

Living under Stalin's Great Terror: Survivors' Narratives in Georgia

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Abstract

This research represents one of the first attempts of studying Stalin's Great Terror (1937-38) in Georgia in the survivors' narratives from the perspective of cultural trauma and formation of the memory of the long and difficult process of survival. Therefore, detecting the key factors of remembering past events and carving out the characteristics of cultural trauma contributes to understanding the broader context of the Great Terror.

The Georgian chapter of the Great Terror is a peculiar case study within the wider Soviet context, since the architects of the terror were ethnically Georgians themselves. Yet, living as a Georgian in 1937-38 could not be considered as privilege - many Georgian victims that proudly claimed to be friends with Joseph Stalin—who was born and raised in Georgia —, were considered as potential threats to the dictator.

Another issue related to the peculiarities of Georgia is Stalin's favorable image in some parts of the Georgian society, which is not related to their Soviet patriotism, but to the image of the Georgian nation, whose son from the peasants' family managed to leave the country and became famous.

The present analysis of the life stories of the survivors of Stalin's Great Terror, highlights the logic of the repressions, their interpretation of this traumatic event and the role played by different people in forming their memory in particular ways. The label "enemy of the people" applied to the Soviet citizens defined their life paths and their social attitudes afterwards. The survivors did blame local inquisitors in their stories, but they have never explicitly condemned the main Soviet terror architects, including Stalin.

Keywords: Stalin's Great Terror, Survivors' Narratives, Oral History Interviews, Trauma Narratives, Social Memory

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*To my grandma,
the most inspiring woman
who has always believed in me*

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Introduction

Almost three decades after the Soviet collapse and seven decades after the death of Stalin, the legacy of ruthless Soviet dictator, including, his role in the Great Terror remains the subject of constant contestation in Georgia. Georgian religious and political leaders cannot avoid discussing the figure of Stalin. The Georgian Orthodox Church Patriarch Ilia the Second, Georgia's most trusted person referred to Stalin in 2013: "He was originally from Georgia, and he knew the Georgian language, Georgian songs, and church songs very well. Once he died, I was a student of a seminary. We were all standing in the conference hall and crying. Stalin was an exceptional person.")¹ Stalin's perceived "Georgianness" gives his image a positive boost among some segments of Georgian society and represents one of the reasons why his role in the Great Terror is minuscule.

This thesis studies the representation of Stalin's Great Terror (1936-38)² in Georgia in contemporary survivors' narratives by examining the traumatic experience of the survivors and detecting the key factors of memory formation. Hence, the research aims at answering the following questions: To what extent Stalin's Terror has generated a cultural trauma?³ What factors contributed to remembering those events as trauma? My research hypothesis is that the survivors' narratives can be considered traumatic since they illustrate a particular event, its impact on the society, and the images of victims and perpetrators in a broader context.

The number of scholarly interests in the Soviet period and particularly in Stalin's Great Terror in Georgia increased during the last decades. Several works have already examined the

¹ Ilia the Second, "When Stalin Died, We Were All Crying in the Seminary," Tabula, July 13, 2013, <http://www.tabula.ge/ge/verbatim/73391-ilia-meore-stalinis-gardacvalebisas-sasuliero-seminariashi-vtirodit>.

² Historians mostly use the term "The Great Terror" for describing series of the Soviet repressions and political persecutions in the period between 1937 and 1938. This term became widespread following the publication of British historian R. Conquest's "The Great Terror" in 1968. This study uses the term "Stalin's Great Terror" for highlighting the role of Stalin in planning and implementing the terror in 1937-38 in Georgia.

³ Cultural trauma is a concept coined by Jeffrey Alexander, who argues that occurrence of cultural trauma is the representation the strong feeling of the particular group towards a horrendous event, which influenced their group consciousness. See Alexander Jeffrey C., *The Meanings of Social Life: A Cultural Sociology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

nature of terror, included, scholarly articles, prisoners' portraits, documentary films, and biographical works about the victims of great terror, etc.⁴ Researchers affiliated with various Think Tanks and academic institutions used diverse methods for studying the topic. Archival and rather descriptive work moved forward. However, the research about Stalin's Great Terror in Georgia significantly lacks analysis and interpretation, especially from a cultural trauma perspective. Therefore, the scientific novelty of this research lies in analysing of the survivors' narratives for defining the nature of the terror and image of the system. This study is the very first account exploring Stalin's Great Terror through the lenses of cultural trauma, examining the formation of the memory of the survivors and the characteristics of cultural trauma in Georgian society after the collapse of the USSR.

Contrary to the widespread academic tendencies of representing the Russian story of Stalin's Great Terror as a single Soviet story, the present research shows the peculiarity of Georgian accounts about the Great Purge, partially determined among others by the fact that the architects of the terror were Georgian born and raised.

This study employs a critical discourse analysis strategy. It explores and compares the survivors' narratives taking the following criteria into account: 1. The biographies of the victims of Stalin's Great Terror and his/her place in the society; 2. The imprisonment of the repressed family members and his/her attempts to establish contact to their families; and 3. The public opinion's perception of prisoners and their families.

Primary sources of the research are oral history interviews of the survivors (interviewees include the people whose parents were the victims of Stalin's Great Terror).

⁴ For more detailed account, please consult the works in Georgia: 1. Nino Bekishvili, ed., *Portraits of the prisoners of "ALZHIR": History of Stalinism* (Tbilisi: Heinrich Böll Stiftung South Caucasus Regional Office, 2008). 2. Nino Bekishvili and Nino Lezhava, eds., *Understanding the Soviet Past: Discussions 2011* (Tbilisi: SOVLAB, 2012). 3. Nino Bekishvili, ed., *Lost History: Memory about Repressed Women* (Tbilisi: SOVLAB, 2012). 4. Omar Tushurashvili, Mark Junge, and Bernd Bonvech, *Bolshevik Order in Georgia: Great Terror in the Small Republics of the Caucasus*, vol. I (Tbilisi, Publishing house? 2015). 5. Omar Tushurashvili, Mark Junge, and Bernd Bonvech, *Bolshevik Order in Georgia: Great Terror in the Small Republics of the Caucasus*, vol. II (Tbilisi, Publishing house? 2015). 6. Mark Junge, Bernd Bonvech, and Danier Muller, *Georgia in the Shades of Stalinism* (Tbilisi: Klio, 2018).

Those oral history interviews were recorded, transcribed and published after the Soviet collapse by Soviet Past Research Laboratory in Georgia and Heinrich Boell Foundation/The South Caucasus Regional Office. Within this project, the researchers further explored family archives (photos, biographies, or other related documents) and gathered individual stories of the family members about the era. Out of hundreds of interviews, this research uses only four, taking the status (*intelligentsia*), generation (the children of the victims of the terror) and both of the parents were repressed under the terror (specifically, the father was executed, while mothers were sent to exile) into account. During my research trip in Georgia, I have conducted four oral history interviews with children of victims of Stalin's Great Terror. Two of those interviewees (the same criteria were used for selection) are presented in the final chapter on the survivors' testimonies.

To understand the peculiarities of Stalin's Great Terror in Georgia, I employ the revisionist approach, which emphasizes the social aspect of the terror. The representation of the survivors' memory includes elements of communication, the relation of the interviewees to a certain group, and its location in the broader Georgian historical context.

This thesis is divided into the following chapters: the introductory part of the paper includes the theoretical framework, literature review, and the methodological and conceptual framework in it. Chapter One presents the historical context of the thesis, and locate Georgia's case in the broader Soviet context, with an emphasis on the development of the image of Stalin after his death. Chapter Two explores the survivors' testimonies, scrutinizing them through the eyes of the trauma, and explores similarities and differences among such stories.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Public interest towards Soviet history increased after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The opening of the KGB (Committee for State Security) Archives in Russia contributed to a paradigmatic shift from traditional Sovietology (totalitarian model) to a revisionist approach. The totalitarian model of understanding Soviet political history, proposed—among others—by German historian Hannah Arendt at the beginning of twentieth century and developed by Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski in the middle of twentieth century, was characterized by the following features: An official ideology, a single mass party, a technologically conditioned monopoly of the control, monopoly of means of communication, terroristic police control - enemies of the regime, and a centrally directed economy.⁵ The totalitarian model examined the political regime instituted by the Communist Party and assumed that the Soviet Union took control over all opinion-forming institutions in the propaganda state. While the Revisionist school, represented by Arch Getty, Sheila Fitzpatrick, and Stephen Kotkin, among others, brought the social history element in the scholarship and questioned monolithic nature of the system.⁶ They underlined the significance of local actors and interest groups in effective implementation of Soviet policies.

The contextualization of Stalin's Great Terror of 1937-38 in the broader Soviet history was one of the most controversial historiographical issues in the Soviet studies. The totalitarian model scholars treat terror as an integral part of the totalitarian system, and the Soviet architects, including Stalin were generally presented as the main decision-makers responsible for planning and implementing the terror.

⁵ Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (Harvard University Press, 1956).

⁶ Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Revisionism in Soviet History," *History and Theory*, no. 46 (2007): 77–91.

Historian David Brandenberger claims the the Soviet system had a totalitarian nature and describes the steps of building propaganda state.⁷ He argues that one of the first steps toward this goal was the formation of a Department of Propaganda and Agitation (Agitrop), which spread Bolshevik values in society through the condemnation of enemies or of any possible threats to the Soviet defence system. The effort of writing and re-writing the Short History of Communist Party included the special section about Communist party congresses and their minutes of meetings and sharing the values of the party. Stalin himself initiated the writing of short history for making it accessible to literate part of the society.⁸ Creating Stalin's biographies, including gathering all the historical records about Stalin's career and publishing almost half million copies of Stalin's work underlined the importance of his vision as a leader. And finally, establishing different media broadcasting channels (radio, newspaper) under the official supervision of Stalin himself was an attempt to create the official mouthpieces of the Communist Party.

Some authors, like Robert Tucker, concentrate on the leadership and argue that Stalin copied the Tsarist political heritage of autocratic, centralized and bureaucratic system. Therefore, he is often compared to Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great.⁹ As Solzhenitsyn and Conquest state, Stalin's image in 1930s was that of "Lenin of Today," yet he was more brutal and cunning.¹⁰ Concentration on Stalin's leadership was a concern of Nicholas Werth while identifying the strategies of the implementation of Stalin's Great Terror. His four strategies include the *Dictator's Cult*, which aimed to empower Stalin and the system itself; *State-building* (by terminating party officials), used by the centralized totalitarian regime; *virtual*

⁷ In the words of David Brandenberger, propaganda state is a careful attempt of using "political sloganeering, imagery and iconography" for influencing the formation of popular opinions, beliefs, attitudes and behavior. See David Brandenberger, *Propaganda State in Crisis: Soviet Ideology, Indoctrination, and Terror under Stalin, 1927-1941* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011). p. 9

⁸ Brandenberger. *Propaganda State*, p. 6

⁹ Robert C. Tucker, *Stalin in Power: The Revolution from Above 1928-1941* (New York: Norton & Company, 1990).

¹⁰ Chris Ward, *Stalin's Russia* (London, New York: Edward Arnold A Division of Hodder & Stoughton, 1993).

criminalization, conducted by the state in order to label individuals as “enemies of the people”; and *collective violence towards non-Russian ethnic groups* i.e. “Great Russian Chauvinism”, which was one of the most significant parts of Russian ideology for a long time.¹¹ Though totalitarian model puts a strong accent on the system and the leadership, it ignores other social narratives about the role of Soviet architects in terror. In this thesis I argue that shifting the focus of research from the political history of the Soviet Union toward social narratives, including diaries, memoirs, and archival materials could contribute to looking at the bigger picture from the perspective of social groups.

Revisionist scholars affiliated with different institutions or analytical centers, endeavor to insert the social narratives along with the political ones. They broadly discuss Stalin’s life, his career, his cult of personality, the Great Terror or everyday life under Stalinism. Though the revisionists have criticized the totalitarian approach for exaggerating the role of Stalin in planning and implementing the terror, they acknowledged that Stalin’s concept of impersonation was an integral part of Socialism realism discourse in the 1930s. As Rosalind Marsh argues, a great amount of biographies of Stalin than of any other man in history has been propaganda pieces published in the USSR in more than 300 languages; Serious historians have still been frustrated by the “secrecy, distortion, and terror” surrounding the figure of Stalin.

The oppressive nature of Stalin’s dictatorship, according to Thomas Henry Rigby, was manifested in the existence of numerous bureaucracies in charge of running the USSR.¹² Moreover, this power struggle between different social strata and personalities in the party caused divisions into confronting groups. This statement responds to the four strategies of implementation of the terror, which included not only the cult of personality, but virtual criminalization inside and outside of the Communist party.

¹¹ Henry Rousso and Richard J. Golsan, eds., *Stalinism and Nazism: History And Memory Compared*, trans. Lucy B. Golsan, Thomas C. Hilde, and Peter. S Rogers (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2004).

¹² Thomas Harris Rigby, *The Stalin Dictatorship: Khrushchev’s “Secret Speech” and Other Documents* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1968), p. 25

Sheila Fitzpatrick argues that the socialist society was supposed to educate an individual, who would become a cultured man – a Bolshevik,¹³ therefore, shaping themselves of the Soviet citizens, adopting Bolshevik habits of thinking and “learning and creating the codes of Stalinist civilization” were common practice in 1930s. As Kotkin argues, accustoming of Bolshevik habits included participation in the Great Terror, too.¹⁴

The revisionists highlighted the active participation of the ordinary citizens in Stalin’s Great Terror, therefore they considered that the people were not only victims of the institutions but the collaborators of the system as well. Sarah Davies highlights the cooperation between authorities and citizens, stating that oftentimes the ambitions of authorities and the people coincided with each other.¹⁵ The claims about the involvement of the society in the great terror emphasized the existence of different political strategies, like denunciation, which the Soviet architects used to tracking the life of the citizens. However, the revisionist approach dismisses the nature and logics of the repressive politics which included not only the “virtual criminalization” of the people, but also active engagement in the implementation of terror, by creating an atmosphere of fear, distrust, provocation and betraying.

The location of Georgian survivors’ perspective in the bigger picture of Stalin’s Great terror, is a difficult exercise. The survivors underline the totalitarian nature of the terror, planned and implemented by the Soviet authorities, they “acknowledge” the role of local inquisitors, yet seem careful towards the condemnation of Stalin. This ambivalence contributed to the famous myth “Stalin does not know”, which might be a naive assessment of reality, involving the representation of the leader from a positive perspective.

¹³ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Tear off Masks! Identity and Imposture in Twentieth-Century Russia* (Princeton University Press, 2005).

¹⁴ Stephen Kotkin, “Speaking Bolshevik,” in *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 198–237.

¹⁵ Sarah Davies, “‘Us against Them’: Social Identity in Soviet Russia, 1934–1941,” *The Russian Review* 56, no. 1 (1997).. pp. 70–89.

One of the survivors of Stalin's Great Terror, Ilya Kenia, discussed the attitudes of the prisoners towards their imprisonment and emphasized their naivety of assessing reality: "They [prisoners] were waiting for the court trials to admit the truth in front of the audience and unmask those willfull and rude officers." The prisoners believed that local "Troikas" were in charge of defining the fate of the accused people and shooting them.¹⁶

Analyzing the minutes of the court trials show that the prisoners unanimously confessed in front of the judges. The court halls were full of phrases "I am guilty, and I should be executed", "my crime is unforgivable", "I am a member of the counter-revolutionary organization" etc. This fact emphasizes the confusion or fear of the people who might be open to their friends and prison mates but not to the judges, because of the omnipotent nature of the local authorities. On the other hand, living under the terror, being in the prison or in Gulag camp was constant suspicion towards their own selves: "I was assessing my life "objectively as well as subjectively" for finding any connection to anti-Soviet or anti-party activities or contacts with arrested persons, even if "unconsciously" - wrote Mikheil Mgaloblishvili in his memoirs, while reflecting his experience in prison.¹⁷

These confusion and suspicion towards themselves refer to Katerina Clark's argument "the entire country in all its many aspects, political, social, symbolical, and cultural became unambiguously centripetal and hierarchical in its organization", emphasizing the totalitarian nature of the Soviet control. However, Georgian chapter of the terror has Stalin as a national icon, who, in the words of Lasha Bakradze, came from a colonized nation, fought against the existing order, and broke the traditions by rising to the top of a system itself.¹⁸

¹⁶ Ilya Kenia, *Under the Shadow of the Fear* (Tbilisi: Merani, 1990). p. 35

¹⁷ Mikheil Mgaloblishvili, *Memoirs of Repressed Person* (Tbilisi: Merani, 1972).

¹⁸ Thomas D. Waal, *Stalin's Puzzle* (Tbilisi: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2013)., p. 9

Conceptual Framework

The survivors' memory in Georgia was formed around the negative experience of Stalin's Great Terror, which included repression, discrimination, silence, and extermination of the files of the family members. Remembrance of the survivors about their parents is cemented with the stories they have heard from other family members or outsiders. Therefore, it is important to include communication element for sticking the narrative together and relating to the bigger picture. In line with the research aims I am going to discuss the following concepts: cultural trauma, collective and cultural memory.

Cultural Trauma

According to the social scientist Jeffrey Alexander, cultural trauma refers to the collective feeling of the group towards a terrible event that had a significant influence on the group or society consciousness.¹⁹ Alexander further considers trauma as the painful injury of the broader collectivity which depicts the victim, attributes the responsibility and distributes the ideal and material consequences on the group.²⁰ While talking the perspective of the broader collectivity, he notes the fact that the social groups sometimes do refuse to recognize others trauma, first of all, to avoid the responsibility and secondly, to place the responsibility to someone else.²¹ Stalin's Great Terror in Georgia might be qualified as cultural trauma, because living under the terror affected the life, values and behavioural codes of each citizen regardless of the fact that the particular group was discriminated or repressed.

¹⁹ Alexander Jeffrey C., *The Meanings of Social Life: A Cultural Sociology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). p. 6

²⁰ Alexander Jeffrey C., *The Meanings of Social Life: A Cultural Sociology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). p. 26

²¹ Alexander Jeffrey C., *The Meanings of Social Life: A Cultural Sociology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). p. 6

For anthropologist, Piotr Sztompka, cultural trauma is characterised by the following traits: specific speed (sudden and rapid) scope (wide and comprehensive), content (radical, deep, fundamental) and mood (unbelieving and unexpected).²² Sudden change, the survivors are talking about, includes the imprisonment of the father in 1937, the arrest of the mother in consequent months or year, eviction of the family house and moving to their relatives or neighbours. Representation the content and the scope of Stalin's Great Terror in Georgia is connected to the term „enemy of the people.“ This particular label defined the whole strategy of the party officials and ordinary citizens in the centre and periphery to work for discerning the enemies, share all existing information about suspicious individuals and help the state to fight against foreign threats. The mood of distrust and unbelieving was a result of unexpected changes which the families experienced in 1937-38 and the accused citizens felt towards their activities while being imprisoned or in exile.

As Neil Smelser argues, qualification of the historical events as cultural trauma is closely connected to the belief that the particular events threatened the essential elements of culture or culture as a whole. Moreover, the group or the society must have a strong negative feeling of disgust, shame or guilt.²³ The stories of the survivors are full of the expressions of shame that they had towards their friends, neighbours, and other members of the society for being labelled as the children of the „enemies of the people.“ Studying the indictments and final speeches of the accused people illustrates the regrets towards the past “unconscious” behaviours and shows how those people found it difficult to confess during the court because they felt guilty and embarrassed.

Qualifying the discrete events as cultural trauma requires comprehensive analysis of scale, indicators and agency. For examining the scale of the event Alexander lists the four

²² Piotr Sztompka, “The Trauma of Social Change: A Case of Postcommunist Societies,” in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2004), 155–95. p. 159

²³ Neil J. Smelser, “Psychological Trauma and Cultural Trauma,” in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (University of California Press, 2004), 31–59. p. 36

elements of cultural trauma: the nature of the pain, the nature of the victim, the relation to the trauma victim to the general public and the attribution of responsibility. To understand the nature of the pain of the survivors of Stalin's Great Terror in Georgia one needs to measure their traumatic experience on the following dimensions: the separation with family members, reuniting with some of the members of the family, applying new life paths and avoiding certain decisions in life.

The nature of the victim/survivor of the story cannot be easily generalized. The victims of the Stalin's Great Terror could be anyone regardless ethnic origin or social belonging, age and sex. Throughout different stages of the terror the system purged kulaks, political elites, intelligentsia people, representatives of different ethnic groups, clergy, landowners, factory owners, other capitalists, bureaucrats and wives of the high-rank officials and intelligentsia prisoners.

Uncovering the relation of their experience to the broader public can be one of the most difficult tasks for the researcher, because the individual trauma of the survivors, which made them belong to a particular group, could be shared only in this narrower circle and not in a broader public. Neil Smelser explains the relationship of the collective traumas and the national identity. Trauma can either result mobilization of the particular group or whole nation or fragment them. In case of the Stalin's Great Terror, the mobilization of one group against other has fragmenting and enhancing effects at the same time.²⁴

The attribution of the responsibility to a particular group of people, institutions or individuals vary from stories to stories. They could include the closer surroundings of the survivors, local secret police representatives, local inquisitors and the architects of the terror. It is worth to highlight that the survivors did not seem hesitant towards talking the

²⁴ Neil J. Smelser, "Psychological Trauma and Cultural Trauma," in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (University of California Press, 2004), 31–59. p. 43

responsibility of the terror, but they were careful about depicting the names or positions of ones they could easily hold accountable.

Alexander also underlines the importance of trauma carrier group, considered “collective agents” of a trauma process, which define their location in particular social structure and articulate the claims for a wider audience.²⁵ They could be part of the elite groups, but can also be marginalized and denigrated classes.²⁶ The trauma process includes the carrier group, audience, homogenous but socially fragmented group and historical, cultural and institutional context, because the carrier group can use the characteristics of the historical situation, constraints and opportunities for its own interest. Therefore, awareness of the common plight, and initiating the exchange of observations and experiences, rumours or myths about the particular event and identifying the causes, lead to the debates which reach to the public areas and are taken by media, literature, art and become cultural.²⁷

As Ron Eyerman argues, representation/agency plays key role in this time-delayed and negotiated process. This representation can include re-representing of the recollections through words or through visual images.²⁸ What adjectives do the survivors of Stalin’s Great Terror use for portraying the key characters of their story? Fathers are especially characterised as honest, hard-working, clean, well-organized, etc. while mothers are described as strict, silent, and patient. Not only wording, but the photo archives are quite selective, they are full of the photos of the father in different periods of time, while photos of mothers are relatively low.

The authors who has been working on the concept of cultural trauma identified five symptoms of cultural trauma: 1. General climate of anxiety, insecurity and uncertainty, 2. Prevailing syndrome of distrust towards the people and institutions 3. Disorientation

²⁵ Simona Mitroiu, “Narrative Identity and Trauma: Sebald’s Memory Landscape,” *The European Legacy* 19, no. 7 (September 30, 2014): 883–900, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10848770.2014.965525>.

²⁶ Alexander Jeffrey C., *The Meanings of Social Life: A Cultural Sociology*. p. 11

²⁷ Piotr Sztompka, “The Trauma of Social Change: A Case of Postcommunist Societies.” p. 160

²⁸ Ron Eyerman, “Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity,” in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2004), 60–111. p. 71-72

concerning collective identity 4. Apathy, passivism, helplessness, 5. Pessimism towards the future.²⁹

In the of book *Moral Panics* Kenneth Thompson characterizes the first symptom of cultural trauma: First of all, there is an initial definition of the threats towards the values or interests. Secondly, media contributes to the depicting of the threat. The third, the broader public starts concerning about the potential threat and finally, the response of the decision-makers causes the panic or social change.³⁰

While discussing demanded trust in totalitarian societies, Piotr Sztompka singles two types of objects out: First one if leader, another one is a whole system of authority. Trust towards the leader might accommodate paternalistic, highly personalized, and unquestionable forms. While on the system level, it can take the forms of indoctrination, censorship, and harsh punishment of any milder doubts or criticism.³¹ 1930s in the Soviet Union is characterized with the sentiments towards the leader and towards the system itself. Being a trustful citizen of the USSR required to learn the codes of this Bolshevik life, which was expressed in several practices: writing autobiographies, carefully looking at the potential enemies of the people and confessing their crime. All of these practices takes the form of religious practice: Firstly, writing autobiographies was the way to find the essence of their life and to see the transformation of their soul with the progression of the revolution in the Soviet Union, it can be referred to Puritan English religious practice of writing diaries.³² Secondly, unmasking of your friend/neighbour is seen as a step forward for putting him/her on the right track of survival. For exposing the sinful people under Stalinism implied denunciation, as one of the methods of tracking someone's life. And finally, admitting the crimes in the rooms of the interrogator or

²⁹ Sztompka, "The Trauma of Social Change: A Case of Postcommunist Societies." p. 166

³⁰ Kenneth Thompson, *Moral Panics* (London: Routledge, 1998). p. 8

³¹ Piotr Sztompka, *Trust: A Sociological Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). p. 148-150

³² Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing Diary Under Stalin* (England: Harvard University Press, 2006).

publicly on the trials was the way of cleansing the accused one before the execution. However, religious practice of confession prepares the person for the death, as an inevitable future.

To summarize the main characteristics of cultural trauma, one can conclude that it establishes the ambivalence in the society. Psychological ambivalence sets the stage for the frequently observed tendency for generation³³ after generation to engage in compulsive examining and re-examining, bringing up new aspects of trauma, reinterpreting, reassessing and battling over symbolic significance.³⁴ Moreover, it results a shocking experience of a person, therefore the responsibility of remembering and the guilt might be so strong that it interrupts, disrupts, and even suspends one's narrative identity.³⁵

Individual, Cultural and Communicative Memory

Formation of the survivors' memory around Stalin's Great Terror take the following trajectories: first, tracking the life of their parents from imprisonment to rehabilitation, and second, their life journey after the rehabilitation. Since, every individual memory locates itself in communication with other groups, including families, neighbourhood, professional groups, parties, associations etc., the survivors' narratives about Stalin's Great Terror in Georgia share the social framework of the collective phenomena, which in the words of Halbwachs, represents social memory, socially mediated and related to the group.³⁶ Therefore, understanding individual and collective levels of their memory formation is key in analysing their experience.

³³ Note: For better understanding of the generation, this study uses the concept, suggested by Jane Edmunds and Bryan S. Turner: "A generation can be defined in terms of collective response to a traumatic event or catastrophe that unites a particular cohort of individuals into a self-conscious age stratum. The traumatic event uniquely cuts off a generation from its past and separates it from the future". Source: Jane Edmunds and Bryan S. Turner, eds., *Generational Consciousness, Narrative and Politics* (The USA: Rowman and Littlefield Publication, 2002). p. 7

³⁴ Neil J. Smelser, "Psychological Trauma and Cultural Trauma," in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (University of California Press, 2004), 31–59.

³⁵ Simona Mitroiu, "Narrative Identity and Trauma: Sebald's Memory Landscape." p. 886

³⁶ Maurice Halbwachs, "Historical Memory and Collective Memory," *The Collective Memory* (Chicago: Univeristy of Chicago Press, 1925), 51–87.

According to Astrid Erll, there are two main levels of memory: individual and collective. As she argues, individual memory is more biological, while collective memory has its symbolic order, the media, institutions, and practices with other social groups, sharing the common past.³⁷ Relation of individual remembrance to biological memory is the concern of different authors in the field of memory studies. Ross Poole claims that individual memory can be considered as autobiographical one, because memory itself involves consciousness and self-consciousness, and autobiography is experience of the past narrated with all present sensations and perceptions, i.e. imagining present self into past and past self into present.³⁸

Lucy Burke breaks the concepts of individual memory into personal and post memory, where personal memory is discussed as pure commemoration of the events and post memory as the individual reaction towards the past experience.³⁹ The survivors' narratives about Stalin's Great Terror in Georgia reflect shared past from a "particular point of view and with a specific focus."⁴⁰ Each story is unique by narrating the plot, presenting "their past self"⁴¹, and representing their individual responses of the painful experience from different perspective.

Most of the authors consider personal memory as one of the cornerstones of collective and cultural memory. Moreover, they highlight the significance of examining intersubjective and cultural characteristics of personal memories, affected by public representations, because those memories share not only the cognitive process of narrating, and comparing of the particular experience, but also the language and wording.⁴² Therefore, social remembrance, in the words of Aleida Assmann is pretty much related to the modelled performance of the

³⁷ Astrid Erll, "Cultural Memory Studies: An Introduction," in *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook* (De Gruyter, Inc., 2008), 1–18.

³⁸ Ross Poole, "Memory, Responsibility, and Identity," *Social Research*, Collective Memory and Collective Identity, 75, no. 1 (2008): 263–86. p. 267

³⁹ Lucy Burke, Simon Faulkner, and Jim Aulich, eds., *The Politics of Cultural Memory* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010). p. 248

⁴⁰ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations*, no. 26; Special Issue: Memory and Counter Memory (1989): 7–24. p. 9

⁴¹ Poole, "Memory, Responsibility, and Identity." p. 265

⁴² Burke, Faulkner, and Aulich, *The Politics of Cultural Memory*. p. 245

memory or cultural programmes, acquires specific cultural models and schemes for organizing the past experience on the particular place of memory.⁴³ Thus, social remembrance involves communication between the generations, within the social groups, with shared past experience about certain aspects of remembering places they have lived through.

For better understanding of social recollection, Jan Assmann brings the concept of communicative memory on the table, which in his words is free from any institutional transmission, and interpretation, lacks formalization, and material symbolization, and bases on everyday communication and interaction.⁴⁴ In other words, the communicative memory has a significant focus on the autobiographical memory, the recent past, and takes the form of everyday communication. However, oral history interviews with the survivors obtain communication elements which was very much affected by the institutional interpretation of the terror. The survivors avoided talking about it for several decades after the rehabilitation of their parents. Therefore, the transmission of the past experience is sporadic and varies from one story to another.

Another angle of understanding collective memory is cultural memory, which in Erll's words represents "the interplay of present and past in socio-cultural contexts," because it related to the cultural context of the particular nation.⁴⁵ While Assmann's definition of cultural memory is closely connected to the concept of all knowledge that is transmitted through generations, which guides our behavior and experience in the society.⁴⁶

For summarizing the experience of the survivors, the study concentrates on the following aspects of Jan Assman's approach about cultural and communicative memory: The language of cultural forms, the concretion of identity, the capacity to reconstruct the narrative,

⁴³ Aleida Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). p. 14

⁴⁴ Jan Assmann, "Communicative and Cultural Memory," in *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook* (De Gruyter, Inc., 2008), 109–18. p. 11

⁴⁵ Astrid Erll, "Cultural Memory Studies: An Introduction." p. 1

⁴⁶ Burke, Faulkner, and Aulich, *The Politics of Cultural Memory*. p. 285

organizing the speech in particular template, self-image and system of the values and reflexivity towards the practice.⁴⁷

Taking the language as an identity marker into account, contributes to understanding the uniqueness of the culture of remembrance in a particular society. Besides, the language captures the experience and has a big impact on the remembrance. Examining 1930s Soviet printed media illustrates how official Soviet perceived anti-Soviet elements: Addressing them as “reptiles”, “gang of criminals”, “immoral people”, “morally wrecked”, terrorists”, and “enemies of the people” illustrates constant emphasis on the crime, existing ideological gaps and significance of Bolshevik values, and the behavioural code in the Soviet Union. Therefore, studying the survivors’ stories about Stalin’s Great Terror shows how socialization in the Soviet Union, and the experience of living under the terror made them employ disciplined tone, develop the storyline in particular template, and use the Soviet legal terms in oral practice.

Concretion of the identity stands for the location of the survivors within the stories they are telling. According to Assmann, memory is considered as open system with frames that relate memory to specific horizons of time and identity on the individual, generational, political, and cultural levels.⁴⁸ This understanding of the memory and concretion of identity refers to the ideas of Lucy Burke about memory formation. As she argues, there are two modes of remembering the past experience: as a traumatic event (which is connected to the family history) and as a mythical event (which involves political history in it).⁴⁹ The survivors stories refer the Great Terror as a traumatic event, because it is very much related to their family experience. While, some segments of Georgian society see it as a mythical event and part of political arrangement of the Soviet Union. According to CRRC data, Stalin’s Great Terror is

⁴⁷ Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka, “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity,” *New German Critique* 65 (1995): 125–33.

⁴⁸ Jan Assmann, “Communicative and Cultural Memory.” p. 113

⁴⁹ Burke, Faulkner, and Aulich, *The Politics of Cultural Memory*. p. 6-8

evaluated as an unjust political fact (45%), while 26% of the respondents think that it was necessary political act, which requires locating it in the broader historical context.⁵⁰

The reconstruction of the narrative requires some time to distil the emotions towards the negative event to reassess the role of the involved interest groups including his/her family members and himself/herself. Dimitri Nikulin registers three kinds of narrative in which historical memory is passed on and told: First types of narratives are about the memory of sublime deeds, while the second ones mention the memory of suffering and trauma and third ones tell us about the memory of thinking.⁵¹ The concept of memory narratives is discussed in James Wertsch's *Texts of Memory*, which show how written texts of memory reflect the past experience and what functions they can have in present and future. As the author explains, schematic structure, which inspire the narratives has some sort of plot to create an alternative image of the past via showing the whole context, including different actors and their attitudes towards the event itself.⁵² Applying particular behavioural and speaking codes, the survivors use legal terms for describing their experience, while creating the self-image, and system of the values help the survivors to deal with the certain turbulences in their life.

Reflexivity of their practice is pretty much reflected in their oral history interviews, where their order of speech, using of the words and tone can be affected by their experience. In the Soviet setting, the life of every citizen was judged under the revolutionary imperatives set by the regime. Their self-expression and work for self-perfection was under the political surveillance of the regime.⁵³ Therefore, narrations of the self under Stalinism were closely related to the image of political establishment, the social interactions and their personal reflections on it.

⁵⁰ Waal Thomas D., *Stalin's Puzzle*. pp. 7-11

⁵¹ Dimitry Nikulin, "Introduction: Memory in Recollection of Itself," in *Memory A History* (Oxford University Press, 2015), 3–34, p. 18

⁵² James Wertsch "Texts of Memory and Texts of History," *L2 Journal* 4, no. 2 (2012): 9–20.

⁵³ Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing Diary Under Stalin*. p.7

The examination of the survivors' narratives as texts of memory and history shows the development of the storyline for illustrating alternative images and the attitudes of different participants towards the event. Connecting the above-mentioned concepts to each other illustrate the entanglement of memory and cultural trauma: all of them share the experience of particular setting, which creates the plots and a concrete presenter speaks to audience about its personal or shared experience.

Methodological Framework

The primary sources of the research are oral history interviews with survivors of Stalin's Great Terror in Georgia. Since the victims of the terror originated from different social strata, the selection of the stories took their status and place in the society into account. However, members of *intelligentsia*, one of the most targeted groups of the terror, are most presented in survivors' testimonies. Since generational approach could not be applied to all stories, I chose only the first generation, namely children of victims of terror. For better detecting the characteristics of cultural trauma in the narratives, I selected the survivors who experienced imprisonment of both parents, separation with the family members as well as reintegration, later on.

Four oral history interviews, presented at the end of the chapter, were conducted by the Soviet Past Research Laboratory and Heinrich Boell Stiftung. Those interviews were transcribed and published in 2008. They applied the technique of oral history interviews and gave the bias to the respondents to narrate their story. Further questions at the end of the interview were technical and clarification questions only.

During my research trip in Georgia, I have conducted four oral history interviews. Two of them are incorporated in the research chapter about the survivors' testimonies. Both interviews were held in the private room of the respondent under their consent. The beginning of the interview was the presentation of their story, while the second part consisted of questions according to the aims of my research. The questions were the same for both of respondents and focused on the reasons of imprisonment, the issues of denunciation, the fate of the family after the imprisonment of the parent, life after the death of Stalin, and attitudes of the victims of the terror towards the system.

Considering the sensitivity nature of the issues discussed, I was granted verbal permission to use the personal details and quotes of my respondents. Since other stories were published, I took the responsibility of translating them and include them in the thesis

The Historical Context

Stalin's Great terror in the Soviet Union literally started with the death of Sergey Kirov on the December 1st, 1934. As Robert Conquest argues, Kirov's death can be considered as "the crime of the century", because the persecution of hundreds of Soviet citizens was for the direct responsibility of this killing.⁵⁴

In March 1935, Moscow ordered Soviet libraries to remove all books by Kamenev, Trotsky and Zinoviev.⁵⁵ They were accused for being members of "Trotskyist Zinoviev Centre" which aimed at weakening the Soviet state by killing Stalin, Voroshilov, and Molotov and convicted for being involved in the assassination of Sergey Kirov.

There were three trials, known as Moscow show trials, held in 1936-38. The first trial was held in August 1936 and implied accusation of Zinoviev, Kamenev and others who confessed being members of "Trotskyist-Zinoviev Centre". They were sentenced to death and executed immediately. The second trial was followed in January-February 1937, where Radek, Pyatakov and others confessed that they were connected to Trotsky and foreign intelligence services. Pyatakov was sentenced to death, and Radek to ten years' imprisonment. The third trial was held in March 1938, where Bukharin, Rykov, Krestinsky and Yagoda confessed their membership of "Trotskyist-Right Bloc". All of them were sentenced to death.⁵⁶

The terror has targeted various groups, which were perceived as real or potential "enemies of the people".⁵⁷ According to International Memorial⁵⁸ Stalin's Great terror included

⁵⁴Conquest, Robert, *The Great Terror: Reassessment*, Second (The University of Alberta Press, 1990).

⁵⁵Ward, *Stalin's Russia*. p. 108-150

⁵⁶ Geoffrey Hosking, *The First Socialist Society: A History of the Soviet Union from Within*, Second Enlarged Edition (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990).

⁵⁷ This expression "ennemi du peuple" was widely used during the French revolution. The Law on the Great Terror in 1794 granted the Revolutionary Tribunal to punish "enemies of the people" with some political crimes, including "spreading false news to divide or trouble the people". Source: Andrew Higgins, "Trump Embraces 'Enemy of the People', a Phrase with a Fraught History," *New York Times*, February 26, 2017.

⁵⁸ International Historical Educational Charitable and Human Rights Society «Memorial» (International Memorial) is a non-commercial organization studying political repressions in the USSR and in present-day Russia and promoting moral and legal rehabilitation of persons subjected to political repressions. Source. <https://www.memo.ru/ru-ru/memorial/memorial-international-aims/>

four main stages: The first phase (from October 1936 to February 1937) implied institutional arrangement, especially restructuring punitive organs, including People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD). The second phase (from March to June 1937) aimed at liquidating of the Communist party members and "*agents of foreign intelligence*" accused of counter-revolutionary activities. Within this period the Soviet architects planned the arrest of intelligentsia people, kulaks and national diaspora. On the third phase (from July 1937 to October 1938) the terror targeted family members of the traitors to the Motherland [*ЧСИР - Члены Семьи Изменника Родины*]. The fourth and final phase (from November 1938 to 1939) was called "Beria Thaw" and inferred secession of the mass repressions, partial release of the prisoners and extermination of Ezhov's cadres in NKVD.⁵⁹

People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) USSR, headed by Grigorii Yagoda was officially created in July 1934 and aimed at controlling the prisons of the People's Commissariats of Justice in the Soviet Republics.⁶⁰ There were split between two agencies within the NKVD before the Great Terror. The Department for Places of Imprisonment (OMZ), which was instructed to control investigative and general prisons, while high-security prisons were controlled by the NKVD prison department, later known as Tenth Department of NKVD.⁶¹ From 1936 to 1938 the NKVD was carrying out the arrests on every stage of the terror. The very first head of the NKVD, Grigorii Yagoda was arrested in March 1937 and executed a year later. Nikolai Yezhov was appointed as the Commissar of NKVD in August 1936. He was one of the main architects of Stalin's Great Terror. However, like his predecessor, he was resigned from his post in 1938 and sentenced to death for lack of witnesses and evidence. He was shot in 1940. Lavrenty Beria was appointed as the head of the NKVD after

⁵⁹ Н. Г. Охотин and А. Б. Рогинский, "Большой террор": 1937–1938. Краткая хроника," 30 октября, 2007, № 74 edition.

⁶⁰ Oleg K. Khlevniuk, *The History of Gulag: From Collectivization to Great Terror* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004). p. 85

⁶¹ Christopher Joyce, "The Soviet Penal System and the Great Terror," in *Stalin's Terror Revisited* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 90–116.

Yezhov's removal. He was of the initiators of the reforms in Gulag camp (*Главное Управление Лагерей и мест заключения*) for increasing economical productivity. Beria presided the NKVD until the death of Stalin. He was arrested in June 1953 and persecuted in December 1953.⁶²

The official document, known as *Stalin's lists* was a list of the people condemned under the personal decision of Stalin and his closest associates in the Politburo, including Molotov, Voroshilov and Kaganovich and sentenced to different types of punishments. These lists were focused on purging the party and the nomenklatura apparatus. The decisions after the imprisonment of the people were made by Troikas (Special Triple), group of three judges who were responsible for the hearing of the case and passing down the sentence during the trials. The composition of the Troikas typically included: the Commissar, or head of the NKVD, the Secretary of the Party organization and the public prosecutor of the republic, state or province.⁶³

The legal base of arresting people in the Soviet Union was Articles 58¹¹, 58⁸, and 57⁷ of the USSR Criminal Code, which sanctioned membership of counter revolutionary organizations, terror, sabotage, espionage and wrecking. According to the Articles of Penal Code of Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR), any actions or organizations directed towards weakening of the authority or external security of the workers' and peasants' governments of the USSR was considered "counterrevolutionary".⁶⁴ However, it was not clear what was a criterion of wrecking behaviour or why their activities can be regarded as terrorism.

The victims of the Stalin's Great Terror could be anyone regardless ethnic origin or social belonging, age and sex. Throughout different stages of the terror the system purged

⁶² David Hosford, Pamela Kachurin, and Thomas Lamont, *Gulag: Soviet Prison Camps and Their Legacy* (Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Harvard University, 2006).p. 5

⁶³ Levan Avalishvili, "The 'Great Terror' of 1937–1938 in Georgia: Between the Two Reports of Lavrentiy Beria," *Caucasus Analytical Digest*, no. 2 (December 1, 2010): 2–6.

⁶⁴ "The Criminal Code of the RSFSR," Pub. L. No. 58 (1922).

kulaks, political elites, intelligentsia people, representatives of different ethnic groups, clergy, landowners, factory owners, other capitalists, bureaucrats and wives of the high-rank officials and intelligentsia prisoners. During the operation NKVD Special Council sentenced 11 072 people to camps, exile and relocation.⁶⁵ When the scholars talk about the specificity of the Stalin's repressive politics, they emphasize the fact it was not targeted to political opponents (the smallest group of the victims) only but created the "imagined myth of the enemy of the people". People were arrested and executed not because of what they said, or they did, but because they belonged to particular groups.⁶⁶

Throughout the Stalin's Great terror 786,098 Soviet people were executed, 3.5 million were imprisoned, and 2 million people died in prison and exile. The vast majority of executions came in 1937 and 1938, corresponding to the years the Soviet Government required the NKVD to fulfill a predetermined quota of arrests and executions. This quota indicated that each city in the country held several thousand "traitors" that must be found and executed.⁶⁷

At its height in January 1, 1941, the NKVD held 1,500,524 Soviet people in prisons and gulags. Death rates while incarcerated (due to hunger, exhaustion, disease, and natural causes) varied from 5-10% of all new arrivals. The vast majority of those in prison were men (~ 93% from 1934 - 1941), with 50-70% (depending on the year in question) between the ages of 25 and 40. Those with a primary education or who were semi-literate were the most likely in prison, steadily representing around 80% of the total.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Oleg K. Khlevniuk, *The History of Gulag: From Collectivization to Great Terror* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004). p. 85

⁶⁶ Bekishvili, Portraits of the prisoners of "ALZHIR": History of Stalinism. p.9

⁶⁷ Arch J. Getty and Oleg V. Naumov, *The Road to Terror: Stalin and the Self-Destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932-1939* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999).

⁶⁸ Oleg K. Khlevniuk, *The History of Gulag: From Collectivization to Great Terror* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004). p. 85

This chapter focuses on Georgian case from three different dimensions: The first sub-chapter locates Georgian case in the broader Soviet Union Narrative, while second sub-chapter presents Georgian reaction on condemnation of Stalin and rehabilitation of the victims of the Stalin's Great Terror. The third and final sub-chapter covers the post-Soviet understanding of the Soviet Past in Georgia, especially Stalin's terror and the image of Stalin.

Stalin's Great Terror in Georgia

The starting point of the Great terror, death of Kirov was presented as a great loss for the party in Soviet Georgian printed media. Georgian versions of *Communist* and *Pravda*, the key propaganda outlets for communicating with "rank-and-file Communist activists"⁶⁹ and spreading Bolshevik values, published the words of Stalin on Kirov's key role played within the party and broader Soviet Union:

*The death of Kirov is an irreparable loss, not only for us, his close friends and comrades, but also for all those who have known him in his revolutionary work, and have known him as a fighter, comrade and friend. A man who has given all his brilliant life to the cause of the working class, to the cause of Communism, to the cause of the liberation of humanity, is dead, the victim of the enemy.*⁷⁰

In 1936, the first secretary of Georgian Communist Party, Lavrentii Beriia officially denounced the predomination of anti-Soviet elements in Georgia.⁷¹ The first Georgian list, signed by I.V. Stalin and V. Molotov (31 May 1937), arrived two weeks after the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Architects that took place in Moscow in May 1937. It mentioned

⁶⁹ Matthew E. Lenoe, *Closer to the Masses: Stalinist Culture, Social Revolution and Soviet Newspapers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

⁷⁰ Joseph Stalin, *Works*, vol. 14 (London: Red Star Press Ltd, 1978), <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1934/12/01.htm>.

⁷¹ Levan Gigineishvili, "Georgia -"ALZHIR" - Georgia: One Passage from 1936-38 Stalin's Repressions in Georgia," in *Portraits of the prisoners of "ALZHIR": History of Stalinism* (Tbilisi: Heinrich Böll Stiftung South Caucasus Regional Office, 2008).

139 people for the “First Category” (to be executed) and 39 for the “Second Category” (10 years imprisonment/exile).⁷² People ascribed to the first category were considered particularly active and vicious in counter-revolutionary activities. Therefore, they should be immediately arrested and, after the consideration of their case by Troikas, specially set up for this purpose, shot. People ascribed to the second category were to be immediately arrested and sentenced by the same Troika to ten years of forced labour in the Gulag camps.⁷³ An examination of the lists for the Soviet Union in 1937–1938 illustrates that out of 38,679 names 3,485 were from Georgia (the third largest number from all the union republics after the Russian SFSR and the Ukrainian SSR).⁷⁴

In parallel of the Moscow show trials, Georgian group of Bolsheviks, including high-ranking officials, Budu Mdivani (Chairman of the Supreme Economic Council, the People’s Commissariat of Light Industry, and First Deputy Chairman of People’s Commissars of Georgia) and other top party workers of Georgia— M. Okudzhava, S. Kavtaradze, M. Toroshelidze N. Kiknadze, S. Chikhladze, and G. Eliava were accused of anti-Soviet and anti-revolutionary activities. They all were sentenced to death and executed immediately.⁷⁵

The trials were one of the integral parts of the Stalin’s Great Terror in Georgia respectively. If the person considered himself/herself as a true member of the Communist Party, and the party blamed him/her for committing the crime, he/she preferred to endure with it than confessing publicly in front of foreign agents: *“Please, help us, they are shooting us, we are innocents”* – he preferred to be shot by their party members than to get help from

⁷² Nicolas Werth, “The NKVD Mass Secret Operation N° 00447 (August 1937 - November 1938),” in *Online Encyclopedia of Mass Violence*, July 24, 2010.

⁷³ Werth. p. 2

⁷⁴ *Information on the number of people sentenced to death by Military Collegiums of the Supreme Court of the USSR in 1937– 38*. For further information: <http://stalin.memo.ru/images/note1957.htm>, accessed 9.04.2019

⁷⁵ Avalishvili, Levan. “The ‘Great Terror’ of 1937–1938 in Georgia: Between the Two Reports of Lavrentiy Beria.” *Caucasus Analytical Digest*, no. 2 (December 1, 2010): p. 2

someone else.⁷⁶ The accused people were sure that admitting their crimes in front of the broader public and the Communist Party was identified the confession in the church.

Careful look of the indictments and final words of the accused people illustrates the regrets towards the past “unconscious” behaviours and shows how those people found it difficult to confess during the court because of feeling of embarrassment. While describing the situations on the trials, one of the defendants said: *“For more than four days the halls of the court pictured a great amount of terrible crimes. I was one of the participants of these crimes and when they suggested me to have a lawyer, I refused because it is impossible to defend what I have done”*. Another one emphasized the severity of his crime by saying that *“I cannot say that I have done everything unconsciously, but I know they are unforgivable.”* Moreover, he considered his activities ridiculous, because a gathering of intelligent people for “coup d’etat against the country, which could not be shaken even by a rabid Fascism”, was stupid and embarrassing.

The NKVD leadership in Georgia under Yezhov and Beria was entrusted to Beria’s local hangman Akvsentii Rapava with Nikolai Rukhadze, serving as is deputy. Later, those two men formed the core of Beria’s extensive power base within the NKVD.⁷⁷ Local inquisitors under the supervision of Rapava and Rukhadze were Sergo Goglidze, Bogdan Qobulovi, Shalva Tsereteli, Sandro Nadaraia, Aleqsandre Khazani. Some of them were instructed to create falsified accusations, some of them were “active” executioners and obliged to torture people after the interrogations in the prisons. They were all arrested and executed throughout the Stalin’s Great Terror or after the death of Beria.⁷⁸

On July 2, 1937, a secret order from the Politburo *“On Anti-Soviet Elements”* called for the arresting all the criminals, troublemakers and persons who had illegally returned from

⁷⁶ Gigineishvili, “Georgia -"ALZHIR" - Georgia: One Passage from 1936-38 Stalin’s Repressions in Georgia.”

⁷⁷ Amy Knight, *Stalin’s First Lieutenant* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993).

⁷⁸ Murusidze Shorena, *Soviet Terror* (Tbilisi: Palitra L, 2015).

exile, some of whom were to be executed immediately without trial, others send to Gulag.⁷⁹

On July 8, 1937 the Communist Party of Georgia sent for approval to Yezhov and Stalin the names of Special Troikas as well as preliminary lists of individuals who had been designated for the first (1419 people) and second categories (1562 people).

On July 31st, 1937 an order from Yezhov established an official quota for Georgia: 2000 people for the first and 3000 people for the second category. Under the decree of Politburo, the family members of the people arrested for the first or second categories were repressed when a) they were actively involved in anti-Soviet and counter-revolutionary activities, b) they were family members of the accused person for the first category and lived in Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Baku, Tbilisi, Rostov, or in the towns Sochi, Gagra and Sukhumi.⁸⁰ On the 5th of October, 1937, all orphan⁸¹ children, under the age of 15 were taken care by the state and everyone above age of 15 should be discussed on an individual basis.⁸²

In parallel to implementing the great purges, the Soviet architects were building a propaganda state.⁸³ At the beginning, they formed the Department of Propaganda and Agitation (Agitrop), which stood for spreading the Bolshevik values in the society through condemnation of the enemies or any possible threats for weakening the Soviet defence system. While writing and re-writing the Short History of Communist Party included the special section about Communist party congresses and their minutes of meetings and sharing the values of the party. Stalin initiated the writing of the short history for making it accessible to literate part of the society. Creating Stalin's biographies, including gathering all the historical records about

⁷⁹ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (USA: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 127

⁸⁰ Operational Order of The People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs of The U.S.S.R. No. 00447. Ap Rf, 3-58-212, L. 55-78, <http://www.memo.ru/history/document/0447.htm>, retrieved on 18th of April, 2019;

⁸¹ Note: Orphan was a child whose parents were arrested or executed.

⁸² Corinna Kuhr, "Children of 'Enemies of the People,'" *Cahiers Du Monde Russe* 39 (1998): 210.

⁸³ Propaganda state in the words of David Brandenberger is a careful attempt of using "political sloganeering, imagery and iconography" for influencing the formation of popular opinions, beliefs, attitudes and behavior. Source: Brandenberger David, *Propaganda State in Crisis: Soviet Ideology, Indoctrination, and Terror under Stalin, 1927-1941*. p. 9

Stalin's career for and publishing almost half million copies of Stalin's work underlined the importance of his activities as a leader. And Establishing different media broadcasting channels (radio, newspaper) under the official supervision of Stalin himself was an attempt to create the official mouthpieces of the Communist party and Stalin himself too.⁸⁴ Engagement of Stalin in the work of every single institution was an endeavour to entangle his personality to the Soviet system and at the same time to involve him in controlling all the opinion-forming institutions down and make popular opinion state narrative.

One of the first articles against counterrevolutionary political elites was published on the 21st of January 1937 on the front page of *Pravda* with the title "*Trotskyist Spies, Diversants and Traitors*" as a notice from the prosecutor's office:

The crimes are different, but they have a common name – black traitors of the homeland, restoration of capitalism. Those traitors are connected to the foreign aggressors. They aim to attack the Soviet Union and defeat it. Under Trotsky's command, they order espionage and crimes. They are planning subversive actions for weakening the defense of the country.⁸⁵

This article was followed by various headlines about the enemies of the people, portrayed as Trotskyists, the agents of Fascist Germany. The articles aimed at underlining Bolshevik values and contributing to the cult of personality and more importantly spreading the mistrust and fear towards the fellow citizens via constant propaganda against the "criminals".

Stalin's Great Terror in Georgia has copied the overall frame of implementing terror in the Soviet Union. However, it was not identified with the Soviet architects, but the local executioners⁸⁶ and Stalin himself was not explicitly criticized by the survivors, who came back from exile. First of all, they learned not to criticize the leaders and the system and secondly, Stalin was perceived as Georgian father, who could mercy them.

⁸⁴ Brandenberger David, *Propaganda State in Crisis: Soviet Ideology, Indoctrination, and Terror under Stalin, 1927-1941*. p. 6

⁸⁵ "Trotskyist Spies Diversants and Triators," *Pravda*, January 21, 1937.

⁸⁶ Gigineishvili, "Georgia - "ALZHIR" - Georgia: One Passage from 1936-38 Stalin's Repressions in Georgia."

After the Death of Stalin

On February 25th, 1956 at the Twentieth Communist Party Congress Nikita Khrushchev announced a new political order.⁸⁷ According to Miriam Dobson, his Secret Speech included three main issues: the representation of the victims as the “true heirs of revolution”, “honest, courageous and devoted communists”. It represented the willingness of the creators of the “new order”, for obvious legitimization purposes, to go back to the revolution – a move that was somewhat ironic as the Gulag prisoners were sent to the camps exactly for the counter-revolutionary activities in the first place. Ultimately, integrating the release of Gulag prisoners in the discourse on the revolution symbolized the return to the Bolshevik values. Second, the Secret Speech was considered as an attempt in “rewriting of party history”, especially because for some party members Khrushchev’s “no reference to finding the guilty” was a crucial step forward for “restoring the party health.” This was an attempt to transform the political imaginary of the Soviet Union and to impose the idea of “legality as a regime’s guiding principle”. The third and final issue was connected to the concept of the “enemy of the people”, which, was a part of “people’s vocabulary” not only during the Great Purges, but also during the de-Stalinization process. It is an interesting point to highlight that “renouncing the notion of “enemy of the people” he [Khrushchev] suggested a less belligerent vision of the world was possible”.⁸⁸

In the propaganda state, where the ideological embodiment of Stalin was institutionalized, condemnation of his cult of personality was considered as “the demise of a certain way of life”.⁸⁹ It clearly aimed at “responding to [the] dramatic revision of the Soviet

⁸⁷ Nikita Khrushchev, “Speech to 20th Congress of the C.P.S.U.,” February 25, 1956, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/khrushchev/1956/02/24.htm>.

⁸⁸ Miriam Dobson, *Khrushchev’s Cold Summer: Gulag Returnees, Crime and the Fate of the Reforms after Stalin* (Cornell University Press, 2009).

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, p. 94

political imaginary” in order to rethink Stalin and “treat the symbols and rituals that embodies their relevant relationship to him”.⁹⁰

In March 1956, the residents of Tbilisi protested the national insult inflicted by Moscow with the spontaneous impulse of the Pioneers and the schoolchildren of Tbilisi to honour Stalin.⁹¹ The very first gathering of the people, which was organized mourning procession were held on the 5th of March 1956, 3 years after of the death of Stalin in Tbilisi, Sukhumi, Gori, and Batumi. The demonstration involved high school, college and university students, and the local authorities. Surprisingly, the top workers of the local authorities had not opposed these activities, moreover, they had actively participated in them.⁹²

Pro-Stalin Georgian citizens expressed their negative attitudes towards the Secret Speech, which was perceived as an insult of a Stalin and indirect insult of Georgian nation. The center of the protests was the Statue of Stalin in Tbilisi. The protest was becoming more and more organized and numerous, especially after classes at schools and institutes.

On 9 March 1956 the demonstrates started making political demands such as the change of the central government in Moscow and calls for the independence of Georgia from the Soviet Union. In spite of party's restriction of Georgian nationalism, Khrushchev's policy of de-Stalinization was, paradoxically, a blow to Georgian national pride.⁹³ The younger generation of the Georgians, who were not familiar with Stalin's rule, were proud to consider him a Georgian who ruled over great Russia, and, as believed widely, dominated the world. Therefore, Stalin's condemnation was seen as a symbol for the mistreatment of the Georgian nation at the hands of the Russian/Soviet rulers.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Dobson. p. 96

⁹¹ Vladimir A. Kozlov, “Political Disturbances in Georgia after the CPSU Twentieth Party Congress,” in *Mass Uprising in the USSR: Protest and Rebellion in the Post-Stalin Years*, trans. Elaine McClamand MacKinnon (United States of America: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2002).

⁹² Aleksandre Saralidze, “The Ministry of Communication - 9th of March, 1956,” *Public Archive* (blog), May 2, 2012; Source: [Public Archive](#)

⁹³ John Wright, *The Georgians: A Handbook* (Curzon Press, 1998).

⁹⁴ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation* (London: I.B. TAURIS & Co Ltd, 1989).

Patriotic feelings mixed with political protest were further inflamed by the sarcastic and bitter manner in which Khrushchev ascribed all horrors of the era to the "genial" leader Stalin, whom, as he ironically put it, the Georgians so much enjoyed calling "the great son of the Georgian nation".⁹⁵

Close to midnight, a bloody confrontation took place. After the first shots of communication building the mob rushed back from Rustaveli Prospect to the neighboring alley where the "outcries and meeting" continued. Later, "shots, cries of Hoorah and "automobile horns" rang out again from the Communications building.⁹⁶ The demonstration was suppressed by the direct order from Moscow. However, there was not exact number of the victims of this confrontation from both sides.

Another issue, which was related to Stalin's condemnation is placement of his body. Katherine Verdery, who suggested that tearing down statues "not only removes that specific body from landscape as if to excise it from history, but also proves that because it can be torn down, no god protects it".⁹⁷ Creating the image of "the enemy of the people" made him distant from the sacred place such as Mausoleum. In the course of the twenty-second party congress the body was reburied in the wall of the Kremlin. Stalin's body was thus not cast out entirely but transferred to a site symbolically on the margins of Red Square's sacred space. In the words of the author "Stalin's new location came closer to what Khrushchev was trying to say: Stalin was not an enemy of the people, but he was no means a hero of Lenin's ilk".⁹⁸

⁹⁵ David Marshall Lang, *A Modern History of Georgia* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962).

⁹⁶ Kozlov, "Political Disturbances in Georgia after the CPSU Twentieth Party Congress." p. 117

⁹⁷ Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

⁹⁸ Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer: Gulag Returnees, Crime and the Fate of the Reforms after Stalin*. p. 194

What came after 1991?

After collapsing the Soviet Union Georgia has faced tremendous challenges in its political, economic and social life. One of the key elements of transitioning was related to construction, reconstruction and interpretation of national history, since it requires dialogues with alternative voices from the past, with the recorders of the past, and with the present interpreters. The process implies constructing coherent, powerful narratives that describe and interpret past events in certain way.

1930s propaganda politics implied engagement of Stalin in the work of every single institution, as an endeavour to entangle his personality to the Soviet system and at the same time to involve him in controlling all the opinion-forming institutions. Therefore, understanding the Soviet past was related to analyzing Stalin's phenomena from political and social angles. After the Rose Revolution⁹⁹ Mikheil Saakashvili, the third president of Georgia, initiated several policies for addressing the Soviet past: On the 26th of May 2006 he opened the Soviet Occupation Museum, which was a symbolic step and dedicate to the revolutionary people, clergy, army officers and the victims of Stalin's terror.¹⁰⁰ This symbolic step was an attempt to reconstruct the Soviet Union as occupier and openly condemn it for repressing different groups of the society. After August War 2008¹⁰¹ political interest towards demolishing Stalin's statues in the center of Gori¹⁰² town and abolishing of Soviet symbols has increased. Despite of the waves of protests from the local society, on the 25th of June 2010, at night, they removed the statue of Stalin from the center of the city. However, the fact caused broader discussions and protests in Gori, the government brought the statue to the Museum garden. This accommodation towards the will of the people was the political step to treat the

⁹⁹ Note: The Revolution of Roses was the peaceful change of the power in November 2003 in Georgia.

¹⁰⁰ Giorgi Gvakharia, "Soviet Occupation Day and Occupation Museum," Radio Liberty, accessed June 10, 2019, <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/2320441.html>.

¹⁰¹ Note: August War was a war between Georgia and Russia in August 2008.

¹⁰² Gori is a small town near the capital of Georgia, Tbilisi. It is known as the birthplace of Joseph Stalin

past “more civilized way”.¹⁰³ In 2010, the Parliament of Georgia enacted the lustration law “Charter of Freedom” which implied abolishment of the Soviet symbols, including the statue of Stalin in public spaces. Some of the members of parliament expressed their protest towards the law and stated that abolishment of the Soviet symbols contributes to demolishing of the artworks.¹⁰⁴ This divergency of the opinions about the Soviet past, which includes Stalin and his cult, on political level was reflected on the social level too. According to CRRC¹⁰⁵ data, 27% of Georgian respondents expressed their respect towards Stalin, while fear and hatred were represented by 7% and 6% respectively. Vast majority of Georgian respondents (approx. 63%) would not like to live in the country, which is ruled by Stalin, because he was a cruel leader himself, however 34% of Georgian respondents still consider Stalin as one of the wise people, who brought Soviet Union to might and prosperity.¹⁰⁶

Current political establishment of Georgia about Stalin’s phenomena is quite cautious in official speeches and statements. Giorgi Margvelashvili, ex-president of Georgia during his presidential campaign stated that Stalin’s figure is still understudied in Georgia:

I am not sure if I managed to reflect on Stalin’s figure, but I think that after a century when the members of those families, who were repressed by the system die, he will be perceived as one of the greatest commanders-in-chief of the great empire and the commander-in-chief who won the WWII. Stalin contributed to this victory so much that soon he will be perceived as a great politician and the commander-in-chief.¹⁰⁷

Illustrating Stalin’s achievements as the winner of the Second World War was showing of Georgian man’s contribution to the better system and his location in Georgian national discourse.

¹⁰³“Civil.Ge | Stalin’s Statue was removed from Gori city center,” Civil Georgia, June 25, 2010, <https://old.civil.ge/geo/article.php?id=22896>.

¹⁰⁴ Salome Chukhua, “The Charter of Freedom and International Practice of Lustration Policy,” <https://idfi.ge/ge>, April 2, 2014, <https://idfi.ge:443/ge/research-48>.

¹⁰⁵ The Caucasus Research Resource Centers is a non-governmental, non-profit research organization, which collects, analyses and publishes policy relevant data on social, economic and political trends in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. It constitutes a network with the common goal of strengthening social science research and public policy analysis in the South Caucasus. Source: <http://www.crrcenters.org/news>

¹⁰⁶ Waal Thomas D., *Stalin’s Puzzle*. p. 7-11

¹⁰⁷ Giorgi Margvelashvili, Stalin will be Perceived as the Greatest Commander-in-chief in the Future, September 20, 2013, <http://www.tabula.ge/ge/verbatim/101069-margvelashvili-stalins-momavalshi-aghiqvamen-rogorc-dzalian-did-mxedarmtavars>.

The Survivors Testimonies about Stalin's Great Terror in Georgia

The following chapter explores oral history interviews (video, audio and transcribed materials) of the survivors of Stalin's great terror, Siuzanna Chavchanidze (1931) and Ioseb (Soso) Tsintsadze (1928), Lili Oshakmashvili (1927), Vladimer (Lado) Baratashvili (1920), Tinatin Kandareli (1933), and Nana Jikia (1932).

Most of oral history interviews with the survivors (interviewees include the people whose parents/grandparents were oppressed under Stalin's terror,) discussed in this chapter were in the frames of the project conducted by Soviet Past Research Laboratory in Georgia and Heinrich Boell Foundation/The South Caucasus Regional Office. The project explored the family archives (photos, biographies or other related documents) and gathered individual stories of the Great Terror told by the family members of the victims. Those stories are transcribed and published or uploaded on YouTube channel. Two of them (Lili Oshakmashvili and Ioseb Tsintsadze) are recorded by me, and I have verbal consent, that I can use their personal details and quotes in my text.

The life stories are studied through the lenses of individual and collective traumas as explained above in the conceptual framework part. They tell us about the terror phases within which their lives were captured. During the interviews the respondents describe individual memories of their parents and share their opinions about the system of the Great Terror and about its logic and strategy.

The selection of the informants/respondents and the family was based on the following criteria: 1. Social status (political prisoners, intelligentsia people and working class) - since *intelligentsia* people were one of the most affected groups by Stalin's terror, their narratives will be more representative in the chapter. 2. Generation criteria – all respondents are the sons or daughters of victims of the Stalinist terror. 3. Both of the parents are the victims of the terror,

which means that the survivors' fathers were persecuted, mothers were sent to exile and they came back from the Gulag camps.

Despite the fact that there are commonalities and differences in each storyline, I decided to carve out a uniqueness of each story and present them separately below. In order to make their stories more personal and intimate, I used the first names of the respondents. Every storyline is designed on chronological bases and includes the victims' family members biographical accounts, such as their places in society, imprisonment of their parents and life in the Gulag camp, public opinion about prisoners and their families, the rehabilitation of their family members and getting access to the files of their fathers or mothers.¹⁰⁸

Soso's Story

- Here is the book, my memoirs about my father - told him and asked me to sit down and read it carefully.
- I started reading the memoirs. I have looked through the whole text, re-read some passages and wrote notes in my notebook.
- Read carefully – repeated him with a louder voice
- I am a fast reader, sir.
- I am saying, read carefully – he said angrily
- I realized that I should be more patient and read this part like a primary school girl who tries to understand not only the context but also any single sentence.
- Half an hour passed
- I have carefully read the memoirs; May I ask you some questions? If possible, I will record only for myself.
- He nodded
- Please ask questions on issues which are not treated in the book
- Of course, I have some clarification questions only.¹⁰⁹

I have prepared the recorder and started asking the questions about the reasons of imprisonment of his parents, his interest in this topic, his attitudes towards the Soviet system etc. The interview lasted for an hour and half, but I was instructed to pause recording several

¹⁰⁸ Note: All the quotes presented in this chapter are translated by the author.

¹⁰⁹ Oral History Interview with Ioseb Tsintsadze, interview by Iveta Gogava, April 20, 2019.

times due to his request. At the end of the interview, he asked me to use his memoirs for my research, because it encompasses all the information I need.¹¹⁰

The main protagonist of the story is Ioseb (Soso) Tsintsadze, one of the survivors of Stalin's terror.¹¹¹ He was born in 1927 in Tbilisi, Georgia. He tracked the lives of his parents from the imprisonment to the rehabilitation. Being in his parents' shoes made him experience discrimination, offense, silence, and repression. Therefore, the storyline, he presents, is not only the chronological sequence of the facts, but also the location of his father's biography, attitudes from the society and living under terror.

The starting point of Soso Tsintsadze's story is the imprisonment of his father, a scientist Shalva Tsintsadze: *"When they arrested my father, I was 9 years old and my brother, Teimuraz – only 8 months. I clearly remember my father's face, his presence at home, and his habits. After a long period of time I have analyzed my father's personality and assessed his life."*¹¹² It is important to note that he met his father for the first time at the age of 7, because a professor Tsintsadze was on his official mission in various countries, including England, Germany, France, and the United States. This passage underlines the fact that the memory about the father is cemented with the stories 9 years old Soso got used to hear from his family members, his father's friends, and from his careful observation in two years of living together.

- Were there any clear preconditions of your father's arrest? Did he get any warning about it before? – I asked
- No – he answered convincingly
- Do you have any doubts that he was denounced?
- No, the man who was travelling a lot outside of the Soviet Union, and who was well known in France, Germany and the United States could not prove that he was not a spy.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Oral History Interview with Ioseb Tsintsadze

¹¹¹ **Note:** Using his real name in his story was his own request.

¹¹² Oral History Interview with Ioseb Tsintsadze.

¹¹³ Oral History Interview with Ioseb Tsintsadze.

NKVD officers visited Soso's house late at night, closely examined it and arrested the father – it was common practice in the Soviet Union that time. “Why” would be one of the first questions his father asked when they woke him up and took him – “You are arrested” – was the answer. He, like many others, was sure he was innocent, and he would be released right after they found out the truth.

My father was arrested at night, on the May 15th, 1937. I was sleeping and when I woke up, I found out that house was a total mess: books, dishes, and clothes were on the floor – they checked the house. They told me that my father went for vacation and he will come back soon. I heard they talked about my father, they did not know where he was, what they should have done etc. They started preparing some packages for my father. My mother was used to go somewhere with a special bag. I have learned a new word – Peredacha (Parcel).¹¹⁴

The imprisonment of his father changed many things in his life. Their close relatives and friends tried to avoid his family because they were told that the father was arrested as an enemy of the people. He recalls that one day her mother came back home and told the story she experienced in the queue. She met one of the most famous math teachers in Tbilisi, who without turning his face told her: “Maro, please do not turn your face to me, we are all worried about you, but what can we do, you see what is happening around, stay strong!”¹¹⁵ This passage underlines that this “imagined myth of the enemy of the people” created the atmosphere of fear and distrust in the society. Therefore, avoiding of meeting the family members of those “enemies” was a step of survival under the terror. However, as Soso mentions, he never felt discrimination from his classmates or school teachers in his high school.

- One day my mom came home and said that they did not receive my parcel. They asked her not to bring another one.
- What did that mean for you that time?
- We did not know anything. We thought that he was sent to exile.¹¹⁶

As Soso found out later, their parcel got rejected as his father was executed in September according to the order of persecution (N380) that was signed by Stalin, Molotov

¹¹⁴ Tsintsadze G. et al., *Shalva Tsintsadze - Famous Georgian Scholar* (Tbilisi: Bechdviti Sitkvis Combinati, 2015).

¹¹⁵ Tsintsadze G. et al., 2015 p. 60

¹¹⁶ Oral History Interview with Ioseb Tsintsadze.

and Kaganovich. The arrest and persecution of his father led to the imprisonment of the mother, Maro Razmadze, as one of the main witnesses of the husband's subversive actions. When the policemen came to imprison her on the December 1st, 1937, she was sure that she will be interrogated and will come back home the next day. However, she did not return, and they sent her to Temnikovski Women's Camp: "We have started sending the parcels to my mom again..." he did sum up his story about the arrest of his mother.

His mother, Maro Razmadze was granted with the right to send letters in 1943. After 7 years of imprisonment and with the help of the friend of the family she came back. She was weakened and sick and as Soso remembers that could be one of the reasons of releasing her earlier than expected. At the end of 1951, former political prisoners were not allowed to live in Tbilisi, therefore Soso's mother was forced to leave the city. She has never talked about her experience in the camp.

His story ends in 1953, the year when Stalin, "our great friend and father" died. The death of Stalin brought crisis threatening Bolshevik values and Communist political order because until 1953 the figure of Stalin was the one that functioned as the source of an absolute knowledge and truth. The death of Stalin was identified with losing its "prophetic authority", which itself threatened the legitimization of the system.¹¹⁷ *"Nobody threatens and represses my family"* – wrote Soso in his last paragraphs about his father.

- How do you remember 1953, the death of Stalin? How did your family react on it?
- Are you recording now?
- Yes
- Stop recording.
- I paused recording immediately.
- Did you really stop it?
- Yes, I did – I showed the recorder.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer: Gulag Returnees, Crime and the Fate of the Reforms after Stalin*.

¹¹⁸ Oral History Interview with Ioseb Tsintsadze.

“Then there was a 20th Congress of Communist Party, and then they rehabilitated my parents ”- Soso continued. He wrote an appeal for reviewing his father’s file. He describes the situation, almost the same as interrogator’s office, where they have interviewed his father: *“Your father did not commit any crime, he was innocent”* were the bullet words in the room. He came home with the notice of rehabilitation, but never managed to get back his father’s file again – *“all the things were burnt during the fire, we do not have your father’s file anymore”*- was the answer from the office. Extermination of his father’s file is destroying all the evidence about his arrest, his innocence, and his rehabilitation. It is a part of the memory which would most probably fade after the death of my respondent.

- He was 86 years old, when he published the memoirs in the book about his father.
- He is 92 years old man now, and still shares the pathos of the memoirs.
- Our interview ended.
- I expressed my gratitude towards his generosity and left home.

He stopped me on the porch and told me: “Please be careful, daughter, you are going to condemn Stalin publicly.”¹¹⁹ I promised him to be careful and watch my words accordingly and said goodbye.

What do his words mean? Why isn’t it easier to condemn Stalin in Georgia? I think that he might not feel safe letting people to denounce Stalin in Georgian academia, which in his opinion can be still under censorship. Moreover, since he does not explicitly condemn Stalin neither in written text, nor in interview, he might did not want me to use his words as an evidence “on the trial”.

My respondent is a trauma-carrier person, who fully absorbed the pain of being the son of the enemies of the people. This experience made him silent towards criticizing the system for a long time. Moreover, his regret to lose the faith in humanity is reflected in the written text (his memoirs about his father) and in his interview.

¹¹⁹ Oral History Interview with Ioseb Tsintsadze.

Lili's Story

- Today is my father's birthday and it is symbolic that we are recording this interview about him – she said and asked me to sit in front of her.
- It is very symbolic indeed. Congratulations with your father's Birthday.
- Thank you. Here are my interviews in the newspapers, if I miss something you can check here too.¹²⁰

She smiled and gave me consent to start the interview. In spite of her health problems and low blood pressure, she did not pause the interview and expressed her happiness to talk about her father. Our interview lasted for almost an hour, where she talked about the arrest of his parents, showed me photos and documents of the arrest, and rehabilitation of them.

The story started with the locating of his father's biography in a broader context. Aleksandre Oshakmashvili, Lili's father was born in Tsarist Russia's Georgia in 1898. Aleksandre was a member of Georgian Communist Party and at the time of his arrest on 7th of July, 1937, while he worked at NKVD Georgia, he still lived in Tbilisi. He graduated from the military college in 1926, and a special reception for the graduates that followed the graduation was attended by Stalin, Molotov and Kalinin. According to Lili, Stalin was interested if there were any graduates from Georgia. They college authorities she says presented her father and before saying goodbye, Stalin asked him to stand next to him on the group photo. Lili showed me the photo with the notice of the date and the title of the event.

Aleksandre was persecuted on the 15th of September 1937 on his way to the Communist party meeting. He was rehabilitated on the 18th of January 1958 under the decree of Military Collegium.

Most of the things she remembers about her family is from her mother, aunts and uncle, and some other information she has from family archives. As she recalls, her father worked in different branches of NKVD in Georgia (including, Tbilisi, Tetrtskaro, Mtskheta and Gori), where he was a head of the department. According to the location of his father's workplace,

¹²⁰ Oral History Interview with Lili Oshakmashvili, interview by Iveta Gogava, April 18, 2019.

the family has experienced changing the houses frequently. She did not remember the arrest of her father, since she was not in Tbilisi that time, however from the stories of the family members she knows that the father was arrested on his way to the NKVD meeting:: “Fortunately, I was not in Tbilisi that time. I was not a witness of this terrible thing. Nobody talked about this, but I realized that some things went wrong.”¹²¹ As my respondent clarified later, she always had premonition about her father and despite of the fact she could not assess the situation adequately, she was sure that her life would probably change to worse:

*“My father was a just, stable, kind and modest person. He was dressed up very modest way. He did not like Beria and Kobulov, that’s why he often has problems at his work. I think this was the reason why they arrested him.”*¹²² With these words she revealed the possible reason of the imprisonment of his father, who could have conflicts at work with the top leaders like Beria and his hangman Kobulov.

On the 25th of October 1937 they have arrested her mother, Elene Adamadze. Despite the fact that she was on her maternity leave and she was not supposed to be taken, she was arrested as a family member of the enemies of the people. Close examination of the house was not the coincident process of the imprisonment of her father, but rather her mother, who was considered as one of the collaborators of the husband.

They have examined the house, checked her notebooks and books as well, but did not find anything. My sister and I left alone without parents” - Lili Oshakmashvili remembers. After the imprisonment of her parents, her uncle from mother’s side, Revaz Adamidze and his family took care of her and her sister. He helped the daughters to get an education and send letters and packages to the camp.¹²³

¹²¹ Oral History Interview with Lili Oshakmashvili.

¹²² *ibid.*, Interview with Lili Oshakmashvili, 2019

¹²³ *ibid.*, Interview with Lili Oshakmashvili, 2019

After the imprisonment of her parents, they evicted her family from the house, sold their furniture and brought other NKVD person in. I was forced to leave my house and live with my uncle's family:

I remember this day. It was rainy. I was shocked. I was not used to cry, always tried to endure my trouble. This was one of the most terrible day. We were left without parents and without house.”¹²⁴My sister was taken to special kindergarten, which was under the control NKVD as the daughter of the enemies of the people. She stayed there until 1940, and I visited her several times after school.

Her mother was sent to exile under the decree of 7th of January 1938. She lived in the village of Potmas in Kazakhstan. They got the letter which granted them the right of correspondence. She did send the gifts and souvenirs from the camp. Then she was sent to Arkhangelsk.

We did not know anything about my father. Our relatives were sure that this confusion would soon be over, and we would find the truth. I have sent the letters to Krupskaja, Kalinin, but I did not get the answer. I decided to send the letter to I. Stalin. I have got the letter back “The file of your parents will be discussed on the special committee meeting”. But since it was 1940, I did not have any hope to get answer soon.

On the 20th of May, 1942 they have released her mother. She brought a lot of letter from the camp and was distributing them for a month.

When I saw my mother, I did not know what to say, she did not look like my mother anymore. The first words I said, was “where is my father”. I did not remember what she answered, but I remembered the answer was not satisfactory.¹²⁵

After a deep breath, she has showed all the documents related to his parents' rehabilitation. One of them was signed by the Ministry of Internal affairs of Georgia and her father was rehabilitated in 1958 under the decree of the collegium: “Annulate the decision made on 14th of 1937 on Aleksandre Oshakmashvili and finish the file because of no evidence of the crime”.

Those details about her father's was important for he to show how it happened, how innocent her father was and how he rehabilitated them. After the return of her mother, they

¹²⁴ ibid., Interview with Lili Oshakmashvili, 2019

¹²⁵ Oral History Interview with Lili Oshakmashvili.

have started a difficult period of reintegration, took care of the flat and other necessary objects at home.

Lili's father had a devoted friend, Philipe Iakovid, whom she remembers from the family visits. He promised to take care of her family and he granted her mother with the right to live in Tbilisi.

My mother was modest, kind and beloved person. Despite of her experience in the Gulag camp, but she did not lose the faith in people. She was always ready to help the people. My mother and I never talked about my father, because it was hard for both of us to talk about his imprisonment. Feeling and thinking about it is hard to remember.

After telling the story of her mother, Lili recalled the story of one of the inquisitors, Shashurkin, who shot her father. As Lili remembers, she was very worried about his behavior and was used to say sorry to every prisoner before the execution, because he was not able to change anything. Shashurkin once told to Philip, "I have shot a lot of them, but Sasha [Lili's father] was the hardest one. His soul is pursuing me."

At the end of the story she expressed the regret about those people who were killed under the label of the enemies of the people. "They were honest, educated and patriots of their country. We, their successors, proudly remember their name." – she told as the very last words before I stopped recording the interview.

Lili, 92 years old woman was happy to give her time and floor for presenting his beloved father. During the interview she was blushed several times, which showed how hard it was for her to talk about this experience after a long time, recall all the names of the people who were responsible for the arrest of her parents and who changed her life completely.

Siuzanna's Story

"Once someone told me: "when there is a new moon, you should make a wish, and it will come true". Every time I saw a full moon, I was making a wish: "Full Moon, full moon,

please bring my parents back” –¹²⁶ told Siuzanna Chavchanidze, one of the survivors of Stalin’s terror. She was five years old, when they took her mother. Nine years after, she came back home. Siuzanna was fourteen years old and she did not manage to call her "mom". “She did not recognize me. I recognized her but did not have enough courage to hug her. It was traumatic for me. If my parents were with me, I would have a different life.”¹²⁷ Her regret is closely connected to the experience of discrimination, offense, silence and repression she got while being in her parents’ shoes.

Her story, like Lili’s one, starts with the locating of his father’s biographical notes in the context of imprisonment. Since she was five years old when his father was arrested, her memory about the father was made up with the stories she used to hear from her grandmother, aunt, mother and friends and classmates of his father: “*I do not remember a lot about my father, but he was one of the honest people I have ever known.*” Talking about her father’s character, referring to his friends or talking about her parents’ relationship are nostalgic parts of her puzzle which included terror, fear, and distrust, the key pieces of the survival mode.

The main character of her story, the father Misha Chavchanidze used to work as the head of the military college. He graduated from the Military Academy of Moscow, worked in Odessa and came back to Tbilisi in 1926. He was arrested in Manglisi (one of the towns in Georgia’s south), while he was leading his students for a field trip. The imprisonment of her father’s friends and eviction of the neighbors from their apartments made 5 years old Siuzanna to feel frightened while noticing military men in the street, because these people would take someone or inform his family about the imprisonment. As the practice showed nobody came back home after their arrest.

I remember the imprisonment of my father: I was sitting on the balcony...there was some furniture in the yard. It was a heavy rain and the furniture was getting wet. Evicted tenants were not allowed to the building, they were called “Trotskyists”. I

¹²⁶ Bekishvili, *Portraits of the prisoners of “ALZHIR”: History of Stalinism.*, 2008, p. 305

saw two men in military uniform and called my mom: “Mom, mom, they are coming”, They have knocked on the door and informed my mom that the father was already arrested. They demanded close examination of the house: The father had a lot of books at home and if they open a book and read “Trotsky” somewhere, it can be a reason of arresting my father. They took all the books for further investigation...We did not manage to say anything. We were sitting in silence.¹²⁸

As Siuzanna Chavchanidze told, a KGB man was very much interested in the imprisonment of her father, because he wanted to get her childhood flat. Therefore, he denounced her father, and the whole family was expelled from the house. Common practice of the denunciation was not a tool of revealing the enemies of the people, some high-ranking officials, members of the party or neighbours could denounce someone to get their flat afterwards.

Her story continues with the imprisonment of the mother, Varvara Barqaia-Chavchanidze as one of the main witnesses of the husband’s subversive actions. As Siuzanna remembers, they warn her mother to avoid showing up in public. Since she was a 4th year student at medical school, she refused to miss the classes, because she did not understand what she did wrong. When the policemen came to imprison her, everyone was sure that she will be interrogated and will come back home next day. However, she did not return, and they sent her first in Tashkent, Uzbekistan where she worked as a pharmacist. Afterwards she was sent to Akmolinsk Camp where the wives of the enemies of the people lived.

Mother’s imprisonment was a traumatic event for Siuzanna, but it made her realize that she should stay strong and be proud of her parents: *“I always hated when they were talking about me “It is so pity, she does not have parents”. It was an offense for me...”*.¹²⁹ She knew, she can do everything to be successful in this system and make their parents proud of her too. What was the source of her pride: to avoid the feeling of misery or to believe that her parents were innocent? It could be both; since everyone in the family were sure that her parents were

¹²⁸ Bekishvili, Portraits of the prisoners of “ALZHIR”: History of Stalinism. p. 306

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 307

innocent, she would have liked to avoid the feeling of embarrassment and be proud of her parents.

Despite the fact that “some of them [her schoolmates] were called “you, the child of Trotskyists”, she never felt anything from her teachers or classmates about the fact that her parents were arrested, she still felt discriminated in the society. Nobody has ever addressed her like that. But she felt later that she was not privileged in the society and she could not access the benefits, including party tickets.

Her story continues with the return of her mother: Despite alienation towards her mother she decided to put the first step forward and ask the questions. “As mother told me, she did not experience any torture there. My mother always worked at really good places.” Not many prisoner women have the right to correspondence to the families, but Siuzanna’s mother managed to send the letters and handmade gifts to the children.

Her story ends in 1956, when the parents were rehabilitated, and she managed to access her parents’ files. Like many others, Siuzanna did not get the notice about the execution of her father. Family members were sure that he was sent to exile without the right of correspondence: “When we received the rehabilitation letter, we found out about his execution.” It is important to highlight that his father’s file and the documents were exterminated and she did not manage to read them, but she was told: “you should be proud that he never signed any lists”, so he was tortured because he did not sign the list with the names of his employees/colleagues. This pride that his father never denounced anybody is the clear-cut for not perceiving him as a collaborator of the system. It made her sure that his father is only the victim of the terror, not the perpetrator, as many people would believe in the case of totalitarian system.

As Siuzanna said, she did not get married and lived with her mother for a long time, she was afraid to live in someone’s family with the label of Trotskyist. Traumatic experience of her parents became the leitmotif of her life: ambivalent feelings of embarrassment and pride,

being discriminated in the broader context, as the daughter of the enemies of the people, and constant feeling that her life would be much better if the parents were with her all the time.

Lado's Story

Vladimer (Lado) Baratashvili as many other survivors of Stalin's Great Terror speaks about his parents with pride. His father Ioseb (Osiko) Baratashvili was very successful lawyer, very educated, and literate person with excellent presentation skills. After a successful graduation from the Faculty of Law in 1900, he became a lawyer. As Lado recalls, the father's assistants were Shalva Aleqsi-Meskhishvili, Vano Japaridze, Jora Chachava and others, who became very successful lawyers later on. In 1906 Lado's father was assigned to be the first counsel deputy in the government. Being on that position he had a lot of speeches related to a freedom of press, the freedom of the speech, abolishing the death penalty. Success of his father made him follow the path, and study law. Presenting his father's story and talking about his merits was an attempt to make the listener aware of his father's innocence.

Like many others, the arrest of his father took place late at night. It was 16th of June 1937, Lado's sister's, Tsisana's birthday and the house was full of the guests. He stayed very late at night and after the guests left, the whole family went to bed.

I woke up thirty minutes after and found out that my bedroom's door was open and accidentally saw a strange man wearing a uniform of the ministry of internal affairs. It was easy to get that something terrible happened: my father was arrested.¹³⁰

Like other survivors say, the imprisonment of the father almost always led to the arrest of the mother. Three months later, Lado's mother, Barbare Khrushchova-Baratashvili was arrested. Since his mother did not have the right of correspondence, Lado was very lately

¹³⁰ Nino Bekishvili, ed., *Portraits of the prisoners of "ALZHIR": History of Stalinism* (Tbilisi: Heinrich Böll Stiftung South Caucasus Regional Office, 2008). p. 78

informed that the mother, as the wife of the enemy of the people, was sent to exile to Kazakhstan and served in Akmolinsk camp.

Their four-roomed flat, located on today's 6 Kostava Street in Tbilisi, was also taken away after the parents' arrest. "Consequently, I ended up in living in one room with other two strange families in this small flat." Since Lado's underaged sister, was taken to Chiatura, a town in Georgia's western Imereti region by the aunt Lamara Gachechiladze and as she was little, she could not experience those changes.

Imprisonment of Lado's parents affected his continuation of the studies. He was expelled from the university and on 14th of May 1938 he was arrested as a political prisoner. However, exactly after one year on May 14 of 1939 he was released. As he remembers, there was no reason of his imprisonment, but now he realizes that it could be related to the imprisonment of his parents.

After the release from the prison, Lado continued went back to the university. However, he has been discriminated for being a son of Trotskyists by his classmates. He remembers one of the exams at his university, when he did not get the exam paper.

I went to my professor, Davit Mirianashvili, and asked him to give me an exam paper. Unexpectedly, he refused my request and did not give me the paper. After asking the reason, I found out that there were some students accusing the professors for protecting and unfairly grading the undergraduates, which were the children of the enemy of the people. His answer made me anxious and I immediately responded to him: "There is one solution. Let other students attend my exam to see that all is fair!" Thus, others attended me and saw that I passed the exams, and that I got the grades fairly and correctly.¹³¹

Finally, Lado managed to graduate from the university in 1940 and get well-deserved degree in Law. This passage shows that his classmates believed that Lado's parents were the enemies of the people, therefore, their children should be punished with hindering them in the future car.

¹³¹ Bekishvili, *Portraits of the prisoners of "ALZHIR": History of Stalinism*. p. 80

Lado's case of meeting his mother after a long silence was quite a different from other survivors's experiences. After his mother was granted with the right of correspondence, he visited her at the Akmolinsk camp. As he remembers, he felt weak and in order not to faint in front of her, he went and hugged his mother.

Her first question was: "Where is your father? Are there any news?" I strictly replied: "Because of father you, an innocent woman, are arrested and sentenced to exile. Why do you ask about him?"; she responded: "Wish only that he would be well, I can even be sentenced for a whole life."¹³²

His mother's attitude was an important message for Lado to realize how hard it was for his mother to be back and did not have any information about her husband. The months passed and in the middle of June, unexpectedly in the street Lado was arrested unexpectedly in the street again and taken to the Ministry of Internal affairs, located on Rustaveli Avenue. He was blamed for incident in restaurant, he has not been involved in. He was accused for killing someone. His friends defended him on the court trials, and he was released after five days of imprisonment.

Lado's story ends with the imprisonment of his mother and the release of her after his efforts to bring her back to Moscow and live there till the end of her life. The experience of Lado does not really differ from other survivors' stories, but severe treatment during his life and constant discrimination made him feel that there is nothing he can protest against any injustice in his life.

Tina's Story

Tina's story starts with the presenting his father as a director of Orjonikidze's automobile factory. Tina's father graduated from Technical university, and then continued his studies in Germany. After a graduation, he returned from Germany and was assigned to work

¹³² *ibid.*, p. 83

in the factory, while delivering the lectures. He was one of the editor-in-chiefs of the well-known journal "Technology and Labor", one of the first technology-related journals in Georgia. Like other survivors, Tina did not remember her father very well: "Unfortunately, I only remember those moments, but do not remember father's face as later I only have seen his photos."¹³³ She recalls that father worked hard and she always enjoyed the dinners in the evening when the father was coming back home.

At the time of the imprisonment, Tina's father was 35 years old. He was executed immediately. She remembers the moment when her father was arrested and taken from their flat's entrance. It was the early morning of May the 1st, 1937. Since the 1st of May Parade was clearly visible from their flat, therefore all of the relatives, friends and neighbors were gathered to see the parade from there. When the strangers came, her grandmother started crying, realized that they came for imprisonment of the family member too: "After my father's arrest, my uncles were also taken. Everybody knew my father was a good man, working in the factory and nobody could solve the mystery why he was arrested."¹³⁴

After Tina's father's arrest, her mother, Elene Sokolova-Kandareli went to meet Lavrenty Beria. She knew him, because her husband was a member of Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. After the meeting, the mother came back home, she went to the balcony, sat on the hammock and started crying, saying that she could not save him.

Already knowing that her husband was mistakenly taken, Tina's mother was waiting for her turn. It was not common practice for the wives who were taken after the imprisonment of their husbands. Meeting with Beria made Tina's feel she could probably be the next one in the list. She has started to work in a printer shop. One day in December, Elene did not come

¹³³ Bekishvili, *Portraits of the prisoners of "ALZHIR": History of Stalinism*. p. 236

¹³⁴ Bekishvili. p. 236

home, she was taken from her workplace immediately: “In May, they have arrested my father, while seven months later, in December I lost my mother too.” – told Tina in her interview.¹³⁵

As in other cases, the families never knew how long those women were imprisoned before sending them to exile to Akmolinsk camp, in Karagand. All the details about her life in Gulag camp was clear for Tina when her mother returned from Gulag.

As Tina found out afterwards, her mother was sentenced to live in Gulag Camp for 8 years, where she worked in a potato warehouse. At the end of her imprisonment years, she was called again for working in the warehouse with three other women, who were locked in a huge area with metal wire. Thus, two more years were added to her sentence and she was released in December 1945.

“After being imprisoned for a long time, my father was called the follower of Trotsky, while mother was called the traitor’s family member.” Unlike other families, after the imprisonment of their parents, Tina and her brother did not leave their childhood flat. They stayed there and were raised up by the neighbors. There were seven neighboring families living in a small apartment, where everybody contributed and helped the orphan children as much as they could.

Before the imprisonment of the parents Tina’s brother was taken to a kindergarten, which was headed by Unofqorishvili. Once he was informed that the mother was also arrested, he accepted Tina at his kindergarten too.

As Tina remembers, her mother’s return reminded her Georgian’s film director’s Lana Ghoghoberidze's movie "Some Interviews on Personal Issues", where Sophiko Chiaureli, famous Georgian actress meets her mother. After a long time of waiting for the mother, Tina and her brother decided not to wait for her anymore, they did not know what was the exile and

¹³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 237

how did their mother lived there. She recalls the day when the mother returned and she was told to meet her in the room:

I rushed into the leaving room, where all of the people sitting there were familiar to me except a woman, who was my mother. I could not recognize her, however, I understood it was my missed mother. When I saw her I started to cry and mother hugged me too. She was always teasing me that I could not recognize her for the first time. But I was three years old when she was arrested, how was I supposed to recognize her? ¹³⁶

Arrival of Tina's mother was not easy for the respondent. She felt that the mother started taking care of their lives, which she was not used to. Tina did not want to change her mind and lifestyle because of the return of her mother, who was not familiar with her at all.

The first years after the arrival of Tina's mother, she had no right to live in the city. Thus, she went to Gardabani and worked at the Institute of Pedology. She was taken right after she visited her family in Tbilisi. Rare cases of imprisonment the person again was a case for Tina's mother, which stressed the children a lot. She did not come back until 1956. Precisely, one-year earlier Tina's mother was already living with her and her brother in a small room at the shared apartment, but in 1956 she was rehabilitated and later officially came back.

Despite all of the struggle Tina's mother faced during her life, she still loved Stalin and defended him in the debates. Tina expressed her surprise about her mother's strong character for never blaming anyone involved in making decisions about her suffer later.

My mother was a very communist person; therefore, she and my brother had been frequently arguing about this topic. She liked Stalin and defended him, while brother was an anti-Stalinist. Mother suffered from exile, but she never blamed anyone. She was saying that it would had been happened and Stalin was not involved in it. ¹³⁷

As Tina remembers, her mother did not believe that the father was not alive, since she was sure that he could not be shot. She started believing after she got a notice of rehabilitation. Despite of the fact that Tina did not remember her father well, she felt terrible when he found out that his father was shot.

¹³⁶ Bekishvili, *Portraits of the prisoners of "ALZHIR": History of Stalinism*. p. 240

¹³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 242

Tina has ended her interview with the faith she always had towards her father: “I had no doubt in my father's truth, but we went to many troubles because of being children of Trotsky.” Unfair treatments because of being the children of the enemies of the people made their life sad and pity. But after political rehabilitation she became free from all those feelings and everything went well.

This hopeful notice of her could be considered as an attempt to encourage herself after all of the trouble she and her family ran through. Separation and reunite of the family was most of the time related to the stress and anxiety, which ended after the political rehabilitation of the parents, like a relief from all the labels she got during the life.

Nana's Story

Nana's father, Vladimir Jikia, was born in 1893 in Western Georgian town Zugdidi at the priest's family. After the graduation from the college, Vladimir was sent to Georgia and he was appointed as a commissar of Military Command of Georgia and Chief of the Transcaucasian Military College. On November 11, 1936, he was summoned to the Central Committee in connection with Samgori's project, from where he had never returned back. At this time, Nana was four years old, while her sister Marine was only two years and 8 months old baby. Nanas' mother had only once a chance to meet father again, where father told her: "I do not understand what is happening. Georgian man is blamed for being Georgian.”¹³⁸

Nana's storyline starts with the imprisonment of her father and continues with the rehabilitation, as an evidence that he was innocent person, who taken mistakenly by the NKVD people. Vladimir Jikia had been rehabilitated by the Supreme Court on May 26, 1956, due to

¹³⁸ Bekishvili. p. 316

the absence of a crime. However, the date of execution and the burial place were unknown, as mentioned in the rehabilitation notice.

In the second half of 1937 Nana's mother, 26 years old Tinatin Jikia was also arrested. As Irakli Abashidze, a famous Georgian writer, writes in his memoirs, "From the Thirties," "she was one of the most beautiful woman of the time".¹³⁹ Her portraits have been created by Ketevan Magalashvili, Vasil Shukhaev, Igor Grabar, Irakli Toidze, Lamara Kvividze and other famous artists. Since Nana was a little girls when they took her parents, the memories about them was transmitted either through different people who were brave enough to talk about them or through the written texts she has read after their rehabilitation.

Nana clearly remembers the day when the mother was arrested, because she could recall two men came from the NKVD. As Nana tells, they were more or less polite and did not hurry her up, gave her time to prepare and say goodbye to her children. The first days of the imprisonment she has spent in the prison in Tbilisi. On December 16, 1937, under the article 58¹ of the Criminal Code of Soviet Georgia, she was sentenced to 5 years imprisonment. After that, she was taken to Baku and through being in several other prisons she has left in the Akmolinsk Women's Camp, where women were mainly taking care of sheep.

While being in Akmolinsk, Nana's mother through other guard's (former political prisoner Zaitsev) help managed to send her and other few women's letters. One of the prisoners from Kazakhstan sued her to another guard. Consequently, mother was taken to a special cellar, where she was sick and had a temperature. On top of this, she was in the cellar with a mentally sick Bulgarian woman, who out of a sudden wanted to bite her mother's nose. It was enough mother to sleep, when this crazy woman was standing in front of her... Therefore, her mother could not close her eyes for five days and nights. She remembered those days terribly.

¹³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 318

Nana remembers that her family had a three-room apartment. At the beginning they took one room, then another and at the end her family left with one living room. Her stories of the discrimination are not very much different from others, but she experienced discrimination from her friends and classmates, which was more traumatic to deal with afterwards:

- Firstly, I was in the first grade, when I visited my friend, who lived on the same street as we did. However, he did not let me in and told: “my mother warned me that you are child of an enemy and do not come here again!”
- Secondly, like almost every child living in the period of repressions, we also studied well. At the end of the school, I had my final exam, where I wrote an essay referring the language (“...I swear to protect your sweet language...”), but Stalin’s work on linguistics, which came out during this period, I have not used. So, for the essay I got 5, while in overall 4 because I have not used the Stalin’s ideas and did not related my essay to the “Popular mind”. Thus, again because of Stalin I could not get the Gold medal from my school, which was at that time was a big fail and trauma for me as I have worked hard and deserved it.¹⁴⁰

When Stalin died, Nana’s friend, whose father also was a victim of the terror, and Nana visited their friend, who felt sick. On the question, what happened and why he was ill, he replied: “Stalin died, whose death impacted me so badly that my temperature went high and suffer from a high fever.” Nana and her friend laughed on those words. However, when they left his house, Nana’s friend told her: “Imagine if he goes and declares that we laughed on his words, we will get caught?” It was one of the most frightening things in her life and she lived under this fear for a long time.

Neither Nana nor her sister have married anybody because of the same fear as Siuzana Chavchanidze, being a child of Trotskyists. Nana’s story does not end with the rehabilitation of her parents, it ends with the funeral of her mother, where this beautiful woman, at the age of 93, were granted with many violets, as the symbol of her beauty. With this passage, Nana emphasized the strength of her mother who kept her beauty in the prisons and camp, where she lived for a long time. Moreover, Nana is proud of the last of the Mohicans of her life who never talked about her suffer.

¹⁴⁰ Bekishvili, *Portraits of the prisoners of “ALZHIR”: History of Stalinism*. p. 318

The stories of the survivors of Stalin's Great Terror in Georgia share the setting in which they have experienced discrimination, silence, oppression and learned how to live in a survival mode. Almost all of the respondents mentioned that there were no clear preconditions for arresting their father, or mother before someone knocked on their door late at night. Even after the knock, accused person and the family members were sure that it was just a mistake and they would come back home next day.

Several decades after the fact it is easier to understand the reasons of the imprisonment, and all of them mentioned different reasons: 1. Being famous outside of the Soviet Union, as the suspicion for being the agents of foreign intelligence. 2. Having conflicts with local NKVD leaders 3. For being the government officers and had access to the files 4. For being closely connected to intelligentsia people, one of the most targeted groups of the terror.

Almost all of the respondents lost their childhood flat and lived with their relatives, neighbours, acquaintances before return of their mother. This fact made them experience separation with their beloved people and reunification was not always smooth and easy for them to encounter. Each story contains of the trauma, which is detected in their style of telling the stories, choosing the starting points and applying the particular templates for reflecting this negative experience.

Conclusion

This thesis studied the representations of Stalin's Great Terror in Georgia in the stories of the survivors from the perspective of the concept of cultural trauma. I argue that the nature of the pain caused by a particular negative event can be captured by several legal terms: "extermination", "arrest", "eviction of the flat", "sentenced to exile", and "rehabilitation". Therefore, growing up in the Soviet Union as a child of an "enemy of the people" was a source of constant stress, marked by negative attitudes from social surroundings. An overarching name???? NOT CLEAR of the victims of the Stalin's terror would be hard to depict: the system treated the men, and women, intelligentsia people, party officials, workers, urban and rural residents "equally" in a brutal manner. They were all summoned to death penalty or exiled in the Gulag camp because of belonging to a particular group. The attribution of responsibility to particular groups, individuals and the institutions is layered differently by the respondents. Blaming someone is the leitmotif of their stories but they have never explicitly condemned the Soviet architects, including Stalin.

The study of oral history interviews about Stalin's terror shows that the label "enemy of the people" applied to Soviet citizens defined their life paths and their social attitudes. I argued that Stalin's Terror generated a cultural trauma, because it did have an influence on the individual and collective consciousness of this particular group. In particular, this trauma impacted the reflections of the members of the group, when confronted with some painful questions about their identity: Who are they? Where are they from and where are they going? Therefore "the trauma is not a result of painful experience, it's a result of painful discomforts in collective thinking".¹⁴¹ Representing Stalin's Terror as a cultural trauma means treating oral history interviews as trauma narratives, because they contain information about a concrete

¹⁴¹ Alexander Jeffrey C., *The Meanings of Social Life: A Cultural Sociology*. p. 92

event and its scale carves out narratives about the victims and their perpetrators. The respondents who described their feelings about the Terror were aware of the fact that innocent people became victims of repression, a well-organized campaign of repression, staged by the Soviet ‘architects.’ NKVD officers and inquisitors were just fulfilling the orders of the central organs. Moreover, the attitudes of the survivors towards the system of terror or the denunciation of victims of the terror show the logic of Stalin’s Terror, which was based on virtual criminalization, fear, distrust, provocation and betrayal.

After the opening the KGB archives in Moscow, academia was flooded with Russian narratives about the Stalinist period. At the same time, the history of “peripheral” regions has been neglected. By focusing on the case of Georgia, this thesis argues that the study of peripheral regions could provide alternative images of the Great Terror. This thesis can be considered a modest contribution to uncovering under-researched stories.

It is important to highlight the limitation of my research endeavour. The location of the narratives in broader Georgian and the Soviet context was a bit difficult. First of all, those survivors who belonged to different sides did not feel brave enough to oppose their experience to the well-spread rumours about Stalinism in Georgia. Secondly, comparing the cases of other republics of the Soviet Union could be further highlight the peculiarities of the Georgian story.

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