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## **Women's Experiences of 1937:**

### **Everyday Legacies of the Purges and the Great Terror in the Soviet Union**

Melanie Ilic

The year 1937 is one of the most important dates in Soviet history. Although the 'nomenklatura purge' and the show trials had started a year earlier, in 1936, it was 1937 that marked the height of the 'Great Terror', when the focus of the purges moved away from Communist Party members and the government elite to ordinary people. July 1937 saw the launch of the mass repressions with the initiation of the 'kulak operation' by the now infamous Operational Order No. 00447 against 'anti-Soviet elements'. The months that followed were marked by a series of national operations against a range of suspect minority ethnic groups.<sup>1</sup> August 1937 saw the introduction of Operational Order No. 00486, which allowed action to be taken against the wives and children of 'enemies of the people'.<sup>2</sup> The mass operations of the Great Terror only came to an end when they were wound down in November 1938, but the purge process continued throughout the Soviet Union.

In consideration of this chapter's title, the year '1937' is used here not just as short-hand for the punitive purge process of the 'Great Terror' that overlaid Stalinist politics in the 1930s,

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<sup>1</sup> For a recent addition to the existing literature on the 'national operations' and their impact on women, see Junbae Jo, 'Memory and History: Korean Women's Experience of Repression in the Stalin Era', in Melanie Ilic (ed.), *Palgrave Handbook on Women and Gender in Twentieth-Century Russia and the Soviet Union*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2017, ch. 12.

<sup>2</sup> The impact of NKVD Operational Order No. 00486 is discussed in Melanie Ilic, 'The Forgotten Five Per Cent: Women, Political Repression and the Purges', in Melanie Ilic (ed.), *Stalin's Terror Revisited*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, pp. 116-39.

which provides the main focus for this study. It is important to remember that a ‘Red Terror’ had already been enacted in the immediate post-revolutionary period that brought the Soviet regime into being; purges continued into the 1920s, with a particular wave of arrests taking place in the late 1920s and early 1930s;<sup>3</sup> beyond the 1930s, the purges continued during the Second World War and extended into the years of post-war reconstruction. From the early 1940s, a whole new agenda of purges was enacted during the early years of the process of Sovietisation in the recently-incorporated Baltic States.<sup>4</sup> Purges were enacted also in the Eastern bloc satellite states after 1945.

The primary targets of the purges came in many guises: political oppositionists from both right and left alongside long-standing and loyal Communist Party members; both the military high command and its rank-and-file; industrial managers who failed to meet production targets and shop-floor workers accused of wrecking; serving and former religious personnel alongside residents of rural religious communities; those identified as *kulaks* during the years of forced collectivisation and the remaining independent farmers in the years that followed; Leningrad citizens expelled from the city in the wake of the murder of Kirov in December

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<sup>3</sup> For one woman’s vivid account of the impact of the purges that took place in the early 1930s, see Tatiana Tchernavin, *Escape from the Soviets*, trans. by N. Alexander, New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1934. This account provides a foretaste of what was to come in ‘1937’.

<sup>4</sup> There is already a substantial literature on the impact of the purges on women in the Baltic States under the Soviet regime. In addition to Dalia Leinarte’s contribution to this volume, see also Leena Kurvet-Käosaar, ‘Travelling Memory and Memory of Travel in Estonian Women’s Deportation Stories’, in Ilic (ed.), *Palgrave Handbook*, ch. 13, and the fictional account presented in Sofi Oksanen’s novel, *Purge* (2011).

1934; nationalists in border regions seeking to separate their territory from the Soviet Union and suspect fifth column supporters of Germany in the run-up to the Second World War; those deemed to be deviants and misfits who found no place for themselves in the new Soviet social order of the 1930s. At the height of the Great Terror in 1937-38, even the internal security forces became targets as members of the NKVD itself were swept up in the purge process.

Emerging from primary documents and research about the Great Terror, two distinct sets of ‘victims’ of the purges can be identified. First, there were those individuals who were themselves arrested, imprisoned and executed; it is these people who have so far provided the focus of most ‘victim studies’. Secondly, there were the immediate family members and close associates left behind, about whom so far relatively little has been written.<sup>5</sup> Stephen Cohen has already pointed to the:

uncounted millions of relatives of ‘enemies of the people’ – or in another formulation of Stalinist repression ‘members of families of traitors to the Motherland’. (Some renounced their accused kin or managed to hide such relationships, but many would not or could not.)

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Corinna Kuhr, ‘Children of “Enemies of the People” as Victims of the Great Purges’, *Cahiers du Monde russe*, nos. 1-2, vol. 39, 1998, pp. 209-20; S.S. Vilensky, et al. (comps), *Deti Gulaga, 1918-1956*, Moscow: Stanford University, 2002, and in English-language translation as Cathy A. Frierson and Semyon S. Vilensky, *Children of the Gulag*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010; and Cathy Frierson, *Silence was Salvation: Child Survivors of Stalin’s Terror and World War II in the Soviet Union*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015. For a fictional account, see Lydia Chukovskaya, *Sofia Petrovna* (orig. 1966, revised 1989).

The story of all those collateral victims, whose spouses, parents or siblings became inadvertent ‘culprit by fate’ ... remains largely unwritten.<sup>6</sup>

The wider impact of the purges, then, came to incorporate not only the direct victims themselves, but also their immediate family members – their wives and children, for example, identified by Frierson and Vilensky likewise as ‘collateral victims’ - and sometimes even the more distant relatives of these many disparate ‘enemies of the people’.<sup>7</sup> Wendy Goldman has similarly pointed out that ‘to conceptualize the terror by looking only at categories of arrest is vastly to underestimate its effects on families and thus on Soviet society at large’.<sup>8</sup>

The purges also had a long lasting impact that reverberated through several Soviet generations and beyond, as writer and literary critic Raisa Orlova (b. 1918) noted in her memoir published in 1983:

Nobody knows the relationship between cause and effect, and unmotivated tragedies occur in even families that do not have the accursed year of 1937 in their prehistory. Still it seems to me that it is those distant mines of a bygone era that continue to explode.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Stephen F. Cohen, *Soviet Fates and Lost Alternatives: From Stalinism to the New Cold War*, New York; Columbia University Press, 2011, p. 35.

<sup>7</sup> Frierson and Vilensky, *Children of the Gulag*, p. 139.

<sup>8</sup> Wendy Z. Goldman, *Inventing the Enemy: Denunciation and Terror in Stalin’s Russia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 310.

<sup>9</sup> Raisa Orlova, *Memoirs*, trans. by Samuel Cioran, New York: Random House, 1983, p. 100.

Autobiographical and biographical accounts, life stories, eye-witness testimonies, memoir literatures and other forms of personal narratives often mention direct experiences of battle and the struggle for survival during the Second World War as the most significant turning point in their individual accounts of the history of the Soviet Union. Since it has become easier in recent years to talk about such events, however, for other memoirists and oral history respondents, the traumas and upheavals inflicted on families and communities by the purge process, and particularly during the years of the Great Terror, are also often now recounted as dramatic turning points in historical narratives of the Stalin era and, indeed, of the entire Soviet period. Such anecdotal evidence provides examples of the devastating impact of the Great Terror on its secondary victims and their descendants. The family members of those arrested as ‘enemies of the people’ experienced their own hardships as they carried this memory with them throughout their lives, and the legacy of the purges was registered also by subsequent generations.

This chapter examines the various recollections of ‘1937’ in a selection of women’s life narratives. In the hope of avoiding too great a generalisation here, from my own extensive reading of women’s and men’s narratives of the direct and lasting impacts of the purges, it is often women’s accounts that offer a more detailed rendering of this history, encompassing the broader networks of its reach and its emotional impact; men’s accounts tend to offer a more individualised and mechanical reconstruction of events. Furthermore, in her autobiography, recalling her ‘no-nonsense’ female relatives and friends in the Soviet Union, Yelena Khanga makes the observation that ‘women provided the glue that held families together in a terrorized society’.<sup>10</sup> Her own mother and grandparents, although under suspicion, survived

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<sup>10</sup> Yelena Khanga, with Susan Jacoby, *Soul to Soul: the Story of a Black Russian American Family, 1865-1992*, New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1992, p. 120.

the threats of the Stalinist purges of the 1930s, but other families in their circle of acquaintances were not so fortunate.

The poet Anna Akhmatova (b. 1889), who herself spent many months in queues outside Leningrad prisons trying to find out about the fate of her arrested son, stepped up to the challenge from someone waiting in line near her to describe the experience with her condemnation of Stalin in her poem entitled *Requiem*:

#### INSTEAD OF A PREFACE

During the frightening years of the Yezhov terror, I  
spent seventeen months waiting in prison queues in  
Leningrad. One day, somehow, someone 'picked me out'.  
On that occasion there was a woman standing behind me,  
her lips blue with cold, who, of course, had never in  
her life heard my name. Jolted out of the torpor  
characteristic of all of us, she said into my ear  
(everyone whispered there) - 'Could one ever describe  
this?' And I answered - 'I can.' It was then that  
something like a smile slid across what had previously  
been just a face.

[The 1st of April in the year 1957, Leningrad]<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> 'Instead of a Preface', Anna Akhmatova, *Requiem*, available in English language translation online: <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/requiem/> (accessed March 2016).

There is no attempt to claim here that the selected sources examined in this chapter offer an exhaustive coverage of ‘women’s experiences of 1937’, but they do go some considerable way in enabling us to establish a typology for the examination of the impact and legacy of the Great Terror on this particular group of its secondary victims. There is no way either of verifying if some of the incidents outlined here were one-off examples, rare occurrences or common experiences (though it is worth noting that some types of incident are regularly and often narrated). The major sources of evidence employed in this chapter are a selection of autobiographies, biographies and memoirs published by and about Soviet women, the public domain life story accounts arising from interviews conducted with women about their lives in Soviet times, and the various primary documents and testimonials available in the multi-volume series of the *Leningradskii martirolog*.<sup>12</sup>

The focus of this study, therefore, is not on the tens of thousands of women who were themselves arrested, imprisoned and executed (which I have examined elsewhere), but on the fate of those grandmothers, mothers, wives, aunts, daughters, sisters and granddaughters left behind; the people whom we could see as the secondary victims of the Great Terror and whose stories have rarely been examined. The events that are recounted here include recollections of female relatives of the victims of the purges about the pervading atmosphere of the terror, their witness to arrest procedures, the disruption caused by the arrests to family

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<sup>12</sup> On the *Leningradskii martirolog* (hereafter LM), see Melanie Ilic, ‘The Great Terror in Leningrad: a Quantitative Analysis’, *Europe-Asia Studies*, no. 8, vol. 52, 2000, pp. 1515-34 (reprinted in S. G. Wheatcroft (ed.), *Challenging Traditional Views of Russian History*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, pp. 147-70), and Melanie Ilic, ‘The Great Terror in Leningrad: Further Evidence from the *Leningradskii martirolog*’, in James Harris (ed.), *The Anatomy of Terror*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 306-25.

life and social interactions, the experience of life in exile, the reactions of school teachers and fellow pupils to children whose parents had been arrested, access to higher education and career choices, and the attempts by these surviving relatives to amend or hide a now tainted family biography.

### **Atmosphere of Terror and Witness to Arrest:**

Even though they were mostly children or young adults at the time of the events they narrate about the Great Terror, some writers and interviewees recall the particular atmosphere that shrouded their family home in these years: ‘a child, however small, can feel a change in atmosphere’, noted Yelena Khanga in reporting her mother’s memories of 1937.<sup>13</sup> Frierson and Vilensky describe babies being born into an atmosphere of ‘isolation, silence, and fear’ by the late 1930s.<sup>14</sup> Adults spoke in whispers, behind closed doors and windows; similarly, wordless conversations and silent exchanges could also convey a great deal.<sup>15</sup> Irina Fedorovna Vainstein (b. 1932) recalled in interview that, ‘whenever my grandfather came round, my mother would close the windows. He was hard of hearing... They talked about political issues that they didn’t want other people to overhear’.<sup>16</sup> When Leah Trachtman-

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<sup>13</sup> Khanga, *Soul to Soul*, p. 89.

<sup>14</sup> Frierson and Vilensky, *Children of the Gulag*, p. 145.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Orlando Figes, *The Whisperers: Private Life in Stalin’s Russia*, London: Penguin, 2008; and Goldman, *Inventing the Enemy*, 2011, p. 140.

<sup>16</sup> Irina Fedorovna Vainstein in Melanie Ilic, *Life Stories of Soviet Women: the Interwar Generation*, London: Routledge, 2013, p. 98.

Palchan (b. 1913) sought out the woman who had advised her to collect her friend's son from a children's home, they 'spoke anxiously, in a whisper, so the walls wouldn't hear'.<sup>17</sup>

In the households of some more senior and high-ranking officials, in the Communist Party, government or security services for example, it appears that families may have led more of a double life. Some husbands and fathers tried to shield their wives and children from the realities of the Great Terror. As Agnessa Mironova-Korol (b. 1902), the wife of NKVD operative Sergei Naumovich Mironov (Mirosha), later reported, 'Mirosha had two lives. One was with me. That's the one I will tell you about, because I knew nothing about his work life'.<sup>18</sup> Once the news of arrests became more commonly known and the wives began to fear for their own husbands, however, 'They lived in anxious expectation'.<sup>19</sup> Agnessa admitted to living 'with my eyes screwed shut. We had it very good, and it would always be so'.<sup>20</sup> Little did she know. When the arrests started at Government House – 'not a night passed that the Black Maria didn't come to our apartment house' – life became far less secure.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Leah Trachtman-Palchan, *Between Tel Aviv and Moscow: a Life of Dissent and Exile in Mandate Palestine and the Soviet Union*, ed. by Nir Arielli, London: I.B. Tauris, 2015, p. 149.

<sup>18</sup> Agnessa Mironova-Korol, *Agnessa. From Paradise to Purgatory: a Voice from Stalin's Russia*, as told to Mira Mstislovna Yakovenko, trans. by Rose Glickman, Bloomington, IN: Slavica, 2012, p. 70. The original was published in Russian language: M.M. Yakovenko, *Agnessa: ustnye rasskazy Agnessi Ivanovny Mironovoi-Korol'*, Moscow: Zven'ya, 1997, p. 77.

<sup>19</sup> *Agnessa*, p. 84; Yakovenko, *Agnessa*, p. 91.

<sup>20</sup> *Agnessa*, p. 103; Yakovenko, *Agnessa*, p. 112.

<sup>21</sup> *Agnessa*, p. 113; Yakovenko, *Agnessa*, p. 123.

Whilst some families were able to depend on the continued support of those around them, others were not so lucky. Following an arrest, formerly trusted neighbours, friends and even close family relatives could no longer always be relied upon. During her family's life in exile in Kazakhstan following the arrest of her father, Ukrainian-born Juliana Starosolska (b. 1912) noted, 'Each neighbour was a potential enemy who paid careful attention to our comings and goings'.<sup>22</sup> As a result of the pervasive atmosphere generated by the terror, the wives of established Communist Party members were sometimes treated with suspicion by the women around them. As one contemporary observer has noted, 'the *banya* [public baths] supplied information on other subjects: ... who became a Party member – meaning his wife should not be trusted in the *banya* conversations'.<sup>23</sup>

It has often been reported that Soviet citizens kept a suitcase ready-packed along with all of their important documents during the 1930s, when the purges were at their height. Nina Markovna (b. 1928) noted that her father kept a full set of warm winter clothes on a chair next to his bed even during the summer months: a quilted long jacket, a pair of quilted dark grey overalls, a fur hat with ear flaps, mittens, a woollen scarf and socks; his internal passport, cigarettes, reading glasses and a small bottle of vodka; a pair of very long felt boots and a large sack of dried bread.<sup>24</sup> The mother of Tamara Nikolaevna Morozova (b. 1941) told

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<sup>22</sup> Juliana Starosolska, *Woman in Exile: My Life in Kazakhstan*, trans. by Marie Ulanowicz, Bloomington: iUniverse, Inc., 2011, p. 100.

<sup>23</sup> Nina Markovna, *Nina's Journey: a Memoir of Stalin's Russia and the Second World War*, Washington, DC: Regnery Gateway, 1989, p. 172.

<sup>24</sup> Markovna, *Nina's Journey*, p. 23.

her daughter about how she used to sleep fully dressed when she lived in Leningrad in the late 1930s, just in case the cars driving around at night stopped outside their building.<sup>25</sup>

Those with a foresight of impending arrest sometimes took steps to conceal or destroy any items that may have been considered incriminating, and took further measures to provide for the material welfare of the family members left behind. In some households, books by now condemned writers were removed from shelves and concealed.<sup>26</sup> Following the arrest of her husband, the mother of Marksena Nikiforova (b. 1923) bought state bonds and started to hoard money in case her children were left to care for themselves. She also destroyed all of the literature relating to any former oppositionists that the family had at home and even had the foresight to order food to be delivered to the apartment on the eve of her arrest. Marksena subsequently had to campaign to be given access to the rooms where the money and bonds had been stored, and she herself later destroyed the letters sent to her by one of her brothers from an orphanage.<sup>27</sup>

In the period leading up to his arrest in October 1937, Comintern official and Central Committee member Iosif (Osip) Aronovich Pyatnitskii similarly tried to make financial provision for his family by transferring all of the money in his bank account into the name of his 'Bolshevik wife', Yulia Iosifovna Sokolova-Pyatnitskaya (b. 1898), and he handed over

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<sup>25</sup> Tamara Nikolaevna Morozova, in Frierson, *Silence was Salvation*, p. 161.

<sup>26</sup> See the example provided in *Agnessa*, p. 136, Yakovenko, *Agnessa*, pp. 147-8.

<sup>27</sup> Frierson and Vilensky, *Children of the Gulag*, pp. 172-3. Anticipating his own arrest, which eventually took place in the autumn of 1930, Vladimir Tchernavin instructed his wife to destroy any potentially incriminating evidence and 'burn everything': see Tchernavin, *Escape from the Soviets*, pp. 39-40.

other documents that would allow her access to money held in his name. As Yulia Iosifovna noted in her diary at the beginning of July 1937, this was no small amount of money by contemporary standards, amounting to tens of thousands of rubles, and this at least provided the family with financial security following her dismissal from work and up until the time when she herself was arrested the following year.<sup>28</sup> As his wife recalled, in advance of his arrest, NKVD operative Mironov also had the forethought to deposit ‘a decent amount of money ... in my name in the bank’.<sup>29</sup>

The sense of impending arrest continued into the post-war period, particularly in Leningrad, where Andrei Zhdanov’s anti-cosmopolitan campaigns posed new threats. Irina Fedorovna Vainstein, whose medal-winning father was temporarily dismissed from his job after the war, recalled:

My friend at school was a relative of someone who was accused of being anti-government. She saw how people came to the apartments and just threw things out the windows. Former soldiers kept packages with all of their important documents and things just in case a black car came to take them away. Adults tried not to speak to children about such things.<sup>30</sup>

In Nina Markovna’s account and others, adults and children are reported as being made nervous by the unexpected sounds of a car driving nearby in the middle of the night. This was

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<sup>28</sup> Yulia Pyatnitskaya, *Dnevnik zheny bol’shevika*, Benson, VT: Chalidze Publications, 1987, pp. 21-22.

<sup>29</sup> *Agnessa*, p. 121; Yakovenka, *Agnessa*, p. 131.

<sup>30</sup> Irina Fedorovna Vainstein, in Ilic, *Life Stories*, p. 95.

especially the case in rural and outlying areas of the country where few people had access to a car and where such vehicles were rarely, if ever, seen. Debora Borisovna Veksler recorded her feelings following the arrest of an uncle: ‘We lived on tenterhooks. As a twelve-year-old girl, I remember sleepless nights when the screech of car tyres, braking beneath the windows, summoned fear and panic’.<sup>31</sup> ‘Gulag actress’ Tamara Vladislavovna Petkevich (b. 1920) recalled similar feelings during her wartime experiences living amongst exiles in Frunze:

We were chatting when a car pulled up outside. Someone knocked on the door of the neighbors’, who were also exiles. We heard the order, ‘Open up!’ There were voices and noise, then silence, then sobs. We could hear something falling to the floor.

We sat as if glued to our places and listened, knowing perfectly what these sounds meant.<sup>32</sup>

Such experiences could have a lasting impact on those who lived through the purges, as one interviewee recalled: ‘It was a “Chernyi Voron”, the black crow; the van was parked in the street. Many Russians of my generation or even younger still wake with a start when a car engine disturbs the silence of the night in front of their house’.<sup>33</sup> Other late night sounds

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<sup>31</sup> LM/4, p. 637. See also the ‘starting at every noise’ comment in Tchernavin, *Escape from the Soviets*, p. 52.

<sup>32</sup> Tamara Petkevich, *Memoir of a Gulag Actress*, DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010, p. 93. See also LM/7, pp. 621-4.

<sup>33</sup> ‘The Black Crow’, in Paola Messana, *Soviet Communal Living: an Oral History of the Kommunalka*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p. 32. Yelena Nikolaevna Berkovskaya’s narrative refers to the NKVD vehicle as the ‘chernaya “emka”’ (black emka): see Yelena Nikolaevna Berkovskaya, *Sud’by skreshchen’ya*, Moscow: Vozrashchenie, 2008,

proved equally difficult to forget. The ringing of the doorbell and banging on the door in the middle of the night recalled similar fears: ‘The horror of that noise will stay with me forever’.<sup>34</sup> In the same vein, Lilianna Lugina recalled the sound of the newly-installed elevator in her apartment building as it ‘creaked into motion’ in the middle of the night: ‘it was terrifying... everyone was on edge, everyone started shaking’.<sup>35</sup>

The day on which the Markovna household was roused in the middle of the night ended in a rather comic situation. It was, as feared, NKVD officers who banged loudly on the door and spurred Nina’s father to dress hastily from the pile of clothes by his bedside. The NKVD officials had come, however, not to make an arrest but to ask to borrow some tools to repair their car, which had broken down. Once the situation of panic had abated, it was only then noticed that the father, warmly clad in padded jacket and felt boots, had failed to put on his trousers and was left standing with his legs covered only in his long grey underwear.<sup>36</sup>

It is important to remember also that it was not only men who were arrested. Irina Kirillovna Odinotsova (b. 1928) noted that alongside the arrest of her grandfather, his daughter (Irina’s mother) was also arrested in October 1937. Anticipating that she was about to be sent into

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p. 222. The Gaz M-1 automobile was first produced in 1936 and soon became used predominantly by the NKVD; it was widely requisitioned for military service during the Second World War.

<sup>34</sup> ‘Black Crow’, in Messana, *Soviet Communal Living*, p. 32.

<sup>35</sup> Lilianna Lungina, as told to Oleg Dorman, *Word for Word: a Translator’s Memoir of Literature, Politics and Survival in Soviet Russia*, trans. by Polly Gannon and Ast A. Moore, London: Overlook Duckworth, 2009, p. 82.

<sup>36</sup> Markovna, *Nina’s Journey*, pp. 24-5.

exile, Irina Kirillovna's father bought a big suitcase and packed it with warm clothes, felt boots and calorie-rich foods. Father and daughter, however, were not able to deliver the suitcase before her sentence was carried out, and they themselves were soon exiled. Irina Kirillovna's father was subsequently arrested and executed.<sup>37</sup>

Growing up in Tambov at the time of the Great Terror, Angelina Kaz'mina-B'erkbakka (b. 1928) recalled the atmosphere surrounding her daily family life as unsettled and tense. The unmasking of enemies was evident even in the school curriculum. Although there appears to have been no immediate serious threat to the family, she reports a genuine sense of fear about what might happen. Angelina's paternal grandfather had already been subject to the dekulakisation campaigns during collectivisation, but this does not appear to have impeded her father's career as a teacher.<sup>38</sup> By 1937, Angelina's parents were clearly alarmed by what they were reading in the newspapers. Her mother was afraid even to turn off the lights in the evening and everyone slept uneasily.

As they heard news of the arrests of notable figures around the city, some of whom were family friends, the parents became worried about what would happen to their daughter if they were caught up in the purges. They took the pre-emptive step of sending their daughter to live with a childless aunt in another city. Angelina's aunt arrived soon afterwards to take her to live in Stalingrad.<sup>39</sup> Her parents, for safety reasons, did not want to call by telephone. If they had something important to convey, they did so in writing.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> LM/7, p. 607. See also LM/4, pp. 585-8.

<sup>38</sup> Angelina Kaz'mina-B'erkbakka, *Russkoe schast'e: semeinaya khronika stalinskikh vremen*, St Petersburg: Aleteiya, 2012, pp. 15-18.

<sup>39</sup> Kaz'mina-B'erkbakka, *Russkoe schast'e*, pp. 28-31.

Angelina's move to Stalingrad did not come too soon. Her parents, still in Tambov, put their own plans into action, aware that an arrest would also mean dismissal from work, the loss of their apartment and confiscation of their belongings. They packed bags filled with only their most essential items and bought train tickets in advance. Within a short while, Angelina's father was called into the local Communist Party office where he had his party card withdrawn, but was not arrested. Without even returning home, he took a train to Ul'yanovsk where he found somewhere to live and settled into a new job. Having taken some time off work claiming to be ill, Angelina's mother, as anticipated, read in the next day's newspaper about her husband's exclusion from the party because of his 'collaboration with enemies of the people'. Now, assisted by her aunt, she packed up all of their household belongings – their furniture, books and even a grand piano – and sent it on to Stalingrad. In order to evade any possibility of arrest herself, she too took the train to Stalingrad.<sup>41</sup>

Once the dust had settled, at the beginning of 1938 Angelina and her mother travelled to Ul'yanovsk to rejoin her father. In her memoir, Angelina refers to this period as her family's life in exile, 'grey and despondent'.<sup>42</sup> After a year, though, and with war swiftly approaching, an apartment became vacant near to Angelina's aunt in Stalingrad and the family decided to move there. By the spring of 1939, they were all living in Stalingrad, and Angelina returned to school in the autumn. In Stalingrad, Angelina was instructed by her parents not to talk about their former life in Tambov. If asked why they had moved to Stalingrad, she was to say that her mother had relatives in the city. Having successfully evaded the purges, however,

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<sup>40</sup> Kaz'mina-B'erkbakka, *Russkoe schast'e*, p. 32.

<sup>41</sup> Kaz'mina-B'erkbakka, *Russkoe schast'e*, p. 34.

<sup>42</sup> Kaz'mina-B'erkbakka, *Russkoe schast'e*, p. 35.

now in Stalingrad a completely different fate awaited the family during the Second World War.<sup>43</sup>

The continual fear and threat of arrest, as Kaz'mina-B'erkbakka's memoir illustrates and especially after a spouse or close family member had already been taken away, kept some individuals and entire families constantly on the move. They tried to avoid spending too many nights in one single location for fear of detection or their whereabouts being reported to the NKVD. They moved regularly from one apartment to the next, even from one town or city to the next, aware also that they should not place their loyal hosts in danger. In her famous memoirs, *Hope Against Hope* (1970) and *Hope Abandoned* (1974), Nadezhda Yakovlevna Mandelstam (b. 1899), wife of poet Osip Mandelstam arrested for the second time in May 1938, reports employing just such an evasive strategy. In her childhood memoir, Ludmilla Petrushevskaya (b. 1938) describes such a peripatetic existence, using a commonly understood Russian euphemism, as 'wandering'.<sup>44</sup>

Petrushevskaya's family were members of the Bolshevik and government elite in the 1930s. They had been part of the revolutionary underground and some had taken an active part in the events of 1917. As the new regime took hold, they were housed in Moscow's prestigious Metropol Hotel. Members of the extended family, 'all prominent Bolsheviks', were arrested in May 1937. Sometime later, after spending much of the summer at the dacha complex, Petrushevskaya's grandmother, mother and aunt returned to the Metropol to find their rooms sealed shut: the handles were encircled in wire from which hung a lead seal: 'If they had

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<sup>43</sup> Kaz'mina-B'erkbakka, *Russkoe schast'e*, pp. 36-7.

<sup>44</sup> Ludmilla Petrushevskaya, *The Girl from the Metropol Hotel: Growing up in Communist Russia*, New York: Penguin, 2017, p. 9.

returned an hour earlier, they would have been taken. But my family is always late'.<sup>45</sup> With all of their belongings sealed inside, they had no choice but to accommodate themselves in the rooms of other relatives also based at the hotel.<sup>46</sup>

Women's narratives record other near misses. Yelena Khanga has noted what happened when her mother, Lily Golden (b. 1934), returned with her family from vacation to their apartment, a building for foreign specialists, in Tashkent. When they arrived on the second floor, they saw that the next door apartment had been sealed and nobody was permitted to enter. The family was told that an unmarked car had, in fact, come for Oliver Golden, Lily's father, in the middle of the night, but he had not been at home. When Oliver Golden enquired the next day at the NKVD offices if they wished to arrest him, he was told to go back home: the planned quota for arrests had already been fulfilled.<sup>47</sup>

### **Sealed Apartments:**

Operational Order No. 00486 'on the arrest of wives' included the provision for a detailed search of apartments to be conducted at the same time that the arrest was made. Specific items were to be confiscated as part of the search, including weaponry, copying equipment, any literature judged to be 'counter-revolutionary', foreign currency, personal and financial

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<sup>45</sup> Petrushevskaya, *Girl from the Metropol*, p. 8.

<sup>46</sup> Petrushevskaya, *Girl from the Metropol*, pp. 7-8. On p. 9, Petrushevskaya notes 'I was Lucky', and suggests that infants were sometimes left alone by the NKVD in the apartments from which arrests were made and that were later sealed.

<sup>47</sup> Khanga, *Soul to Soul*, pp. 90-91. See also Lily Golden, *My Long Journey Home*, Chicago: Third World Press, 2002, pp. 19-20.

documents. Personal property, excepting essential items of clothing and footwear, linens and bedding, was also to be confiscated. An allowance of living space, furniture, pots and pans was to be left for any underage children, parents or other relatives who would remain living in the apartment. Following the arrest, the apartment was to be sealed.<sup>48</sup>

Once an arrest was made, therefore, rooms were searched, personal items were confiscated and apartments were sometimes sealed up, usually with the family's remaining belongings and furniture, all of their often meagre worldly goods, still inside. Families may also, but not always, have been denied possession of and access to their dacha.<sup>49</sup> Returning to her apartment unaware of the arrest of her husband, Olga Adamova-Sliozberg (b. 1902) recalled:

I opened the door. The awful smell of boots and tobacco struck me.

Marusia [the nanny] sat in the middle of complete devastation, telling the children a story. Piles of books and manuscripts had been thrown across the floor. Cupboards were open, and our underwear had been pulled out and then roughly stuffed back into them. I understood nothing and not even one single thought came into my head, only that I was terrified, and a premonition of misfortune turned my soul to ice. Marusia stood up and quietly, in a strange voice, said:

'It's nothing. Don't get worked up!'

'Where's my husband? What's happened? Was he knocked over by a car?'

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<sup>48</sup> *Memorial-Aspekt*, no. 2/3, 1993. Tchernavin's chapters on 'The End of Family Life' and 'Order for Search and Arrest' in *Escape from the Soviets* suggest that a similar process was already operational in the early 1930s: see pp. 58-60, 92-6.

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, Inna Aronovna Shikheeva-Gaister in Frierson, *Silence was Salvation*, p. 46.

‘Really, you don’t understand? They took him’.<sup>50</sup>

These searches, lasting up to four hours or more, sometimes involved the destruction or confiscation of family photographs so future generations were left without pictures of their repressed relatives.<sup>51</sup> Following the arrest of her stepfather, Debora Veksler noted that, ‘they came to take stock of our things. We had nothing except a writing desk and a chair which had moved with us from Vladivostok. They confiscated them. These from a family with three destitute children’.<sup>52</sup> From prominent academics and scientists, some of the confiscated items often included foreign-language books and journals. The home of Lyudmila Petrovna Gaevaya was similarly cleared out by arresting officials, leaving her mother in floods of tears. The family was eventually saved from penury when the mother was able to secure a job as a machinist.<sup>53</sup>

The searches were not always conducted solely by men. Maya Rudolfovna Levitina (b. 1928) recalls a woman and two men coming to her apartment: ‘they took whatever we had of value,

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<sup>50</sup> There are several different Russian-language editions of Adamova-Sliozberg’s memoir.

See, for example, Ol’ga Adamova-Sliozberg, *Put’*, Moscow: Vozvrashchenie, 2002, p. 11. In English translation see, Olga Adamova-Sliozberg, *My Journey: How One Woman Survived Stalin’s Gulag*, trans by Katherine Gratwick Baker, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2011, pp. 8-9. For an abbreviated account from Olga Adamova-Sliozberg’s memoir in English, see also Simeon Vilensky (ed.), *Till My Tale is Told: Women’s Memoirs of the Gulag*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999, pp. 1-86.

<sup>51</sup> See, for example, LM/11, p. 746; LM/12, p. 590.

<sup>52</sup> LM/4, p. 637.

<sup>53</sup> LM/11, p. 673.

we had almost nothing of value. They took the most valuable books'. They also took her father's 'remnants' from international conferences, his poor quality suits and her mother's outfits that had been sent from relatives in Estonia: 'a beautiful wool suit, some nice shoes'. The commandant who drew up the list to be signed was 'a woman, and later she was the mother of one of my students... That was such a terrible, tragic meeting'.<sup>54</sup>

When a similar situation arose in the family of ballerina Maya Mikhailovna Plisetskaya (b. 1925) following the night-time arrest of her father and subsequent imprisonment of her mother, she was left wondering, 'how do those killers divide up the things, furniture, shoes, pots and pans? ... Did their fat wives squeeze into other people's used clothing, or did they drag everything to the flea market?'<sup>55</sup> The 'ill-starred corner house' where she spent some time as a child and in which the initial arrest had occurred left her with a permanent sense of horror.<sup>56</sup> Many families resorted to selling their remaining possessions as a means of survival or before being sent into exile. Tamara Petkevich later noted, 'In 1937 and 1938, second-hand stores in Leningrad resembled dumping grounds for expensive antiques', but, as the purges progressed, 'the overfilled pawnshops were no longer accepting goods from families sentenced to exile'.<sup>57</sup> In another account, following the arrest of her uncle in Leningrad, one young girl, Musya, was dragged away from the second-hand shop by her mother after she

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<sup>54</sup> Maya Rudolfovna Levitina, in Frierson, *Silence was Salvation*, pp. 202-3.

<sup>55</sup> Maya Plisetskaya, *I, Maya Plisetskaya*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001, p. 39. On the possible destination of the contents of sealed apartments, see online:

<http://top.thepo.st/1037268/Togda-osenyu-i-zimoy-tridtsat-sedmogo-goda-po-vsey-Moskve-otkryilos-mnojestvo-strannyih-magazinov> (accessed March 2016).

<sup>56</sup> Plisetskaya, *I Maya*, p. 35.

<sup>57</sup> Petkevich, *Gulag Actress*, pp. 41 and 47.

recognised the family's chairs and sideboard and started to stroke the plush furnishings: 'I lost my innocence at that moment'.<sup>58</sup>

Less common are reports of searches being conducted in a more orderly manner. Yelena Nikolaevna Berkovskaya (b. 1923) noted that the search of her family's apartment was unusually civil: 'the bedding wasn't moved about, the pillows weren't ripped open, underwear items were examined superficially and nothing was taken'. There was no such 'impudent plundering' of their belongings as was later reported by other people she knew, and she was able to keep possession of her diary.<sup>59</sup> When money was short after the arrest of her father, the family moved to a single room.<sup>60</sup>

It also appears to have been the case that families could petition for the return of some of the items of personal property that had been taken from them when the apartment was sealed up. Agnessa Mironova-Korol did just this, but her initial attempts to secure the return of some of her mother's possessions was frustrated by the official in charge of the storehouse, who was himself frustrated by the chaos of the situation. Even before she had done this, however, Agnessa had resorted to breaking the seal on the apartment and reclaimed some of their belongings still remaining there simply by stealing them back.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Anya von Bremzen, *Mastering the Art of Soviet Cooking: a Memoir of Food and Longing*, London: Doubleday, 2013, p. 83. As an adult, Musya claimed 'We Leningraders hated Stalin. Before anyone else in the country, *we knew*'.

<sup>59</sup> Berkovskaya, *Sud'by skreshchen'ya*, pp. 220-1.

<sup>60</sup> Berkovskaya, *Sud'by skreshchen'ya*, p. 224.

<sup>61</sup> *Agnessa*, pp. 126-7; Yakovenko, *Agnessa*, pp. 137-8.

### **Aftermath and Consequences of Arrest:**

The arrest of a husband and father in many cases denied his wife and children not only of somewhere to live, but also of the family's main source of material and financial support. Families were often left with no obvious means of subsistence.<sup>62</sup> After the arrest of her father, Lyudmila Timofeevna Gordeevna described family life continuing in conditions of 'hunger, cold and without rights'.<sup>63</sup> Likewise, after the arrest of her father, the mother of Ninel' Nikolaevna Fefelova (Doross) (b. 1925) was 'left with five children on her hands and without a single kopek'.<sup>64</sup> Mariya Petrovna Pankina-Gracheva also similarly described a childhood of poverty in exile in the countryside: 'Continual suffering, impoverished, hunger, cold, grief, fatherless'.<sup>65</sup> Even those mothers who were able to continue working sometimes had to resort to selling their remaining family belongings in order to be able to feed their children.<sup>66</sup>

The arrest of a husband put his wife's job and future employment prospects in jeopardy. In her account of the impact of arrests in the early 1930s, Tatiana Tchernavin (b. 1887), noting a number of highly-qualified individuals who were forced to work in lower grade jobs, makes reference to the concept of "home *emigres*" – an opprobrious term applied by the Bolsheviks to those whom they themselves had thrown out of employment'.<sup>67</sup> Larisa Arturovna

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<sup>62</sup> See, for example, LM/7, p. 624, LM/9, p. 644.

<sup>63</sup> LM/2, p. 436.

<sup>64</sup> LM/12, p. 588.

<sup>65</sup> LM/7, p. 620.

<sup>66</sup> See, for example, LM/12, p. 591.

<sup>67</sup> Tchernavin, *Escape from the Soviets*, p. 164.

Morozova reported that nobody would employ her grandmother after the arrest of her husband in July 1938, although she was now responsible for the care of two children and her mother-in-law.<sup>68</sup> Fakiya Veli-Akhmetovna Chelishcheva's enterprising mother purchased a Singer sewing machine following the arrest of her husband so that she could work from home and care for her young family. Once the children started at kindergarten she found employment at a nearby sewing enterprise.<sup>69</sup> After the arrest of her husband, the mother of Irina Andreevna Dubrovina (b. 1928) was allowed to keep her job, but she did not receive any bonuses and was not promoted.<sup>70</sup>

It was not only future employment that became precarious; the remaining family members now had to secure a place to live. It appears to have been not unusual in rural areas for families to be thrown out of their houses, leaving them to find accommodation in village buildings, barns, nearby huts or even dugouts in the ground that provided inadequate protection in the winter months.<sup>71</sup> In the towns and cities, some families lost access to one or two of the rooms they had formerly occupied and were now presented with new neighbours in their vacated space. At the beginning of the 1930s, Tatiana Tchernavin defended her right to retain occupation of her two rooms following the arrest of her husband by arguing that she had 'a right to them; mother and son are not supposed to share a room'.<sup>72</sup> In the later 1930s, others families were not always so fortunate. They were sometimes relocated to outlying regions, usually outside the major cities, or they were sent into internal exile.

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<sup>68</sup> LM/11, p. 745.

<sup>69</sup> LM/11, p. 766.

<sup>70</sup> Irina Andreevna Dubrovina, in Frierson, *Silence was Salvation*, pp. 128, 132.

<sup>71</sup> See, for example, LM/7, p. 674 and LM/11, p. 746.

<sup>72</sup> Tchernavin, *Escape from the Soviets*, p. 72.

Even if the family was permitted to remain in their apartment, the wife, if she was already in employment, now found herself in danger of losing her own job. She struggled as a mother to feed and clothe their children. After Klavdiya Aleksandrovna Zolotareva complained about the ‘absurd’ arrest of her husband, she found herself dismissed from her job and thrown out of her flat along with her children before she herself was also arrested and sentenced to eight years as the wife of an enemy of the people.<sup>73</sup>

The Communist Party member wives and daughters of arrested officials also found themselves in difficult circumstances. They were more often than not encouraged to denounce their husband or father and were expelled from the party if they refused. Emila Robertovna Dambran’s mother, a senior academic, like many others, was thrown out of the Communist Party following the arrest of her husband and she herself was subsequently exiled.<sup>74</sup> Maya Rudolovna Levitina’s mother was similarly expelled from the party, exiled to the north and deprived of her job and the right to vote.<sup>75</sup> She died in exile in 1939 leaving her two daughters to be raised by their former nanny, for which only minimal financial assistance was paid to support these orphan girls.<sup>76</sup> Some party members chose voluntarily to forfeit their party cards following the arrest of a spouse or parent and succeeded in evading arrest themselves by moving far away deep into the countryside.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> LM/11, p. 688.

<sup>74</sup> LM/11, p. 675. For an example of a daughter being expelled from the party after the arrest of her father, see also LM/12, p. 585.

<sup>75</sup> Maya Rudolfovna Levitina, in Frierson, *Silence was Salvation*, p. 205.

<sup>76</sup> Maya Rudolfovna Levitina, in Frierson, *Silence was Salvation*, p. 209.

<sup>77</sup> See, for example, LM/7, p. 587.

The loss of a Communist Party card, however, was not universally the case. Party activist Nina Vasil'evna Popova (b. 1908) (mother of film-maker Renita Andreevna Grigor'eva, b. 1931) was able to escape this fate following her vociferous protests at the arrest of her husband. Through her persistent efforts, she was able to secure the release of her husband and his comrades: 'It was thanks to the collective work of her comrades that she was able to continue working. She wasn't even dismissed from her job'.<sup>78</sup> Following a divorce and second marriage, Nina Popova went on to have a highly successful political career. She was a founder member of the Soviet Women's Anti-Fascist Committee in 1941 and was the first chair of the Soviet Women's Committee from 1956.

There were, of course, other families who were the unfortunate, and perhaps even unknowing, beneficiaries of this whole process. The apartments and rooms vacated by arrested and exiled families were now offered as accommodation to other people. The family of human rights campaigner, Lyudmila Mikhailovna Alekseeva (b. 1927), benefitted in just such a way:

[I]n 1937 all the heads of department and all the chiefs of the organisation where my dad worked were arrested. As a result, the house where they lived became empty and my dad was given two rooms in a three-room flat. The person who'd had the three-room flat was arrested and his wife and daughter were allowed to stay in one of the rooms while the other two rooms were given to our family.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Renita Andreevna Grigor'eva, in Ilic, *Life Stories*, p. 76.

<sup>79</sup> Lyudmila Mikhailovna Alekseeva, in Ilic, *Life Stories*, p. 15.

Tamara Petkevich's narrative hints at a more sinister reason for the arrests and sending families into exile:

As apartments were being vacated, people were waiting to take them over. More often than not, they were investigators and NKVD officials, and it was not unusual for a good apartment to serve as grounds for exiling an arrested man's family.<sup>80</sup>

Other relatives suspected their neighbours in communal apartments of submitting incriminating evidence so that they could access the newly vacated rooms.<sup>81</sup>

In the particular case of Leningrad, there are also the poignant survival stories of those identified as 'socially harmful elements' and as relatives of 'enemies of the people' who were expelled or exiled from the city before the Second World War, but whose relatives and friends remained living there. Many of those living in the city died or suffered greatly during the wartime years of the blockade. Tamara Petkevich struggled to send food from Frunze to her surviving sister, now living in an orphanage following the death of their mother and another sister in Leningrad.<sup>82</sup> The mother and daughter of Nadia Vasil'evna Grankina (b. 1904) died during the siege whilst she had a relatively easy job working as a seamstress during her years as an inmate at Kolyma.<sup>83</sup> In just one more of many other examples,

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<sup>80</sup> Petkevich, *Gulag Actress*, p. 47.

<sup>81</sup> See, for example, LM/12, p. 600.

<sup>82</sup> Petkevich, *Gulag Actress*, pp. 96-8.

<sup>83</sup> This example is reported by Adamova-Sliozberg in *Put'*, pp. 127-8, and Adamova-Sliozberg, *My Journey*, pp. 137-8. For more about Grankina's fate, see Vilensky, *Till my Tale is Told*, pp. 111-39.

Valeriya Vasil'evna Marakasova's 17-year-old brother and her grandmother both died during the Leningrad siege, whilst she, another brother and their mother lived in exile in Alma-Ata.<sup>84</sup>

### **Locating Detainees:**

Following an arrest and especially in the larger metropolitan centres, it was not always possible for the family members remaining at liberty to locate where their relative had been taken, as Akhmatova's testimony illustrates. Wives and mothers, sisters and children queued, seemingly endlessly and in all weathers, outside central police stations, NKVD offices, information bureaux (in Moscow noted as at the address Kuznetskii, 24) and nearby transit prisons (such as Lefortovo in Moscow) in the hope that a name could be identified on local lists, money could be handed over and their carefully packed parcels could be delivered.<sup>85</sup> Each family would have to wait for their turn to be seen at the small window where enquiries could be made. Tatiana Ivarovna Smilga (b. 1919) noted that, 'At the age of 16, I remember

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<sup>84</sup> LM/2, p. 429.

<sup>85</sup> See Petkevich's account of her search for her father and to discover his fate: *Gulag Actress*, pp. 39-46. For references to 'Kuznetskii, 24', see Berkovskaya, *Sud'by skreshchen'ya*, p. 224, and Pyanitskaya, *Dnevnik*, p. 27. For just one example of the many mentions of Lefortovo, see *Agnessa*, pp. 45, 128, Yakovenko, *Agnessa*, pp. 52, 138-9, and in these sources for mention of '24 Kuznetsky Bridge', see *Agnessa*, p. 122; Yakovenko, p. 132. On the preparation, contents and delivery of parcels in the early 1930s, see Tchernavin's chapter, 'Parcels for the Prisoners', in *Escape from the Soviets*, pp. 76-86.

going round all the prisons'.<sup>86</sup> Gertruda Fedorovna Tegleva noted that queues built up over night depending on the date of the arrest and by the alphabetical order of surnames.<sup>87</sup> Maya Rudolfovna Levitina recalled delivering parcels with her mother to the Kresty prison, where those arrested were detained in Leningrad before being executed or sent to the camps.<sup>88</sup>

When her former nanny, by now her adoptive mother, was arrested in Danilov in 1947, Maya Rudolfovna was convinced that it was her direct petition to Molotov's office that secured her release within a matter of just a few days.<sup>89</sup> Other narratives also record direct appeals to other senior government personnel, including Stalin. Hoping to find the whereabouts of her arrested father, teenager Yevgeniya Aleksnadrovna Lakotkina recalled queueing through the night for a meeting with Kalinin, but without result.<sup>90</sup>

Many queued outside offices and prisons similarly without success. Nina Markovna reported that her Aunt Olga was unable to find out the whereabouts of her arrested husband. It was only when an official note was delivered that she discovered his fate: 'sentenced with no right to receive visitors, correspondence or packages. To the Soviet citizen, this all-explaining

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<sup>86</sup> 'The Gulag and the Roslovian Smell', in Messana, *Soviet Communal Living*, p. 81. For more on Tatiana Smilga, see online: <http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2014/10/21/smil-o21.html> (accessed March 2016).

<sup>87</sup> LM/7, p. 596. In Tchernavin's account in *Escape from the Soviets*, p. 92, Saturday was 'the day of giving in parcels'.

<sup>88</sup> Maya Rudolfovna Levitina, in Frierson, *Silence was Salvation*, p. 203.

<sup>89</sup> Maya Rudolfovna Levitina, in Frierson, *Silence was Salvation*, pp. 215-16.

<sup>90</sup> LM/11, p. 710.

notice meant that the person had ceased to exist'.<sup>91</sup> Following her son's death – either an unexplained accident or suicide – Olga was herself found hanged.<sup>92</sup> In a similar vein, Tamara Aleksandrovna Volkova eventually came to realise only in 1948 that her father's sentence in 1938 to '10 years without the right to correspondence' meant that he had already been executed.<sup>93</sup> Likewise, Kseniya Moiseevna Kirpichnikova 'much later' came to realise that 'without the right to correspondence' was the written formula used for those who were executed, but she deeply regretted not knowing exactly where this had taken place or the exact date of her father's death.<sup>94</sup> Sometimes, there were unwritten clues to the fate of the husband and father. Pregnant at the time of her father's arrest, Yelena Vasil'evna Bulak's mother sent money and notes that she could not be sure he received, and wondered if her husband was aware that he now had a daughter. Even when his clothes were returned to her, however, she continued to wait.<sup>95</sup>

Olga Adamova-Sliozberg's mother was not willing to sit around passively following the arrest of her daughter: 'During the course of the first four years after my arrest every day she

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<sup>91</sup> Markovna, *Nina's Journey*, p. 32. See also *Agnessa*, pp. 45 and 132, Yakovenko, *Agnessa*, pp. 52 and 142, which suggests the phrase was already well-known by the wives of high-ranking officials.

<sup>92</sup> It is likely that suicide amongst relatives of the accused, and amongst those fearing accusation themselves, was a common adjunct to the purge process. For further cases reported in women's narratives, this time of male family members, see Eugenie Fraser, *The Dvina Remains*, Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 1996, p. 91.

<sup>93</sup> LM/11, p. 655. See also LM/7, p. 542.

<sup>94</sup> LM/11, p. 686.

<sup>95</sup> LM/11, p. 658.

went around “petitioning”. Beginning with the prosecutor general of the USSR and all the way up to Kalinin’, until she secured a review of Olga’s case and the original charges against her were downgraded.<sup>96</sup>

In provincial cities, it was seemingly easier for relatives to locate and even to visit detainees, many of whom were held in central locations or alongside railway tracks and sometimes easily in view of the local population. Irina Andreevna Dubrovina, for example, was able to visit the barracks where her father was being held in a central square in Stalingrad.<sup>97</sup>

The situation was significantly more difficult for the families and friends of pre-revolutionary political activists living in emigration after the Bolshevik revolution. Vera Broido has noted how her family, now mostly based in Western Europe, gradually lost contact with her mother, the Menshevik activist Eva Broido, after she decided to return incognito to the Soviet Union in 1927 to make contact with beleaguered party members. After successfully travelling around the country for six months unrecognised, Eva Broido was eventually arrested and imprisoned. Eva was able to send letters, though heavily censored, to her family for a few years from 1929, but these stopped arriving in 1936 and the remaining family knew nothing of her fate. Vera only learned the details half a century later.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Adamova-Sliozberg, *Put’*, pp. 112-15, and Adamova-Sliozberg, *My Journey*, pp. 122-4.

<sup>97</sup> Frierson and Vilensky, *Children of the Gulag*, p. 180.

<sup>98</sup> Vera Broido, *Daughter of Revolution: a Russian Girlhood Remembered*, London: Constable, 1998, pp. 183-4, 208-11. Eva Broido was held in solitary confinement for three years before being exiled to Central Asia. She survived the trial of the Mensheviks in 1931, but, following the outbreak of war, she was shot in Orel on 14 September 1941.

This was not the only loss suffered by the Broido family. One of the children, Vera's sister Sanya, had remained living in Leningrad, was married to a Communist Party member and was mother to a daughter and son. Sanya's husband was arrested during the Great Terror and disappeared without trace. During the Second World War, Sanya's daughter, Galya, who was studying at Leningrad University, was evacuated from the city, but she too was soon arrested. Sanya promptly left Leningrad with her ten-year-old son to try to find her daughter. She was arrested while she was trying to locate Galya. Now separated from her son, Sanya never saw him again and knew nothing of his fate.<sup>99</sup>

There are many cases of children born after the arrest of their father and who, therefore, never had the chance to know him personally. Oksana Tagirovna Grigor'eva was born in May 1935, five months after the arrest of her father in December 1934.<sup>100</sup> Vera Nikolaevna Yefimova was born almost nine full months after the arrest of her father and, 'unfortunately, mother never told us anything about our father'; this mother died without knowing why her husband had been executed or where he had been buried.<sup>101</sup>

Many children reported the life-long impact that the arrest of their father had on their mother, especially when they lived with no confirmed news of his fate.<sup>102</sup> Maya Plisetskaya noted that her mother, 'did not want to believe that Father had been killed... She waited her whole life. She jumped every time there was an unexpected peal of the doorbell, ring of the phone,

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<sup>99</sup> Broido, *Daughter of Revolution*, p. 208. Sanya and Galya spent eleven years in the labour camps.

<sup>100</sup> See, for example, LM/9, p. 624; LM/12, p. 580.

<sup>101</sup> LM/7, p. 567.

<sup>102</sup> See, for example, LM/9, p. 627.

or unfamiliar voice in the hall. She never saw him again'.<sup>103</sup> Kseniya Yevgen'evna Uzilevskaya reported that her mother, not wanting to believe that her husband was dead, waited many long years in hope of a miracle that he would one day return home.<sup>104</sup> Yekaterina Filippovna Rudi also noted that her mother waited and lived in hope of her husband's return, not knowing what had happened to him, and never talking to anyone about him.<sup>105</sup> In memory of her father, Larinisa Martynovna Alksnit decided to keep his name when she got married.<sup>106</sup>

The experience of witnessing their parents' arrest, or listening to the eye-witness testimonies of their parents, inevitably drew many siblings close together and formed a characteristic bond that lasted throughout their lives.<sup>107</sup> Zoya Yur'evna Shatova and her brother, born in the decade after the Second World War, only came to learn details about their grandparents' lives through documents carefully collected and preserved by their father and through materials released in the post-Soviet period.<sup>108</sup>

### **Family Life Disrupted:**

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<sup>103</sup> Plistetskaya, *I Maya*, p. 49, and p. 40: 'He had been executed by firing squad on 7 January 1938'.

<sup>104</sup> LM/7, p. 497.

<sup>105</sup> LM/9, p. 691.

<sup>106</sup> LM/7, p. 499.

<sup>107</sup> LM/7, p. 565.

<sup>108</sup> LM/7, p. 580. See also LM/7, pp. 583 and 698.

Following the arrests, family survival became precarious and everyday life could end up severely disrupted. Cathy Frierson has noted, following her interviews with child survivors of the purges, that ‘Soviet policies truncated and divided families, displaced adults and children, jeopardized educational opportunities, and imposed political stigma across three generations’.<sup>109</sup> Various family members were themselves sometimes deeply divided over how to respond to an arrest. This was particularly the case in social circles where Communist Party membership was an issue because this would sometimes give rise to divided loyalties – to the party and to the family.<sup>110</sup>

The disruption to family life came far too soon in the married lives of some couples. Lidiya Ieronimovna Timoshkova met her future husband, Mikhail Ivanovich, at the beginning of 1937 and the couple married in August. Mikhail, however, was arrested in October 1937 and executed in December, leaving his new wife a widow. Thrown out of the institute where she was studying, she could find nowhere else to take her. Without a place to study or to work, she herself was left feeling persecuted.<sup>111</sup>

In some examples, the requirement of Soviet citizens to register a nationality in their internal passport came to be the source of considerable family disruption and division particularly during the ‘national operations’ of the Great Terror. Where children were raised by parents of different nationalities, they were allowed to choose which nationality to indicate in their passport. In Lyudmila Sergeevna Polyakova’s family, the male members (her grandfather and uncles) were registered as Russian, but the female members (her grandmother, mother and

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<sup>109</sup> Frierson, *Silence was Salvation*, p. 87.

<sup>110</sup> On ‘a family torn apart’, see Goldman, *Inventing the Enemy*, pp. 186-98.

<sup>111</sup> LM/7, pp. 663-4.

aunt) were registered as Polish. In 1937, Lyudmila Sergeevna's mother and aunt were arrested and executed as members of a Polish counter-revolutionary organisation, but their brothers survived the purges.<sup>112</sup> Nina Markovna noted a similar family break-up during the deportation of those registered as German from the Crimea during the Second World War.<sup>113</sup> Maya Rudolfovna Levitina reported being bullied at school not because her father had been arrested, but because she was of Polish descent.<sup>114</sup>

In some families, older children were removed from their places of study, were sent out to work or had to care for younger siblings whilst their mother was working.<sup>115</sup> Many children were sent to live with relatives elsewhere.<sup>116</sup> The six-month old sister of Lenina Semyenovna Rafal'son (b. 1924) was sent to live with her uncle in Moscow and was eventually adopted by his family, living under his surname.<sup>117</sup> Vera Orlovskaya and her brothers were taken in by a distant relative. Vera began to work for her relative as a maid, and her siblings were also expected to earn their keep, but this was the only way to ensure that all of the siblings were able to stay living together.<sup>118</sup> Anna Antonovna Tsvetkova reported that her twelve-year-old sister was sent out to work as a nanny for three roubles a month so that the family would have

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<sup>112</sup> LM/7, p. 695.

<sup>113</sup> Markovna, *Nina's Journey*, pp. 162-3.

<sup>114</sup> Maya Rudolfovna Levitina, in Frierson, *Silence was Salvation*, p. 208.

<sup>115</sup> See, for example, LM/7, p. 674.

<sup>116</sup> See, for example, LM/11, p. 737.

<sup>117</sup> LM/12, p. 591.

<sup>118</sup> Frierson and Vilensky, *Children of the Gulag*, p. 179.

enough money to buy school books.<sup>119</sup> Tsvetkova also noted, ‘the arrest of my father left an imprint not only on our lives, but also on the lives of our relatives’.<sup>120</sup>

Spouses and children were now often identified and labelled as ‘hostile’ and ‘social outcasts’.<sup>121</sup> The family of young diarist Nina Kosterina (b. 1921) survived because of the ‘flinty strength of mama’s character ... material privations, abandonment by many of those who had sat at our table so many times’.<sup>122</sup> This particular mother made a direct complaint to Stalin and was successful in securing the continued education of her daughter. As the family continued to receive letters from the imprisoned father, Nina’s mother became enraged by her husband’s seeming unwillingness to raise any defence against the charges levelled against him.<sup>123</sup> Not everyone was able to demonstrate such resilience. Following the arrest of her husband, Nina Kosterina’s ‘last friend of my youth’ ... ‘had to resign from her job, and she intends to leave Moscow to try to find a place in the provinces, among new people, and somehow reintegrate herself’.<sup>124</sup>

Many of the wives of arrested husbands now found it difficult to secure new jobs for themselves and sometimes through necessity resorted to deceitful practices. Iraida Fedorovna Bartashevich’s mother denied knowing the whereabouts of her imprisoned husband when she

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<sup>119</sup> LM/2, p. 422.

<sup>120</sup> LM/2, p. 422

<sup>121</sup> See, for example, LM/2, p. 427.

<sup>122</sup> *The Diary of Nina Kosterina*, trans. by Mirra Ginsburg, New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1968, p. 137.

<sup>123</sup> *Nina Kosterina*, p. 164.

<sup>124</sup> *Nina Kosterina*, p. 163.

was looking for employment.<sup>125</sup> Returning to school after having survived the Leningrad blockade and continuing to believe that her arrested father would return to the family, Nina Petrovna Zueva simply noted him as ‘missing’ when she was required to complete application forms.<sup>126</sup> The financial reverberations of the Great Terror were also evident many years later. As they grew older, some of the ‘wives of enemies of the people’ found that they were deprived of their pension entitlements.<sup>127</sup>

In searching for her arrested husband in Murmansk, Galina Nikolaevna Karchevskaya’s mother was advised by the investigating officer to get a divorce. This could be obtained in three days and would help her to avoid any future unpleasantness because the statute of her husband’s arrest allowed also for her to be arrested and for their daughter to be sent to a children’s home. Galina Nikolaevna’s mother advised her daughter never to talk about her father’s arrest and, when required, to state simply that he lived elsewhere. Nevertheless, despite this secretive approach and following a good education, Galina Nikolaevna was later thrown out of her job, ‘because of your father’.<sup>128</sup>

In order to secure the family’s immediate livelihood and well-being and to protect their children from future stigma, some wives took this more demonstrative step of instigating divorce proceedings, sometimes with the encouragement of the arresting authorities and even their own husband.<sup>129</sup> They were, thus, able to forge new identities and lives for themselves

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<sup>125</sup> LM/10, p. 611.

<sup>126</sup> LM/11, p. 710.

<sup>127</sup> See, for example, LM/9, p. 638.

<sup>128</sup> LM/11, pp. 670-1.

<sup>129</sup> See, for example, LM/12, pp. 559-60.

and their children. When her husband was arrested in August 1937 and sentenced to ten years without the right to correspondence, Nina Ivanovna Nikonova was left on her own with a young baby. She was assisted by a friend who worked for the NKVD to obtain a quick divorce and subsequently returned to the use of her maiden name. She left Leningrad and went to live with her mother in the countryside, where she was able to find a job.<sup>130</sup>

The parents of Tamara Nikolaevna Morozova (b. 1941) had already left Leningrad before the final outbreak of war, but her father was subsequently arrested. Her mother moved the family to live with relatives in the countryside, but she herself lived apart from them and took refuge in the forest in order to evade arrest. In the hope of avoiding the children being stigmatised, they were split up and lived with different members of the extended family. The mother took the advice of a friend who worked on the village soviet to acquire a new passport and revert to the use of her maiden name.<sup>131</sup> Even after 1945, the family did not return to Leningrad, where their former apartment had been sealed. When her father eventually returned to the family, Tamara Nikolaevna did not know him at all and the consequences of her early life experiences meant that, 'the feeling of loneliness has stalked me always'.<sup>132</sup>

Family lives were disrupted by the purges in ways other than direct arrests, as Yelena Khanga has explained in relation to the wider international community. The foreigners in her parents' social circle who were unwilling to take up Soviet citizenship were ordered to leave the country at very short notice, leaving their Russian families behind:

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<sup>130</sup> LM/10, p. 657.

<sup>131</sup> Tamara Nikolaevna Morozova, in Frierson, *Silence was Salvation*, pp. 163-4, 166.

<sup>132</sup> Tamara Nikolaevna Morozova, in Frierson, *Silence was Salvation*, pp. 165, 169.

There were other tragedies among the Russian wives and children left behind in 1937. When the wives tried to establish contact with their husband in the United States, Soviet authorities told them the men had been arrested upon their return and died in American prisons. ... My mother always told them not to take the word of officials that their families were dead... After thirty-five years, the Russian wives learned that their husbands had been alive all along.<sup>133</sup>

### **Impact on Wider Social Circles:**

Everyday relationships were changed notably by the instigation of the purges, but the impact of arrests varied considerably in different social circles. In some cases, relatives and friends no longer visited and sometimes, through fear of further repercussions, asked not to be visited themselves.<sup>134</sup> Olga Adamova-Sliozberg felt like a 'strange life began' after the arrest of her husband:

[W]hen I went out into the street and walked to work - I looked at all of the people as if through a glass wall: and unseen barrier separated me from them. They were normal, and I was doomed. And they spoke to me in a particular voice, and they were afraid of me. When they caught sight of me, they crossed to the other side of the street. There were also others who paid special attention to me, but this was heroism on their part, and I and they knew it.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Khanga, *Soul to Soul*, pp. 92-3.

<sup>134</sup> See, for example, LM/2, p. 441.

<sup>135</sup> Adamova-Sliozberg, *Put'*, pp. 11-12, and Adamova-Sliozberg, *My Journey*, p. 9.

Even though nobody in her family was arrested, the American origins of Lily Golden's family meant that their social circle was broken up through fear of association:

We lost friends, who no longer came to visit us as they had before. From fear of the KGB, people avoided us because we were of foreign origin, though we were Soviet citizens.

Many of those arrested in the purges had been accused of contacts with 'foreign spies', and of themselves becoming spies for other countries.<sup>136</sup>

As the daughter of an American Jewish mother, Lily Golden was aware of the suspicions that fell on Soviet Jews during the purges and again after the Second World War. She argued that 'this fear was cultivated among the Soviet people quite consciously'.<sup>137</sup> Similarly, Leah Trachtman-Palchan and her husband, as Jewish Palestinian deportees in Moscow in the 1930s, slowly managed to cultivate friends amongst their Russian co-workers, but as the Great Terror progressed relationships became strained. One good friend asked them to let him have 'all of the pictures where they were photographed together' and told them that he would 'no longer be able to be in touch'.<sup>138</sup>

The unspoken point here rests on the widespread suspicion of an international Jewish conspiracy to undermine the Soviet Union. Nadezhda Mandelstam underlined this perception of Soviet anti-Semitism from her own personal experience: 'I never hid the fact that I am Jewish, and I must say that among the ordinary people I have yet to encounter any anti-

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<sup>136</sup> Golden, *Long Journey*, p. 20.

<sup>137</sup> Golden, *Long Journey*, p. 20.

<sup>138</sup> Trachtman-Palchan, *Between Tel Aviv and Moscow*, p. 141.

Semitism. In working-class families and among collective farmers I was always treated as one of them, without the least hint of what one found in the universities after the war'.<sup>139</sup>

Whilst such deliberate avoidance of relatives, friends and neighbours was a common occurrence, it does not seem to have been universally the case. Inna Aronovna Shikheeva-Gaister (b. 1925) noted that there were 'amazing people who in those years were not afraid to help, when everyone turned their back on us, right down to my uncle'.<sup>140</sup> Meri Berngradovna Il'ina reported that, 'after the arrest of my father, we lived quietly in our home; we weren't exiled. Our neighbours behaved very kindly towards us because they knew our father was a good man'.<sup>141</sup> Another account from an occupant of a communal apartment notes a similar outcome:

The co-tenants had probably heard everything through the walls. The next day, in the kitchen, they pretended that nothing had happened. During the rest of the 15 years I spent in this communal apartment, in the frightening lack of privacy living with three other families, no one ever mentioned my father, who disappeared forever one night in 1937.<sup>142</sup>

### **Internal Exile:**

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<sup>139</sup> Nadezhda Mandelstam, *Hope Against Hope: a Memoir*, trans by Max Hayward, London: Collins and Harvill, 1971, p. 342.

<sup>140</sup> Inna Aronovna Shikheeva-Gaister in Frierson, *Silence was Salvation*, p. 44.

<sup>141</sup> LM/10, p. 671.

<sup>142</sup> 'The Black Crow', in Messana, *Soviet Communal Living*, p. 32.

When family members were forced into internal exile, they were often given only a very short period of time – sometimes as little as twenty-four hours, occasionally a little longer, perhaps up to 48 or even 72 hours – to pack up their belongings and prepare themselves to leave.<sup>143</sup> They were forbidden to settle within a predetermined radius – usually over 101 kilometres - of major cities.<sup>144</sup> Agnessa Mironov-Korol declined even to live in one of the designated towns of the exclusion zone, preferring instead to move to live near her sister in Lithuania: ‘How lucky that I declined: everyone who went to those towns was rearrested’.<sup>145</sup> Exiles were left without defined rights and were not entitled to any form of maintenance from the state.<sup>146</sup> Some families found themselves continually on the move, with children regularly changing schools as they moved from one place to the next.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> For example, see the account published on 24 September 2012 of an interview with Geliana Sokolnikova (daughter of Soviet government official Grigory Sokolnikov, who was arrested in 1937 and murdered by convicts in 1939) of what happened following the arrest of her father: Anna Sayed-Shakh, ‘Cast Out of Soviet Paradise’, available online: <http://en.novayagazeta.ru/society/54597.html> (accessed March 2016). Geliana’s older half-sister, Zorya (daughter of Leonid Serebryakov), was sent to ‘the notorious home for children of “enemies of the people”’, from which she escaped and rejoined her family at liberty. Her mother was arrested in their place of exile, Semipalatinsk, and served an eleven-year sentence.

<sup>144</sup> See, for example, LM/7, p. 596.

<sup>145</sup> *Agnessa*, p. 180; Yakovenko, *Agnessa*, p. 197.

<sup>146</sup> See, for example, LM/11, p. 713.

<sup>147</sup> See, for example, LM/11, p. 734.

Starting a life in exile often proved precarious. After the arrest of their father, Zinaida Nikitichna (b. 1929) and Aleksandra Nikitichna Petukhova (b. 1931) were exiled to Saratov, where their mother was left ‘without money, without help, with young children, living for a whole month at the station’. Nobody would offer her work or accommodation, until she finally found unskilled factory work and a place to live in a kitchen.<sup>148</sup> In order to avoid such a fate and the children being taken to a distribution centre, Nina Nikolaevna Strelkova’s family moved into some sort of bath house in the forest for the winter following the arrest of her father. Her mother foraged for food at night, and the family continued to live very poorly even after they had returned home.<sup>149</sup>

Nikolai Bukharin’s third wife, Anna Mikhailovna Larina (b. 1914), was given a choice of five possible locations for her period of exile and ended up, with transport and carriage assistance provided by the NKVD, in Astrakhan.<sup>150</sup> Enforced exile from the home city carried with it also the loss of a residence permit and often the prohibition on settling within the predetermined radius of the other major metropolitan centres or coastal port towns. Ada Aleksandrovna Federolf noted:

Ariadna Sergeevna Efron and I came to seek haven in Ryazan for the same reason. ... At the end of our terms [in labour camps] we were issued domestic passports of the type known as ‘minus thirty-eight’: we could live anywhere except in the thirty-eight cities that were the USSR’s capitals and regional centres or in border towns and cities with top-secret

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<sup>148</sup> LM/7, pp. 625-6.

<sup>149</sup> LM/7, p. 630.

<sup>150</sup> See Anna Larina, *This I Cannot Forget*, London: W.W. Norton and Co., 1994, p. 169. The other choices were Aktyubinsk, Akmolinsk, Semipalatinsk and Orenburg.

industries. Ryazan was the city closest to Moscow where one could get a residence permit...<sup>151</sup>

The number of places of exclusion and the distance from major urban centres changed over time and varied from individual to individual. Those living under such restrictions were known by their own particular nomenclature, as Nadezhda Mandelstam observed: ‘I learned that a woman forced to live beyond the hundred-kilometre limit was popularly known as a “hundred-and-fiver” (*stopyatnitsa*)’.<sup>152</sup>

Many exiles had to register regularly with the local police and were denied full access to their internal passport. Exiled to Samarkand in April 1938, Emira Dambran’s mother had to report every month to the local NKVD office to prove that she was still there.<sup>153</sup> Likewise, whilst visiting her mother in exile during 1939, Maya Plisetskaya noted that she ‘went with Mother to the police precinct, where she had to check in twice a month. She had to appear before the keepers of law and order. Otherwise, how would they know whether she had run away?’<sup>154</sup>

This restriction could cause unanticipated problems. In voluntarily following her exiled fiancé to Frunze that left him without an internal passport, Tamara Petkevich discovered that it was difficult for the couple to obtain the necessary paperwork that would enable them to

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<sup>151</sup> Ariadna Efron and Ada Federolf, *Unforced Labors*, comp, ed. and trans. by Diane Nemeec Ignashev, Moscow: Vozvrashchenie, 2006, p. 51. Ariadna Sergeevna Efron (b. 1912) was daughter of the poet Marina Tsvetaeva, who committed suicide in 1941 following the arrest of her husband and daughter.

<sup>152</sup> Mandelstam, *Hope Against Hope*, p. 344.

<sup>153</sup> LM/11, p. 677. See also LM/7, p. 626.

<sup>154</sup> Plisetskaya, *I Maya*, p. 43.

marry.<sup>155</sup> Following her own arrest and rehabilitation, and now caught in a similar bureaucratic nightmare in Moscow, Agnessa Mironova-Korol had difficulty obtaining a death certificate for her executed husband (and still not being aware of the exact date of his death that was requested by the officiating clerk at ZAGS), and this paperwork was essential to allow her to remarry.<sup>156</sup>

These sites of exile (and evacuation during the Second World War) could have unexpected benefits as they coincidentally became locations for particular groups of people to congregate. When visiting her exiled mother in the Kazakh city of Dzhetysay, Yevgeniya Aleksandrovna Lakotkina (b. 1923) was introduced to a ‘very interesting society: a mix of the Moscow intelligentsia (journalists, doctors, etc.); Koreans exiled from the East, amongst whom there were many intelligent people and handicraft workers’.<sup>157</sup> Many of the wives of high-ranking government and military personnel were exiled to Central Asia and they provided invaluable mutual support and education to each other’s children.<sup>158</sup>

Exile also meant that it was sometimes difficult for individuals even to return to their place of birth or former residence and doing so placed them in danger of arrest. This situation, however, was somewhat eased by the disruption caused by evacuation and displacement during the Second World War. The chaos of the war years and the renewal of internal passports after the war, again ironically, provided the opportunity for some of these secondary victims of the purges deliberately to obscure their past family connections to an

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<sup>155</sup> Petkevich, *Gulag Actress*, p. 75.

<sup>156</sup> *Agnessa*, p. 130; Yakovenko, *Agnessa*, p. 141.

<sup>157</sup> LM/11, p. 711.

<sup>158</sup> See, for example, Frierson and Vilensky, *Children of the Gulag*, p. 176.

‘enemy of the people’ and to secure new identities for themselves. Residency rights and access to former apartments, however, were not formally restored until the rehabilitation process was initiated following the death of Stalin and when Khrushchev came to office in the mid-1950s.

### **The Fate of Children:**

Operational Order No. 00486 ‘on the arrest of wives’ made provision for the removal of children if they were now left with nobody to care for them.<sup>159</sup> Breast-feeding babies and infants were allowed to remain with their mother until they reached the age of one or one and a half years old. The youngest children, up to three years of age, were to be taken to People’s Commissariat of Health-run children’s homes or nurseries. Children from the age of three to fifteen were to be taken to reception-distribution centres before being forwarded to more permanent People’s Commissariat for Education-run children’s homes in other areas of the country and outside the major exclusion zones, where they were to be supported at state expense.<sup>160</sup> Relatives, if they were not themselves facing repressive measures, were allowed

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<sup>159</sup> *Memorial-Aspekt*, no. 2/3, 1993. The named exclusion zones in this Order were Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Tbilisi, Minsk and maritime and border towns. Various testimonies suggest that if relatives decided to take care of these ‘orphaned’ children, they did so at their own expense and without financial assistance from the state.

<sup>160</sup> Kuhr, ‘Children of “Enemies of the People”’, p. 209, names one of the reception centres in Moscow as the ‘Danilovskii detipriemnik’. Presumably, this was the site of the former Danilovskii monastery; p. 211 (citing a range of archival documents) notes that the standard of living in the children’s homes was extremely low, with poorly-maintained buildings and inadequate sanitary facilities, insufficient food and clothing, and badly-trained staff.

to take responsibility for these children if they wished to do so. Children over the age of fifteen showing potential for socially-dangerous, anti-Soviet activity were to be treated accordingly as adults, including possible detention in NKVD-run camps or corrective labour colonies.

Corinna Kuhr's research suggests that there were 176 reception centres run by the NKVD and that they had the official capacity to house 10,000 children.<sup>161</sup> The actual number passing through them is unknown and they were reported as being overcrowded and underequipped. Kuhr's study offers estimates from which, 'we may conclude that some 200-300,000 children were directly victimised by secret order no. 00486'.<sup>162</sup> A subsequent adjustment to the terms of Operational Order 00486, in part perhaps to deal with the unexpected overcrowding in the reception centres and orphanages, was introduced on 7 January 1938. An NKVD circular allowed the children of repressed parents to be released to the guardianship of relatives.<sup>163</sup>

In reality, the fate of young children whose parents had been arrested varied greatly, but the experience of repression was something that significantly informed the remainder of their lives, despite official pronouncements to the contrary. One often cited phrase in relation to the treatment of the offspring of those arrested and exiled was Stalin's declaration that 'the son does not answer for the father'.<sup>164</sup> Like thousands of others, however, after the arrest of

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<sup>161</sup> Kuhr, 'Children of "Enemies of the People"', p. 217, citing *Sbornik Detkomissii*, no. 3, 1936, pp. 1-3.

<sup>162</sup> Kuhr, 'Children of "Enemies of the People"', p. 217.

<sup>163</sup> See Frierson and Vilensky, *Children of the Gulag*, pp. 167-8.

<sup>164</sup> See, for example, *Pravda*, 2 December 1935, p. 3. For the origins and contemporary interpretation of the saying, see also Petkevich, *Gulag Actress*, p. 50.

their father, Inessa Uzilevskaya (b. 1931) and her brother, Yurii Uzilevskii (b. 1932), recalled having to carry the ‘shameful’ and harsh judgement of themselves as a ‘child of an enemy of the people’ throughout their lives.<sup>165</sup> In an attempt to safeguard against such an eventuality, Leah Trachtman-Palchan and her husband registered their children only with their mother’s surname: ‘Trachtman and not Palchan, in case Michael was, God forbid, arrested, and so our son would not be considered the son of an “enemy of the people” in kindergarten’.<sup>166</sup>

Sensing what was happening around them and confused by their suddenly changed circumstances, some children did not even attempt to defend their parents, though they mostly later came to regret their childish responses. Renita Andreevna Grigor’eva had spent the evening of her father’s arrest learning a poem by heart, but she was denied the chance to recite it the next morning at kindergarten because her father was now deemed to be an ‘enemy of the state’. As a young girl at the time, Renita Andreevna was not angry with the nursery assistant who had denied her this opportunity, but with her father: ‘in my opinion, it was his fault that I wasn’t allowed to recite the poem’.<sup>167</sup> Nina Kosterina’s initial response to the threat of her father’s arrest was not to feel sorry for him, despite some doubts, but her attitude soon changed.<sup>168</sup>

In the face of such responses, well-meaning relatives sometimes went to extraordinary lengths to protect the young and the elderly from the realities of the Great Terror. Plisetskaya has noted that the caring relative with whom she was living orchestrated telegrams,

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<sup>165</sup> LM/8, p. 619.

<sup>166</sup> Trachtman-Palchan, *Between Tel Aviv and Moscow*, p. 143.

<sup>167</sup> Renita Andreevna Grigor’eva, in Ilic, *Life Stories*, p. 75.

<sup>168</sup> *Nina Kosterina*, pp. 44.

supposedly from her imprisoned mother, whilst her paternal aunts sent their own mother letters allegedly from her son (Plisetskaya's father) asking her to forget about him: 'Just think how many holy deceits were perpetrated in our miserable, god-forsaken, blood-covered Russia'.<sup>169</sup> Olga Adamova-Sliozberg's sister sent packages by mail to her children 'From Mama', so they would believe they were from their mother, who, they had been told, was on an extended business trip.<sup>170</sup>

Likewise, Margarita Ivanovna Solov'eva's mother told her children that their father was away on a business trip and gave them presents supposedly sent by him. Perhaps realising that the deceit could not be maintained, the mother finally announced that the father had died and would never return, but this caused her to panic when the 'death' was later noted on an application form for entry into an educational institute. The truth was eventually admitted, and the children were nevertheless still able to study in careers that later involved overseas travel, a rare privilege for Soviet citizens.<sup>171</sup> Olga Adamova-Sliozberg told her two young children, aged four and six, that their father was away on a business trip after he had been arrested, and, on the eve of her own arrest, she told them that she too had to go away on a business trip. She had said nothing of what lay ahead for her to her own mother. Her mother subsequently decided to continue the deceit when she was left to care for Olga's children.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Plisetskaya, *I Maya*, p. 39.

<sup>170</sup> Adamova-Sliozberg, *Put'*, p. 214, and Adamova-Sliozberg, *My Journey*, p. 224.

<sup>171</sup> LM/11, p. 653.

<sup>172</sup> Adamova-Sliozberg, *Put'*, pp. 13, 114 and 219; Adamova-Sliozberg, *My Journey*, pp. 11, 123 and 230.

Such an explanation, it has been suggested, could help to save children ‘from the fear of permanent loss’.<sup>173</sup>

Like many other mothers, what concerned Olga most, however, was that her children would be separated from each other and even given new names if they were taken to a state-run orphanage.<sup>174</sup> The children were taken in by their grandparents, who fiercely protected them from attempts by the NKVD to remove them to an orphanage and, thanks to the intervention of Olga’s high-ranking brother-in-law, lived relatively peacefully with one of Olga’s sisters taking on the role of mother.<sup>175</sup> They were well looked after by their extended family while their mother was in prison and labour camps. Olga’s son later suggested in interview that the main reason he and his sister had not been sent to an orphanage was because their parents were not amongst the most important people to be arrested during the Great Terror.<sup>176</sup>

Anna Larina did not want to be parted from her toddler son, Yura (b. 1936), following her interrogation in 1937. An NKVD official tried to reassure her that ‘the boy is not responsible for anything’, but she noted, ‘On the contrary, the boy was found guilty forever’.<sup>177</sup>

Following the arrest and death of his grandparents, Yura spent most his childhood years in a series of orphanages and foster homes. Mother and son had not seen each other for eighteen years by the time they were reunited in 1956. By this stage in his life, Yura was living under

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<sup>173</sup> Frierson and Vilensky, *Children of the Gulag*, p. 152.

<sup>174</sup> Adamova-Sliozberg, *Put’*, p. 22; Adamova-Sliozberg, *My Journey*, p. 21.

<sup>175</sup> Adamova-Sliozberg, *Put’*, pp. 212-214; Adamova-Sliozberg, *My Journey*, pp. 222-224.

<sup>176</sup> Frierson and Vilensky, *Children of the Gulag*, p. 162. See also, Adamova-Sliozberg, *My Journey*, p. xiv.

<sup>177</sup> Larina, *This I Cannot Forget*, p. 169.

an adopted surname and was not aware of the true identity of his parents. Like Yura, younger children may not have been fully and immediately aware of what was happening around them, but older children certainly were and they carried these memories with them throughout their lives.

Yelena Nikolaevna Berkovskaya accompanied her arrested mother when the NKVD came to take her to the Lubyanka in Moscow during the night of 1-2 December 1937. At 14 years old, Yelena Nikolaevna tried to persuade the NKVD driver that she was able to make her own way back home by metro. The driver at first offered to take her to the metro station, but instead deceived her by driving straight past it. He only came to a stop at the Danilovskii reception centre, where he dropped her off. She had nothing with her. At the reception centre, Yelena Nikolaevna was photographed (facing front and in left and right profile), had her fingerprints taken from both hands and was given a quick medical check-up.<sup>178</sup>

According to her narrative, Yelena Nikolaevna was well cared for at the reception centre, treated kindly, given tasty and fresh meals, in a clean environment.<sup>179</sup> The children played games together, walked in the former monastery grounds and there was even a cinema. Some of the children's parents were Comintern officials or diplomats and Yelena Nikolaevna was left wondering if they had any family members in Moscow who would be able to collect them. After two or three days at the reception centre, the children were usually dispersed to more permanent children's homes in other areas of the country. Yelena Nikolaevna, however, was fortunate. On 5 December 1937, her older sister, Olya, and aunt arrived to take her back

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<sup>178</sup> Berkovskaya, *Sud'by skreshchen'ya*, pp. 229-30.

<sup>179</sup> Berkovskaya, *Sud'by skreshchen'ya*, pp. 232 and 234.

home.<sup>180</sup> Forecasting her own arrest, Yelena Nikolaevna's mother had left a note giving instructions that her younger daughter should be sent to live with relatives in Akhtyrka in Ukraine. Before Yelena Nikolaevna left for Akhtyrka the two sisters struggled to survive on Olya's meagre student stipend, meaning there was no money left over for them even to be able to think about providing financial assistance to their imprisoned mother.<sup>181</sup>

It is already evident that even in cases where both parents were arrested, children were not necessarily condemned to life in a state-run children's home. Many were taken in by relatives, friends and sometimes even neighbours, or continued to be cared for by their nannies.<sup>182</sup> Yevgenia Olimpovna Ishchenko reported that following the arrest of her father in the autumn of 1936 and the subsequent exile of her mother to Uzbekistan, she and her sister were saved from life in a children's home by being taken to live with their grandmother and an aunt.<sup>183</sup> Three-year old Korina Vladimirovna Klodt, having witnessed the arrest of her parents, continued to live with her maternal grandfather and aunts. Nothing was confiscated from them and they continued to live in the same apartment.<sup>184</sup>

The daughters of Soviet government official and member of the Left Opposition Ivars Smilga were cared for by their nanny after the arrest of their father on 1 January 1935, following the

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<sup>180</sup> Berkovskaya, *Sud'by skreshchen'ya*, p. 235.

<sup>181</sup> Berkovskaya, *Sud'by skreshchen'ya*, p. 238.

<sup>182</sup> See *Agnessa*, pp. 151-2, Yakovenko, *Agnessa*, p. 168 for an example of an eleven-year-old taken in by neighbours '...for a whole month, they had to feed her...'

<sup>183</sup> LM/4, p. 594.

<sup>184</sup> LM/11, p. 694.

assassination of Kirov, and the subsequent exile of their mother. The nanny, Anna Kuzmichna, appears to have been a devoted carer for the children. Tatiana Smilga later noted:

When my mother was taken away on 1 July 1936, ‘neighbours’ arrived in the [communal] apartment. My sister and I shared the room with our nurse who never abandoned us. A lot of nurses distanced themselves from the children of the victims of the purges mainly because they were afraid that they in turn would be targets of repression, and also because nobody paid them. But our nurse came to visit my mother when my father was arrested, and even though she no longer worked for us, she said to my mother, ‘I will raise your kids, I do not need to be paid’. She stayed with us after mother was taken away.<sup>185</sup>

The two sisters, however, were subsequently themselves arrested and exiled from Moscow, Tatiana in 1939 and Natalia in 1949:

We never saw [our nurse] again. She died, alone, in the communal apartment in Moscow during my exile in Riazan. My sister, she is still somewhere else, in a city where she was exiled 10 years after me. Neither of us two could go back to be with her.<sup>186</sup>

Similarly, Renita Grigor’eva’s nanny, Anna, insisted on accompanying the family back to Moscow following the arrest of her father even though ‘everyone said she was a fool and they warned her that she was putting herself in danger of being arrested as well’.<sup>187</sup> Inna Aronovna Shikheeva-Gaister also noted that, following her parents arrest, her nanny ‘defended us, she

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<sup>185</sup> ‘Gulag and the Roslovian Smell’, pp. 80-81.

<sup>186</sup> ‘Gulag and the Roslovian Smell’, p. 82.

<sup>187</sup> Renita Andreevna Grigor’eva, in Ilic, *Life Stories*, p. 75.

did not let us wind up in the child receiver, she stayed with us'.<sup>188</sup> Irina Fedorovna Vainstein's German nanny, however, was no longer able to care for her: 'It's sad what happened to this woman. I don't know exactly what happened to her, but when the war was approaching all of the Germans living in Leningrad were sent to Central Asia'.<sup>189</sup> This is likely to have been as a consequence of the German 'national operation' launched on 25 July 1937 by Order No. 00439.

Some children, like the Smilga sisters, found themselves separated from their siblings. Others found themselves in children's homes until a parent or relative was able to retrieve them, sometimes after a sentence had been served. Nina Kosterina noted that her young cousin, Irma, was sent to a children's home following the arrest of her paternal uncle and his wife.<sup>190</sup> Despite the difficulties of such a situation, life was not necessarily experienced as bad or miserable in these orphanages. The following fragments from an unpublished interview recall a happy childhood spent in a series of children's homes in Leningrad, but perhaps this is partly narrated in light of a rather poor relationship with the woman who came to retrieve her, though she was never sure that this was actually her mother: 'My mother had been arrested. I was taken to another children's home. I had a good life here... I didn't know anything about life outside of the home; I didn't know anything about the blockade of the city during the war... We were fed four times a day. ...When I came to see how other families lived I thought that my own life had been much more fun'.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Inna Aronovna Shikheever-Gaister, in Frierson, *Silence was Salvation*, p. 41.

<sup>189</sup> Irina Fedorovna Vainstein, in Ilic, *Life Stories*, p. 90.

<sup>190</sup> *Nina Kosterina*, p. 35.

<sup>191</sup> Unpublished interview with Melanie Ilic, September 2010; the respondent wishes to remain anonymous.

A second round of arrests and re-arrests took place in the late 1940s and families were left to pick up the pieces once again. This time, however, the now adult children of former ‘enemies of the people’, who had been too young to share their parents’ fate in 1937, became the targets of arrest. This was the fate of Inna Aronovna Shikheeva-Gasiter, who was arrested as the daughter of enemies of the people at her university thesis defence in 1949.<sup>192</sup> Olga Adamova-Sliozberg’s account, along with detailing her own second arrest, suggests that it was predominantly the children of the elite who were targeted in this second round: ‘Happily my husband didn’t belong to the enemies of the people at this rank, so my children were not arrested’.<sup>193</sup>

### **Teachers, School and Higher Education:**

For some children, although their daily routine was not significantly interrupted by the arrest of their parent, they were met with mixed, and often confusing, responses from their school teachers and fellow pupils. Nina Markovna’s cousin, Alesha, was bullied mercilessly by his classmates, to the extent that he stopped even trying to defend his father. It appears that he was eventually hounded to his death.<sup>194</sup> Mariya Aleksandrovna Ostrovskaya’s mother refused to tell her anything about her father’s arrest on the basis of ‘the less you know, the better’, but this left the children with the feeling that their childhood had been stolen from them. Their

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<sup>192</sup> Inna Aronovna Shikheeva-Gaister, in Frierson, *Silence was Salvation*, pp. 59-60.

<sup>193</sup> Adamova-Sliozberg, *Put’*, pp. 164-5, and Adamova-Sliozberg, *My Journey*, pp. 174-5.

<sup>194</sup> Markovna, *Nina’s Journey*, p. 32.

relationships with other people were always ‘negative’ and other children did not want to hang around or play with them.<sup>195</sup>

Children reported being deliberately left out by their teachers when snacks and treats were routinely distributed at school and when gifts were presented on festive occasions. Their fellow pupils, however, did not always treat them so harshly and often offered to share their bounty so that the child who had been deprived of the treat sometimes ended up having more than anyone else as they were given shares by all of their friends and classmates. Masha Gessen’s narrative based on the reminiscences of her two babushkas includes the details of one of the grandmother’s, Rozalia Solodovik (b. 1920), expulsion from the Komsomol in January 1937 because of her refusal to retract an anti-government statement: ‘terror had now entered their home’.<sup>196</sup>

Inna Aronovna Shikheeva-Gaister noted that the children from Government House who attended the elite school in Moscow were expected publically to denounce their parents following their arrest. She, however, attended a different school, where there was ‘no persecution of any kind’ and ‘there were no renunciations of one’s parents, nothing happened’.<sup>197</sup> Maya Plisetskaya’s account also suggests that children of lower status and ordinary citizens did not suffer as badly as the offspring of high-ranking and notable officials:

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<sup>195</sup> LM/11, p. 700.

<sup>196</sup> Masha Gessen, *Two Babushkas: How My Grandmothers Survived Hitler’s War and Stalin’s Peace*, London: Bloomsbury, 2004, p. 51. See also pp. 49-50 for denunciations of parents at school and the observation that those who refused ‘never came to school again’.

<sup>197</sup> Inna Aronovna Shikheeva-Gaister, in Frierson, *Silence was Salvation*, pp. 42-3.

‘Fortunately for me, the attitude at school did not change toward me. ... the children of not-so-famous people were left alone’.<sup>198</sup>

Many mothers made huge sacrifices to ensure that their children received an education.<sup>199</sup> As the following account suggests, teachers did not always behave unkindly towards their pupils. Raisa Fedorovna Lushchuk (b. 1928) reported that:

Mama was afraid that we would be excluded from school and that we would not be able to finish our education. My teacher reassured her, saying that those children who were already studying would be allowed to finish: children do not answer for their father.<sup>200</sup>

In fact, there are many narrative accounts in which the children of repressed parents praise the teachers at their schools for treating them kindly, even sometimes providing them with food, clothing and ways to earn some money, as well as providing an environment that allowed them to complete their education successfully. Even though her mother warned her not to talk about her family circumstances at school, Irina Andreevna Dubrovina, for example, noted that her teacher ‘did not say a word. She must have known that they had taken our parents. But she didn’t say a word’.<sup>201</sup> The director of Yelena Nikolaevna Berkovskaya’s school simply asked if her mother was ‘unwell’ (*bol’na*), a commonly-understood euphemism for ‘arrested’, when she went to him to explain her difficult

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<sup>198</sup> Plistetskaya, *I Maya*, pp. 36 and 37.

<sup>199</sup> See, for example, LM/7, p. 674.

<sup>200</sup> LM/3, p. 481.

<sup>201</sup> Irina Andreevna Dubrovina, in Frierson, *Silence was Salvation*, p. 127.

circumstances. He offered her comforting words and asked if there was anything he could do to help.<sup>202</sup>

Whilst it was true that these children were allowed to complete their schooling, like many others, further avenues were closed to them. As they grew up, some children found that they were unable to pursue their long term education, training and career aspirations. Some young children feared they would not be permitted to join the Pioneers.<sup>203</sup> There are many accounts of older children being denied entry into the Komsomol (the youth section of the Communist Party) and, later in life, to the Communist Party itself.<sup>204</sup> Tatiana Smilga noted, ‘My life all of a sudden practically stopped, I was 15 years old. They refused to allow us in the Komsomol, threw us out of the “House on the Embankment” within a few days’.<sup>205</sup>

Children who were unwilling to denounce their arrested parents were likewise excluded from Komsomol membership. Yelena Dmitrievna Ronginskaya-Prokofeva (b. 1922) noted that, ‘When I was in school and went to join the Komsomol in the autumn of 1937, at the very first meeting of the Komsomol committee I was asked if I loved my father. I answered, “Yes”.

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<sup>202</sup> Berkovskaya, *Sud’by skreshchen’ya*, p. 237. Berkovskaya, p. 219, also notes other commonly-used euphemisms to denote someone being ‘arrested’: ‘*tyazhelo zabolet*’ (fallen seriously ill), ‘*vyyali*’ (taken), ‘*zabrali*’ (captured). Goldman, p. 140, includes mention of a letter noting that the writer was now ‘alone’, meaning that her husband had been arrested.

The word ‘repressed’ was not in common usage.

<sup>203</sup> See, for example, LM/9, p. 631 and LM/11, p. 672.

<sup>204</sup> See, for example, LM/11, p. 711.

<sup>205</sup> ‘Gulag and the Roslovian Smell’, p. 80.

They didn't accept me'.<sup>206</sup> Nina Kosterina found herself in the difficult position of having to support her Komsomol organiser in a debate about excluding an eighteen-year-old school friend, Laura, from the organisation once her parents had been arrested. Despite the fact that she was left with nowhere to live, Laura refused to 'repudiate her parents', leaving Nina with 'the feeling that I was doing something bad': 'how is it her fault if her parents were arrested for something?'<sup>207</sup> Incidentally, the arrest of Nina Kosterina's own father in September 1938 did not lead to her exclusion from the Komsomol and she continued to be assigned as a Pioneer organiser.

Nina Kosterina refused to lie to the officials who interviewed her for a placement after she completed her schooling, despite the fact that this enraged her mother and aunts: 'they want me to follow their example and try to make my way by "accommodating myself" – to vileness! No, my Komsomol honor is much more precious to me than "getting on"'.<sup>208</sup> Nevertheless, she complained that, 'there are considerable numbers like me, turned into lepers because of our parents... We are constantly told that "the son is not responsible for the father."' Such hypocrisy!<sup>209</sup> Despite her attempts to remain in Moscow, she was initially sent to Baku to continue her education, but could not take up the course because she was not provided with a scholarship.

When Maya Rudolfovna Levitina was being considered for Komsomol membership in Moscow in 1946, she was called to the dean's office and ordered to destroy all of the

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<sup>206</sup> LM/3, p. 534.

<sup>207</sup> *Nina Kosternina*, pp. 45-7.

<sup>208</sup> *Nina Kosternina*, p. 128.

<sup>209</sup> *Nina Kosternina*, p. 131.

correspondence she had been conducting with an aunt living in Sweden, who had located her after the end of the war with the help of the Red Cross. This mirrored the fact that Maya Rudolfovna's mother had had no contact with her own extensive family in Poland from 1935, leaving her feeling 'alone in the world, that she had no friends, no one'.<sup>210</sup> After some debate, Maya Rudolfovna was eventually admitted to the Komsomol because the school director argued that 'According to the law, the daughter does not answer for her father'.<sup>211</sup>

Without membership of the Komsomol, school leavers were often denied entry to the most prestigious universities and institutes of higher learning. Even those students who had performed well at school and would ordinarily have been awarded a gold or silver medal for their achievements were denied the honour that, under different circumstances, would have allowed them entry to their first-choice university course.<sup>212</sup> Yevgeniya Lakotkina, 'as the daughter of someone who had been repressed', was refused a highly sought after place in the Philology Faculty at Leningrad State University, but was accepted into the History Department. Her sister, likewise, was not admitted to her first-choice placement.<sup>213</sup> Similarly, Margarita Yakovlevna Lebedeva was not allowed into the Chemistry Faculty, but with the support of the pro-vice-chancellor was allowed to study in the Physics and Maths Faculty.<sup>214</sup> Inna Aranovna Shikheeva-Gaister noted that maths and physics 'didn't have an ideological component' and so were more accessible to children whose parents had been arrested.<sup>215</sup> It is

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<sup>210</sup> Maya Rudolfovna Levitina, in Frierson, *Silence was Salvation*, pp. 211, 220.

<sup>211</sup> Maya Rudolfovna Levitina, in Frierson, *Silence was Salvation*, p. 227.

<sup>212</sup> There are many recorded cases of this. See, for example, LM/7, p. 581 and LM/11, p. 768.

<sup>213</sup> LM/11, p. 710.

<sup>214</sup> LM/9, p. 684.

<sup>215</sup> Inna Aronovna Shikheever-Gaister, in Frierson, *Silence was Salvation*, p. 63.

important to note here also that Jews were similarly often restricted in their choice of higher education, particularly in the immediate post-war years.<sup>216</sup>

As the memoir of Sarra Vladimirovna Zhitomirskaya (b. 1916) attests, the universities themselves were particular sites where the impact of the Great Terror was much in evidence.<sup>217</sup> In 1935, Zhitomirskaya became a student at the recently revived History Faculty at Moscow State University (MGU), where she studied alongside the children of top-ranking party, government and Comintern officials as well as those of diplomats. Other students had earned their place through their work records or a service career in the Komsomol or Communist Party. Students came from all over the country and included the children of regional party bosses. Over the course of the next few years, however, the number of students enrolled on the course gradually dwindled. The cause of this decline was not only the growing threat of war by the late 1930s with students being recruited to the war preparations, but also, as the purges spread throughout the country, many of these children of high-ranking officials were now deprived of their university place when their parents were arrested.

Leah Trachtman-Palchan's memoir covertly offers two further explorations for why the History Faculty at MGU became a particular target of the Great Terror: 'history was considered to be a political subject' and 'there were a large number of Jewish students on our course'.<sup>218</sup> She offers a number of examples of denunciation and exclusion from membership at Komsomol meetings at MGU during the Great Terror and she herself was called to an open meeting to defend her membership. She both defended others in the Komsomol meetings and

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<sup>216</sup> See, for example, Vainstein, in Ilic, *Life Stories*, pp. 93-4.

<sup>217</sup> S.V. Zhitomirskaya, *Prosto zhizn'*, Moscow: Rosspen, 2008, pp. 115-28.

<sup>218</sup> Trachtman-Palchan, *Between Tel Aviv and Moscow*, pp. 119-20.

was defended by others.<sup>219</sup> Masha Gessen describes MGU as ‘grand and ideologically cleansed’ in comparison with the less prestigious Institute of History, Philosophy and Literature (IFLI), which was located on the outskirts of Moscow and where Jews were more likely to be accepted as students. By 1940, however, the academics at IFLI were also under threat of the purges.<sup>220</sup>

In Zhitomirskaya’s peer group at MGU, the local Komsomol organisation condemned a whole cohort of students for their anti-Soviet activities, leading to their arrest. Two of her peer group had married Germans and suffered a different type of repression: these families were expelled from the city in the run up to the Second World War. Other student couples distanced themselves from each other if a member of one or other of their families was arrested. As Zhitomirskaya also observed, members of the faculty staff and even senior university officials and administrators themselves were not immune from arrest.

Yet, despite the arrests of her colleagues and the nightmare of Komsomol meetings, Zhitomirskaya concluded that, ‘we lived and studied’.<sup>221</sup> It was also possible to be the child of arrested parents and study successfully at the MGU History Faculty, as Yelena Nikolaevna Berkovskaya’s narrative outlines; her older sister studied there during the purges and she herself took up a place at the beginning of the war, having clearly noted on her initial entrance questionnaire that both of her parents had been repressed.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Trachtman-Palchan, *Between Tel Aviv and Moscow*, pp. 129-36.

<sup>220</sup> Gessen, *Two Babushkas*, p. 58.

<sup>221</sup> Zhitomirskaya, *Prosto zhizn’*, p. 128.

<sup>222</sup> Berkovskaya, *Sud’by skreshchen’ya*, p. 316.

### **Hiding a Tainted Biography:**

The family members of those who had been purged during the Great Terror carried the burden of association and this now tainted personal biography with them throughout their lives.<sup>223</sup> The desperate situation of the wartime years to some extent allowed prejudices to be ignored and barriers to be lifted. Once war broke out in the Soviet Union in June 1941, being the child of an enemy of the people 'no longer had any significance' and offered Inna Aronovna Shikheeva-Gaister the opportunity to serve as a Pioneer leader.<sup>224</sup> It was also possible for those who had refused to join or who had been refused membership of the Komsomol during the Great Terror to be granted membership during the war years.<sup>225</sup> On her admission to MGU in 1944, Shikheeva-Gaister also noted: 'at that time they accepted everyone, both Jews and children of enemies of the people'.<sup>226</sup> After the war, however, the situation changed considerably: a new round of arrests was initiated and anti-Semitism was re-ignited.

Maya Rudolfovna Levitina noted that her life course was dictated, first, by her Polish origins, despite endless talk about 'the friendship of people's', and, second, by the repression of her father. She could never forget her origins, 'not for one minute', even when she had been

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<sup>223</sup> On 'spoilt biographies', see also Goldman, *Inventing the Enemy*, pp. 166-74. See also *Agnessa*, p. 212, which notes that, for Agnessa's adopted daughter, Agulya, 'the consequences of that life followed her into her adult years'.

<sup>224</sup> Inna Aronovna Shikheeva-Gaister, in Frierson, *Silence was Salvation*, p. 55.

<sup>225</sup> See, for example, Gessen, *Two Babushkas*, p. 185.

<sup>226</sup> Inna Aronovna Shikheeva-Gaister, in Frierson, *Silence was Salvation*, p. 60.

enjoying herself: ‘for my whole life, I have felt that I live on the wrong street’.<sup>227</sup> As a teacher, she never received any awards, despite her outstanding work and extensive extra-curricular contributions. She spent most of her life with her emotions closely in check: ‘I was very self-contained... I never cried’; she only really was able to express her emotions when she turned 70 years of age, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and when there was much publicity given to the repressions: ‘I was like a tightly wound spring, that has been wound up for a long time, and then it is released, and it all comes unwound’.<sup>228</sup>

There are numerous examples of the children of those who had been arrested during the Great Terror as adults themselves being thrown out of their jobs in the post-war period as the child of ‘an enemy of the people’.<sup>229</sup> Several members of Nonna Yevgen’evna Voronina’s extended family were arrested and executed in 1937 and 1938. When she was an adult, she was invited several times to join the Communist Party but was afraid that this background would be revealed.<sup>230</sup> Likewise, pressure was put on Tamara Nikolaevna Morozova to join the Communist Party once she had settled into a job, but she steadfastly refused to do so now that she understood what had happened to her father: ‘I already saw that by far not the most honourable people were joining the Party. I didn’t want to stand side by side with them’.<sup>231</sup>

There is a good deal of evidence available also to show that a tainted biography could potentially have a negative impact on an individual’s future career prospects and professional

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<sup>227</sup> Maya Rudolofovna Levitina, in in Frierson, *Silence was Salvation*, pp. 232.

<sup>228</sup> Maya Rudolofovna Levitina, in in Frierson, *Silence was Salvation*, pp. 213.

<sup>229</sup> See, for example, LM/7, p. 624.

<sup>230</sup> LM/7, p. 687.

<sup>231</sup> Tamara Nikolaevna Morozova, in Frierson, *Silence was Salvation*, p. 171.

standing, but there were also some high-profile and high-flying exceptions to this outcome. A number of women who served as fighter pilots and snipers or medics and frontline nurses during the Second World War had family members who had been purged just a few years earlier during the Great Terror or were still serving time in the labour camps. Renowned fighter pilot Anna Timofeyeva-Yegorova (b. 1916) was expelled from the flying school where she was undergoing cadet training once the authorities learned of the arrest of her brother. She was eventually able ‘with the help of good people’ to complete her training in the Ukraine.<sup>232</sup>

In another similar example, the arrest of her father by the NKVD in 1937 did not prevent Lidiya Vladimirovna Litvyak (b. 1921) from following the patriotic call to arms which cost her her own young life in 1943. Her biographer asks whether she would have considered her father to have been guilty and suggests that part of her desire to fight in the war was an attempt to atone for her father’s crimes and to rehabilitate the Litvyak family name.<sup>233</sup>

Likewise, when medic Mariana Vladimirovna Milyutina was called up to serve in military hospitals on the war front in 1943, she was eager to go. She wrote in the required autobiographical questionnaire that both of her parents had died. In fact, her father had been

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<sup>232</sup> Lyuba Vinogradova, *Defending the Motherland: the Soviet Women who Fought Hitler’s Aces*, trans by Arch Tait, London: Maclehorse Press, 2015, p. 56.

<sup>233</sup> Bill Yenne, *The White Rose of Stalingrad: the Real-Life Adventure of Lidiya Vladimirovna Litvyak, the Highest Scoring Female Air Ace of All Time*, Oxford: Osprey, 2013, pp. 103 and 236. Yenne blames ‘Iron Commissar’ Lazar Kaganovich for the arrest of Litvyak’s father. On p. 290, he notes that Lidiya’s brother chose to use his mother’s maiden name as his surname following the arrest of his father. Yenne draws extensively on Nina Kosterina’s diary and other published sources.

arrested and executed in 1937 and her mother at that time was serving eight years in the labour camps, which were then followed by a further seven years in exile before she returned home in the early 1950s.<sup>234</sup> In such cases, patriotism and heroism trumped a tainted personal biography during the years of the Second World War.

There were also other factors that allowed some women to bypass the limits imposed on them by their tainted biography. Ballerina Maya Plisetskaya recalled having to complete a four-page, fifty-question application before she was allowed to travel to the World Youth Festival in Prague in 1947. The questionnaire required answers about her parents, who had both been arrested during the Great Terror: 'I kept vacillating. I wrote the truth, but messily and illegibly'.<sup>235</sup> The others in her group left for Prague without her, while she was called to a Komsomol meeting in Moscow at which she 'squirmed like an eel in a hot frying pan'.<sup>236</sup> Her honesty paid off. She followed the remainder of her group to Prague two days later. Despite the threats and dangers that her tainted biography imposed on her, Plisetskaya was able to forge a very successful career as a world-renowned ballerina:

The label 'daughter of an enemy of the people' did not ruin my life's calling. I avoided the hell of a Soviet orphanage, where they wanted to put me. ... I did not end up in Vorkuta, Auschwitz, or Magadan. They tormented me, but they didn't kill me. Didn't burn me in Dachau.<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> 'Mariana Milyutina', available online: <http://iremember.ru/en/memoirs/medics/mariana-milyutina/> (accessed September 2015).

<sup>235</sup> Plisetskaya, *I Maya*, p. 96.

<sup>236</sup> Plisetskaya, *I Maya*, p. 96.

<sup>237</sup> Plisetskaya, *I Maya*, p. 37.

Plisetskaya's tainted personal biography did, nevertheless, impose limits on the public acknowledgement of her talent. She was awarded, amongst her many domestic and international honours, the Lenin Prize in 1964, for which she 'was very proud and happy. I won't be a hypocrite about it'; yet, 'I was never deemed worthy of the Stalin prize. I was once on the list of contenders ... but my family's ideological impropriety brought that notion to naught'.<sup>238</sup>

In another example, world renowned soprano opera singer, Galina Pavlovna Vishnevskaya (b. 1926), recalled her terror after winning a prestigious post-war national competition at the Bolshoi Theatre that led to her being offered a place in their youth group. In order to take up the offer, she had to complete an extensive twenty-page questionnaire that required details of her family background dating to before the October Revolution, the occupations of her siblings and if she had any relatives living abroad. She initially felt that she had nothing to worry about when she was asked if there was anything in her background that would raise concerns. She had already erased her father from her life. She described him as a 'confirmed Marxist-Leninist' who 'had fallen into the same meat grinder he had been so eager to push others into'.<sup>239</sup> By this stage in her life, she rarely thought about him at all since he had refused to help her and her new-born baby during the Leningrad siege. Her realisation slashed her like a knife as she recalled that he had been arrested under Article 58: 'if they dug up the facts about my father, the Bolshoi would drop me with no discussion whatsoever'.<sup>240</sup> Rather

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<sup>238</sup> Plisetskaya, *I Maya*, p. 270.

<sup>239</sup> Galina Vishnevskaya, *Galina: a Russian Story*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1984, p. 52.

<sup>240</sup> Vishnevskaya, *Galina*, p. 80.

than admit this, she resorted to deceit and declared instead that her father was missing in action during the war. Following this, however, she became obsessed about the truth being eventually revealed.

By the end of the Soviet period under Gorbachev in the late 1980s, a tainted family background was no longer a matter of general public or even political concern as the policy of *glasnost* began to reveal a different history of 1937. Even Raisa Gorbachev (b. 1932), the wife of the Soviet leader, came to note in her autobiography that her grandfather had been a target of the de-kulakisation campaigns under Stalin and was later accused of Trotskyism: 'he was arrested and disappeared without a trace. ... My grandmother died of grief and hunger as an "enemy of the people". And the four children she left behind were left to the mercy of fate'.<sup>241</sup>

### **Conclusion:**

The timing of this study of 'women's experiences of 1937' falls at an important socio-historical crossroads. On the one hand, in social and generational terms, those with any direct living memory of the Great Terror are now reaching the end of their lives. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, knowledge of the impact of the purges on both its primary and secondary victims is still able to cause significant disturbance in individual everyday lives and in post-Soviet culture more broadly, but the transmission of these events to successive generations is likely to witness a diminishing ripple effect over the next few decades. On the

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<sup>241</sup> R.M. Gorbacheva, *Ya nadeyus'*..., Moscow: Novosti, 1991, pp. 26-7, and Raisa

Gorbachev, *I Hope: Reminiscences and Reflections*, trans. by David Floyd, London: Fontana, 1992, pp. 16-17.

other hand, the extensive revelations about the realities of the Great Terror that have occurred since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 have resulted in significant historical research and historiographical controversy over the past quarter of a century, though even here much is yet to be revealed about the experiences and sufferings of its victims. It is now clear that there was no singular and universal experience of the purges and the Great Terror in the Soviet Union under Stalin. These events had a kaleidoscopic and telescopic impact on the victims that has extended across generations.

Even for its secondary victims, the Great Terror proved to be a life-changing event that had a life-long impact; it reverberated through successive Soviet generations and beyond into post-Soviet society.<sup>242</sup> For many, the haunting nightmares of 1937 extended far beyond that fateful year. As Frierson has noted, many a Soviet mother's sleep was disturbed by the fear of losing her children to arrest.<sup>243</sup> The dreaded sounds of cars stopping in the street, the sudden and unexpected ringing of the doorbell, the elevator whirring into action similarly continued to keep people awake at night. As Lungina noted in her memoir, 'It turns out that none of those memories of the past simply disappeared without a trace. We remember it all'.<sup>244</sup> Anya von

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<sup>242</sup> For example, to discover how Katya Jung (Cathy Young, b. 1963) came to find out about the impact of the post-Second World War purges on members of her own extended Jewish family, including her paternal grandfather, who was a loyal Communist Party member, and his wife, who were both sent to a labour camp because they wanted to leave the Soviet Union for Israel, see Cathy Young, *Growing Up in Moscow: Memories of a Soviet Girlhood*, London: Robert Hale, 1989, pp. 212-21: 'For the most part, people were not overeager to air such episodes in their own or their families' past'.

<sup>243</sup> Frierson and Vilensky, *Children of the Gulag*, p. 178.

<sup>244</sup> Lungina, *Word for Word*, p. 81.

Bremzen has noted that on just one single fateful wintry day in 1937, through witnessing the arrest of a family friend, Uncle Dima, her mother was turned into a life-long dissident, who eventually found solace only in emigration.<sup>245</sup>

This study has served to reveal some of the gradations of the secondary victims' experiences of the purges and has noted that precedents for what was to come were already in place by the early 1930s. There is ample anecdotal evidence to suggest that the closest relatives of the Soviet Communist Party elite and higher-ranking government officials were more harshly treated than those of lower ranking and more ordinary citizens, and this perhaps has also served to colour our historical perspective of the Great Terror. The withdrawal of Communist Party membership cards, exclusion from the ranks of the Komsomol, eviction from apartments, condemnation of children to a life in orphanages, sentence to a term in internal exile, dismissal from jobs, denial of access to prestigious educational institutions, restricted career opportunities and loss of state financial support are all reported in the narratives and documents, but these punishments were experienced unevenly by different social groups. In making no attempt to minimise the impact of these events, it should be noted that a good number of the narrators cited here suggest that they and their families were treated less harshly because they were not members of the Soviet elite. This included the likelihood of falling victim to the renewed wave of arrests that took place in the years after 1945.

Indeed, as many of these narratives attest, the difficult circumstances of the Second World War witnessed a relaxation of the purge process for many of the earlier targeted ordinary families. Opportunities opened up for wives and children that would earlier have been denied to them. It also provided the opportunity, through dedication to the war effort, for relatives of

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<sup>245</sup> von Bremzen, *Mastering the Art*, pp. 64-7.

those who had been purged to restore a blighted family name and reputation. Likewise, the significant movements of the population during the years of the war, in the experiences of evacuation and displacement, for example, even served as an opportunity for some to construct for themselves a more innocent family history. As Frierson, again, has noted, ‘wartime chaos helped some victims of political repression evade imprisonment and further family separation’.<sup>246</sup> The renewal of internal passports after the end of the war, and for those who turned 16 years old at this time, also provided the opportunity to create a new identity. In addition to these factors, so many school children had lost a parent during the years of the war that it was not uncommon for them to be raised in fatherless households after 1945, and this also provided an opaque masking for the children of purge victims.<sup>247</sup>

These narratives suggest also that many of the secondary victims of the terror sometimes received unexpected help along the way from a variety of saviours and Samaritans. As Maya Rudolfovna Levitina commented in interview, ‘the world was not without good Russian people’.<sup>248</sup> For parents fearing for the care of their children following their arrest, the reliance on the extended family, although not always forthcoming, is perhaps an expected and anticipated outcome. Neighbours and friends often, though not always, remained discreetly supportive. A number of narratives, however, also point to the unflinching loyalty of nannies, who willingly took over the day-to-day care of children in the absence of their parents, even though this could also place them in danger of arrest. Some nannies took on the role almost of adoptive parents and formed caring relationship with the children that lasted a whole lifetime.

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<sup>246</sup> Frierson, *Silence was Salvation*, p. 157.

<sup>247</sup> See, for example, LM/12, p. 604.

<sup>248</sup> Frierson, *Silence was Salvation*, p. 215.

Many narrators also offer testimony to the kindness and support offered by their teachers and school directors, alongside their fellow students.<sup>249</sup> Similarly, not all employers were hostile to the idea of hiring a relative of an ‘enemy of the people’ and looked for ways to accommodate such workers in their labour force. More surprising and unexpected, perhaps, are the anecdotal accounts of assistance and guidance provided by Communist Party officials, local soviet administrators and even NKVD operatives in helping families to adjust to life following an arrest. It should be recognised here, though, that this advice sometimes came in the form of cutting off all ties with the member of the family who had been purged, even to the extent of seeking a divorce or reverting to the use of a maiden name, which not all wives were willing to do. Likewise, not all children were willing to condemn their parents when challenged to do so at Komsomol meetings, but neither did this necessarily always lead to their expulsion from the organisation.

Coming to terms with their status as a relative of an ‘enemy of the people’ and living with a tainted biography were the most common and widespread experiences of virtually all of the secondary victims of the purges. Though for most these circumstances raised insurmountable barriers in different aspects of their lives, a few others were able to forge highly-successful, even internationally renowned careers despite their blighted personal background. The shadow of 1937 loomed large, but there were also occasional rays of sunshine. For those from the artistic and cultural world, such as ballerina Maya Plisetskaya and opera singer Galina Vishnevskaya, fortune favoured those with an unusual and prodigious talent. In addition to these high-profile cases, many others were also able to forge successful academic and scientific careers, for example, reaching so far, but perhaps not to the very top of their

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<sup>249</sup> Frierson and Vilensky devote a whole section to the topic of ‘Teachers as Samaritans for Children of Enemies of the People’ in *Children of the Gulag*, pp. 219-22.

chosen profession. In these cases, contact with foreigners and travel abroad in their professional capacity were not necessarily denied to them in later life.

The Great Terror and the entire purge process served to divide families, often times irretrievably. This was particularly the case for foreign nationals resident in the Soviet Union in the 1930s, who were sometimes left with the choice to renounce their original nationality and accept Soviet citizenship or return to their country of origin, whatever this may have meant for their ties to their Soviet family. It is clear also that the 'national operations' resulted in the widespread arrest of foreign nationals, with their long term whereabouts remaining a mystery to their family abroad. In some fortunate cases, the opportunity for divided family members finally to reconnect with each other and perhaps to meet overseas relatives for the first time emerged in the post-Soviet period when, with the aid of the security services, access was given to NKVD files and assistance was provided by such organisations as the International Red Cross.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> See, for example, LM/12, pp. 526-7.