camps, Solzhenitsyn comments on the affects it had on the health of women in camp. "And then, too, venereal diseases were nearly epidemic at Krivoshchekovo. There was a rumor that nearly half the women were infected, but there was no way out, and on and on both the sovereigns and the suppliants kept crossing the same threshold" (Solzhenitsyn, 234). He explains how because of the frequency of rapes within the camp, venereal diseases were all too common. Furthermore, how the treatment of these diseases was uncommon, and he states how even those who worked in the medical section failed to aid these women. Solzhenitsyn describes how doctors, and those working with them, would strategically avoid women known to have these diseases. Thus,

explaining how the rape of women in the camp was not only a traumatizing experience, but one with lasting consequences that were unlikely to be resolved.

Shalamov's story about the kitchen server Nina in, *The Spade Artist*, parallels abuse of women today, ignoring consent by differing blame to the victims by suggesting that in some way, her actions of appearance mean "she was asking for it". The patriarchal structure of the labor camps allowed for men to behave as if they were above women feeling entitled to sex and control based on nothing but gender. We can observe that the sexual assault, and gender-based violence described by Shalamov and Solzhenitsyn is still occurring today within our society, for the attitudes held by abusers have not changed, just the setting. Solzhenitsyn concludes his chapter on women in the camp stating, "Why recall all that when it is still the same even today?" (Solzhenitsyn, 237).

Sexual abuse of women in the Soviet Prison system was a common occurrence, as depicted by both Solzhenitsyn, and Shalamov. The assaults seem even more tragic when analyzing the power dynamics of the work camps and the conditions that led to such a hostile sexual environment. Shalamov and Solzhenitsyn describe situations and mindsets that can still be observed in modern day abuse of women. These authors help educate their readers about the treatment of women in the Gulag, leaving those who read the works with a better understanding of the traumas these women endured in a prison system where sexual abuse was normalized.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE MEMOIRS OF EVGENIA GINZBURG, *JOURNEY INTO THE WHIRLWIND* AND *WITHIN THE WHIRLWIND*

Evgenia Ginzburg's memoirs, *Journey into the Whirlwind* (2002) and *Within the Whirlwind* (1981), provide an account of her own experiences during Stalin's purges. Born in Moscow in 1904, Ginzburg was a college educated active communist. She worked as a professor, and head of the Kazan State University department of the history of Leninism. In 1935 Ginzburg was forced to step down and leave the university when accused of participating in a counter revolutionary Trotskyist organization lead by a fellow professor. Ginzburg's refusal to denounce her colleagues when questioned by Soviet officials resulted in her arrest in 1937. Just as Solzhenitsyn and Shalamov, Ginzburg was arrested under Article 58 of the Soviet Penal Code, suspicion of counter-revolutionary activity. She served an 18-year sentence, beginning in the notorious Moscow prisons Lefortovo and Butyrka, then to Magadan where she worked in a camp hospital, and finally to the labor camps of Kolyma. Ginzburg was released from exile in 1955 and allowed to return to Moscow where she began to write *Journey into the Whirlwind* and *Within the Whirlwind*. Paul R. Gregory writes in *Women of the Gulag*, "Most belles-lettres on the Gulag, starting with the classic accounts of Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Varlam Shalamov, explore primarily the travails of men" (Gregory, x). Ginzburg's memoirs focus on the experience of women, thus it is an important contribution to Gulag literature. Furthermore, Ginzburg's memoirs provide insight into the psychological suffering of imprisoned women. Her memoirs are the first to do so, Ginzburg's inclusion of the theme is a new addition to Gulag literature.

In the epilogue to the second volume of her memoirs, *Within the Whirlwind*, Ginzburg explains that hoping to pass the Soviet censors for publication of her work, she sacrificed parts of her narrative while writing and editing volume one. She writes, “Alas, together with my hopes of publication the missing inner editor came into being. He carped at every paragraph: ‘You won’t get that past the censor.’ I started looking for more streamlined formulation, and I not infrequently spoiled passages that had come out well, comforting myself with the thought, that, after all, a sentence or so was not much sacrifice for the sake of publication, of reaching people at last. All this had a considerable effect on the first part and the beginning of the second part of *Whirlwind*” (Ginzburg 1981, 419). Ginzburg explains that though her hopes for the publication of her work in the USSR impacted the first volume, she wrote only the truth, and when writing volume two had given up on the possibility and sought only to finishing telling her story. Thus, in *Journey into the Whirlwind* Ginzburg describes the suffering she endured during her sentence, but focuses on her thoughts and feelings during this time. Whereas this exploration of her psyche is continued in *Within the Whirlwind*, but to a lesser degree as she portrays the horror she witnessed during her sentence in Kolyma which result in her moral and political awakening. She explains in the epilogue to her second volume why she needed to finish telling her story, “Not so much because I want to record facts about my later years in camp and exile as to reveal to the reader the heroine’s spiritual evolution, the gradual transformation of a naïve young Communist idealist into someone who had tasted unforgettably the fruits of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, a human being who amid all her setbacks and sufferings also had moments (however brief) of fresh insight in her search for truth. It is this cruel journey of the soul and not just the chronology of my sufferings that I want to bring home to the reader” (Ginzburg 1981,

423). The second volume vividly depicts the horror of imprisonment within the Soviet prison system.

In his essay “The Uses of Vulnerability: Literature and Ideology in Evgenia Ginzburg’s *Memoir of the Gulag*”, Dariusz Tolczyk writes, “Whereas most testimonies to moral resistance in the Gulag underscore the reliance of the victims on moral languages that anchored their identities before their imprisonment, Ginzburg testifies to resisting this assault despite discovering in prison that the moral language that anchored her identity before her imprisonment was, in fact, vacuous. Her experience of the Gulag is not of a successful defense of her moral identity against overwhelming pressures, but rather of a purposeful abandonment of her old moral framework of identity and the construction, almost from scratch of a new one. She accomplishes this under conditions of extreme vulnerability, in a situation defying all reasonable expectations of success” (Tolczyk, 61). A loyal communist before and after her imprisonment, Ginzburg’s awakening manifests in the abandonment of the belief that communism as it occurred was a moral institution. Despite her experience, Ginzburg remains a loyal communist, but her experience allows her to see the flaws in her complete devotion to the party, and understand the horrors that occurred under Stalin. Furthermore, Tolczyk states “What Zhenia realizes in Stalin’s prison is that, in order to rebuild her moral sense of self, she must find a language enabling her to view the world and herself from the viewpoint of those who suffer history, rather than those who claim to make it” (Tolczyk, 67). As Tolczyk explains, the conditions in which she must rebuild her view of the world and of herself have ultimately set her up for failure. She is physically and mentally broken down by the conditions in prison and camp as well as from the abuse inflicted upon her by jailers and guards. Yet, her strength and refusal to succumb to hopelessness allow her to embark on the “journey of the soul” which she aims to share in her

works. Ginzburg's memoirs not only address the horrors inflicted upon imprisoned women, but the internal struggle of coming to terms with one's reality.

Of the beginning of her time in prison Ginzburg explains, "They made not the slightest attempt to conceal their cynicism, cruelty, and anticipation of the pleasure of torturing a victim. No commentary was needed- they spoke for themselves. But I did not give up immediately. I tried to make it plain that I still considered myself a human being, a Communist, and a woman" (Ginzburg 2002, 51). She describes the Soviet officials and prison guards as extremely cruel, and writes that they enjoy their work. The sadism witnessed by Ginzburg helps elaborate on the reader's view of Soviet officials and guards on a larger scale, showing their hatred of prisoners and the pleasure they took in punishing them. Ginzburg's view of self is clear at the beginning of the novel. Despite the horrific conditions in prison, physical and verbal abuse from the officials and guards, she remains steadfast in her beliefs and self-perception. Throughout her trial and interrogations, Ginzburg maintains that she is innocent. Arrested for a crime she did not commit, she refuses to take responsibility for something she didn't do, and as a loyal communist she maintains that she would not act against the party's interest. She cannot understand how the system in which she believes and actively participates could wrongfully accuse one of its own, and begins to question the party's interests.

Tolczyk also comments on the ways Evgenia is able to restructure her moral identity. "What Zhenia realizes in Stalin's prison is that, in order to rebuild her moral sense of self, she must find a language enabling her to view the world and herself from the viewpoint of those who suffer history, rather than those who claim to make it" (Tolczyk, 67). She does so by composing poems and reflecting on literature while in prison. "I reflected once again on the power which literature exerts on us in that state of spiritual composure which prison life induces, and which

makes us strive, devoutly and humbly, to drink in an author's words to the full" (Ginzburg 2002, 238). Reading, and reflection on literature allowed Ginzburg to maintain composure and her will to live during her time in prison. Tolczyk explains, "What she draws on in particular is the Russian tradition of literature as a force subverting the oppressive social status quo. Nikolai Nekrasov's long poem *Russian Women* and Tolstoy's *Resurrection* provide her with central models in this respect. She compares herself to Nekrasov's characters of Ekaterina Trubetskaia and Maria Volkonskaia (both historical figures), wives of Decembrists, who accompanied their husbands to their punitive labour colonies and Siberia. Viewing her own fate in terms of Tolstoy's novel, she draws on a central character of *Resurrection*- Maslova- a victim of social injustice wrongly condemned to punitive labour, who, through her altruism towards fellow prisoners, experiences moral growth even under the oppressive conditions of a Siberian prison colony" (Tolczyk, 67-68). In prison Ginzburg draws inspiration from Tolstoy's heroine, Katusha Maslova.

"Which would I start on? Of course, Tolstoy's *Resurrection!*" (Ginzburg 2002, 213). As Tolczyk discusses above, Ginzburg uses Maslova as a model for moral growth and strength through imprisonment. Literature provides Evgenia with an escape from prison life, and serves as a way for her to reevaluate her moral ideology that she describes as her "journey of the soul". Furthermore, she composes poetry while in prison. "I composed some verses about my second spell in the punishment cell:

It's like the Holy Inquisition,
My bare feet stand on icy stone-
Am I accused of dealing with the devil
Or of opposing the Party line?

The centuries merge and blur

In this renovated dungeon.

Is that Princess Tarakanova

Breathing her last here at my side?..." (Ginzburg 2002, 258). In solitary confinement in a punishment cell, Ginzburg uses poetry to reflect on her imprisonment and escape from her suffering. In the poem she makes reference to Princess Tarakanova, imprisoned under Catherine the Great. Again the reader can observe Ginzburg drawing strength and inspiration from women imprisoned before her, and using poetry and literature to escape from life in prison.

Furthermore, Ginzburg provides vivid descriptions of interrogation techniques used on female prisoners. "Vevers sniffing cocaine and giggling as well as shouting. 'Ha-ha-ha! What's become of our university beauty now! You look at least forty. Aksyonov wouldn't recognize his sweetheart. And if you go on being stubborn we'll turn you into a real grandma. You haven't been in the rubber cell yet, have you?'" (Ginzburg 2002, 88). She describes the behavior of her interrogator, Vevers. Depicting his cruelty and the sadistic pleasure he seems to take in his work, Ginzburg recalls the verbal abuse inflicted upon female prisoners. Vevers degrades Evgenia by insulting her physical appearance and implying that she would no longer appear attractive to her husband. Soviet guards and officials used verbal abuse to break down the already physically weakened women. Imprisoned women suffered the horrific conditions of prison, torture during interrogation, and by insulting their appearance and femininity their jailers increased their mental suffering as well. "Thus I felt that the shaving of the heads of the Suzdal prisoners, and especially of my old friend Lena, was the supreme insult to their femininity" (Ginzburg 2002, 338). In transit to labor camp in Magadan, Evgenia reunites with a prisoner she had known at the beginning of her sentence who had been transferred to a different prison. All

women in the Suzdal prison had their heads shaved. Again, the reader can observe the Soviets degradation of female prisoners, stripping them of their femininity and attempting to reduce them to from women to strictly prisoners.

Ginzburg continues to comment on the degradation of femininity. “No woman of thirty likes to be transformed into a scarecrow, even if no one is going to see her. But we soon turned our minds to the problem of how to keep at least one brassiere each. Prison underwear consisted only of coarse calico shirts and trousers. There were no brassieres, and the resultant slovenliness of our appearance was more than we could bear” (Ginzburg 2002, 216). In prison, Evgenia and the other women hid brassieres in an attempt to maintain some semblance of femininity. She writes that herself and the other women found their physical appearances unbearable, and despite the torture and horrific prison conditions they still strove to take some pride in their identity as women. “‘Underwear can only be changed if it’s badly stained by menstruation,’ declared the Brigand in a loud, official tone. ‘It will all be fumigated while you’re washing, and then you’ll have to put it on again. It may not look very nice, but at least it’ll be disinfected’” (Ginzburg 2002, 328). On the train to Magadan, one of the women asks the Brigand if they could have a change of underwear. Not only were female prisoners appalled by their physical appearance and lack of proper undergarments, but those supplied were unsanitary. Thus, the degradation of female prisoners can be seen besides the verbal abuse inflicted upon them by the Soviet guards and officials and in deprivation materials needed to maintain basic human decency.

In *Journey into the Whirlwind* Ginzburg reflects upon her mindset in prison. When informed by another prisoner that her husband has been arrested she as well recounts her reaction. “Your husband is here. He was arrested a week ago.’ I collapsed onto the bunk. Even today I cannot write calmly of that moment. From the minute I was arrested I had strictly

forbidden myself to think about the children. The thought of them drained me of courage. The worst thing of all was to dwell on the details of their daily life” (Ginzburg 2002, 122). Arrested under Article 58 of the Soviet Penal Code, Ginzburg’s husband was persecuted for her alleged crime. Upon learning that her husband is also in prison, Evgenia’s suffering reaches its peak as she confronts the question of her children’s fate. Like many other female prisoners, Ginzburg had to leave her children upon arrest, the suffering of an imprisoned mother was exacerbated by the worry that their children remain safe when they are not there to protect them. By refusing to think of her children, Evgenia was able to maintain a mental distance between her current situation as it applied to her family. But, when learning of her husband’s arrest, this distance was shattered, and she finds herself “drained of courage”.

Ginzburg’s descriptions of her mental state while in prison provide insight into the thoughts and feelings of other imprisoned women. Through her own experience and those of the women imprisoned with her she explains the toll of physical and mental struggling in prison. “One night in the Lubyanka cell she shared with Eugenia, Anna woke up to a faint sound like that of dripping water. It was blood pouring from her cellmate’s wrist. She had cut it with a small razor blade she had somehow managed to steal from an interrogator. Anna shouted for help, and the warders came and took Eugenia away” (Ginzburg 2002, 193). Held in the Pugachev Tower, a transit prison, before she was to be sent to a solitary prison (though her sentence was altered and she was sent to labor camps instead), Ginzburg listens to her cellmate’s story about a woman she had met in Lubyanka, Eugenia Podolskaya. Podolskaya was a loyal party member summoned by the NKVD and told she would spend a month in Lubyanka as if she was serving a sentence, and afterward sign a statement confirming the guilt of members of a counter-revolutionary group. She was told to confess to the same crime, and in return for her

statement she would be given a new name and allowed to leave Moscow. After a month of imprisonment, Eugenia signed the statement, leading to the death of twenty-five individuals. After the signature, the NKVD informed her that she would be shot and left Eugenia in her cell for over a month without contact, at which point she attempted suicide. This story told to Evgenia by her cellmate demonstrates the corruption of the Soviets, and illegitimacy of the accusations against many prisoners. Furthermore, Evgenia's steadfast belief in and loyalty to the communist party is shaken. She has already begun to doubt the system to which she dedicated her life for she is imprisoned under false pretenses, but now Evgenia has learned of another instance of corruption within her party. Ginzburg's "journey of the soul" that she wants to share with her readers is observed in her acknowledgement of the evils committed by the communist party, as well as a perfect example of the Soviet's agenda taking precedent over the life of individuals. Though Eugenia Podolskaya's actions resulted in the death of many individuals, the story shows readers how the Soviet's manipulations and the suffering inflicted upon innocent women in prison and camp led many female prisoners to suicide, for they had completely given up hope or simply lacked the strength to suffer any longer.

In prison, Ginzburg also describes the physical abuse inflicted on female prisoners. "On the floor, beside the slop pail, lay Zina. Her white blouse, crumpled, torn, and blood-stained, now looked like a wounded bird. There was a huge bruise on her bare shoulder. We stared in horror. So it had begun! This was the first case (at any rate, the first we had seen) of a woman being beaten during interrogation" (Ginzburg 2002, 129). In the Lubyanka prison, Ginzburg and the other female prisoners had been subject to verbal abuse, deprivation of food and water, isolation, and other forms of torture during interrogation, but until this event women had not been beaten. The first woman, that they had observed, beaten during interrogation terrified

Ginzburg and her fellow imprisoned women for they were now aware of the possibility. She describes the atmosphere of fear following the beating of Zina, “Over and through the screams of the tortured, we could hear the shouts and curses of the torturers. Added to the cacophony was the noise of chairs being hurled about, fists banding on tables, and some other unidentifiable sound which froze one’s blood” (Ginzburg 2002, 166). Ginzburg recounts the sounds of torture she and the other women heard every day from their cells. They not only lived in fear of their own interrogations, but heard the suffering of their friends or cellmates experiencing the abuse soon to be inflicted upon themselves. The abuse inflicted upon imprisoned women was both mental and physical.

In addition, Ginzburg describes the sexual abuse inflicted upon imprisoned women. “Before I knew what was happening he started to undress me by force. I felt his paws on my breast. I heard myself scream wildly, and broke loose from him. This time it was more than I could stand... Suddenly I felt a sharp pain, so excruciating that I almost lost consciousness. The Nabob had twisted my arms back and bound my hands together with a towel. Through my daze I saw a wardress rush over to help him. She undressed me down to my prison shirt... My whole body throbbed with pain. I lay on my back on the low plank bed, almost naked” (Ginzburg 2002, 228). A senior warder escorts Evgenia into an “underground punishment cell” wherein he rapes her. Ginzburg’s portrayal of the assault depicts the normalcy of sexual violence in prison. The wardress assists the senior warder in undressing Evgenia when she refuses to do so, seemingly prepared to assist in the rape of another woman. There were no repercussions for the sexual assault of women in prison, the warder like many others took advantage of his power knowing the only punishment for this rape would be suffered by the victim for it added to the horror she endured during her sentence. In her essay “Rape Trauma Syndrome” Ann Wolbert

Burgess explains, “Recognition of rape as a significant trauma and life event capable of disrupting normal patterns is clearly being addressed by clinicians in the treatment setting” (Burgess, 98). The psychological trauma accompanying rape proliferated the suffering of female prisoners for they were already combating the trauma of imprisonment. Furthermore, “observe how a rape attack heightens a woman’s sense of helplessness, intensifies conflicts about dependence and independence, generates self-criticism and guilt that devalue her as an individual” (Burgess, 101). Imprisoned women were already helpless, and unable to resist rape intensified that feeling.

Solzhenitsyn writes about the sexual abuse of female prisoners by trusties (privileged male prisoners), “In the camp bath the naked women were examined like merchandise... now recollect with amusement how the male trusties stood on either side of a narrow corridor and passed the newly arrived women through the corridor naked, not all at once, but one at a time. And then the trusties decided among themselves who got whom” (Solzhenitsyn, 232). Ginzburg explains the same situation from her own experience, “The problem of women was an acute one for the arrogant, well-fed trusties recruited from among the ‘embezzlers’ who held positions of authority in the men’s zone... On the first day I was constantly close to tears; I realized that I was surrounded by wild beats and should be lucky if I could keep myself from going under for more than a few days... I sat there like a person condemned, while an unsavory pack of trusties debated with relish which of them would have first go at me” (Ginzburg 2002, 399-400). As described by Solzhenitsyn, Evgenia’s depiction of male trusties provides insight into the thoughts and feelings of female prisoners as they were chosen by these men. Explained by Solzhenitsyn in the previous chapter, male trusties would provide female prisoners with food, warm sleeping quarters, or money in exchange for sex. Ginzburg shows how female prisoners,

already suffering from starvation and physical exhaustion, were further punished as they were forced to have sex to ensure their safety. The exchange of sex for goods was not only humiliating, but the fear of physical violence if the woman denied the trustees proposition further increased their suffering. Comparing the trustees to “wild beasts”, Ginzburg’s language helps the readers understand the attitudes men in power, they felt no remorse taking advantage of imprisoned women seeking only to satisfy their sexual needs. Men in a position of power felt entitled to sexually abuse female prisoners with no consideration for the wellbeing of these women.

In the second volume of Evgenia Ginzburg’s *Within the Whirlwind* Ginzburg provides detailed accounts of the experience of women in Kolyma labor camps, allowing her readers to understand the violence committed against these women. “The squeals of naked girls mingled with the swearing and guffawing of the drunken, maddened yokels. They now bore no resemblance to soldiers or to the peasants they had once been. They were satyrs, Grand Guignol grotesques” (Ginzburg 1981, 104). Ginzburg depicts the guards as “satyrs”, in Greek mythology, a satyr is a male spirit with a tail and ears resembling a horse, with a permanent exaggerated erection. As well as comparing the situation to a show at the Grand Guignol theater, which specialized in naturalistic horrors. “On this particular occasion they had come on private business, for a nauseating, fearful mass orgy” (Ginzburg 1981, 104). Evgenia describes one night when the guards entered the women’s hut and drunkenly raped the women prisoners. This event shows the readers the complete lack of power these women had; they were at the disposal of their captors unable to stop this horrifying event. The guards’ power over these women allowed them to do with them what they pleased.

Evgenia portrays to readers how in the Gulag women were treated as objects in the social

aspect of camp life, yet were sentenced to hard labor just as the men, for they were still prisoners. Evgenia's depiction of the guards in this passage, characterizing them as something other than human. Taking advantage of women prisoners not only because of their natural urges, but driven by their ability to do so because of their position of power over the convicted women. Thus, Eugenia explains the power dynamic between prisoners and guards which allows those in a position of power to feel as if those beneath them are to be used for their personal benefit. Sexual abuse of women by guards was a common occurrence in the Gulag, Ginzburg's detailed depiction of this massive orgy not only provides commentary on this specific event, but gives the readers an understanding of the power the guards hold over women prisoners and the ways in which they abuse it.

Women were not only sexually abused by guards or those in positions of power, but some viewed their sexuality as their only means of survival. Women consenting to sexual relations with males in exchange for goods can also be viewed as sexual abuse. The conditions these women were forced to endure caused them to live purely to survive, and in order to survive many women had to resort to sexual relations to stay alive. "It's hell to be an intellectual! Absolute Hell! After all it's not as if it were a tragedy, is it? Others do just the same to get themselves some bread. And I did it too. Earned it in the same way as thousands of other women earned it when there was no other way open to them. There was this peasant coming through the taiga. And I was sawing on my own. My workmate was out sick, you see. And the guard was a long way off at the time... He put the loaf straight down on the snow. I couldn't take my eyes off it. Now I can't even touch it" (Ginzburg 1981, 42). While Eugenia is working in the dispensary at Sudar, a young woman prisoner carrying a loaf of black bread rushes into the dispensary late one night. "I remembered her as she was in our Car Number 7 of that first prison

train en route to Yaroslavl. A merry, curly-haired girl, so pleased that she had managed to get her postgraduate thesis approved before her arrest” (Ginzburg 1981, 42).

Motivated by starvation, this young woman sees an opportunity to acquire some bread by sleeping with a peasant walking through the taiga. The prisoner obtains the bread, but is unable to eat or look at it, she falls into a fit of hysteria brought on by self-loathing for what she has been reduced to. Though, the young woman is not being directly victimized by a specific individual, the system which has forced her to resort to such unthinkable actions for an intellectual ultimately result in her self-victimization. The woman is punished by no one but herself, yet she is unable to cope with the life she now lives, unable to do whatever she must to merely survive. Though this woman consented to sex in order to receive bread, which may not be read as rape, her extreme self-loathing and disgust in the situation shows us that these women too, are victims of sexual abuse. Ginzburg’s recollection of this event relates to her readers that sexual abuse against women in the work camp does not have to overtly manifest as rape. That the desperation of women often forced them to put themselves into situations of sexual assault. The normalcy of sex in exchange for food allowed these women to view these actions as means of survival, not sexual assault, normalizing sexual abuse of women in the Gulag.

Ginzburg reflects upon the guards indifference to female prisoners while in transit to Kolyma. “The commander, with enviable nonchalance, was walking up and down among the hundreds of naked women... ‘they must think we’re not human, making us walk past the men with nothing on like this. Are they out of their minds or something?’ ... there are no differences of sex where spies, saboteurs, terrorists, and traitors are concerned” (Ginzburg 2002, 331). The vulnerable naked women discuss how the guards and Soviet authorities view them as subhuman, making no distinction between the men and women, they are viewed as just prisoners. The

imprisoned women are further humiliated by their jailers when allowed to wash themselves as they are stripped naked and paraded past the men. Yet, as seen in earlier passages when the male guards or jailers wanted, they saw female prisoners as women taking advantage of them sexually.

In camp Ginzburg also comments on the hatred camps guards had for the incarcerated women. “*We* were ready to forget and forgive now that the whole nation was suffering, ready to write off the injustice done to us. Just as long as we didn’t have to stay there, a sitting target for sadists and a source of gratification to paranoiacs! Please let us go to the front! We’re at war with the fascists, after all! *Our Jailers* were obsessed with tightening everything up... ‘No mercy for the enemy!’ But who the enemy was, was left to be elucidated later... As the result of some incomprehensible logic, the hatred directed at the Germans spilled over onto us” (Ginzburg 1981, 30). She explains how the imprisoned women would have preferred to fight in World War II than remain in camp, where the guards projected their hatred for the Germans onto the prisoners. Feeling as if they were not directly contributing to the war against Germany, the guards sought to serve their country by punishing the imprisoned “enemies of the people”.

Again, describing the Soviet authorities and guards’ view of female prisoners Ginzburg explains how they were considered less important than the camp’s livestock. “The roof leaks, the eaves are iced up, and the rafters have rotted through, so it isn’t safe to put cattle in it. We will be doing a proper repair job on it in due course.’ ‘It’s not worth wasting money on such a pile of old lumber. The best thing would be to use it as a hut for women.’... This was not a joke, nor a witticism, nor even a sadistic gibe. It was simply the profound conviction of a good husbandman that bulls were the foundation of the state farm’s life and that only extreme thoughtlessness on the part of Orlov had prompted him to put them on equal footing with female prisoners” (Ginzburg 1981, 72). Prisoners were considered less important than bulls, for they

were expendable but everyone in the camp depended on livestock to survive. When renovating a structure for housing cattle, one of the camps authorities argues that if it is not safe for cattle it could not be safe for female prisoners. This statement is viewed as ridiculous, for women in camp provided significantly less than cattle, and were subject to worse living conditions. Ginzburg's depiction of this interaction shows how little regard the camp authorities had for the lives of imprisoned women.

Describing her time in the camp, Izvestkovaya for criminal female prisoners, Ginzburg writes, "In Izvestkovaya, as in the most real of hells, there was not only no day and no night, there was not even any intermediate temperature to make existence bearable. It was either the glacial cold of the lime quarry or the infernal cauldron of the hut. I was the first political to find herself in that lepers' colony" (Ginzburg 1981, 103). The horrific conditions in Izvestkovaya are more bearable than living with the criminal woman imprisoned there. Ginzburg, a political prisoner has only spent time in prison and camp with other women like herself. "Both the girls and the guards were at one in their instinctive recoil from me, being from another planet. I was not allowed to rest after our trek" (Ginzburg 1981, 102). The female prisoners and guards were uncomfortable with Evgenia's presence, she is the first political prisoner transferred to Izvestkovaya. The camp guards would not allow her to rest like the other women after working, and she was not accepted by her fellow prisoners. Ginzburg describes the violence against women in Izvestkovaya carried out by the women imprisoned there. She explains the type of women she encountered during her time in the criminal camp, and how like camp guards, these female prisoners carried out acts of violence with little punishment, for most of them had already been sentenced to life in camp. Ginzburg was appalled by the violence and evil she witnessed. "Everyone knew that it was she who had just recently murdered a sweet young girl in the

punishment cells- one of the decree-infringers who had been given five days in the punishment cell for being late for morning parade. Killed her just like that. Because Simka was a toughy! She strangled the girl with her massive arms” (Ginzburg 1981, 101). When committing violence against other women there was little for camp guards to do other than send them to the punishment cells, only for them to be set free and resume normal camp life.

Evgenia Ginzburg’s memoirs allow us to understand the horrors women imprisoned in the Gulag had no choice but to endure. The vivid depiction of physical, mental, and sexual abuse allows readers to understand the suffering endured by female prisoners. Her memoirs not only provide us with information about the Soviet prison system, but she tells us a compelling narrative about the life of women in prison. By describing her own thoughts and interactions with those around her, Evgenia helps readers to understand the ways different people coped with this imprisonment. Thus, Ginzburg provides a unique narrative about her time in the labor camps describing, and often times focusing on the ways in which one can retain their humanity in such inhumane conditions.

CHAPTER FIVE

ANALYSIS OF GUZEL YAKHINA'S *ZULEIKHA OPENS HER EYES*

Guzel Yakhina also depicts the abuse of imprisoned women in her novel, *Zuleikha Opens Her Eyes* (2015). Born in Kazan, Yakhina grew up speaking Tatar and Russian and graduated from the Moscow School of Film with a degree in screenwriting. Her first novel, *Zuleikha Opens Her Eyes* won the Yasnaya Polyana Award, Prose Work of the Year Award in Russia, and the Big Book Award, furthermore, the English Translation by Lisa C. Hayden won the English Pen Award. Based on stories told to Yakhina by her grandmother, who was exiled to a Siberian labor settlement as a child, this historical fiction novel draws inspiration from Yakhina's family history to provide insight into the experience of prosecuted women. Yakhina's novel is an important addition to works depicting imprisoned women, she is a young writer and her return to the topic demonstrates its importance. She recognizes the importance of sharing the previously unexplored suffering and stories of the women before her. The narrative and return to themes of women's suffering, strength, and resilience highlights the importance of discussing the topic. In an interview titled "A Muslim woman and a communist find love in Guzel Yakhina's *Zuleikha*" (2016) for *Russia Beyond* conducted by Alexandra Guzeva, Yakhina states about her grandmother's story, "I also borrowed two specific episodes she remembered: the one where a barge carrying several hundred prisoners locked in the hold sinks in the middle of a river, and another minor fact that my grandmother was taught math by an exiled professor who used a textbook he wrote himself. The rest is either fiction, or facts I took from the memoirs of people who were dekulakized, relocated or imprisoned in the Gulag" (Yakhina).

Yakhina's work of historical fiction is a significant contribution to the theme of women in the GULAG, commenting on the experience of Tatar women and their persecution. The

protagonist, Zuleikha, is a peasant Tatar woman who is arrested and relocated to a Siberian labor settlement after the murder of her abusive husband who resisted dekulakization. Yakhina portrays the abuse, and horrific conditions endured by imprisoned women during the Soviet regime by means of historical fiction. Russian scholar, Valentina V. Borisova writes, “Vladimir Abashevs saw it as ‘the subject of collectivization and camps developed in the books by V. Tendryakov, V. Belov, A. Solzhenitsyn and V. Shalamov’ and attributed it to modern camp prose, along with Zakhar Prilepin’s novel ‘Abode’. They also noted the connection with Russian women’s prose in the novel” (Borisova, 657).

Zuleikha’s life before arrest was a form of imprisonment. Living with her abusive husband and mother-in-law, Zuleikha was routinely physically and verbally assaulted. Yakhina’s novel depicts the violence against imprisoned women, expanding the theme to include that of women trapped in abusive partnerships. The majority of the direct physical abuse inflicted upon Zuleikha occurs at home despite the work she puts into maintaining their home and lifestyle. Yakhina describes the abuse of Zuleikha at the hands of her husband, who is incredibly violent and favors his even crueler mother over his wife. “Murtaza hurls the broom. The handle strikes Zuleikha on the shoulder, hurting; her sheepskin coat falls to the floor. She drops the felt boots herself and darts into the steam room. The door shuts behind her with a bang and the bolt clatters; her husband is locking her inside” (Yakhina, 31). This occurs after Zuleikha is bathing with her mother-in-law, whom she calls “the vampire hag”. Her mother-in-law demands to be beaten with a bundle of birch leaves. Zuleikha complies, and is ridiculed by “the vampire hag” for her weakness. Her mother-in-law claims Zuleikha beat her unprompted, and Murtaza believes his mother and proceeds to beat his wife to punish her for her actions. “Zuleikha lies still, as her husband ordered, but she shudders and scratches the shelf with her

nails at each strike so he doesn't beat her long" (Yakhina, 32). Yakhina explains that Zuleikha is frequently subject to this physical violence at the hands of her husband. Her mother-in-law, who truly hates Zuleikha, abuses her by manipulating Murtaza into becoming violent with his wife. Thus, characterizing the conditions of Zuleikha's imprisonment within her marriage. Zuleikha is submissive to both her husband and mother-in-law, she has accepted her role in the household, and does nothing to better her standing.

Yakhina describes sex between husband and wife, which Zuleikha calls "her wifely duty". "Murtaza's impatient hands pull down her baggy pants (he grunts peevisly: *Now that's a lazybones, hasn't even undressed yet*), lays her on her back, and lifts her smock. His uneven breathing grows closer. Zuleikha senses her husband's beard, long and still smelling of the bathhouse and frost, covering her face; the recent beating on her back aches under his weight. Murtaza's body has finally responded to his desires and he hurries to fulfill them, greedily, powerfully, at length, and triumphantly" (Yakhina, 34). Though, less violent than the beatings Zuleikha receives, sex with her husband is demanded of her and something she just endures. "he's breathing wearily, with satisfaction. 'Go to your own place, woman,' he says and pushes her unmoving body. He doesn't like her to sleep next to him on the bench" (Yakhina, 35). After sex, Zuleikha is sent to her sleeping bench, her husband does not like to share his with her, and calls her "woman", sex with his wife is utilitarian and once they are finished he no longer requires her presence.

Zuleikha, in her own home, serves no other purpose than to satisfy her husband, continue his bloodline, and maintain their household. She is inhuman in the eyes of her husband and mother-in-law, despite all she does they will never see her differently. About sex with Murtaza, Victoria Kravtsova writes, "While Zuleikha's Tatar husband is big, hairy and dark... sex with the

Tatar husband is mere suffering” (Kravtsova, 7). There is no love in Zuleikha’s marriage, and she is a slave in her own home, all acts of intimacy with her husband are to serve him and protect herself.

Furthermore, even before her arrest and exile because of her race and gender, Zuleikha experiences cruelty and verbal abuse from the official Soviet regime. Right before the execution of her husband, by the soldier Ignatov, members of the Soviet military detachment find Zuleikha and her husband foraging for mushrooms in the woods. “The members of the detachment laugh. ‘Tartar woman, oh, but they are harsh! You won’t get away with anything! Isn’t the right, Green Eyes?’ Her father called her Green Eyes when she was a child. That was a long time ago. Zuleikha no longer thinks about the color of her eyes” (Yakhina, 66). The Soviets mock Zuleikha’s nationality, intelligence (for she does not speak Russian very well), and compare her physically to the more conventionally attractive woman with them, Natasha a female Red Army soldier with whom Ignatov’s entire detachment is infatuated. The language used by Ignatov and the other Soviets serves to show their view of Zuleikha at the beginning of the novel. Her ethnicity and gender are something to be laughed at, and she is viewed as lesser than even before she is imprisoned. The Soviets demand that Murtaza show them the bags he is carrying, but he refuses and lifts his ax as if to strike Ignatov, who then shoots him. They leave Zuleikha alone with the body in the woods. When she returns home with his body, the chairman of the rural council arrives to inform her that she is being evicted for failure to collectivize their property. “He glances around dissatisfied, at the bed where Murtaza’s powerful body lies, dark. ‘Just you. As a kulak element of the first category. Active counterrevolutionary. The Party meeting ratified it.’ Mansurka’s short finger pokes at the paper on the trunk” (Yakhina, 73). Dekulakization was a Soviet campaign that resulted in the arrest, deportation, or execution of millions of kulaks,

“wealthy peasants”. Zuleikha’s husband refused to relinquish property and possessions to the state. This results in her arrest for she refuses to leave their home. In his book *Women of the Gulag* Paul R. Gregory writes about dekulakization, “Liquidating the hundreds of thousands of kulak households represented a more ambitious undertaking. In January 1930, the Master (Stalin) assigned each region numerical targets for arrests, shootings, and deportations of kulaks, defined as the more prosperous peasant farmers who owned their own land and who tended to oppose collectivization” (Gregory, 7).

Following her arrest Zuleikha arrives at the transit prison, and Yakhina describes her experience. “Zuleikha steps into an inky darkness that breathes with the smell of bodies long unwashed; the cold metal door nudges her forward... Two tiers of bunks are crowded with people. Others sit on crates, on heaps of old clothes, and on the floor. There are so many people that there’s nowhere to move to. There’s the sound of loud scratching, of snoring, and low voices. A mother whispers a fairytale to her child. In one corner; they’re murmuring, ‘Lord Jesus, have mercy on us sinners,’ while another voice pleads to Allah for refuge from the devil” (Yakhina, 128). Yakhina’s depiction of prison conditions is similar to that of authors such as Ginzburg and Solzhenitsyn. The crowded cells and atmosphere of fear can be observed in other portrayals of Soviet prisons.

In Yakhina’s novel, the description of Zuleikha’s time in prison is brief, but she focuses on Zuleikha’s thoughts and self-reflection. Zuleikha’s experience in prison and exile result in her “awakening” as a woman, similar to that described by Ginzburg in her memoirs. In prison we can observe Zuleikha’s view of self. Her “awakening” can be described as her journey to independence, as the novel progresses, she learns to function independently. “In Zuleikha’s whole, life, she’s never unuttered the word ‘I’ as many times as she has during this month in

prison. Modesty is a virtue so it doesn't befit a decent woman to say 'I'. No matter what tense you use to speak about yourself, the verb will go into the necessary form and the ending will change, making the use of the vain little word superfluous" (Yakhina, 146). In prison Zuleikha is forced to think about herself, no longer thinking only about being a good wife, though despite his death she still worries about failing Murtaza.

Zuleikha and the other kulaks spend a month in the transit prison. Zuleikha reflects on her time in prison, thinking, "After so many days of darkness, light from a kerosene lamp seems as bright as a sliver of sun. After the cell's stuffy air, the cold air in the corridor intoxicates. Legs tired from constant sitting have slackened and plod falteringly along, but the body is glad to be moving. How long had they stayed in the dungeons? Neighbors confirmed it was several weeks; they'd kept track with the daily roll calls" (Yakhina, 147). Again, similar to other authors of camp literature, Yakhina explains how time in prison is difficult to track. Without sunlight or even a lamp, Zuleikha is unable to tell how long she spent in her cell. Furthermore, Zuleikha calls the cells "the dungeons", Yakhina's choice of language reinforces the horror of time in prison.

When moved into the trains for transport, Yakhina explains how the prisoners were packed into a cattle car. "fully loaded with fifty-two deportees and ready for departure. Exceeding the planned load by twelve heads can be considered insignificant because, as the head of the transport hub in Kazan wisely noted the morning, soon they'll be going with ninety per car, standing like horses" (Yakhina, 154). Zuleikha considers herself lucky to only be packed into the car with 51 other prisoners, Yakhina's comment that soon the cars will be filled with more elaborates on the Soviet government's complete disregard for the life of those imprisoned. Comparing the prisoners to horses, packed in as efficiently as possible, readers understand the

reality of mass imprisonment and the view held by the Soviet's that these individuals are subhuman. Not only are the prisoners given little space in the train car, but they also lack food and warmth. After a short time the passengers begin to die. "The children begin dying first. All the children of the unfortunate peasant who had so many ran off to the other side, one after another, as if they were playing tag- first the babies (both at once, on the same day) then the older ones. His wife went after that; she wasn't distinguishing the boundary between this world and the other very clearly" (Yakhina, 163). Watching fellow prisoners die, especially children, was difficult for both men and women. But, Yakhina's description of the death of the children's mother, immediately after the passing of her last child, reiterates the tragic reality of imprisoned mothers previously depicted by Solzhenitsyn, Ginzburg, and Shalamov. Writing that the mother "wasn't distinguishing the boundary between this world and the other" Yakhina suggests the mother's grief was too much for her to handle, resulting in her death.

Zuleikha is imprisoned with both men and women. As a devout Muslim, she feels extremely uncomfortable around the male prisoners. Yakhina's description of Zuleikha and the other women in the train car depicts how female prisoners felt when imprisoned with men. Yakhina explains the horror these women, specifically Muslim women imprisoned during dekulakization, faced. "he unfastens his pants and releases a loud, taut stream into an open hole in the floor. Several women gasp, and stare at the long arc glistening in the firelight, entranced and unblinking. Their husbands tug at their sleeves and they look down, covering their children's eyes" (Yakhina, 157). Zuleikha is "ashamed" witnessing the male prisoner urinate, but this "shame" is replaced with horror as she realizes there is no designated place to use the bathroom and questions what she and the other women will do. Yakhina depicts the unpleasant realities of imprisonment, that without mention may not have occurred to readers.

Again, Yakhina comments on shame, “There is constant shame when she feels the heavy smell of an unwashed body coming from herself, when the soldiers indifferently slide their eyes along her uncovered head and braids during their daily inspections, when she squats behind the latrine’s cloth divider for all to see, when she presses against the sleeping professor at night to try and warm up. She nearly burned up with shame when the unfamiliar doctor’s puffy, indifferent fingers touched her last night. And she’d begun wailing when he announced her pregnancy for all to hear. This was so shameful, shameful, shameful. She would have to bear the disgrace in front of everybody. For the first time in her life, she cannot conceal her secret behind the tall fence of her husband’s house. In her relentlessly displayed belly she will nurture a child who will leave her as soon as it is born” (Yakhina, 187-188). While on the train, Zuleikha faints, and an imprisoned doctor in her car informs her that she is pregnant. Zuleikha birthed four daughter, all of whom died, her mother-in-law used to tell her she was “cursed” and “would only have daughters”. Zuleikha believes she and the child will not survive imprisonment, she is already in poor physical condition and understands this will only get worse. She is not only confronted with the improbability of their and her own survival, but she faces her “greatest fear”, shame. As mentioned above the conditions on the train such as the lack of a bathroom, freezing temperatures, cohabitation with male prisoners, etc. are already shameful to Zuleikha. Now she faces the shame of displaying her pregnancy for all other prisoners to observe. Yakhina’s fictional account of Zuleikha’s pregnancy portrays the suffering of imprisoned pregnant women previously described by Solzhenitsyn, Shalamov, and Ginzburg. But, the conditions in which she must do so are significantly worse, to be discussed later in the chapter. Zuleikha is carrying the child of her deceased husband, she struggles with the realization that she will endure her pregnancy alone, and in the horrific conditions of prison and exile.

Zuleikha Opens Her Eyes explores the suffering of imprisoned women through historical fiction that depicts the same suffering described in nonfictional portrayals. Aside from the physical suffering shown in the novel, Yakhina also explores the idea of psychological suffering as seen in the memoirs of Evgenia Ginzburg. “Sometimes she recites poems that are intelligent, incomprehensible, and very beautiful, in Russian and occasionally, surprisingly, in French, which rumbles like the train wheels. She never recites the same poem twice. The railroad car listens. Zuleikha doesn’t understand how so many varied, complex, and very long lines can fit inside one head, and a female one besides” (Yakhina, 158). Zuleikha’s self-worth at the beginning of the novel and her imprisonment is almost nonexistent, for as a woman she has been taught to not value herself for anything other than her duties as a wife and mother. As the novel progresses, Zuleikha develops self-confidence and worth, discussed in the following pages, but Yakhina’s depiction of her psychological torment allows the reader to understand how many imprisoned women not only physically suffered during their sentences, but mentally as well. Zuleikha’s negative view of self adds to the shame she feels during imprisonment and leads her to question her strength.

Arriving in Siberia, Zuleikha and the other prisoners are transferred onto a barge to take them across the Angara River to the location of the labor settlement. Yakhina comments on Zuleikha’s physical condition. “Carrying the baby is difficult. Zuleikha’s belly has become large and cumbersome, and her legs are unwieldy, like iron... Zuleikha herself has lost a lot of weight over these past months, like during the time of the Great Famine in 1912. Even her fingers are thinner, weakened, and stretched with translucent skin. And so it follows that the baby can’t be getting enough food, either” (Yakhina, 205-206). The lack of food and poor living conditions which weigh heavily on all prisoners are especially difficult for Zuleikha. She is

given no extra food or special treatment despite her pregnancy. Yakhina's depiction of Zuleikha's suffering is similar to the suffering endured by real imprisoned pregnant women, both despite their needs, were treated the same as other prisoners. Pregnant women in prison or camp, who were in poor physical condition, worried about not only their own health, but the health of their unborn child as well. "And these issues of whether to give birth or not, which were difficult enough for any woman at all, were still more confused for a woman camp inmate. And what would happen to the child subsequently?" (Solzhenitsyn, 237). Alexander Solzhenitsyn comments pregnant women in camp, also portraying the addition to the mother's suffering for she is now worried about the survival and future of her child.

As the prisoners are transported by barge to the labor settlement, it sinks and only Zuleikha, Ignatov, and a small number of prisoners survive. When they make it to shore, Ignatov sets off in search of the settlement, only to find there is not one. All their food and supplies sank with the barge, and Ignatov is ordered to wait with the prisoners for the arrival of replacements. "They had enough time to build three shelters under a canopy of wide-boughed spruces. The large tree branches served as a beam on which to lay, crosswise, sizable shaggy boughs with slightly thinner branches over them; the same boughs were used for bedding. Someone proposed tossing birch branches and armfuls of grass on the tree needles inside the shelters for softness, but they didn't have either the energy or the time for that" (Yakhina, 237). Yakhina's contribution to the Gulag theme is her innovative depiction, of the living conditions of prisoners who are stranded outside of a camp. Zuleikha has to survive, not only for herself but for her unborn child as well, increasing the difficulty of her sentence.

Women giving birth within the camp faced undesirable conditions, without a camp, Zuleikha suffered through even worse. "He's never once seen a clinic without walls or a ceiling.

Where the medical staff are dressed in tatters and so muddle-headed they can't lay the maternity patient down properly. Where the operating room is lighted by campfire instead of a bright gas light" (Yakhina, 256). Yakhina describes the thoughts of the imprisoned doctor assisting in the birth of Zuleikha's child. Living in temporary shelters, he had no choice but to deliver her baby without proper supplies or medicine, by firelight. Zuleikha almost dies, and Yakhina's fictional description of the birth can be compared to the lived experience of imprisoned women for the terrible conditions and physical toll childbirth took on the malnourished and physically exhausted mother are similar. Thus, again it is made clear that the experience of imprisonment is difficult for all women, but this difficulty is increased for those who are pregnant. "Her body freezes at night, suffers from heat and mosquito bites during the day, and her stomach demands food" (Yakhina, 273-274).

As observed in Ginzburg's memoirs, camp guards treated prisoners, especially women, as if they were less than human. Even though he is also stranded in Siberia, Ignatov still assumes the role of a guard. He institutes quotas on wood and food gathering, believing that even though he is in the same position, it is his duty to the Soviet state to ensure the prisoners serve a proper sentence. "One time they tried, complaining of cold, rainy weather. Without saying a word, Ignatov grabbed the bucket with the supper Zuleikha had prepared and flung the contents in the Angara" (Yakhina, 280). In the same situation as the prisoners at this point in the novel, Ignatov still believes he should act as a guard. They are all starving and providing enough food for everyone is a difficult task, but to remind the prisoners of his position, he throws away the food Zuleikha has prepared when they complain. Yakhina's description of Ignatov's behavior provides insight into the attitudes and beliefs held by soviet prison and camp guards, they feel it is their duty to use their power to punish the "guilty" beyond imprisonment itself.

Furthermore, the abuses of power and mindset of guards and Soviet officers can be observed in the following passage, specifically how they regarded and treated female prisoners. Gorelov, formally one of the original prisoners in the labor settlement, is drafted into military service. Several years later he returns to the settlement, a lieutenant in the Red Army. Aglaya and Gorelov, imprisoned together with Zuleikha from the beginning, had been engaged in an affair. Yet, upon his return he treats her with cruelty and disgust. His promotion from prisoner to officer completely changes the way he views his former equals, thus Yakhina presents how those in a position of power exhibit superiority and abusive tendencies towards the incarcerated even if they themselves had suffered the same fate. “He releases spicy, dark gray smoke into her face. ‘Listen here, you slut,’ he says calmly, all businesslike. ‘What happened, happened. It’s over. My home’s in another place now. I’ll send for you if I want to screw around. Till then, get lost. About face, march!’ Glashka’s face twitches and collapses into one big, wrinkled grimace. She shrugs her shoulders, turns around, and trudges away, her gaping eyes brimming with large tears that don’t roll away” (Yakhina, 460). Gorelov’s treatment of Aglaya shows how this abuse was worse when directed towards women for the feelings of superiority were compounded with sexism. Yakhina’s language in this passage, Gorelov calling Aglaya a “slut” and later on the page a “hussy”, mirrors the language described by other Gulag writers when describing the guards statements to or about female prisoners.

The surviving exiles, stranded with no food or shelter, barely survive the winter. Many perish, and they are left with no food or tools in the taiga for a year. “There are fewer of them now than a month ago because the exiles have begun using up the firewood supply. Blizzards sometimes cover the taiga, howling over the house for several days, singing and shrieking in the stovepipe, and sending snow flying over the earth in a dense burst, carpeting the sun overhead”

(Yakhina, 292). The conditions to which the exiles in Yakhina's work are subject are even worse than those described in other works. They have no food, shelter, or supplies and Yakhina's description of their suffering is another innovative addition to previously analyzed themes.

Eventually the prisoners receive supplies, and the labor settlement is built around them. Years later it is inhabited by over 100 prisoners, guards, and the commandant Ignatov. In exile, Zuleikha is transformed by motherhood, she develops hunting skills and even kills a bear to save her son. "The beast bares its teeth and a shiny black and pink tongue flashes between yellowed fangs. Yuzuf screeches with joy and stands, too. Zuleikha squeezes the trigger and a shot bangs. The butt of the rifle strikes her hard and painfully in the shoulder, throwing her backward. Gunpowder sharply hits her nose... The bear takes a step toward Yuzuf. A second. A third. Then it collapses to the ground" (Yakhina, 343). The wellbeing of her son is the most important aspect of Zuleikha's life, her determination to keep him safe strengthens her and allows her to develop confidence in herself and her capabilities. Before they are given tools and supplies, Zuleikha begins hunting to provide food for the exiles. Because of necessity she must find her strength to ensure the survival of herself and her son.

One of Zuleikha's duties is to serve Ignatov his dinner in his private quarters every night. Yakhina comments on Zuleikha's feelings during these visits stating, "Her husband's killer is looking at her with her husband's gaze and she's turning to honey. This is agonizing, unbearable, and horrendously shameful. It's as if all her past and present shame has merged, absorbing everything she hasn't felt shameful enough about during this mad year" (Yakhina, 325). Though Yakhina's novel becomes a love story between Ignatov and Zuleikha, her description of Zuleikha's thoughts provides insight into the psychological torment imprisoned

women faced. Zuleikha acknowledges that she is developing romantic feelings for Ignatov, yet this only leads to mental anguish. As previously analyzed, Zuleikha's greatest suffering is her shame. She feels she has betrayed her husband with her interactions with other male prisoners, and the way Ignatov makes her feel is an even larger betrayal. Yakhina's choice of words, "agonizing, unbearable, and horrendously shameful" express the intensity of Zuleikha's mental suffering, proving more difficult than the horrific physical suffering she has experienced through imprisonment. As observed in the works of Ginzburg, Shalamov, and Solzhenitsyn, the psychological torments female prisoners faced amplified their suffering. The conditions Zuleikha meets in imprisonment continue to worsen as she confronts her relationship with Ignatov, her captor and husband's murderer. Eventually, Zuleikha accepts her feelings for Ignatov as she comes to understand that she is not bound to her deceased abusive husband.

In her article, Victoria Kravtsova comments on the Soviets' treatment of Tartar peasants, specifically Zuleikha, as portrayed by Yakhina. "In the book, Ignatov and his friend call Tatarstan 'Tataria' (Yakhina 2015, 19), a Russian variation of the republic's name nowadays used in a derogatory manner (while other parts of the former USSR—Bashkortostan, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan—are still predominantly called by these 'russified' names). Soviet modernity helps Zuleikha to get away from the backward traditions of her 'barbaric' nation. The liberation of the heroine continues with her son's fate" (Kravtsova, 7). Kravtsova's article comments on the controversy surrounding the novel upon publication. Herself and others believed that Yakhina used colonial language, and Zuleikha's redemption after her arrest was attributed, by Yakhina, to Zuleikha's abandonment of her national identity in favor of that of modern Soviets. In Yakhina's novel, this change is characterized as Zuleikha's "awakening",

and her abandonment of previously held values can be compared to Ginzburg's moral and political "awakening" she describes in the epilogues to her memoirs.

Yakhina's novel depicts the story of an imprisoned woman, and though she is subject to horrific suffering, the presentation of the narrative as a work of historical fiction allows her to conclude the story happily. Zuleikha begins the novel as an abused woman who places little to no value on her own life, her imprisonment results in the development of strength and a sense of worth as a woman. "And she will sense that while the pain that fills the world hasn't gone, it has allowed her to breathe" (Yakhina, 482). This is the last line of the novel, Yakhina concludes the story explaining that despite the abuse, suffering, and trauma Zuleikha has survived, she now can live the rest of her life with an understanding of her strength and confidence in her own abilities. Her selfless love for her son gives her the motivation and strength to survive and assures her of her own self-worth. The title of the novel, *Zuleikha Opens Her Eyes* (in the original Russian, *Зулейха Открывает Глаза*), foreshadows Zuleikha's "awakening" as a woman, similarly to Katusha Maslova in Tolstoy's *Resurrection*. The Soviet soldier and executioner of Zuleikha's husband, Ignatov, tasked with transporting Zuleikha and the other prisoners to the Siberian labor settlement helps Zuleikha come to her "awakening", in exile Zuleikha and Ignatov form a relationship. This relationship is not one of abuse, and though she initially struggles to accept her feelings, she sees that she is worthy, he loves her for her resilience and strength. Yet, though Zuleikha's arrest and subsequent exile lead to her transformation, the depiction of the journey to and arrival at the labor settlement still provide insight into the experiences of female prisoners and horrific conditions they had no choice but to endure.

Thus, Guzel Yakhina's debut novel, *Zuleikha Opens Her Eyes* explores the experience of imprisoned women. Her depiction of Zuleikha as an abused wife, a prisoner, and mother reflects

the suffering and experience of female prisoners observed throughout Russian literature. Zuleikha's story ends happily, but the abuse and horrific conditions suffered by imprisoned women is still observed in the narrative. Based on stories passed to Yakhina by her own grandmother and what she has learned about other imprisoned women, the work of historical fiction, *Zuleikha Opens Her Eyes* is a unique exploration of a female prisoner's story and the hardships faced by real women in the Gulag system.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

I have explored the ways imprisoned women have been depicted in Russian literature and analyzed the similarities in themes. The descriptions of these women's mental and physical suffering throughout all works analyzed contain common points. Tolstoy's novel *Resurrection* depicts the imprisonment and exile of Katusha Maslova under the Russian empire. His portrayal of Maslova's moral growth and awakening resulting from her sentence is comparable to that of Evgenia Ginzburg described in her memoirs, *Journey into the Whirlwind* and *Within the Whirlwind*. Ginzburg draws strength from literature throughout her imprisonment, Katusha Maslova inspires her to find strength and pursue her own moral awakening. The similarities between Tolstoy's fictional portrayal of female imprisonment and Ginzburg's recollection of her own suffering are observed not only within the descriptions of prison conditions but in the moral growth of these women. Furthermore, the continuation of the theme of moral growth, or "awakening" can be seen in Guzel Yakhina's fictional novel *Zuleikha Opens Her Eyes*. Zuleikha's time in prison and exile results in her "awakening" as a woman. Abused by her husband and mother-in-law, at the beginning of the novel, Zuleikha is a victim with no confidence in herself or sense of worth. As the novel progresses, and she gives birth to a son, she finds her strength and becomes confident in her worth as a woman. Both Evgenia and Ginzburg developed strong bonds with their sons, finding strength in motherhood. Furthermore, Evgenia met her second husband, Walter, in camp while Zuleikha fell in love with Ignatov, a Soviet guard who became a prisoner when stranded in exile. The bonds between mother and son as well as love found during imprisonment helped Evgenia and Zuleikha find strength and survive the horrors they endured.

The depiction of sexual abuse of women is observed by male authors, such as Solzhenitsyn and Shalamov. While Evgenia Ginzburg's memoirs, chronicling her 18-year sentence, depict in horrific detail the sexual assaults, rapes, and sufferings specific to female prisoners briefly described in works by male authors. The experience of female prisoners, subject to the same conditions, labor, and abuse as men, was made significantly more horrific by the frequent and normalized sexual assaults. Guzel Yakhina's novel exhibits a continuation of these themes in contemporary literature. Zuleikha's experiences in imprisonment are similar to those described by Ginzburg. Yakhina provides a new insight into her heroine's shame as a Muslim woman, she is seen in vulnerable positions by the men with whom she is imprisoned. Ginzburg, and the other women she is imprisoned with struggle to survive the verbal abuse from their jailers with regards to their looks, unsanitary conditions in prison, lack of proper undergarments, and unattractive physical appearances as a result.

My thesis aims to add to the historical accounts of the suffering of imprisoned women. Thus, adding to the historical record using comparative literary analysis of works from different genres due to the lack of information or accounts of the experiences of female prisoners in the Soviet prison system. The works of male authors cannot be compared to the lived experiences of female prisoners, but they help clarify the reality of imprisonment. Frequent and violent sexual abuse of female prisoners, observed by authors such as Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Varlam Shalamov, is rarely discussed in works about the Gulag and their contributions to the topic help fill the gaps in the historical record. Evgenia Ginzburg's memoirs describe her own experiences and the abuse inflicted upon her as seen and reported by male authors in their writing about female prisoners. Her account not only depicts the physical and sexual abuse suffered by imprisoned women, but by providing insight into her thoughts and feelings she explains the

psychological suffering of female prisoners. Therefore, by comparing the depictions of imprisoned women in Russian literature one may develop a clear understanding of the horror and suffering these women endured.

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In Spring 2023 I will receive my Mater of Arts degree in Slavic Studies. I graduated from Florida State in Spring 2021 with a Bachelor of Science in Political Science and an additional major in Russian Language, Literature, and Linguistics and a minor in History. My educational interests include Slavic literatures and languages, linguistics, and world history. In the future I hope to pursue a PhD in Comparative Literature.