

**THE BOLSHEVIK AFTERLIFE:
POSTHUMOUS REHABILITATION IN THE
POST-STALIN SOVIET UNION, 1953-1970**

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For Hannah

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though she passed away while this project was still in its early stages, the example she set was never far from my thoughts. My sister Nora's dedication to others and ability to contain her exasperation at my pedantic ramblings are marvels of the modern world. My parents, Daniel and Lauren Casper, fostered my fascination with history from an early age, unfailingly encouraged me to pursue my passions, no matter how far they took me from home, freely gave their time to read my writing, and are inexhaustible sources of wisdom and perspective. I only hope that the satisfaction that they derive from my having completed this undertaking is in some small measure commensurate with the pride that I feel at being their son.

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ABSTRACT

THE BOLSHEVIK AFTERLIFE: POSTHUMOUS REHABILITATION IN THE POST-STALIN SOVIET UNION, 1953-1970

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Benjamin Nathans

This dissertation explores how an illiberal, authoritarian state confronted and attempted to make amends for its extraordinary history of mass violence, specifically the Soviet Union's efforts to posthumously exonerate eminent political, military, and cultural figures executed in the 1930s and early 1940s. All of Iosif Stalin's successors were implicated, to one degree or another, in the Terror that swept the Soviet Union and consumed much of the party-state's founding elite. Yet in the months following the dictator's death in March 1953, a contingent within the new collective leadership began to allow cases against certain "enemies of the people" who had been put to death to be reopened, and their convictions to be vacated. This policy, which broke with decades of Soviet precedent, was initially conceived as a means of discrediting deposed secret police chief Lavrentii Beria, but soon acquired more ambitious dimensions. This dissertation foregrounds the official intentions that underpinned the decision to implement posthumous rehabilitation, the investigative work that went into determining which figures merited absolution and on what grounds, and efforts by the families of the repressed to obtain recognition of and restitution for losses and suffering endured during the era of High Stalinism. Posthumous rehabilitation thereby merged a symbolic "resurrection" of the dead – through distinct but intertwined legal and political processes – with tangible socio-economic benefits for their survivors. Drawing upon documents generated by the USSR Procuracy, Council of Ministers, and Supreme Soviet, as well as

the Central Committee of the Communist Party, citizens' letters of petition, and memoirs, this dissertation argues for posthumous rehabilitation as a crucial means through which the post-Stalin Soviet government attempted to extract useable, redemptive narratives from its cannibalistic past, and as an avenue for the families of the wrongfully repressed to reassert their place in society.

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Introduction

In the Party death was no mystery, it had no romantic aspect. It was a logical consequence, a factor with which one reckoned and which bore rather an abstract character. Also death was rarely spoken of and the word "execution" was hardly ever used; the customary expression was "physical liquidation." The words "physical liquidation" again evoked only one concrete idea: The cessation of political activity. The act of dying in itself was a technical detail, with no claim to interest; death as a factor in a logical equation had lost any intimate bodily feature.¹

The deputies of the Central Intelligence Agency were in high spirits during their meeting on May 16, 1956. Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev, First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), had aired his regime's dirty laundry, and the American intelligence community was eager to exploit this move. Nearly three months earlier Khrushchev delivered his bombshell speech "On the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences" before a closed session of the CPSU's 20th Party Congress, and as Deputy Director of Plans Frank Wisner announced, the agency had recently acquired what was purportedly a copy of the revelatory text. The organization's leadership seemed especially taken with Khrushchev's disclosures about the posthumous rehabilitation process underway at the time in the Soviet Union, as Inspector General Lyman Kirkpatrick proposed that the Agency sponsor "an *Animal Farm* type piece on the Soviets put to death by Stalin who have since been vindicated by the present leaders in Russia."² Director Allen Dulles endorsed the idea as "excellent," but cautioned that while he was

¹ Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon*, trans. Daphne Hardy (New York: Bantam Books, 1966), 111.

² Deputies' Meeting, 16 May 1956, CREST Collection, document number CIA-RDR80B01676R002300190008-1, available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/cia-rdp80b01676r002300190008-1> (accessed May 1, 2017). Many thanks to James Ryan for bringing this document to my attention.

prepared to allocate funding for such a venture, “he would withhold decision on whether to make a movie out of it as was done in the case of the *Animal Farm* project.”³

Kirkpatrick and Dulles’ enthusiasm notwithstanding, the mooted paean to fallen Old Bolsheviks never materialized, and the CIA found alternate ideological avenues through which to contest the Soviets. But the avidness with which America’s spymasters seized upon the stories of Iosif Stalin’s redeemed targets speaks to one of the enduring dilemmas of mature socialism in the Soviet Union: what prompted the party-state to concede that hundreds of thousands of individuals executed as “enemies of the people” were in fact wholly innocent of the charges for which they had been condemned? Beyond the potential propagandistic coup this decision offered to anti-Communist elements in the West, it also threatened to upend the carefully constructed and diligently maintained narrative of the early Soviet Union having been under existential threat from internal enemies, which served as justification for the bloodletting and mass incarceration of the 1930s and 1940s. Yet during Khrushchev’s tenure as First Secretary over 900,000 individuals in the Soviet Union – living and dead alike – had their convictions for putative counterrevolutionary crimes overturned and their names officially cleared.⁴ By delving into the cases of some of the Soviet notables subjected to capital punishment during the Great Terror – which represented a small minority of the verdicts that Soviet

³ Ibid. On the CIA’s covert funding of the animated adaptation of *Animal Farm*, produced in the UK, see Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: The New Press, 2013), 247-248; Daniel J. Leab, *Orwell Subverted: The CIA and the Filming of Animal Farm* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007).

⁴ Marc Elie, “Rehabilitation in the Soviet Union, 1953-1964: A Policy Unachieved,” in *De-Stalinising Eastern Europe*, eds. Matthew Stibbe and Kevin McDermott (Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 25. According to Elie, this figure represented approximately one third of those who had been “politically repressed” up to 1964, including some who had been arrested and had their sentences reversed under Khrushchev, though the vast majority dated to the Stalin years. On the problematic nature of the term “de-Stalinization,” see Benjamin Nathans, “Myth, Memory, Trauma – Coming to Terms” available at <http://russianhistoryblog.org/2014/05/myth-memory-trauma-coming-to-terms/> (accessed February 24, 2018).

authorities revisited in the 1950s and 1960s, but loomed large in the party-state's internal discussions and public pronouncements – this dissertation plumbs one of the earliest and most fraught instances of a modern state confronting its legacy of mass violence.⁵

Though the rehabilitation policies later promoted by Mikhail Gorbachev as part of *glasnost* were more thoroughgoing and forthright about the fates of the disappeared, the practices implemented by Stalin's immediate heirs defined the longstanding goals and parameters of this wide-ranging revisionist endeavor.

Why Rehabilitation, and For Whom?

For all its ubiquity in the Soviet and post-Soviet sphere, rehabilitation writ large, and its posthumous permutation specifically, have remained underexplored in contemporary scholarship relative to the amount of attention paid to the various purges that roiled the USSR. One can hardly open a collection of documents relating to the early Soviet Union without encountering names of dozens of prominent figures designated as having been “repressed” and then “posthumously rehabilitated” without further explication of what the latter status entailed or conferred upon recipients. Despite the inroads in exploring the motivations, mechanisms, and scope of the Great Terror, the process that sought, to a certain extent, to reverse or revise its excesses – albeit some two decades after the fact – has remained obscure.⁶

⁵ According to partial data compiled by the Memorial Society, approximately 150,000 people who had been sentenced to capital punishment were posthumously rehabilitated between 1953 and 1964. Although there is no reliable indication of how many of these individuals were Party members, elites were likely overrepresented relative to the overall number of executed persons, given the priority their cases were shown; that said, they probably made up a small fraction of the total, given the fact that the vast majority of those shot during the Terror were ordinary Soviet citizens. See “Zhertvy politicheskogo terrora v SSSR,” available at base.memo.ru (accessed March 13, 2018).

⁶ Recent works that have broadened understanding of the character and course of the terror include Rolf Binner and Marc Junge, *Kak terror stal Bol'shim: Sekretnyi prikaz no. 00447 i tekhnologiia ego ispolneniia* (Moskva: AIRO-XX, 2003); Wendy Z. Goldman, *Inventing the Enemy: Denunciation and Terror in*

In vindicating selected individuals who had been publicly branded “enemies of the people” Stalin’s heirs exposed themselves to unprecedented liabilities, jeopardizing the authority they had inherited from their forebear. Despite the suggestion that rehabilitation was an outgrowth of popular clamoring for a reckoning with the party-state’s extraordinary history of domestic repression, at the time of Stalin’s death there was no means by which the Soviet citizenry could pressure its rulers to embark on such a sensitive endeavor. The impetus for rehabilitation was sparked within the halls of power, and – even taking into account portrayals of Khrushchev’s decision-making as reckless and impulsive – senior officials had to consider the liabilities inherent in admitting that hundreds of thousands persecuted under false pretenses were indeed innocent.⁷ In their estimation the payoffs evidently outweighed the potentially disastrous ramifications. Given that the vast majority of the post-Stalin ruling clique were involved in, or directly benefitted from the destruction of the old Communist Party cadres, having assumed posts

Stalin’s Russia (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Paul Gregory, *Terror by Quota: State Security from Lenin to Stalin (An Archival Study)* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); Paul Hagenloh, *Stalin’s Police: Public Order and Mass Repression in the USSR, 1926-1941* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); David R. Shearer, *Policing Stalin’s Socialism: Repression and Social Order in the Soviet Union, 1924-1953* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); Oleg Khlevniuk, “The Objectives of the Great Terror, 1937-1938,” in *Soviet History, 1917-53: Essays in Honour of R.W. Davies*, eds. Julian Cooper, Maureen Perrie and E.A. Rees (London and Basingstoke: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), 158-176; Hiroaki Kuromiya, *The Voices of the Dead: Stalin’s Great Terror in the 1930s*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007; Lynne Viola, *The Unknown Gulag: The Lost World of Stalin’s Special Settlements* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); James Harris, ed., *The Anatomy of Terror: Political Violence under Stalin* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); idem., *The Great Fear: Stalin’s Terror of the 1930s* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Stephen Kotkin, *Stalin: Waiting for Hitler, 1929-1941* (New York: Penguin Press, 2017).

⁷ For a generally admiring portrait of Khrushchev from one of his contemporaries that recognizes the shortcomings in his “disposition” that isolated him from the rest of the Presidium and hastened his downfall, see Fedor Burlatsky, *Khrushchev and the First Russian Spring: The Era of Khrushchev Through the Eyes of His Advisor*, trans. Daphne Skillen (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons: 1991). Dmitrii Shepilov – once one of Khrushchev’s closest collaborators within the Party and a central player in crafting the Secret Speech who turned on his patron during the struggle with the Anti-Party Group – conversely offers a scathing portrayal, depicting the First Secretary as a crass, boorish provincial who was at once out of his depth and at the same time an inveterate conniver; see Dmitrii Shepilov, *The Kremlin’s Scholar: A Memoir of Soviet Politics under Stalin and Khrushchev*, ed. Stephen V. Bittner, trans. Anthony Austin (New Haven: Yale University Press: 2007).

previously held by the purged, revisiting legal cases against supposed “enemies of the people” dead nearly twenty years seemingly ran contrary to their interests. Thus a guiding question for this dissertation is why the Party’s inner circle considered it prudent, and perhaps even necessary to clear the names of so many who had been condemned by the very government they served.⁸

The Soviet government did not generally solicit cases for posthumous rehabilitation; the onus lay with relatives, friends, and occasionally erstwhile colleagues to initiate the review of convictions by filing an appeal with the Procuracy (the state prosecutor’s office), which was authorized to reopen criminal cases. This arrangement required persons who had already suffered tremendous loss at the hands of the regime to resubmit themselves and their loved ones to state scrutiny; that many were willing, if not eager, to do so speaks to the benefits promised by rehabilitation beyond the symbolic restoration of individuals’ good names. This is not to devalue the importance of reputation within the postwar USSR. In a polity wracked by violent upheavals – self-inflicted and from abroad – the only remaining traces that many families had of the disappeared were the memories of their deeds and contributions to the construction and defense of socialism, and the inclusion of these exploits in the broader national narrative

⁸ Igal Halfin offers this explanation for the rationale behind posthumous political rehabilitation: “Surprising as it may be in a Marxist, secular context, posthumous reinstatement made sense because spiritual affiliation with the brotherhood of the elect was more important than life itself. In readmitting the dead into its ranks, the Party accepted that their deaths were not in vain: they were human, they had names and voices, and they should therefore be remembered. Thus, they became sacrifices after all (‘victims of repression’) – opening comrades’ eyes to the dangers of cults of personality.” While this is a compelling teleology of why the Party reopened its ranks to thousands of deceased former members, it does not account for the particular practices that defined rehabilitation, nor the fact that political reinstatement was always subordinate to legal exoneration. See Igal Halfin, *Stalinist Confessions: Messianism and Terror at the Leningrad Communist University* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009), 467 fn79.

was a matter of great significance.⁹ That said, the survivors of those under consideration for posthumous rehabilitation were seldom content to confine themselves to matters of remembrance. While legal cases were under review they actively sought to refashion the narrative of the Great Terror that the Procuracy and other investigative organs were called upon to shape, and upon learning of their relatives' exculpation many proved remarkably adept in mobilizing this status to press claims upon the government that had gone unanswered for decades. Conceived as a means of discrediting and disparaging the pasts of the new collective leadership's adversaries – first and foremost Lavrentii Pavlovich Beriia and his secret police network, eventually Stalin himself, and then the so-called “Anti-Party Group – posthumous rehabilitation assumed dimensions that its initiators could not have foreseen, as it ultimately became a ritualistic set of practices through which the party-state and Soviet citizens grappled with and reframed notions of loyalty, justice, retribution, and social belonging that had been rent asunder by the Stalin regime's descent into near self-destruction.

Precedents and Innovations

Posthumous rehabilitation, as a legal and political process, was in many respects distinct from its Imperial Russian and Soviet precedents. Mass amnesties were not unfamiliar occurrences under either the Romanovs or the Bolsheviks. It was customary for the empire's ruling dynasty to mark momentous occasions – such as the birth of a royal heir – with blanket reprieves for certain classes of prisoners; notable examples

⁹ On memory practices and mass mortality in modern Russia, see Catherine Merridale, *Night of Stone: Death and Memory in Twentieth Century Russia* (New York: Viking, 2001); and Alexander Etkind, *Warped Mourning: Stories of the Undead in the Land of the Unburied* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013). Though Merridale deals extensively with the Great Terror and mentions the waves of returnees who emerged from the “distant camps” over the course of the 1950s, she makes no mention of posthumous rehabilitation, one of the quintessential arenas in which her chosen topics intersected.

included the 1856 remission of the surviving Decembrists upon Alexander II's assumption of the throne, and the release of some 2,000 political deportees in conjunction with celebrations of the Romanov tercentenary in 1913.¹⁰ In addition to such coordinated liberations, convicts could seek and were occasionally extended imperial pardons; tellingly, the April 1906 Fundamental Law reserved the right for the sovereign to commute or otherwise mitigate any sentence passed.¹¹ These decisions were taken not in the name of justice, but rather as a display of the autocrat's capacity for mercy.

Soviet authorities acted very much in the vein of the monarchists they supplanted when formulating their policy on juridical forgiveness. Amnesties were proclaimed to coincide with the fifth and tenth anniversaries of the October Revolution in 1922 and 1927, the founding of the USSR in 1923, as well as the twentieth anniversary of the Red Army in 1938.¹² The single largest amnesty prior to Stalin's death was implemented in 1945 in honor of the Soviet Union's victory over Nazi Germany; some 620,000 prisoners serving sentences of three years and under – mostly handed down under wartime provisions introduced in December 1941 – were afforded early releases from Gulag camps and special settlements, and some 400,000 more saw their sentences reduced. As Golfo Alexopoulos has demonstrated, the 1945 amnesty “represented an intensification

¹⁰ Thanks to this act of imperial magnanimity several notable revolutionaries were able to return from exile, among them Menshevik leader Iulii Martov and Lev Kamenev. See Israel Getzler, *Martov: A Political Biography of a Russian Social Democrat* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 28; Stephen Kotkin, *Stalin: Paradoxes of Power, 1878-1928* (New York: Penguin Books, 2014), 132.

¹¹ The relevant article reads: “The Sovereign Emperor has the right to pardon the accused, to mitigate the sentence, and even to completely forgive transgressions, including the right to terminate court, actions against the guilty and to free them from trial and punishment. Stemming from royal mercy, he also has the right to commute the official penalty and to generally pardon all exceptional cases that are not subject to general laws, provided such actions do not infringe upon civil rights or the legally protected interests of others.” See “The Russian Fundamental Law of 23 April 1906,” available at <https://community.dur.ac.uk/a.k.harrington/fundlaws.html> (accessed on February 15, 2018).

¹² Golfo Alexopoulos, “Amnesty 1945: The Revolving Door of Stalin's Gulag,” *Slavic Review* 64, 2 (Summer 2005): 276. There were no anniversary amnesties in either 1937 or 1947, though the tradition was revived in the following decades, and the 1938 amnesty applied only to military personnel.

or expansion of existing practice. It targeted the revolving majority of gulag prisoners – those who served shorter sentences and whose eventual release was expected – while doing nothing to stem the flow of prisoners coming in.”¹³ The sole innovation of the even larger mass amnesty that Beria engineered to solemnize Stalin’s passing, according to Alexopoulous, was that it made no attempt to replenish the labor camp population, a radical move for its time.

Convicts in the Soviet Union were also able, in principle, to seek clemency from the state. Requests for pardons (*khodotaistva o pomilovanii*) were generally adjudicated by the USSR Supreme Soviet, which was empowered to intervene in criminal cases. Neither amnesties nor pardons, as forms of reprieve, necessitated the acknowledgment of any wrongdoing on the part of the judiciary or other branches of the government; as in imperial times, they were extended as emblematic of rulers’ clemency toward admitted offenders. Critically, in most instances amnesties and pardons only provided for prisoners’ physical release. They did not expunge individuals’ criminal records, which in turn gave rise to a host of difficulties in housing, employment, and the receipt of social benefits.¹⁴

Rehabilitation entailed an entirely novel set of admissions on the part of the Soviet authorities. Rather than an official indulgence, rehabilitation was an express recognition of miscarriages of justice; as linguist D. M. Fel'dman notes, the very term "rehabilitation" had little to no connotation in the Imperial Russian or Soviet legal contexts prior to 1953, and in fact it migrated from the political lexicon into common

¹³ Ibid., 299. Alexopoulous persuasively argues that such instability in the penal labor force reveals that the Gulag’s primary purpose was carceral, not economic.

¹⁴ Marc Elie, “Les politiques à l’égard des libérés du Goulag: Amnistiés et réhabilités dans la region de Novosibirsk, 1953-1960,” *Cahiers du Monde russe* 47, 1/2 (January – June 2006): 327-347.

parlance over the course of the twentieth century. In the 1920s and 1930s, “rehabilitation” referred to the process by which the Party restored to good standing members who had been expelled or otherwise sanctioned for misconduct, and it was not until the public disavowal of the so-called “Doctors’ Plot” in April 1953 that the term acquired juridical significance.¹⁵ While most judicial verdicts in the USSR were subject to cassation review, and could be modified or thrown out entirely by higher courts, from December 1, 1934 such protections did not extend to counterrevolutionary crimes.¹⁶ Promulgated in the immediate aftermath of Sergei Kirov’s murder, a decree issued by the Central Executive Committee denied those convicted of betraying the Revolution any right to appeal; death sentences were to be carried out immediately.¹⁷ Controls remained on the implementation of state violence, as in late autumn 1938, when approximately 110,000 prisoners were liberated at the close of the *Ezhovshchina* – so named for People’s Commissar of Internal Affairs Nikolai Ivanovich Ezhov, who oversaw the Terror at its apex – and the following year nearly 1,000 NKVD operatives were arrested for previous “violations of soviet legality.”¹⁸ Yet at the time state security declined to authorize the streamlining of the existing review process, and it did not address – or repudiate – the systemic nature of repressions against purported opponents of Soviet

¹⁵ Iurii Fel’dman, *Terminologiya vlasti: Sovetskie politicheskie termny v istoriko-kul’turnom kontekste* (Moskva: Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi gumanitarnyi universitet, 2006), 65-117. As Cynthia Hooper notes, in January 1938 Stalin referred to the “need to ‘rehabilitate the party, primarily by admitting new members, reinstating those unjustly expelled, and punishing the kind of Communist who ‘is willing to expel dozens of members from the party on false grounds just to appear vigilant himself.’” See Cynthia V. Hooper, “Terror from Within: Participation and Coercion in Soviet Power, 1926-1964,” (Ph.D. diss. Princeton University, 2003), 323.

¹⁶ According to Peter H. Solomon, Jr., approximately nine percent of cassation reviews in the early 1930s modified existing sentences or verdicts. See Peter H. Solomon, Jr., *Soviet Criminal Justice Under Stalin* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 135-136.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 260.

¹⁸ Lynne Viola, *Stalinist Perpetrators on Trial: Scenes from the Great Terror in Soviet Ukraine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 5, 38. Viola’s monograph sheds light on the little-studied “purge of the purgers,” which in key respects served as precedent for the trials analyzed in Chapter 4.

power perpetrated over the preceding years. Functionaries were also specifically instructed to focus their oversight on “living persons,” thereby excluding from consideration the hundreds of thousands of people put to death in 1937 and 1938.¹⁹

The first instances of posthumous rehabilitation in the Soviet Union in the closing months of 1953 marked a decisive break with the efforts that preceded them. Rather than skirting the question of the rectitude of sentences in counterrevolutionary cases, rehabilitation was predicated upon vindicating the accused of the charges against them, and in many instances dispelling the notion that their alleged conspiracies ever existed. The most common formulation that accompanied rehabilitation reports – “in the absence of a *corpus delicti* (*za otsutstviem sostava prestupleniia*)” – rejected convictions on the precise grounds that the proffered evidence failed to demonstrate the commission of a crime. The party-state thus took it upon itself to admit not only that repressed individuals were innocent, but that the very charges with which they had been impugned had no grounding in reality. For the dead, who had been liquidated with such urgency, denying them the opportunity to dispute their vilification, this represented an unparalleled attempt to set right the wrongs of the past.²⁰ Such revisionism is all the more remarkable for the fact that – unlike almost every other instance of contemporary state-driven truth-telling – the rulers who spearheaded Soviet rehabilitation were often directly implicated in the

¹⁹ Solomon, *Soviet Criminal Justice*, 259.

²⁰ As Kevin Platt and David Brandenberger have demonstrated, the Bolsheviks were no strangers to reassessing the historical legacy of figures who had previously been expunged from the past or openly vilified (though never before had the authorities sought to revise the standing of those who had been so recently disgraced and so violently effaced). Furthermore, the rehabilitations that Platt and Brandenberger treat involved the reputations of long-dead notables, rather than the overruling of decades-old legal verdicts. See David Brandenberger and Kevin M. F. Platt, “Terribly Pragmatic: Rewriting the History of Ivan IV’s Reign, 1937-1956” in *Epic Revisionism: Russian History and Literature as Stalinist Propaganda*, eds. Kevin M. F. Platt and David Brandenberger (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 157-178. On the active construction and cultivation of the more recent Soviet past, see also Frederick C. Corney, *Telling October: Memory and the Making of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004).

crimes being decried, and professed themselves to be the legitimate successors of the regime whose recourse to internal violence they now disavowed.²¹ The operating assumption that transitional justice is the province of democratizing states has led scholars to disregard the ways in which the decidedly illiberal Soviet Union of the 1950s adopted policies that at times exceeded the standards set by post-authoritarian societies – particularly with regard to property restitution to survivors – and performed the delicate balancing act of admitting past atrocities without delegitimizing the wider Bolshevik project.

Historiography

The rehabilitation process became the subject of scholarly inquest within a decade of its inception. Western Sovietologists, eager to discern the USSR's future course absent the guidance of the only ruler it had known for most of its thirty-odd-year history, seized upon the scanty information emerging from behind the Iron Curtain in the period following the 22nd Party Congress in October 1961, when reports eulogizing the posthumously rehabilitated began appearing in Soviet press outlets and publications in

²¹ Much of the existing literature on transitional justice – of which rehabilitation was in many ways a prime, and quite early example – focuses on Africa, Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Eastern Europe, to the exclusion of the USSR; when Russia is addressed, it is almost exclusively in the post-Soviet context. See Ruth G. Teitel, *Transitional Justice* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Béatrice Pouligny, Simon Chesterman and Albrecht Schnabel, eds., *After Mass Crime: Rebuilding States and Communities* (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2007); Melissa S. Williams, Rosemary Nagy, and Jon Elster, eds., *Transitional Justice*, NOMOS LI (New York: New York University Press, 2012); Vesselin Popovski and Mónica Serrano, *After Oppression: Transitional Justice in Latin America and Eastern Europe* (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2012); Alexander Laban Hinton, ed., *Transitional Justice: Global Mechanisms and Local Realities after Genocide and Mass Violence* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011); Alexandra Barahona de Brito, Carmen González-Enríquez, and Paloma Aguilar, eds., *The Politics of Memory: Transitional Justice in Democratizing Societies* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

earnest.²² Cold War-era Kremlin watchers saw in the rehabilitation process a portal onto the decision-making process and political maneuverings of Stalin's successors. Leopold Labedz, one of the earliest and – given the limited array of material at his disposal – more astute observers of Soviet rehabilitation, attributed its emergence to the demands of Kremlin intrigues and the desire of members of the new collective leadership to ensure their own survival. Based on official Soviet media and Khrushchev's public pronouncements, Labedz detects only mercenary considerations in the form and tempo of the regime's exoneration campaign.²³ As the following chapters will demonstrate, far more went into the resolution to initiate wide-scale rehabilitation and follow through on its various aspects than wanton self-interest, but Labedz's perspective proved to have considerable staying power through the USSR's remaining lifespan, as it is echoed in the subsequent work of scholars seeking to make sense of the divulgements emanating from Moscow and other Soviet administrative centers.

Jane P. Shapiro's unpublished 1967 dissertation "Rehabilitation Policy and Political Conflict in the Soviet Union, 1953-1964" marked the first full-length study of Soviet exonerations in the post-Stalin years. Though Shapiro acknowledges the limitations of her source base – composed exclusively of official Soviet materials available in the West – she approaches rehabilitation as something of a barometer of the new ruling circle's capacity for reform and ability to distance itself from Stalin's repressive legacy. In Shapiro's schema, the public discussion of eminent Union-wide, republican Party, and military officials previously excised from Soviet history augured

²² Many of these materials, including biographic sketches and laudatory remembrances of revolutionary service, are compiled in Borys Levytsky, ed., *The Stalinist Terror in the Thirties: Documentation from the Soviet Press* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1974).

²³ Leopold Labedz, "Resurrection—and Perdition," *Problems of Communism* 12, 2 (March-April 1963): 48-59.

efforts by Khrushchev and similarly inclined bureaucrats – impelled by various special interests – to dispel the lingering manifestations of coercion through state terror.²⁴ In the absence of any indication of how rehabilitation functioned in practice, Shapiro devotes considerable attention to devising a taxonomy of the different modes of rehabilitation predicated on the vagaries of Soviet linguistic choices.²⁵ Although such fine distinctions appear to have held little actual currency for those who spearheaded, implemented, or benefitted from rehabilitation, they held considerable attraction for researchers as a means of imposing a semblance of order on the seemingly arbitrary and inconsistent currents of rehabilitation.

To give an example, in his study of rehabilitation, Albert P. Van Goudoever – drawing upon essentially the same source-base as Shapiro, but with twenty years' worth of additional data – offers a streamlined selection of three types of rehabilitation (formal, public, and posthumous) that he applies to the reinstated Party and military cadres under consideration.²⁶ By limiting their sample populations to Party and military elites – even when writers, artists, scientists, and other specialists were among the publicly rehabilitated – both Shapiro and Van Goudoever reinforce the impression prevalent

²⁴ Jane P. Shapiro, "Rehabilitation Policy and Political Conflict in the Soviet Union, 1953-1964" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1967). Samuel A. Oppenheim's article, published the same year, is almost entirely superseded by Shapiro's work, though it does include useful appendixes listing rehabilitees and where information about them had been made available, and the fates of the men elected to full Central Committee membership at the 17th Party Congress in 1934; see Samuel A. Oppenheim, "Rehabilitation in the Post-Stalinist Soviet Union," *The Western Political Quarterly* 20, 1 (March 1967): 97-115.

²⁵ From the descriptions in the documents at her disposal, Shapiro identifies five categories of rehabilitation: judicial (meaning posthumous legal exoneration), physical (referring to those who survived their sentences), public (returning individuals to historiography), full public (commemoration of individuals' activities), and historical (mention of purged figures, but without clear indication of their sentences having been revised). See *ibid.*, 8-13. One of the major shortcomings of Shapiro's highly quantitative approach is that she considers individuals to have been rehabilitated from their first mention as such in the press, when in actuality the legal proceedings that exculpated individuals predated these announcements by several years, which significantly distorts the process' timeframe.

²⁶ Albert P. Van Goudoever, *The Limits of Destalinization in the Soviet Union: Political Rehabilitations in the Soviet Union since Stalin*, trans. Frans Hijkoop (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 7.

during the Cold War that Stalinist state terror primarily befell the upper strata of Soviet society;²⁷ however, this perspective became increasingly untenable as the true extent of the Terror began to emerge with the partial opening of the Soviet Union to outside academics during *glasnost*'.

Rather than focusing their attention on the exalted martyrs of the 1930s, researchers allowed into the USSR during Gorbachev's *glasnost*' – inspired in part by the herculean efforts of civil society organizations such as Memorial – took as their subjects the former political prisoners (known colloquially in Russian as *zeks*, short for *zakliuchennyye*) who emerged from the Gulag archipelago in the mid-1950s to a society deeply suspicious of their presence and the feasibility or desirability of their reintegration. Labor camp returnees – who required rehabilitation to reclaim their rights even after serving out their sentences or being amnestied – found a remarkably sympathetic audience in the form of foreign scholars eager to grant them voice. Stephen F. Cohen and Nanci Adler best exemplify this approach, though they have reached disparate conclusions regarding the regime's role in facilitating or hindering survivors' reintegration into a world that stigmatized and scorned them.

As he details in the opening chapter of his *The Victims Return: Survivors of the Gulag after Stalin*, Cohen became a trusted intimate of Nikolai Bukharin's second wife, Anna Larina, and their children, thanks to his seminal biography of Bukharin; through these connections Cohen was able to embed himself into the tightly-knit milieu of former

²⁷ This notion was largely nurtured by the work of Robert Conquest, who dubbed the height of the 1930s purges "The Great Terror." See Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

elites who had been confined in the Gulag.²⁸ Basing his narrative upon the life stories of members of this group to which he had privileged access – frequently identified as his “friends” – Cohen ties their fortunes to the machinations of competing factions within the Kremlin: repentant reformers, headed and exemplified by Khrushchev, who “expended more political capital on his anti-Stalinism than he acquired,” and unreconstructed Stalinists, whose crowning objective, according to Cohen, was to mask the blood on their hands.²⁹ In presenting the rehabilitation of “Khrushchev’s *zeks*” as an integral component of the reformist mission – one that bore moral underpinnings – Cohen directly challenges the received image of rehabilitation as a purely opportunistic endeavor designed to ensure the political longevity of its partisans. For indeed, if Khrushchev intended rehabilitation to shield him from his foes within the Party, it ultimately failed in grand fashion in 1964 when he was toppled by Leonid Brezhnev and his circle – reductively branded “neo-Stalinists” by Cohen – and the Gulag survivors he promoted were purportedly consigned to the margins of society, where they remained until Gorbachev’s redemptive rise to power.³⁰ Though this perspective effectively dispels the notion that rehabilitation was pursued purely for the sake of power politics, Cohen’s near-exclusive reliance upon and unstinting credulity of his informants’ subjective experiences serves to reinforce mythologies that the circle built around themselves, and obscures the internal dynamics

²⁸ Stephen F. Cohen, *The Victims Return: Survivors of the Gulag After Stalin* (Exeter, NH: PublishingWorks, 2010).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 92. This Manichean argument – in one form or another – has been a staple of Cohen’s writing since the 1980s, when he maintained “proposals for change throughout the rigidified Soviet system and opposition to change became the central features of official political life after Stalin’s death. The conflict between reformers and conservatives was inseparable from the Stalin question because the status quo and its history were Stalinist.” See Stephen F. Cohen, *Rethinking the Soviet Experience: Politics and History since 1917* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 100.

³⁰ Cohen, *The Victims Return*, 125-154.

that drove the implementation of rehabilitation, which this project seeks to bring to the fore.

While a great deal of Nanci Adler's findings on the travails of Gulag returnees are drawn from materials originally compiled by Cohen, Adler does not share his assessment of the munificent impulse underlying rehabilitation; rather, she describes it as "a rear-guard action to preserve entrenched power," and the Soviet authorities' attitude toward political prisoners as "at best ambivalent, at worst destructive."³¹ Adler posits an almost entirely adversarial relationship between a duplicitous party-state "more interested in rehabilitating its public image than in rehabilitating people" and citizens attempting to eke their way back into "the big zone" of Soviet society after having escaped the camp system "zone."³² In light of the begrudging attitudes of Soviet officials and non-repressed citizens that emerge in former political prisoners' accounts, Adler asserts that many former *zeks*, frustrated by "the limited character of official de-Stalinization," began "unofficially exonerating themselves," constituting a demimonde that existed, in the words of her subtitle, "beyond the Soviet system."³³

This perspective flies in the face of many documents uncovered over the course of researching this study, which express deep disaffection with the pace of investigations and the generosity of offered financial compensation, but are also cognizant of the fact

³¹ Nanci Adler, *The Gulag Survivor: Beyond the Soviet System*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2002, 151-152, 92. Kathleen E. Smith similarly views rehabilitation as a defensive and reactionary move, though she presents it as a response to pressure "from below." This reads largely as a transposition of 1980s and 1990s-era realities, given her overriding focus on the activities of Memorial and other civil society groups, onto the immediate post-Stalin period. See Kathleen E. Smith, *Remembering Stalin's Victims: Popular Memory and the End of the USSR* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996), 20-40.

³² Adler, *The Gulag Survivor*, 180.

³³ *Ibid.*, 31.

that the only avenue for ameliorating one's situation was through the party-state.³⁴ In a similar vein, Adler's exclusive focus on living rehabilitees – and advocating on their behalf – leads her to understate the import of posthumously rehabilitated figures, as when she refers to bureaucrats' attempts “to render the living rehabilitated returnees as politically inactive as their posthumously rehabilitated comrades.”³⁵ It is a central contention of this dissertation that although the dead could not speak for themselves, with the inauguration of posthumous rehabilitation being deceased proved to be no major impediment to playing an outsized role in post-Stalin political developments.

Two emergent lines of historical inquiry within the growing bodies of scholarship on the Khrushchev and early Brezhnev eras with which this dissertation is particularly engaged are the themes of carceral reform and socio-cultural responses to the revelations of the so-called “Khrushchev Thaw.”³⁶ The bulk of this scholarship has been written under the influence of the turn toward social history, which, in the Soviet context, has privileged the experiences and perspectives of “ordinary” citizens over those of recognized, “named” personages. While this study is primarily concerned with eminent figures, it is influenced by the social turn in Soviet history through its focus on interpersonal relationships and the material lives of returnees. Though it operated according to unique imperatives, posthumous rehabilitation as a legal process was very much embedded within the evolving judicial and penal environment of the 1950s and

³⁴ Adler's most recent monograph attempts to address some of the critiques leveled at her expressions of incredulity in *The Gulag Survivor* over the fact that some returnees continued to identify with the Communist project by using psychological precepts to account for this Party loyalty. See Nanci Adler, *Keeping Faith with the Party: Communist Believers Return from the Gulag* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012).

³⁵ Adler, *The Gulag Survivor*, 181.

³⁶ The tendency to identify the period under consideration intrinsically with Khrushchev the individual is also evident in Russian scholarship. See, for example Aleksandr Pyzhikov, *Khrushchevskaia “ottepel,” 1953-1964* (Moskva: OLMA-PRESS, 2002); Iurii Aksiutin, *Khrushchevskaia “ottepel” i obshchestvennye nastroyeniia v SSSR v 1953–1964 gg.* (Moskva: ROSSPEN, 2004).

early 1960s, in which the Procuracy and courts saw their bailiwicks expanded at the expense of the significantly reined-in organs of state security.

Such developments are most readily perceived in the wholesale reorganization of the Soviet labor camp and special settlement system undertaken within months of Stalin having exited the scene. As Marc Elie shows, the succession of amnesties between 1953 and 1957 that saw the outflow of millions of prisoners from the Gulag into surrounding localities was intrinsically related to upper-level debates surrounding the course of judicial reform; he attributes the hardships that many liberated prisoners faced to the Kafkaesque dilemmas engendered by the lack of planning for this influx of vulnerable people.³⁷ In his work, Jeffrey Hardy details how the curtailment of arbitrary force within the Gulag was achieved in part through the empowerment of camp procurators, whose prestige increased as Khrushchev vested the All-Union Procuracy with increasing authority (including purview over the legal aspect of rehabilitation), while Alan Barenberg reveals how onetime slave laborers became industrial employees in Vorkuta's post-Stalin industrial enterprises.³⁸ While coercion and repression remained firmly within the state's repertoire during these years, they were decisively disavowed as the first recourse for many offenses that in the past would have been met with serious reprisals.³⁹

³⁷ Marc Elie, "Les anciens détenus du Goulag: libérations massives, réinsertion et réhabilitation dans l'URSS poststalinienne, 1953-1964," (Ph.D. diss., École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 2007); idem., "Les politiques à l'égard des libérés du Goulag," *Cahiers du Monde russe* 47/1-2 (Janvier-juin 2006): 327-348.

³⁸ Jeffrey S. Hardy, *The Gulag after Stalin: Redefining Punishment in Khrushchev's Soviet Union, 1953-1964* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2016); Alan Barenberg, *Gulag Town, Company Town: Forced Labor and Its Legacy in Vorkuta* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

³⁹ See Steven A. Barnes, *Death and Redemption: The Gulag and the Shaping of Soviet Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), Chapter 6; Amir Weiner, "The Empires Pay a Visit: Gulag Returnees, East European Rebellions, and Soviet Frontier Politics," *The Journal of Modern History* 78, 2 (June 2006): 333-376; Robert Hornsby, *Protest, Reform and Repression in Khrushchev's Soviet Union* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013). On the topic of Party discipline in these years, see Edward Cohn, *The High Title of a Communist: Postwar Party Discipline and the Values of the Soviet Regime* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2015), Chapter 3.

In moving away from the omnipresent threat of political violence as a ruling technique, the Soviet government under Khrushchev attempted to appropriate and repurpose aspects of the Stalinist system to meet its ends. Though it in many respects defied precedent, by virtue of operating through the same institutions that enacted the Terror, posthumous rehabilitation was very much a constituent component of this phenomenon. As with the penal reforms discussed in the mentioned works, rehabilitation was often constrained by vestiges of state oppression that could not be so easily excised.

Khrushchev's Cold Summer: Gulag Returnees, Crime, and the Fate of Reform after Stalin by Miriam Dobson effectively straddles the line between studies devoted to issues of correctional policy and the literary and cultural realms. Her systematic treatment of returnee's petitions – the first of its kind – effectively charts a sort of transmission history, whereby themes and concepts that supplicants for rehabilitation employed to justify themselves migrated to and ultimately attained public expression in Khrushchev's anti-Stalinist rhetoric.⁴⁰ In treating many sources similar to those that Dobson examines, this dissertation is deeply indebted to her insights, though instead of reading petitions for recurring literary tropes, as Dobson does, it delves into the ways in which the letter writers sought to connect with their audiences, emphasizing their intent over their cultural frame of reference. Although research into literary and popular responses to Khrushchev and company's admissions of Stalin's transgressions has shed valuable light on the ways in which Soviet intellectuals and the reading public wrestled with and assimilated these revelations into their worldview, such works often reinforce a persistent impression that

⁴⁰ Miriam Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer: Gulag Returnees, Crime, and the Fate of Reform after Stalin* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2009), Chapters 2 and 3.

this study aims to complicate.⁴¹ Framing the period's cultural history as one of reception of and response to signals emanating from the center, many authors take the 20th Party Congress as their point of departure, and treat it as the initiation Khrushchev's efforts to dismantle Stalin's legacy.⁴² However, as an examination of the posthumous rehabilitation process from its inception reveals, the Secret Speech was not so much the launch of a new bold campaign to confront the Stalinist past with candor as it was a culmination and appropriation of developments that had been proceeding quietly – though not entirely beyond public view – for over two years prior to late February 1956.⁴³

Grounded as this work is in historiographic trends, it is also informed by anthropological perspectives. Most useful for the purposes of the present study is the notion of “dead-body politics” that Katherine Verdery introduced in her study of bones and corpses “that have become political symbols” in postsocialist Central and Eastern

⁴¹ On the socio-cultural sphere as the most active site for reassessing the past under Khrushchev, see Karl Edward Loewenstein, “The Thaw: Writers and the Public Sphere in the Soviet Union,” (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1999); Stephen V. Bittner, *The Many Lives of Khrushchev's Thaw: Experience and Memory in Moscow's Arbat* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press: 2008); Polly Jones, ed., *The Dilemmas of de-Stalinization: Negotiating Cultural and Social Change in the Khrushchev Era* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006); idem., “Memories of Terror or Terrorizing Memories? Terror, Trauma and Survival in Soviet Culture of the Thaw,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 86, 2 (April 2008): 346-371; idem., *Myth, Memory, Trauma: Rethinking the Stalinist Past in the Soviet Union, 1953-70* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); Denis Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir: Coming to Terms with the Stalinist Past* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013); idem. and Eleonory Gilburd, eds. *The Thaw: Soviet Society and Culture during the 1950s and 1960s* (Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 2013).

⁴² For example, though the listed chronology for Polly Jones' monograph begins in 1953, its first chapter jumps directly to the Secret Speech, and devotes precious little attention to the preceding three years, even misstating the date of Beria's death. Kathleen Smith is sufficiently convinced of 1956 as the lynchpin moment in postwar Soviet history that her latest book is devoted exclusively to that year, with each month meriting its own chapter. See Kathleen E. Smith, *Moscow 1956: The Silenced Spring* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017).

⁴³ For studies that emphasize continuities between the late Stalin years and Khrushchev-era reforms, see Elena Zubkova, *Russia After the War: Hopes, Illusions, and Disappointments, 1945-1957*, trans. and ed. Hugh Ragsdale (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharp, 1998); Yoram Gorlizki and Oleg Khlevniuk, *Cold Peace: Stalin and the Soviet Ruling Circle, 1945-1953* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), especially Chapters 5 and 6; Juliane Fürst, ed. *Late Stalinist Russia: Society between reconstruction and reinvention* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

Europe.⁴⁴ Under this scenario, “[parading] the dead bodies of famous men [...] uses their specific biographies to reevaluate the national past” and provide stability of meaning within systems that have been cast into disarray by earth-shaking changes.⁴⁵ Although in the Soviet case actual mortal remains were rarely forthcoming, the death of Stalin and the array of developments that followed were sufficiently disruptive to unsettle the government’s established means of rule, as well as previously accepted patterns for demonstrating loyalty.⁴⁶ Within this uncertain context, figures who had been excluded from the national master narrative following their imprisonment and execution could be reintegrated into Soviet history to serve as anchors for a reconceived vision of the path to state socialism, thereby granting them something akin to a political afterlife.⁴⁷ This perspective allows the following investigation of posthumous rehabilitation to encapsulate official intentions and popular responses while envisioning both as components of the search for stable meaning in the wake of tumultuous transformations.

In an effort to explain the rationale of posthumous rehabilitation to (presumably) baffled American readers who, as denizens of a “secular society [...] put little stock in posthumous status,” journalist Adam Hochschild maintains that Soviet Communism was “psychologically, a religious culture. Just as the Great Purge was Inquisitorial in its

⁴⁴ Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 3.

⁴⁵ Here Stephen Bittner’s observation on the implications of the Thaw are especially resonant: “a universe of meaning was thrown into disarray, a process that was akin to the ‘cosmic reorganization’ that followed the collapse of communism.” See Bittner, *The Many Lives of Khrushchev’s Thaw*, 12

⁴⁶ The physical remains of those executed under Stalin were rarely uncovered prior to the late 1980s. Often there was no trace left of repressed elites, as NKVD directives for dealing with “important cases” instructed functionaries to cremate corpses following executions, and even after rehabilitation the authorities refused to provide survivors with information regarding their relatives’ burial places. In her article on the NKVD’s mass graves in Vinnitsa, Irina Paperno observes that the Nazis’ discovery of various shooting sites across the city and their exploitation of forensic findings to advance the narrative of “Judeo-Bolshevik” violence against Ukrainians and Poles indelibly tainted inquiries into these executions with the stain of fascist occupation. See Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment*, 288; Irina Paperno, “Exhuming the Bodies of Soviet Terror,” *Representations* 75, 1 (Summer 2001): 89-118.

⁴⁷ Verdery, *Political Lives of Dead Bodies*, 20.

fervor, so rehabilitation, and posthumous restoration of Party membership, have offered a kind of sainthood for martyrs.”⁴⁸ This argument draws upon a well-established literature that depicts state socialism as a “political religion,” and is echoed by Yuri Slezkine’s recent work situating Bolshevism within the vein of millenarianism.⁴⁹ Though one may indeed detect in posthumous rehabilitation traces of a type of Marxist-Leninist canonization, by focusing on outward homologies this perspective obscures the decidedly pragmatic and instrumental motivations underpinning the process. Khrushchev and his cohorts were adept at invoking the posthumously rehabilitated in moments of political extremis, but at no point did they transform their erstwhile comrades into objects of any sort of regular reverence. The kind of afterlife that posthumous rehabilitation promised in the 1950s and 1960s was therefore one predicated on the ability of past actors to help mediate present-day struggles, rather than the notion of an eternal reward for faithful, yet repressed Communists.⁵⁰

Old Bolsheviks and the Victim-Perpetrator Binary

This project is concerned with individuals sentenced to death for supposed counterrevolutionary offenses – which fell under Article 58 of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR) penal code – as opposed to “conventional”

⁴⁸ Adam Hochschild, *The Unquiet Ghost: Russians Remember Stalin* (Boston and New York: Mariner Books, 2003), 169.

⁴⁹ See, for example, René Fülöp-Miller, *The Mind and Face of Bolshevism* (New York: Knopf, 1929); Yuri Slezkine, *The House of Government: A Saga of the Russian Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 189

⁵⁰ As Victoria Smolkin has shown in her study of Soviet atheism, one of the main arenas in which the government’s campaign to suffuse the “sacred spaces” of society with positive, atheistic content failed was in the realm of death; unable to provide a compelling vision of what lay beyond, the Party risked losing the loyalty of those confronting their own mortality. See Victoria Smolkin, *A Sacred Space is Never Empty: A History of Soviet Atheism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 138, 192.

criminal acts.⁵¹ Although, as Oleg Khlevniuk has pointed out, this distinction is somewhat artificial and tenuous in the Soviet context, given that the “bulk of those imprisoned for nonpolitical (*bytovye*) crimes were [...] de facto political prisoners of the regime” by virtue of the disproportionate punishments meted out for relatively minor infractions, it still merits consideration in light of the fact that, as Alexopoulos says, “the regime took its own categories seriously.”⁵² The focus on capital punishment cases is born both of the fact that many high-profile individuals were sent before the firing squad and the finality of a death sentence that has been carried out. It can be difficult to conceive of how a polity attempts to make amends for past injustices when the most directly injured parties are no longer among the living – particularly when they were acolytes of and then violently eliminated by the very government that now recognizes their blamelessness.

The figures around whom this study is constructed generally conform to a common profile; this is a reflection predominantly of the types of individuals on whom the central authorities focused their efforts in the decade following Stalin’s death. Most of the men discussed – and the overwhelming majority of posthumous rehabilitees during this period were indeed men – were born between the mid-1880s and the 1890s – making them the prime age for participation in the revolutions of 1917 – though some were contemporaries of Lenin and Trotsky, born in the 1870s, and a select few were barely past adolescence when they were swept up into the Bolshevik cause during the Civil

⁵¹ When referring to Article 58 cases, this thesis uses the terms “counterrevolutionary” and “political” interchangeably. Although as Steven Barnes notes the category of “political prisoner” officially ceased to exist in the Soviet Union in 1926, the distinction between “politicals” and hardened “criminals” within the Gulag continued to hold currency, even as the lines between these groups remained under dispute. See Barnes, *Death and Redemption*, 83-93.

⁵² Oleg Khlevniuk, “The Gulag and the Non-Gulag as One Interrelated Whole,” *Kritika* 16, 3 (Summer 2015): 481-482; Alexopoulos, “Amnesty 1945,” 275.

War.⁵³ As Old Bolsheviks, almost all had enlisted in Lenin's faction, or the pre-schism Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party, prior to the October Revolution; several joined other leftist parties that were eventually subsumed into the Communist Party, such as the Jewish Labor Bund or the Azeri Hümmet, or were inducted through service in the Red Army. Importantly, none were members of the so-called "Stalin generation" that swelled the Party's ranks after the ascendant General Secretary cemented his grip on power in 1928.⁵⁴ These early Party cadres, who played some of the most outsized roles establishing Soviet power throughout the former tsarist empire, were particularly targeted for elimination during the purges, and therefore figured particularly prominently among the "true sons of the Party" whose reputations were redeemed in the first waves of rehabilitation.⁵⁵

A mode of rehabilitation that cannot be substantively examined in the present thesis is the restoration of the rights of the "punished peoples" – national and ethnic minorities deported en masse from their homelands within the USSR. These groups, including most notably Crimean Tatars, Chechens, Ingush, Volga Germans, Balkars, and Kalmyks were subjected to collective punishment ostensibly on the grounds of collaboration with Nazi occupiers during the war, and exiled from their homes to the

⁵³ This generational span is encapsulated by two of the more prominently featured personages in the dissertation: Sarkis Kas'ian, one of the elder statesmen and theoreticians of Transcaucasian Bolshevism, was born in 1876, while Aleksandr Kosarev, the youthful head of the Komsomol born in 1903, was a mere 35 years old upon his arrest. Regarding the gender balance of posthumous rehabilitees, the Sakharov Center's database of individuals shot in Moscow and the surrounding region between 1918 and 1953 lists the names of some 25,000 men, but only 1,000 women; see "Martirolog zhertv politicheskikh repressii, rasstrel'iannykh i zakhoronennykh v Moskve i Moskovskoi oblasti v 1918-1953 gg.," available at <https://www.sakharov-center.ru/asfcd/martirolog/>.

⁵⁴ For the canonical discussion of these cadres, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Stalin and the Making of a New Elite, 1928-1939," *Slavic Review* 38, 3 (September 1979): 377-402.

⁵⁵ According to J. Arch Getty and William Chase's quantitative analysis of approximately 900 Party elites, 55.6 percent of those who joined the Party before 1912, and 63.9 percent who joined between 1912 and 1920, were purged. See J. Arch Getty and William Chase, "Patterns of Repression Among the Soviet Elite in the Late 1930s: A Biographical Approach," in *Stalinist Terror: New Perspectives*, eds. J. Arch Getty and Roberta Manning (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 225-246.

Central Asian interior, where tens of thousands died from disease, exposure, and starvation. Over the course of the second half of the Soviet century the government acknowledged that many of these groups had been falsely maligned, and haltingly allowed some to return to the lands from which they had been expelled, though the repatriation process rarely proceeded smoothly and few were able to recuperate the houses and property that had been lost as a result of official reprisals.⁵⁶ While the nomenclature of the procedures for rehabilitating political prisoners and “punished peoples” is essentially identical, and the struggles of returned nationalities to reclaim their possessions is immediately reminiscent of analogous efforts on the part of former elites, the mechanisms of repression and remission were in most regards diametrically opposed. Because the groups in question were collectively penalized as entire communities, when they were cleared of wrongdoing blanket declarations of guiltlessness – often from non-judicial organs – sufficed. However, the operating logic of individual legal and political rehabilitation – of which the posthumous variant was a subset – was predicated upon exhaustively reviewing the files assembled against suspected counterrevolutionaries and thereby separately determining whether each figure under consideration merited exculpation.

This dissertation actively avoids referring to most of its subjects as “victims,” as a gesture toward two distinct trends that have remained largely unarticulated in the existing scholarship.⁵⁷ Unlike the vast majority of those arrested under Stalinism – or, for that

⁵⁶ On the rehabilitation of punished peoples, see N. F. Bugai, *Reabilitatsiia repressirovannykh grazhdan Rossii: XX-nachalo XXI veka* (Moskva: MSNK-Press, 2006); idem., *Problemy repressii i reabilitatsii grazhdan: istoriia i istoriografiia: XX v. – nachalo XXI v* (Moskva: Grif i Ko, 2012); and Pavel Polian, *Against Their Will: The History and Geography of Forced Migrations in the USSR*, trans. Anna Yastrzhemska (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2004), 181-232.

⁵⁷ For a notable exception to this trend, see Kevin M. F. Platt, “Secret Speech: Wounding, Disavowal, and Social Belonging in the USSR,” *Critical Theory* 42 (Spring 2016): 647-676.

matter, the groups targeted by the Nazis and other genocidal regimes – the elites swept up during the purges of 1937-1941 were often implicated in the very same systems of violence that ultimately claimed their lives. Despite Anton Antonov-Ovseenko's adamant insistence that "the difference between 'victims and hangmen' was absolute and 'eternal,'"⁵⁸ in actuality quite a few of the personages discussed herein were directly involved in the devastating collectivization campaigns of the early 1930s; some sat on regional NKVD *troikas* and signed off on mass executions and imprisonments; some hectoring and denounced their rivals and former comrades alike, out of ideological zeal, vain attempts at self-preservation, or some combination thereof; others still personally meted out revolutionary justice and terror through their positions in the judiciary and state security. Russian historian Elena Zubkova observes that the purges were "often a thoroughly confused conglomerate of ironic dramas and broken fates. Among the victims were former informers and executioners, and among the loyal camp guards were genuine executioners and potentially honest people deluded by a perverse conception of dutiful service."⁵⁹

In light of their extensive involvement in the Soviet government's repressive apparatus, it is methodologically unsound to depict many of the posthumously rehabilitated solely as victims. The avoidance of the term "victim" is also intended to more accurately reflect the terminology employed contemporaneously by Soviet officials and citizens alike. While "victim" has become ubiquitous in scholarly and popular treatments of all those who endured Stalinist repression, it does not appear to have been as widely embraced when the authorities first began to admit the innocence of certain

⁵⁸ Quoted in Cohen, *The Victims Return*, 83.

⁵⁹ Zubkova, *Russia After the War*, 167.

“enemies of the people,” as emphasizing the heroism and honorable contributions of the men in question remained the order of the day.

Sources

This study is based predominantly on archival documents held in former central Soviet repositories in Moscow, namely the State Archive of the Russian Federation (*Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi federatsii*, GARF), the Russian State Archive of Contemporary History (*Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii*, RGANI), the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (*Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii*, RGASPI), and the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (*Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i isskustva*, RGALI). The most frequently referenced collection from GARF is that of the USSR General Procuracy, which contains individual rehabilitation case files, internal communications between various branches of the judiciary, and the Procuracy's close interactions with the Central Committee and specific Party leaders. Also of great value are the *fondy* of the USSR Council of Ministers and Supreme Soviet, which preserve letters from applicants for rehabilitation, and the Council of Ministers' Housing Directorate, which fielded requests from former elites for property restitution over the course of the 1950s.

The papers of the CPSU, bifurcated between RGASPI and RGANI, constitute another major source-base for the dissertation. The records of the Central Committee Presidium (prior to 1952 the Politburo) and the Party Control Committee found at RGANI both comprise numerous deliberations relating to legal and political rehabilitation, and RGASPI boasts an entire fond of accounts written by survivors of the “lawlessness” of the 1930s-1950s in addition to the archives of numerous Old

Bolsheviks.⁶⁰ RGALI proved fruitful for its collection of personal papers from authors who were both the subjects and recipients of rehabilitation appeals.

These materials, most of which were inaccessible to scholars until relatively recently, are supplemented by published documentary collections, including the indispensable series *Reabilitatsiia: kak eto bylo (Rehabilitation: As It Happened)*, which mines the holdings of the Archive of the President of the Russian Federation, an institution that remains inaccessible to researchers. Beyond officially generated sources and petitions to the authorities, this thesis turns to memoirs, diaries, and other ego documents written by functionaries from the judiciary and affiliated government bodies, as well as beneficiaries of rehabilitation. Combined, they allow one to access the multifarious objectives and outcomes that made posthumous rehabilitation one of the most contentious and consequential innovations of the decade following Stalin's demise.

Chapter Outline

The dissertation consists of five interconnected, thematically arranged chapters. Chapter One approaches the tentative first months and years of posthumous rehabilitation through the prism of patronage networks. The Great Terror often targeted individuals according to their personal and professional affiliations, and when Stalin's heirs turned on one of their own in a coordinated attack on Beria it signaled an opportunity for vindication to those who had clashed with the secret police chief and his circle in the past. When the official mechanisms for initiating rehabilitation proved unresponsive or insufficiently expeditious, survivors of the Transcaucasian Party elite reached out in

⁶⁰ Recently some components of both the Politburo/Presidium *fond* as well as that of the Party Control Committee have been transferred from RGANI to RGASPI; for the purposes of this study, references to files will be maintained as they appeared in RGANI's collection.

considerable numbers to Anastas Mikoian – the last remaining member of the Kremlin’s “Caucasian clique” – to secure relief. In soliciting the intervention of Mikoian and other erstwhile patrons still within the halls of power, rehabilitation seekers counted on the continued viability of relationships that had been quiescent for the better part of two decades; the traction that their cases gained stands as a testament to the deeply personalized nature of the early rehabilitation process.

Building upon the findings from the previous section, Chapter Two applies a microhistorical approach to the remarkable case of one of Mikoian’s ill-fated acquaintances, the former Georgian Party Secretary Levan Davydovich Gogoberidze. Having leveraged their family’s history with Mikoian, Gogoberidze’s sister, daughter, and wife were able to directly influence the course of his rehabilitation, and also induce the Procuracy to open a wide-ranging investigation into his possible whereabouts. Despite the authorities’ repeated – and remarkable, for the time – assurances that Levan Davydovich had been executed in March 1937, the remaining Gogoberidzes were steadfast in their conviction that he was alive in one of the “distant camps” thanks to both the Stalin-era assertion that those sentenced to death had received “ten years without the right of correspondence,” and a steady stream of reported sightings at various Gulag outposts that made their way to the family through the pipeline of recent returnees from “the zone.” Though these rumors proved to be false, the lengths to which the Procuracy was willing to go in order to verify them speak to the premium that the post-Stalin authorities placed on uncovering what actually became of repressed Party luminaries in light of the extremes of deception that marked the legacy of state violence they inherited.

Chapter Three takes as its subject the central role that the various branches of the judiciary – particularly the Procuracy – played in establishing the procedure of rehabilitation, a critical topic largely overlooked by existing works. Although the Central Committee reserved the prerogative to dictate which individuals were eligible for consideration, the substantive legal work of rehabilitation, which consisted of extensive reviews of case files and archival documents, interviews with witnesses, and devising coherent narratives out of contradictory testimony – much of it extracted under duress – fell to the Procuracy’s investigators, and was made binding through rulings of the USSR Supreme Court’s subsidiary collegiums and plenums. The judiciary also bore partial responsibility – in consultation with the organs of state security – for determining the type and amount of information that would be provided to concerned citizens inquiring after their disappeared relatives; the inability of these state institutions to effectively coordinate the fictitious answers they routinely supplied engendered a serious credibility gap among the populace. The limited mandate under which the Soviet judiciary operated at this time obliged it to thoroughly dismantle certain Stalin-era fabrications to justify the exoneration of thousands of Bolshevik stalwarts while it diligently maintained other canards in the interest of concealing the Terror’s true toll and defending the Party line from the contagion of Oppositionism.

The currents surrounding posthumous rehabilitation, the judiciary’s increased clout under Khrushchev, and the Party’s determination to reassert control over the organs of state security coalesced around a series of trials against the remnants of Beria’s secret police clan in Tbilisi, Moscow, and Baku between the autumn of 1955 and the spring of 1956. These hearings are the focus of the fourth chapter. The tribunals held in the

Georgian and Azerbaijani capital cities were widely publicized spectacles, while the one in Moscow was held *in camera*; at each trial, posthumously rehabilitated individuals – and particularly their suffering while in custody – were prominently invoked to exemplify the former top-ranking secret policemen’s lawlessness and justify the death sentences that were handed down against the majority of the fourteen accused. Though the proceedings were in many respects reminiscent of the Terror’s show trials – insofar as the guilty verdicts were predetermined – rather than opening a new spate of bloodletting, they marked the last instance of political violence being used as a means of eliminating internal rivals; from that point on Khrushchev and his cohort effectively wielded accusations of complicity in past crimes against their adversaries, but spared the lives of those who found themselves on the losing side of power struggles.

Having established the ways in which the Soviet government instrumentalized the life stories of the posthumously rehabilitated to mediate the fraught aftermath of Stalin’s demise, the fifth and final chapter considers what survivors of the exonerated sought to gain – in material terms – through their participation in the rehabilitation process. Many figures first discussed in the opening chapter reappear here, as they mobilized patronage ties to secure concessions from the state in the form of improved housing, restored property, financial assistance, and social privileges; in many instances those linked to the anti-Berria campaign were able to garner some of the earliest and most generous benefits. The chapter traces the evolution of restitution to rehabilitees’ families from its largely piecemeal beginnings to a bureaucratized procedure wherein the state’s obligations before the rehabilitated were codified, though inconsistently met. Appeals from families whose homes and belongings were seized during the Terror reveal an enduring sense of

entitlement that withstood decades of stigmatization directed against “family members of enemies of the people,” and proprietary feelings toward specific places and objects that seemingly ran counter to the ethos of state or collective ownership espoused in the early Soviet Union. This emphasis on reclaiming dwellings, belongings, and other trappings of privilege indicates the centrality of material possessions to notions of elite identity that relatives of the posthumously rehabilitated sought to recapture once they were restored their civil rights.

Several Old Bolshevik families – including the Gogoberidzes, Naneishvili-Kosarevs, and Orakhelashvilis, among others – appear with some regularity across the dissertation. This is a reflection first and foremost of their prominent representation in the source base, but it is also intended to provide through lines between the chapters and some indication of how specific families experienced the various aspects of rehabilitation over the course of the decade-plus following Stalin’s death, a perspective that is largely absent from existing studies. By tracing certain individuals and their extended circles from their pre-Revolutionary activities to the circumstances of their arrests and executions, and then continuing through the process of posthumous rehabilitation and the restoration of some semblance of their families’ former lives, the dissertation attempts to provide a more holistic image of posthumous rehabilitees and their families, and situates itself within a narrative continuity that underscores the personal factors at play in some of the most sensitive political decisions taken in the post-Stalin Soviet Union.

Chapter One – Personal Patronage and the Genesis of Posthumous Rehabilitation

...Anastas Ivanovich stood up so suddenly that we were all stupefied (you can't come up with another verb). And here are his words – approximately, of course, but with a great guarantee for accuracy: – Yes, we indeed dragged out rehabilitation for many years, rather than acknowledging our mistake once and rehabilitating everyone immediately. Why did we not do this? I say “we,” bearing myself in mind personally: more than once I stood in for the General Secretary when he was away... Why did we not do this? Who were we afraid of? You think that we were afraid of each other? No! You can believe me. We were so afraid of Him that his successors could not fear one another after the fear of Him... So why did we enact “acts of rehabilitation,” rather than exonerate everyone immediately? Why did we arrange the façade of court proceedings for acquittals? Because if we had proceeded otherwise, if we had proceeded according to our conscience, our people would ultimately have been convinced that we were scoundrels! I remember that Anastas Ivanovich hesitated for a moment. Then he concluded: – Scoundrels! Which in actuality is what we were!⁶¹

In late December 1953 Antonina Aleksandrovna Kalmykova wrote to Nikita Khrushchev from the Siberian city of Kansk, in southern Krasnoïarsk *krai*. Prior to his arrest in November 1938, Kalmykova's husband, Betal Edykovich Kalmykov, had served as the First Secretary of the Kabardino-Balkar Party *obkom* for much of the 1930s, and the announcement of Minister of Internal Affairs Lavrentii Pavlovich Beria's arrest in June 1953 and execution that December over the airwaves and in the Soviet press represented for Kalmykova an opportunity to free herself from exile and restore her family's good name. In her petition, Kalmykova insisted that both she and her husband

⁶¹ Natal'ia Mostovenko, *Dnevnik optimistiki v inter'ere utrat: odin god* (Moskva: “Magisterium,” 1995), 169-170. Mostovenko, who was on the staff of the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, witnessed this confession on Mikoian's part at a gathering in 1972 to mark the first anniversary of the death of Lev Stepanovich Shaumian, the encyclopedia's former editor, a strong advocate on behalf of the rehabilitated, and one of Mikoian's closest friends. In a later diary entry, Mostovenko second guessed herself over whether Mikoian actually said “scoundrels” or “bastards”; Mikoian's son, Sergo – himself a historian – suggested that in such a situation his father most likely would have said “bastards.” See S. A. Mikoian, “Aleksi Snegov v borbe za ‘destalinizatsiiu,’” *Voprosy istorii* 4 (2006): 83.

were victims of “the despotism and lawlessness Beria perpetrated.”⁶² Kalmykova’s missive narrated the *via dolorosa* that she had tread since Betal’s repression: subjected to repeated, brutal interrogations designed to force her to incriminate her husband and his close friend Grigorii “Sergo” Konstantinovich Ordzhonikidze, she was driven to the brink of suicide, then spent ten years confined to a labor camp and a further five in exile in Krasnoiarsk.⁶³ Kalmykova requested that Khrushchev clear the way for her to be reunited with her last living relative, her daughter, and that the charges against her and Kalmykov be reexamined in light of Beria’s recent unmasking. Appended to her appeal was an attestation from the director and Party committee chairman of the hydrolysis plant where Kalmykova had been employed for the past three and a half years noting that she had proven herself to be “hardworking,” and “honestly and diligently applie[d] herself to her work.”⁶⁴ With this inclusion Kalmykova seemingly attempted to signal though assiduous labor her continued devotion to building socialism despite the misfortunes that had befallen her – and her worthiness of absolution.

Neither Kalmykova’s family saga nor her contributions to the Soviet project attracted Khrushchev’s notice, and her letter was appended to the growing file on Beria’s case without any sign that entreaties within had been taken up for consideration. Yet her pleas did not ultimately go unanswered: at the end of the following April, Anastas Ivanovich Mikoian, the great survivor of Soviet politics, forwarded an identical copy of Kalmykova’s letter – sans the endorsement from her employers – as well as a second note from her daughter and brother-in-law to the rest of the Central Committee, suggesting

⁶² Rossiiskoi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii (RGANI) fond 5, opis’ 30, delo 78, list 1.

⁶³ RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 78, ll. 1-3

⁶⁴ RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 78, l. 5.

that the matter warranted further attention.⁶⁵ It was no coincidence that the Kamykovs directed their supplications to Mikoian after failing to gain traction with Khrushchev, as Mikoian and Betal Kalmykov had served together in the North Caucasus, and were both extremely close to Ordzhonikidze. That Kalmykova's overtures found purchase with Mikoian after Khrushchev was left unpersuaded underscores the centrality of patron-client and kinship relationships to the functioning of Soviet rule. Over the course of his decades-long political career Mikoian proved himself to be particularly adept at navigating this aspect of the system by mobilizing practices and affinities that were forged in the crucible of revolutionary conspiracy on the borderlands of the Russian Empire.⁶⁶

Within the Kremlin of the mid-1950s and 1960s Mikoian came to represent the interests of an array of Old Bolsheviks with whom he served in Transcaucasia (today's Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan) in the pre-Revolutionary and Civil War-era Communist underground, many of whom began their radical careers under Sergo Ordzhonikidze's tutelage. As historian Erik Scott has shown in his study of the Georgian diaspora within Russia and the Soviet Union, Communists who traced their political

⁶⁵ Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF) f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1100, ll. 90-95. Mikoian is perhaps most noted for being the only member of the Soviet leadership to have served "from Il'ich to Il'ich" – meaning Lenin to Brezhnev – without falling into disgrace or suffering arrest, though he came close to both on several occasions. Mikoian combined amiability – Stalin described him in a 1927 letter to Molotov and Bukharin as "a duckling in politics, a capable duckling, but a duckling nevertheless" – with a shrewd instinct for self-preservation. See I. V. Stalin, "Pis'mo V. M. Molotovu i N. I. Bukharinu, 27 iunია 1927 goda," available at https://c21ch.newcastle.edu.au/stalin/t17/t17_165.htm; Michael Ellman, "The Road from Il'ich to Il'ich: The Life and Times of Anastas Ivanovich Mikoian," *Slavic Review* 60, 1 (Spring 2001): 140-150.

⁶⁶ On late Imperial precedents for Soviet-era patronage practices, see Daniel T. Orlovsky, "Political Clientelism in Russia: the Historical Perspective" in T.H. Rigby and Bohdan Harasymiw, eds., *Leadership Selection and Patron-Client Relations in the USSR and Yugoslavia* (London: George Allen & Unwin: 1983), 174-199. A classic treatment of patronage at the highest levels of early Soviet politics is T.H. Rigby, "Was Stalin a Disloyal Patron?," *Soviet Studies*, 38, 3 (July 1986): 311-324. On present-day clientelism in the former Soviet Union, see Henry E. Hale, *Patronal Politics: Eurasian Regime Dynamics in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

origins to this milieu emerged with a shared, engrained set of values: “the risk of arrest meant that loyalty was prized and the danger of betrayal always present. For these reasons, ideological commitment was wedded to a symbolic – and sometimes genetic – sense of fraternity among the predominantly male socialists of the Caucasus, a region where idealized male friendship was celebrated in poetry and practices of adoptive kinship were deep-rooted.”⁶⁷ Though Scott emphasizes the particularly Georgian character of these circles, the multiethnic background of those who sought help from Mikoian suggests that shared service in the Communist underground was an equally strong locus of solidarity. Due in part to the particularly strong ties that existed among Transcaucasian Bolsheviks, “the purges hit this community with exceptional force,” as NKVD investigators recast longstanding interpersonal bonds as evidence of counterrevolutionary conspiracies, thereby consuming almost an entire generation of Party faithful.⁶⁸ However, following the deposal of Beria – himself a product of Ordzhonikidze’s extended network – the surviving relatives of Mikoian’s disappeared clients began to flood his office at the Council of Ministers (*Sovmin*) with requests for aid; their letters, along with Mikoian’s reactions, are preserved in his personal files.

Unaware that their spouses, parents, and siblings had been summarily executed, petitioners sought information about their possible whereabouts, demanded their legal exoneration, and tried to extract material concessions, thereby reestablishing patronage relationships that had lain dormant for nearly two decades. Rather than ignoring these supplications, which arrived in the midst of major upheavals at the top of the Soviet party-state, Mikoian upheld his commitments to his repressed comrades and their

⁶⁷ Erik R Scott, *Familiar Strangers: The Georgian Diaspora and the Evolution of Soviet Empire* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 38.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 80.

relations, taking an active part in securing their exculpation. Thus, in many of its earliest instances the posthumous rehabilitation of former Soviet elites was fostered largely by personalistic, patron-client and kinship relationships that could be traced back to the earliest days of Soviet power.

Scholars have long acknowledged the important place of patronage ties in the establishment, consolidation, and maintenance of Soviet power across the former Russian Empire, though the issue of how the resulting networks manifested themselves beyond political maneuvers and in daily life has only been incorporated into the research agenda since the opening of the former Soviet archives.⁶⁹ As Sheila Fitzpatrick observes, “[p]atronage relations were ubiquitous among the Soviet elite,” to the point that “nobody within the elites [...] could live in a patronage-free environment.”⁷⁰ As a prototypical patron Ordzhonikidze “expected dedication, results, and loyalty [from clients]. But he also offered protection, intervening energetically on behalf of ‘his people’ when they got into trouble with the party, the secret police, or other control agencies”; by that same turn,

⁶⁹ For examples of classic, politically-oriented treatments of patron-client relationships, see T.H. Rigby, *Political Elites in the USSR: Central Leaders and Local Cadres from Lenin to Gorbachev* (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1990), and John. H. Miller, “Putting Clients in Place: the Role of Patronage in Cooption into the Soviet Leadership,” in *Political Leadership in the Soviet Union*, ed. Archie Brown (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 54-95. The most extreme version of this narrative, which directly likens regional Party heads to Muscovite boyars, can be found in J. Arch Getty, *Practicing Stalinism: Bolsheviks, Boyars, and the Persistence of Tradition* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013). Getty’s bold premise pays dividends in the form of insights into how clan-based structures provided a persistent means of projecting power in Russia and the Soviet Union, but is too quick to dismiss the typological and behavioral distinctions between a hereditary nobility that had been consolidating and contesting for influence over the course of generations and groups of upstart revolutionaries, most of whom were dead within twenty years of their having seized power.

⁷⁰ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Tear Off the Masks!: Identity and Imposture in Twentieth-Century Russia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 182-183.

members of Ordzhonikidze's network were expected to alert him if there was trouble bound his way from the periphery, forming "mutual-protection circles."⁷¹

Beyond the exchange of political favors and support, patronage in the early Soviet Union primarily expressed itself as a function of the state's status as "the monopoly distributor in a context of shortages of all goods and services. State monopoly meant that *allocation* was a major function of Soviet bureaucracy. Shortages meant that access was a matter of priority and privilege [...] The ultimate allocational decisions were made by bureaucrats – but on personalistic, not bureaucratic-legal reasons."⁷² This access to and preferential distribution of goods and services that were in short supply – which, for the families of purged notables included justice (broadly understood), housing, and material possessions – proved to be one of the most enduring aspects of patronage as practiced by Mikoian into the 1950s and 1960s.⁷³

Another one of "the normal prerogative[s] of power" wielded by Soviet patrons that Fitzpatrick discusses was the ability "to intervene to protect subordinates, associates, and clients who fell into the hands of the NKVD."⁷⁴ However, according to Mikoian's memoir, this perquisite was abrogated in the lead up to the Great Terror by a "special Politburo decision forbidding Politburo members from interfering with the work of the

⁷¹ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 39-40. On petitioners' rhetorical strategies in the 1930s, see Fitzpatrick's seminal "Suplicants and Citizens" in *Tear Off the Masks*, Chapter 9.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 114.

⁷³ There are two key factors, for the purposes of this chapter, for distinguishing between patronage and more common appeals to authorities for aid. In order for an appeal to reflect a patron-client relationship, it must be predicated on a preexisting relationship between the recipient and the author's family, usually one based on shared service, and should not be addressed to the official primarily in his official capacity. That is, Mikoian's clients wrote to him not specifically because he was Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers, and not because they needed something from that body, but because he had been close with their relatives in the past, and they trusted him to honor that established bond.

⁷⁴ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *On Stalin's Team: The Years of Living Dangerously in Soviet Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 136.

NKVD.”⁷⁵ This marked, in Fitzpatrick’s words, “a highly significant (albeit temporary) change in the informal rules of the game” in which those in the upper echelons of Soviet power were engaged.⁷⁶ It also engendered a serious dilemma for exponents of patronage like Mikoian: if patrons were incapable of safeguarding their clients from unjust execution, what loyalty, if any, did they owe the latter’s survivors? Furthermore, if a senior patron, such as Ordzhonikidze, was no longer on the scene was it incumbent upon those with whom he had served in the past, such as Mikoian, to see to the needs of his erstwhile clients? Materials from Mikoian and other leaders’ personal archives suggest that despite the disruptions and upheavals of state-sponsored terror, which was disproportionately aimed at kinship groups, patronage relationships among old Party stalwarts proved to be surprisingly resilient and inheritable in the years following Stalin’s death.⁷⁷ However, those who benefitted from these arrangements could not and did not simply take it for granted that after a decade and a half in disgrace they would be able to pick up affairs where they had left off in 1937 or 1938; for most, the decision to seek out Mikoian’s intercession was a product of the party-state’s perceived unresponsiveness to their pressing concerns.

The most cited studies of Gulag returnees have tended to depict interactions between survivors and the Soviet state as strictly adversarial, and therefore minimize the contacts between privileged survivors and figures still within the Kremlin.⁷⁸ This trend has served to obscure the fact that rehabilitation policy in the period immediately

⁷⁵ Anastas Ivanovich Mikoian, *Tak bylo: razmyshleniia o minuvshem* (Moskva: Vagrius, 1999), 583.

⁷⁶ Fitzpatrick, *On Stalin’s Team*, 270.

⁷⁷ On kinship groups as specific targets of the Terror, see Golfo Alexopoulos, “Stalin and the Politics of Kinship: Practices of Collective Punishment, 1920s-1940s,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 50, 1 (2008): 107-108.

⁷⁸ Adler notes in passing that Mikoian helped arrange for treatment of Elena Bonner’s wartime eye injury, but provides no explanation for why he took a particular interest in her. See Adler, *The Gulag Survivor*, 212. The Mikoian-Alikhanov-Bonner connection is discussed later in this chapter.

following Stalin's death was a highly hierarchical process that required close cooperation between the families of the wrongfully repressed and representatives of the party-state.⁷⁹ In her recent work on the year 1956 in Soviet Russia, Kathleen Smith observes that "the simplest and fastest way to begin the rehabilitation process was to rely on direct ties to very high officials," and despite the disruptions of state terror and the infusion of new cadres into the bureaucracy, "ties of kinship, histories of patronage, and traces of friendship remained to link prisoners and rulers."⁸⁰ The controversy over who within the Soviet government was responsible for initiating and pursuing rehabilitations was litigated with particular vigor in the memoirs of the leaders involved and has subsequently shaped researchers' perspectives.

In taking credit for raising the issue of investigations against supposed "enemies of the people," Nikita Khrushchev was quick to denounce Kliment Efimovich Voroshilov, Lazar Moiseevich Kaganovich, and Georgii Maksimilianovich Malenkov for their foot-dragging. Regarding Mikoian, however, Khrushchev was decidedly circumspect: "I can't remember specifically what position [Mikoian] took. As I recall, [Mikoian] didn't pursue an active policy, but he didn't try to hold back the process of exposing injustice."⁸¹ Evidently stung by these allegations, Mikoian responded in his own autobiography that in actuality it was he who had proposed forming a commission to investigate Stalin-era political cases, "and there is no way that Nikita Sergeevich could

⁷⁹ Adler's latest monograph, which is explicitly presented as a response to some critiques of her earlier book, is focused on the question of individual returnees' belief in Communism and various aspects of the Soviet system, rather than their reliance on the state for official vindication and redress. See Adler, *Keeping Faith with the Party*.

⁸⁰ Smith, *Moscow 1956*, 85.

⁸¹ Sergei Khrushchev, ed., *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev, Volume 2: Reformer [1945-1964]*, trans. George Shriver and Stephen Shenfield (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 203.

have forgotten this.”⁸² Mikoian also pointed to the large number of families that sought his help following Stalin’s death, and proudly claimed that of the dossiers he forwarded to USSR Procurator General Roman Andreevich Rudenko, “there was not a single occasion in which a case I sent was denied rehabilitation.”⁸³ Although it was not possible to review every letter that Mikoian forwarded to the Procuracy for the purposes of this study – as many were not yet available to researchers – those consulted appear to bear out this track record, as all of the cases Mikoian gave his imprimatur were eventually reviewed and the charges dismissed.⁸⁴

Stephen Cohen is among the few authors to acknowledge Mikoian’s interventions “on behalf of many victims, sometimes on his own initiative,” basing this impression off of individuals’ reminiscences.⁸⁵ However, Cohen attributes this engagement to Mikoian’s supposed “need for absolution” in light of his own involvement in the purges, and, embracing Khrushchev’s account of the genesis of rehabilitation, contends that regardless of Mikoian’s “degree of repentance, [he] could have done little had Khrushchev not played his much larger role.”⁸⁶ The thesis that rehabilitation constituted an act of contrition is difficult to substantiate – or, for that matter, dismiss – beyond the speculations of some of Mikoian’s contemporaries, but the documentary record from

⁸² Mikoian, *Tak bylo*, 589.

⁸³ Ibid., 589-590. For an overview of Mikoian’s career, see M. Iu. Pavlov, *Anastas Mikoian: Politicheskii portret na fone sovetskoi epokhi* (Moskva: Mezhdunarodnaia otnosheniia, 2010).

⁸⁴ It bears mentioning that Mikoian did not automatically endorse every rehabilitation request he received. For example, the wife of purged secret policeman Lev Nikolaevich Bel’skii wrote an impassioned note to Mikoian saying that she “preserved [his] shining image in [her] heart,” and that he was her “last hope”; although Mikoian was recorded as having met with her, there is no indication that he made any recommendation to the Procuracy, and in keeping with the prevailing hostility of the time to former NKVD agents Bel’skii was not vindicated. See GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1099, l. 76.

⁸⁵ Cohen, *The Victims Return*, 91.

⁸⁶ Ibid. Cohen’s preceding claim, that there is “no evidence that any of the others – Molotov, Kaganovich, Voroshilov, or Malenkov – took any initiatives to help survivors after Stalin’s death,” is also not borne out by archival sources, which show that both Voroshilov and Malenkov supported various individuals’ rehabilitations. See idem, 90.

recently opened former Soviet repositories suggest that this understanding merits serious complication. There is no indication that Mikoian waited for Khrushchev's say-so before involving himself in rehabilitations, as most of the letters he received arrived in the immediate aftermath of Beria's execution in December 1953, well before Khrushchev consolidated power.

Though archival materials cannot attest directly to Mikoian's motivations, the shared profile of the vast majority of "his people," the grounds on which they based their appeals, and the diligence Mikoian showed in taking care of them all strongly suggest that while advocating for posthumous rehabilitation may indeed have helped to salve his guilty conscience, his responses were largely conditioned by practices of kinship that had seen him through his entire revolutionary and political career. Through this prism, Mikoian's actions can be framed as a way of fulfilling his obligation to protect his clients and ensure their material well-being, something he was prevented from doing by the extraordinary circumstances of the 1930s and early 1940s. For their own part, it was incumbent upon the surviving relatives of the repressed to remind him of why they were owed his loyalty, and what the stakes were should he fail to honor their requests. The affective style on display in both letters to Mikoian and, to a certain extent, in his responses is all the more pronounced when compared with the type of patronage practiced by Kliment Voroshilov, whose correspondence reflects a far more hierarchical streak.

Miriam Dobson, who has worked with Mikoian and other leaders' correspondence on rehabilitation – including Kalmykova's letter – is primarily concerned with "ordinary" Soviet citizens, and therefore does not delve deeply into appeals by

former elites.⁸⁷ Dobson works off the assumption that individuals' onetime status afforded them special access to the halls of power without noting the fact that for the better part of twenty years they had been part of one of the most stigmatized groups in the USSR, and therefore could not count on official intervention on their behalf. In what she terms the "art of petitioning," Dobson perceives direct connections between imagery evoked in prisoners' appeals and tropes from early Soviet heroic narratives; however, by emphasizing literary form over intended function, she elides the primary impetus of the petitions, which was to persuade recipients of the rectitude of the appellant's cause and thereby secure their exoneration. This chapter diverges from Dobson's approach by foregrounding preexisting interpersonal and experiential ties between petitioners and addressees, which played a crucial part in dictating the grounds upon which petitioners based their claims, and the responsiveness of the parties they entrusted to shepherd their cases.

Defining Mikoian's Clients

Historians have pointed to the April 1953 announcement of the dismissal of the case against the accused "doctor-saboteurs" as the official signal that provoked a flood of rehabilitation appeals in mid-1953, but for those who turned to Mikoian the deposal of Beria that June proved to be far more portentous. The revelation that Beria had been a clandestine "enemy of the people" for the duration of his career as state security chief in Transcaucasia, then as the region's Party boss, and finally as head of the Union-wide secret police, in Dobson's words "gave rise to a variety of confused and sometimes passionate reactions," and prompted scores of those who attributed their falls from grace

⁸⁷ Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer*, Chapter 2.

to Beria's malign influence to reemerge.⁸⁸ As there was considerable overlap between this cohort and Mikoian's patronage network, within months of the announcement of Beria's sentence Mikoian's office had become a veritable clearinghouse for aggrieved families seeking information about and exculpation of their missing relatives.

Who exactly, then, were "Mikoian's people?" The vast majority of appellants who sought his intervention in the first post-Stalin years could trace their connections to Mikoian through the fight to establish Soviet power in the restive Caucasus during the Civil War and in the years immediately following. Most were themselves either Armenian (like Mikoian) or Georgian, though there were also ethnic Slavs and Jews among them. The oil boomtown of Baku was a particularly important locus for this cohort, both because of its pre-Revolutionary admixture of workers from various backgrounds that made it a fertile breeding ground for Communist agitation and its storied history during the Civil War. The heroism of the martyred 26 Commissars who led the Baku Commune, as well as of the Bolsheviks who continued their struggle underground after the Commune's fall, was among the most potent of the Soviet state's founding myths, and out of the Baku cauldron emerged many of the USSR's future leaders, including Ordzhonikidze, Sergei Mironovich Kirov, and Mikoian.⁸⁹

Mikoian and Ordzhonikidze, along with Stalin, comprised the notorious "Caucasian Clique" within the Kremlin during the 1920s and 1930s, and befitting their status – and in keeping with Union-wide practice – they seeded the provinces with their

⁸⁸ Ibid., 34.

⁸⁹ The canonical account of the Baku Commune is Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Baku Commune, 1917–1918: Class and Nationality in the Russian Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972). On the wide-ranging influence of the Transcaucasian network, see Gerald M. Easter, *Reconstructing the State: Personal Networks and Elite Identity in Soviet Russia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 82–88.

clients.⁹⁰ Matters began to come to a head, however, when Beria and his affiliates supplanted several of Ordzhonikidze's trusted friends in the Transcaucasian Party *apparatus*; many from the former group took refuge in Moscow in order to be closer to their patron.⁹¹ From the capital, the "old guard that had allied itself with Ordzhonikidze" grumbled and intrigued over Beria's supposed service in a pan-Turkic militia during the Civil War: "Distinguished Caucasian Bolsheviks who traveled in top Kremlin circles did not have nice things to say about Beria and particularly enjoyed bringing up his ties with Musavat intelligence."⁹² Ordzhonikidze's suicide in February 1937, possibly prompted by his older brother Papuliia's arrest, stripped his clients of their chief advocate within the Politburo, and before long those with close ties to him – including many other relatives – were rounded up for execution or long imprisonment; those left behind frequently held Beria directly responsible for what they viewed as reprisals against Ordzhonikidze's "clan."⁹³ Mikoian remained a voice for Caucasian Old Bolsheviks at the

⁹⁰ Mikoian was the junior-most member of the Kremlin's Transcaucasian *troika* by nearly a decade – Ordzhonikidze was nine years his senior – and therefore the last to reach the heights of full Politburo membership, in 1935. Though this decreased his influence in the center for most of the 1930s, it also meant that he spent more time "in the trenches" with the Party workers – most of whom were his contemporaries – on whose behalf he would write in the 1950s. My thanks to Erik Scott for the crucial observation on the age differential within the Caucasian Clique.

⁹¹ Beria had also been under Ordzhonikidze's protection for much of the 1920s and into the early 30s; on their relationship, see Oleg V. Khlevniuk, *In Stalin's Shadow: The Career of "Sergo" Ordzhonikidze*, ed. Donald J. Raleigh with Kathy S. Transchel, trans. David J. Nordlander (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1993), 106; and Amy Knight, *Beria: Stalin's First Lieutenant* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 9-10, 37. In prison letters to Malenkov and Khrushchev from July 1953, V. N. Merkulov, one of Beria's closest adjutants, who eventually shared his fate, repeatedly maintained that Ordzhonikidze had personally introduced Beria to Stalin, likely in 1930 or 1931 while they were resting in Borzhomi or Kislovodsk. See V.N. Khaustov, ed., *Delo Beriia: prigovor obzhalovaniiu ne podlezhit* (Moskva: Mezhdunarodnyi fond "Demokratiia," 2012), 128, 136.

⁹² Oleg V. Khlevniuk, *Master of the House: Stalin and His Inner Circle*, trans. Nora Seligman Favorov (New Haven, CT and Stanford, CA: Yale University Press and Hoover Institution Press, 2009), 225. The pan-Turkic and pan-Islamic Musavat was one of the leading parties in the the independent Azerbaijan Democratic Republic between 1918 and 1920. Beria complained about this rumormongering in a letter to Ordzhonikidze from 1933; see A. V. Kvashonkin, et al, eds., *Sovetskoe rukovodstvo. Peregovory. 1928-1941 gg.* (Moskva: ROSSPEN, 1999), 204.

⁹³ Khlevniuk, *In Stalin's Shadow*, 105-106. Although Beria's role as a mastermind of the Terror was severely overstated during the Khrushchev years, archival evidence conclusively ties him to the arrests of

top of the Party, but as discussed above his ability to guarantee individuals' personal security was compromised by external constraints as state repression against leading cadres began to ramp up.

It bears mentioning that in at least two instances during the 1930s Mikoian attempted to exert his influence to come to the aid of those he would later help achieve rehabilitation, but to little apparent effect.⁹⁴ In 1937 Mikoian was dispatched to Armenia, along with Malenkov, to oversee the purge of the local Party *apparat* and intelligentsia. One of his tasks while there was to sign off on a list of individuals marked for arrest that the Armenian NKVD had prepared; on it he noticed the name of one of his oldest comrades from the Party's pre-Revolutionary illegal days, Daniil (Danush) Aleksandrovich Shaverdian, which he struck off the list. Despite Mikoian's efforts, Shaverdian was still taken into custody, and ultimately died in a labor camp.⁹⁵ In a move that could have proven immensely costly for Mikoian, he also extended an extraordinary offer of help to the family of Comintern official Gevork Sarkisovich Alikhanov, the

many of the figures discussed in this and subsequent chapters. In a July 1937 memorandum on counterrevolutionary groups in Georgia addressed to "Dear Koba!" – one of Stalin's many sobriquets – Beria implicated Orakhelashvili, Eliava, Matikashvili, Shaverdian, and much of Azerbaijan's elite in various conspiracies. Of his efforts to extract a confession from Orakhelashvili, Beria wrote: "This bastard and traitor Mamiia Orakhelashvili is still staying silent. We're afraid to really work him over (*krejko brat' ego v rabotu*), as during every interrogation he passes out and has to be injected with camphor. There's no doubt that he'll talk soon." See V. N. Khaustov, V. P. Naumov, and N. S. Plotnikova, eds., *Lubianka: Stalin i glavnoe upravlenie gosbezopasnosti NKVD, 1937-1938* (Moskva: Mezhdunarodnyi fond "Demokratiia," 2004), 252-255.

⁹⁴ Mikoian was not alone in such efforts. As Cynthia Hooper notes, Sergo Ordzhonikidze's former secretary denounced his onetime boss' widow to Stalin in 1937 for fielding phone calls from the wives of "enemies of the people" with requests to be passed on to Ezhov; see Cynthia Hooper, "Terror of Intimacy: Family Politics in the 1930s Soviet Union," in *Everyday Life in Early Soviet Russia*, eds. Christina Kiaer and Eric Naiman (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 72-73.

⁹⁵ David Satter, *It Was a Long Time Ago, and It Never Happened Anyway: Russia and the Communist Past* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 153. Shaverdian's son, Sergei, wrote to Mikoian for help with his parents' rehabilitation in April 1954, and eventually went on to be a noted diplomat; see GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1101, l. 103.

stepfather of Elena Bonner.⁹⁶ As Bonner described in her memoir, while imprisoned at the Akhmolinsk Camp for Wives of Traitors to the Motherland – known as *ALZHIR* – her mother, Ruf’, instructed her to pass on a note requesting assistance from Mikoian in either 1939 or 1940. Bonner took the note in person to Mikoian’s dacha outside Moscow, where she spoke first with his wife, who she recalled being “very kind to me, perhaps excessively so.”⁹⁷ She was then received by Mikoian himself, who admitted that it was beyond his power to rescue Alikhanov, but proposed that Elena and her younger brother come to live with his family; insulted by the suggestion, Bonner “replied very harshly, almost rudely,” and did not see Mikoian again until after Stalin’s death.⁹⁸

Even before Beria’s formal conviction Mikoian mined his own personal history as a Party fighter in the Caucasus to discredit the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) chief, and in doing so he affirmed his connections to those who had fallen into disrepute and physical destruction. Though Mikoian had not been an enthusiastic supporter of Khrushchev and his supporters’ plot to depose Beria, and was hesitant to swiftly consign another member of the Party’s inner circle to the firing squad, once Beria’s arrest had been carried out Mikoian duly aligned himself with the winning faction.⁹⁹ On the evening of July 3, 1953 – little more than a week after Beria had been taken into custody – at the Central Committee Plenum convened to legitimize the palace coup, Mikoian took to the

⁹⁶ On Alikhanov’s career and downfall, see William Chase, “Scapegoating One’s Comrades in the USSR, 1934-1937,” in *The Anatomy of Terror: Political Violence under Stalin*, ed. James Harris (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 263-281.

⁹⁷ Elena Bonner, *Mothers and Daughters*, trans. Antonina W. Bouis (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 323.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 323-324. Both Ruf’ and Elena Bonner contacted Mikoian repeatedly over the course of 1954 and 1955 seeking help in housing, employment, and financial matters; see GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1099, ll. 67-69; GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1099, ll. 40, 68-69.

⁹⁹ Mikoian was leery of disposing of a still “useful” member of the “team” so close on the heels of Stalin’s death, and was led to believe that Beria would be transferred from the MVD to head up oil production. See Fitzpatrick, *On Stalin’s Team*, 233-235.

floor to address Beria's claim that during the Civil War in Baku he had infiltrated Musavat counter-intelligence as a double agent on behalf of the Party. Mikoian soundly dismissed this notion, as he insisted that he had been one of the only Party officials in the city empowered to dispatch individuals on such missions. When questioned by Malenkov as to who else possessed this authority, Mikoian mentioned two of his erstwhile comrades, "Sarkis" and "Viktor," referring to Sarkis (Sergei) Ivanovich Kas'ian and Viktor Ivanovich Naneishvili, both of whom had been swept up in the prewar purges.¹⁰⁰ Mikoian's apparent lack of concern in associating himself with known "enemies of the people" was underscored by his extremely familiar use of their first names without patronymics, rather than identifying them simply by their last names; it stood to reason, then, that both men's families might eventually approach Mikoian seeking redress.

The profile that emerges of Mikoian's clientele is thus of a group bound together by both shared revolutionary experiences and persecution. Over the course of the first three years following Stalin's death Mikoian – as the last remaining member of the "Caucasian Clique" – became something of an Old Bolshevik ombudsman, fielding dozens, if not hundreds of requests from the intimates of those with whom he had crossed paths in the nascent days of Soviet power. Their belief, articulated through scores of letters, was that if someone like Beria could be exposed for the enemy that he truly was, then perhaps their honest Communist relatives – who stood alongside Mikoian during the nascent Soviet republic's darkest moments – could in turn be located and finally redeemed.

¹⁰⁰ V. Naumov and Iu. Sigachev, eds., *Lavrentii Beria, 1953: Stenogramma iul'skogo plenuma TsK KPSS i drugie dokumenty* (Moskva: Mezhdunarodnyi fond "Demokratiia," 1999), 166. The unedited stenogram of the plenum only lists the men's first names, while the "corrected" official transcript inserts Naneishvili's last name; see *idem*, 307, 416 fn113.

That said, onetime clients of Ordzhonikidze or Mikoian could not simply take it for granted that their entreaties would be readily received in the Kremlin. For the vast majority, their relationships with these men and the larger networks they cultivated had been sundered by death, disappearances, extended incarceration, and dispossession; indeed, after a patron had failed to shield so many comrades, could he be expected to help rectify the situation for his clients' survivors so long after the fact?

In one of the first rehabilitation letters to reach Mikoian, written in July 1953, Elena Davydovna Gogoberidze, sister of the Baku underground member and onetime Party Secretary of Georgia Levan Davydovich Gogoberidze, drew upon the themes of shared service in the Caucasus, alignment with Ordzhonikidze, and past confrontations with Beria to articulate the overarching importance of clearing her brother's name. Gogoberidze opened her entreaty by noting that although she had also written to Malenkov and Khrushchev, she was "appealing to you [Mikoian] as the only person within the Party leadership who from his very youth over the course of many years knew my brother Levan Davydovich Gogoberidze. I remember well how sincerely Levan loved you."¹⁰¹ Building off of the recent attacks upon Beria in the Soviet press, Gogoberidze stated that "it has become evident to me that the person who ruined Levan is an enemy of the people," insisting that Beria had targeted him "deliberately, fearing denunciations":

I doubt whether you knew for certain how much Beria hated Levan because at one time (1933) Levan had material in his hands that attested to shameful facts of Beria's biography. Sergo ordered Levan to remain silent until irrefutable evidence was collected. Over the next two to three years,

¹⁰¹ A. N. Artizov et al, eds., *Reabilitatsiia: kak eto bylo. Dokumenty prezidiuma TsK KPSS i drugie materialy. Vol. 1. Mart 1953 – fevral' 1956* (Moskva: Mezhdunarodnyi fond "Demokratiiia," 2000), 60. For Elena Gogoberidze's letter to Malenkov, see RGANI f. 3, op. 8, d. 83, ll. 73-74. There is no indication from the subsequent archival record that Elena's overtures to either Khrushchev or Malenkov elicited any response.

if you recall, Levan was seriously ill, and then came 1936-1937 and Beria did away with him.¹⁰²

By contrasting the fraternal love that Levan Gogoberidze bore Mikoian with the hatred that Beria harbored for Levan, Elena Gogoberidze articulated the deeply personal hue in which political alliances and rivalries were cast within the Transcaucasian Bolshevik context. If Mikoian reciprocated Levan's affection, as she hoped, perhaps the damage wrought by Beria's malice could, at some level, be undone.

Given the established animosity between Levan Gogoberidze and Beria and the length of time since the former's disappearance, Elena Gogoberidze was not sanguine about the possibility of her brother's survival: "I implore you, Anastas Ivanovich, save Levan if he is still alive – it has already been 17 years since we heard anything of him."¹⁰³ Were he still alive, Elena reasoned, "there is a great deal he could reveal today – after all, there are very few witnesses to the beginning of Beria's political career left among the living."¹⁰⁴ She then urged Mikoian, "regardless of whether the Party currently needs this type of testimony," to "remember Levan, and if Levan has already died at least save his name, the name of an honorable Bolshevik who walked the glorious path of a fighter devoted to the Party and the people."¹⁰⁵

Many of the points Elena Gogoberidze raised were echoed – unwittingly – by Elena Solomonovna Breitman, who also seized upon the public excoriation of Beria as an opportunity to realize her siblings' redemption in January 1954. Breitman noted that it "has come to my attention that in the indictment against Beria the former Georgian People's Commissar of Agriculture Matikashvili Shalva Spiridonovich figures among

¹⁰² Artizov et al., *Reabilitatsiia*, 60.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

those individuals who became victims of his criminal activities.”¹⁰⁶ Breitman’s sister, Anna Solomonovna, in addition to having participated in the struggle for Baku herself, was married to Matikashvili and arrested alongside him, and Breitman believed that the invocation of Matikashvili against Beria “[cast] a new light” on Anna Solomonovna’s case, as well as that of their brother, Aleksandr Solomonovich, who worked under Mikoian at the People’s Commissariat of the Food Industry.¹⁰⁷ Breitman further justified her outreach by noting that she was “appealing personally to you, Comrade Mikoian, as one of the leaders of the Party and country who personally knew the Breitmans since 1917.”¹⁰⁸ Having had such a long acquaintance with her siblings, Breitman assumed that Mikoian would be able to attest to their true characters, and inform his colleagues of the egregious error that had been made in their cases.

Other rehabilitation-seekers fell back upon the familiar format of the Party biography and rendered their requests in the guise of a record of their relatives’ revolutionary exploits. Artak Stamboltsian devoted “[his] whole life from the age of reason [...] to the great cause of our Communist Party,” wrote his wife, Pavla Ivanovna Galkina.¹⁰⁹ Stamboltsian spent his youth in Tbilisi (then Tiflis) participating in Bolshevik-led student circles, joining the Party in 1916, after which point he became a professional revolutionary, working on behalf of the Soviets throughout Transcaucasia.

¹⁰⁶ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1099, l. 61. It is unclear how Breitman became aware of Matikashvili’s mention during Beria’s trial, as few details of the proceedings were publicized, and his name did not appear in any of the related press releases; given that Matikashvili himself had served in Georgian state security, it is possible that some within the organs were still sympathetic to him, and passed on the information to Breitman. For the references to Matikashvili from interrogations of Beria’s circle, including accusations that Beria himself beat Matikashvili, see Khaustov, ed., *Delo Beria*, 223, 235, 283, 379-380, 386.

¹⁰⁷ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1099, l. 61.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1099, l. 107. Galkina renders Artak’s last name as “Stamboltsan” throughout, but “Stamboltsian” is used in all official and secondary sources.

He found himself in Baku during the heady days of the Commune, fighting “against the German-Turks and Musavat counterrevolutionary bands” for which he later received a “certificate of honor.”¹¹⁰ When a British expeditionary force occupied Baku, the Party demonstrated its faith in Stamboltsian by selecting him to stay behind and “conduct underground Party work in the city.”¹¹¹ Galkina’s emphasis on Stamboltsian’s past bravery served a dual purpose: it challenged the prevailing narrative that he had been an enemy of the Party, and reminded Mikoian of events that he himself had witnessed, which might in turn impel him to advocate for his former comrades who no longer had a voice and help prove their innocence before the Party and Soviet people.

Not every survivor who fit the above-mentioned profile needed or solicited Mikoian’s help in drawing the state’s attention to their cause. In December 1953 Mariia Viktorovna Naneishvili-Kosareva, Viktor Naneishvili’s daughter and the wife of longtime Komsomol head Aleksandr Vasil’evich Kosarev, pled her case before both Malenkov and Voroshilov, as chairmen of the USSR Council of Ministers and Supreme Soviet, respectively, in nearly identical letters. Writing from perpetual exile in Noril’sk, Naneishvili-Kosareva sought to bring “certain facts” to the attention of the party-state leadership “which might explain one of the reasons for Kosarev’s arrest.”¹¹² Recounting an incident that would eventually become a staple of the Soviet judiciary’s anti-Beria repertoire, Naneishvili-Kosareva described a visit that Azerbaijani headman and close Beria confidante Mir Dzhafar Bagirov paid her family in 1937. During dinner, Kosarev proposed a toast to “true Bolshevik leadership in Transcaucasia, which does not currently

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Artizov et al, eds., *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 1, 79; for the version sent to Voroshilov, four days after the original, see GARF f. 7523, op. 85, d. 255, ll. 71-72.

exist there,” a transparent dig at Beria’s handling of affairs in the region.¹¹³ Several months after Beria assumed the reigns of the NKVD from Nikolai Ezhov in autumn 1938, he came in person to the Government House to seize the Komsomol secretary.¹¹⁴ Naneishvili-Kosareva asked the arresting officers whether she was also to be detained, and though she was initially assured that they had no designs on her, as Kosarev was being led out Beria instructed his subordinates to “take her too.”¹¹⁵

In light of the speciousness of the grounds upon which Naneishvili-Kosareva was sentenced to ten years in the distant camps, followed by a second conviction that made her exile “perpetual,” and Beria’s recent unmasking, she conjectured that there was “every reason” to review her case.¹¹⁶ Malenkov apparently agreed with her assessment, and the following month he suggested that Rudenko “inquire into this case.”¹¹⁷ Naneishvili-Kosareva did not hear back from the authorities until May 8, 1954, when an officer from the local branch of state security came to her home and announced her full rehabilitation; she was subsequently put on a flight to Krasnoiarsk and from there was dispatched to Moscow to confirm her allegations regarding Bagirov with Chairman of the Military Collegium of the USSR Supreme Court Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Cheptsov and Deputy Chief Military Procurator D. I. Kitaev.¹¹⁸ Thanks to the extraordinary

¹¹³ Artizov et al, eds., *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 1, 79. In the first iteration of the letter Naneishvili-Kosareva wavered over whether the episode in question transpired in 1936 or 1937, but in later retellings she placed it firmly in 1937. In her brief treatment of this same letter, Miriam Dobson leaves Bagirov out of the equation entirely; see Dobson, *Khrushchev’s Cold Summer*, 66. On the eventual uses of this story by the Procuracy, see Chapters 3 and 4 of this dissertation.

¹¹⁴ As Amy Knight points out, it was “highly unusual” for Beria to be present during arrests, as he “normally did not deign to participate in these routine late-night round-ups”; see Knight, *Beria*, 99.

¹¹⁵ Artizov et al, eds., *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 1, 79.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹¹⁸ “Mariia Viktorovna Naneishvili,” Muzei “Dom na Naberezhnoi,” available at <http://museumdom.narod.ru/bio07/naneyshvili.html> (accessed January 16, 2018). This sequence of events is drawn from an account written by Naneishvili-Kosareva’s daughter, Elena Aleksandrovna Kosareva for

circumstances of her and her husband's arrest, which had direct bearing on the party-state's ongoing investigation into Beria's circle, Naneishvili-Kosareva was able to seize the Soviet government's attention and secure a quite early rehabilitation for herself. Tellingly, though, when the judicial system proved less attentive to subsequent requests, it was Mikoian to whom she and her family turned for support.

The Non-Responsive State: Patronage over Bureaucratic Inertia

Beria's trial and execution alongside those of his closest lieutenants figured heavily into Mikoian's eventual clients' correspondence, as they were convinced that they and their disappeared relations would be vindicated by the revelations resulting from these proceedings. Their personal propinquity to and investment in the results of Beria's prosecution caused many to expect that the relevant authorities would handle their dossiers expeditiously. Yet they were dismayed to discover that the Procuracy, Central Committee, and the organs of state security did not treat their petitions with the sense of priority that they believed they were due, and it was only when more conventional avenues appeared to be a dead end that most relatives of the repressed ventured to contact Mikoian. Personal patronage was therefore not the first recourse of most who sought out Mikoian's help, but rather a last resort when standard channels of redress appeared deaf or otherwise inured to their pleas.

Antonina Kalmykova's second attempt to draw attention to her plight was among a rash of letters that arrived at Mikoian's door in April 1954. As with Elena Gogoberidze, Kalmykova found an explanation for her family's persecution in Beria's "devious struggle (*intriganskuiu bor'bu*) against the prominent Party leader Sergo

the website of the House on the Embankment museum. The two were reunited in Noril'sk following Elena Aleksandrovna's arrest during the postwar sweep of "children of enemies of the people."

Ordzhonikidze.”¹¹⁹ This conflict led Beria to “[aim] his stinger at those with whom Sergo maintained business and friendly relations, and who indirectly from Comrade Sergo’s mouth could have learned of Beria’s criminal activities in the past.”¹²⁰

Kalmykova highlighted the fact that following Kamykov’s arrest, NKVD officers charged with searching the family apartment were specifically ordered to locate any personal correspondence between Kalmykov and Ordzhonikidze. With Betal “slandered” as an enemy of the people, and the Party “meanly deceived” regarding his “supposedly hostile conduct,” any tangible ties between him and Ordzhonikidze could be employed “to cast a shadow of mistrust on Sergo’s cherished memory.”¹²¹ Having remained loyal to the Ordzhonikidzes, Kalmykova trusted that Mikoian would in turn keep faith with her and her husband.

Raisa Konstantinovna Mikadze, the wife of the onetime head of Transcaucasian State Trade Archil Vissarionovich Mikadze, recounted in detail how Beria intrigued against her husband – who had snubbed Beria by “avoiding and ignoring” him – prior to his arrest in 1936.¹²² Raisa Konstantinovna received an eight-year sentence as the wife of an enemy of the people, and even after release was plagued by her criminal record, which “horribly complicate[d] [her] existence.”¹²³ Yet she took solace in the fact that Beria’s actual character had been exposed: “Now, after the unmasking of the real enemy of the people Beria, one of whose victims was my husband, I hope and believe that the truth, finally, will prevail. Now I am not afraid to petition (*khlopota*) for my innocently

¹¹⁹ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1100, l.92. Here Kalmykova was directly appropriating the distinctive phrasing the Procuracy employed to describe Beria’s scheming against Ordzhonikidze.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1100, l. 93.

¹²² GARF f. 5446, op. 120, 1100, 148.

¹²³ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1100, l. 149.

victimized husband, an honest Communist.”¹²⁴ No longer threatened by reprisal from Beria, Mikadze initially contacted the Chief Military Procuracy, where she was “promised [...] that they would track down and review” her husband’s case.”¹²⁵ As this pledge had yet to materialize – Mikadze did not indicate how long she had been kept waiting – she trusted that Mikoian’s “intervention [...] would render invaluable help and expedite the search for A. Mikadze.”¹²⁶

Emboldened by Beria’s toppling, Natal’ia Evgen’evna Chizhova compiled all of the necessary documentation for her own exoneration and provided it to the Leningrad-region branch of the MVD in March 1954; her daughter later informed her that the Leningrad MVD subsequently forwarded these materials to the Procuracy’s headquarters in Moscow. Having waited for any sign of further progress for eight months, she solicited Mikoian’s input. Chizhova and her second husband, the eventual First Secretary of the Belorussian Party Nikolai Fedorovich Gikalo, became acquainted while they were both working under Mikoian at the Northern Caucasus Party *kraikom* in Rostov-on-Don during the 1920s; Chizhova’s responsibilities within the press department included weekly reports to Mikoian on the work of the region’s newspapers.¹²⁷ In the “difficult seventeen years” since her and her husband’s arrest, Chizhova claimed to have drawn moral support from Mikoian’s example, as she “clung to an old Party leader, who taught the young workers to fight for the Party line.”¹²⁸ During that time Chizhova declined to

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1101, l. 88.

¹²⁸ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1101, l. 89.

“[turn] to [Mikoian] for help” in expunging her conviction, but with Beria out of office she finally “decided to do so.”¹²⁹

Chizhova bemoaned the fact that Gikalo could neither “request the review of his case” nor “prove that he was innocent,” as the MVD had informed her eight years earlier – falsely – that he “died in 1943 somewhere in the camps.”¹³⁰ Because Chizhova had been sentenced as the “wife of an enemy of the people,” she was at a loss for “how to rehabilitate [her]self,” given that she could not refute charges predicated entirely on her husband’s legal status.¹³¹ Chizhova emphasized that it was because she had “yet to receive an answer from the Procuracy on my petition to expunge my conviction” that she was asking Mikoian’s help in the form of a telephone call to the Procuracy confirming that he knew her “as an honest Party member, a participant in the Civil War, never part of the Opposition.”¹³² She assured Mikoian that “if I am readmitted into the Party’s trust I will prove myself worthy of it.”¹³³ With this promise Chizhova recognized that for the party-state, one’s worthiness of legal redemption was inextricably tied to one’s political reliability, which would therefore be a central component of any argument Mikoian might make in her favor.

Writing to Mikoian at around the same time as Chizhova, the wife and daughter, respectively, of Mikoian’s fellow Armenians Suren Petrovich Akopian and Sergei Kas’ian – the “Sarkis” of the Baku underground – detailed how the Party and government leadership’s initially promising responses to their inquiries seemingly foundered once they reached state security or the Procuracy. Kas’ian’s surviving family contacted both

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1101, l. 88. Gikalo was actually shot in Moscow on April 25, 1938.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1101, ll. 88-89.

¹³³ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1101, l. 89.

Khrushchev and Malenkov in January 1954 in light of Beria's denunciation and were cheered to learn in July that the government had authorized the Georgian MVD to reopen Kas'ian's case.¹³⁴ Their relief was tempered by the fact, however, that "up to this point we do not have any results from the case review, and we do not even know whether Sergei Ivanovich is alive or not."¹³⁵ Likewise, Petrosian's wife, Marusia Makovetskaia, noted that on May 15th of the same year she addressed herself to Khrushchev "with a request to give the order to review and rehabilitate my husband"; Khrushchev passed this on to Rudenko four days later, after which point Makovetskaia and her children received no reports of further progress.¹³⁶

Mark Natanovich Belen'kii and Abram Lazarevich Gilinskii were both Mikoian's deputies at the People's Commissariat of the Food Industry during the mid-1930s, though the Baku-born, Sorbonne-trained Belen'kii first encountered Mikoian in the Azerbaijani capital in 1919. When their wife and daughter, respectively, wrote to Mikoian in 1954, both had been awaiting some word of the men for months, if not years. Gilinskii's daughter, N. A. Stechkina, claimed that she had "appealed repeatedly to the organs of internal affairs in order to find him, but up to the present time" she had not gotten any substantive replies.¹³⁷ If Mikoian's memoir is to be believed, Belen'kii's arrest in November 1937 particularly affected him. When Stalin told him that Belen'kii had been taken into custody, Mikoian vociferously protested his innocence, entering into a "sharp and pointed debate with Stalin." The following week Stalin presented Mikoian with a transcript of Belen'kii's interrogation, in which he confessed to the charges against him;

¹³⁴ GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 46019, l. 24.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1100, l. 141.

¹³⁷ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, 1170, l. 176.

Mikoian described reading the document as “such a blow,” though it is unclear if his main concern was for his deputy or how such a development might bode for him.¹³⁸

Belen’kii’s wife, Natal’ia Vladimirovna, was arrested two months after her husband and sentenced as a “family member of a traitor to the Motherland (*chlen semei izmennika Rodiny*, or *ChSIR*),” but was released early from her camp term due to illness. At the time of writing, October 1954, Belen’kaia was living in the Golden Ring city of Zagorsk (previously and currently Sergiev Posad), which was within 100 kilometers of Moscow, and therefore technically off-limits to former political prisoners; however, Mikoian had already pulled some strings behind the scenes to help her live closer to her daughter, Tat’iana (later the wife of author Anatolii Rybakov).¹³⁹ Belen’kaia protested that in July she had written to the Procuracy about reopening her husband’s case, and received confirmation that his file had been taken up for review, but in the intervening months nothing had become of the investigation, and so she requested a “huge favor (*velikaia pros’ba*) of Mikoian, that he “facilitate the expedition of the inquiry into the case.”¹⁴⁰

Although Mariia Naneishvili-Kosareva was shown exceptional treatment when she approached the authorities regarding her and Kosarev’s case, her experience in seeking the expiation of her father Viktor – also invoked by Mikoian in July 1953 against Beria – was far more typical of the obstructions faced by other members of the extended

¹³⁸ Mikoian, *Tak bylo*, 318-319.

¹³⁹ Tat’iana Rybakova, “*Schastlivaia ty, Tania!*” O “*Detiakh Arbata*” i ne tol’ko (Moskva: Vagrius, 2005), 38. My thanks to Rybakova’s daughter, Dr. Irene Kolchinsky, for providing me with supplementary information about her grandparents.

¹⁴⁰ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1168, l. 39. Given the wait times cited by other appellants, the July-October interval that Belen’kaia faced was comparatively short. Though Mikoian contacted Rudenko within days of receiving Belen’kaia’s note, and Belen’kii was rehabilitated the following March, it appears that she came away from the experience with an overall negative impression of Mikoian. When her daughter, presumably in 1955, urged Belen’kaia to again write to Mikoian in order to secure the family a new apartment – as Tat’iana’s friend had done via Bulganin – she refused, insisting that “Mikoian is a traitor [...] for starters he betrayed his brother, didn’t protect him (referring to Mikoian the aircraft designer), and then he betrayed your father.” It is unclear in what capacity Mikoian was supposed to have been disloyal to his brother. See Rybakova, “*Schastlivaia ty, Tania!*,” 53-54.

Transcaucasian Bolshevik network. Along with her brother Pavel, Naneishvili-Kosareva gave voice to their apparent dismay at the delay in their father's rehabilitation, but the siblings struck a conciliatory tone in acknowledging the issues inherent in the process. In their February 1955 appeal to Mikoian they revealed that eight months had passed since their initial overture to the Military Procuracy, yet it was evident that their "father's case still has not been reviewed."¹⁴¹ The Naneishvilis professed to "understand all the complexity and difficulty of analyzing our father's case, as he is no longer alive and cannot refute all the false accusations raised against him," but contended that "surely his entire life as a revolutionary-Bolshevik itself refutes all the vile accusations."¹⁴² If Viktor Naneishvili's revolutionary bona fides alone were insufficient to ensure timely consideration of the accusations against him, Pavel and Mariia grasped, then the intervention of one of his last remaining comrades was imperative. Trusting in the ability of a concerned benefactor to spur on the Soviet bureaucracy, the Naneishvilis and other families in their situation carefully avoided casting aspersions on the bodies responsible for carrying out rehabilitations.

Some of Mikoian's bolder clients were far less guarded in their assessments of the process' initial shortcomings. Rita Emmanuilovna Kornblium was something of an outlier among those who sought Mikoian's favor: born in 1908, she was easily a decade younger than most of the other supplicants, her ex-husband, the playwright and Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP) activist Vladimir Mikhailovich Kirshon, was

¹⁴¹ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1170, l. 59. By this time both Pavel and Mariia had themselves had already been rehabilitated, as had her late husband, Kosarev.

¹⁴² Ibid. The Naneishvili siblings mentioned Elena Dmitrievna Stasova, the grand dame of Bolshevism, as one of the other remaining Party figures who knew their father. Mariia Naneishvili's correspondence with Stasova, also from February 1955, struck a decidedly apologetic tone for having "disturbed" the long-lived revolutionary and former Comintern official; see Rossiiskoi gosudarstvennoi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii (RGASPI) f. 356, op. 2, d. 7, ll. 175-176.

part of the creative intelligentsia rather than the Party elite, and she and Kirshon dissolved their marriage after less than a decade together, some five years before his arrest and execution in 1937.¹⁴³ Although Kornblium and Kirshon had separated acrimoniously, she doggedly pursued his rehabilitation by dint of the fact that she raised his two sons and her professed belief in the value of his work as a proletarian author and playwright. By the time she first contacted Mikoian in late January 1955, Kornblium had already “sent four petitions to KGB Chairman Comrade Serov and appealed twice to the Military Procuracy” for official information regarding Kirshon’s place and cause of death, but she had yet to “receive a death certificate for him.”¹⁴⁴ Kornblium also raised the possibility of rehabilitating Kirshon with Rudenko in June 1954, but as she pointedly observed, “despite the fact that many petitions which were lodged at the same time as mine have received decisions that fully, morally satisfied them, this whole time the Procuracy has answered me that Kirshon’s case has still not arrived from the KGB.”¹⁴⁵

The discrepancies in response time on the authorities’ part led Kornblium – like Elena Gogoberidze – to speculate that there remained elements within the security apparatus that had a vested interest in keeping the truth about Kirshon under wraps:

Over the past 17-18 years my sons and I have drained the bitter cup of suffering, and the totally inexplicable delay in the review of Kirshon’s case currently places us in an even more difficult and awkward position

¹⁴³ An open letter to the Presidium of the Soviet Writers Union denouncing Kirshon and other writers published several months before his arrest included accusations from Kornblium of emotional and physical abuse on his part; see “‘Lichnaia zhizn’ pisatelei: Otkrytoe pis’mo prezidiumu pravleniia soiuza sovetsskikh pisatelei,” *Pravda*, May 15, 1937, 4.

¹⁴⁴ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1169, l. 42. For the KGB’s internal response to one of Kornblium’s requests from June 1954, see the third volume of Kirshon’s Procuracy file, GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 98741, l. 202. On November 18, 1954, the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court authorized ZAGS to inform Kornblium that Kirshon died in July 1942 of pneumonia while serving his sentence, when in actuality he had been executed four years earlier. See the first volume of Kirshon’s Procuracy file, GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 98739, l. 104.

¹⁴⁵ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1169, ll. 42-43. For a copy of Kornblium’s petition to Rudenko, see GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 98739, l. 17.

and gives rise to suspicions that perhaps there remain some forces that have an interest in the fact that “Kirshon’s case remains unexamined (*vnute*).” What else can explain such a situation, when in 7 months’ time the Military Procuracy cannot get the files from Vladimir Kirshon’s case?¹⁴⁶

As justified as Kornblium’s misgivings were, the candor with which she expressed them was apparently a political liability. The heavily modified second iteration of her letter to Mikoian that the latter ultimately submitted to the Central Committee for consideration in August 1955 was stripped of any intimations about the suspect loyalties of certain cadres, and in reference to her petition to Rudenko Kornblium only mentioned – albeit inaccurately – that it had been a year and a half since she first reached out to him.¹⁴⁷ The modified tack that Kornblium adopted suggests that the ability of even a highly placed patron like Mikoian to ensure the expedition of his clients’ cases was dependent – at least in part – on their complaints being couched in terms that did not question the integrity of the judicial or security organs, even in light of perceived obstruction in their handling of cases that, for the survivors of the repressed, were of the utmost urgency.

One of the last families to seek Mikoian’s relief also experienced one of the longest intervals between their first contact with representatives of the party-state and their resort to personal patronage. Asatur Stepanovich Kakhoian, one of the elder statesmen of Transcaucasian Bolshevism, with a Party *stazh* (tenure) dating to 1898, was – in the words of his son Karlos – “arrested at the hands of Beriia’s traitors (*Berievskikh izmennikov*)” in Georgia in 1937.¹⁴⁸ Eager to capitalize on the anti-Beriia sentiment in

¹⁴⁶ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1169, l. 43. Kornblium’s suspicions were actually quite well-placed. As Kirshon’s voluminous Procuracy file attests, the KGB openly resisted participating in the writer’s rehabilitation, given his ties to former NKVD head Iagoda, whose brother-in-law, Leopold Leonidovich Averbakh, co-headed RAPP with Kirshon. See GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 98739, ll. 33-34.

¹⁴⁷ Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 1, 255-257.

¹⁴⁸ GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 50450, l. 32.

circulation, Karlos petitioned Malenkov in November 1953; though the actual text of the message is not preserved in Kakhoian's Procuracy file, there is record of Malenkov's secretariat forwarding the note to newly-minted KGB head Ivan Aleksandrovich Serov with instructions to "inform the petitioner of the results of the investigation."¹⁴⁹ Karlos and his sister, Elena, later learned that their father's case had been placed under the purview of the Georgian republican KGB, and as the inquiry wound its way through the state security system over the next thirteen months they put themselves at investigators' disposal.¹⁵⁰ Karlos – whose own conviction as the son of an enemy of the people was also under consideration – was tasked with tracking down exculpatory documents and witnesses, including attestations from Baku Commissar Stepan Shaumian and Stalin's revolutionary cohort Simon "Kamo" Petrosian's sisters, as well as members of the Kas'ian family.¹⁵¹ The siblings were informed on July 25, 1955 that the investigation had concluded and its findings were being passed on to Moscow for confirmation, but by the time Karlos reached out to Mikoian already five months had passed and no verdict was forthcoming.¹⁵² Karlos entreated Mikoian "to take an interest in our case and if possible expedite its confirmation," a gesture for which he would be "deeply grateful."¹⁵³

"Now You Are My Only Hope": Personal Knowledge and the Utility of Rehabilitation

Given that some 15 years – if not more – had passed since Mikoian's last contact with the families soliciting his benefaction, most petitioners felt compelled to justify

¹⁴⁹ GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 50450, l. 3.

¹⁵⁰ Possibly out of concern that the wrong case had been reopened, in a June 1954 note Elena Kakhoian admonished Malenkov not to confuse her father with the Georgian Party Secretary Mikhail Kahkiani. GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 50450, l. 7.

¹⁵¹ GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 50450, l. 32.

¹⁵² GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 50450, l. 32ob.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

themselves before the longstanding Presidium member, and explain how he was uniquely positioned to render them assistance.¹⁵⁴ In doing so, they revealed many of the operating assumptions that underlay Mikoian's patronal obligations before them. The opening gambit of Raisa Mikadze's letter touched upon these precise ideas. She described Archil Mikadze as someone Mikoian "knew personally in the past. I will not begin to describe him, and only say that no one who knows him believed or believes in his guilt. Those who knew him well and trusted in him included such people as Sergo Ordzhonikidze, Kamo and other famous Party figures, who, unfortunately, are no more. Now you are my only hope"¹⁵⁵ As the final exponent of the once-predominant Caucasian contingent in the Kremlin, Mikoian was the only remaining person of influence who could attest to Mikadze's true character, and it therefore fell to him, according to Raisa Konstantinovna, to impress this knowledge upon the functionaries at the Chief Military Procuracy. This same sentiment was expressed across numerous letters addressed to Mikoian, such as the one from the Naneishvili siblings, who maintained that he knew their "father better than anyone else (*luchshe drugikh znavshego ottsa*)," including Elena Stasova and Lev Shaumian, which therefore made him uniquely qualified to advocate for Viktor Naneishvili's rehabilitation.¹⁵⁶

Patronage-seekers approached Mikoian with a clear sense of what he could do on their behalf, and how the rehabilitation of their disappeared relatives would tangibly improve their lives. Elena Gogoberidze's overture to Mikoian highlighted one of the most immediate, concrete benefits that he, as someone with access to the Soviet state's deepest

¹⁵⁴ The fact that many petitioners felt compelled to reintroduce themselves to Mikoian and narrate the major events of their and their relatives' lives, both before and after their repression, indicates that most remained estranged from Mikoian through at least 1953.

¹⁵⁵ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1100, l. 148.

¹⁵⁶ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1170, l. 59.

secrets, could provide to Ordzhonikidze and his erstwhile clients: information about the whereabouts and status of their loved ones. Most families of elites sentenced to capital punishment in the 1930s had been told that their relatives were serving “ten years in the distant camps, without the right of correspondence,” and this campaign of misinformation on the part of the state security organs and judiciary continued unabated for the better part of the next two decades. Next of kin were systematically fed contradictory reports about “inmates” conditions, but as the years passed without any sign of their imminent emergence from the Gulag many began to suspect the worst. Thus the rehabilitation appeals that crossed Mikoian’s desk were just as much concerned with locating missing persons as they were with exonerating the wrongfully convicted.¹⁵⁷

Many writers to Mikoian further justified their pleas for information and aid as an expression of concern for the welfare of their children, whose youths had been irrevocably marked by the repression of one or both of their parents. Antonina Kalmykova’s family had been devastated by both Stalin’s purges and the ravages of war. As she reported to Mikoian, upon her arrest her three children – two sons and a daughter – took shelter with Ordzhonikidze’s wife until the war’s outbreak, when her sons, “while valiantly defending the Motherland, perished heroically.”¹⁵⁸ Desperate to be reunited with her remaining kin, Kalmykova entreated Mikoian for “the chance to live as an equal member of socialist society, let me at least at the end of my life be with my one living child – with my daughter, and with this give my daughter, a member of the Komsomol, the opportunity to become a member of the Communist Party in the future”;¹⁵⁹ for a Communist stalwart like Kalmykova, there was no future for her daughter outside the

¹⁵⁷ For more on this issue, see Chapters 2 and 3.

¹⁵⁸ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1100, l. 95.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

Party. Unsure of her husband's ultimate fate, Kalmykova clung to the unlikely prospect of seeing him again, and closed her lengthy letter by urging Mikoian to "help me to learn the truth, where is Betal and is he alive?"¹⁶⁰ Other appeals, though no less impassioned, were much more circumspect with regard to their subjects' likelihood of survival.

Elena Breitman stated that she had no idea if her sister, brother-in-law, or brother were still alive when she penned her overture to Mikoian, but made a point of "requesting their full rehabilitation even in the event that they are not."¹⁶¹ Both of her siblings had "left behind children whom I raised and who unjustly bear the stigma of their parents having been 'enemies of the people,'" and her interest in their futures animated her appeal in equal measure with her desire to learn what ultimately became of her disappeared relatives.¹⁶² Pavla Galkina pessimistically averred that it was "hardly necessary to search for [Artak Stamboltsian] among the living" when conducting his rehabilitation, given the amount of time that had transpired since he was taken into custody.¹⁶³ That said, she still considered Stamboltsian's vindication critical for her "daughter's sake – Artak Stamboltsian's daughter, because as a repressed person her father did not have a hand in her upbringing (*otets ee ne stal, kak repressirovannyi, na ee zhiznennom puti*)."¹⁶⁴ Though Mikoian could not overcome the legacy of familial rupture engendered by the Terror, he was able to contribute to freeing Stamboltsian and Galkina's daughter from the enduring repercussions of being branded a child of an enemy of the people.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. Kalmykova's confusion about Betal's whereabouts was due at least in part to "incomplete information" which put him at the Komsomol'sk camps on the Amur River; see GARF f. 5466, 120, 1100, l. 90.

¹⁶¹ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1099, l. 61.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1099, l. 107.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

Marusia Markovetskaia likewise bristled at her children having “suffered for their entire young lives because of their father, as though they were children of an enemy of the people, when their father was with the underground, and then under Soviet power gave his whole life to the cause of building Communism.”¹⁶⁵ Markovetskaia begged Mikoian to aid her in “remedy[ing] the error” of Akopian’s persecution by “speak[ing] with Comrade Rudenko and affirm[ing] that Akopian S. P. is an honest, faithful Communist, and that he must be rehabilitated, independent of whether or not he is alive.”¹⁶⁶ For Kas’ian’s daughter, Ruzanna, the “blot” that she, her mother, and her sister – herself a single parent to two children – bore as “the family of an enemy of the people” constituted a “serious moral outrage.”¹⁶⁷ Even though they were unaware “whether Sergei Ivanovich is alive or not,” the remaining Kas’ians’ “main priority is the rehabilitation of Kas’ian and his family from the ignominious sobriquet enemy of the people”; as the family of “an old revolutionary,” for them the question of his reputation as a true Communist held more currency than the (unlikely) possibility of his return from physical exile.¹⁶⁸

None of Mikoian’s clients challenged, in principle, the category of “enemy of the people”; indeed, some avidly adopted it to describe Beria and others whom they held accountable for their families’ decades of suffering. Their common objection was to the fact that this brand had been unjustly applied to their relatives and, by extension, themselves. Karlos Kakhoian assured Mikoian that he was not seeking “some sort of illegal favoritism (*kakoi nibud’ nezakonnoi protektsii*),” suggesting that the descendants

¹⁶⁵ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1100, l. 141.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 46019, l. 24.

¹⁶⁸ GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 46019, l. 24ob.

of true opponents of the Soviet regime did not merit succor from an eminent figure like Mikoian.¹⁶⁹ Were Asatur Kakhoian “actually an ‘enemy of the people,’” Karlos continued, “even you would not want to utter his name, and this would be correct.”¹⁷⁰ Fortunately for Karlos and his family, the Georgian authorities’ case review had entirely exculpated his father and proven him to be a steadfast, “humble (*skromnim*) Communist,” who was therefore wholly deserving both of his place in Mikoian’s memory and any assistance the Deputy *Sovmin* Chairman could offer.¹⁷¹

The Artists’ Warrior: Voroshilov and His Circle

An instructive point of comparison to the variety of correspondence Mikoian received and the type of patronage he practiced can be found in the files of Marshal Kliment Voroshilov, who held the post of Chairman of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet following Stalin’s death. Although he was evidently not as avid a practitioner of clientelism as Mikoian, Voroshilov also proved to be a popular recipient of rehabilitation inquiries. While the majority of Mikoian’s interlocutors depicted relations between him and their relatives as having been comradely, fraternal ties forged in the underground, in Voroshilov’s case supplicants tended to approach him as former commanding officer, bureaucratic superior, or – alternately – as a benefactor of the proletarian arts.

In December 1954 Antonina Georgievna Vainer apprised Voroshilov of the “exceptionally” slow progress in the examination of the criminal file of her husband,

¹⁶⁹ GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 50450, l. 32ob. Fitzpatrick points out that such a direct description of patronage as “*protektsiia*” was almost always used pejoratively; see Fitzpatrick, *Tear Off the Masks*, 183.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

former Red Army Corps Commander Leonid Iakovlevich Vainer.¹⁷² Vainer had served with distinction under Voroshilov in the 14th Army during the Civil War, and after a rapid ascent through the ranks of the fledgling Red Army was dispatched as a military advisor to the Mongolian People's Republic; recalled back to Moscow in August 1937 – ostensibly to receive the Order of Lenin – he was seized from his train en route, arrested, and sentenced the following month.

Antonina Vainer first broached the possibility of restoring her husband's good name before the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet in December 1953 – coinciding with Beria's trial – and in due course the case was turned over to the USSR Chief Military Procuracy.¹⁷³ Yet after a meeting the following September with the head of the investigative division, Antonina Georgievna began to despair of her husband's chances for rehabilitation. The Chief Military Procuracy informed her that under interrogation Leonid Vainer had “incriminated himself and gave testimony against others, but during the trial he recanted,” and in this confession, as well as others' denunciations, the Chief Military Procuracy found a pretext “to hold back the review of Vainer's investigative file, as they consider it proof of his guilt.”¹⁷⁴

To dispel the pall that had been cast over Vainer's reputation Antonina Georgievna invoked their families' shared revolutionary heritage and contributions to the Soviet project: Leonid Iakovlevich's mother hid Bolsheviks in her home during the First World War and eventually joined the Party along with her five sons, while Antonina

¹⁷² GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 123, l. 9.

¹⁷³ Vainer attempted to suggest in her letter to Voroshilov that her husband's arrest was Beria's doing, though there is nothing to suggest that he had any hand in the matter.

¹⁷⁴ GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 123, ll. 9-11. This represented precisely the type of over-credulity of confessions against which Rudenko warned in his June 1955 speech to leading Procuracy workers; see Chapter 3.

Georgievna's father was a "Baku worker-railway-man" and Party member since 1905, and she herself "raised two sons in the Soviet ethos," one of whom "died a heroic death (*pogibshogo smert'iu khrabrykh*) during the Great Patriotic War."¹⁷⁵ While relatively few could claim such an extensive Communist pedigree, Antonina Georgievna was attuned to the overriding importance of emphasizing Voroshilov's role in Vainer's professional "trajectory."¹⁷⁶ She therefore appealed to him first and foremost "as the former Commander of the 14th Army, who knew Vainer L.Ia. during the fighting of the Civil War" and personally promoted him to a division leadership, "and as the former USSR People's Commissar of Defense, who knew Vainer L.Ia. from his work in subsequent years during the period of building up the [Red Army's] defensive capacities."¹⁷⁷ Through these intersections Antonina Vainer sought to assert her husband's "rightful place among the names of those who selflessly fought for the freedom and happiness of the Soviet people," and thereby placed her faith in Voroshilov's willingness to defend his own past.¹⁷⁸

N.Z. Pertsovskii's father, Zakhar Davudovich, was a career Red Army man who crossed paths with Voroshilov while heading the People's Commissariat of Defense's Central Financial Department. When Pertsovskii *filed* wrote to Voroshilov in the fall of 1954 on behalf of his father, who disappeared in February 1938, he was sure to mention his late mother's recollections of how Voroshilov "personally valued and respected my father as an honest and diligent worker."¹⁷⁹ Bolstered by this characterization, N.Z.

¹⁷⁵ GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 123, l. 11.

¹⁷⁶ GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 123, l. 9.

¹⁷⁷ GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 123, ll. 9, 11. Vainer forward a copy of Voroshilov's Civil War-era order to the Chief Military Procuracy to be included in her husband's file.

¹⁷⁸ GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 123, l. 11.

¹⁷⁹ GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 123, l. 20.

Pertsovskii expressed his conviction that his father “was and remained loyal to the Motherland,” and requested that “the decision in [his] case be reviewed with the goal of rehabilitation.”¹⁸⁰ In her June 1955 appeal, Sof’ia Abramovna Pavlova explained her decision to “disturb” Voroshilov because “only” he could help her.¹⁸¹ Pavlova’s husband from 1932 until his arrest in December 1936, Viacheslav Ivanovich Zof, had previously been head of the USSR’s naval forces, and as such Voroshilov had come to know him “personally.”¹⁸² Though most of Pavlova’s missive was given over to detailing her personal work history – to distinguish her career from Zof’s – and the litany of hardships that had befallen her as a wife of an enemy of the people, her insistence that Voroshilov alone was capable of defending her interests and ameliorating the injustices that had perpetrated against her family spoke to the expectation that as Zof’s former military superior, Voroshilov would serve as a character witness on his behalf in the halls of power.

As much as Voroshilov’s dabbling in the art world may have apparently cost him in Stalin’s eyes, it eventually made him a significant resource for the relatives of literary figures who had been subjected to repression.¹⁸³ In a clear sign that patronage relationships were not exclusive propositions, and that rehabilitation-seekers were prepared to seek assistance from any likely corner, Rita Kornblium also addressed herself to Voroshilov at the same time as her first impassioned overture to Mikoian. Kornblium’s overture to Voroshilov was denuded of many of the familial details that marked her letter

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 138.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Fitzpatrick, *Tear off the Masks*, 198. For a detailed discussion of Voroshilov’s role as “protector” of artists, see Kiril Tomoff, “‘Most Respected Comrade...’: Patrons, Clients, Brokers and Unofficial Networks in the Stalinist Music World,” *Contemporary European History* 11, 1 (Feb., 2002): 33-65.

to Mikoian and written in a far more impersonal register, reflecting the formal tenor of relations that had existed between the Kirshons and the Supreme Soviet chairman. In attempting to persuade Voroshilov of the rectitude of her cause she made explicit mention of the fact that Isaak Babel' and Mikhail Kol'tsov's families were among those that received rehabilitation decisions from the Procuracy before her, even though she filed her claim at the same time as them.¹⁸⁴ Kornblium closed by imploring Voroshilov "to once again come to the aid of [her] family," suggesting that at some point in the past he had already extended help to the Kirshons in his role as advocate for the art world.¹⁸⁵ However, Kornblium's decision to pursue the matter further with Mikoian rather than Voroshilov suggests that she was dissatisfied with the response she received – if any – from the art world's preeminent defender within the Kremlin.

Patronal Obligations: Mikoian and Voroshilov's Responses

Mikoian displayed a remarkable degree of consistency in his commitment to getting decades-old political cases reopened. Usually within days or weeks of receiving a petition – though on occasion there were gaps of months between a letter's date of composition and Mikoian taking action – he would forward a copy to Rudenko with his commentary attached; drafts of these memos, affixed to the appeals in question, are preserved in the archives. Each note to Rudenko began with the request that he "consider" the following missive and "inform [Mikoian] of the results." The fact that Mikoian wanted to remain apprised of each case's progress indicates that his investment in seeing rehabilitations through to fruition went beyond simply passing the buck. To

¹⁸⁴ On Voroshilov's dealings with the families of Isaak Babel' and Mikhail Kol'tsov, see Chapter 3. Kornblium did not specify the source of this (in principle correct) information, though news of Babel' and Kol'tsov's rehabilitations likely traveled quickly through Moscow's literary grapevine.

¹⁸⁵ GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 98739, l. 24.

underscore his personal involvement, Mikoian often appended an additional sentence or two listing the subject's commendable qualities. He thus described having known Artak Stamboltsian as "an honest and steadfast Bolshevik."¹⁸⁶ During their time together Archil Mikadze proved himself to be "an honest and good worker," while Gevork Alikhanov – Bonner's stepfather – was "honest and faithful."¹⁸⁷ Suren Akopian warranted special mention, because Mikoian had known him "since childhood."¹⁸⁸ The underlying message that emerged in all these assessments was the same: the image of these men as inveterate foes of Soviet power that had been promulgated during and after the Terror was a distortion of the truth that Mikoian knew from having spent his formative years with them. This gave the lie to the notion that Stalinist state violence was justified by its ability to uncover seemingly loyal cadres' true, conspiratorial selves, and it fell to Rudenko and his subordinates within the judiciary to reconstruct the truth of these individuals, as Mikoian recalled them, from the materials assembled in their criminal case files.¹⁸⁹

Mikoian followed a distinct protocol for those cases that involved former Party Secretaries or others whose pasts were of a more politically sensitive nature. Rather than going directly to Rudenko, Mikoian would first make his pitch to the Communist Party's Central Committee. In these proposals Mikoian went beyond the rote phrases that characterized his communiqués to Rudenko, turning instead to more forcefully worded arguments. Writing to Khrushchev and Malenkov in January 1954 – exactly six months after Elena Gogoberidze's initial letter – Mikoian recalled the conditions in which he and

¹⁸⁶ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d.1099, l. 107.

¹⁸⁷ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1100, l. 148; GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1168, l. 68.

¹⁸⁸ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1100, l. 141.

¹⁸⁹ On the purges as a means of revealing supposed enemies' true selves, see Fitzpatrick, *Tear Off the Masks!*, ch. 5, and Halfin, *Stalinist Confessions*.

Levan Gogoberidze worked together most closely: “I knew L. Gogoberidze during the difficult time of illegal work in Baku under the English occupation. He conducted himself selflessly and exemplarily.”¹⁹⁰ While serving in the Baku underground Gogoberidze proved his bravery when he suffered three nearly fatal bullet wounds fired by a Musavat assassin, something that, Mikoian implied, shaped Gogoberidze’s future hostility toward Beria, who eventually “did away with him.”¹⁹¹ Echoing many petitioners’ appeals to pathos, Mikoian acknowledged Gogoberidze’s female survivors – his daughter, wife, and sister – before recommending that the Party “instruct” Rudenko “to carry out a review of Gogoberidze’s case for his rehabilitation.”¹⁹²

Shortly thereafter, Mikoian presented Kalmykov’s exoneration as a pressing imperative, stating that he “consider[ed] it necessary to assign Comrade Rudenko to take an interest in Kalmykov B.E.’s case and submit his suggestions to the Central Committee.”¹⁹³ Unusually, when presenting Natal’ia Chizhova’s entreaty, Mikoian opted to foreground his connection with her over her more notable husband, Nikolai Gikalo; in Mikoian’s words Chizhova had shown herself to be “an honest and good worker” in Rostov-on-Don who not only warranted legal rehabilitation but also reinstatement into

¹⁹⁰ RGANI f. 3, op. 8, d. 83, l. 69. A visit that Mikoian received from Levan Gogoberidze’s daughter Lana on January 4, 1954 – after which Mikoian first called Roman Rudenko to discuss the case – was likely the immediate impetus for this; see GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, l. 1. Boris Sheboldaev, one of Gogoberidze and Mikoian’s comrades from the Baku underground who eventually rose to the post of Party Secretary of the Azov-Black Sea *kraikom*, garnered similar praise for having “conducted himself selflessly” in Mikoian’s note to the Central Committee; see GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1171, l. 30.

¹⁹¹ RGANI f. 3, op. 8, d. 83, l. 69. For more on this incident, see Chapter 2.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1100, l. 90. Because Mikoian forwarded them to the Central Committee the materials relating to Kalmykov are also preserved in RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 78, ll. 63-70. Dobson’s claim that the presence of Kalmykova’s letter in the Central Committee’s archive is reflective of the latter’s status relative to other appellants is somewhat over-determined, as a copy can also be found at GARF, and there are numerous letters from ordinary citizens held in the files of the Central Committee’s General Department. See Dobson, *Khrushchev’s Cold Summer*, 66 fn67.

Party.¹⁹⁴ Gikalo had been known to Mikoian “for many years and, it seems to me, that it would follow to instruct Comrade Rudenko to also review Gikalo N.F.’s case.”¹⁹⁵ It is unclear whether this apparent lack of enthusiasm reflected Mikoian’s low opinion of Gikalo, but what is most telling is that Mikoian did not allow any reservations he might have had about Gikalo to stand in the way of his patronal obligations before Chizhova and her late spouse. Although Mikoian may not have been the only member of Party’s ruling circle to bring rehabilitation cases before his peers, he was almost certainly the most prolific in this respect, and the evident pride that he expressed at his untarnished success rate is a striking indication of the premium that he placed on meeting his obligations before the survivors of his onetime clients and comrades.¹⁹⁶

The continued delays faced by Voroshilov’s onetime adjutants in attaining rehabilitation are a further indication of the noteworthy efficacy of Mikoian’s energetic advocacy. Like Mikoian, Voroshilov succinctly annotated the letters he received with instructions for Rudenko, and occasionally included personal assessments of the figures in question. Writing to Rudenko in early December 1954, Voroshilov requested that orders be given to expedite the investigation into Vainer, whom he “knew well”; this might have reminded Voroshilov that he had yet to weigh in on Pertsovskii’s case, as a little over a week later he dispassionately requested that Rudenko “consider” N.Z.

¹⁹⁴ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1101, l. 87.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Of all the members of the Presidium, Mikoian appears to have been the most willing to engage with the rehabilitation process at its various levels, including serving as a material witness for an investigation. In the summer of 1954, a young military procurator, Sergei Gromov, was dispatched to interview Mikoian regarding the case of the former Azerbaijani People’s Commissar of Agriculture, Iu. A. Belen’kii (no known relation to Mark Belen’kii), who claimed under interrogation to have participated in a Marxist reading circle with Mikoian prior to the Revolution. Mikoian received Gromov at his office in the Kremlin, corroborated Belen’kii’s testimony after recognizing the scar on his left cheek in a photograph, and graciously agreed to confirm all his statements. See Sergei Gromov, *Zapiski “vazhniaka”* (Moskva: Detektiv-Press, 2001), 26-31.

Pertsovskii's appeal.¹⁹⁷ Voroshilov reserved his most effusive endorsement for Zof, asking the Procurator General to both examine the case and "inform of [his] decision," because Voroshilov "knew Zof V.I. very well and always believed in him."¹⁹⁸ From receipt of Voroshilov's instructions it took anywhere between an additional five to ten months for the judiciary to hand down their decisions, during which time the families in question remained perpetually in limbo. Such wait times were by no means unheard of during the first decade of the rehabilitation process, but as the following chapter demonstrates, once Mikoian made clear his personal investment in a case, it often wound its way through the justice system at a considerably faster clip.¹⁹⁹

Conclusion

In response to a question regarding why Anastas Mikoian took such an interest in her welfare upon her return to Moscow in 1954, Lana Gogoberidze attributed this "special affection (*osobuiu teplotu*)" to Mikoian's guilt over his inability to protect her father in 1937.²⁰⁰ While Mikoian may indeed have felt morally culpable for the annihilation of so many of his friends and colleagues at the hands of the state they helped to build, his involvement in posthumous rehabilitation does not seem to have been born primarily out of pangs of conscience. Rather, the mediating role that Mikoian played

¹⁹⁷ GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 123, ll. 9, 20.

¹⁹⁸ GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 138, l. 15.

¹⁹⁹ It is also possible that many of Mikoian's clients were given priority treatment in this regard because of their direct connections to Beria's past, which Voroshilov's subordinates could not boast. There seems to have been a perception within some segments of the Procuracy, though, that Voroshilov's commitment to rehabilitation was opportunistic. Military procurator Boris Viktorov, having read Voroshilov's denunciations of other Red Army commanders from the 1930s, was taken aback when in "1955-1956 Voroshilov changed his views (*perestroilsia*) and began to support requests for rehabilitation of many of those commanders whose arrests he sanctioned. In his resolutions on petitions he wrote: 'I knew him as a dedicated commander,' 'I doubted that he could commit sabotage (*vredit*),' 'He was an excellent political worker,' etc.'" Viktorov clearly doubted the sincerity of these sentiments. See B. A. Viktorov, *Bez grifa "Sekretno."* *Zapiski voennogo prokurora* (Moskva: "Iuridicheskaiia literatura," 1990), 235.

²⁰⁰ Lana Gogoberidze response to author's questionnaire, May 22, 2015. For more on Mikoian's material assistance to Lana Gogoberidze, see Chapter Five.

between the families of the wrongfully repressed and various branches of the Soviet bureaucracy reflected his status as the last man standing of a once-powerful network of Transcaucasian Bolsheviks that made its outsized influence felt far beyond the confines of the Soviet Union's southern periphery. The experience of underground agitation inculcated in Mikoian and his fellow revolutionaries a sense of mutual responsibility and deeply held loyalty that remained with them as they forged separate paths within the fledgling socialist state; these bonds were broken only by the physical annihilation of most of this cohort's members during the Great Terror, which cast asunder all existing guarantees of reciprocal protection and aide. Following such a pronounced rupture, the families of Ordzhonikidze and Mikoian's close associates could not be sure that the latter would be open to their entreaties, or recognize them as belonging to his extending network. Yet when they approached him with appeals for help with rehabilitation that invoked his responsibilities to those who served alongside him but whom he was ultimately unable to protect, Mikoian consistently and vigorously extended his patronage, showing concerted interest in his former comrades' absolution. Though these rekindled relationships did not serve to recreate the pre-Terror *status quo ante*, they did prove to be remarkably resilient, and Mikoian remained engaged with many of those who contacted him in the early 1950s over the coming decades, helping to see to their welfare and other needs. One family in particular, the Gogoberidzes, proved extraordinarily adept at leveraging Mikoian's involvement not only to secure rehabilitations, but also induce the Procuracy to inaugurate a search for one of the Terror's missing millions that occupied months and stretched from Vladivostok to Estonia; the following chapter explores their efforts to uncover what actually became of Levan Gogoberidze.

Chapter Two – Resurrecting Levan Davydovich: Truth, Justice, and Gulag Rumors

Many died in the camps and prisons, but the news of their deaths might take years or decades to reach their families and friends. The sentence had little or no predictive value. The gulag did not provide reality checks for either hope or mourning. In an indefinitely large part of the Soviet experience, death could not be recognized as death, and survival could not be relied upon as life. The state, the source of the repressions, was also the only source of information. This is a condition of uncertain loss, in which the beloved person disappears for reasons that nobody understands; in which she may be alive and might possibly return; in which no information about the loss is available or trustworthy.²⁰¹

In the short story “Aleksandr Gogoberidze” from the semi-fictional *Kolyma Tales*, Varlam Shalamov recounts his time studying under the titular camp medical assistant, depicted as a benevolent Georgian of elephantine proportions whose lessons in pharmacology offered a lifeline to his fellow prisoners. Shalamov details his acquaintance with this paragon of decency within the Gulag through the latter’s ignominious death in the Iagodnoe settlement several hundred kilometers outside Magadan, only noting the ostensible reason for his imprisonment in the story’s closing sentences: “Such was the fate of Aleksandr Gogoberidze, who perished only because he was Levan Gogoberidze’s brother.”²⁰² Poignant as this coda may be, it strains credulity in a crucial respect: though Levan Gogoberidze had several sisters, he was – according to information from his family – his parents’ only son. Intriguingly, Shalamov’s account shares its setting with one of several locales where Levan Gogoberidze himself was supposedly sighted in the fifteen years after he was arrested, according to reports that

²⁰¹ Etkind, *Warped Mourning*, 18.

²⁰² Varlam Shalamov, “Aleksandr Gogoberidze,” available at <https://shalamov.ru/library/7/15.html>, accessed November 5, 2015. According to Shalamov’s official website, the story was written between 1970 and 1971.

filtered back to his wife, daughter, and sisters. While it is today apparent that the self-proclaimed Gogoberidze in the Iagodnoe settlement was an impostor – or at the very least not who others took him to be – amidst the confusion and uncertainty of the first post-Stalin years Levan Gogoberidze’s survivors tenaciously clung to the prospect that through some twist of fate he had escaped capital punishment and survived the Stalin years in an outpost of the Soviet camp system.

On January 27, 1954, Elena Gogoberidze, having already reestablished contact with Mikoian, approached Procurator General Rudenko with the startling revelation that her brother Levan had been seen alive in the Gulag as recently as 1952. Were he to be located and extricated from captivity, Elena Davydovna suggested, he might be able to shed valuable light on Beria’s early history of perfidy.²⁰³ Despite his own misgivings about the reliability of this information, Rudenko surprisingly gave his assent to Gogoberidze’s proposal, launching a search several months later that – if the records of the USSR General Procuracy are any indication – was unprecedented and unrepeated in annals of Soviet rehabilitation.²⁰⁴ Little did Elena Davydovna know that the leads she would bring to the Procuracy’s attention over the next two years were little more than fantasies, and her hope to reunite Levan with his wife, the pioneering filmmaker Nutsa Varfolomeevna Gogoberidze, and daughter, Lana, was chimeric, as he had been executed in Rostov-on-Don in March 1937.²⁰⁵ Drawing primarily upon the voluminous Procuracy

²⁰³ GARF f.8131, op. 32, d. 3304, l. 1.

²⁰⁴ Although other presumably executed Communists were also supposed to have been spotted in the Gulag, there is no indication from the consulted *dela* that any kind of search resembling the one for Levan Gogoberidze was initiated; this issue is discussed at greater length later in the chapter.

²⁰⁵ Lana Gogoberidze would go on to become one of the Soviet Union’s most prominent female directors and a politician in independent Georgia. The Gogoberidzes’ central role in Georgian filmmaking was highlighted during a recent retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. See J. Hoberman, “Independent Nation With Films to Match: A Survey Celebrates Georgia’s Rich Film Tradition,” *The New*

file that collected the documents assembled for Levan Gogoberidze's posthumous rehabilitation – among the very first in the Soviet Union's history – as well as the materials generated by the fruitless investigation into his possible whereabouts, this chapter applies a microhistorical lens to the vicissitudes of the party-state's earliest attempts to get to the truth behind the destruction of Old Bolshevik cadres. [William Chase has argued – regarding Béla Kun's fall during the Terror – that “[m]icrohistory offers a potent method that enables us to identify and track the twists and turns in people's lives that may have contributed to their becoming victims of the Stalinist mass repression.”²⁰⁶] As this chapter demonstrates, the microhistorical perspective can be equally illuminating with regard to how certain individuals were given priority in attaining legal absolution, and what their families expected would result from this process.²⁰⁷

In terms of its timing, the personages involved, and the intense interest that the Procuracy and the Party took in various aspects of the case, Levan Gogoberidze's rehabilitation was exceptional. His family had privileged access to Mikoian, which seems to have afforded them a remarkable degree of leverage with the judiciary, and the circumstances of his arrest in late 1936 fit neatly within the anti-Beriia narrative being promulgated at the moment. However, for all its remarkability, Gogoberidze's case

York Times, September 18, 2014, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/21/movies/a-survey-celebrates-georgias-rich-film-tradition.html> (accessed September 21, 2014).

²⁰⁶ William Chase, “Microhistory and Mass Repression: Politics, Personalities, and Revenge in the Fall of Béla Kun,” *The Russian Review* 67 (July 2008): 479.

²⁰⁷ Western scholars have been aware of Gogoberidze's rehabilitation since the mid-1960s thanks to official publications and transcripts of the 22nd Party Congress, at which Gogoberidze was invoked alongside other fallen representatives of the Georgian wing of the Party in a speech by G. D. Dzhavakhishvili. However, none have delved into the actual process of rehabilitation that preceded these announcements by nearly a decade, nor have they examined the labyrinthine investigations that accompanied the inquiries into Levan's fate. See, for example, Oppenheim, “Rehabilitation in the Post-Stalinist Soviet Union,” 113; Levytsky, *The Stalinist Terror in the Thirties*, 225-228; van Goudoever, *The Limits of Destalinization*, 97.

speaks to many of the issues that would come to define posthumous rehabilitation as it went from a process that applied to no more than 500 individuals in 1954 – the year that charges were dismissed against Gogoberidze – to one that two years later nearly 30,000 people went through.²⁰⁸ For former members of the Soviet elite, posthumous rehabilitation was an essentially restorative process, one that promised to repair the reputations, social standing, and – eventually – material condition of families that had been unceremoniously banished from the halls of power and influence by accusations of disloyalty. Khrushchev and his contingent within the Communist Party, seeking to legitimize their preeminence by taking the organs of state security to task, cherry-picked figures from the past whose laudable commitment to Soviet power and ignominious demise could be held up as emblematic of Beria's acrimony toward true guardians of the Revolution.

Amidst mistrust, duplicity, and under the weight of decades of unpunished crimes, posthumous rehabilitation offered the Party, Soviet judiciary, and the survivors of the repressed an opportunity to collaborate in formulating new, politically expedient accounts of the rise of Soviet power and its betrayal at the hands of opportunistic infiltrators within state security. Thus, posthumous rehabilitation was not only an opportunity to exonerate those who had been murdered and vilified during the Terror: it was also a generative process that helped to build the pedestals upon which the reconceived Party history would rest.²⁰⁹ However, as the Gogoberidze inquiry so aptly reveals, by embracing

²⁰⁸ These (incomplete) figures are drawn from the Memorial Society's online database "Zhertvy politicheskogo terrora v SSSR," which has recently been updated to allow searches by sentence and year of rehabilitation, among other parameters; see base.memo.ru (accessed March 13, 2018).

²⁰⁹ The most prominent example of this mobilization of rehabilitation for revisionist purposes remains Khrushchev's Secret Speech, which redeemed the reputations of numerous Bolshevik stalwarts in the interest of diminishing Stalin's reputation. A further illustration of this phenomenon is the transmission history of Mariia Naneishvili-Kosareva's account of her husband's rivalry with Beria and Bagirov, which

revised narratives that were themselves often short on truth, the Soviet authorities risked giving credence to rumors spawned in the Gulag that filtered back to the populace via the multitudes of prisoners amnestied in 1953, and would find that in the wake of years of state-mandated deception, it was far more difficult to disseminate a painful reality than a reassuring falsehood.

An Execution Foretold?: The Rise and Fall of the “Pushkin of the Revolution”²¹⁰

Though he never ascended to the heights of the all-Union Soviet bureaucracy, Levan Gogoberidze had a storied political career that garnered him admirers and adversaries among the Caucasian Bolshevik elite. Born in 1896, Gogoberidze earned his revolutionary bona fides in 1915 by propagandizing to fellow conscripts in the Tsarist Army, for which he served a term in a penal battalion. Upon being transferred to an infirmary near Trabzon, he met Prokofii “Alesha” Dzhaparidze – later one of the immortalized 26 Commissars of the Baku Commune – whom he credited with his “Party education and ‘literacy.’”²¹¹ Gogoberidze was admitted to the Bolshevik Party in February 1916 thanks to Dzhaparidze’s endorsement, and he went on to play a variety of roles in the struggle to establish Soviet power in Baku and Tbilisi. By February 1918 he had been elected to the Presidium of the Baku Soviet, and later that year he was assigned to captain one of the ships involved in the failed attempt to evacuate the 26 Commissars

first appeared in her letter to Malenkov from Noril’sk, was officially endorsed via the Procuracy’s rehabilitation report on Kosarev, and subsequently made its way into the trial against Bagirov and his lieutenants held in Baku in April 1956. For the various permutations of this story, see Chapters 1, 3, and 4.
²¹⁰ This sobriquet is based on filmmaker Aleksandr Dovzhenko’s glowing recollection of Levan Gogoberidze to his daughter Lana while she was enrolled in his course at the Moscow Institute of Cinematography. See Lana Gogoberidze, *rac' magondeba da rogorc' magondeba (What I Remember and How I Recall)* (Tbilisi: 2003), 117. My thanks to Teona Jikia for translating the relevant portions of this memoir from Georgian.

²¹¹ Levytsky, *Stalinist Terror in the Thirties*, 226

to Astrakhan following the collapse of the Baku Commune.²¹² It was in the aftermath of this early setback for Soviet power in the Caucasus that Levan Gogoberidze had his first brush with both mortality and infamy.

On September 6, 1919 – almost a year to the date of the 26 Commissars’ mass execution – Gogoberidze was sitting at the New Light Café in Baku with two of his Azeri comrades from the city’s Bolshevik underground, when they were approached by Hajibäk Seidbäkov, a supporter – and according to some, an agent – of the ruling pan-Islamist Musavat Party. While accounts vary wildly as to what exactly transpired, all agree that Seidbäkov eventually produced a pistol and opened fire on the three seated Communists.²¹³ The two Azeris were killed instantly; Gogoberidze, shot multiple times and left for hours on the floor of the crime scene to bleed and be taunted by the local authorities (the city’s governor-general is purported to have said “So Gogoberidze, your crimes have finally caught up with you!” upon arriving at the café), barely survived the incident.²¹⁴ Although the attempted killing did not derail Gogoberidze’s revolutionary career in the Caucasus – he was ultimately made chairman of the Baku *revkom* in 1920, and then held the same post in Tbilisi from 1922-1924 – this violent encounter with the Musavat loomed large in his mind as he rose through the ranks of the Communist Party, and perhaps even afforded him additional revolutionary credibility, as well as in the memories of his family members as they sought his exoneration.

²¹² Ibid., 227.

²¹³ Michael G. Smith has productively explored the ways in which the New Light Café shooting was exploited by the Bolsheviks as part of a campaign of whispers intended to depict the Musavat as mortal enemies of the revolution; see Michael G. Smith, “Anatomy of a Rumor: Murder Scandal, the Musavat Party and Narratives of the Russian Revolution in Baku, 1917-20,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 36, 2 (Apr. 2001): 211-240.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 212.

Following the death of his Bolshevik patron, Dzhaparidze, Gogoberidze found a new ally through his work in Tbilisi in the form of Vissarion “Beso” Lominadze, himself a close associate of Sergo Ordzhonikidze; their fortunes would be closely linked through the remainder of both of their lives. From 1926 to 1930 Gogoberidze held the position of Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia, and when Lominadze replaced Aleksandr Krinitskii as the First Secretary of the Transcaucasian Party Committee (*Zakkraikom*) in April 1930 he brought on Gogoberidze to fill one of the positions vacated by Krinitskii’s men. However, in a rapid reversal of fortune, Lominadze, Gogoberidze, and the rest of their clique were forced from power before the year was out after the former spoke out against the forced collectivization policies introduced in the Caucasus.²¹⁵ Both Lominadze and Gogoberidze were exiled to the People’s Commissariat for Supplies – Lominadze to the scientific research division and Gogoberidze to the animal husbandry department.²¹⁶ Most likely stung by being so brusquely sidelined, Gogoberidze began to engage in intrigues against the cadre that had supplanted him and his comrades in the Transcaucasian *krai*. Using his position as a veteran of the internecine struggle in Azerbaijan to inveigh against the region’s new leadership, Gogoberidze focused his ire on the ascendant Lavrentii Beriia, whom he alleged had hidden his service in the Musavat counterintelligence from the Party. According to Elena Gogoberidze, in 1933 Levan approached Ordzhonikidze, supposedly with proof of Beriia’s counterrevolutionary activities. Although there is no published

²¹⁵ R. W. Davies, “The Syrtsov-Lomanidze Affair,” *Soviet Studies* 33, 1 (Jan. 1981): 35, 44.

²¹⁶ On Gogoberidze’s career trajectory, see RGANI f. 6, op. 3, d. 945, ll. 95-97ob. This Party Control Committee report, which secured Gogoberidze’s readmission to the CPSU in February 1956, was prepared in part by Gogoberidze’s comrade from Baku Ol’ga Shatunovskaia, who became a leading exponent for the rehabilitation of former political prisoners following her own release from exile. For her reminiscences of Gogoberidze in Baku and beyond, see Ol’ga Shatunovskaia, *Ob ushedshem veke: rasskazyvaet Ol’ga Shatunovskaia* (La Jolla, CA: DAA Books, 2001), 40, 49, 63, 73. My thanks to Hugh Truslow of Harvard University’s Fung Library for providing me with a digital copy of the document from RGANI.

record of what this evidence constituted, Beria's attempt to nip this rumormongering in the bud was preserved in Ordzhonikidze's personal archive.

Beria wrote to Ordzhonikidze in early March 1933 to complain that Gogoberidze – who at the time was “resting in Sukhumi,” likely due to health problems that would plague him over the next several years – was “disseminating vile things about me and the new Transcaucasian leadership in general. In particular, regarding my past work in the Musavat counterintelligence, he maintains that the Party supposedly did not know and does not know about it.”²¹⁷ These accusations, which reached Beria through Nestor Lakoba and others, ran directly counter to his own account of his acknowledged service with the Musavat. Beria reminded Ordzhonikidze that “you know well that I was sent to the Musavat counterintelligence by the Party and that this question was examined by the CC of the ACP(b) in 1920 in the presence of yourself, Coms. Stasova, Kaminskii, Mirza Davud Guseinov, Narimanov, Sarkis, Rukhulla Akhundov, Buniatzade and others.”²¹⁸ He further claimed to have sent Ordzhonikidze in 1925 “an official abstract of the decision of the CC of the AKP(b)” by which “I was completely rehabilitated, i.e. the fact of my work in the counterintelligence with the Party's knowledge was confirmed by Coms. Mirza Davud Guseinov, Kasum Izmailov and others' statements.”²¹⁹ Though this correspondence attests to the personal enmity that existed between Gogoberidze and Beria, it was not this animus that ultimately cost the former his life.

²¹⁷ Kvashonkin, et al, eds., *Sovetskoe rukovodstvo*, 204.

²¹⁸ Ibid. It bears mentioning that of the individuals Beria listed, only Stasova and Narimanov were spared execution; the rest were posthumously rehabilitated within the 1950s, and almost all were publically lauded, in one form or another, for having challenged Beria's rise. For specific instances, see Chapters 3 and 4.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

Beso Lominadze's outbursts against forced collectivization in Georgia came back to haunt him in the flurry of repressions against oppositionists within the Party unleashed by Sergei Kirov's murder. Notified of his impending arrest in January 1935, Lominadze chose to commit suicide rather than face a show trial; from that point, it was only a matter of time until the networks of Party cadres linked to Lomanidze were themselves purged. In October 1936 Stalin issued a directive to then-NKVD head Nikolai Ezhov on rounding up Lomanidze's former circle. The first head on the chopping block was that of Stepan Vardanian,

currently the secretary of the Taganrog city committee. He is undoubtedly a secret Trotskyite, or at least he is a patron and protector of Trotskyites. He should be arrested. L. Gogoberidze – secretary of one of the factory party committees in the Azov-Black Sea territory – should also be arrested. If Lominadze was a secret enemy of the party, then Gogoberidze is also a secret enemy of the party, since he was as close as could be with Lominadze. He should be arrested.²²⁰

At the time, Levon Gogoberidze had been working as the Party Secretary at the Rostov agricultural machinery factory (*Rostsel'mash*) for about a year, but it was in Sochi – where he was probably seeking treatment for the same ailments that took him to Sukhumi in 1933 – that he was arrested on October 22, 1936 by the Azov-Black Sea *krai* UNKVD.²²¹ For much of the next two months officers from the regional branch of state

²²⁰ Quoted in Khlevniuk, *Master of the House*, 156. In the original version of the list of Party members arrested in the Azov-Black Sea *krai* in late-1936 and early-1937 submitted to the Central Committee by local NKVD Deputy Chief Kagan, both Gogoberidze and Vardanian's names were clearly added as an afterthought, as both were handwritten while the other 130-odd names were typed; see RGASPI f. 17, op. 71, d. 54, ll. 23-31.

²²¹ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1105, l. 12. This information is drawn from a top secret summary of Gogoberidze's case file prepared by the MVD found in a file composed exclusively of Elena Gogoberidze's correspondence with Mikoian and materials relating to her brother. This is remarkable both for the fact that similar such reports sent to the Procuracy during rehabilitation investigations were as a rule returned to state security organs and are now inaccessible to researchers, and because of all the repressed families that contacted Mikoian, only the Gogoberidzes warranted their own file within his personal *opis'* at GARF. Gogoberidze's warrant was authorized by the head of the Azov-Black Sea NKVD G. S. Liushkov, who is notorious for having defected to Japan in June 1938 while in charge of the NKVD in the Far East when he became convinced that his own arrest was imminent. See Marc Jansen and Nikita Petrov,

security questioned Gogoberidze, and induced him to confess that he had been working against the Party, and Beria specifically, with Lominadze since he was stripped of his leadership role in Georgia.²²² Likely based on these admissions, in mid-December he was transferred to the custody of the Transcaucasian NKVD in Tbilisi, and thereby placed under Beria's control.

Between December 22, 1936 and February 2, 1937 Beria's chief enforcer within the Transcaucasian NKVD, Sergei Arsen'evich Goglidze, personally interrogated Gogoberidze ten times; during these sessions Gogoberidze attempted to walk back his earlier statements, attributing them to his "nervous condition" after being arrested, but was assailed with a new host of charges, including accusations from his coworkers in the Azov-Black Sea *krai* – who had been taken into custody since Gogoberidze's fall – that he had partaken in Trotskyite activities.²²³ Gogoberidze managed to smuggle two notes to his wife from captivity in Tbilisi, both of which bespeak the profound despair that marked his final months. He dismissed the charges against him of attempting to organize an attempt on Stalin's life as "false, absurd, monstrous and ridiculous" in the first note, but acknowledged fatalistically that "it's all over... [my] salvation: to die as quickly as possible"; after brief mention of a message intended for Sergo Ordzhonikidze the second note bemoaned the fact that "practically every day I give testimony, but all that, my dear, is now merely for the archive ... All of my testimony means nothing against the testimony of 5-7 scoundrels."²²⁴ Soon the ranks of these "scoundrels" would swell to

Stalin's Loyal Executioner: People's Commissar Nikolai Ezhov, 1895-1940 (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2002), 143-144.

²²² GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1105, l. 12.

²²³ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1105, l. 13.

²²⁴ Artizov et al, eds., *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 1, 386 fn6. For the full versions of these notes, as they were submitted to the Presidium for consideration in January 1954, see RGANI f. 3, op. 8, d. 83, ll. 71-72. Gogoberidze showed a great deal of concern for his daughter in these missives, asking that she be raised

include some of Gogoberidze's closest confederates from his years in the revolutionary underground.

The weeks leading up to Gogoberidze's conviction saw the advent of a concerted campaign to denounce him and those arrested simultaneously with him as inveterate enemies of the Party working to subvert Soviet power from within. The task of disavowing and excoriating Gogoberidze fell most notably to one of his Baku comrades, Boris Sheboldaev, who until that January had served as the First Secretary of the Azov-Black Sea *krai* Party Organization. On January 6, he was called before a meeting of the Azov-Black Sea Territorial committee to answer for the supposed perfidy that had transpired on his watch. Sheboldaev admitted to having known "Gogoberidze when I was in the underground in Baku in 1918":

As for Vardanian, I didn't know him at all. Gogoberidze arrived here in 1934 to serve in the region. He came to Yeisk, to the territorial committee, and I—we—gave him the opportunity to carry on his activities [...] There is no doubt that, had we exercised Bolshevik vigilance, had we checked on our people, we could have exposed them much, much earlier [...] Proceeding from trust, from credulity, we essentially covered up their activities and helped carry them out. And this was reflected in our decisions. There were many such incorrect decisions: the decision concerning Ovchinnikov, the decision concerning the car accident involving Gogoberidze, who killed someone because he feared him, the decision concerning Limarev in Shakhty, who criticized Liubarsky—these and a host of many other decisions about which, no doubt, you will be hearing, all of this, comrades, speaks of gross, totally unacceptable errors which I, as a leader, had committed and which, objectively speaking, have slowed down the unmasking of those enemies whom we, in effect, by virtue of our authority, shielded from the [party] organization and the Central Committee of our party.²²⁵

"with deep love and respect for the Party of Lenin-Stalin," and that she be told that "provocateurs abused mama-Liman [her pet name for him] and flayed him alive." He begged his wife's forgiveness for the "shameful end to [his] life."

²²⁵ J. Arch Getty and Vladimir Naumov, *The Road to Terror: Stalin and the Self-Destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932-1939*, trans. Benjamin Sher (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 342. A. A. Andreev elaborated on the accusation of vehicular homicide against Gogoberidze at the February-March plenum of the Central Committee in 1937: apparently, in June 1936 Gogoberidze was involved in a car crash that killed the wife of a certain engineer Nesterenko. Nikolai Glebov-Avilov, the doomed onetime

Having engaged in what J. Arch Getty and Vladimir Naumov term a “a ritualized affirmation of the new dominant line” via “apologetic performance,” Sheboldaev was able to spare himself – for a short while – from serious punishment, though two months later he was again required to debase himself before the assembled Party elite at the Central Committee’s plenum. Under the withering scrutiny of Stalin, Beria, and other potentates, when pressed about his relationship with Gogoberidze and other supposed Trotskyites in his midst Sheboldaev said that he was aware only that Gogoberidze “was connected with Lominadze, I knew that they had a personal connection.”²²⁶ Questioned as to the nature of this connection, Sheboldaev replied evasively: “I am saying that I knew Gogoberidze from the underground”; Stalin inquired if this was “from Baku (*po Baku*),” which Sheboldaev confirmed, continuing, “It must be said, at the time he was a quite good (*neplokhoi*) member of our organization.”²²⁷

Sheboldaev pleaded ignorance in the face of Beria’s accusation that he had sheltered both Gogoberidze and Vardanian despite their past expulsions and links to traitors like Lomanidze, and insisted that his oversights were due to “blindness, this gullibility, which led to us not even subjecting these people to scrutiny, we did not monitor (*ne kontrolirovali*) them, because we trusted them.”²²⁸ As Gerald M. Easter notes, Anastas Mikoian, Sheboldaev and Gogoberidze’s onetime cohort from

director of *Rostsel'mash*, testified – presumably under duress – that the incident was not an accident, and that Gogoberidze’s intended target had been Nesterenko, a co-conspirator in his Trotskyite cell who had developed cold feet. These lurid allegations were apparently never mentioned during Gogoberidze’s trial, and were not acknowledged during his rehabilitation. See *Voprosy istorii* 8 (1995): 5.

²²⁶ *Voprosy istorii* 4 (1995): 15. Gerald M. Easter quotes from this exchange, though the text he employs differs significantly from the version in *Voprosy istorii*; see Easter, *Reconstructing the State*, 156-157.

²²⁷ *Voprosy istorii* 4 (1995), 15.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

revolutionary Baku, watched these proceedings “in silence.”²²⁹ His denunciation of the Azov-Black Sea “conspirators” complete, Sheboldaev was briefly allowed to resume his Party career before his own arrest and execution in June 1937, while Gogoberidze – stripped of his revolutionary credentials – was drawn interminably closer toward his demise and erasure from the annals of Soviet history.

On March 21, 1937 Gogoberidze’s wife, Nina (Nutsa) Varfolomeevna, attended a meeting of Rostov-area Party organizations at which the previous week’s executions of Glebov-Avilov, Vardanian, and others were announced. She noted “that L. Gogoberidze was not on this list, and when it was read out at the meeting at *Rostsel’mash* one of the attendees posed the question – And Gogoberidze? – to which the speaker answered: - Gogoberidze is connected with the Georgian functionaries, and the investigation into the case has not been completed.”²³⁰ Little did Nutsa (and perhaps even the Party spokesman) know that Gogoberidze had been returned to Rostov the previous month and that very day was brought before a visiting session of the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the USSR, overseen by Deputy Chairman Ivan Osipovich Matulevich.²³¹ The Military Collegium’s proceedings were carried out behind closed doors, and consisted of little more than reading excerpts from the accused’s testimony before the sentence – death, in most cases – was handed down. There was no right of appeal, and sentences were carried out immediately.²³² Levan Davydovich’s hearing and sentencing appear to have followed

²²⁹ Easter, *Reconstructing the State*, 157.

²³⁰ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, l. 82.

²³¹ As the MVD’s case summary makes clear, Gogoberidze was transferred back to Rostov in error, as he was supposed to have been sent to Moscow for further interrogation at the behest of the NKVD’s Special-Political Department; however, once in Rostov he was made to confess to all the charges pressed against him. GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1105, ll. 13-14.

²³² Marc Jansen and Nikita Petrov, “Mass Terror and the Court: The Military Collegium of the USSR,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 58, 4 (June 2006): 589-602. Jansen and Petrov argue that the Military Collegium did not function as an independent judicial body; rather, it “operated as an organ of extra-judicial reprisal,”

this template exactly: he plead guilty, asked no quarter, and at 4 pm, within hours of Matulevich passing judgment on Gogoberidze, NKVD Commandant Genkin shot him in the presence of Deputy Procurator Pruss, there to provide the state-sanctioned murder with a further veneer of legality.²³³

Nutsa subsequently traveled to Moscow, where she “secured a meeting” with a Military Procurator named Azarin to clarify Levan’s legal status.²³⁴ Having “told Azarin that I was prepared for the possibility that Gogoberidze might have been shot and asked only that they tell me the truth” during their first appointment, Nutsa was unequivocally informed several days later “that Gogoberidze had not been shot,” and was eventually given the name of an investigator, Shalavin, to whom “Gogoberidze’s case had [ostensibly] been transferred for further inquiry.”²³⁵ After several months without any developments, Shalavin finally notified her via postcard at the end of July – in keeping with established protocol – that “L Gogoberidze had been sentenced to 10 years in the remote camps without the right of correspondence.”²³⁶ Once provided with this misinformation, Nutsa had precious few remaining days of freedom herself; by the year’s end she was arrested as the wife of an enemy of the people, and in January 1938 she

providing sanction for lists of predetermined cases put forward by Stalin and the Politburo, via the NKVD, acting, as they suggest, as a legal façade to give the impression that the party-state elite was not subject to the same sort of arbitrary destruction that the rest of Soviet society faced. According to figures provided by Dmitrii Iurasov, between 1935 and 1940 the Military Collegium delivered verdicts on some 50,000 individuals, 36,000 of whom were put to death; see Stephen Kotkin, “Terror, Rehabilitation, and Historical Memory: An Interview with Dmitrii Iurasov,” *Russian Review* 51, 2 (April 1992): 251.

²³³ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1105, l. 14; GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, l. 12. The “Genkin” referred to in Gogoberidze’s file was most likely Iakov Mikhailovich Genkin, who at the time was the Deputy Chief of the 10th (Prison) Department of the GUGB of the NKVD; see N. V. Petrov and K. V. Skorkin, *Kto rukovodil NKVD: spravochik* (Moskva: Zven’ia, 1999), 144.

²³⁴ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, l. 82.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid. In her correspondence with the Procurator General from 1954 Nutsa Gogoberidze lamented that she “did not preserve” this and an earlier postcard from Shalavin “for understandable reasons.”

received an eight-year term in a “corrective labor camp.”²³⁷ Thus the Gogoberidze family was shattered and cast to the wind, with Levan executed and his reputation as an “honorable” Bolshevik slandered, Nutsa exiled to the far reaches of the Gulag, and their daughter Lana effectively left an orphan. It would be nearly twenty years before this once powerful and privileged clan knew some semblance of normalcy, though their efforts to restore that which had been lost demanded the direct sanction of the ruling elites and exacted a grievous, unanticipated toll of their own.

Hope Against Documents: Persuading the Procuracy

Within days of the Presidium authorizing the Procuracy to assume control over Levan Davydovich’s investigation Elena Davydovna contacted Rudenko and laid out her conviction that her brother had survived his spell in Beria’s custody.²³⁸ As with her entreaty to Mikoian, Elena Davydovna foregrounded the importance of having a private audience with Rudenko, opening her appeal “with a request to receive me in person for a few minutes in relation to the case of my brother, the former Secretary of the CC of Georgia Levan Davydovich Gogoberidze.”²³⁹ She claimed that all the information she had provided to Malenkov, Khrushchev, and Mikoian regarding “Levan Gogoberidze’s sharp confrontations with Beria [...] proved to be correct and Gogoberidze was fully

²³⁷ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, l. 53. By her own account, Nutsa’s imprisonment was particularly harrowing. For a time, she was a cellmate of Nestor Lakoba’s wife, a “silent and calm woman [who] was taken away every evening and in the morning was dragged back to the cell, bloody and unconscious,” having refused to defame her husband; eventually she expired from this routine of abuse. See Roy Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, ed. and trans. George Shriver (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 495-496.

²³⁸ Elena Davydovna had already raised this issue in her correspondence with Mikoian, but based on the tenor of her protestations he does not appear to have been particularly persuaded by the evidence she cited; see GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1105, ll. 6-7, 9-11.

²³⁹ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, l. 1.

rehabilitated.”²⁴⁰ It therefore stood to reason that Levan Davydovich’s “fate is naturally of interest not only to our family,” but also to leading circles within the Party and government; she pointed to Mikoian’s phone call to Rudenko following Lana Gogoberidze’s January 4 visit as a prime example of how the case had grabbed the attention of the Party’s ruling clique.²⁴¹ Yet Elena Gogoberidze did not write to Rudenko to convince him of the importance of clearing Levan’s name, as Mikoian’s call had likely already driven this point home. Rather, she proffered a much more provocative claim that pushed the Procurator General’s nascent investigation in previously unforeseen directions.

Elena Gogoberidze introduced her conviction that Levan Davydovich had survived the Stalin years with the assertion that the “[o]ne thing I know for certain” was that “contrary to the certificate provided by the MVD leadership and investigative organs, my brother L. D. Gogoberidze was still alive in 1952.”²⁴² Giving no indication of her source for this startling statement, Elena once again closed her appeal with an entreaty to meet with Rudenko beyond the prying eyes of state security: “I beg you, Roman Andreevich, allow me to visit: I have some information and considerations that I am not comfortable including in a petition.”²⁴³ Rudenko eventually assented to this meeting on February 3, and although there is no record of what exactly transpired during their audience, two memos written by Elena Gogoberidze provide some indication of what was discussed, and what went unsaid that day.

²⁴⁰ Ibid. In this context, Elena Davydovna’s use of the term “rehabilitated” is meant to indicate that Levan’s charges against Beria had been substantiated and he had thereby been informally vindicated, rather than referring to the legal rehabilitation process, which had only just been initiated in his case.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Ibid.

In a single typed page titled “MATERIAL on LEVAN DAVYDOVICH GOGOBERIDZE,” Elena Davydovna laid out the most trenchant points that she wished to raise with Rudenko. She highlighted the 10-year sentence supposedly handed down by the Military Collegium in spring 1937 and the fact that Levan “left Rostov on warrant No., according to the *spravka* I received in the summer of 1937 at the Moscow Procuracy” as official substantiation for her theory, though these meager clues by no means served as the crux of her argument.²⁴⁴ More recently, Lusia Petrosian – one of the sisters of Stalin’s notorious (and by most accounts deranged) accomplice Kamo Petrosian – briefly returned to Tbilisi following her release from prison in 1945 or 1946 and while there reported to Elena Davydovna that she “saw L. GOGOBERIDZE in 1942 in Magadan.”²⁴⁵ Elena Davydovna characterized Petrosian’s account as “absolutely reliable,” given that “she knew L. Gogoberidze well.”²⁴⁶ Additionally, an unnamed (at-the-time) former *zek* “who had returned from the remote camps reported [in January 1954] that he ‘saw Levan Gogoberidze in 1952 in the Iagodnoe settlement (700-800 km from Magadan), from which L. Gogoberidze was /already in the capacity of a “perpetual settler” without the right of correspondence/ transferred to Pevek, Chukotka, Dal’sroi, the Main Administration (*Glavnoe upravlenie*) in Magdan [sic].”²⁴⁷ It remains unclear

²⁴⁴ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, l. 5. Elena Davydovna further noted that “[t]here was no indication in the *spravka* of where L. D. GOGOBERIDZE ‘went’” when he was taken from Rostov in 1937.

²⁴⁵ Ibid. Though it is possible that Lusia Petrosian shared her brother’s mental instability, at this point it cannot be conclusively documented, and would add relatively little to understanding the events that transpired in the 1950s. Noted memoirist Evgeniia Ginzburg encountered Petrosian on a prisoner transport train, and remembered how she played down her familial connections, describing herself as a “plain, ignorant girl from the mountains,” in the vain hope that she would be reprieved and summoned back to Moscow with her things. See Eugenia Semyonovna Ginzburg, *Journey into the Whirlwind*, trans. Paul Stevenson and Max Hayward (Harvest: New York, 1967), 261.

²⁴⁶ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, l. 5.

²⁴⁷ Ibid. The text in italics was handwritten on the original document. It also bears mentioning that Elena Davydovna’s original text was torn into sixteen pieces, then glued back together on another piece of paper, and copies were then made from the original to be sent to the MVD; see GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, l. 14.

how much of this information Elena Davydovna was able to impart to Rudenko during their conversation, and – more importantly – how it was received, though her letter written to Rudenko immediately afterward addresses several issues that she was unable to raise in person.

Elena Davydovna hoped that her visit had “managed to raise some doubts for [Rudenko] regarding the execution of L. D. Gogoberidze’s sentence in 1937,” but acknowledged that “[n]aturally,” being “agitated by this conversation,” she had “overlooked the following information” that she deemed critical to her brother’s case.²⁴⁸ Having been in Rostov while Levan Davydovich was in custody, Elena Davydovna – much like her sister-in-law – interacted with workers from *Rostsel’mash* who “were extremely (even openly) agitated over his fate and repeatedly questioned the Azov-Black Sea leadership at rallies and meetings about Gogoberidze’s ‘case.’” When they demanded news of Gogoberidze at the meeting during which Sheboldaev’s execution was announced, they were apparently told that his file had been “submitted for further inquiry.”²⁴⁹ Elena Davydovna saw this inconsistency in the timeline of Levan’s prosecution as indicative of the possibility that he had somehow escaped death, a position further supported – in her eyes – by details within documents from the Procuracy and MVD that contradicted the sequence of events Rudenko presented.

The *spravka* that Elena Davydovna received from the Procuracy in 1937 – referred to in her initial list from the conversation with the Procurator General – stated

²⁴⁸ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, l. 6.

²⁴⁹ Ibid. The December 20, 1937 edition of *Pravda* featured an extraordinary notification from the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court – seemingly the only one of its kind – announcing the conviction and execution of Sheboldaev, Avel’ Enukidze, Mamiia Orakhelashvili, and Lev Karakhan for terrorism and espionage several days prior; though these men were indeed shot over the course of late 1937, they were not tried together, and in June 1956 the Procuracy assembled a report identifying this account’s falsehoods at the behest of Khrushchev’s assistant Grigorii Shuiskii. See “V Voennoi Kollegii Verkhovnogo Suda Soiuzu SSR,” *Pravda*, December 20, 1937, 5; GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4578, ll. 271-273.

that Levan Davydovich had been transferred from Rostov in “either July or August 1937,” thereby suggesting that he was alive well past the date of his sentencing.²⁵⁰

Likewise, a *spravka* the MVD provided Elena Davydovna early in her search made “no mention of an execution” in reference to Levan Davydovich. Rather, the *spravka* in its entirety consisted of “the following: ‘L. D. Gogoberidze, year and place of birth, arrested in Azov-Black Sea in 1937 (instead of 1936), sentenced to 10 years – nothing more is known about him.’” When Elena Davydovna pressed about the possibility of her brother having been executed, MVD officials told her “categorically” that they had “no such information.”²⁵¹

These discrepancies, compounded by rumors and testimonies circulating among Gulag returnees from the Caucasus and Rostov, led the surviving Gogoberidzes to “have no doubt [...] that L. D. Gogoberidze at that time [1937] was saved from death by a fluke, and that later, perhaps precisely this sentence saved him from Beria’s hands.”²⁵²

Although Elena Davydovna was credulous of the MVD’s assertion that it had no indication of Levan’s fate after he was supposedly dispatched to an unspecified camp, the mistrust that she harbored for the central institutions of the Terror, as previously

²⁵⁰ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, l. 6ob. Elena Davydovna regretted that she could not remember the exact date specified in the *spravka*.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid. Although this sort of “fluke” seems far-fetched, A. Sadovskii, the onetime commandant of the Moscow NKVD’s Economic Department, recalled that during the height of the Terror at the Butovo firing range, one of the busiest execution sites, “People who were sentenced only to prison terms were occasionally shot in error, and vice versa [...] in the 1950s a person registered as having been shot suddenly reappeared and sent in a petition for rehabilitation written in his own hand. This means of course that in the years 1937-8 someone else must have been shot in his name, either intentionally or in error.” That said, Sadovskii was referring to production-line killing that took place at Butovo, rather than the more careful protocol that was probably observed in Rostov when dealing with a Party notable. Miriam Dobson cites a letter from an Ossetian man living in the Komi ASSR who for two decades lived under an assumed Georgian identity to escape Beria’s grasp, and only revealed himself to the authorities upon the announcement of Beria’s deposal. Sadovskii, quoted in Karl Schlögel, *Moscow 1937*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Polity Press: Cambridge, UK and Malden, MA, 2012), 483; Dobson, *Khrushchev’s Cold Summer*, 34.

articulated in her letter to Mikoian from July 1953, remained a leading concern. She acknowledged the possibility that “as family members, despair dictates our suspicions – but can one rule out the possibility of resistance by such a family to inquiries from the depths of the very *apparat* of the MVD or GULAG?”²⁵³ The organs of state security were still viewed as a potential den of fabricators and their enablers, and Elena Davydovna questioned whether it could “be absolutely ruled out that people from Beria’s structures still remain [within the MVD], whose interests are by no means served (*kotorym otniud’ ne na ruku*) by such a resurrection of the dead, especially of those like Levan Gogoberidze?”²⁵⁴ This sentence, suffused with religious symbolism, gave voice to the leading paradox of the new post-Beria order: how could those who owed their very careers to a proclaimed enemy of the people be entrusted to delve into his past misdeeds? In Elena Davydovna’s eyes, Beria’s history of criminality had already touched her family well before Levan’s 1936 arrest.

Though she dismissed this closing observation as “already irrelevant” to the investigation, as Beria had been dead for over a month, Elena Davydovna drew attention to “the fact that the Musavatists already put three bullets in Levan in 1919 (the Baku underground barely nursed him back to health). It is clear that this attempt could not have been carried out (*ne oboshlos’*) without Beria.”²⁵⁵ Elena Davydovna thus depicted Levan Davydovich’s 1936 arrest as the final blow in a concerted campaign by Beria against her brother that stretched back to the Civil War. Thanks to Mikoian’s patronage and the sanction provided by the Presidium, Elena Davydovna’s arguments merited serious consideration, and it therefore fell to Rudenko and his subordinates at the Procuracy to

²⁵³ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, l. 6ob.

²⁵⁴ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, ll. 6ob-7.

²⁵⁵ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, l. 7.

arrange this constellation of contradictory claims and hearsay into a politically useful and legally viable narrative of the early Terror.

The Aims and Parameters of Gogoberidze's Rehabilitation

In Rudenko's February 6, 1954 report to the Central Committee recommending that Levan Gogoberidze be exonerated, the Procurator General evinced a studious legalism and ingenuity in reframing the case from a story of anti-Stalin terrorism nipped in the bud to one of a ruthless political vendetta. Though he operated along many of the same premises that Elena Davydovna had advanced, holding Beria responsible for Levan Davydovich's persecution, he did not share her optimistic assessment of the latter's chances of survival. His report to Khrushchev and Malenkov began with the sentence handed down by the visiting session of the Military Collegium in Rostov-on-Don: "highest measure of criminal punishment – execution. In the file there is a *spravka* which states that GOGOBERIDZE's sentence was carried out that same day."²⁵⁶ For the purposes of Rudenko's inquiry, Elena Davydovna's allegations regarding her brother's sentence were a nonstarter; Levan Davydovich's rehabilitation was to be handled decidedly – and rightfully – as a posthumous one. The procedure for posthumous rehabilitation did not differ substantively from the rehabilitation of living subjects; in both its permutations, the imperative of legal rehabilitation was to establish the soundness of convictions through close scrutiny of available evidence, verdicts, and, if possible, interviews with directly involved persons. Though the task of posthumous rehabilitation was somewhat complicated by the fact that the individual under consideration could not

²⁵⁶ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3286, l. 39. It bears mentioning that there is no copy of the Procuracy's review of Levan Gogoberidze's case in the *delo* dedicated to investigating his possible whereabouts.

advocate on his or her own behalf, there is no indication that the Procuracy approached the practice as somehow outside its typical purview.

As a prelude to dismantling the case against Gogoberidze, Rudenko laid out the laundry list of charges with which he had been impugned in 1937:

According to the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the USSR's sentence GOGOBERIDZE was found guilty of being "an active participant in a counterrevolutionary Trotskyite-Zinovievite organization that on 1.XII.1934 perpetrated the foul murder of S. M. Kirov and prepared terrorist acts against the leadership of the VKP(b) and Soviet government during the period 1934-1936" (l.d. 216). The sentence also asserts that beginning in 1930 GOGOBERIDZE conducted active counterrevolutionary activities, and from 1930 he "joined the terrorist struggle" and took part in preparations for a terrorist act against I. V. Stalin. Moreover, GOGOBERIDZE stood accused, having entered into a criminal conspiracy with the terrorist-Trotskyites Vardanian, Livshits, and others, of recruiting new members for the counterrevolutionary Trotskyite group, and also, having established ties with the Trotskyite-saboteur Glebov-Avilov, of helping him conduct sabotage at the Rostsel'mash factory.²⁵⁷

Rudenko observed that "[n]ot one of these accusations leveled against GOGOBERIDZE is corroborated by evidence, with the exception of the transcript of the interrogation of GOGOBERIDZE himself from March 17, 1937"; the transcript was treated as particularly suspect, as it "gives no indication of by whom or where GOGOBERIDZE's interrogation was carried out."²⁵⁸ This was far, though, from the most egregious example of legal misconduct to be found in Gogoberidze's case file.

Over a month after his arrest Gogoberidze was "charged under articles 58-10 (counterrevolutionary agitation) and 58-11 (participation in a counterrevolutionary organization) of the Penal Code," neither of which "provide[d] for capital punishment"

²⁵⁷ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3286, ll. 39-40.

²⁵⁸ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3286, l. 40.

during peacetime.²⁵⁹ This proved to be little impediment to the NKVD: once a confession had been extracted in which Gogoberidze implicated himself, the Military Collegium quickly tried and sentenced him to death, rather than waiting for investigators to press new charges.²⁶⁰ Rudenko emphasized that this slapdash sentence constituted a total contravention of both the spirit and the letter of Soviet law.²⁶¹ The case's shaky legal footing additionally "[drew] attention to the fact that although GOGOBERIDZE was charged with participation in a counterrevolutionary organization, he was tried not with a group of other defendants, but alone."²⁶² Rudenko's highlighting of this issue – meant to further cast Gogoberidze's persecution as the product of personal antipathy on Beria's part – served to isolate Gogoberidze rehabilitation from its wider political implications: it did not prompt a review of the cases against those who were implicated, though not directly charged in Gogoberidze's case, and Beria and his accomplices' systematic reliance upon torture to extract confessions, which Rudenko invoked as proof of their malign intent and Gogoberidze's innocence, did not furnish a pretext for automatically reopening the investigations that the Transcaucasian NKVD had conducted.²⁶³

Rudenko devoted considerable attention to the Georgian NKVD's preoccupation with Gogoberidze's and Beria's shared past in Baku, underscoring the presence of Gogoberidze at Gogoberidze's "repeated interrogations" in Tbilisi.²⁶⁴ Gogoberidze had been sentenced to capital punishment alongside his patron in December 1953, and Rudenko

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ This is not to suggest, however, that others who could be tied to Beria's criminality did not have their cases heard in due time. As the previous chapter demonstrated, Mikoian was quite proactive in forwarding appeals involving Beria to the Procuracy, and the following chapter delves into the manner in which chains of rehabilitation were formed in the 1950s and 1960s, as later exonerations relied on the precedents set by previous cases for justification.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

mentioned that prior to their convictions, investigators “established that Beria and his accomplices were aware of the fact that GOGOBERIDZE knew about Beria’s service in the Musavat counterintelligence and spoke about this with Sergo Ordzhonikidze” through materials written by NKVD members and – presumably – the copy of Beria’s letter to Ordzhonikidze that had been entered into evidence.²⁶⁵ Rudenko failed to emphasize, though, that the letter also made it clear that Beria did not seem especially threatened by these allegations, as the Party already declared the matter closed in 1920. The transcripts of Gogoberidze’s interrogations from both Tbilisi and Rostov-on-Don revealed that investigators “were particularly interested in [his] supposedly ‘slandering’ statements about Beria,” from which Rudenko concluded that “Beria and his accomplices feared denunciations from GOGOBERIDZE and had an interest in his conviction.”²⁶⁶ While these materials laid bare the obvious animus that Beria harbored for Levan Davydovich – inspired, in no small part, by the latter’s intriguing – they did not address the actual impetus for his arrest and elimination.

As the memo uncovered by historian Oleg Khlevniuk demonstrates, Beria was simply acting upon orders he had received from Ezhov, who in turn had been specifically directed by Stalin to have Gogoberidze arrested because of his ties to Lomanidze.

Rudenko decidedly downplayed the close relationship between Lomanidze and

²⁶⁵ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3286, l. 41; Rudenko quoted from a December 16, 1937 report written by Bogdan Kobulov, one of Beria’s trusted subordinates, which had been appended to Gogoberidze’s case file: “Recounting a conversation with Levan Gogoberidze in Sukhumi in 1933, Agniashvili testified that Levan Gogoberidze disseminated a counterrevolutionary, slanderous fabrication about Comrade Beria’s past based on Comrade Sergo Ordzhonikidze’s words.” For the excerpt from Beria’s letter entered into evidence in 1953, see Oleg Mozokhin, ed., *Politbiuro i delo Beria: sbornik dokumentov* (Moskva: Kuchkovo pole, 2012), 556-557.

²⁶⁶ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3286, l. 41. The late Russian Marxist historian Vadim Rogovin suggests that this emphasis on Gogoberidze’s accusations – evident in others’ interrogation transcripts as well – was ultimately grounded in Beria’s desire to posthumously discredit Ordzhonikidze. See Vadim Z. Rogovin, *Stalin’s Terror of 1937-1938: Political Genocide in the USSR*, trans. Frederick S. Choate (Oak Park, MI: Mehring Books, 2009), 162-163.

Gogoberidze, as well as the former's role in his onetime ally's downfall. He noted that Gogoberidze "convincingly refuted the charges of counterrevolutionary activity pressed against him" during the interrogations, "acknowledging only friendly relations with Lomanidze."²⁶⁷ Despite its brevity, this passage is extremely telling with regard to the nascent objectives and assumptions of posthumous rehabilitation. Because the Presidium had "cleared" only Gogoberidze's case for review, Rudenko was obliged to insulate Levan Davydovich from politically suspect individuals; Lominadze and most of those who rose alongside him remained enemies in the eyes of the Party, and therefore Gogoberidze's propinquity to them had to be minimized. Even though Rudenko deemed the "absence in the file of any sort of other objective evidence" beyond the transcript of Gogoberidze's interrogation from shortly before his execution totally insufficient to convict him of "grave counterrevolutionary crimes," at no point did he extend this same scrutiny to other cases mentioned during Gogoberidze's trial.²⁶⁸

Likewise, the admission that it was "also known that interrogations in the cases of individuals from whom participants in Beria's counterrevolutionary treasonous group feared denunciations were carried out through strong-arm methods of assault and tortures prohibited by law" did not immediately occasion the reopening of the cases against thousands of other individuals who had the misfortune to fall into Beria's clutches.²⁶⁹ Indeed, as the previous chapter attests, many families, such as the Kalmykovs, who could also claim to have been specifically targeted for reprisals by the NKVD chief, were kept in suspense for months, unsure if their dossiers had even been retrieved from the

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Ibid. Vardanian and Glebov-Avilov were not rehabilitated until 1956, Iakov Livshits only in 1988, and because Lominadze shot himself rather than face trial he was not eligible for official legal exoneration.

²⁶⁹ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3286, ll. 41-42.

archives. This underscores the extremely limited mandate under which the earliest posthumous rehabilitations operated; even as the exculpation of specific individuals revealed yawning fissures in the legalistic edifice that allowed the Bolsheviks to cannibalize themselves in the 1930s, the Procuracy was not automatically empowered to scrutinize other related cases. Because Gogoberidze was tried on his own and because of his established history of antagonism with Beria, his case provided an ideal opportunity to coopt the past in the service of the new anti-Beria Party line.

For all its conclusive findings, Rudenko's report was without legal force; it was only within his purview to recommend that the case be dismissed and Gogoberidze posthumously rehabilitated by way of "a protest before the Military Collegium of the USSR Supreme Court."²⁷⁰ However, in practice the Military Collegium appeared to have had little agency of its own in the rehabilitation process, as its verdicts closely mirrored materials that the Procuracy submitted, and it rarely— if ever — declined to endorse the Procuracy's proposals in this sphere. On March 6, one month after Rudenko issued his conclusions, his deputy, Lev Nikolaevich Smirnov, presented the Procuracy's argument before the Military Collegium.²⁷¹ The Military Collegium's ruling, issued that same day, summarized and reiterated the major points of Rudenko's report, foregrounding the fact that the "preliminary investigation and proceedings of Gogoberidze's case were conducted with flagrant violations of procedural law"; no explicit mention was made of the fabricated nature of the charges against Gogoberidze.²⁷² It endorsed the interpretation

²⁷⁰ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3286, l. 42.

²⁷¹ Smirnov initially came to prominence as a deputy prosecutor at both the Nuremberg and Tokyo war crimes tribunals, and he eventually rose to the position of chairman of the Supreme Court of the RSFSR, in which capacity he presided over the 1966 proceedings against dissident writers Andrei Siniavskii and Iulii Daniel' (my thanks to Benjamin Nathans for pointing out this detail). Starting in mid-February 1954 he assumed control over the Gogoberidze dossier from Rudenko.

²⁷² GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, l. 35.

that “Gogoberidze’s arrest and his sentencing for grave crimes was an act of reprisal by the enemy of the people Beria and his accomplices because Gogoberidze knew about Beria’s service in the Musavat counterintelligence and spoke about this with Sergo Ordzhonikidze,” thereby lending judicial credence to the narrative originally promulgated by Elena Gogoberidze and a small cohort of Gulag survivors.²⁷³

The ruling actually hewed closer to Elena Davydovna’s account of Levan’s downfall than Rudenko’s did, in that it included mention of his being “grievously injured by Musavat counterintelligence” in Baku, which led “Beria and his accomplices [to have] grounds [...] to fear denunciations from Gogoberidze, which is why they inflicted reprisals on him,” though like the Procuracy, the Military Collegium unequivocally identified March 21, 1937 as Gogoberidze’s date of death. Given these “newly disclosed circumstances” and “the absence of a *corpus delicti*” the Military Collegium annulled Levan Gogoberidze’s death sentence and closed the case against him.²⁷⁴ Though this legal vindication could not negate Gogoberidze’s physical destruction, it did serve – in the eyes of Soviet officialdom – to efface the concerted blackening of his reputation that Stalin oversaw, allowing him to once again be counted among the pioneers of Soviet power in the Caucasus. Yet by laying ultimate responsibility for Levan Davydovich’s persecution at the feet of “Beria and his accomplices” – all of whom by that point were either dead or awaiting trial – both the Procuracy and the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court reflected a continued deference to procedural and political concerns, as well as the reluctance of the post-Stalin ruling elite to confront the full scope of the legal

²⁷³ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, ll. 35-36.

²⁷⁴ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, l. 36.

falsification and fabrication that allowed so many of their onetime comrades to be liquidated by the very system that they had striven to create.

Once Levan Davydovich had been fully exculpated the Soviet government was able to make use of his past actions to discredit newly identified enemies. For example, in March and April 1954 as part of the case against Mir Dzafar Bagirov, investigators from the Party Control Committee and Procurator General Rudenko repeatedly brought up Bagirov's 1918 arrest in Baku by Gogoberidze, now hailed as a "representative of the famous Baku commissar Dzhaparidze."²⁷⁵ Prior to his rehabilitation Levan Davydovich's involvement with an established martyr of the revolution like Dzhaparidze would never have been acknowledged, but upon his being readmitted to the fold this relationship was avidly exploited as a means of impugning Bagirov's – and by extension, the late Beria's – commitment to the Soviet project. From that point on, Gogoberidze was repeatedly mentioned in legal proceedings, Party reports, and the press as a valiant fighter for Communism felled by Beria's machinations. In particular, at times when Moscow sought to discipline the Georgian Communist Party and its members, Levan Davydovich's demise was consistently cited as an example of the human cost of the failure to practice proper Bolshevik vigilance.²⁷⁶ Yet as the Party began to exploit Gogoberidze's memory for its own ends, his survivors continued to struggle with the stigma of having been "family members of a betrayer of the Motherland."

Also indicative of the initially limited aims of rehabilitation is the fact that the onus of initiating Levan Davydovich's widow's exoneration fell to Nutsa Gogoberidze

²⁷⁵ Khaustov, *Delo Beria*, 440, 442.

²⁷⁶ See, for example, A. N. Artizov et al, eds., *Reabilitatsiia: kak eto bylo. Dokumenty prezidiuma TsK KPSS i drugie materialy. Vol. 2. Fevral' 1956 – nachalo 80-kh godov* (Moskva: Mezhdunarodnyi fond "Demokratiia," 2003), 151; for Dzhavakhishvili's speech at the 22nd Party Congress, see *XXII s'ezd Kommunisticheskoi partii Sovetskogo Soiuzha, 17-31 oktiabria 1961 goda: stenograficheskii otchet, tom III* (Moskva: Gos. izd-vo polit. lit-ry, 1962), 118.

herself, even though the charges against her consisted only of being the wife of an “enemy of the people.”²⁷⁷ She wrote to Rudenko on April 7, 1954 – a month following the Military Collegium’s decision regarding her husband – to request that her conviction be reviewed, as living in Tbilisi on a former *zek*’s restricted passport was causing her – as she put it later to Smirnov – “no small measure (*nemalo*) of unpleasantness.”²⁷⁸ Over the next few weeks the Procuracy and Military Collegium quickly went to work, and both ruled that Nutsa’s sentence constituted “an act of reprisal against a member of the family of an individual from whom Beria and his accomplices feared denunciations,” and the case was vacated by May 5.²⁷⁹ The justice of the Military Collegium who signed off on the notification order for Nutsa Gogoberidze’s rehabilitation was none other than Ivan Matulevich, the same man who imposed Levan Davydovich’s death sentence.²⁸⁰ While the surviving Gogoberidzes may have struggled to dispel the lingering aftereffects of repression even once Levan Davydovich was officially exculpated, at the same time they managed to induce the Procuracy to embark upon an altogether different mission: to prove that Levan Davydovich did not die in Rostov, but instead lived out the height of the Terror in the (relative) safety of a series of prison camps.

²⁷⁷ While Nutsa’s predicament appears to have been the rule at this time, rather than the exception, there were several notable instances in which living wives were rehabilitated before their more prominent executed husbands; such cases included those of Naneishvili-Kosareva, Chizhova, and Elena Bogoraz, who had been married to RSFSR *Sovnarkom* head Daniil Sulimov.

²⁷⁸ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, ll. 44, 82ob. Though the vast majority of posthumous rehabilitation appeals appear to have come from wives, children, siblings, and other relatives, there do not appear to have been any official restrictions in place on who could apply for any given individual’s rehabilitation. Tsetseliia Isaakovna Kin, the widow of writer Viktor Pavlovich Kin, wrote in to the Procuracy in April 1956 on behalf of Marsel’ Izrailevich Rozenberg, the USSR’s representative in Spain during the Spanish Civil War, who did not have any surviving family to advocate on his behalf. See Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i isskustva (RGALI) f. 2803, op. 1, d. 174.

²⁷⁹ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, ll. 45-46, 53-55, 62-62ob.

²⁸⁰ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, ll. 61, 120. Matulevich did not remain in his post long after this; in late August 1954 he was removed from the bench along with two of his colleagues at the Military Collegium, and a year later all three were expelled from the Party for having participated in the illegal repression of innocent Soviet notables; Gogoberidze was not mentioned among those in whose deaths Matulevich was implicated, though. See Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 1, 239-243.

Dredging the Archipelago: The Search for Specters in the Gulag

Despite all available evidence indicating that Elena Davydovna was mistaken regarding her brother's survival, Procurator General Rudenko treated her insistence that Levan Davydovich did not die in Rostov-on-Don with all attendant seriousness, if not quite credulity.²⁸¹ In a letter to Minister of Internal Affairs Sergei Nikiforovich Kruglov written two days after Elena Davydovna's audience at the Procuracy in February 1954, Rudenko conceded that it was "evident" from the materials in Gogoberidze's file that the Military Collegium condemned him to death and that the sentence had been carried out almost immediately, which he "announced [...] to [Gogoberidze's] sister."²⁸² Undeterred by this stark admission, "E. Gogoberidze maintains that she allegedly has information from reliable sources that her brother was alive in 1942-43," citing Liusia Petrosian's account that she "supposedly encountered L. Gogoberidze in Magadan."²⁸³ Forwarding a copy of Elena Davydovna's "Material on L. D. Gogoberidze," Rudenko requested that

²⁸¹ The Gogoberidze's refusal to entertain the possibility that Levan had been shot in 1937 was echoed in the struggles of another Georgian Old Bolshevik family, the Alliluevs. Anna Allilueva, the younger sister of Stalin's second wife Nadezhda and wife of secret policeman Stanislav Redens, balked at the notion that her husband had been executed as an enemy of the people, even when confirmation came from Stalin himself. As Svetlana Allilueva wrote, her aunt was "convinced her husband is still alive, although she's had word of his posthumous rehabilitation. She thinks he has a new wife and family somewhere in the Far North like Kolyma or Magadan ('After so many years, why not?' she'll ask) and that he just doesn't want to come home. From time to time she'll insist after one of her dreams or hallucinations that she's seen her husband and had a talk with him." Svetlana Allilueva attributed this certitude to the schizophrenia that ran in her mother's side of the family, and tellingly, unlike the Gogoberidzes, the Alliluevs made no apparent attempt to officially corroborate Anna's delusions regarding Redens. See Svetlana Allilueva, *Twenty Letters to a Friend: A Memoir*, trans. Priscilla Johnson McMillan (Harper Perennial: New York, 2016), 54-58.

²⁸² GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, l. 4. That Rudenko was so forthright with Elena Davydovna about the facts of Levan Davydovich's death was remarkable in and of itself and a reflection of the early juncture at which their exchange occurred; it appears that Naneishvili-Kosareva was one of the only other survivors to be directly informed of the actual circumstances of her husband's execution in 1954. See Elena Kosareva, "Zvezda i smert' genseka," *Moskovskii komsomolets*, October 29, 2003, available at <http://www.mk.ru/editions/daily/article/2003/10/29/124768-zvezda-i-smert-genseka.html> (accessed March 11, 2018). On the official practice of fabricating causes and dates of death, and the resulting controversies, see Chapter 3.

²⁸³ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, l. 4.

Kruglov “give suggestions on the verification of her petition and notify the Procuracy of the USSR of the results.”²⁸⁴ As the MVD began the process of combing its own files to ascertain whether there existed any possibility that Levan Davydovich had survived his captivity, Elena Davydovna was aggressively soliciting the testimony of others who purportedly saw him alive in the hopes of bolstering her case to the authorities.

The first such witness to come forward – in mid-February – was Teimuraz Iraklievich Vashklevich, the Tbilisi denizen to whom Elena Davydovna alluded in her note to Rudenko as having recently returned from the “remote camps.” Vashklevich confirmed for Rudenko, “[a]t the insistence of the relatives of the former secretary of the TsK of Georgia,” that he “encountered [him] in the summer of 1952 in the Iagodnoe settlement [...] in Kolyma. I was working in the settlement mess hall as a watchman [...] he told me that after the end of his sentence he had to remain in exile and would soon be leaving for the Pevek settlement.”²⁸⁵ While the Procuracy apparently sat on this statement for several weeks, Elena Davydovna continued to barrage the Procurator General and his subordinates with evidence to foster her fact-finding campaign.

Liusia Petrosian telegraphed Elena Davydovna on February 14 from exile in the Eniseisk settlement to describe her passing encounter with the individual she recognized as Levan Davydovich. She claimed to have run into Gogoberidze in summer 1939 at a “transit point” in Vladivostok from which she was sent to Magadan; she confessed to being unaware of Levan’s “further movements,” but “suppose[d] [he] went to

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, l. 8.

Kolyma.”²⁸⁶ This scanty information prompted Elena Davydovna to write to Rudenko the following day, this time with almost triumphant conviction: “It has thus been made clear with absolute certitude that the sentence handed down in L. D. Gogoberidze’s case on 21 March 19X7 [sic] was NOT carried out: in the summer of 1939 my brother was alive and found in Vladivostok.”²⁸⁷ Elena also invoked Vashkevich’s account as further proof that Levan was seen alive less than two years prior some 700-800 kilometers from Magadan, urging Rudenko to corroborate this data with the Main Camps Administration: “The GULAG can easily verify this upon request, and furthermore, at the very least the GULAG must have its own lists, its own registries, its own filing system, if the latest information proves to be not quite accurate.”²⁸⁸ Elena Davydovna’s letter – which up to that point had maintained a largely impersonal tone – suddenly took a dramatically more emotional tack, as she lamented, “[i]f only I could communicate with Eniseisk myself, but otherwise we are completely helpless! (*Esli ia mogla snestis’ s Eniseiskom sama, to dal’she ved’ my sovershenno bespomoshchny!*)”²⁸⁹ On behalf of the entire Gogoberidze clan, Elena Davydovna “implore[d]” the Procurator General “to say nothing of Levan’s terrible fate, take into consideration the fact that our family endured these 17-18 years having lost a father, husband and only brother! – And help us with your power and your authority.”²⁹⁰ This expression of unchecked pathos marked a distinct shift in the grounds that Levan Davydovich’s relatives employed to justify the continued search for his possible whereabouts. While Elena Davydovna initially emphasized the pragmatic value of retrieving Levan Davydovich from exile, as her hopes for a swift resolution to this

²⁸⁶ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, l. 3.

²⁸⁷ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, l. 2.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

mystery proved fleeting both she and her sister-in-law came to rely on a combination of irreverent effrontery and sentiment in order to ensure the authorities' continued vigilance, even in the face of overwhelming evidence that disputed their claims, reflecting their determination to keep the investigation going by any means necessary.

Within days of Liusia Petrosian's inflammatory telegram reaching Elena Gogoberidze, Rudenko received confirmation from the First Special Department of the MVD that the Gogoberidze family's hopes were entirely misplaced; the First Special Department's archive held a copy of Matulevich's verdict from March 21, 1937, as well as a certificate verifying the execution of the sentence. Both the verdict and the certificate pertained to "a single individual – GOGOBERIDZE L. D."²⁹¹ The chief of the First Special Department additionally insisted that there existed "no information to suggest that GOGOBERIDZE Levon [*sic*] Davydovich is supposedly located in exile in Department "P" [for special settlers] of the MVD of the USSR."²⁹² There is no indication in the Procuracy's file as to when, how, or even whether Rudenko confronted Elena Davydovna with this material, but based on her responses to similar discouragement, in all likelihood whatever Rudenko might have told her would have done little to shake her convictions. Bolstered by Petrosian and Vashklevich's respective reports, Elena Davydovna could not be persuaded by mere documents alone that Levan had died an ignominious death in Rostov-on-Don. This is unsurprising in light of the emotional turmoil to which the Gogoberidze family had been subjected since Levan's arrest; to abandon their faith after such a prospect materialized would have been unbearable. What is more remarkable, however, is that rather than curtailing its inquiries once Levan

²⁹¹ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, l. 12.

²⁹² *Ibid.*

Davydovich's execution had been established, the Procuracy continued in its attempts to untangle the mystery of Levan Davydovich's location, devoting considerable time and manpower to this tenacious quandary at a point when its resources were already stretched razor-thin by the influx of complaints and inquiries to its various departments.²⁹³ The continued allocation of state resources to what increasingly appeared to be a wild goose chase can be best accounted for through Mikoian's repeated exertion of his influence on the Gogoberidze's behalf.

Frustrated by the Procurator General and MVD's apparent lack of zeal in pursuing her brother's case, in late February Elena Davydovna proposed to Mikoian "a very simple, easy, and quick way to ascertain, finally, Levan's fate: you might make arrangements for Liusia Arkad'evna Petrosian to be summoned to Moscow from Eniseisk, where she is living in a settlement after completing her camp term."²⁹⁴ Elena maintained that "[t]alking with [Petrosian] will be sufficient to cause all doubts concerning the execution of the sentence in 1937 to fall away, and then the MVD will be able, finally, to begin real inquiries for L. D. Gogoberidze in the camps, colonies, and so on."²⁹⁵ She closed by "beg[ging]" Mikoian to inform her if this scheme was "feasible"; while it is again unclear if this missive elicited a direct response, by early March, when Mikoian instructed Rudenko with a memo designated "SPECIAL SUPERVISION" to "familiarize" himself with Petrosian's file, the latter had already had his subordinates take steps to shed light on the situation.²⁹⁶

²⁹³ On the Procuracy's inability to keep pace with citizens petitions, see Chapter 3.

²⁹⁴ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, l. 21.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.; GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, l. 20. Mikoian described Liusia Petrosian to Rudenko as "the sister of the renowned Kamo."

Smirnov's first action as the lead investigator into Levan Gogoberidze's purported survival in the Gulag was to instruct the Military Procurator of the Transcaucasian Military District and the Procurator of the Krasnoiarsk *krai* to bring in Vashklevich and Petrosian, respectively, for questioning. Vashklevich was to be confronted with a copy of the statement he sent to the Procurator General, and then interrogated regarding the circumstances under which he encountered Gogoberidze, whether he was "sure that the person with whom he supposedly spoke in the Iagodnoe settlement was in actuality Gogoberidze," his level of familiarity with Gogoberidze, and – most pointedly – "[w]ho requested that Vashklevich affirm that he supposedly encountered Gogoberidze at Kolyma."²⁹⁷ Smirnov acknowledged in his orders that the MVD possessed a copy of Gogoberidze's death certificate, but his "relatives insist that in actuality *he* was not shot" thanks in part to Vashklevich, and although "Vashklevich's statement contradicts an official certificate, it needs to be verified" through a "close interrogation."²⁹⁸ Likewise, the Krasnoiarsk Procurator was told to establish "where precisely in 1939" Petrosian "supposedly" saw Gogoberidze, "under what conditions did this encounter take place, and is Petrosian not mistaken in asserting that the man who she encountered in 1939 was indeed Gogoberidze," and – again – at whose request she "confirm[ed]" this meeting.²⁹⁹ Both regional procurators were urged to do their "utmost (*maksimal'no*)" to "expedite the execution of this order," and before the month was out the transcripts of both interrogations were on Smirnov's desk in Moscow.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁷ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, l. 15.

²⁹⁸ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, l. 16.

²⁹⁹ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, l. 17.

³⁰⁰ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, ll. 16, 17. Smirnov also ordered the interrogation of a third individual, Prokofii Fedorovich Berdzenishvili, who was interned at Noril'sk and subsequently questioned by the authorities there. However, his testimony is not mentioned in the file outside of the initial order and

Because Vashklevich had no interactions with Gogoberidze prior to his imprisonment he could not say definitely whether the individual with whom he spoke was indeed the former Party Secretary of Georgia. In response to the Military Procurator's queries, Vashklevich described a Georgian, "by appearance was roughly 48-50 years old, the hair on his head was entirely grey, his face was large, his forehead broad and prominent, his eyes were blue...lean"; this man "supposedly called himself Gogoberidze Levan Davydovich and reported that he had served out his sentence and was due to leave soon for settlement in the Chain-Chukotskoe administration of Dal'stroi."³⁰¹ Based on their handful of exchanges, Vashklevich had no reason to doubt the veracity of this "Gogoberidze's" account, and upon his return to Tbilisi he contacted the latter's surviving sisters. Vashklevich's lack of a personal history with Gogoberidze did not necessarily cast his testimony into doubt, but he had no basis upon which to judge whether his interlocutor was indeed who he purported to be. This was far less of an issue for Liusia Petrosian, though, as she repeatedly emphasized her close, longstanding ties with the man she insisted she saw through a fence at the Vladivostok transit prison in 1939.

During her interrogation in Krasnoiarsk, Petrosian reported that she and Gogoberidze first became acquainted "in 1921 in Tbilisi after I was freed from prison in Batumi, where I was held by order of the Menshevik authorities, apparently as a hostage."³⁰² From that point through 1929 she came to know him "very well," seeing him "repeatedly while working at the Georgia *Sovnarkom*, at friends' and comrades'

transcript, which suggests that either he retracted the statements he made, or the Noril'sk procurator found his account unreliable. See GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, ll. 18, 40.

³⁰¹ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, l. 50.

³⁰² GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, l. 57.

apartments, meetings, conferences, in the street, theaters, the cinema, etc. In general we were comrades and knew each other very well.”³⁰³ This close familiarity with Gogoberidze – coupled with her own family’s close ties to the halls of power – afforded Petrosian’s statements an authoritative quality, and also allowed her to redirect the thrust of the interrogation toward her own experience of wrongful imprisonment and unrealized exoneration. When asked about the circumstances of her encounter with Levan Davydovich in 1939, Liusia Petrosian first insisted on relating the story of how she came to pass through Vladivostok in the first place: in September 1937 she was sentenced to a ten-year prison term, the first two years of which were spent in solitary confinement in Iaroslavl’. Having taken “violently ill” and become “seriously swollen,” she was transferred to Kolyma, and the first leg of her journey brought her to Vladivostok’s transit prison via sealed freight car. Petrosian claimed that she spent no more than two to three days in Vladivostok, and while taking a “stroll” in the prison yard one of these days “someone called out to [her] from the fence that separated the men’s zone from the women’s.”³⁰⁴ Having been “called [...] by name,” Petrosian “came close to the fence,” and there “saw Gogoberidze Levon Davidovich [*sic*] through a slit.”³⁰⁵ Liusia Petrosian was able to recount this unlikely reunion in some detail almost 15 years later.

Petrosian told the Transcaucasian Military Procurator that she immediately recognized Levan Davydovich, “called him by name, and he responded.”³⁰⁶ Although Gogoberidze’s “appearance was poor, thin, pallid,” Petrosian noted that he retained his

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, l. 58.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

“cheerful” humor, and “smiling he tried to joke about my appearance.”³⁰⁷ When she inquired after his own well-being, “Gogoberidze answered in Georgian: ‘so far, I’m still alive.’”³⁰⁸ Based on Petrosian’s interrogation this was the total extent of their exchange, as a warning shouted from a guard tower curtailed their conversation and drove both away from the dividing fence. Despite the fleeting nature of their meeting, Petrosian was unequivocal regarding the accuracy of her recollections. When challenged that she might have been mistaken about the identity of her partner in conversation Petrosian bristled, and “categorically maintain[ed] that it was indeed Gogoberidze,” as she “knew him very well” and therefore “could not have been mistaken.”³⁰⁹ At least one of the other female convicts who had been transferred from Iaroslavl’ alongside Petrosian, Zina Rinberg, was said to have been familiar with Levan Davydovich from Taganrog, and apparently saw the two of them speaking together.³¹⁰ Petrosian was also pointedly asked about who induced her to come forward after so much time having passed. She explained that upon returning to Tbilisi from the camps in 1947 she met with one of Levan Davydovich’s sisters and described what she had experienced in Vladivostok; it was not until February 1954, amidst the anti-Berria tide, that she received Elena Davydovna’s telegram requesting that she attest to having seen Levan.³¹¹ When Petrosian’s interrogation transcript arrived in Moscow it apparently elicited far more questions than it answered, and instead of resolving the question of Levan Davydovich’s fate it prompted its own series of side investigations.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Ibid. Petrosian was subsequently asked whether she knew where Rinberg and Babulia Gvakharia-Chachibaia – the other prisoner she mentioned by name – could be found; when she replied in the negative, the Procuracy made it a priority to locate them.

³¹¹ Ibid.

While Nutsa Gogoberidze's rehabilitation wound its way through the Soviet judicial system the Procuracy traced multiple leads in the quest to disentangle the contradictions between the MVD's official records and Liusia Petrosian's eyewitness testimony. An essential element of this effort involved corroborating Petrosian's claims by cross-examining the women she identified as having been with her in Vladivostok, Zina Rinberg and Babulia Gvakhariia-Chachibaia. In order to track them down Smirnov turned to the Primorskii *krai* Procurator F. D. Kononenko. Forwarding him a copy of Petrosian's interrogation, Smirnov assigned the regional procurator to "to take urgent and thorough measures to verify the information contained" therein regarding Gogoberidze's fate.³¹² Smirnov deemed it particularly "essential to obtain background information on [the two women] referred to in the interrogation transcript, to ascertain where they were sent and, in the event that they are located in Primorskii *krai*, to interrogate them, having clarified whether they encountered Levan Gogoberidze with Petrosian at the Vladivostok transit prison"; were they no longer found in or around Vladivostok Kononenko was instructed to inform Smirnov via special telegram of where they were ultimately sent.³¹³ Independent of locating Rinberg and Gvakhariia-Chachibaia, Kononenko was to establish whether Gogoberidze was registered among the detainees who passed through Vladivostok in summer 1939, whether it was possible at the time for male and female prisoners to establish contact, and where Gogoberidze was sent if he was indeed in transit through Vladivostok.³¹⁴ Smirnov made his own skepticism regarding Levan Davydovich's prospects for survival evident, citing the MVD's death certificate, but he

³¹² GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, l. 47; this order was issued on April 14, nearly a month after Petrosian's questioning.

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ Ibid.

explained that “in relation” to Gogoberidze’s rehabilitation it was “necessary to thoroughly verify Petrosian’s information.”³¹⁵ Despite Smirnov’s orders, his inquiries ground to a halt in Vladivostok thanks to a paucity of available information.

At the end of April the chief of MVD Prison Number 1 in Vladivostok, a Major Volkov, wrote to Kononenko’s assistant, Deputy Procurator Nesterov, to inform him that “in view of the absence of registration information it is not possible to establish whether GOGOBERIDZE Levan Davydovich, GVAKHARIIA-CHACHIBAIA Babul’ and RINBERG Zina passed through the prison.”³¹⁶ Volkov was able to confirm, however, that in 1939 it was technically possible for male and female inmates to speak to one another, “as the exercise yards were separated by single-board fences and there were slits in the fences through which the prisoners could observe each other and exchange words (men and women). In 1952 the exercise yards were re-divided with two boards and the possibility for discussions was eliminated.”³¹⁷ What little credence the fact that Petrosian and Levan Davydovich’s exchange was technically feasible lent to the former’s account was undone by the unavailability of any sort of documentation that attested to Gogoberidze’s, or even Petrosian’s presence in Vladivostok. Kononenko explained in his brief report to Smirnov, which included Volkov’s memorandum, that prior to 1940 the registration of prisoners in transit through Vladivostok was carried out in logbooks separate from those used for the general population; according to the prison personnel’s “assertions,” these registries were destroyed sometime between 1941 and 1945.³¹⁸ Yet even in the face of this investigative dead end Smirnov was not prepared – or perhaps not

³¹⁵ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, l. 48.

³¹⁶ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, l. 60.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, l. 56.

empowered – to close the Gogoberidze case. Written in the margins of Kononenko’s dispatch in Smirnov’s hand was the instruction to “[w]ait for a response from Kruglov”; while Smirnov pursued the Vladivostok leads, Rudenko had updated MVD head Kruglov on the most recent developments in the Gogoberidze inquest and requested that he direct “a careful additional verification” of Petrosian and Vashklevich’s testimonies.³¹⁹

When this review was completed in mid-June, it too revealed very little in the way of actionable evidence: Kruglov reaffirmed the details of Levan Davydovich’s execution in Rostov-on-Don, and noted that upon repeat interrogation Petrosian “did not provide any further information” about him.³²⁰ Kruglov’s findings also closed off at least one avenue of exploration, as he announced that Zinadia Markovna Rinberg, Petrosian’s “Zina,” had died the previous April in *Sevvostlag* while serving out her sentence; presumably the MVD was unable to determine what became of Gvakhariia-Chachibaia.³²¹ Without any additional materials or witnesses to draw upon, and with no clear resolution to the case in sight, the Procuracy curtailed the hunt for traces of Levan Davydovich; the Gogoberidze women, however, would not be dissuaded from their chosen course of action, nor would they allow the Soviet authorities to abandon their commitments unchallenged.

Before her own rehabilitation was completed Nutsa Gogoberidze wrote to Smirnov to persuade him to remain vigilant in tracking down Levan Davydovich. Acknowledging “how important [Smirnov’s] moral conviction that it has real significance is to the search for Levan Davydovich Gogoberidze,” Nutsa confessed to having “considered coming to Moscow and personally sharing [...] the facts that confirm

³¹⁹ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, l. 50.

³²⁰ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, l. 84.

³²¹ *Ibid.*

that the sentence in Gogoberidze's case of March 21, 1937 was not carried out," but she was prevented from doing so by "illness and domestic conditions" and was therefore "compelled to confine [her]self to a letter."³²² After relating the conflicting reports that she received regarding Levan Davydovich's sentence (treated above), Nutsa justified her persistence by setting herself apart from "the category of people who prefer either consciously or unconsciously to engage in self-deception and are deluded by illusions"; that being said, she insisted that there could be "no doubt that neither in March nor in April 1937 was L. Gogoberidze executed."³²³ She conceded that she was unsure of "what his fate was afterwards," but in her eyes the issue of Levan's possible survival to the present day was largely tertiary.³²⁴ Her major concern was the apparent inability of the combined efforts of the Procuracy and Soviet state security to locate any trace of Levan Davydovich post-1937, and she defiantly pointed out that "even if he is not among the living today, it is not possible for a person to vanish, such that it is impossible even to ascertain where, when and under what circumstances he passed away," a significant overestimation on her part of the state's ability to monitor the fate of everyone it took into custody during the Terror.³²⁵ This challenge marked the return of a far more confrontational tenor to the interactions between the Gogoberidze family and the state authorities. Long gone were the appeals predicated on Levan Davydovich's utility to the Party's revisionist history; rather, the matter at hand was one of the state's obligations to a family that it had repeatedly wronged, and the insufficient care with which the government had handled their dossier.

³²² GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, l. 82.

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, l. 82ob.

³²⁵ Ibid.

In late July 1954 Smirnov received a letter from Elena Davydovna, this time via Lana Gogoberidze, requesting an additional meeting and announcing the unlikely discovery of yet another Gogoberidze family friend who crossed paths with Levan Davydovich during his time in exile. Elena Davydovna managed to track down Gerasim Iasonovich Amashukeli to the Estonian village of Kohtla-Järve, and after speaking with him in person she decided to forward his information to the Procuracy. According to Elena Davydovna, Amashukeli “knew my brother since their school days (*so shkol’noi skam’i*),” and wrote to his own family about encountering Levan around Vorkuta in 1940.³²⁶ Elena Davydovna explicitly refused to provide Smirnov with any further information gleaned from her interview with Amashukeli, demanding that he “be officially interrogated, as was done in the other cases,” though she could seemingly not resist mentioning two details that “especially struck” her.³²⁷ Firstly, Smirnov had apparently told Elena Davydovna in the past that – in his words – Levan Davydovich’s name “turned up” in the region of Vorkuta, which she took to be a portentous coincidence; secondly, Elena Davydovna claimed that Pavel Petrovich Postyshev, the former Secretary of the Central Committee of Ukraine, was in the same camp as her brother in Vorkuta, and might provide confirmation of Levan’s “stay in these places” were he still alive.³²⁸ While Elena Davynovna was confident that this latter point would afford her further credibility, in retrospect it underscored the false nature of the hopes that animated her relentless searching.

Although Postyshev was arrested a year and a half after Gogoberidze, like his fellow Party secretary he was subjected to extended imprisonment before being tried and

³²⁶ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, l. 81.

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ Ibid.

executed in February 1939.³²⁹ Given that Postyshev's entire time in captivity was most likely divided between Kuibyshev, where he was arrested, and Moscow, where he was shot, it is highly unlikely that he ever passed through the gates of one of the far northern camps in the vicinity of Vorkuta. Postyshev was not the only example of a supposedly dead Party official being spotted in the Gulag that Elena Davydovna marshaled to substantiate her convictions. In an April 1955 letter to Mikoian – written after the Procuracy had closed its investigation into Gogoberidze's location – she brought up “the incredible story of Misha Kakhiani” – one of Levan Davydovich's predecessors as head of the Georgian Party – which had become the talk of Tbilisi.³³⁰ As with her brother, a death sentence had been handed down against Kakhiani, and there existed confirmation of its implementation, but the Georgian capital was inundated with scuttlebutt to the effect that he was “alive and [had] been found,” leaving the surviving Gogoberidzes “stunned (*potriaseniy*) by this analogy.”³³¹ While Gogoberidze and Kakhiani did share similar fates, neither involved a premortem stint in labor camps, a fact that did little to dampen the Soviet populace's apparent enthusiasm for accounts of the improbable survival of prominent figures in Stalin's penal system.³³²

Elena Davydovna's invocations of Postyshev and Kakhiani suggest that the various Gogoberidze sightings across the expanse of the Gulag were not as anomalous as they might initially have seemed; rather, the “appearance” of various dead Party notables

³²⁹ On Postyshev's trial and execution, see Rogovin, *Stalin's Terror*, 21-26.

³³⁰ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1168, ll. 97-97ob.

³³¹ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1168, l. 97ob.

³³² The case of Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish diplomat responsible for rescuing thousands of Hungarian Jews from the Nazis, is in many respects analogous to those of Gogoberidze and Kakhiani. Wallenberg disappeared into Soviet custody when the Red Army seized Budapest in January 1945. Though most official sources maintain that he either died or was executed in 1947, numerous supposed Wallenberg sightings through the 1980s have kept his actual fate a subject of regular speculation. My thanks to Peter Holquist for raising this point.

to friends, acquaintances, and admirers may have helped them to make sense of the calamitous events that had befallen them, in that they provided a familiar and sympathetic figure with whom they could “share” their experiences.³³³ While confined to the Gulag archipelago those who experienced these supposed sightings circulated their stories within a closed world that offered little to no access to outside information, which allowed such rumors to crystallize and proliferate. Yet the mass return of *zeks* from the “zone” brought these whispered tales to the attention of the larger Soviet populace, which served to further muddy the already opaque waters of public knowledge about the Terror, fostered by decades of official misinformation.³³⁴ The Procuracy and other investigative organs were thereby forced to wade into a situation that pitted flawed, and perhaps even fabricated recollections against their own imperfect knowledge of the largely untold, devastating extent of Stalin’s repressions.

Regardless of whether Smirnov was at the time aware of Postyshev’s or later Kakhiani’s demise, it is evident from the manner in which this new evidence was handled that he was not eager to pursue any new leads in Levan Davydovich’s disappearance, and Elena Davydovna was indignant in anticipation of this dismissiveness, which so starkly diverged from the attentive treatment she had received early in the year. Assuming a tone that both castigated and cajoled the Procurator General’s assistant, she echoed Nutsa’s

³³³ The Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System (HPSSS), which consists of interviews with Soviet refugees living in West Germany, Austria, and the US conducted in 1950-1953, also offers some perspective on this question. One respondent, a writer who claimed to have served a sentence at Vorkuta, insisted that he encountered “many prominent writers” in the camp, among them Vladimir Kirshon, whose incarceration in Moscow prior to his death is well documented; the interviewee may have mentioned Kirshon as a means of boosting his own perceived prestige. Another participant discussed the supposed existence of “special isolators for big shots, where they receive good food, are permitted to read and write but are completely isolated from one another,” where he believed Kosarev was held, and asserted that he had been in the same camp at Vorkuta as Trotsky’s youngest son Sergei Sedov. See HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 32, Case 308, 12; and Schedule B, Vol. 2, Case 385, 2.

³³⁴ There is also the possibility that some of those who claimed to have seen eminent Bolsheviks in the Gulag were themselves *agents provocateurs*, instructed to spread misinformation by the authorities; this allegation is discussed further in Chapter 3.

incredulity at the authorities' inability to pinpoint Levan Davydovich's whereabouts: "As before, *and* now, it remains unclear to me: is it really possible for a person to so thoroughly disappear without a trace that the mighty state *apparatus* cannot uncover a trace of him, even if he is not alive!"³³⁵ This bold sendoff reflected the inflated vision of the Soviet government's capacity to pinpoint individuals that Elena Davydovna held, and marked an unofficial close to the most active period of the hunt for Levan Gogoberidze, and it would be another five months before his family would once again reach out to the Procuracy.

By the time Lana Gogoberidze delivered Elena Davydovna's penultimate letter to Smirnov at the end of December 1954 almost all of the momentum that drove the investigation in March and April had dissipated: over the preceding months the flurry of communications between various state bodies relating to the Gogoberidzes' cases had ground to a halt, and the Procuracy's attentions diverted to Liusia Petrosian's (failed) appeal for rehabilitation.³³⁶ With no further information from Rudenko, Smirnov, or other state representatives forthcoming, and developments on her own end mounting, Elena Davydovna attempted to resuscitate her brother's moribund case, informing Smirnov that she had learned through one of Kamo's other sisters that Liusia Petrosian would be traveling to Moscow in December, and would therefore be available for questioning. Regardless of what Smirnov might have thought of Petrosian's testimony, in light of the

³³⁵ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, l. 81.

³³⁶ For consideration of and the ultimate decision to deny Petrosian's rehabilitation request, see GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, ll. 85-97. Petrosian later unsuccessfully appealed to the Party Control Committee to restore her membership, and explained that her first arrest in 1929 had been tied to her and her husband's support for the Trotskyite "Platform of the 83"; in one of the ironies of the rehabilitation process, as Georgian Party Secretary Gogoberidze's responsibilities in 1927 included compiling and submitting to Moscow lists of signatures of those expressing their opposition to the platform. GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, ll. 102-106; RGASPI f. 17, op. 71, d. 13.

failure to locate Levan Davydovich Elena Davydovna “implore[d] (*Ochen’ , ochen’ Vas proshu*)” him, “pursuant to the promise you gave, that you speak to her personally.”³³⁷

Although there is no indication that Smirnov entertained this entreaty, he was apparently reminded of Amashukeli’s existence by Elena Davydovna’s request for confirmation that the latter’s information had been checked, and he eventually did order the Estonian Procuracy to follow up with him.³³⁸ Skeptical of Smirnov’s continued commitment to chasing down leads on her behalf, Elena Davydovna admitted that she herself had begun to walk the “‘interrogator’s’ path,” and planned to visit Kakhetiia and Central Asia in order to vet at least two purported witnesses.³³⁹ Apparently conscious of how her unflagging determination must have appeared to a legal veteran like Smirnov, Elena Davydovna signed off with a plaintive appeal for understanding devoid of the brashness and daring that distinguished her prior missives, and that seemingly conceded the strong likelihood that Levan Davydovich was no longer among the living:

Lev Nikolaevich, do not condemn us for our persistence. We – L. D.’s entire family – are all deeply convinced that my brother escaped execution in 1937, but beyond that? Further, if he is not alive, it is extremely important for us to know where, when, and why he died.

In the past you have personally devoted so much truly human attention to this case, help us see it through to the end. I want to hope that the Procuracy will continue its inquiries until it receives exact and irrefutable information about L. D.’s death in one of the remote camps.³⁴⁰

³³⁷ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, l. 97.

³³⁸ Smirnov issued the interrogation order on March 25, 1955, and received a response from the Estonian Procuracy on April 4. By that time Amashukeli’s story had changed somewhat: though he “categorically maintain[ed]” that he had seen Gogoberidze at the special security sector of the Pechora camp, he now stated that the meeting took place in 1938. He first informed the Gogoberidze family of this encounter following Beria’s denunciation in 1953, when another of Levan’s sisters, Lili, wrote to him bemoaning Levan’s untimely death. At the close of his interrogation Amashukeli “expressed regret that he had interfered in this case” out of fear that he would be held accountable for providing inaccurate information, though the interrogator noted in his report that he did not have any doubts regarding Amashukeli’s credibility as a witness. See GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, ll. 98-99.

³³⁹ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, l. 97.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Although it is impossible to be certain without outside confirmation from the Gogoberidze family itself, it is highly unlikely that Elena Davydovna's impassioned entreaty elicited any response from Smirnov. This underscores a fundamental discrepancy in the objectives of the Gogoberidze family versus those of the Procuracy and its representatives.

In the eyes of Smirnov and his subordinates, the search for Levan Davydovich was complete when it became evident that the conflicting, and in many instances unreliable accounts of those who "encountered" him at various camps could not be verified through official documentation. Only the MVD had been able to produce conclusive evidence of what exactly befell Levan Gogoberidze following his arrest, and though his relatives rejected the possibility of execution in March 1937 out of hand, it remained the most feasible explanation for the Georgian Party Secretary's nearly twenty-year absence, and without any further grounds for prolonging the investigation Smirnov chose to close the case. Given their deep emotional investment in the hunt for traces of Levan Davydovich, the Gogoberidzes could not accept such an abrupt and grim conclusion to this affair. Elena Davydovna articulated the family's dissatisfaction with the inquiry's denouement in her final letter to Smirnov, sent in May 1956 and inserted into the Procuracy's file without receiving page numbers. Requesting that Smirnov "make one more effort" and check the claims of the noted tenor Nikolai Konstantinovich Pechkovskii, who purportedly saw Levan Davydovich while on tour at a camp near Vorkuta, Elena Davydovna admitted that she and the rest of the family had "almost no hope that L.D. is alive, but it is extremely important for us to know when, where, and

under what circumstances he perished.”³⁴¹ She fervently believed that “[i]t would be all the easier for us to know that L.D. was not killed on 21/III at 4:20 in the morning [*sic*], but lived until some year, not losing hope, and died his death among normal, unfortunate people like him”; until Smirnov provided her with information to that effect, Elena Davydovna would continue the futile quest for signs of her brother among Stalin’s exiles.³⁴² Smirnov, no longer inclined to indulge the Gogoberidzes and their theories, dismissively scrawled across the top of the letter: “The question of the execution of Levan Gogoberidze’s sentence has been thoroughly checked. There is no basis to believe reports that he is alive.”³⁴³ It was in this manner that the Procuracy put an end to a case that illustrated the perils of attempting to pin down the truth through the fractured accounts of Gulag returnees, and the Gogoberidze women, their hopes all but dashed against the brutal reality of Stalin’s extermination of the Old Bolsheviks, were forced to concede that even the mighty Soviet state could not raise the dead.

Conclusion

Posthumous rehabilitation in the post-Stalin Soviet Union was a process that compelled the families and friends of the “unlawfully repressed” to closely engage with a judiciary and state security apparatus that were themselves deeply implicated in the abuses of the Terror. As the Gogoberidzes’ case trenchantly demonstrates, the most effective avenue for achieving meaningful redress was through patronage networks

³⁴¹ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3304, no *list* number. This information came to Elena Davydovna via Nutsa, who was herself reluctant to reopen the case, because the family had already “reconcile[d] ourselves with the idea that all of this was some sort of incomprehensible, cruel hoax, [...] and that, finally, I want to spare my daughter and safeguard her against new illusions and their downfall.”

³⁴² *Ibid.*

³⁴³ *Ibid.* Eventually, Elena Davydovna also came to accept this fact, though it is unclear what served as the impetus for her shift. In a 1961 letter to Il’ia Erenburg, a frequent correspondent of her husband’s, she stated that her brother died in 1937. See B. Ia. Frezinskii, ed., *Pochta Il’i Erenburga: Ia slyshu vse... 1916-1967* (Moskva: Agraf, 2006), 436.

forged in the crucible of revolution and civil war that had lain dormant for decades, but even such ties could only initiate a legal review; the substantive work of rehabilitation was handled by the Procuracy, in concert with the MVD and the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court. As a legal procedure underpinned with distinctly political aims, rehabilitation – in its earliest years – invited the families of the disappeared to collaborate with the Party-state in fashioning accounts of the recent past that implicated approved targets, but often left the actual architects of the Terror unmentioned.

At the same time as the post-Stalin judiciary was assembling its own selective history of the first decades of Soviet power in the form of internally circulated rehabilitation materials, as well as the reports it submitted to the Central Committee and courts, it had to confront the legacy of systematic misinformation sown by its predecessors in the form of variegated and contradictory reports emerging from the Gulag on what actually became of many “enemies of the people.” These two trends converged around Levan Gogoberidze’s utterly remarkable case, for as his sister and wife endorsed and helped to substantiate the anti-Berria interpretation of Levan’s downfall, they pressed the Soviet authorities on his whereabouts and were able to spur an investigation that, though ultimately fruitless, revealed the intense staying power of Gulag rumors in a society starved for news of its former leading figures. Regardless of the tenor or frustrations of their interactions, the Gogoberidzes were deeply engaged with, and utterly reliant upon, representatives of the Procuracy to see through the redemption of Levan Davydovich’s reputation and, as they hoped, his person. For its part, the Soviet government would continue to grapple over the following decade with the manner in which it handled inquiries into the fates of those supposedly sentenced to “10 years

without the right of correspondence” – though never again would it allocate so many men and so much time to tracking down a single individual. In subsequent years the authorities would expand the mandate of posthumous rehabilitation, allowing cases of even greater political sensitivity to be reopened and further raising the stakes of the disclosures that were made.

Chapter Three – “No Statute of Limitations on the Restoration of a Good Name”: The Shaping Role of the Judiciary

*The firmness of a verdict that is final and binding serves the common good. The review of verdicts that are res judicata would turn “all Moscow justice upside down” and would give birth to a “bona fide revolution among those who have been tried.”*³⁴⁴

On June 23, 1955, USSR Procurator General Roman Rudenko addressed the All-Union Meeting of Leading Procuracy Workers in Moscow. Before his assembled subordinates, Rudenko articulated his vision of the Procuracy’s place within the Soviet Union’s new political landscape. Though prosecutions for counterrevolutionary crimes had fallen markedly over the previous two years – a trend that Rudenko attributed to the “moral-political unity of the Soviet people” and the dismantling of Beria’s network within the state security organs – the Procuracy’s activities in that sphere showed no sign of abating.³⁴⁵ As compared to 1952 levels, Rudenko reported, the number of requests for criminal case reviews addressed to the central Procuracy *apparat* had increased 45-fold; for regional offices, this figure was as high as 50-times.³⁴⁶ This surge in appeals demanded “political maturity and special attention” from the engaged functionaries, who were liable to make “errors.”³⁴⁷ The main pitfall faced by reviewers of sensitive cases involved the credulity of “so-called ‘confessions’ (*tak nazyvaemykh ‘priznatel’nykh’ pokazanii*) from prisoners” and “denunciations of these individuals” issued by others “in

³⁴⁴ This passage, written by the Imperial legal scholar Vladimirivov, appeared in the 1878 edition of the *Journal of Civil and Criminal Law* published in Saint Petersburg. Roman Rudenko showed it to the young military procurator Boris Viktorov in early 1955 to explain the fetishization of the “stability of verdicts” that prevailed among Stalin-era jurists. See Viktorov, *Bez grifa “Sekretno,”* 16.

³⁴⁵ Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 1, 222.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 223.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid*.

the absence of objective evidence of guilt.”³⁴⁸ Such liabilities had been avoided in previously reexamined cases including the Leningrad Affair and that of Aleksandr Kosarev through “a thorough and objective review of the evidence of guilt, carried out at the behest of the Central Committee,” which resulted in the full rehabilitation of the wrongfully convicted.³⁴⁹

The nature of the system Rudenko described, in which the Procuracy professed itself to be engaged in “objective” work while under the watchful eye and mandate of the Party’s highest body, has not escaped outside observers, who have often depicted the Procuracy, and the judiciary writ large, as entirely subordinate to the Communist Party. While the juridical aspect of rehabilitation was certainly embedded in – and in many instances subservient to – the political demands of the post-Stalin power struggle, it was primarily representatives of the Procuracy and courts – as well as some state bodies like the KGB and Supreme Soviet – whose work determined the way rehabilitation took shape over the course of the 1950s and early 1960s. It was these officials’ attempts to extract useable narratives of a redemptive past from the mire of forced confessions and overlapping denunciations generated during the purges that defined the substantive work of posthumous rehabilitation. In attempting to efface the Terror’s elimination of successive cadres of Party faithful, rehabilitation came to operate as a process that, much like the Terror itself, was self-reinforcing; just as one individual’s forced confession could be employed to implicate dozens of others, each rehabilitee could potentially be cited in support of other former comrades’ innocence. This logic created chains or webs of rehabilitation, wherein individuals who were tied together by past experiences or

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

affiliations were exonerated in rapid sequence. Yet rehabilitation remained, at its core, a fundamentally individual-focused endeavor, and even as the ranks of potential rehabilitees swelled, the prospect of mass legal rehabilitation for those charged with counterrevolutionary crimes was never given serious consideration, lest an actual enemy of the people inadvertently be reprieved.

Although the previous chapters attest to the fact that the Soviet Union was by no means a *Rechtsstaat*, and that the wheels of justice often turned based on the imprimatur of influential Party figures, legal reformism was a crowning objective of the Khrushchev period. While the notion of “socialist legality” was publicly championed during the last months of Beria’s tenure in office, it was most fully embraced as an operating principle in the months and years following his deposal. This attempt to bind the conduct of both individuals and state bodies to the law clearly favored certain institutions, and came at a profound cost to others.³⁵⁰ The organs of state security saw their purview diminish markedly, as they were no longer afforded a free hand in matters of criminal justice and penal policy. As Jeffrey Hardy observes, though the legal reformism of the 1950s and 1960s never resolved “the fundamental tension between the rule of law and the extralegal nature of the Communist Party, this campaign resulted in a host of new legal codes, a better-educated corps of judges and lawyers, renewed academic study into the nature of crime and punishment,” and, critically, increased procuratorial oversight in many segments of Soviet society.³⁵¹ Though Hardy focuses primarily on the role of procurators within the Gulag system, he aptly notes that the power and prestige of the General Procuracy rose in proportion to the institutional decline of both the All-Union Ministry of

³⁵⁰ On “socialist legality” as slogan and practice, see Dina Moyal, “Did Law Matter? Law, State and Individual in the USSR” (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 2010), Chapters 1 and 2.

³⁵¹ Hardy, *Khrushchev’s Gulag*, 97-98.

Justice, which was abolished in 1956, and the All-Union MVD, which was dissolved in 1960.³⁵² This new constellation of legal power afforded the Procuracy and courts a greater degree of authority than they had previously known under Soviet socialism, and among their key responsibilities was to bring legal order to a system of state violence that overwhelmingly had operated extrajudicially.³⁵³

Bringing the Terror under Judicial Scrutiny

Much of the Soviet public first became acquainted with the concept of rehabilitation through the quashing of the investigation into the “doctor-saboteurs” that made the front page of *Pravda* on April 6, 1953.³⁵⁴ Yet this widely-discussed disclosure, as well as the more clandestine, state security-directed reversals enacted between late March and June 1953 that comprised what Gennadii Kostyrchenko has termed “Beriiia’s micro-rehabilitation,” differed considerably from the procedures adopted following Beriiia’s ouster, in that Beriiia’s primary intent appears to have been ingratiating himself with other members of the collective leadership and garnering favor with institutions like the armed forces through acts of remission.³⁵⁵ The first such revision was accomplished within weeks of Stalin’s death, when Beriiia arranged for the release of Molotov’s ex-

³⁵² Ibid., 99-100. On the dismantling of the Ministry of Justice, see Yoram Gorlizki, “Anti-Ministerialism and the USSR Ministry of Justice, 1953-1956: A Study in Organizational Decline,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 48, 8 (December 1996): 1279-1318.

³⁵³ According to figures that Rudenko, Minister of Internal Affairs Kruglov, and Minister of Justice Gorshenin presented to Khrushchev in February 1954, of the nearly 3.8 million individuals sentenced for counterrevolutionary crimes between 1921 and 1953, some 2.9 million, or over 75 percent, had their verdicts imposed by extrajudicial bodies, which were under the direct control of the state security organs rather than the justice system. See “Pis’mo General’nogo prokurora SSSR R.A. Rudenko, Ministra vnutrennikh del SSSR S.N. Kruglova i Ministra iustitsii SSSR K. P. Gorshenina 1-mu sekretariu TsK KPSS N.S. Khrushchevu o peresmotre del na osuzhdennykh za kontrrevoliutsionnye prestupleniia,” Fond Aleksandra N. Iakovleva, available at <http://www.alexanderyakovlev.org/fond/issues-doc/1009140> (accessed January 20, 2018).

³⁵⁴ “Sovetskaia sotsialisticheskaia zakonnost’ neprikosnovenna,” *Pravda*, April 6, 1953, 1.

³⁵⁵ Gennadii Kostyrchenko, *Tainaia politika Khrushcheva: vlast’, intelligentsia, evreiskii vopros* (Moskva, Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 2012), 14-31.

wife, Polina Zhemchuzhina, whose Party membership was restored immediately thereafter.³⁵⁶ The Doctors' Plot was particularly straightforward for Beria to unravel, as the accused parties had yet to be formally convicted on any charges, and therefore it was only a matter of the Presidium endorsing the Ministry of Internal Affairs' (MVD) recommendation that the case be closed and everyone involved exonerated.³⁵⁷ Having nipped Stalin's final exercise in terror in the bud, Beria turned his attention to his own imprisoned clients and consolidating influence in critical sectors.

In rapid sequence, between late March and early April, Beria secured the release of his allies detained as part of the antisemitic "anti-cosmopolitan" campaign, as well as all those implicated in the Mingrelian Affair, which specifically targeted many of his Georgian subordinates.³⁵⁸ The following month saw Mikhail Moiseevich Kaganovich, Lazar's younger brother, cleared of the accusation of membership in a Rightist-Trotskyite organization that precipitated his 1941 suicide, in another move designed to curry favor with a more senior figure in the Presidium. As with the Doctor's Plot, by dint of the fact that no sentence had been passed on Mikhail Kaganovich, his rehabilitation could be accomplished via MVD fiat, with the Party's assent.³⁵⁹ More ambitious in this arena – and consequently of greater concern for the rest of the Presidium – were Beria's attempts to cultivate ties with the military through the selective rehabilitation of recently purged

³⁵⁶ Molotov had been forced to divorce Zhemchuzhina in 1948 because of her close ties to the Jewish Antifascist Committee; her warm reception of Israeli Ambassador Golda Meir helped ensure her arrest early the following year. When Khrushchev and Malenkov asked him what he wanted for his birthday on March 9, 1953 – which also happened to be the date of Stalin's funeral – Molotov is reputed to have replied curtly "Give me back Polina." Artizov et al, eds., *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 1, 15; Derek Watson, *Molotov: A Biography* (Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 238-239; Roy Medvedev, *All Stalin's Men*, trans. Harold Shukman (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1984), 102.

³⁵⁷ V. Naumov, and Iu. Sigachev, eds., *Lavrentii Beria. 1953, TsK KPSS i drugie dokumenty* (Moskva: Mezhdunarodnyi fond "Demokratiia," 1999), 21-23; Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 1, 19.

³⁵⁸ Artizov et al, eds., *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 1, 18; Naumov and Sigachev, eds., *Lavrentii Beria*, 29-40.

³⁵⁹ Naumov and Sigachev, eds., *Lavrentii Beria*, 42; Artizov et al, eds., *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 1, 38.

officers and figures from the armaments and aviation industries.³⁶⁰ Beria's maneuvers – which appear to have been a source of consternation among the rest of the Presidium, and may have helped convince them that it was necessary to check his ambitions – kept the judiciary at arm's length from the rehabilitation process.³⁶¹ Although the Military Collegium of the USSR Supreme Court was involved in officially dismissing the “aviation affair,” the MVD issued all of the relevant recommendations to the court, and retained control over the case review process along with the evidence necessary to complete such processes. Were Beria to be disarmed, and the larger state security *apparatus* brought to heel, the MVD's control over politically sensitive criminal cases would have to be curtailed, and Beria's tactic of selective exoneration turned against him.³⁶² Khrushchev and his allies settled on the judiciary, and specifically the Procuracy, as the vehicle for this reordering of the balance of power within the Soviet state.

The man entrusted with overseeing both Beria's prosecution and the revitalization of the Procuracy, Roman Rudenko, had proven himself a capable jurist and someone amenable to placing himself at the disposal of the Party, and Khrushchev specifically. Khrushchev first encountered Rudenko as the procurator of the Lugansk region while he was the Party secretary of Ukraine. At some point during the late-1930s Procurator General Andrei Vyshinskii approached Khrushchev about the possibility of transferring Rudenko to Moscow to serve as his deputy; Khrushchev, wanting to keep Rudenko within his sphere, demurred, mentioning that a great deal of *kompromat* had

³⁶⁰ Naumov and Sigachev, eds., *Lavrentii Beria*, 41-42 52-55, 59-61. Beria laid responsibility for the “aviation affair” at the feet of Abakumov and his deputies, presaging the very tactics that would be employed against him in the following months.

³⁶¹ On the rationale of Beria's opponents, see Joseph Torigian, “Prestige, Manipulation, and Coercion: Elite Power Struggles and the Fate of Three Revolutions” (Ph.D. diss., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2016), 51-54.

³⁶² Matthew E. Lenoe, *The Kirov Murder and Soviet History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), 555.

been collected on the Lugansk procurator, and that it might appear improper for him to assume such an influential post. Vyshinskii relented, and Rudenko was eventually promoted to chief procurator of the Ukrainian SSR “with the qualification that since evidence had been given against him, it had to be looked into.”³⁶³ Khrushchev thus had control over Rudenko in two key respects: he had knowledge of black marks on Rudenko’s record, but could also claim credit for having saved Rudenko from the meat grinder of Moscow politics during the Terror. These factors – compounded by Rudenko’s star turn as the Soviet delegation’s lead prosecutor at the Nuremberg trials – made him an ideal replacement for Stalin’s last Procurator General, Grigorii Nikolaevich Safonov, who was perceived as incapable of standing up to Beria.³⁶⁴ Under Rudenko’s leadership the Procuracy would go on to assert its prerogatives with renewed vigor, and assume direct responsibility for overseeing the review of counterrevolutionary cases that had previously been in the hands of state security.³⁶⁵

The key development that unleashed the torrent of rehabilitations and placed the USSR Procuracy and Supreme Court at the center of this process was the Supreme Soviet Presidium’s September 1, 1953 decree “On the Abolition of the Special Board of the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs.” This proclamation dissolved the extrajudicial body that since 1934 had sentenced nearly 450,000 Soviet citizens to various terms in prison

³⁶³ Sergei Khrushchev, ed., *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev, Volume 1: Commissar [1918-1945]*, trans. George Shriver and Stephen Shenfield (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 181-182.

³⁶⁴ Mark Kramer, “Leadership Succession and Political Violence in the USSR Following Stalin’s Death,” in *Political Violence: Belief, Behavior, and Legitimation*, ed. Paul Hollander (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 91, 232 fn117.

³⁶⁵ Rudenko was not so much Khrushchev’s man that he was unable to serve other masters; unlike other Khrushchev appointees, such as Serov, who was cycled out during the former’s rule, or Shvernik, who was pushed out of office shortly after Khrushchev’s fall, Rudenko went on to have the longest tenure as Procurator General in Soviet history, still holding the post at the time of his death in January 1981, making him Khrushchev’s most enduring appointee. On the rest of Rudenko’s life and career, see Aleksandr Zviagintsev, *Rudenko* (Moskva: Molodaia Gvardiia, 2008).

camps, special settlements, and – in the case of some 10,000 individuals – death.³⁶⁶ Going forward, all criminal cases were to be “considered only by judicial organs,” and the Procurator General and Minister of Internal Affairs were to report to the Central Committee Presidium on any “important investigative cases in advance” of rendering decisions.³⁶⁷ In addition to keeping the Party’s highest body closely apprised of major criminal decisions, the decree established the protocol by which previous decisions of the Special Board and related bodies would be reviewed beyond the MVD’s purview. All complaints and petitions relating to verdicts rendered by the OGPU Collegium, NKVD *troikas*, and the Special Board were henceforth to be handled by the All-Union Procuracy, which would then submit its protests to the Supreme Court; the MVD was relegated to a consultative role, providing the Procuracy “with preliminary conclusion[s].”³⁶⁸ This provision bore major implications for the course of the rehabilitation process, as NKVD *troikas* were responsible for most of the sentences handed down during the height of the repressions of 1937 and 1938.³⁶⁹ Summary, extrajudicial rulings that had previously been the secret police’s exclusive province were opened to scrutiny, and the Procuracy would be among the main points of contact between Soviet citizens demanding the reexamination of politically sensitive cases and a state that had hidden its citizens’ fates with impunity for decades.

Procuracy offices were quickly inundated with appeals and petitions, and found themselves shorthanded. The Department for Special Cases, reporting to Rudenko in

³⁶⁶ These figures are drawn from a report that Kruglov and Rudenko made to Khrushchev in December 1953; see Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 1, 73.

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 69-70.

³⁶⁸ Ibid., 70. The Supreme Soviet identified the listed organs as extrajudicial (*vnesudebnye*) insofar as they levied sentences without the input of the Procuracy or courts. Sentences that had been imposed judicially could only be quashed, for the purposed of rehabilitation, by the original bodies that imposed them.

³⁶⁹ Ibid., 77.

April 1954, noted that between June 1953 and March 1954 it had received nearly 36,000 letters of complaint, a figure that its barebones staff of 17 functionaries and six assistants (*referentov*) dispatched from other departments could not even begin to effectively process. In order to handle the influx, the Department for Special Cases would require at least twice as many permanent employees and temporary assistants.³⁷⁰ Yet additional manpower was not forthcoming, and in April and May of that year over 7,000 more petitions arrived per month, leading to a backlog of nearly 5,000 cases.³⁷¹ As D. E. Salin made clear in his report from March of the following year, the situation had only worsened with time: even though the Department for Special Cases managed to recommend more than 5,000 counterrevolutionary cases for rehabilitation over the previous three months, and had examined some 13,000 altogether over the past seven, there were still 10,000 files on hand awaiting review, and over 30,000 complaints that had yet to be addressed.³⁷² Yet as the Procuracy's workers clamored for more support, the government slashed its rolls in the name of cutting costs, placing the remaining staff under even greater strain.³⁷³ As Marc Elie notes, between 1956 and 1957 the Procuracy and Supreme Court introduced no fewer than three proposals designed to substantively expedite the rehabilitation process by streamlining review procedures and transferring unheard cases to specially formed commissions or local courts; the Central Committee declined to entertain any of these suggestions, and the backlog of petitions and files

³⁷⁰ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3729, ll. 42-44. By January 1955, D. E. Salin had revised this estimate up to 100 workers; see GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3732, l. 26.

³⁷¹ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3729, l. 82.

³⁷² Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 1, 196-203. Discussing this same report, Dobson also notes that workers at the Supreme Soviet were similarly overwhelmed by the amount of correspondence they were receiving, and repeatedly requested additional help in handling requests for clemency. See Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer*, 53-54.

³⁷³ Elie, "Rehabilitation in the Soviet Union," 32.

continued to grow apace.³⁷⁴ This refusal on the part of the Party to take decisions that would simplify and rationalize matters relating to rehabilitation found its analogue in the government's handling of death notifications for the families of executed persons, a critical issue that underscored the regime's inability to fully free itself from Stalinist methods of misinformation.

The Duty to Deceive: Official Death Dates and the Toll of Stalinist Repression

The myth of “ten years without the right of correspondence” indelibly marked Soviet citizens expectations for repressed relatives' return from the Gulag.³⁷⁵ As cognizant as they might have been of mass executions during the Terror, many expected that it was only a matter of time before they were reunited with their loved ones. When confronted with hundreds of thousands of relatives fearing the worst for their disappeared loved ones, the post-Stalin Soviet leadership was forced to somehow account for the absence of persons supposedly serving sentences in the Gulag archipelago without unveiling the full destructive extent of the purges.³⁷⁶ In seeking to avoid exposing the repressions' true toll, the judiciary and state security organs ultimately engendered a credibility gap in the eyes of the survivors of the repressed, rehabilitated and unrehabilitated alike. Rather than countering past lies with accurate information, they opted to promulgate new, often-contradictory deceptions, and as these falsehoods

³⁷⁴ Ibid., 31.

³⁷⁵ Although the practice of misinforming relatives about executions had been in place for the duration of the Terror, it was not codified until Beria's May 11, 1939 order “On Issuing Certificates on the Whereabouts of Arrestees and Convicts.” See “Prikaz NKVD SSSR No. 00515 ‘O vydache spravok o mestonakhozhdenii arestovannykh i osuzhdennykh,’” Fond Aleksandra N. Iakovleva, available at <http://www.alexanderyakovlev.org/fond/issues-doc/1009108> (accessed January 20, 2018).

³⁷⁶ On the imperative to obfuscate mortality rates within the Gulag, see Golfo Alexopoulos, *Illness and Inhumanity in Stalin's Gulag* (New Haven and Stanford: Yale University Press and Hoover Institution Press, 2017); on the falsification of death certificates see Paul Gregory, *Lenin's Brain and Other Tales from the Secret Soviet Archives* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2008), 73-79.

compounded they revealed the Soviet government's struggle to manage its own narrative of the 1930s and 1940s.

The difficulties authorities faced in sustaining the “ten years without the right of correspondence” ruse were manifest even as Stalin's purges began to wind down. During the spring of 1939 Margarita Aleksandrovna Smol'ianinova, the second wife of Lenin's former personal secretary and member of the USSR Academy of Sciences Nikolai Petrovich Gorbunov, addressed the Procuracy to demand her husband's release over a year after he had been taken into custody.³⁷⁷ Smol'ianinova herself had been held in Butyrka prison for eight months without charges, and though she still trusted that her husband was alive – due to the NKVD's assurances – an exchange she had while under interrogation gave her pause. Smol'ianinova was brought before an investigator – after six months of neglectful imprisonment – who attempted to cajole her into signing a denunciation of Gorbunov, insisting that she would never see her husband again: “Why would I never see my husband (*Pochemu nikogda ne vstrechus' s muzhem*)? Had he really (*neuzheli*) died or been shot and the NKVD falsely informed me that he had been sentenced and was in the far camps? Whom to believe?”³⁷⁸ Smol'ianinova repeated this same query the following December, indicating that her solicitation had gone unanswered, but only received final confirmation of Gorbunov's status in 1946. She was then told he had expired from heart failure in October 1944, though she had been informed the previous year that he was still serving out his sentence; her local registry

³⁷⁷ On Gorbunov's life and career, see A. A. Parkhomenko, “Akademik N. P. Gorbunov: vzlet i tragediia. Shtriki k biografii nepremennogo sekretaria Akademii nauk SSSR,” in *Repressirovannaia nauka* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1991), 408-423.

³⁷⁸ GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 918, l. 36ob. For Smol'ianinova's letter to Stalin from this same period, see Z. D. Iasman, ““Ne mogu dobit'sia spravedlivosti”. Pis'mo zheny N. P. Gorbunova, M. A. Smol'ianinovoi, I. V. Stalinu. 1939 g.,” *Otechestvennye arkhivy* 5 (2005): 108-113.

office (*organy zapisi aktov grazhdanskogo sostoianiia*, or ZAGS) refused to provide any indication of where he had died.³⁷⁹

During the waning years of Stalin's reign Soviet state security acknowledged that previous decades' duplicities were generating significant concerns among the citizenry. In a memorandum to the Politburo dated October 30, 1951, MGB chairman Semen Denisovich Ignat'ev outlined the practical challenges that had resulted from the policy of concealing the Terror's grim extent, and proposed stopgap measures to satisfy citizens' curiosity and help see to their material needs. As Ignat'ev observed, by 1951 more than ten years had elapsed since most of the relevant death sentences had been handed down, and the rote answers delivered by MGB functionaries could no longer "satisfy the relatives of the condemned, all the more so because many of them cannot resolve their legal issues, such as, for example, the registration of a new marriage, claiming inheritance, establishing custody, and others, without a death certificate for the condemned."³⁸⁰ Stymied in their attempts to perform these important tasks, relatives of the disappeared began "approaching central Party and government organs, and Party and government leaders, with numerous complaints persistently seeking (*dobivaia*s) the receipt of a comprehensive answer about the fate of the condemned," which in turn had to go unanswered, as the authorities in question were not permitted to provide them with answers, assuming that they knew what had become of the individuals in question.³⁸¹

To ameliorate this situation and dispel the pressure exerted on Party and state representatives, Ignat'ev deemed it "advisable to amend" the existing protocol in a number of key regards. Under his proposed schema, immediate relatives of the repressed

³⁷⁹ GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 918, ll. 22-23, 35.

³⁸⁰ Iakovlev, *Lubianka*, 663.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*

– including parents, spouses, and children – were to be informed “orally” that their loved one had “died in detention”; to “maintain strict secrecy (*strogoi konspiratsii*) in this work” all aspects were to be handled in-house at the MGB, including the drafting of death certificates at the central *apparat* and their dissemination in various localities.³⁸² The one exception to this arrangement related to cases that had been heard by the Military Collegium of the USSR Supreme Court, which would be held responsible for managing the fallout from its past sessions.³⁸³ Although Ignat’ev’s recommendations were not adopted at the time, most were replicated in subsequent plans introduced following the *vozhd*’s death, at which point the number of those seeking information about missing intimates swelled dramatically.

A more modest proposal for handling questions related to death sentences was put to Malenkov by Minister of Justice Konstantin Petrovich Gorshenin, Procurator General Grigorii Nikolaevich Safonov, and Supreme Court Chairman Volin in May 1953. Reacting to a wave of petitions regarding Soviet citizens executed within the USSR as well as foreigners in the Soviet zones of occupation in Germany and Austria, the three jurists noted that under existing convention these entreaties went “without answer.”³⁸⁴ Though no sweeping suggestions were made vis-à-vis the protocol for transmitting notifications, the panel did endorse orally informing relations of death sentences, but only after the Supreme Soviet certified the verdicts and all appeals had been exhausted.³⁸⁵ As with Ignat’ev’s memorandum, there is no indication that this joint approach found meaningful consideration among Party higher-ups. A year later, following the shakeup in

³⁸² Ibid., 663-664.

³⁸³ Ibid., 664.

³⁸⁴ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 2232, l. 19.

³⁸⁵ Ibid.

the judiciary occasioned by Beria's deposal, acting Chief Military Procurator Evgenii Ivanovich Varskoi contacted Rudenko with a schema for addressing inquiries about the fate of people who vanished in past decades, which had begun to pile up.³⁸⁶ Pointing to the fact that the answers supplicants received depended entirely on the organ to which they addressed themselves – the KGB continued to maintain that missing persons were located in “special camps,” while the Military Collegium indicated that they died serving out their sentences, but provided their actual execution dates – and because these inventions were accepted “as truth (*za istinu*),” Varskoi urged the Procurator General to weigh in on the situation.³⁸⁷

For his own part, Varskoi floated dividing responsibility for replying to such queries between the KGB for all sentences handed down extrajudicially, and the USSR Supreme Court for those imposed by the justice system. Although his description of the status quo implied that Varskoi took exception to the systematic deception currently in practice, his pitch kept one of its key provisions intact: for individuals convicted from 1950 onward, survivors were to be informed of the actual circumstances of death, whereas anyone executed prior to May 1947 – when the USSR briefly abolished capital

³⁸⁶ Varskoi assumed the post of Chief Military Procurator in September 1954 after his predecessor, A. P. Vavilov, was removed from office and – like Matulevich and other former members of the Military Collegium – eventually censured by the KPK for his role in postwar repressions. Varskoi took part in many rehabilitation investigations, including quite a few forwarded to his department by Voroshilov, but was in turn toppled by objections Minister of Defense Georgii Zhukov raised in November 1956 to his and Military Collegium Chairman Cheptsov's complicity in the arrests of Red Army generals between 1946 and 1951. In his recommendation to the Central Committee, Rudenko expressed his agreement with Zhukov, and claimed that Varskoi had failed to “exhibit the requisite decisiveness (*neobkhodimoi reshitel'nosti*) in his work,” and was “insufficiently principled” in resolving issues. The Supreme Soviet Presidium officially dismissed Varskoi in February 1957 and replaced him with Artem Grigor'evich Gornyi. See Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 1, 244-246; V. Naumov, N. Tomlina, and I. Shevchuk, eds., *Georgii Zhukov: Stenogramma oktiabr'skogo (1957 g.) plenuma* (Moskva: Mezhdunarodnyi fond “Demokratiia,” 2001), 150; GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 5065, ll. 11, 140-141.

³⁸⁷ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3286, l. 266.

punishment – would still be reported as having died in a camp or prison.³⁸⁸ Varskoi's pressing concern for the truth apparently extended only to families of the recently deceased, and made no provision for resolving the uproar that would inevitably arise among people who had been told for years that their relatives were isolated – but alive – in the far reaches of the Soviet Union. There is no indication that Rudenko pursued Varskoi's bid any further, and the piecemeal approach that had been in place since the 1930s continued to predominate as the rehabilitation process began to gather steam.

From the moment of Isaak Babel's arrest in May 1939, his second wife, Antonina Pirozhkova, worked assiduously to determine his whereabouts and condition. Despite the fact that Babel' was put to death in January 1940, beginning in 1944 through the early 1950s Pirozhkova received "annual" reassurances from the state security information office at 24 *Kuznetskii most* that Babel' was alive and confined to one of the "far camps."³⁸⁹ In August 1952 a certain Zavadskii, who presented himself as a former *zek*, approached Pirozhkova with a letter from "Middle Kolyma" that included the sentence, "How disappointed Babel' will be after leaving the hospital, that he missed an opportunity to send a message home," which appeared to confirm the authorities' claims that Babel' was still among the living.³⁹⁰ Likewise, Boris Efimov, the famed caricaturist and brother of the purged journalist Mikhail Kol'tsov, maintained that rumors of the latter's survival reached him during the 1940s through anonymous phone calls, one of which included a supposed sighting in the area of Nizhnii Tagil that he attempted to trace

³⁸⁸ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3286, l. 266-267.

³⁸⁹ Antonina Pirozhkova, *Ia pytaius' vosstanovit' cherty: o Babele – i ne tol'ko o nem: vospominaniia*, ed. A. Malaev-Babel' (Moskva: AST, 2013), 419.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 423.

while on a lecture tour of the Urals.³⁹¹ However, in both cases the hopes of the parties involved, fostered by seemingly deliberate inventions on the part of the Soviet government, proved illusory.

Upon Babel's posthumous rehabilitation in December 1954 Pirozhkova was summoned to the Military Collegium to receive his *spravka*. The document listed the date of Babel's conviction – January 26, 1940 – but it neither specified the sentence, nor provided any further details as to his status. Pirozhkova inquired about Babel's fate, and the bureaucrat who had handed her the certificate “took a pen and in the margin of a newspaper lying on the table wrote: ‘Died March 17, 1941 of heart failure’ – and gave it to me to read. And then he tore this entry out of the newspaper and ripped it up, having said that I will receive a death certificate from my district ZAGS.”³⁹² Pirozhkova struggled to reconcile this blunt admission of Babel's death – the date and cause of which were fabricated – with the previous decade's repeated guarantees of his survival. She contacted Cheptsov and Serov at the Military Collegium and KGB, respectively, to express her incredulity and seek clarification:

This sequence of responses from year to year attesting that Babel' is still alive totally rules out the credibility of the report made to me on December 23 of this year on Babel' I.E.'s death in 1941.

In addition, in summer 1952 a man freed from a camp in Middle Kolyma found me and informed me that Babel' is alive and healthy.

Thus for me there is absolutely no doubt that through summer 1952 Babel' was alive and the report of his death in 1941 is erroneous.

I ask you to take all the measures contingent upon you to search for Babel' Isaak Emmanuilovich and, having informed me of where he is staying, allow me to follow after him (*vyekhat' za nim*).³⁹³

³⁹¹ M. B. Efimov, *On byl “slishkom pryto” ...: zhizn' i kazn' Mikhaila Kol'tsova* (Moskva: “Khudozhestvennaia literatura,” 2013), 478-479. Many thanks to Steve Norris for bringing this aspect of the Efimov-Kol'tsov family saga to my attention.

³⁹² Pirozhkova, *Ia pytaius' vosstanovit' cherty*, 422.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, 423-424.

These missives went unanswered, and it was not until Pirozhkova took a call from Kliment Voroshilov's receptionist urging her on behalf of the Supreme Soviet chairman to "believe in Babel's death," that she visited her local ZAGS branch to collect his death certificate; "Were he alive," the receptionist noted, "he would have been home long ago."³⁹⁴

Mikhail Kol'tsov was posthumously rehabilitated at the same time as Babel' – somewhat fittingly, as they had been shot mere days apart in January and February 1940 – and Boris Efimov received explanations of his brother's demise that were as perplexing as those Pirozhkova described. Likely due to his high profile, Efimov managed to secure a meeting with Cheptsov after getting word of Kol'tsov's vindication, at which point he was told that his brother had been dead since 1939 – a rare instance in which fabricated death date predated the actual one.³⁹⁵ Efimov, balking at this admission given all the indications he had to the contrary, was urged to return to the Military Collegium after a month to allow its officials time to verify all the relevant details. During the second encounter Efimov was again assured that Kol'tsov had died in 1939, and he again demurred. Finally, two days after this exchange Efimov was summoned back to the same office at the Military Collegium and furnished with a death certificate listing 1942 as the year of Kol'tsov's death. As Efimov's son recounts, at the time the cartoonist recognized the revision as yet another "pack of lies (*vran'e*)."³⁹⁶

The extended Babel' and Kol'tsov-Efimov families were far from the only ones to confront contradictory reports about their relatives' untimely passing. Survivors of the

³⁹⁴ Ibid., 425.

³⁹⁵ Many of the falsified death dates tended to fall during the years of the Great Patriotic War, a tactic presumably designed to aid survivors in situating their relatives' loss within a narrative of mass mortality resulting from foreign invasion and its attendant hardships, rather than holding state violence accountable.

³⁹⁶ Efimov, *On byl "slishkom prytok,"* 481-482.

“wrongfully repressed,” desperate for any scrap of information, appealed to a host of state and Party bodies in the course of their inquiries. As there was little if any coordination among these entities with regard to falsifying vital statistics, petitioners received myriad responses from different institutions. Rita Kornblium sent a letter in late 1954 to the head of the Soviet Writers’ Union Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Fadeev complaining that the KGB had previously notified her verbally of Vladimir Kirshon’s death on July 28, 1948, but despite her repeated entreaties refused to authorize the issuance of a death certificate for him.³⁹⁷ Unbeknownst to Kornblium, the KGB had already changed course in the matter; apparently unaware of the initial date that Kornblium had been provided by word-of-mouth, as early as August 1954 the KGB pinned Kirshon’s death date at July 27, 1942, and that November Cheptsov authorized ZAGS to release a death certificate featuring the new date and listing pneumonia as the cause of death.³⁹⁸

Even those at the top of the party-state leadership looked askance at some of the falsehoods that proliferated during this period. In his October 1954 letter to Voroshilov, Zakhar Pertsovskii’s son related that his father had purportedly passed away in 1943, but the KGB had yet to indicate the circumstances or location. A reader – either Voroshilov himself or a member of his staff – annotated the year “1943” with a large question mark in blue pencil as a clear expression of his skepticism.³⁹⁹ The regularity with which such statements crossed the desks of the elite convinced them that a more permanent, less haphazard mechanism for notifying relatives of the repressed was in order, though an enduring solution eluded the Soviet authorities for years to come.

³⁹⁷ GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 98739, ll. 26-27.

³⁹⁸ GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 98739, ll. 15, 104.

³⁹⁹ GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 123, l. 21.

As chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet Voroshilov was personally responsible for overseeing the body that reviewed decisions on capital punishment, to which most Soviet citizens directed their complaints and concerns. In late October 1954 the head of the Supreme Soviet's letters department notified Voroshilov of the new reality his staff faced: every day they received between 10 and 15 letters from individuals whose husbands, fathers, and sons had been taken away in 1937 and 1938. Many remained trapped in a legal limbo of sorts: the missing men were in most instances the official owners of the homes in which their families resided, and without proof of death the survivors were powerless to sell or otherwise dispose of this property.⁴⁰⁰ Others complained of their inability to obtain official recognition for longstanding relationships. One man wrote of how "as a Communist and father of five children" he could "no longer stand to look at himself because of [his] juridical helplessness," resulting from the fact that his common-law wife of 12 years' was still technically married to her first husband, arrested in 1937, and all of their children bore the latter's family name.⁴⁰¹ The bulk of the 16 representative letters forwarded to Voroshilov, though, centered on the authors' frustration at the KGB's refusal to release any information regarding prisoners' whereabouts. Upon receipt, the Supreme Soviet's letters department dutifully relayed these petitions to the KGB for follow-up, where they joined a growing mass of unresolved supplications.⁴⁰² The examples brought before him evidently moved Voroshilov to charge the ministers of Internal Affairs and Justice, along with the

⁴⁰⁰ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3286, ll. 268-269.

⁴⁰¹ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3286, l. 269.

⁴⁰² GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3286, ll. 269-270.

Procurator General and the chairmen of the KGB and Supreme Court with devising a solution.⁴⁰³

The following month Kruglov, Gorshenin, Rudenko, Volin, and Serov responded to Voroshilov and submitted their report on the existing procedure for handling inquiries about executed individuals. Largely echoing Ignat'ev's dispatch of over three years prior, the assembled judicial and state security representatives noted the insufficiency of the "ten years without the right of correspondence" reply, given citizens' need to resolve property and legal matters, but considered it "inadvisable to inform petitioners about their relatives' actual punishment, as they were previously issued *spravki* on the latter being sentenced to 10 years of incarceration."⁴⁰⁴ Their proposal mirrored the substantive points of Ignat'ev's recommendations, including giving oral death notices only to immediate relatives "as a general rule," the role of ZAGS in cases involving outstanding rights and estate issues, and the reaffirmation of state security's control over the issuance of death certificates. Verdicts issued by state security organs were to remain within the KGB's purview, while those originating with the police were referred to the MVD, save cases heard by the Military Collegium.⁴⁰⁵ Despite the apparent consensus among the various bodies involved in compiling this report, the Supreme Soviet failed to adopt its suggestions, and nearly another year would elapse before the question was settled.

The August 24, 1955 order from KGB head Serov to his regional subordinates that dictated the official line for handling questions about executed persons diverged little from the 1951 and 1954 iterations, although by this juncture the Soviet judiciary had been removed from the decision-making process. In an ostensible effort to rein in the

⁴⁰³ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3286, l. 268.

⁴⁰⁴ Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 1, 179.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

miscommunication and inconsistencies that had plagued earlier reporting, Serov asserted the KGB's preeminence over all critical aspects of communication with relatives of those sentenced to capital punishment, except for individuals convicted by the Military Collegium. Any disclosures were to be made at the discretion of local KGB branches, and in areas without a KGB presence the police were obligated to solicit the KGB's written sanction before proceeding.⁴⁰⁶ This is not to suggest, however, that Serov's instructions were without innovation. For the first time, KGB officers were furnished with explicit parameters for fabricating death details: dates communicated to ZAGS were to fall within ten years of the individual's actual sentencing, and "provisional" causes of death were likewise to be included in materials sent to ZAGS.⁴⁰⁷

Furthermore, Serov specified that the "deaths of those sentenced to capital punishment will be registered according to the same procedure if they have subsequently been rehabilitated."⁴⁰⁸ This indicated that although the posthumously rehabilitated were officially blameless in the eyes of the regime, this status did not confer upon their relatives any more right to the truth – or some approximation thereof – than those who were still viewed as "family members of betrayers of the Motherland." Finally, Serov mandated that the dates and causes of death concocted by KGB functionaries be passed on to the MVD's First Special Department, which was responsible for recordkeeping, to ensure that they were preserved in a state repository and could be referenced for later use.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., 254.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., 255.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid. Serov informed *Sovmin* chairman Bulganin of the broad contours of this policy in April 1956; see idem., *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 2, 58-59.

As definitive as Serov's directive was, its erratic execution ultimately stoked further confusion and mistrust of the central authorities on the part of its target population. Agnessa Mironovna-Korol', the onetime wife of notorious *chekist* Sergei Mironov, remembered the experience of claiming her husband's death certificate at ZAGS with unveiled bitterness:

After my rehabilitation in 1958, I needed a document verifying Mirosha's death. I was told to go to the regional ZAGS. The young girl at the reception asks, "What is this about? Has someone been born into the family?"

"No," I said, "I need a death certificate."

She gave me a form to fill out. These were the questions: surname, name, patronymic, date of birth, date of death, cause of death.

"But," I said, "I don't know when and why he died."

She was astonished. "How could you not know?"

Another employee, somewhat older, quiet, said pointedly, "Katya, this one..." And he pulled a list.

"Ah." Katya guessed. She looks down the list and finds what she's looking for. I see that she writes the date of death. She writes it down, and I already know that she is writing "February 22, 1940." Where it asks for the cause of death, she leaves it blank.

Then she asks for fifty kopeks.

The older employee takes the document from her and writes at the top "no charge."

"Oh, I see. They're paying me fifty kopeks for my murdered husband. He didn't die, he was shot."

Speechless, they averted their eyes.⁴¹⁰

When the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the USSR "informed the relatives of Borovskii E. S., sentenced to capital punishment, that he died May 7, 1938 in detention" its credibility was undercut by the fact that *Izvestiia* had already reported Borovskii's execution on July 24, 1934. The Party's separate procedure for adjudicating posthumous readmissions into its ranks also proved problematic in this regard, as Party

⁴¹⁰ Agnessa Mironova-Korol', *Agnessa: From Paradise to Purgatory: A Voice from Stalin's Russia*, as told to Mira Yakovenko, trans. Rose Glickman (Bloomington, IN: Slavica Publishers, 2012), 130. Mironova-Korol' claimed to have had a premonition early one morning that February 22, 1940 would be a fateful day for her; Petrov and Skorkin confirm that Mironov was sentenced to death on February 21, 1940 and shot the following day. See Petrov and Skorkin, *Kto rukovodil NKVD*, 301.

Control Committee workers announced death sentences without compunction, contrary to the Military Collegium. In the case of one K. F. Litvinenko, the Military Collegium insisted that he had died in prison in March 1939, but the Karaganda Party *obkom* informed his wife of her husband's execution nearly a year prior in April 1938.⁴¹¹

These embarrassing contradictory moments were highlighted in a unique mid-1959 memorandum from Cheptsov's replacement as Chairman of the Military Collegium, Viktor Valer'ianovich Borisoglebskii, to Supreme Court Chairman Aleksandr Fedorovich Gorkin. Writing with remarkable candor, Borisoglebskii enumerated the failings of the death notification process in place since Stalin's death and the liabilities it held for the legitimacy of the Soviet judiciary as well as state institutions at large. Though the Military Collegium maintained independence from the KGB in these matters, it largely adhered to the same protocol, which Borisoglebskii denounced as "inherently flawed (*porochnyi*)" in that it caused a great deal of "bewilderment among individuals who address themselves to us, engenders in them distrust of state organs, and in particular of the USSR Supreme Court, and misinforms a number of state organs, as giving fictitious dates of death to relatives, we are obliged to give the same information to these organs."⁴¹² The existing practice eroded public trust and the state's own ability to control information, necessitating "an immediate change in the current situation."⁴¹³

In many instances the party-state's organs did not have to work at cross-purposes for Soviet citizens to "raise their eyebrows" at the discrepancies in accounts promulgated by the judiciary. Petitioners found it particularly difficult to swallow the notion that all of the arrested men and women from one locality or enterprise happened to die within a year

⁴¹¹ GARF f. 9474, op. 16, d. 637, l. 40.

⁴¹² GARF f. 9474, op. 16, d. 637, l. 39.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*

or two of their arrest, as articulated by R. M. Itkova, who wrote in search of her husband M. I. Iktov: “100 people were arrested from the *stanitsa* and all ended up in the grave...did they all really (*neuzheli*) die [of natural causes]?”⁴¹⁴ In other trials only some of the defendants were sentenced to death, and those who survived captivity returned home to recount what had actually become of their friends, neighbors, and coworkers. Such confounding accounts were additionally complicated by the fact that – despite Serov’s instructions – many death dates devised by local state security representatives were never transmitted to the MVD’s records division, which led the Military Collegium to invent new dates distinct from the ones relatives had already received.⁴¹⁵

The government’s insistence that executed persons had died while serving their sentences in camps gave rise to a host of persistent complications in the realm of property rights. In keeping with the established pension regime, some relatives of the posthumously rehabilitated attempted to calculate the state’s financial obligations to them based on the time their loved ones purportedly served out in the Far North, while others insisted that they be granted permission to travel to the camps in order to claim the savings that their relatives must have accumulated while incarcerated. The “arbitrary dates of death” that officials selected also spawned what Borisoglebskii described as “a whole range of material misunderstandings” that precluded individuals from obtaining what they were rightfully owed.⁴¹⁶ The wife of one S. I. Sverdlov remarried after her husband’s actual death in April 1938, but before the September 1943 date that the Military Collegium fraudulently registered: “As a result she was denied compensation for their confiscated property and the receipt of two-months’ salary” that was her due as the

⁴¹⁴ GARF f. 9474, op. 16, d. 637, l. 40.

⁴¹⁵ GARF f. 9474, op. 16, d. 637, ll. 40-41.

⁴¹⁶ GARF f. 9474, op. 16, d. 637, l. 41.

survivor of a posthumously exonerated person.⁴¹⁷ Galled as Borisoglebskii was by this situation, he appeared to be equally or even more concerned by the disservice that the death notification policy had done to posterity. He recalled that institutions such as *Glavlit*, the Institute of Marx-Engels-Lenin, and the Museum of the Revolution had approached the Military Collegium

with lists of individuals who in the past rendered great service to the people, with the request to report whether they had been rehabilitated and what were their fates. We are obliged to provide the same fictitious date of death that we gave the condemned's relatives, and this date appears in official documents, journals, and autobiographies that are published in our press.⁴¹⁸

As a result of this practice falsified biographical details had been disseminated about Georgii Lomov-Oppokov, Osip Piatnitskii, Iakov Iakovlev, and Aleksandr Egorov, among other luminaries.⁴¹⁹

Borisoglebskii reported that the Military Collegium's protocol had recently "changed slightly," insofar as citizens were now notified of their relatives' actual death date rather than one made from whole cloth, but this generated its own set of problems, as it was impossible to "coherently explain" the coincidence between people's sentencing and their death dates "without revealing the truth (*istiny*)," which was that there was usually little to no delay between a death sentence's passage and its implementation.⁴²⁰ To help resolve this issue, Borisoglebskii endorsed a proposal forwarded by the RSFSR Ministry of Justice, which entailed orally informing surviving relatives of individuals' executions, but issuing them death certificates on which the column for "cause of death"

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.

⁴¹⁸ GARF f. 9474, op. 16, d. 637, l. 42.

⁴¹⁹ For a list of death date discrepancies that appeared in official Soviet publications, see Shapiro, "Rehabilitation Policy and Political Conflict," 340-343; according to Shapiro's data, between 1957 and 1964 at least four separate death dates – with varying degrees of specificity – were provided for Vlas Chubar'.

⁴²⁰ GARF f. 9474, op. 16, d. 637, l. 42.

was struck through with a dash.⁴²¹ Although the extent to which such ongoing evasiveness about the fate of the repressed satisfied citizens' curiosity is unclear, the KGB apparently opted to emulate it when state security decided to revise its own procedure for notifying next of kin.

By early 1963 the KGB's new chairman, Vladimir Efimovich Semichastnyi, had come to acknowledge that the protocol on the books since 1955 was entirely divorced from realities in the Soviet Union. Framing the 1955 policy in a decidedly benevolent light, Semichastnyi suggested that it had been established due to the state's concern that "notification of the repressed's actual fate could adversely affect their families' standing," and the belief that such revelations could have been picked up "by certain hostile elements to the detriment of the Soviet state's interests."⁴²² Thanks to the work of the Central Committee "in exposing the illegalities that were authorized during the period of Stalin's personality cult," Soviet citizens had become "aware of mass violations of socialist legality"; therefore, the rationale for the 1955 order had been rendered "irrelevant."⁴²³ In light of these factors, Semichastnyi deemed it appropriate to afford cases within the KGB's remit – concerning individuals sentenced by extra-judicial bodies like NKVD troikas – the same consideration as those sentenced by the Military Collegium and other courts by allowing relatives to be made aware of their deaths, though not registering this information with ZAGS. However Semichastnyi's proposal bore an important caveat: it was intended to apply exclusively to those whose inquiries were left unanswered under the 1955 protocol. Given that as of 1963 approximately half of the people extra-judicially sentenced to death had already been posthumously

⁴²¹ GARF f. 9474, op. 16, d. 637, ll. 43-45.

⁴²² Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 2, 418.

⁴²³ Ibid.

rehabilitated, and with each passing year the number of new inquiries declined, Semichastnyi realized that this new, ostensibly more humane approach would only encompass a relatively small percentage of the families affected by the purges.⁴²⁴

Although they were portrayed as correctives to the harsh measures adopted in the aftermath of Stalin's death, neither Borisoglebskii nor Semichastnyi's schemes addressed one of the lingering aftereffects of the Soviet government's deceptions, that being suspicion of the system that had become engrained in citizens like Pirozhkova, Efimov, Kornblum, and Itkova, among hundreds of thousands of others. The ways in which the party-state mismanaged inquiries into the status of the disappeared reveal that, for all their ambitions to control the dissemination of information about the Bolshevik experiment's formative years, the judiciary and other Soviet state bodies were ill-equipped to coordinate such a concerted undertaking; ultimately hamstrung by the obligation to conceal the extent of Stalinist state-sanctioned killing, the institutions involved in formulating death notification policies signaled the Soviet regime's unwillingness to reckon fully with the recent past to those who had fervently awaited answers for the better part of two decades.⁴²⁵

Dethroning the “Queen of Evidence”: Confessions and Chains of Rehabilitation

Procurator General Andrei Vyshinskii, who oversaw the Moscow show trials and provided much of the Terror with a legal gloss, is notorious for having described confessions as the “queen of evidence (*tsaritsa dokazatel'stv*),” a principle that held sway

⁴²⁴ Ibid., 418-419.

⁴²⁵ Thousands of rehabilitees' relatives had to wait until the Gorbachev years to learn what in actuality became of the disappeared. The family of Boris Grigor'evich Kozelev, a Party member since 1910 executed in 1937 while serving out a ten-year sentence, did not learn of the full circumstances of his death until September 1990, some 34 years after the dismissal of the charges against him. See GARF f. 7918, op. 1, d. 48, l. 4.

for the remainder of the Stalin years.⁴²⁶ The imperative to extract confessions from prisoners defined the work of the NKVD's investigative units, and judicial bodies, such as the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court, imposed tens of thousands of death sentences predicated solely on individuals' putative admissions, without a single piece of material evidence. Rudenko made his disdain for this order of affairs clear to Khrushchev even before his address to the assembly of Procuracy workers. Khrushchev asked Rudenko of his opinion of the accusations against "Bukharin, Rykov, Syrtsov, Lominadze, Krestinsky, and many other people who were well known to the Central Committee [...] To what extent was that all well founded?"⁴²⁷ Rudenko replied that according to "ordinary legal standards there had been no evidence for condemning these people. Everything was based solely on their personal confessions obtained through physical and moral torture. Confessions could not serve as the basis for condemning anyone."⁴²⁸ While this was a striking condemnation of the Stalinist legal system, what is perhaps most telling is that of the figures Khrushchev specifically mentioned, only two – Syrtsov and Krestinskii – were legally rehabilitated during his tenure, in 1957 and 1963, respectively. Thus, even though the Procurator General was aware that all of the verdicts against major Party figures from the Great Terror were legally unsound, he allowed them to stand unchallenged. This is extremely informative when considering the interplay between judicial norms and political concerns at work in posthumous rehabilitation, for as the Procuracy dismantled case after case predicated exclusively on forced confessions,

⁴²⁶ See Arkadii Vaksberg "Tsaritsa dokazatel'stv," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, January 27, 1988.

⁴²⁷ Khrushchev, *Memoirs*, vol. 2, 204.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*

it did so in accordance with the political demands – such as tarring Beria's reputation, or redeeming Khrushchev's erstwhile colleagues – and prohibitions of the moment.⁴²⁹

In the opening months of posthumous rehabilitation procurators faced the imperative to link the subjects of their investigations to the newly minted public enemy number one, Beria.⁴³⁰ This task was fairly straightforward in instances where Beria's interactions with the individuals in question were documented, or in which he oversaw arrests and prosecutions, as was the case with two of the very first individuals to receive posthumous rehabilitation, Sergo Ordzhonikidze's older brother Papulia (also known as Pavel) and his wife Nina Davydovna. Papulia's arrest was widely seen as a retaliatory move by Beria against his former mentor, and Rudenko challenged him on the subject during questionings in August and November 1953.⁴³¹ In early November Rudenko introduced protests before the Supreme Court on behalf of Papulia and Nina Ordzhonikidze, and over the following weeks both of their convictions were vacated. In January 1954 – after Beria's execution – Rudenko circulated notifications to the couple's three daughters and one son informing them of their parents' exonerations.⁴³² In sharp contradistinction to the terse *spravki* that almost all relatives of posthumous rehabilitees

⁴²⁹ Despite Rudenko's admonition to Viktorov that there "can be no statute of limitations on the restoration of a good name," the rehabilitation process was often circumscribed by competing interests and the assumption that even perceived opposition to the Party line was innately criminal. These factors were expressed in a notorious memo from Serov to Rudenko in which the former informed the latter that the KGB would not cooperate in the rehabilitation of individuals convicted prior to 1935, as there was insufficient evidence from the 1920s and first half of the 1930s to conclusively determine guilt or innocence. This appears to have been an attempt on Serov's part to shield the legacy of state security activities from before Kirov's assassination. See Viktorov, *Bez grifa "Sekretno,"* 16; Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 2, 244-246.

⁴³⁰ See Chapter 2.

⁴³¹ In the same letter to Sergo, in which he complained of Gogoberidze's rumormongering, Beria portrayed Papulia as a malcontent and a grumbler who refused every position he was offered and threatened to go on a hunger strike. See Kvashonkin, et al, *Sovetskoe rukovodstvo*, 203-204; see also Knight, *Beria*, 49-50. For the relevant interrogation transcripts, see Khaustov, *Delo Beria*, 214, 409-413.

⁴³² In one of several exaggerations that appear in her memoir, Olga Shatunovskaia claimed that Papulia Ordzhonikidze's entire family was wiped out, root and branch, when in actuality several – if not all – of his children survived the Terror; see Shatunovskaia, *Ob ushedshem veke*, 303.

would receive in later years, Rudenko provided the Ordzhonikidze children with a clear indication of the rationale for and broader significance of their parents' exoneration. Rudenko explicated that Papuliia and his wife had been "fully posthumously rehabilitated of the charges slanderously brought against them by the enemies of the people Beriiia, Kobulov, and Goglidze," as a part of the "betrayer of the Motherland and agent of foreign intelligence" Beriiia's campaign against their uncle.⁴³³

However, judiciary functionaries were also evidently encouraged to lay cases at the feet of Beriiia and his cohorts in which the latter played no demonstrable role. This approach was on full display in the Procuracy's approach to Nikolai Gorbunov's exculpation, completed in March 1954. The precedence that Gorbunov's case was granted was likely due in no small part to his service during the first three years of Soviet power as Lenin's personal secretary; with the Party's renewed emphasis on "Leninist norms" such a direct connection to the Bolshevik founder may have afforded Gorbunov particular consideration. At the moment of his arrest in February 1938 Gorbunov was permanent secretary of the USSR Academy of Sciences, which purportedly was host to a "National Center" run by German intelligence. Accused of espionage and terrorism, Gorbunov and his fellow chemist Petr Ivanovich Dubov received death sentences in September 1938, while their two co-defendants were given labor camp terms of 15 and 20 years.⁴³⁴

Major General of Justice N. Khokhlov's report to the Military Collegium from March 12, 1954 foregrounded many points that would become staples of later

⁴³³ GARF f. 8131, op. 23, d. 2232, l. 179. Sergo Ordzhonikidze's surviving brothers, Konstantin and Ivan, and their families were also rehabilitated of the charges against them at this same time.

⁴³⁴ GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 918, ll. 71-73; for Dubov's Procuracy file, which surprisingly includes only one mention of Gorbunov, despite the fact that the same procurator endorsed both men's rehabilitations on the same day, see GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 58630.

rehabilitation materials: Gorbunov's arrest "by enemies of the people" had been carried out "without a procurator's sanction," and the ensuing investigation was "conducted with gross violations of [procedural] norms," such as the omission of the initial transcripts of Gorbunov's interrogations and his reactions to the charges pressed against him from the case file.⁴³⁵ Aside from Gorbunov's own pretrial testimony – which he retracted in court – and statements from other arrestees, the Procuracy could not uncover any "objective information" supporting the existence of a "National Center" within the Academy of Sciences or ties to German spies.⁴³⁶ Khokhlov contended that materials from the file of Gorbunov's surviving codefendant Pavel Alekseevich Chekin made it "evident that knowingly false testimony on the fabricated case of the Russian illegal national-fascist organization (the "national center") that supposedly existed within the USSR Academy of Sciences was collected at the order of the now unmasked enemies of the people Beria and Kobulov" through "forbidden investigative methods."⁴³⁷ Claiming that these constituted the "genuine reasons (*istinnykh prichinakh*)" that Gorbunov and his colleagues perjured themselves, Khokhlov successfully pressed the Military Collegium to rescind its verdict from September 1938.⁴³⁸

However, the causality Khokhlov outlined before the court was itself dubious, if not entirely impossible. Beria was only summoned to Moscow to serve as Ezhov's deputy – and eventual replacement – at the NKVD in late August 1938; Kobulov, one of his most trusted associates, remained in Georgia until the middle of the following month,

⁴³⁵ GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 918, l. 71. Khokhlov, as with those who composed subsequent dispatches, failed to note that on August 7, 1937 then-Procurator General Andrei Vyshinskii issued a telegram to all Soviet procurators informing them that they were no longer required to sign off on arrests. See Viola, *Stalinist Perpetrators on Trial*, 16.

⁴³⁶ GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 918, l. 72.

⁴³⁷ GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 918, ll. 72-73.

⁴³⁸ GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 918, l. 73.

when he assumed control of the NKVD's secret-political department.⁴³⁹ It therefore is doubtful that Beria or his proxies would have taken any interest in Gorbunov's case, as he had already been imprisoned for some six months prior to Beria's arrival in the capital, and was condemned within weeks of the latter's appointment to the central security *apparat*. Yet by invoking the disgraced secret police chief Khokhlov and his fellow procurators situated Gorbunov's persecution within the narrative that at the time held the most currency for the Party leadership. This point was driven home by the fact that, in his brief summary of the "National Center" members' rehabilitation prepared for Khrushchev, Rudenko went so far as to allege that the entire case had been fabricated at Beria and Kobulov's impetus, decisively dismissing chronology in the interest of implicating the new authorities' foremost public enemy.⁴⁴⁰

Aleksandr Kosarev's rehabilitation report – one of the earliest submitted to the Central Committee Presidium for approval, on August 4, 1954 – is indicative of the material the Procuracy avidly seized upon as the anti-Beria furor reached its apex. As early as 1934 Kosarev had aired reservations about Beria's leadership style in the Caucasus before a "narrow circle of Komsomol and Party workers," which made their way back to Beria and caused Kosarev considerable concern.⁴⁴¹ Even more worrying, though, was when Beria challenged Kosarev regarding the content of the toast delivered in Bagirov's presence referenced by Mariia Naneishvili-Kosareva. While giving evidence against Bagirov, Naneishvili-Kosareva recalled that at a political meeting Kosarev "encountered Beria, who in an accusatory tone began to demand why my husband did

⁴³⁹ For the relevant dates from Beria and Kobulov's career trajectories, see Petrov and Skorkin, *Kto rukovodil NKVD*, 107, 234

⁴⁴⁰ Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 1, 112.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 166.

not consider him, Beria, a true Party leader [...] Beria explained that he had the whole story from Bagirov (*emu vse izvestno so slov Bagirova*).”⁴⁴²

In Rudenko’s retelling, Beria went to great lengths in order to avenge himself on Kosarev. The procurator general noted with clear approbation that upon his first interrogation and during in-person confrontations with other prisoners Kosarev “categorically denied” the “treasonous” and “treacherous” actions that had been imputed to him, conceding only that he had erred in recruiting some members of the Komsomol leadership. When apprised of this resistance, Beria ordered NKVD Investigative Section Deputy Chief Lev Leonidovich Shvartsman – whose testimony from July 1954 provided the basis for much of Rudenko’s reconstruction of Kosarev’s time in prison – to “employ measures of physical coercion against Kosarev and extract a confession from him.” Kosarev was worked over “savagely” until, as Shvartsman attested, “having grasped the hopelessness (*bezvykhodnost*) of his situation, [he] agreed to testify about his hostile work,” which supposedly included preparations for “open, armed struggle against Soviet power.”⁴⁴³ At Beria’s insistence this confession was then grafted onto the transcript of the earlier interrogation in which Kosarev maintained his innocence, and the resulting document was circulated widely within the NKVD so that, as Beria allegedly told Shvartsman, the “echelons” could see “the process of Kosarev’s active incrimination.”⁴⁴⁴

Kosarev ultimately confessed to the charges against him before the Military Collegium, and his death sentence was carried out on February 23, 1939. That Kosarev

⁴⁴² Ibid.

⁴⁴³ Ibid., 167.

⁴⁴⁴ The significance that Beria assigned to undoing Kosarev was further indicated by the NKVD’s strong-arming of Komsomol secretary Valentina Pikina; not only was Pikina herself beaten at Beria’s behest, but her parents and child were detained to secure her cooperation, a tactic that nevertheless failed to elicit the desired *kompromat*. See *ibid.*, 168.

failed to denounce “the false confession (*samoogovore*), beatings, and tortures can only be explained,” Rudenko concluded, “by the fact that Beria and Shvartsman resorted to deception, that is they promised to spare Kosarev’s life if he confirmed his fictitious testimony in court.”⁴⁴⁵ Rudenko presented this uncorroborated contention, alongside the evidence from Kosarev’s dossier, and the reprisals against Mariia Naneishvili-Kosareva and Elena Kosareva – both of whom had already been cleared of all charges against them – as confirmation of Beria’s determination to “[do] away with Kosarev as a person who was inconvenient and dangerous to him (*s neugodnym i opasnym dlia nego chelovekom*).”⁴⁴⁶

Beria’s involvement in individuals’ prosecution, or even the mere mention of his name in relation to the charges pressed, was in many instances taken as proof positive of innocence. Ruben Gusevich Rubenov (born Mkrtchian) served in a variety of Party positions throughout the 1930s, including as Bagirov’s direct predecessor within Azerbaijan’s Central Committee; his arrest in September 1937 and execution that November were put down to his affiliation with Lomanidze’s alleged Trotskyite terrorist group. Yet Baranov’s October 1954 ex post facto briefing to Khrushchev on the case – which was reopened at the latter’s behest after he received a petition from Rubenov’s daughter – made only fleeting reference to Rubenov’s supposed allegiance to Lominadze. Instead, it dealt in bulk with a pair of written declarations Rubenov wrote within a week or so of being taken into custody, in which he admitted to belonging to a group of former

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid. In his own defense, Shvartsman maintained that he had risked Beria’s ire by furnishing Kosarev with paper to draft an appeal for clemency, but the Commissar for Internal Affairs rejected it out of hand.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid. Curiously, despite the fact that Kosarev was one of the first Party headmen to obtain legal rehabilitation, his Party membership was not restored until April 1989. This nearly 35-year delay can probably be attributed to reservations on the part of Party functionaries, as it is highly unlikely that Kosarev’s relatives failed to officially request his reinstatement, and ultimately it was the Moscow City Party Committee, rather than the central KPK, that returned Kosarev to the rolls. See *ibid.*, 436.

Transcaucasian leaders who “spoke openly about Beria’s ties to the Musavat secret police” and “through various avenues, including by using their close relations with Sergo Ordzhonikidze, sought to remove Beria from the leadership of Transcaucasia and Georgia.”⁴⁴⁷ Although it is not entirely clear whether Baranov intended to endorse the existence of such a plot, his tight focus on this aspect of Rubenov’s file – and relative disinterest in other particulars thereof – is strongly indicative of the exculpatory significance with which past resistance to Beria – either actual or alleged – was imbued. Not only was resistance to Beria taken as evidence of individual rectitude, it further obviated the need to substantively engage other charges with which the posthumously rehabilitated had been impugned.

Baranov recommended that Levan Gogoberidze’s immediate predecessor as Party Secretary of Georgia, Mikhail Kakhiani – who finished his career at the Party Control Commission – be rehabilitated in March 1955. As a Georgian Party leader whose tenure predated Beria’s rise, and who maintained a continuous relationship with Sergo Ordzhonikidze, Kakhiani conformed perfectly to the profile the Procuracy had drawn over the previous year of those Beria found “disagreeable to him (*neugodnymi emu*).”⁴⁴⁸ While under questioning conducted by Beria and members of his retinue from the Georgian NKVD, Kakhiani divulged that he had disseminated “counterrevolutionary calumnies” about Beria and conspired alongside Mamiia Orakhelashvili to perpetrate an

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., 181-182.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., 195. Amy Knight notes that prior to their falling out, Kakhiani and Beria collaborated closely in suppressing the 1924 Georgian Menshevik uprising and hounding accused leftists in the Transcaucasian Party *apparat*. However, by 1929 Kakhiani had taken to making jibes at Beria’s Mingrelian background, and Beria complained to Orakhelashvili about Kakhiani’s father, who owned a hotel and other major property in Batumi. See Knight, *Beria*, 34, 37-38, 43.

act of terrorism against his person.⁴⁴⁹ Yet by dint of the fact that the Supreme Court had officially recognized Orakhelashvili as innocent of all the charges leveled against him, Baranov was able to discount this aspect of Kakhiani's confession out of hand. He observed that the Procuracy's scrutiny of "analogous cases" to Kakhiani's – including those of Orakhelashvili, Gogoberidze, and Papuliia Orzhonikidze – had revealed "that Beria, in doing away with individuals tied to S. Ordzhonikidze, falsified criminal cases against them and, while eliciting false testimony from arrestees, was executing (*rasstrelival*) people who were known to be innocent."⁴⁵⁰ Kakhiani's rehabilitation report thus gave expression to the emerging self-reinforcing logic of the Procuracy's work: as more and more individuals' cases were deemed eligible for judicial review the Procuracy acquired a growing stable of individuals whose example could be invoked to provide justification for subsequent exculpations. This pool of already-rehabilitated Old Bolsheviks provided investigators with a new, ever-expanding avenue through which to reassess past miscarriages of justice.

Despite the anti-Beria wave that animated much of the Procuracy's early rehabilitation work, there were notable instances in which Beria's involvement in prosecutions went largely unexploited. Writing to Malenkov and Khrushchev in January 1954, Sergei Kas'ian's widow Sof'ia Aleksandrovna was sure to note in her opening sentence that the Soviet media had brought to her attention the "vile atrocities of the archenemy of the people, the betrayer of the Motherland Beria and his accomplices."⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴⁹ Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 1, 195. Kakhiani was further induced to admit that Sergo Ordzhonikidze was aware of the content of the seditious exchanges that he, Orakhelashvili, and others held. At the time of the report's composition, several of these former state security officials – Khazan, Krimian, Savitskii, and Paramonov – were in custody awaiting trial for their violations of socialist legality. For more on these proceedings, see the following chapter.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 196.

⁴⁵¹ GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 46019, l. 3.

Having provided an exhaustive summary of Kas'ian's revolutionary bona fides dating back to 1905, Sof'ia Aleksandrovna explained that it was precisely Beria who dragged her husband before the Georgian Party Collegium in July 1936 and engineered his expulsion for Trotskyism. Kas'ian stood accused of translating the "Platform of the 83" – the same document for which Lusia Petrosian was imprisoned – into Armenian, although no copy was produced as evidence.⁴⁵² After over a year of fruitless protests to both the local Party *apparat* and the center, Kas'ian was informed on September 15, 1937 of his readmission to the Party and instructed to report the following morning at 10 am to collect his Party card; the Georgian NKVD appeared at the Kas'ian family apartment at 5 am.⁴⁵³ Sof'ia Aleksandrovna concluded that this action – which directly contravened the spirit of the Party Control Commission's ruling – could only been orchestrated personally by Beria.⁴⁵⁴

By the time the judiciary got around to hearing Kas'ian's case it had begun to gradually shift away from explanations for the Terror predicated on personal enmity, and for all of Sof'ia Kas'ian's insistence that her husband was undone by Beria's machinations, the late secret police chief's name surprisingly appeared only twice in the Procuracy's protest before the USSR Supreme Court's Judicial Collegium of February 28, 1955. Beria was mentioned solely in reference to the alleged objectives of Kas'ian's counterrevolutionary organization, which sought to separate Armenia from the USSR and plotted a terrorist attack against the then-face of Soviet power in Transcaucasia.⁴⁵⁵ No

⁴⁵² GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 46019, l. 5.

⁴⁵³ GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 46019, l. 6.

⁴⁵⁴ If at any point Kas'ian entertained the notion that the announcement of her husband's reinstatement was itself a ruse designed to put him off guard, she did not indicate this in her letter to the party-state's leaders.

⁴⁵⁵ GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 46019, l. 27. Salin included these salient details from Kas'ian's case in his report to the Central Committee on the work of the Department for Special Cases covering the latter half of 1954 through the beginning of 1955; of the broad range of individuals sentenced for counterrevolutionary

allusion was made to Beria's supposed role in Kas'ian's removal from the Party, or the suspicious timing of the latter's arrest. The vast majority of Deputy Procurator General Salin's text instead concerned itself with the web of contradictory accounts that Kas'ian and his accused cohorts generated while in detention. Four other Caucasian Old Bolsheviks – A. Kh. Khumarian, A. S. Kakhoian, A. S. Minasian, and A. I. Melikian – were supposed to have joined Kas'ian in his endeavor to undermine Bolshevik rule.⁴⁵⁶ Yet when the Procuracy's investigators compared the timelines that each man presented for the initial formation and expansion of their circle glaring inconsistencies began to emerge: Khumarian maintained that no one actively recruited him into the organization, at the head of which stood Kas'ian, but Kas'ian was on the record as having said that Khumarian inducted him. Kakhoian first suggested that Minasian had turned him to Trotskyism as early as 1928, but later averred that it was not until a 1935 meeting at Kas'ian's apartment that their seditious company took shape.⁴⁵⁷ [Such lack of consensus on the very circumstances under which the group was formed sparked questions within the Procuracy over whether it existed at all, and disqualified all of the cited testimony as proof of Kas'ian's criminality.⁴⁵⁸

Even though it was never raised during the Georgian NKVD's investigation of Kas'ian, the Procuracy's Department for Special Cases also weighed in on the issue of the purported translation of the "Platform of the 83" into Armenian that cost him his Party membership. An investigator from the Georgian Party Collegium acknowledged that he never saw a version of the disputed document among the materials presented

crimes that Salin discussed, Kas'ian was one of only two who faced execution. See Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 1, 196-203.

⁴⁵⁶ For Kakhoian's children's dealings with Mikoian see Chapter One.

⁴⁵⁷ GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 46019, ll. 27-28.

⁴⁵⁸ GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 46019, l. 28.

against Kas'ian. Likewise, the republican MVDs of both Georgia and Armenia possessed no “compromising materials” on Kas'ian, and the Armenian archives offered no indication that any such translation existed in their holdings. Salin therefore found it impossible to establish – authorship notwithstanding – whether an Armenian text of the “Platform of the 83” had in actuality ever been produced.⁴⁵⁹ Given the paucity of credible evidence against Kas'ian, Salin called for the ruling of the NKVD *troika* against him to be expunged, and, as he reported to Mikoian, the USSR Supreme Court endorsed his conclusions in late March 1955.⁴⁶⁰ The following summer Melikian, Khumarian, and Kakhoian were in turn cleared of all charges against them; Kas'ian's exoneration was duly invoked in each of their files, marking one of the earliest instances of “chain” rehabilitation, whereby the exoneration of one member of a fictitious counterrevolutionary circle served as a wedge by which the Procuracy and Supreme Court could “break open” the associated cases.⁴⁶¹

At first glance Aleksandr Svanidze's case appeared to fit neatly into the dominant anti-Beriia narrative, but it took on a decidedly different hue when placed in the judiciary's hands. Prompted by Bogdan Kobulov's admission under interrogation that he had a “personal interest in the fate” of the Svanidze family, and Dzhonrid Svanidze's protestations about his father's innocence – likely forwarded by Mikoian – the Procuracy approached the Svanidze dossier in December 1955 with little to no outward concern for the delicate issues of Beriia and Stalin's personal culpability that the case raised. Rudenko's report dating December 21 to the Plenum of the Supreme Court – which, as the body that both rescinded and reinstated Svanidze's capital punishment in 1941, was

⁴⁵⁹ GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 46019, ll. 28-29.

⁴⁶⁰ GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 46019, l. 30.

⁴⁶¹ See GARF f. 8131, op. 31, dd. 48920, 49089, 50450.

authorized to clear his record – acknowledged the issue of the multiple judgments against Svanidze, yet no effort was made to extrapolate that this was somehow indicative of the case’s compromised nature.⁴⁶² Instead, as with other posthumous rehabilitations, the Procurator General honed in on the testimony that Svanidze’s peers had been induced to give against him, as well as the offences to which Svanidze himself had confessed.

Rudenko’s task was complicated by the fact that while under interrogation Svanidze acknowledged having worked on behalf of German intelligence, belonging to a Rightist organization, and wrecking. The Procurator General therefore emphasized Svanidze’s repeated denials as the initial investigation against him progressed. When pressed by his jailers, Svanidze attributed his false statements to “being overcome by weakness, a ‘mental blackout (*zatemnenie mozgov*),’ that only cleared up after some time”; once Svanidze regained his senses “he was shocked that he could tell so many falsehoods about himself.”⁴⁶³ As Kosarev and others’ rehabilitations attest, the Procuracy did not shy away from recognizing instances of *chekist* brutality, but with no concrete evidence to that effect Rudenko allowed Svanidze’s words to stand as an indication of the coercion to which he was most likely subjected. Rudenko cast further doubt on the veracity of Svanidze’s admission of guilt by noting that in the interrogation transcripts of those he named as his Rightist co-conspirators – including Avel’ Ehlukidze, and Grigorii Sokol’nikov – “one does not come across Svanidze (*po pokazaniiam etikh lits SVANIDZE ne prokhodit*).”⁴⁶⁴ In the absence of independent corroboration, Rudenko dismissed

⁴⁶² GARF f. 9474, op. 1a, d. 13846, l. 1.

⁴⁶³ GARF f. 9474, op. 1a, d. 13846, ll. 3-4. The “blackout” that Svanidze cited as the reason for his self-incrimination is reminiscent of the notion of the “solar eclipse” that Igal Halfin describes as a defense mechanism for “errant Communists”; see Igal Halfin, *Terror in My Soul: Communist Autobiographies on Trial* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 92-93. Thanks to Peter Holquist for bringing this citation to my attention.

⁴⁶⁴ GARF f. 9474, op. 1a, d. 13846, l. 4.

Svanidze's disputed testimony outright, but he still had to contend with the declarations the latter's contemporaries made under questioning.

In the years immediately preceding and following Svanidze's disappearance from the Government House many of his Transcaucasian revolutionary peers also found themselves in state custody and under heavy pressure to implicate the onetime Gosbank deputy chairman. Among those coerced into pointing fingers at Svanidze were Mariia Orakhelashvili (Mamiia's wife), Shalva Eliava, Shamshe Lezhava, and Levan Gogoberidze. Rudenko operated within the self-reinforcing logic of rehabilitation to discredit each of these (involuntary) accusers in turn. Given that the Military Collegium had already cleared Mariia Orakhelashvili of any wrongdoing, the knowledge she claimed to have had of Svanidze's counterrevolutionary activities was immediately rendered suspect: what could an innocent woman know of such nefarious deeds? Lezhava's statements were likewise gainsaid by the mention of Mamiia Orakhelashvili among "Svanidze's accomplices in anti-Soviet work," because all the charges against Mamiia had previously been dismissed, and thus there could not have been any conspiracy in which he had a hand.⁴⁶⁵

Eliava's supposed statements were rendered suspect by their implausible timing. The Georgian NKVD conducted its final interrogation of Eliava on July 17, 1937, nearly five months prior to Svanidze's arrest, and according to Rudenko, the latter did not figure at all in Eliava's last round of testimony. On December 3 of that year an NKVD *troika* handed down a death sentence against Eliava, which, in keeping with standing protocol, was carried out almost immediately. Yet the Eliava transcript that found its way into

⁴⁶⁵ GARF f. 9474, op. 1a, d. 13846, ll. 4-5. Lezhava was also said to have implicated Avel' Enukidze – who was not rehabilitated until 1959 – as one of Svanidze's fellow counterrevolutionaries, but according to Rudenko Enukidze gave no testimony relating to Svanidze.

Svanidze's file –certified by Bogdan Kobulov – was dated December 4, suggesting that the statements therein had been made postmortem.⁴⁶⁶ Though Rudenko could not similarly question the veracity of Gogoberidze's disclosures, the fact that they were "imprecise and contradictory" and that Gogoberidze had disavowed them before the Military Collegium was taken as a clear indication that neither he nor Svanidze had been involved in any demonstrable wrongdoing. After establishing the speciousness of the charges against Svanidze of financial dereliction and Georgian nationalism, Rudenko pushed for all three of the Supreme Court's rulings against Svanidze to be suppressed.⁴⁶⁷

Strikingly absent from this précis was any intimation of personal animus on Beria's part as a factor in Svanidze's ultimate fate; despite Khrushchev's eventual embrace of the narrative that Beria turned Stalin against Svanidze, the Procuracy and Supreme Court made little effort to implicate the state security leader in Svanidze's untimely death.⁴⁶⁸ Beria only appeared twice in Rudenko's account of Svanidze's persecution: it was evidently "at the enemy of the people Beria's order" that Svanidze was executed immediately following the reversal of his commutation, and he was mentioned as the target of an assassination plot into which Eliava purportedly enlisted Svanidze.⁴⁶⁹ In its January 19, 1956 ruling, the Plenum of the USSR Supreme Court –

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ GARF f. 9474, op. 1a, d. 13846, ll. 5-6.

⁴⁶⁸ For the purported conversation in which Beria convinced Stalin of Svanidze's guilt, see Khrushchev, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, 187. This conversation became a key component of Khrushchev's anti-Stalin rhetoric: he was first recorded discussing it at a speech before the Polish Central Committee less than a month after the 20th Party Congress; he trotted it out again at the 22nd Party Congress, and then brought it up during a May 1962 dinner in Bulgaria. See "Speech by Comrade Khrushchev at the 6th PUWP CC Plenum, 20 March 1956, Warsaw," History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, available at <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111920> (accessed December 30, 2015); *XXII s'ezd KPSS*, vol. 2, 587; "Speech of N. S. Khrushchev at a friendly dinner in Yevksinograd (Varna), 16 May 1962," History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, available at <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113341> (accessed December 30, 2015).

⁴⁶⁹ GARF f. 9474, op. 1a, d. 13846, ll. 1-2. The report that the Chief Military Procuracy prepared for Mikoian on Svanidze's case – compiled just prior to the Supreme Court Plenum's decision at the beginning

chaired by Cheptsov – reiterated Rudenko’s findings nearly verbatim.⁴⁷⁰ Such stinting use of Beria as justification for Svanidze’s exculpation stood as a far cry from previous efforts that liberally invoked his name as a means of demonstrating select Communists’ innocence. This strongly suggests that as the posthumous rehabilitation process came into its own, within the judiciary the task of excoriating Beria for his trespasses against Soviet legality assumed less urgency in favor of a new operating logic predicated on the existence of a critical mass of prior exonerations that could be drawn upon to help clear the names of the as-yet unrehabilitated. This rationale began to manifest itself in a cluster of rehabilitations of those who had close working and personal ties to First Secretary Khrushchev.

Khrushchev began his career in Khar’kov – then the seat of the Ukrainian SSR’s government – working directly under Nikolai Nesterovich Demchenko, the chairman of the local Central Committee’s organizational department. Recalling his early days in the Party *apparatus* Khrushchev professed his great respect for Demchenko, who, he was sure to note, “deserved it.”⁴⁷¹ When Demchenko was transferred to the Kiev district committee Khrushchev followed, and was willing to continue to serve alongside him “indefinitely,” had Khrushchev not decided to pursue studies at the Industrial Academy in Moscow.⁴⁷² Yet after 1929 the two men’s paths diverged dramatically, and while Khrushchev’s took him to the Kremlin, Demchenko’s ultimately led to an execution chamber. Convicted on October 29, 1937 of participation in an “anti-Soviet conspiratorial

of January – included these two references to Beria. It further mentioned that the Military Collegium had rehabilitated Svanidze’s wife, sister, and son (posthumously in the first two cases) in September and November of the previous year. Mikoian annotated the text with a note for Khrushchev stating that the information “warrants attention.” See Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 1, 299-300.

⁴⁷⁰ GARF f. 9474, op. 1a, d. 13846, ll. 8-11.

⁴⁷¹ Khrushchev, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, 24.

⁴⁷² *Ibid.*, 29, 31.

center in Ukraine” after a five-minute hearing before the Military Collegium, Demchenko was shot the following day.⁴⁷³ In his comparatively brief treatment of the materials against Demchenko from November 10, 1954, Rudenko made much of the fact that Ul’rikh and his subordinates ploughed forward with proceedings despite the fact that in court Demchenko recanted the self-incriminatory statements he made under interrogation. The transcript from the Military Collegium session stated that testimony from Red Army Commander Iona Emmanuilovich Iakir had been “entered into the record (*oglasheny*)” – presumably as a counterweight to Demchenko’s denials – but the Procuracy’s probe found no copy appended to Demchenko’s file; when investigators subsequently revisited materials on Iakir they discovered that at no point did he give any testimony relating to Demchenko.⁴⁷⁴ Rudenko dismissed the allegations from other Party officials that made their way into Demchenko’s file with the popular formulation of being “vague and contradictory,” and thereby cleared the way for the first of Khrushchev’s mentors to be posthumously vindicated.

An even more pronounced connection to Iakir – and, by extension, Khrushchev – was on display in the communiqué Rudenko prepared regarding Semen Zakharovich Korytnyi. Korytnyi was married to Iakir’s sister, Izabella, and had become acquainted with Khrushchev while living in Kiev; eventually he served as Khrushchev’s subordinate in Moscow’s Krasnaia Presnaia district. Khrushchev professed to have admired Korytnyi as “a practical and efficient man, a good organizer, and a good speaker,” and their camaraderie apparently extended beyond the professional.⁴⁷⁵ The two men were neighbors at the storied Government House on *ulitsa Serafimovicha*, sharing a balcony

⁴⁷³ Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 1, 174.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁵ Khrushchev, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, 106.

between their apartments, and both had dachas at Ogarevo – the tsarist-era estate – where their families would socialize. When in the capital, Iakir would join in these gatherings; shortly before his arrest he and Khrushchev took a long walk together around the grounds of Ogarevo, an encounter that Khrushchev feared would come back to haunt him.⁴⁷⁶

Evidently stricken by the implications of his brother-in-law's detention, Korytnyi suffered a heart attack, only to be plucked out of his hospital bed by NKVD agents several months later, the evening after Khrushchev paid him a visit. Dismayed that “an entirely honorable and irreproachable person” could fall under suspicion, Khrushchev assured himself that Korytnyi had fallen under Iakir's pernicious influence, and his trust had been misplaced.⁴⁷⁷

Whatever doubts Khrushchev may have harbored regarding Korytnyi's reliability apparently did not long survive Stalin's demise, and he endorsed the findings of Korytnyi's case review on December 11, 1954. The document assigned particular significance to the fact that for the first two months of his captivity the physically diminished Korytnyi managed to resist exhortations to confess to state crimes, before succumbing to pressure from Viktor Abakumov. During his hearing before the Military Collegium held in August 1939 – some two years after he first gave testimony – Korytnyi disavowed his previous admissions, which provided the Procuracy with a pretext to shunt them aside without addressing their substance. Despite Korytnyi and Iakir's familial ties,

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., 105-106. On the Khrushchev and Korytnyi families sharing a balcony, see Rada Adzhubei's interview in Melanie Ilic, *Life Stories of Soviet Women: The Interwar Generation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 61.

⁴⁷⁷ William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003), 102; Khrushchev, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, 108. Following Iakir's arrest Khrushchev took pains to distance himself from his erstwhile friend. At a Party conference in Kiev in June 1938 he referred to Iakir as among the “riffraff” who “wanted to let in the German fascists, the landowners and bourgeois, and make the Ukrainian workers and peasants slaves of fascism, and the Ukraine a colony of the Polish-German fascists.” Quoted from Lazar Pistrak, *The Grand Tactician: Khrushchev's Rise to Power* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1961), 151-152.

none of the members of the putative “Trotskyite Anti-Soviet Military Organization” identified Korytnyi as a fellow conspirator.⁴⁷⁸ Another purported Trotskyite within Moscow’s Party organization to whom Korytnyi had been tied, Evgeniia Solomonovna Kogan, had herself been posthumously rehabilitated the previous month, further contributing to the conclusion that Korytnyi had been “unjustly convicted based on unverified and falsified materials.”⁴⁷⁹

Before long, Korytnyi himself was being invoked to substantiate the exculpation of another one of the figures who followed Khrushchev from Kiev to Moscow, Natan Veniaminovich Margolin. Margolin had been a protégé of Kaganovich’s in the Ukrainian underground, and worked alongside Khrushchev in Kiev before both matriculated at the Industrial Academy in Moscow. While Khrushchev was in charge of Krasnaia Presnaia, Margolin was entrusted with the Bauman district; knowing Margolin as a “tried and tested comrade,” Khrushchev could not “accept the idea that [he] was an enemy of the people.”⁴⁸⁰ Baranov’s summary of the case against Margolin from late March 1955 noted that the major grounds for his conviction were his own self-incriminatory statements as well as “notes appended to [his] file” drawn from Korytnyi and another Moscow Party leader’s testimony.⁴⁸¹ In the face of such a paucity of evidence, the fact of Korytnyi’s prior rehabilitation helped to expedite the redemption of one of his fellow Muscovite party secretaries.

⁴⁷⁸ Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 1, 184-185. Akulov was recommended for rehabilitation a little more than a week before Korytnyi’s case was submitted; see *idem.*, 183-184.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 185, 400 fn 73. Kogan appears to have been one of the few women to merit a report to the Central Committee on her exoneration. Khrushchev remembered being “especially shaken” by Kogan’s arrest, as she was “a person of exceptional honesty and ability,” and had mentored Kaganovich, among others, in Kiev’s underground revolutionary movement. Despite reports that Kogan had admitted to wrecking, her case review “found she hadn’t confessed to anything, but hurled accusations at her accusers and denounced as fascists those who had arrested her.” See Khrushchev, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, 183.

⁴⁸⁰ Khrushchev, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, 108-109.

⁴⁸¹ Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 1, 208-209.

The Procuracy and KGB's joint report on Grigorii Naumovich Kaminskii – who at the time of his arrest in June 1937 held the post of USSR People's Commissar of Health – spanned the divide between the memoranda foregrounding Beria's personal grudges and ones that drew upon Khrushchev's network of affiliates from Ukraine and Moscow. Kaminskii and Beria had a longstanding acquaintance dating back – like so many of Beria's associations – to Civil War-era Baku, where Kaminskii held multiple responsible posts.⁴⁸² Apparently it was Kaminskii who in 1920 first received allegations of Beria having served in the Musavat counterintelligence, prompting the special Party inquiry that ultimately “rehabilitated” Beria.⁴⁸³ This incident seems to have rankled Kaminskii, though, and some 17 years later, at the June 1937 Central Committee Plenum, he directed his ire at the ascendant Transcaucasian Party head. Khrushchev was present for this oration, and in his memoirs related what this “forthright, sincere person, loyally devoted to the party, a man of uncompromising truthfulness” stated:

All those speaking here have told everything they know about others. I would also like to say something, so that it will be known to the party. When I was sent to Baku in 1920 and worked there as a secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan and chairman of the Baku Soviet, persistent rumors were circulating that Comrade Beria, who is present here, during the occupation of Baku [by the British] collaborated with the counterintelligence services of the Musavat and even that somewhat earlier he had collaborated with British counterintelligence.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸² Timothy K. Blauvelt, “March of the chekists: Beria's secret police patronage network and Soviet cryptopolitics,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 44 (2011): 74. On Kaminskii's life and career, as related by his family and coworkers, see Z. N. Zhavoronkov and V. I. Pariiskii, “Skazavshii budet uslyshan,” in *Oni ne molchali*, ed. A. V. Afanas'ev (Moskva: Politiizdat, 1991), 199-214.

⁴⁸³ Khaustov, *Delo Beriia*, 35. In this instance, Beria's reference to being “rehabilitated” was meant to convey that he had been vindicated of the charges lodged against him.

⁴⁸⁴ Khrushchev, *Memoirs*, vol. 2, 174-175. Khrushchev and Kaminskii were familiar with one another from working together in the Moscow Party *apparat*, and Khrushchev singled him out for praise during the Secret Speech.

In Khrushchev's telling, this broadside was met with silence among those in attendance, and he implied that Kaminskii was subsequently taken into custody on the third day of the plenum in retaliation for having challenged the NKVD leadership.⁴⁸⁵

Even in the face of the documented animosity between Kaminskii and Beria – of which Rudenko was certainly aware, given that he conducted Beria and Bagirov's interrogations – the Procuracy did not seize upon Kaminskii's case as eagerly as those of other old Party fighters from the Caucasus. On February 12, 1955 Kaminskii's daughter complained to Bulganin that her appeal on behalf of her parents had been languishing at the Chief Military Procuracy since May 1954 without any apparent progress or resolution; Bulganin shortly thereafter dashed off an order for Rudenko, Baranov, and Serov to “promptly present a proposal,” and within four days Baranov and Serov's findings were put to the Presidium.⁴⁸⁶ This tight timeframe may account for the relative brevity of Kaminskii's report, as well as the absence of any detail relating to his hostile interactions with Beria, but the fact that Baranov and Serov chose to highlight the glaring contradictions between the various depositions that supposedly incriminated

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., 175. Khrushchev's depiction of the June Plenum mischaracterized the intent behind Kaminskii's salvo against Beria, insofar as Beria had no official standing within state security at the time. The exact contents of Kaminskii's statement at the June 1937 plenum are the subject of pronounced historical debate, as no stenographic record of the meetings exist. Boris Starkov maintains that Kaminskii openly denounced the NKVD's recent actions in the Caucasus and opposed a proposed expansion of the organization's powers, while Oleg Khlevniuk remains skeptical that any effort was made during the forum to curtail the Terror. Yet it is incontestable that Kaminskii publicly assailed Beria, as both the latter and Bagirov independently mentioned this episode to investigators in 1953 and 1954. See Boris Starkov, “The Trial that Was Not Held,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 46, 8 (1994): 1299, and idem., “Narkom Ezhov,” in *Stalinist Terror: New Perspectives*, eds. J. Arch Getty and Roberta T. Manning (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 36; Oleg Khlevniuk, “Party and NKVD: Power Relationships in the Years of the Great Terror,” in *Stalin's Terror: High Politics and Mass Repression in the Soviet Union*, eds. Barry McLoughlin and Kevin McDermott, 24; Khaustov, *Delo Beria*, 36, 395.

⁴⁸⁶ Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 1, 402 fn3. An additional copy of the report was forwarded directly to Bulganin in his capacity as Chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers; see GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4000, ll. 38-39.

Kaminskii shows how much proof for posthumous rehabilitation could be found in simply reading the evidence that the NKVD cited to make its own cases.

While under interrogation Kaminskii admitted to membership in a “diversionary-terrorist organization,” but when brought before the Military Collegium – which heard the case, as Baranov and Serov portentously noted, for all of fifteen minutes, including the pronouncement of the death sentence – he maintained that he did not “feel himself to be an enemy of the people.”⁴⁸⁷ Placing considerable stock in Kaminskii’s professed loyalty to the Soviet cause, the Procuracy and KGB denigrated the evidence against him as “contradictory and unconfirmed in court.”⁴⁸⁸ In particular, Kaminskii was alleged to have been inducted into the Rightist conspiracy by Bukharin himself in 1929, and thereafter thrown in with Rykov, Aleksandr Petrovich Smirnov, and Daniil Egorovich Sulimov, the former RSFSR *Sovnarkom* chairman. Yet state functionaries’ renewed scrutiny of materials from Bukharin, Rykov, and Smirnov’s investigative files revealed that none of the three mentioned Kaminskii among their confederates; only Sulimov claimed knowledge of Kaminskii’s Rightism, but he purportedly learned of it second-hand, via Rykov. This assertion flew in the face of Kaminskii’s pre-trial testimony, wherein he identified direct orders from Sulimov and Nikolai Antipov as the impetus for his creation of a “wrecking organization (*vreditel’skaia organizatsiia*)” within the People’s Commissariat of Health.⁴⁸⁹ These inconsistencies were sufficiently glaring – in the eyes of the Procuracy and KGB – to constitute grounds for the reversal of Kaminskii’s conviction from February 1938.

⁴⁸⁷ Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia*, vol 1, 181.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid.

The aftereffects of Kaminskii's rehabilitation – which the Military Collegium finalized on March 2, 1955 – manifested themselves with remarkable rapidity. That month at least two of his putative cohorts, Mark Belen'kii – Mikoian's onetime deputy – and Zhosef Isaakovich Meerzon, were deemed deserving of rehabilitation by the Procuracy.⁴⁹⁰ In his assessments submitted to the Central Committee, Baranov foregrounded Kaminskii's central role in both men's condemnations: Kaminskii was the first of several plotters listed with whom Belen'kii acknowledged being “closely associated,” while Meerzon identified Kaminskii as the party responsible for initiating him into anti-Soviet activities.⁴⁹¹ Yet as Baranov observed, neither Belen'kii nor Meerzon appeared in the statements extorted from Kaminskii, and due to the latter's recent exculpation any allegations of criminality on his part could not anchor charges against others. With no further “compromising materials” forthcoming, Baranov motioned to have Belen'kii and Meerzon's cases dismissed. Another effect of Kaminskii's rehabilitation – one that was perhaps of even greater consequence – was its tentative breaching of the until-that-point impermeable barrier that placed all cases linked to the Moscow Show Trials beyond the judiciary's scrutiny.

From Liability to Asset: The Transformation of Nikolai Antipov

Perhaps best known today as one of the figures excised from the photograph that appears in various iterations on the cover of David King's study of image manipulation under Stalin, *The Commissar Vanishes*, Nikolai Kirillovich Antipov was a leading Leningrad Bolshevik (and rival of Kirov's) who held a series of key positions within the Party and government beginning in 1923; at the time of his arrest in June 1937 he was a

⁴⁹⁰ On Belen'kaia rebuffing Mikoian's patronage, see Chapter 1.

⁴⁹¹ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d, 4000, ll. 92, 94.

member of the Central Committee, as well as both chairman of the Soviet Control Commission and deputy chairman of the USSR *Sovnarkom*. The authorities briefly mooted trying him alongside Bukharin and Rykov in open court, and though they ultimately opted to sentence him *in camera*, references to Antipov as an organizer and accomplice of the “Anti-Soviet Bloc of Rightists and Trotskyites” proliferated throughout the draft indictment and transcripts of the Third Moscow Trial.⁴⁹² As rehabilitation materials and first-hand accounts indicate, over the thirteen months that Antipov spent in state custody he denounced dozens of fellow Old Bolsheviks as would-be spies, saboteurs, and assassins.⁴⁹³ During a jailhouse confrontation with longtime friend and colleague Vlas Iakovlevich Chubar’ at which Molotov – their former superior – was present, Antipov produced a litany of seditious utterances that Chubar’ had supposedly voiced in his presence.⁴⁹⁴ Chubar’, who had not yet been officially detained, indignantly assailed Antipov as “such a snake” that Chubar’ had “held to [his] breast,” and a “provocateur”; though Molotov left the scene unconvinced of the veracity of Antipov’s allegations, he was certain that neither man could be trusted further.⁴⁹⁵

Khrushchev also reported that Stalin leveraged Antipov’s volubility as a means of testing his subordinates. He recalled receiving an urgent summons to join Stalin and

⁴⁹² Lenoë, *The Kirov Murder*, 592-593; Zh. V. Artamonova and N. V. Petrov, eds., *Protsess Bukharina. 1938 g.: Sbornik dokumentov* (Moskva: Mezhdunarodnyi fond “Demokratiia,” 2013), 41-44, 107-109, 347-349.

⁴⁹³ For a brief summary of one such questioning session, conducted by Boris Rodos, in which Antipov tied himself to figures from Bukharin and Rykov to Gikalo, Ikramov, and Tukhachevskii, see V. N. Khaustov, ed., *Lubianka: sovetskaia elita na stalinskoi golgofe. 1937-1938* (Moskva: Mezhdunarodnyi fond “Demokratiia,” 2011), 12.

⁴⁹⁴ According to Boris Viktorov, NKVD First Department head Izrail’ Dagin testified prior to his own execution in 1940 that when investigators were “warned in advance of confrontations involving Politburo members, prisoners would be ‘pumped’ until the last minute.” See Viktorov, *Bez grifa “Sekretno,”* 227.

⁴⁹⁵ Chuev, *Sto sorok besed*, 413-414. Molotov maintained that Beria was in attendance for this exchange and a similar one he described with Ian Rudzutak, but this is highly unlikely, as at the time Beria was still based in Tbilisi, and it would be another year before Stalin brought him to Moscow to take the reins of the All-Union secret police.

Molotov for a stroll around the Kremlin, when the *vozhd'* suddenly turned to him and announced – in what Khrushchev characterized as “the kind of joke that could turn your hair gray” – “Antipov is giving testimony against you.”⁴⁹⁶ Incredulous, Khrushchev insisted that this was impossible, because Antipov had nothing on him; he surmised that Stalin was closely watching for any telltale reaction to the allegation, and, refusing to be unmanned by this feint, Khrushchev claimed to have withstood Stalin’s “psychological provocation.”⁴⁹⁷ Eventually Antipov’s utility as a means of testing other *apparatchiks’* loyalty waned, and on July 26, 1938 both Stalin and Molotov signed off on a list of over 130 Party and state notables whose cases were set to be heard before the Military Collegium under the “first category” – meaning the death penalty – which included Antipov’s name.⁴⁹⁸ Two days later sentence was passed and carried out on Antipov, and as the images King features so aptly demonstrate, he was quickly and thoroughly excised from the official depictions of the triumphant march to socialism.

Antipov first reemerged in the Procuracy’s December 1954 rehabilitation proposal for Izrail’ Mikhailovich Kleiner, a onetime chairman of *Sovnarkom’s* Procurement Committee whose case was brought to the judiciary’s attention by Mikoian.⁴⁹⁹ While under NKVD questioning Kleiner identified Antipov as the head of the alternate Rightist center from whom he took his marching orders, and although he eventually insisted in court that he had “worked honestly through the years,” Rudenko’s

⁴⁹⁶ Khrushchev, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, 107.

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁸ V. N. Khaustov, V. P. Naumov, and N. S. Plotnikova, eds., *Lubianka. Stalin i Glavnoe upravlenie gosbezopasnosti NKVD* (Moskva: Mezhdunarodnyi fond “Demokratiia,” 2004), 540-544. Of the 139 individuals listed – including Ian Rudzutak – Stalin and Molotov only excerpted one, Red Army Commander Aleksandr Il’ich Egorov, thereby affording him a few additional months of freedom before his eventual arrest and execution.

⁴⁹⁹ Like Mark Belen’kii, Kleiner had been one of Mikoian’s deputies, in this case at the People’s Commissariat of Supply, before the commissariat was divvied up and he was charged with overseeing the Soviet government’s procurement efforts. See Mikoian, *Tak bylo*, 299.

deputy Pavel Vladimirovich Baranov pointed out that Kleiner failed to disassociate himself from Antipov.⁵⁰⁰ It was therefore incumbent upon Baranov to demonstrate that any dealings that might have existed between Antipov and Kleiner did not constitute “incontrovertible proof” of criminality on the latter’s part.⁵⁰¹

Antipov testified during his own interrogation that he had become acquainted with Kleiner in late 1935 through Rykov, and for the next two years he delegated acts of sabotage to Kleiner on behalf of the Rightist movement. Baranov cast doubt upon these statements because no corresponding testimony from Rykov could be located, and they were contradicted by the conclusions of a “special expert examination (*spetsial’noi ekspertizy*)” of Kleiner’s file and other archival documents, though he declined to indicate how precisely these materials diverged from one another. Most telling, though, was a select quotation from State Security Major Zinovii Naumovich Glebov-Iufa, Antipov’s lead interrogator, who described his subject as “the type of prisoner who is ready to give any testimony in any direction.”⁵⁰² Baranov thereby predicated his argument for Kleiner’s innocence on the fundamental unsoundness of Antipov’s testimony. At no point did he appear to suggest that this should occasion the reopening of other dossiers in which Antipov was cited as a material witness, and in the year and a half interval between Kleiner and Antipov’s rehabilitations the operating protocol for addressing the latter’s appearances in others’ case files remained fairly consistent, foregrounding Antipov’s unreliability as a witness.

Under NKVD inducement some Party and state officials, such as Kaminskii and Nikolai Vasil’evich Krylenko, declared that Antipov and his confederate Sulimov had

⁵⁰⁰ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3288, l. 238.

⁵⁰¹ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3288, l. 239.

⁵⁰² Ibid.

inducted them into the Right Opposition, but neither of the supposed ringleaders confirmed this testimony, making it all the easier for the Procuracy to discount it when the former Commissars of Health and Justice, respectively, came up for consideration.⁵⁰³ Of those Antipov actually incriminated while in custody, over a dozen had their cases posthumously dismissed in the three years following Stalin's death. In each of these instances, procurators were compelled to find grounds upon which to write off Antipov's statements without explicitly suggesting that he was no more an "enemy of the people" than those currently undergoing rehabilitation, as for the time being his legal standing remained beyond their mandate. In Nikolai Gikalo's case, this entailed emphasizing the questionable timing of Antipov and others' avowals. Rudenko, writing with Vladimir Luk'ianov from the Party Control Committee, intimated that Antipov's words "[did] not inspire confidence" by virtue of the fact that they were "obtained [...] only after Gikalo's arrest," implying that Gikalo's imprisonment could possibly have prejudiced this evidence, and because they were contradicted or entirely refuted by other witness testimony.⁵⁰⁴ A three-year discrepancy in the dates that Antipov provided for when he and RSFSR Commissar for Light Industry Konstantin Vasil'evich Ukhanov purportedly founded their "reserve center" was likewise zeroed in on to give lie to the notion of Ukhanov's guilt.⁵⁰⁵ Chubar's Rightist-Trotskyite activities were called into question because Antipov's "circumstantial" testimony was predicated entirely on allusions to

⁵⁰³ Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia*, 181, 217.

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 221.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 235. Rudenko further noted that Sulimov rescinded his admission of joining the "reserve center" with Ukhanov in a letter to the Politburo, and that Bukharin's admission of having known about Ukhanov's "participation in our organization from the first year of our struggle against the Party" could not be considered credible, as Bukharin had been in open defiance of the general line since at least the 10th Party Congress, when Ukhanov along with other delegates helped to put down the Kronstadt mutiny.

other Party figures, who made no reference to Chubar' in their own confessions.⁵⁰⁶ The frequency with which Antipov appeared in the investigative files of his fellow Old Bolsheviks led the Procuracy to issue serious challenges to his personal integrity in the interest of redeeming others' reputations, a tack that its functionaries were obliged to reverse when they were called upon to find cause for his rehabilitation.⁵⁰⁷

In Antipov's case the investigators' task was simplified considerably by the fact that nearly twenty of his nominal cohorts in counterrevolutionary activity – including Ukhanov, Sulimov, Rudzutak, Kaminskii, and Vladimir Ivanovich Polonskii – had been cleared of all the charges against them. Many of these men had also been listed by Rykov and Bukharin as participants, alongside Antipov, in their organization; therefore any attempt to implicate Antipov in Rightism through its leaders' own words was rendered immediately suspect, given that they had denounced demonstrably innocent Party cadres.⁵⁰⁸

Baranov also took the opportunity to revisit and reframe the statement behind the damning portrayal of Antipov that surfaced in Kleiner's earlier rehabilitation. Now attributing the depiction in question to one of Glebov-Iufa's fellow *chekisty*, Baranov substantively altered its connotation: "The former USSR NKVD operative Tserpento (convicted), who participated in the investigation of the Right-Trotskyite center case, under questioning in his own case testified that through illegal investigative methods Antipov was driven to the point that he was ready to give any sort of testimony in any

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., 251.

⁵⁰⁷ Prior to May 1956, when Baranov put his recommendation to the Central Committee, Antipov's testimony had been cited approvingly only once in rehabilitation materials. A note in which he described the "abnormal personal relations (*nenormal'nye lichnye otnosheniia*) between [Stanislav Vikent'evich] Kosior and [Pavel Petrovich] Postyshev" that had been appended to Kosior's file was raised during Postyshev's case review as proof that the two Ukrainian Party figures could not have plotted together, given the enmity that existed between them. See *ibid.*, 219.

⁵⁰⁸ Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 2, 83.

direction.”⁵⁰⁹ This new perspective on the account that had been circulating since late 1954 was evidently intended to absolve Antipov of responsibility for the fates that had befallen the Communists he implicated; indeed, it was all the more difficult to argue that Antipov merited rehabilitation while the image of him as a fabulist continued to hold currency.⁵¹⁰ Yet even in light of this remarkable reversal, the prospect of Antipov’s exoneration was met with raised eyebrows on the part of some within the Presidium.

Molotov annotated his copy of Antipov’s report with the following admonition: “It would be a good idea to have more detailed information.”⁵¹¹ Such reservations are unsurprising coming from one so deeply implicated in Antipov’s repression – having witnessed his confrontation with Chubar’, authorized his death warrant, and remained an avowed skeptic of rehabilitation through his final years – though requests from the top for additional material as issued by Molotov appear to have been vanishingly rare.⁵¹² Baranov dutifully acceded to this directive, supplementing his initial, somewhat brief two-page summary with a more in depth discussion of the factors that supported his conclusions. As the Deputy Procurator General noted, though Antipov pled guilty to a

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., 84.

⁵¹⁰ KGB chief Serov, who was likely unaware of Baranov’s linguistic manipulations, provided the fullest version of this testimony in his July 1956 report to Molotov on the trial of the “Anti-Soviet Right-Trotskyite Bloc.” As it happens, Tserpento was the original source of the story, but he had related second-hand what Glebov-Iufa told him about complications in building the case against Rykov. Antipov had told a third NKVD operative, Litvin, that Rykov instructed him to form the reserve center in September 1936; Rykov insisted that he had only met with Antipov in 1932, but was pressured into confirming the 1936 date. In the meantime, Antipov composed an entirely new statement, in which he wrote that he had indeed received orders from Rykov in 1932. When Tserpento marveled at the fact that Antipov had so deceived Litvin, Glebov-Iufa remarked that it came as no surprise to him, given Antipov’s willingness to change his tune. Glebov-Iufa did not allude to any sort of physical pressure being applied to Antipov, though this does not rule out the possibility that he was tortured. Artamonova and Petrov, eds., *Protsess Bukharina*, 854.

⁵¹¹ Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 2, 83.

⁵¹² Molotov was of the conviction that rehabilitation went too far, and exonerated people who were committed enemies of the state; Tukhachevskii seems to have been a particular target of his ire. See “Zapiska (G.M.) po probleme kul’ta lichnosti I. V. Stalina i o programme KPSS. (Pis’mo V. M. Molotova v TsK KPSS (1965g.)),” *Voprosy istorii*, issues 1-6, 8-11 (2011), 1,3 (2012); see also Feliks Chuev, *Sto sorok besed s Molotovym. Iz dnevnika F. Chueva* (Moskva: “Terra”-“Terra,” 1991), 412-413, 427.

host of offenses during his hearing – including participation in Rightist organizations, collaboration with Germany and Poland, and having served as an *agent provocateur* for the pre-Revolutionary police – the charges filed against him were predicated entirely on his and others’ testimony, which was “contradictory and refuted by objective materials.”⁵¹³ Having studied the archival-investigative files of the Party figures at whom Antipov pointed fingers, Baranov discovered that all but one of them, Syrtsov – whose case was under review – had already been rehabilitated. He likewise found no substantive basis for the allegations of pre-Revolutionary treachery against Antipov beyond the latter’s own statements, which ran contrary to archival documents that had been “hidden by the investigative organs.”⁵¹⁴ Antipov claimed responsibility for betraying a Party meeting and underground press in Saint Petersburg while working for the tsarist *Okhrana* under the codename “Youngster (*Molodoi*).” The materials Baranov uncovered suggested that Antipov had not been implicated in either incident, and the policeman that he identified as his handler did not have an informant known as “Youngster” on his roster. Regarding Antipov’s more recent malfeasance, Baranov put aside both Rykov and Smirnov’s testimony, as the *chekisty* Tserpento, Tsesarskii, and Zhurbenko all stated that names had been inserted arbitrarily at investigators’ discretion.⁵¹⁵ Evidently persuaded by these additional facts, Molotov retracted his initial misgivings, and deemed it “advisable to hear [Antipov’s case] before the Presidium.”⁵¹⁶

Antipov’s rehabilitation, which the Military Collegium certified at the end of June 1956, marked a sea change not only in his individual legal standing, but also the

⁵¹³ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4578, l. 1.

⁵¹⁴ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4578, l. 2.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid.

⁵¹⁶ Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 1, 83.

judiciary's approach to others who were linked – either directly or indirectly – to the defendants in the trial of Bukharin, Rykov, and other members of the “Anti-Soviet Bloc of Rightists and Trotskyites.”⁵¹⁷ Suren Konstantinovich Shadunts – a former Party Secretary in Tajikistan – had been incriminated as a counterrevolutionary by his onetime Uzbek counterpart Akmal' Ikramovich Ikramov, who was among those put on display during the final Moscow show trial. In one of the closing points of his case summary before the Central Committee, Baranov explained that Ikramov had only heard about Shadunts' purported misdeeds second-hand through Antipov, who had since been rehabilitated. The unarticulated assumption underlying this point was that no honest Bolshevik, such as Antipov, could have possessed material knowledge of anti-Soviet plans in the making, and therefore any claims that he passed on such knowledge were automatically rendered suspect.⁵¹⁸ Antipov's status as a source thereby assumed an entirely different hue from that of his first invocation in Kleiner's case, as by virtue of having been rehabilitated his mention in the case against an individual could be used to help call the conviction into question.

Although it was most likely Serov's determination in July 1956 that “the majority of those convicted” in the Third Moscow Trial – regardless of their actual stance on the Party line – “merited rehabilitation,” figures like Antipov played a critical role in providing justifications for accused Oppositionists' legal redemption. Ikramov was the

⁵¹⁷ For the Chief Military Procuracy's findings, prepared in late April 1956 and submitted to the Supreme Court Military Collegium in June, see GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4578, ll. 5-8.

⁵¹⁸ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4580, l. 19. A similar logic that also invokes Antipov and Ikramov is on display in the rehabilitation report for Aron Abramovich Tsekher – the Party's second in command in Uzbekistan – in GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4579, ll. 298-299.

first of those tried alongside Bukharin and Rykov to have his case come up for review.⁵¹⁹ In their joint briefing to the Presidium of May 18, 1957, Rudenko and Serov rejected the self-incriminatory statements that Ikramov made under interrogation and in court as “at variance with facts.”⁵²⁰ Ikramov testified at various times to the Uzbek NKVD and the USSR NKVD and Procuracy that he had been initiated into Rightism in 1935 “through Antipov, from whom he received all instructions on rolling out anti-Soviet activities in Uzbekistan,” yet as the investigation was wrapping up Ikramov suddenly amended his account, suggesting that it was Bukharin who inducted him into the conspiracy in 1933, and that Antipov was responsible for overseeing Ikramov’s subversive schemes. Rudenko and Serov concluded that this narrative was not feasible, as Antipov’s expiation obviated the possibility of his involvement in counterrevolutionary endeavors; in the absence of any other conclusive evidence of wrongdoing on Ikramov’s part, they proposed expunging his criminal record, thereby marring the façade of the Third Moscow Trial.⁵²¹

Over the coming months and years more tertiary figures in the “Anti-Soviet Bloc of Rightists and Trotskyites” were haltingly exonerated, including Belorussian First Secretary Vasilii Fomich Sharangovich in December 1957, People’s Commissar of Finance Grigorii Fedorovich Grin’ko and Ikramov’s predecessor in Uzbekistan Isaak Abramovich Zelenskii in April 1959, and former ambassador to Germany Nikolai Nikolaevich Krestinskii in July 1963.⁵²² Antipov’s presence in each of these men’s criminal investigative files – alongside other rehabilitees – was cited as grounds for

⁵¹⁹ Citing Ikramov’s son Kamal’s novelistic memoir, Kathleen Smith mistakenly maintains that Ikramov was the sole show trial defendant to obtain rehabilitation under Khrushchev. See Smith, *Remembering Stalin’s Victims*, 135; and K. A. Ikramov, *Delo moego ottsa* (Moskva: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1991), 56-60.

⁵²⁰ Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 2, 271.

⁵²¹ *Ibid.*, 271-272.

⁵²² *Ibid.*, 296-298, 334-337, 462-465. Like Grin’ko and Zelenskii, former light industry commissar Vladimir Ivanovich Ivanov was also put forward for rehabilitation on April 28, 1957, but the materials in his case made no mention of Antipov; see *ibid.*, 337-338.

challenging aspects of the widely trumpeted verdict from March 13, 1938, though in none of the reports was the question of Bukharin, Rykov, or Iagoda's innocence broached.⁵²³

The manner in which the Procuracy handled the issue of Antipov's testimony and the question of his innocence at various times is reflective of the balance its functionaries were obliged to strike between making the case for those already cleared for rehabilitation and treading upon the still-unassailable myth of a heretical Opposition committed to undermining Soviet power in the 1930s.

The NKVD as Information Source and Scapegoat

An unacknowledged debt loomed over much of the Procuracy's work in the decade following Stalin's death. Though blackening Beria's reputation remained a top priority throughout the period, the rehabilitation process came to rely extensively on investigative materials generated during the post-Great Terror "purge of the purgers," which Beria personally oversaw. Charged with reining in the excesses of the *Ezhovshchina* upon his ascent at the central NVKD, Beria rounded up many of the Terror's most prolific agents, capitalizing on the opportunity to stack the ranks of the security *apparat* with his own loyalists. To imbue this violent changing of the guard with a legalistic veneer, new NKVD cadres subjected their predecessors to coercive interrogations over their role in the repressions, then convened secret tribunals that often resulted in death sentences; most frequently, the accused *chekisty* were charged with abuse of office.⁵²⁴ The confessions produced during these sessions later proved invaluable to Rudenko and his colleagues as they both sought information for the

⁵²³ On the fraught question of Bukharin's rehabilitation, which with Khrushchev-era authorities flirted, see Mark Junge, *Strakh pered proshlym: Reabilitatsiia N. I. Bukharina ot Khrushcheva do Gorbacheva* (Moskva: AIRO-XX, 2003).

⁵²⁴ On the course and character of this round of purges in Ukraine, see Viola, *Stalinist Perpetrators*.

purposes of rehabilitation and attempted to ascribe responsibility for the violent excesses of the past.⁵²⁵ Yet in exploiting this evidence base, Khrushchev-era investigators made no apparent effort to dispel – or even acknowledge – the tension inherent in predicating their claims on sources furnished by a professed “enemy of the people,” who employed the very methods of brute force and torture that the judiciary decried vis-à-vis those who drove the violence of the Great Terror.⁵²⁶

A relatively small coterie of prolific NKVD interrogators emerged in the Procuracy reports as bearing particular responsibility for contriving charges against the party-state’s “outstanding figures.” Glebov-Iufa, who served in the GUGB’s secret-political department, was first mentioned to the Central Committee as one of Moscow obkom Secretary Mikhail Efimovich Mikhailov’s tormentors. Glebov-Iufa and his fellow *chekist* Moisei L’vovich Gatov had been entrusted with building the case against Mikhailov, but found themselves under arrest within mere months of his sentencing in August 1938.⁵²⁷ Under interrogation by his former collaborators, Glebov-Iufa admitted “that while seeking testimony from Mikhailov investigators beat him and employed other illegal investigative methods”; Glebov-Iufa recounted the confrontation between Mikhailov and one A. A. Levin at Lefortovo, during which Ezhov himself, his deputy and GUGB head Mikhail Petrovich Frinovskii, and other ranking NKVD officers took turns

⁵²⁵ On the scale of these reprieves versus the wider scale of the Terror, see Shearer, *Policing Stalin’s Socialism*, 369.

⁵²⁶ This suggests that for the Soviet judiciary there was no notion of “fruit of the poisonous tree.” My thanks to David Brandenberger for highlighting this point.

⁵²⁷ Military Procurator Mikhail Sergeevich Gromov, who was responsible for compiling Mikhailov’s rehabilitation materials, recalled in a laudatory article from 1988 that all of the NKVD operatives involved in Mikhailov’s abuse had in turn been purged save one, a junior officer by the name of Nemov, who he was able to track down and interrogate. See Nikolai Popkov, “Tikhaia rabota: Tri siuzheta iz zhizni sledovatel’ia,” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, June 1, 1988, 12.

battering Mikhailov.⁵²⁸ Alongside Beria's lieutenants Abakumov and Vlodzimirskii, Glebov-Iufa also helped to formulate the indictment against Margolin, who – according to Baranov – tried to take his own life to avoid further torture: “In the course of the investigation illegal investigative methods and force were used on Margolin, because of which on November 27, 1937 he attempted suicide in his cell by fashioning a noose out of two handkerchiefs.”⁵²⁹ In light of all three *chekisty*'s convictions, Margolin's suicide attempt – which could easily have been construed as a bid to elude justice – was reframed as an act on the part of an honest Party worker desperate to preserve his honor in the face of unremitting brutality.

The tactic of burnishing arrestees' reputations by censuring their persecutors' violent conduct and personal origins was on full display in Postyshev and Ukhanov's rehabilitations. Both had been placed in the hands of secret-political operatives Grigorii Nikolaevich Lulov and Petr Iustinovich Tserpento during their imprisonments. Rudenko devoted much of his defense of Ukhanov to castigating Lulov and Tserpento, who had been “unmasked as criminals who insinuated themselves into the organs of state security and were sentenced to execution for a number of crimes including the falsification of investigative files”; Beria's purge had exposed the skeletons within each *chekist*'s closet.⁵³⁰ Lulov, the superior officer, was originally from “a socially alien milieu (*iz sotsial'no-chuzhdoi sredy*),” sullied by ties to the twin heresies of commerce and Zionism through his brother, “a major capitalist living in Palestine.” He was further guilty of opposing the Party line during the 14th Party Congress, and on at least one occasion had

⁵²⁸ Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia*, 176. Glebov-Iufa's testimony from the late 1930s was confirmed by two former GUGB special investigators questioned in 1954, one of whom was Boris Rodos, whose own trial is addressed at length in the following chapter.

⁵²⁹ *Ibid.*, 209.

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*, 234.

written approvingly to Zinov'ev regarding a speech of his.⁵³¹ Tserpento owed his entire career in state security to a politically suspect past, as in 1934 he had been recruited to inform on fellow members of a supposed Trotskyite cell within Saratov's pedagogical institute, and was subsequently promoted to a central NKVD staff position.⁵³² Given the precariousness of their positions, "Tserpento and Lulov did not shrink from extorting false testimony regarding specific Party and government leaders" in order to build the cases their superiors demanded of them, as evinced by their treatment of Postyshev.

Throughout Postyshev's rehabilitation report Rudenko assiduously offset references to the former's "testimony" with quotation marks, an expression of unreserved skepticism that was not on display in any similar such documents. Rudenko decisively dismissed Postyshev's statements as counterfeit based on a report Tserpento submitted to the NKVD brass following his own arrest, but prior to Postyshev's sentencing. Tserpento maintained that at Lulov's behest he and another NKVD officer doctored the interrogation transcript "without Postyshev's participation and without his confession of guilt. Postyshev first became aware of the contents of 'his testimony' when it was given to him to sign."⁵³³ Similarly, Rudenko made Frinovskii's written description of his subordinates' methods for efficiently extracting confessions a centerpiece of Ukhanov's vindication, though he did not specify whether Frinovskii provided this information freely. Frinovskii – who signed Ukhanov's arrest warrant – admitted that as part of their duties "[i]nvestigators beat prisoners uncontrollably and in the shortest time possible

⁵³¹ Ibid.

⁵³² Ibid.

⁵³³ Ibid., 219. Tserpento admitted that Andrei Sergeevich Bubnov, one of Postyshev's pre-Revolutionary comrades, had been placed in the same cell as him with instructions to "prepare" Postyshev to sign the investigative materials.

obtained ‘testimony,’ and knew how to skillfully, colorfully compile transcripts.”⁵³⁴

These interrogations records did not in practice relate verbatim statements made in the NKVD’s cells, but were instead artfully stitched together from notes taken during repeated interrogations. The resulting collage would then be forwarded to the chief of the relevant department for “correction” before making their way to Ezhov or occasionally Frinovskii’s desks, where they would receive final approval.⁵³⁵ Unsurprisingly, most prisoners balked at the creations placed before them that supposedly represented their words, but were dissuaded from taking any moral stands by their wardens and would become pliant, affix their signatures to the cobbled-together texts, and the names of other conspirators “suggested themselves (*podskazyvalis’ familii*).”⁵³⁶ In Frinovskii’s estimation, it was “very often investigators [who] gave the testimony, not the suspects.”⁵³⁷ It is telling that although Frinovskii’s statement referred to NKVD interrogators’ modus operandi across the board, this stark admission was cited only in reference to Ukhanov’s case, in which Frinovskii had a direct hand.

The judiciary’s practice of rehabilitation also advanced a distinctly retributive agenda. Beyond their mandate to recommend dismissal of charges against the wrongfully accused, the Procuracy and courts sought to identify the individuals responsible for wresting confessions and denunciations out of suspects. In a special codicil to its ruling

⁵³⁴ Ibid., 234.

⁵³⁵ Ibid.

⁵³⁶ Ibid. Igal Halfin captures the logic that drove this mechanism of falsification: “Now that criminals were believed to have lived up to their potential, the enemy’s course of action became predictable – acts of oppositionism, wrecking, and espionage could be foretold. So why should confessions not be prepared by NKVD investigators themselves? The prospective traitor became identical with the real traitor – and it was not that important whether he was caught before or after the act. What mattered was that he had fully exposed the wicked creature he had always been. His counterrevolutionary essence (*kontrrevoliutsionnaia sushchnost’*) had to be urgently drawn out so that additional culprits could be disarmed – hence the exponential growth in the number of files, one person implicating several others.” See Halfin, *Stalinist Confessions*, 9.

⁵³⁷ Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 1, 234.

on Kas'ian's case from March 23, 1955, the Supreme Court Judicial Collegium for Criminal Cases noted that based on the "case materials it appears that the investigation [...] was conducted tendentiously (*tendentsiozno*) and a number of documents appended to the file were falsified"; Kas'ian's daughter further attested to having been physically coerced into defaming her father and signing a pre-prepared interrogation transcript.⁵³⁸ Evidently scandalized that such underhanded methods had been applied against a Party member since 1905 who had endured repression under the Tsarist authorities, Georgian Mensheviks, and Armenian Dashnaks, the court deemed it "necessary to conduct a review and establish who falsified the abovementioned materials, and also identify all the individuals who had an interest in the biased (*neob''ektivnom*) conduct of the investigation into Kas'ian's case, and resolve the question of their accountability."⁵³⁹ Rudenko's deputy D. E. Salin tasked his Department for Special Cases with tracking down the responsible parties; in a June 1955 directive the department instructed Georgia's procurator to assist in ensuring that the guilty were "brought to justice," as per the Judicial Collegium's special ruling.⁵⁴⁰ After several months' delay, the Georgian Procuracy identified Kas'ian's tormentor as Gurgen Aivazov, the former chief of the 7th Section of the Georgian NKVD's Secret-Political Department.⁵⁴¹ Aivazov was already

⁵³⁸ GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 46019, l. 45.

⁵³⁹ GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 46019, l. 46.

⁵⁴⁰ GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 46019, l. 50.

⁵⁴¹ The Department for Special Cases reminded the Procurator of the Georgian SSR M. E. Topuridze in September of his obligation to provide an answer to the Judicial Collegium's query in a timely manner; the Georgian Procuracy responded at the end of the month that the question had been forwarded to the KGB for further clarification, and it was not until October 27 that the All-Union Procuracy was informed of Aivazov's identity. GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 46019, ll. 51-52.

beyond the judiciary's reach, though, as he had fallen in combat during the Great Patriotic War.⁵⁴²

While Vladimir Kirshon's rehabilitation was still in progress – in June 1955 – the Chief Military Procuracy tried to track down a pair of state security officers involved in his interrogation. Citing “demands that have arisen (*voznikshei nadobnosti*),” investigators inquired with the KGB's personnel department after the current whereabouts of Aleksandr Spiridonovich Zhurbenko and Vladimir Izrailevich Rusinov, taking pains not to mention the ultimate subject of their research.⁵⁴³ If the two were no longer employed within the “organs,” the military procurators wanted to know when and under what circumstances they had been removed from their posts. The KGB's reply the following month made clear that neither man remained on state security's payroll: Zhurbenko had been drummed out in December 1938, while Rusinov remained at his post until late 1950.⁵⁴⁴ No indication was given of their ultimate fates – which for Zhurbenko entailed capital punishment in February 1940 – and the Chief Military Procuracy evidently opted against following up on Rusinov, suggesting that either his potential testimony was not deemed essential, or there was no further interest in pursuing charges against him.⁵⁴⁵

⁵⁴² GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 46019, l. 54. Aivazov appears to have been one of some 1,600 imprisoned *chekisty* who Beria requested be released from imprisonment and allowed to redeem themselves at the front in December 1941; see Viola, *Stalinist Perpetrators*, xii.

⁵⁴³ GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 98739, l. 48. It is possible that investigators sought only to question Zhurbenko and Rusinov about the circumstances surrounding Kirshon's repression, but given the atmosphere at the time and Zhurbenko's ranking position within state security it seems unlikely that they would not have been called to account for their actions.

⁵⁴⁴ GARF f. 8131, op. 31, d. 98739, l. 56.

⁵⁴⁵ On Zhurbenko's career, see Petrov and Skorkin, *Kto rukovodil NKVD*, 195. Ezhov purportedly entrusted Zhurbenko with secreting materials relating to Beria's Civil War-era activities from the Central State Archive of the October Revolution (today's GARF) for use as *kompromat*; Beria subsequently oversaw Zhurbenko's arrest. See Nikita Petrov and Marc Jansen, “*Stalinskii pitomets*” – *Nikolai Ezhov* (Moskva: ROSSPEN, 2009), 164-165, 182-183.

Although the putative conspiracies for which NKVD officers were repressed rarely had any connection with their actual offenses against Soviet citizens, the Procuracy and the Party frequently upheld their sentences as retroactive punishment for the “violations of socialist legality” that transpired under Stalin. This logic emerged in a memorandum that Baranov prepared at Mikoian’s request on April 29, 1956, listing purged 17th Party Congress attendees according to their current legal status. Of the 195 repressed individuals recorded, 123 had already been rehabilitated, 28 awaited final decisions on already completed investigations, 25 had cases currently under review, and 15 had been defendants at the Moscow show trials and were therefore ineligible – at the time – for rehabilitation.⁵⁴⁶ The remaining four men – Vsevolod Appolonovich Balitskii, Terentii Dmitrievich Deribas, Iakov Saulovich Agranov, and Stanislav Redens – were identified as having permitted or carried out “mass arrests, falsification of cases, and other gross violations of legality” while holding senior positions in the NKVD, which also exempted them from exoneration.⁵⁴⁷ Despite this insistence on the part of the Procuracy, within several years two of the four, Redens and Deribas, had been officially exculpated, further blurring the tenuous distinction between victims and perpetrators that Baranov and his colleagues attempted to draw. Yet their pariah status, along with that of their fellow secret policemen, remained a source of contention within the Soviet government.

⁵⁴⁶ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4575, l. 119. The report divided repressed attendees into six categories: those who were already rehabilitated, those whose case reviews had been completed, but a decision on their rehabilitation had not yet been issued, those whose case reviews were underway, those who were convicted in public trials (“*Osuzhdennye po otkrytym sudebnym protsessam*”), which, based on the figures listed referred to the three Moscow show trials, those who had committed suicide, and those whose cases were not reopened (*Proverka ne proizvodilas*). All of those included in the last category, save Avel’ Enukidze, who was tied to the show trial defendants, were ranking senior policemen.

⁵⁴⁷ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4575, ll. 115-118.

Rudenko overruled his deputy on Deribas' case just over a year and a half after Baranov issued his memorandum to Mikoian, and in their report to the Central Committee, he and Serov sidestepped the issue of Deribas' culpability in the outrages of the purges entirely. The duo even went so far as to attribute Deribas' repression to his principled stance against the NKVD's resort to illegal tactics. Only after Deribas "attempted to obstruct (*vosprepiatstvovat*) the baseless arrests and illegal investigative methods" that had become standard recourse for NKVD officers in the Far Eastern *krai* was he removed from his post and arrested.⁵⁴⁸ Thus in Rudenko and Serov's depiction Deribas emerged not only as innocent of the crimes that Baranov had ascribed to him, but also as a martyr for Soviet state security's founding values of discipline and vigilance. Viktorov appears to have internalized this narrative, extolling Deribas in his memoir as having been among the "genuine, stalwart, principled *chekisty*" who "[stood] up for Leninist principles."⁵⁴⁹ However, he did not extend this assessment to Deribas' fellow secret policeman Redens, whose rehabilitation both he and the Party Control Committee regarded as a grave error.

In conversation with journalist Evgeniia Al'bats, Viktorov acknowledged his participation in Redens' rehabilitation as a "sin" that weighed particularly heavily on his conscience.⁵⁵⁰ According to Viktorov, the Chief Military Procuracy received a petition from the Redens family requesting that his file be reexamined in 1956; familiar with Redens' career within the Moscow branch of the NKVD, Viktorov refused it immediately. Sometime thereafter – Viktorov provided no indication as to when – he

⁵⁴⁸ Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 2, 296.

⁵⁴⁹ Viktorov, *Bez grifa "Sekretno,"* 267-268.

⁵⁵⁰ Evgeniia Al'bats, *Mina zamedlennogo deistviia (Politicheskii portret KGB)* (Moskva: Russlit, 1992), 116.

took delivery of a terse admonition from Khrushchev: “I strongly urge you to sort this out (*Nastoiatel’no proshu razobrat’sia*).”⁵⁵¹ Khrushchev had signaled his openness to reassessing Redens’ reputation as early as May 1954, when he suggested at the close of a speech to the Leningrad Party *aktiv* that Beria had masterminded Redens’ downfall within the Georgian NKVD, and in this instance he did not hesitate to exert direct influence over the course of justice.⁵⁵² The military procurator surmised the General Secretary’s wishes, and in due course grounds were found to recommend Redens’ rehabilitation. In its ruling from November 10, 1961, the Military Collegium acknowledged Redens’ participation in mass arrests, application of physical force against detainees, and falsification of investigative materials, any one of which under ordinary circumstances would have constituted “official misconduct,” but deemed it “inadvisable” to weigh in on the question of Redens’ liability, and instead went forward with the controversial vindication.⁵⁵³ In keeping with a pattern identified by historian Edward Cohn, the Party’s deliberative bodies maintained a hard line in the face of Khrushchev and the judiciary’s more conciliatory position on Redens, dredging up his extensive history of misdeeds to substantiate the repeated denial of requests to restore his membership.⁵⁵⁴ The Party Control Committee’s (KPK) refusal to allow the ranks of the

⁵⁵¹ Ibid. Khrushchev’s intervention in the Redens case might have been out of concern for Anna Allilueva’s wellbeing, though he also admitted in his memoirs to having “liked [Redens] a lot” based on their interactions around Stalin’s table. They also came close to sitting together on the Moscow-region NKVD *troika*, but Khrushchev’s spot was taken by his deputy. For Khrushchev’s recollections of Redens, see Khrushchev, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, 46, 78.

⁵⁵² Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 1, 141-142. Redens was sacked from his position as chief of the Georgian secret police after being found drunk on the streets of Tbilisi. Khrushchev maintained that Beria plied Redens with alcohol at his home, threw him out, and then phoned the police. Khrushchev also suggested (likely disingenuously) at this meeting that he was unaware whether Redens was alive or dead.

⁵⁵³ Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 2, 393-394. Redens’ son, Vladimir Alliluev, evocatively conflated the “incredible year 1961 of Gagarin’s flight” with the timing of his father’s posthumous rehabilitation; see Vladimir Alliluev, *Stalin-Alliluevy: khronika odnoi sem’i* (Moskva: Algoritm, 2014), 308.

⁵⁵⁴ Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 2, 392-394. Anna Allilueva first approached the Moscow City Party Committee in February 1962 seeking Redens’ reinstatement into the CPSU, and the following summer she

Party to be sullied by a figure as compromised as Redens speaks to its willingness to defend its prerogatives against intrusion even by the First Secretary, as well as a distinct tension over the direction that rehabilitation would assume in the aftermath of the 22nd Party Congress.⁵⁵⁵

Given the large number of ranking NKVD operatives who to this day remain unrehabilitated, the judiciary and Party's handling of Izrail' Iakovlevich Dagin's dossier appears far more typical than that of Deribas or Redens' files.⁵⁵⁶ For much of the 1930s Dagin was one of Ezhov's most trusted lieutenants; at the time of his arrest in November 1938 he was in charge of the Soviet leadership's security detail.⁵⁵⁷ Some 18 years later his brother addressed himself to Mikhail Suslov at the Central Committee, calling for Dagin's conviction to be vacated, and his Party membership restored. Although the Chief Military Procuracy's review found nothing to support the accusation of membership in a Rightist terrorist organization for which Dagin was condemned in January 1940, it did uncover his extensive involvement in purging the North Caucasus and Ordzhonikidze *krais* between 1933 and 1937, which was marked by the widespread use of "illegal

pressed her luck again, appealing to the Party Control Committee in the name of the 22nd Party Congress. On similar rejections and the KPK's approach to secret police perpetrators, see Cohn, *High Title of a Communist*, 103-104, 109-114.

⁵⁵⁵ The Redens case was one of several in which daylight seems to have existed between the upper leadership, the judiciary, and the Party's deliberative bodies over which figures merited rehabilitation. Boris Viktorov maintained that between 1956 and 1961 the Procuracy submitted protests to the Plenum of the USSR Supreme Court on behalf of several show trial defendants, including Piatakov, Sokol'nikov, Radek, and Livshits, but none of these cases were reopened until the Gorbachev years. Likewise, in one of the latest rehabilitation reports uncovered for this study, from February 1962, Rudenko recommended the dismissal of all charges against Left Oppositionist Evgenii Alekseevich Preobrazhenskii to KPK Deputy Chairman Zinovii Timofeevich Serdiuk, arguing that there was no evidence of him diverging from the Party line following his readmission in 1933; Rudenko's recommendations appear to have gone unheeded, though, as Preobrazhenskii was not legally cleared until December 1988. See Viktorov, *Bez grifa "Sekretno,"* 211; GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 6748, ll. 46-47.

⁵⁵⁶ The vast majority of *chekisty* put to death who are mentioned in Petrov and Skorkin, *Kto rukovodil NKVD* are listed as "not rehabilitated." To this day, the rehabilitation of leading secret policemen remains a highly controversial issue, as evinced by the fact that within the past five years both Iakov Agranov and Genrikh Iagoda, among many others, were put forward for and subsequently denied legal absolution.

⁵⁵⁷ Iakovlev, *Lubianka*, 66, 193; Petrov and Skorkin, *Kto rukovodil NKVD*, 165; Jansen and Petrov, *Stalin's Loyal Executioner*, 155.

investigative methods” to induce suspects to “slander themselves and others,” and thereby saw “innocent people sentenced to execution and other serious punishments.”⁵⁵⁸ Those targeted included the head of the Ordzhonikidze railroad I. I. Maevskii – whose case Dagin personally oversaw – and his staff, as well as over 300 Party, industrial, and agricultural figures shot as conspirators in a putative “Circassian Bourgeois-Nationalist Organization”; the KPK found that recent investigations had resulted in the overturning of all of the convictions in the North Caucasus affairs.⁵⁵⁹ For such “egregious perversions (*grubeishie izvrashcheniia*) of Soviet legality” the Chief Military Procuracy allowed the verdict against Dagin to stand, which marked a wholly different tack than the one adopted with Redens, who was acknowledged to be politically and morally compromised, but still found deserving of absolution.⁵⁶⁰

Conclusion

The Khrushchev years were marked by the reassertion of legal norms that had either been suppressed by Kremlin fiat or were openly flouted during the period of High Stalinism. Beyond the disbandment of the MVD Special Board, judges began to sour on the use of many of the provisions of Article 58 of the criminal code, which concerned counterrevolutionary crimes, with Cheptsov at the Military Collegium deeming a

⁵⁵⁸ RGANI f. 6, op. 6, d. 1716, l. 11.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid. Toward the end of his memoirs Mikoian noted that in 1972 he aided Maevskii’s son in restoring his father’s Order of Lenin, and suggested that the order for Maevskii’s arrest had originated with Kaganovich, who demanded a preemptive purge of his commissariat. See Mikoian, *Tak bylo*, 630.

⁵⁶⁰ RGANI f. 6, op. 6, d. 1716, l.12. Agnessa Mironovna reported that her attempts to secure rehabilitation for Sergei Mironov – who was part of the same *chekist* clique from which Dagin emerged – were similarly rebuffed on the grounds that he “exceeded his powers in Mongolia,” where as a plenipotentiary of the Soviet regime he helped organize purges in the fledgling people’s republic. She considered the fact that Mironov went without a grave where he could be properly mourned as part of his “posthumous punishment.” See Mironova-Korol, *Agnessa*, 203-205.

directive on the application of 58-8 against suspected terrorists “outdated.”⁵⁶¹ In April 1956 the emergency law of December 1, 1934, which had allowed for the summary execution of counterrevolutionaries, was repealed, and the 1958 Fundamental Principles of Criminal Law ruled out confessions as constituting the sole grounds for conviction.⁵⁶² As the Soviet state sought to eliminate the conditions that facilitated mass terror, the judiciary – and the Procuracy in particular – did the substantive work of exonerating those for whom such reforms came too late. Well before the principle was recognized as law, the Procuracy’s investigations provided incontrovertible proof of the unviability of relying exclusively upon confessions to secure convictions, and furnished the Party with material that bolstered Khrushchev and his contemporaries’ drive to bring the organs of state security to heel.

Through successive, interlinked rehabilitations that reinforced one another the Procuracy was gradually able to transition from a model of posthumous exoneration that was predicated on attacking Beria and his subordinates’ roles in individuals’ repressions to one that emphasized the prevalence of already-rehabilitated figures within the investigative file of a person under consideration. While the Procuracy’s functionaries gradually moved away from predicating individual rehabilitations on Beria’s malign influence, as the following chapter reveals throughout the Khrushchev years the former head of state security was never far from the judiciary’s consciousness, as he and his subordinates were held exclusively responsible for the destruction of Bolshevism’s best and brightest. In keeping with their generally hostile and exclusionary attitude toward

⁵⁶¹ Yoram Goralzki, “De-Stalinization and the Politics of Russian Criminal Justice, 1953-1964,” (D. Phil. Thesis, University of Oxford, 1992), 57.

⁵⁶² Harold J. Berman, *Soviet Criminal Law and Procedure: The RSFSR Codes*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 51, 57-58; Gordon B. Smith, *Reforming the Russian Legal System* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 55.

secret policemen, and in the interest of shielding the Party from any hint of complicity in the Terror, the Procuracy and Supreme Court mobilized the posthumously rehabilitated to force a reckoning with the former headmen of the NKVD.

Chapter Four – Chastening *Chekisty*, Redeeming the Party: The Anti-Berria Trials of 1955-1956

[...] after the trial of Beria we found ourselves prisoners of this version that we had created in the interests of clearing Stalin's name. It was not God who was to blame but one of the lower-ranking "saints" who reported to God. They didn't report accurately, and therefore God sent down hailstorms, thunder and lightning, and other calamities. The people had suffered not because God wanted that to happen but because "Saint Nicholas," "Elijah the Prophet," Beria, and others had been bad. We tried to whitewash Stalin, to clean him up. We acted contrary to the Russian proverb that says: "You can't keep washing a black cat till it turns white."⁵⁶³

In April 1956 Mir Dzhafar Bagirov, the onetime Communist Party satrap of Azerbaijan, candidate member of the Central Committee's Presidium, and close confederate of Lavrentii Beria, addressed the visiting session of the USSR Supreme Court's Military Collegium convened to try him and five subordinates from the republic's organs of state security at Baku's Dzerzhinskii Palace of Culture. Upon hearing the allegations leveled against his codefendants, Bagirov hyperbolically declared: "I believed them, I entrusted them with the organs of the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs. Therefore, the wrong I have done to the people is so great that it is not enough to shoot me, not enough to hang me, I should be quartered and ripped into pieces."⁵⁶⁴ Though likely intended as a self-preservationist gambit, Bagirov's outburst failed to stay the hand of socialist justice, and on May 26 that year, having exhausted all of his appeals for clemency, he became the final Party secretary to face execution in the USSR.

⁵⁶³ Khrushchev, *Memoirs*, vol. 2, 212.

⁵⁶⁴ Dzhamil' Gasanly (Jamil Hasanli), *Khrushchevskaiia "otpepel'" i natsional'nyi vopros v Azerbaidzhane (1954-1959)* (Moskva: Flinta, 2009), 125. On the role of trust and *kompromat* within Bagirov's patronage network, see Yoram Gorlizki, "Structures of Trust after Stalin," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 91, 1 (January 2013): 132-138.

The deaths of Bagirov and most of his lieutenants dealt a decisive blow in a campaign engineered by the post-Stalin Party leadership to root out the remnants of what Timothy Blauvelt has termed Lavrentii Beria's "secret police patronage network," which was launched with Beria's own ambush-style arrest in June 1953.⁵⁶⁵ Between the September 7-19, 1955 show trial in Tbilisi against Avksentii Narikievich Rapava, the former Georgian Minister of State Control, Nikolai Maksimovich Rukhadze, Georgia's Minister for State Security until he was toppled during the Mingrelian Affair, and other accused *lipachi* (serial fabricators) from Georgian state security and the Baku proceedings – which took two weeks beginning April 12 – the Soviet judiciary prosecuted fourteen of Beria's principal clients in open court; all but four were condemned to die.⁵⁶⁶ A third trial, held during the interval between the Caucasian public spectacles and concurrently with the 20th Party Congress in late February 1956, was convened *in camera* in Moscow to pass judgment on Boris Veniaminovich Rodos, likely Soviet state security's single most notorious interrogator, given the number of high-profile individuals in whose questioning he participated.⁵⁶⁷ As with most of the Tbilisi and Baku defendants, Rodos was sentenced to capital punishment.

As previous chapters have demonstrated, at its very inception posthumous rehabilitation in the Soviet Union was bound up with ascribing responsibility for the mass

⁵⁶⁵ See Blauvelt, "March of the chekists."

⁵⁶⁶ For an exhaustive account of all the personages involved in the show trials, see N. G. Smirnov, *Rapava, Bagirov i drugie: antistalinskie protsessy 1950-kh gg.* (Moskva: AIRO-XXI, 2014). A young Procuracy functionary at the time of the Tbilisi and Baku proceedings, Smirnov was present for both as acting secretary. The defendants in Tbilisi were Rapava, Rukhadze, Shalva Otarovich Tsereteli, Nikita Arkad'evich Krimian, Aleksandr Samoilovich Khazan, Konstantin Sergeevich Savitskii, Georgii Iovich Paramonov, and Sardon Nikolaevich Nadaraia; in Baku, Bagirov, Aga Salim Atakishiev, Ruben Ambartsumovich Markarian, Khoren Ivanovich Grigorian, Timofei Mikhailovich Borshchev, and Stepan Fedorovich Emel'ianov were in the dock.

⁵⁶⁷ Rodos is one of the few NKVD interrogators to have cameos in at least two works of fiction, including Simon Sebag Montifiore's pastiche on the life of Ezhov's wife, Evgeniia Feigenburg, *Sashenka*, and Travis Holland's *The Archivist's Story*, both of which draw on his part in the investigation against Isaak Babel'.

violence that the state had unleashed against its earliest acolytes. From Beria's initial questionings following his arrest, when he was confronted with the names of individuals who would shortly be returned to posterity, to the judiciary's efforts to track down specific operatives involved in fabricating materials against innocents, the NKVD and its successor agencies were consistently identified as the source of the rot that had perverted healthy Bolshevik vigilance into self-destructive paranoia. Yet in the first two years following posthumous rehabilitation's inauguration, the findings it generated regarding the organs of state security remained predominantly under wraps, broached only during high-level Party meetings or discussions within the judiciary. With the decision to hold proceedings against Beria's accomplices, the post-Stalin government exploited an opportunity to instrumentalize the investigations that had come to occupy so much of the Procuracy's energies, and make public certain details about the purges that had been uncovered over the opening two years of the rehabilitation process.

Though the proceedings against Rukhadze, Rapava, Rodos, and Bagirov remained well within the vein of earlier prosecutions of secret police perpetrators, in that the defendants' convictions were foregone conclusions and they were found guilty of offences that had been authorized at the highest level, the trials also served as something of a turning point in the Soviet regime's relationship to the internal implementation of violence. By confronting the mass repressions of the recent past through selective rehabilitations of purged Party members, and deploying the records of their persecution to excise those within the secret police who had been called to account, the party-state's leadership managed to foist responsibility for the Terror onto newly designated "enemies

of the people.”⁵⁶⁸ Once these elements had been dealt with, instead of initiating a new wave of purges, the members of the post-Stalin ruling circle renounced the threat of lethal force as a means of conducting domestic politics, and instead embraced a form of collective security, even amidst mutual distrust and suspicion.

Although these trials are largely absent from recent accounts of the Khrushchev era, beginning in the early 1960s Russia-watchers in the West seized upon the Tbilisi and Baku actions both because of the implications they bore for Soviet power politics, and the fact that they occasioned the first widespread mention of posthumously rehabilitated individuals since Beria's prosecution. Though the only materials made available on the trials consisted of two short press releases, Sovietologists were eager to extract whatever information they could, and made much of the long-disappeared figures who merited exposure in connection with the verdicts.⁵⁶⁹ However, given the widespread impulse to question the official Soviet account of major developments, some scholars were quick to discount the received version of events, going so far as to express skepticism over whether they were open to the public or even held at all.⁵⁷⁰ This incredulity, compounded by the paucity of information in circulation regarding the visiting sessions of the Military Collegium, has led many to disregard these important proceedings.⁵⁷¹

Writing about Beria's deposal and elimination, historian Mark Kramer contends that it “marked the last time that violence was used in power struggles in the USSR,”

⁵⁶⁸ On the notion of “excision” in the postwar Soviet Union, see Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), Chapters 3 and 4.

⁵⁶⁹ See Robert Conquest, *Power and Policy in the U.S.S.R.: The Study of Soviet Dynasties* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1961), 269, 289; Labedz, “Resurrection—and Perdition,” 50; Shapiro, “Rehabilitation Policy,” 120-124.

⁵⁷⁰ Vladimir Gsovski, “The Soviet Union,” in *Government, Law and Courts in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*, eds. Vladimir Gsovski and Kazimerz Grzybowski (New York: Praeger, 1960), 584-585.

⁵⁷¹ A notable exception is Michael Parrish, *The Lesser Terror: Soviet State Security, 1939-1953* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996), 277-280.

eliding the slow-moving purge that targeted Beria's clients in his power bases of the Caucasus and Moscow.⁵⁷² On the subject of trials against purge perpetrators, Roy Medvedev has altogether denied their existence, writing that in the aftermath of the 20th Party Congress “[n]o one was brought to justice – neither the NKVD investigators who used torture on their victims nor the heads or warders of camps and prisons.”⁵⁷³ Likewise, Stephen Cohen has broadly generalized about the trajectory and objectives of the anti-Beria campaign: “When Stalin’s other successors put on trial and executed ‘Beria’s gang’ in 1953, 1954, and 1955, they attempted to obscure any larger implications. The proceedings were closed, Beria was falsely convicted of treason and espionage, and his misdeeds were disassociated from Stalin’s remaining heirs.”⁵⁷⁴ While the assertion that the trials were intended to divert accountability away from the new ruling clique is indeed correct, the claim that all were “closed” is belied by the presence of hundreds of carefully selected spectators in both Tbilisi and Baku. Though the trials fell far short of present-day notions of judicial independence and openness, as tent poles of the larger campaign to discredit Beria, rein in state security, and ultimately eliminate internecine violence as a means of conducting Soviet politics, they cannot be discounted.

By virtue of the fact that Khrushchev stridently disparaged him in the Secret Speech, Rodos has been guaranteed a place in Soviet historiography, but few works have probed his life beyond his brief audience with the Presidium on February 1, 1956 and its description in “On the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences.”⁵⁷⁵ As with many

⁵⁷² Kramer, “Leadership Succession and Political Violence,” 70.

⁵⁷³ Zhores A. Medvedev and Roy A. Medvedev, *The Unknown Stalin*, trans. Ellen Dahrendorf (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2003), 109.

⁵⁷⁴ Cohen, *The Victims Return*, 99.

⁵⁷⁵ See, for example, Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 279; Moshe Lewin, *The Soviet Century* (London: Verso, 2005), 239-240; Satter, *It Was a Long Time Ago*, 116; Geoffrey Swain, *Khrushchev* (Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 80; Jörg Baberowski, “Nikita

matters related to Soviet state security, the best account of Rodos' career comes courtesy of Nikita Petrov, who reconstructs the notorious inquisitor's methods and assignments largely through evidence assembled for his trial, though he does not delve into the court case itself.⁵⁷⁶ Petrov is among the pioneers of the field of perpetrator studies in the Soviet context, a rapidly developing discipline with which this chapter engages.

Historian Lynne Viola has posited the participation of citizens at all levels of Soviet society in mass repressions “against mainly innocent people” as the “question of questions in our effort to fathom the mass violence of the Stalin era.”⁵⁷⁷ Drawing upon interrogation transcripts and court materials generated during the trials of NKVD perpetrators – largely in the Soviet periphery – over the course of Beria's “purge of the purgers” between 1939 and 1942, which was meant to rein in the excesses of the *Ezhovshchina*, Viola and her collaborators have attempted to reconstruct the methods and motivations of state security operatives working far from the Kremlin's watchful eye.⁵⁷⁸ Addressing the political calculus behind this round of bloodletting directed against the group Paul Gregory has termed “Stalin's Praetorians,” Viola aptly notes that the trials

Khrushchev and De-Stalinization in the Soviet Union 1953-1964,” in *The Cambridge History of Communism, Volume II: The Socialist Camp and World Power, 1941-1960s*, eds. Norman Naimark, Silvio Pons, and Sophie Quinn-Judge (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 122; Smith, *Moscow 1956*, 37-38. In his lurid account of Soviet state security, Donald Rayfield describes some of Rodos' brutal exploits, but he mistakenly asserts that Rodos was the last of Beria's trustees to go before the firing squad. See Donald Rayfield, *Stalin and His Hangmen: The Tyrant and Those Who Killed for Him* (New York: Random House, 2004), 466.

⁵⁷⁶ Nikita Petrov, *Palachi: Oni vypolniali zakazy Stalina* (Moskva: Novaia gazeta, 2011), 139-150; Petrov incongruously refers to Rodos as an “island in the GULAG archipelago,” despite the fact that he never served in the system, and most of his high-profile assignments never saw the inside of a camp. For a more sympathetic account of Rodos' life, see the memoir by his son, Valerii Rodos, *Ia – syn palacha: vospominaniia* (Moskva: OGI, 2008).

⁵⁷⁷ Lynne Viola, “The Question of the Perpetrator in Soviet History,” *Slavic Review* 72, 1 (Spring 2013): 23.

⁵⁷⁸ See Viola, *Stalinist Perpetrators*; Marc Junge, Lynne Viola, and Jeffrey Rossman, eds., *Chekisty na skam'e podsudimykh. Sbornik statei* (Moskva: Probel-2000, 2017). For a similar study that focuses on Moscow's immediate environs, see Alexander Vatlin, *Agents of Terror: Ordinary Men and Extraordinary Violence in Stalin's Secret Police*, trans. Seth Bernstein (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2016).

were not carried out in the spirit of “justice for the real victims” – meaning the vast majority of those arrested during the Terror, who were non-Party members – nor did they represent “a change of heart on the part of Stalin.”⁵⁷⁹ Rather, they were conceived as a means of asserting the Party’s status as innocent victim of a state security apparatus run amok, “ignoring the central role of the leadership of the Party in the Great Terror. The trials were Stalin’s gift to the Party, serving to relegitimize its authority and its power following two years of terror.”⁵⁸⁰

Though the hearings against NKVD officers during the Stalin years were held in secret and scant details made public, in many respects they were the direct antecedents of the trials that this chapter explores. By foisting all responsibility for the destruction of loyal Party and Soviet cadres on Beria and his band of malefactors, the Khrushchev-era authorities reaffirmed the Party’s status as the primary target of the Terror’s devastation, and insulated its leadership – Stalin included – from further scrutiny.⁵⁸¹ Within this equation, the posthumously rehabilitated functioned both as icons of the Party’s righteous past, and as physical embodiments of the irreparable devastation that Beria’s attempts to conceal his transgressions and settle old scores wrought.⁵⁸²

Striking the First Blow: Early Trials and Investigations

When Beria and his closest lieutenants Goglidze, Kobulov, Vlodzimirskii, Meshik, Dekanozov, and Merkulov went before a special session of the USSR Supreme

⁵⁷⁹ Gregory, *Terror by Quota*, Chapter One; Viola, *Stalinist Perpetrators*, 3.

⁵⁸⁰ Viola, *Stalinist Perpetrators*, 168.

⁵⁸¹ On the depiction of the Party as victim in the Secret Speech, see Platt, “Secret Speech.”

⁵⁸² This chapter departs somewhat from the approach that Viola, Vatlin, and others adopt, insofar as it employs the materials from the studied trials not as a window onto the NKVD’s workings in the 1930s, but instead as indicative of 1950s imperatives. It therefore makes no claims to the veracity of the accounts that emerged in the trial, as their analytic value lies less in what they might reveal about what transpired in Beria’s interrogation cells than what Khrushchev-era authorities believed was persuasive.

Court chaired by Marshal Ivan Konev – who, like most of the panel’s members, had no judicial experience – on December 18, 1953, they faced charges of treason, terrorism, and counter-revolutionary activities, relating to their chief’s supposed ties to British intelligence, the purge of the Red Army in the fall of 1941 following the Nazi invasion of the USSR, and Beria’s service in Azerbaijan’s pan-Islamic Musavat government during the Russian Civil War, respectively. These accusations suggested a longstanding pattern of treachery that supposedly culminated with Beria’s design to wrest control of the USSR from the Party and place it in the hands of the security organs. After six days in session, all the defendants were found guilty and summarily executed.⁵⁸³

In passing judgment on their former collaborators at the Ministries of Internal Affairs and State Security, the Soviet judicial organs were confronted with a set of challenges engendered by the new political environment. Having reconsolidated the MVD and MGB under his purview following Stalin’s death, Beria embarked on an ambitious, unilateral program of carceral reform.⁵⁸⁴ Among these changes was an April 4 ban on the implementation of “any measures of coercion or physical force” against prisoners.⁵⁸⁵ While the impetus for this decision is unclear, given Beria’s extensive, career-long reliance on torture, it brought the remaining members of the Presidium up against a stark dilemma in building the case against Beria and those that followed: would they revert back to the practices that were widespread under their predecessors by

⁵⁸³ Beria’s death sentence was carried out in the same bunker under Moscow where the trial was held. He was tied to a wooden board designed to prevent ricocheting bullets from striking bystanders, and when he attempted to speak Rudenko had him gagged with a towel. Red Army General P. F. Batitskii then shot Beria in the forehead at point-blank range. See Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 256-257; Naumov and Sigachev, *Lavrentii Beria*, 387

⁵⁸⁴ On these initiatives, which ran contrary to the revived spirit of “collective leadership” that prevailed in the Kremlin in spring 1953 see Fitzpatrick, *On Stalin’s Team*, 230-233.

⁵⁸⁵ V. Naumov and Iu. Sigachev, eds., *Lavrentii Beria. 1953* (Moskva: Mezhdunarodnyi fond “Demokratiia,” 1999), 28-29

extracting confessions under duress, or would they turn to new means of substantiating the charges they leveled? The question of whether torture was employed during *chekisty*'s interrogations in the 1950s is a thorny one that cannot be conclusively resolved with currently available materials. That said, Viola has discerned certain telltale signs of torture in interrogation transcripts from Beria's purge of the NKVD, such as a sudden shift to "stilted, sometimes monosyllabic" responses on the defendants' part; accused state security operatives also showed little reticence in claiming to have been tortured when professing their innocence.⁵⁸⁶ No such caesuras are present in the records of interrogations from the period under study – though they may well have been doctored accordingly – and at no point either in open court or in their various appeals for clemency did the members of Beria's coterie claim that their testimony was in any way coerced.⁵⁸⁷

The more outlandish accusations contrived against Beria and his cohort – particularly those relating to his supposed collaboration with British agents to reestablish capitalism in the Soviet Union, and the sordid focus on Beria's sex life – resulted in a verdict that remains under a pall of doubt to this day.⁵⁸⁸ Were the cases against Beria's allies to proceed at least semi-transparently, new grounds would have to be found to substantiate the state's allegations. The solution that the Party and judiciary devised would have major ramifications not only for the trajectory of the proceedings themselves, but also for the Soviet polity's understanding of its own troubled past.

⁵⁸⁶ Viola, *Stalinist Perpetrators*, 7-8, 188 fn22.

⁵⁸⁷ Sheila Fitzpatrick definitively states that Beria was not tortured during his months in captivity, though her sources for this assertion are Beria's interrogation transcripts; see Fitzpatrick, *On Stalin's Team*, 234.

⁵⁸⁸ For the argument that Beria's trial was illegitimate, see Oleg Khlevniuk, "L. P. Beria: predely istoricheskoi 'reabilitatsii,'" in *Istoricheskie issledovaniia v Rossii: tendentsii poslednikh let*, ed. G. A. Bordiugov (Moskva: AIRO-XX, 1996), 139-154; the opposing position is articulated in the subtitle to Khaustov's recent documentary collection, "a sentence not subject to appeal (*prigovor obzhalovaniu ne podlezhit*)."

Beriia and Bogdan Kobulov were interrogated at length in August and September 1953, respectively, about their dealings with former Georgian Party Secretary Samson Andreevich Mamuliia, who had been arrested and executed in the fall of 1937. Pressed about testimony that Mamuliia faced abuse during his imprisonment, Kobulov prevaricated, first insisting that he knew nothing of such activities, then suddenly recalling that he and Goglidze once went to speak to Mamuliia and found him “saddled with a table” across his shoulders, which “obviously the investigators did without authorization (*samovol' nichali*).”⁵⁸⁹ When the newly-promoted Rudenko interrogated Beriia a month later, his queries were met with matter-of-fact denials, as had been the case with his questions regarding Papuliia Ordzhonikidze: Beriia claimed not to know why Mamuliia was arrested, nor could he recall what sort of statements he made to investigators. He asserted that no specific order was given to beat Mamuliia, though “in general prisoners were beaten.”⁵⁹⁰ Beriia was equally stoic when challenged over his conduct toward Mamiia Orakhelashvili, who Rudenko alleged had been arrested at the end of 1937 and transferred from Moscow to Tbilisi for the explicit purpose of coercing him to make defamatory statements against Sergo Ordzhonikidze. Even when confronted with testimony from Nadaraia, Savitskii, and Goglidze that directly contradicted his statements, Beriia categorically rejected Rudenko’s allegations.⁵⁹¹ Rudenko’s attempt to make use of the example of Mamuliia and Orakhelashvili was further hampered by the fact that in the eyes of the Soviet authorities they remained enemies of Soviet power. It should come as little surprise, then, that these particular charges were not revealed during

⁵⁸⁹ Khaustov, *Delo Beriia*, 280.

⁵⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 315.

⁵⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 315-317. Beriia was similarly unfazed in early November when he was confronted with a transcript he had signed from one of Orakhelashvili’s interrogations detailing Ordzhonikidze’s supposed role in the Georgian counterrevolutionary center; see *ibid.*, 399-402.

the course of the proceedings against Beria or his closest lieutenants, but they were clearly never far from the minds of Rudenko and others at the Procuracy.⁵⁹²

Bagirov's expulsion from the Communist Party occasioned one of the first instances in which posthumously rehabilitated figures were mentioned outside of internal judiciary, Party, or KGB documents. Bagirov remained at liberty following Beria's downfall – though he was removed from the Central Committee and all positions of influence by July 1953 and transferred to a menial role at the Ministry of Oil Production – but in March 1954 he was summoned before the Party Control Committee and castigated for his cozy relationship with Beria and their joint criminal ventures. The KPK detailed Bagirov's feud with Osval'd Ianovich Nodev, the Latvian deputy chief of the Azerbaijan NKVD who had the temerity to cast aspersions on Beria's record as a secret policeman, and also brought to light Bagirov's arrest at the hands of Gogoberidze, who seized him in 1918 after he rampaged through Azerbaijan as part of a "flying squad."⁵⁹³ Although neither Nodev nor Gogoberidze were described as having been posthumously rehabilitated, the fact that they were officially acknowledged as loyal exponents of Soviet power marked a major shift in the Party's relationship with wrongfully executed notables, and demonstrated the value of these individuals' stories for the purposes of the anti-Beria purge.

This is not to suggest, though, that the Soviet judiciary immediately embraced rehabilitation cases as sources of incriminating evidence. Between the fall of 1954 and

⁵⁹² Amy Knight conjectures that the anti-Beria plotters might have initially planned on bringing Beria to account in a public forum, which would help account for the reams of unused investigative materials assembled against him; though this is a intriguing possibility, as Rodos' case indicates, the Procuracy did not hesitate to compile testimony and archival evidence that were not necessarily intended for public consumption. See Knight, *Beria*, 222.

⁵⁹³ *Ibid.*, 435, 440.

February 1955 two of Beria's trusted adjutants, Bogdan Kobulov's younger brother, Amaiak, and Solomon Rafailovich Mil'shtein, were tried for their roles in Beria's organization and put to death. In both instances the bills of indictment made explicit mention of the *chekisty*'s participation in beatings intended to extract testimony from prisoners implicating themselves and others, but few individual targets were mentioned; Mil'shtein admitted that he knew of Beria's conspiring against Gogoberidze, Kakhiani, and other Georgian politicians, but he took no part in their repression and was accused only of having helped Beria to conceal evidence of their mistreatment.⁵⁹⁴ Lev Shvartsman, who collaborated closely with Rodos on "special assignments" and claimed to have purposefully undermined the case against Kosarev, was eventually shot in April 1955; the Military Collegium ruled that Shvartsman had tortured detainees because he was "in outlook a bourgeois nationalist" who had been "raised in the spirit of Zionism."⁵⁹⁵ This verdict was far more in line with the anti-cosmopolitan campaign of the closing years of Stalin's rule – when Shvartsman was first taken into state custody – than the sort of legalism that Khrushchev-era courts professed. Even as the judiciary exploited preexisting prejudices to secure Shvartsman's conviction, it had already initiated a wave of prosecutions that drew directly upon recent strides that had been made in the campaign for posthumous rehabilitation.⁵⁹⁶

⁵⁹⁴ For the indictments against Amaiak Kobulov and Mil'shtein, see *ibid.*, 501-529; for the Military Collegium's sentences, see GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3286, ll. 175-180, 315-323.

⁵⁹⁵ Quoted in Petrov, *Palachi*, 164. Shvartsman's wife and two children were expelled from Moscow following his conviction; see Mozokhin, *Politbiuro i delo Beria*, 829.

⁵⁹⁶ Other ranking NKVD officers sentenced to various camp or prison terms at this time included Efim Mikhailovich Libenson, accused of gathering *kompromat* on Mikhail Kaganovich and extensive involvement in the repression of the Kedrovs, and Arkadii Iakovlevich Gertsovskii, who purportedly intercepted prisoners' letters meant for Party and government leaders and helped conceal the extent of the mass shootings carried out in October 1941 at Beria's order. See Mozokhin, *Poliburo i delo Beria*, 816-826.

Already in early May 1954 Rudenko and Khrushchev delivered speeches about the unraveling of the Leningrad Affair to the city's Party *aktiv*, depicting its organizer, Viktor Abakumov, as an intriguer who alongside Beria fabricated cases against honest Party workers and openly flouted Stalin's will.⁵⁹⁷ During his freewheeling address, Khrushchev – in trademark style – floated an idea that the audience met enthusiastically: “Apparently in the near future there will be a trial against Abakumov. I was of the opinion, we exchanged opinions, I don't know how feasible it is: maybe Abakumov's trial ought be organized here, in Leningrad.”⁵⁹⁸ Regardless of whether this proposal was off-the-cuff or reflected preexisting plans, on December 14 that year the Military Collegium convened a public session to try Abakumov and five of his former associates from the MGB in the same building where the hearings on the Leningrad Affair had taken place. Four lawyers were brought in from Moscow to represent the accused, but the proceedings were not held in a spirit of openness: when Abakumov and his codefendants attempted to point out Stalin's initiating role in the Leningrad Affair, Rudenko, acting as public prosecutor, stripped the men of their right to speak.⁵⁹⁹ The announcement of the verdict in *Pravda* on December 24, 1954 – exactly a year after news of Beria's execution was made public – included mention of Abakumov having run the case against Leningrad's Party leadership, and described the affair's casualties as “fully rehabilitated,” but provided no names and gave few specifics about the nature of Abakumov's offenses.⁶⁰⁰ Though the Leningrad tribunal proved somewhat tentative in its handling of

⁵⁹⁷ Artizov, *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 1, 117-142; this was the same meeting at which Khrushchev blamed Beria for Stanislav Redens' downfall.

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁵⁹⁹ Naumov, “Repression and Rehabilitation,” 98. Khrushchev had previously expressed concern that Abakumov would attempt to implicate “the old man.”

⁶⁰⁰ “V verkhovnom sude SSSR,” *Pravda*, December 24, 1954, 2. The political fallout from the Abakumov conviction was rather swift: by February 1955 Georgii Malenkov – who had actively taken part in the

the issue of rehabilitation, the Procuracy at this time was already well into its preparations for the Tbilisi trial, which would marshal copious evidence relating to the posthumously rehabilitated and provide survivors with a forum in which to confront their tormentors in the name of restoring Soviet legality on Beria's home turf.

“The Foul Death of a Pack of Scoundrels”: Rapava and Rukhadze in the Dock

Initially – as attested to by communications between the Procuracy and the Central Committee Presidium – the authorities intended to try Konstantin Savitskii, Nikita Krimian, Aleksandr Khazan, and Georgii Paramonov as a quartet, without Rapava, Rukhadze, Tsereteli, or Sardon Nadaria. On May 25, 1954 Rudenko forwarded a draft indictment against the four Georgian operatives to the Presidium and requested that the case be put before the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court. The document dwelled on the accused's social backgrounds, but also dealt extensively with Beria's antagonism toward Sergo Ordzhonikidze and his eventual persecution of Ordzhonikidze's intimates, including Mamuliia and Orakhelashvili, which would ultimately become a major feature of the Tbilisi show trial.⁶⁰¹ Whether the decision to postpone Savitskii, Krimian, Khazan, and Paramonov's case and widen its scope originated with the Party or the Procuracy remains unclear, as does the reasoning behind this move, which carried significant implications for the proceedings in Tbilisi. One potential dilemma engendered by this choice was the fact that although Rapava and Rukhadze had both worked under Beria for extended periods of time, they made for odd dock-mates, as their struggle for preeminence within Georgian state security culminated with the former's arrest at the

Leningrad Affair and exploited it to improve his own standing – was ousted from the chairmanship of the Council of Ministers and demoted to Minister of Electrification; see Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 264-265.

⁶⁰¹ Khaustov, *Delo Beria*, 461-485.

latter's hands during the Mingrelian Affair. This inconvenient reality caused little to no concern within the Procuracy's headquarters, though, and by January 10, 1955 Rudenko and Serov at the KGB presented the Central Committee with an expanded indictment that incorporated materials on all eight defendants.

In their introduction to the document, Rudenko and Serov noted for the first time that the case would be heard "in open court in Tbilisi with the participation of the prosecution and defense," rather than a more secretive venue.⁶⁰² On July 23 Rudenko provided Vasili Pavlovich Mzhavanadze, the Party boss of Georgia, with a copy of the final indictment, and informed him that the case would be heard the following month, though in reality the proceedings did not open until September.⁶⁰³ It is striking that even though the judiciary resolved in January to hold the trial in Tbilisi, it was only in July that the local leadership was fully apprised of the plan; this points to the degree of control that Moscow maintained over preparations for the case, which may have been geographically "peripheral," but resonated deeply within the Kremlin.

The defendants faced charges of having abused their positions in order to abet Beria's nefarious aims under articles 58-1b, 58-8, and 58-11 – treason by service members, terrorist acts against representatives of Soviet power, and conspiracy – of the RSFSR penal code (unlike the more commonly applied article 58-10, counterrevolutionary agitation, the first two statutes carried the death penalty, even in peacetime).⁶⁰⁴ As articulated in the press release that announced the trial's verdict,

⁶⁰² Ibid., 550.

⁶⁰³ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4002, l. 104.

⁶⁰⁴ Even though the hearing took place in Georgia, the Russian penal code was employed on the grounds that Beria's criminal activities had begun in the Caucasus, but he had continued them once in the Soviet metropole. See Smirnov, *Anti-stalinskie protsessy*, 144. These same three articles would be invoked to try Rodos in Moscow and Bagirov et al. in Baku.

“[while] helping Beria to hide his criminal past and basely deceiving the Party and state” Rukhadze, Rapava, and company “used their official positions within the system of the NKVD, and then the MVD and MGB of the Georgian SSR for hostile ends.”⁶⁰⁵ The Tbilisi indictment located the accused’s readiness to serve as Beria’s willing executioners in their own past misdeeds and socially alien backgrounds. While still a youth Rapava purportedly joined the Georgian Socialist-Federalist Revolutionary Party, which sought to establish an independent, “bourgeois” Georgia under the aegis of Great Britain, and remained a member between 1917 and 1920.⁶⁰⁶ Although this information made its way into Rapava’s personal file, it did not prevent him from rising to the top of state security of the Georgian SSR. Likewise, Rapava’s wife was a cousin of the Georgian Menshevik leader Noi Zhordania, and her brother had fled to Turkey and from there made his way to Paris.⁶⁰⁷ Savitskii, it was noted, was the son of noble who held the rank of colonel in the Tsarist Army and was an “organizer of White Guard detachments for the struggle against Soviet power.”⁶⁰⁸

Most damning in this regard was Tsereteli’s personal trajectory. Born into the family of a hereditary prince, he was denounced by the soon-to-be-executed Bogdan Kobulov as “nearly illiterate,” which apparently did not prevent him from eventually being promoted to head the NKVD’s infamous Fourth Special Department, responsible for running the *sharashka* program of forced research and development within Gulag camps.⁶⁰⁹ Having risen to the junior-most officer’s rank in the Imperial Army (*praporshchik*), in 1915 Tsereteli was taken prisoner by German forces and subsequently

⁶⁰⁵ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4002, l. 239.

⁶⁰⁶ Khaustov, *Delo Beria*, 598.

⁶⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 603.

⁶⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 601.

enlisted in their “Georgian Legion,” which served on the Turkish front. Upon his return to Georgia in 1918 Tsereteli supposedly took up arms alongside the Mensheviks, and found himself on the wrong side of Soviet power after the Bolshevik takeover when he was arrested for the murder of a policeman.⁶¹⁰ Beria, fully aware of this wrongdoing, still opted to entrust Tsereteli with some of the most sensitive assignments he could delegate as GPU chief of the Transcaucasian Federation, and as his fortunes rose so too did Tsereteli’s. The image that emerged of Beria’s extended network was of one predicated on negative trust that saw the complete eradication of competing (and, in the eyes of the judiciary, loyal Soviet) cadres as the only means of assuring its continued existence. This, then, furnished the motive for the Tbilisi defendants’ avid participation in Beria’s machinations.

The narrative of the Terror that the Procuracy devised for the purposes of the anti-Beria trials distilled the complex factors that led the revolution to devour its own into a more palatable, familiar chronicle of a Caucasian vendetta that pitted faithful Party cadres against a criminal clan of bandits, sadists, and “alien elements.” In Tbilisi, the elimination of the better part of Georgia’s revolutionary elite was attributed to Beria’s feud with his former mentor, Sergo Ordzhonikidze, whose family and inner circle served as the locus around which many of the Procuracy’s most effective arguments coalesced. In the preamble to the draft indictment against Rapava and Rukhadze, Rudenko and Serov identified the discrediting of Ordzhonikidze as among “the most important criminal tasks” for Beria:

Thus the accused Rapava, Rukhadze, Krimian, Khazan, Savitskii and Paramonov directly participated in Beria’s devious struggle (*intriganskoi bor’be*) against the prominent figure of the Communist Party and Soviet

⁶¹⁰ Ibid.

government Sergo Ordzhonikidze, gathering slanderous materials against S. Ordzhonikidze, extorting false testimony, to this end subjecting prisoners to torture, falsifying criminal cases against Ordzhonikidze's relatives and friends, and then destroying these individuals under the guise of repressing counter-revolutionary activities.⁶¹¹

Ordzhonikidze's family was particularly devastated by the Georgian NKVD. As the court heard, it was Rapava who opened the case against Sergo's brother Papuliia and signed his cousin Dmitrii's arrest warrant, which was carried out by Khazan. Dmitrii Ordzhonikidze was subsequently interrogated by both Savitskii and Paramonov; Tsereteli, in his capacity as head of the local branch of the security police, sat on the *troiki* convened on August 11, 1937 and July 13, 1938, respectively, that sentenced both Papuliia and Dmitrii to death.⁶¹²

Beriia's animus toward Ordzhonikidze was allegedly so great that even after the latter's suicide he "gave his accomplices the task of finding incriminating testimony relating to" him, which was to be "extorted from prisoners through beatings and torture."⁶¹³ Samson Mamuliia – whom Beriia replaced as Georgian Party Secretary – was arrested "[o]n Beriia's direct order," after which "deliberately (*zavedomo*) false testimony about S. Ordzhonikidze was extracted [from him] with the help of criminal methods of interrogation."⁶¹⁴ As commandant of the Georgian NKVD's internal prison Nadaraia witnessed Mamuliia's torture and recounted the process to investigators:

"During the investigation Mamuliia was severely beaten. I remember that for 7-8 days he was forced to stand while tied to a weighted table (*ego zastavliali stoiat' s priviazannym stolom s gruzom*). When he fell they picked him up and again forced him to stand.

⁶¹¹ Khaustov, *Delo Beriia*, 552.

⁶¹² Ibid., 569-570, 562.

⁶¹³ Ibid., 567.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid.

While Mamuliia stood in the investigative office for several days tied to the table Kobulov and Goglidze visited him almost every day.”⁶¹⁵

In addition to extracting slanderous statements against Ordzhonikidze, Savitskii and Paramonov reportedly induced Mamuliia to denounce persons who had “close relations with Ordzhonikidze,” eventually leading to former *Zakkraikom* (Transcaucasian Regional Committee) head Mamiia Orakhelashvili’s implication as a member of a Rightist conspiracy in Georgia.⁶¹⁶

A former medical assistant at the Georgian NKVD’s internal prison by the name of Aroian testified to the conditions Mamiia Orakhelashvili endured while in Bogdan Kobulov and Krimian’s custody. Having treated Orakhelashvili prior to his execution, Aroian vividly recalled the “gaping bleeding wounds” on his back, which she smeared with iodine, and the bruises that covered his feet.⁶¹⁷ Even confined in his cell Orakhlashvili was afforded no respite from abuse, as “there was another prisoner in the cell with [him] who was either insane or feigned insanity. He systematically tormented Orakhelashvili in the cell, clawed at him, beat him, never gave him a moment’s peace”; while receiving care for his wounds Orakhelashvili confided his suspicion that his captors purposefully “planted” the crazed man in his cell.⁶¹⁸

Rukhadze, who had just begun his career in state security when Orakhelashvili was arrested in summer 1937, was serving under Kobulov that fall and recalled:

Kobulov ordered Krimian or Khazan to help me in conducting the confrontation between the Vardzieli [a former procurator of the GSSR] and Orakhelashvili. This confrontation was purely formal in nature and lasted no more than 5-10 minutes, and although at the time Orakhelashvili named Vardzieli as a participant in an anti-Soviet organization, I

⁶¹⁵ Ibid.

⁶¹⁶ Ibid., 568.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid., 569.

⁶¹⁸ Ibid.

nonetheless came to the conclusion that Orakhelashvili slandered Vardzieli as a result of the application of measures of physical force against him...

There was an interruption during the confrontation, and afterward Vardzieli was beaten by Khazan, who approached him in the course of the confrontation. Khazan beat Vardzieli on the heels with a special metallic, nickel-plated rod with an extended rubber tip. Subsequently Orakhelashvili and Vardzieli were shot.⁶¹⁹

As in Papuliia's and Dmitrii Ordzhonikidze's executions, Tsereteli was a member of the *troika* that issued Orakhelashvili's death sentence. The draft indictment pointedly noted that the USSR Supreme Court had since "fully posthumously rehabilitated" Orakhelashvili "in the absence of a *corpus delicti*."⁶²⁰ Although the preliminary accusation against Rapava, Rukhadze, and the other representatives of Georgian state security only singled out a handful of figures as having been rehabilitated, during the interval between the document's composition and the actual trial the Procuracy marshaled additional examples to reinforce its case, and made posthumous rehabilitees' comrades and relatives centerpieces of its in-court strategy.

A rare firsthand account of the Tbilisi proceedings comes from the memoirs of Suren Ovanesovich Gazarian, a deputy head of the Georgian NKVD's economic department who ran afoul of Beria in 1937 and spent ten years in various labor camps. Following his return to Georgia and subsequent rehabilitation, Gazarian was summoned to serve as a witness for the prosecution.⁶²¹ Gazarian placed a heavy emphasis on the degree of public spectacle involved in the hearing; in his retelling, the trial's venue, the Railroad Worker's Club, "was always packed to capacity. If the hall held ten times more

⁶¹⁹ Ibid., 558.

⁶²⁰ Ibid., 569.

⁶²¹ Many of the witnesses that the prosecution called were, like Gazarian, either rehabilitees themselves or relatives of the repressed. Nanci Adler discusses Gazarian's internal struggle with his continued allegiance to the Communist Party during and following his imprisonment, but inexplicably describes this occurring "[in] the absence of judicial or other proceedings," despite Gazarian's extensive description of his involvement in the Tbilisi case. See Adler, *Keeping Faith*, 89-90.

people, even then all those who wanted to would not have been able to get in.” The street outside the building, *Plekhanovskii prospekt*, was similarly “thronged with people” for the duration.⁶²² To gain admission to the gallery spectators required tickets, which were primarily distributed by factories, enterprises, and agencies in the Georgian capital and other regions of the republic, although according to Gazarian rehabilitees also received tickets “on a priority basis.”⁶²³ This combination of carefully screened loyalists selected by their local Party organizations and employers and recently exonerated individuals who harbored deep resentment toward Beria and his servitors ensured that the defendants would be facing an audience suitably hostile for the state’s purposes.

Though the end result of the tribunal was predetermined and the hall stacked with attendees eager to see the *chekisty* punished, Gazarian stressed that the hearings themselves were conducted in strict accordance with Soviet legal precepts. Each of the eight accused was represented by his own counsel, “[a]s the law demand[ed],” and at the opening of the first hearing the defendants were asked if they had any objections to the court’s composition and whether they wished to file any motions.⁶²⁴ Most came forward with requests for various exculpatory documents to be appended to the case, which would (rightfully) have shown them to have been cogs in an expansive system of repression directed from above; based on the trial’s outcome it is evident that if included they did nothing to mitigate the sentences passed.⁶²⁵

⁶²² Suren Gazarian, “O Berii i sude nad beriiivtsami v Gruzii,” *SSSR: vnutrennie protivorechiia* 6 (1982): 129.

⁶²³ *Ibid.*, 129-130.

⁶²⁴ *Ibid.*, 129. Gazarian ruefully noted that this protection was denied to the Georgian NKVD’s prisoners in 1937.

⁶²⁵ *Ibid.*, 130-131.

According to Nikolai Smirnov, in his opening statement before the visiting session of the Military Collegium under Cheptsov's chairmanship, Rudenko justified the charges that the defendants faced under article 58-8 on the grounds that "a significant portion of the accused's criminal acts (*prestupnykh deianii*) represent[ed] terroristic reprisals against those disagreeable to Beria and his close accomplices or people who were dangerous to them, who impeded the implementation of the conspirators' treasonous plans or were able to expose Beria's criminal past."⁶²⁶ In light of the mortality rate among this cohort, Rudenko characterized Gazarian's presence in the courtroom as "a stroke of luck. One could say that a person emerged from the world beyond (*chelovek iavilsia s togo sveta*). But how many people who were expelled from the Party on [Hazan's] report (*po vashemu dokladu*) unfortunately cannot take the witness stand at this court hearing. Behind Gazarian stand many silent witnesses."⁶²⁷ After his time on the stand, Gazarian took the opportunity to deliver a scathing set of closing remarks, in which he railed against the defendants' defilement the "church of the Revolution," as the Cheka hailed itself, and the insult and pain they caused "to those noble lives that they ruined. Gone are the glorious revolutionaries Mamiia Orakhelashvili and Mikhail Kakhiani, Saak Ter-Gabrielian and Agasi Khandzhian, [Usein] Rakhmanov and Gazanfar Musabekov."⁶²⁸ Though Gazarian was confident that the "just court will

⁶²⁶ Smirnov, *Anti-stalinskie protsessy*, 145. The inclusion of this article in the bill of indictment apparently proved controversial with Soviet judicial circles, as the Military Collegium's judges did not believe that the marshaled evidence demonstrated counterrevolutionary intent on the defendants' part, but the Central Committee had already signed off on the indictment, and a meeting of the Presidium chaired by Kaganovich refused to consider a reassessment. This information came to light through a 1964 inquiry conducted by an inspector at the Military Collegium. See *idem.*, 297.

⁶²⁷ Gazarian, "O Berii i sude," 134. Rudenko made this statement while questioning Khazan, who admitted his guilt in the cases of such "silent witnesses."

⁶²⁸ *Ibid.*, 135. While Kakhiani had been posthumously rehabilitated in the interval between the completion of the draft indictment and the trial's opening, neither Rakhmanov nor Musabekov were officially exonerated by September 1955. The cases against both of them were closed, though, in time for the Baku

sweep away all this vermin, all this strife from the face of the earth,” he regretted that “the foul death of a pack of scoundrels will not return the many thousands of noble lives of the best and most needed people.”⁶²⁹

This candid eulogy for Transcaucasia’s destroyed Party cadres garnered the attention of many in attendance at the Railroad Workers’ Club. During a recess between sessions, Gazarian found himself thronged by the wives and children of vanished Old Bolsheviks. They expressed their appreciation for Gazarian’s acclamation of their husbands and fathers, many of whom had not been mentioned publicly for nearly two decades, and implored him for any scrap of information on the off chance that he had encountered them in prison. Gazarian was struck by how time, physical hardship, and emotional turmoil had rendered most of these women unrecognizable; only the “dear” Ketevan Orakhelashvili-Mikeladze, who thanked him for the “kind words about [her] father,” retained her youthful appearance.⁶³⁰ Some of these women were also called upon to provide testimony, though the strain of reliving the horrors of the 1930s could prove too much to bear. Dmitrii Orzhonikidze’s widow Mariia Minaeva Ordzhonikidze, looking “white, like the moon [...] broke down in sobs and left the stand,” unable to finish her testimony.⁶³¹ Such moments attest to the Tbilisi trial’s function as a site of intense

trial. Khandzhian, who was Party Secretary of Armenia for most of the 1930s, died in July 1936 in Tbilisi under suspicious circumstances; at the time it was claimed that he committed suicide, though rumors quickly spread that Beria had shot him in his own office. See Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 1, 314-316.

⁶²⁹ Gazarian, “O Berii i sude,” 134-135.

⁶³⁰ Ibid., 135-136. The wife of one Kobiashvili encapsulated this approach, “For the first time in 18 years I heard a living word about my husband, tell me, please, what else you know of him?” The name Kobiashvili appeared in the preliminary indictment against the four lower-ranking operatives among the arrestees from whom they extracted fabricated denunciations. See Khaustov, *Delo Beriia*, 480. Even after the proceedings concluded, the wives of fallen Communists “flocked to” Gazarian, tracking him down to his accommodations in Tbilisi to ask “a single question. Did I meet their husbands in prison?” Gazarian, “O Berii i sude,” 146. For more on Ketevan Orakhelashvili-Mikeladze, see Chapter 5.

⁶³¹ Gazarian, “O Berii i sude,” 141. While there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of Mariia Minaeva’s sentiments, it is also possible that the prosecution encouraged this emotional outburst to inspire further resentment against the defendants.

catharsis for survivors of the posthumously rehabilitated. After years of denigration and oblivion, executed Old Bolsheviks were finally being recognized as loyal adherents of the Bolshevik project in the Caucasus, and for the first time their relatives were able to express grief over their loss in a public forum.

As Rudenko and Supreme Court Chairman Volin reported to the Central Committee at the end of September, the more than six hundred members of Georgia's party *aktiv*, laborers, office workers, and intelligentsia who filled the court venue for thirteen days reacted with "indignation and anger" to the accounts of the human costs of Beria and his "accomplices'" criminality, and subsequently met the announcement of Rapava, Rukhadze, Tsereteli, Krimian, Khazan, and Savitskii's death sentences with "tumultuous applause."⁶³² By Rudenko and Volin's finally tally, the Tbilisi defendants were implicated in the repression of at least 21 Party, state, military, and cultural figures who had since been rehabilitated.⁶³³ Even though the law of December 1, 1934 concerning the immediate implementation of capital punishment in terrorism cases would still be in effect until April of the following year, the six men who faced execution were allowed to issue appeals for clemency, which the judiciary vigorously disputed.⁶³⁴ To refute these pleas for mercy, Rudenko and Volin outlined for Voroshilov – in his capacity as Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet – the supplicants' roles in the arrest, torture, and execution of Papuliia and Dmitrii Ordzhonikidze, Orakhelashvili, Kakhiani, and Gogoberidze, among many others.⁶³⁵ All the sentences were upheld, and by the time *Zaria vostoka* – the official Russian-language organ of the Georgian SSR – announced

⁶³² GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4002, ll. 237-238. Paramonov and Nadaria received sentences of 25 and 10 years, respectively.

⁶³³ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4002, l. 236.

⁶³⁴ Berman, *Soviet Criminal Law*, 51.

⁶³⁵ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4002, ll. 245-259.

the results of the Tbilisi trial on November 22 – over two months after the proceedings’ conclusion – the principle six defendants had already been dead for a week.⁶³⁶ This bulletin discussed Mamiia Orakhelashvili and his wife Maria, as well as two other former Georgian officials, as having been subjected to “terrorist reprisals” on the part of the defendants, occasioning the first mention of posthumously rehabilitated figures in the Soviet mass media. The decision to publicize the trial exclusively in the Georgian press suggests further intent on the part of the authorities to paint the entire affair as a purely regional phenomenon, though its ramifications would be felt throughout the Union as the Soviet state continued to seek to assign guilt for the deaths of those it had posthumously exonerated.⁶³⁷

Questioning the Inquisitor: Boris Rodos and the Secret Speech

For one so practiced in the art of eliciting statements from unwilling subjects, many of them top Communist Party members, Boris Rodos’ position on February 1, 1956 must have made for a striking, if not poetic reversal: the NKVD’s expert interrogator, who had been languishing in prison for two and a half years, was called to account for himself before the Central Committee Presidium. Already in a suspicious mood, Molotov

⁶³⁶ “V verkhovnom sude SSSR,” *Zaria vostoka*, November 22, 1955, 1. For a draft version of the pronouncement, presented by Rudneko and Volin to the Central Committee, see GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4002, ll. 239-241; for an English translation of the final document, see Conquest, *Power and Policy*, 449-451. Smirnov asserts that Rapava, Rukhadze, Tsereteli, Savitskii, Krimian, and Khazan were shot on November 15; see Smirnov, *Anti-stalinskie protsessy*, 150.

⁶³⁷ Procurators subsequently appropriated the findings from the Tbilisi tribunal to justify the posthumous rehabilitation of additional Transcaucasian Bolsheviks. In its rehabilitation reports before the Military Collegium regarding Budu Mdivani (Stalin’s adversary in the 1922 Georgian Affair), Mikhail Okudzhava (uncle of the bard Bulat), and Semen Chikhladze from June 1956, the Chief Military Procuracy listed Savitskii, Krimian, and Khazan among the participants in the “preliminary investigation” conducted against the trio. The proceedings from the previous September had revealed how these three “through the application of torture [...] against people who were honest and loyal to the Communist Party and Soviet Motherland, exterminated them,” thereby clearing the way for Mdivani, Okudzhava, and Chikhladze’s absolution. GARF f. 8131, op. 31, dd. 72185, 72186, 72188, l. 3 (the opening pages of all three *dela* are identical).

opened the unprecedented and utterly unique audience by asking whether Rodos was behaving himself, alluding to the fact that he had been uncooperative in the past; Khrushchev, for his part, inquired as to what Rodos knew of the ongoing rehabilitation of repressed persons, and demanded that he explain how Party luminaries had been incriminated while in his custody.⁶³⁸ The ensuing exchange would prove to be among the most consequential of the decade following Stalin's death, as it marked the first documented airing of the dictator's complicity in the destruction of his comrades and subordinates, thereby providing partial impetus for the monumental disclosures of the Secret Speech, delivered less than a month later. However, the materials assembled against Rodos both before and after his closed trial – held concurrently with the 20th Party Congress – made no allusion to Stalin, and continued to point to Beria and his closest aides as the parties ultimately responsible for the Terror, demonstrating that while judicial proceedings against ranking *chekisty* remained embedded within the framework established in June 1953, Khrushchev had far more ambitious plans for information uncovered through rehabilitation investigations.

Born in 1905 into the family of a tailor in Melitopol', unlike most of the defendants in Tbilisi Rodos was too young to have made any suspect allegiances during the Civil War, though he entered the ranks of state security under a different sort of cloud. He joined the Komsomol in 1926, only to be expelled four years later and sentenced to six months' hard labor for the attempted rape of one of his female coworkers at a nature preserve."⁶³⁹ During his incarceration Rodos placed himself at the disposal of the GPU, and upon his release he began working as an informant in Kherson province.

⁶³⁸ Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 1, 308.

⁶³⁹ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4575, l. 38; Petrov, *Palachi*, 141. Rodos claimed to have simply “hugged the woman around the waist (*obnial zhenshchinu za taliu*)

From such compromised beginnings Rodos rose steadily through the ranks of the GPU and its successor organizations, working in Odessa *oblast'* for several years before being transferred to Moscow in 1937.⁶⁴⁰ Although he was brought to the capital under Ezhov's tutelage, when it became apparent that the former's days were numbered Rodos quickly sought to commend himself to the ascendant Beria.

That Rodos and his partner, Anatolii Aleksandrovich Esaulov, were among those selected to personally question Ezhov was a testament to the regard in which he was held by his superiors; his subsequent assignments involved, as Amy Knight put it, "cleaning up loose ends left dangling by Ezhov," which included investigations against notables like Chubar', Kosior, and Postyshev.⁶⁴¹ In August 1941 Rodos and his close cohort Lev Shvartsman were made Vlodzimirkii's deputies at the NKVD and later MGB's investigative unit, where he remained until 1946, when he was transferred to Crimea.⁶⁴² Accusations of sexual impropriety and moral turpitude continued to stalk Rodos, though it was not until 1952 – likely in connection with the antisemitic "Abakumov-Shvartsman

⁶⁴⁰ Petrov, *Palachi*, 142. This trajectory – from felon to state security operative – seems to have been fairly typical in the 1930s, as it gave local NKVD bosses considerable leverage over their underlings; see Vatlin, *Agents of Terror*, 12-13, and Gregory, *Terror by Quota*, 61. In his eventual appeal for clemency, as cited by Petrov, Rodos maintained that he never witnessed physical violence as a *chekist* before a 1937 confrontation during which Ezhov and Frinovskii beat the recalcitrant M. E. Mikhailov; as Petrov notes, Rodos proved to be a quick study. See Khaustov, *Delo Beriia*, 642.

⁶⁴¹ On Rodos' role in interrogating Ezhov, see Halfin, *Stalinist Confessions*, 359, and Jansen and Petrov, *Stalin's Loyal Executioner*, 183; Knight, *Beria*, 98. The three Ukrainian chiefs, along with fellow Rodos charge Aleksandr Kosarev, were all mentioned in a March 1939 memorandum from Military Collegium Chairman Ulrikh to Stalin, in which the former crowed that from the end of February through mid-March 436 individuals had come before him and his colleagues, all but 17 of whom had been sentenced to be shot, though some recanted the testimony they gave under interrogation; see Dmitri Volkogonov, *Stalin: Triumph and Tragedy*, ed. and trans. Harold Shukman (Rocklin, CA: Forum, 1996), 336-337. Esaulov died in June 1954, before he could be arrested and tried for his offenses.

⁶⁴² Petrov, *Palachi*, 145-147. In recognition of his work purging L'vov's Polish population in March 1940, Rodos was awarded an engraved watch by none other than then-head of Ukrainian state security Ivan Serov; unsurprisingly, this aspect of his career went unmentioned in materials assembled against Rodos in the 1950s, though Rodos brought it up in his appeal for clemency.

plot” – that he was dismissed from the Crimean MGB.⁶⁴³ At the time of his October 1953 arrest in Kiev, Rodos was responsible for the Simferopol’ telegraph’s anti-aircraft defenses, a relatively menial position, though his fall up to that point had not been nearly precipitous as that suffered by many of his fellow secret policemen.⁶⁴⁴

Despite Rodos’ refusal to cooperate with investigators, the Procuracy had little trouble collecting evidence against him, thanks to the willingness of many of his former colleagues – including Shvartsman – to denounce him, and the reams of archival materials uncovered during rehabilitations.⁶⁴⁵ By January 5, 1956 the Procuracy had completed its investigation, gathered sufficient evidence to press charges, and apprised the Party’s innermost circle of its findings, which centered around the accusation that Rodos, as a leading accomplice of Beria’s, “[falsified] investigative cases against honest Soviet, Party, and military workers, and also against scientific and cultural figures.”⁶⁴⁶ Among the high-profile individuals Rudenko singled out whom Rodos “brutally beat and inhumanely tormented,” were Vlas Chubar’, Pavel Postyshev, Aleksandr Kosarev, Betal Kalmykov, Rukhulla Akhundov, Iakov Smushkevich, Viacheslav Meierkhol’d, and Isaak Babel’; all told, some 38 individuals who passed through Rodos’ hands had been

⁶⁴³ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4575, l. 50-51; while working in Crimea, Rodos “struck up an intimate relationship” with a repatriated woman suspected of spying, attempted to coerce a woman sentenced to 17 years for serving as a Gestapo translator into “cohabitation,” and harassed an Investigative Department stenographer to the point that she requested to be released from the MGB or transferred to a different department. On Abakumov and Shvartsman’s arrests, see Gennadii Kostyrchenko, “The Abakumov-Shvartsman Case: A ‘Zionist Plot’ in the Ministry of State Security,” *Russian Studies in History* 43, 2 (Fall 2004): 85-94.

⁶⁴⁴ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4575, l. 42. Shortly following Stalin’s death Rodos made an abortive plea to Bogdan Kobulov for his old position in state security, but Beria and his circle’s arrest appears to have nipped any such plans in the bud.

⁶⁴⁵ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4575, l. 43.

⁶⁴⁶ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4575, l. 1.

posthumously rehabilitated by January 1956.⁶⁴⁷ Materials the Procuracy uncovered, which drew upon interviews with former prisoners and NKVD officers and documents from cases Rodos helped to fabricate, distinguished him as “as a deeply morally rotten person, who won ‘glory’ as a torturer and sadist both among prisoners and officials of the organs of state security.”⁶⁴⁸ To substantiate this depiction Rudenko compiled a supplementary report for the Party leadership’s consumption several days later that included additional details on Rodos’ mistreatment of Chubar’ and Postyshev, Khrushchev’s predecessors in Ukraine, likely piquing the First Secretary’s curiosity.⁶⁴⁹

By the time Khrushchev dictated his memoirs, at least ten years after Rodos’ questioning, the inquisitor’s name had slipped his mind, but he was quick to claim credit for bringing Rodos before the Presidium.⁶⁵⁰ Khrushchev stated that, having taken an interest in Chubar’s fate following Stalin’s death, he “asked the Chekists to find the person who had interrogated Chubar, who had been in charge of the investigation. I was curious to know exactly what they had accused him of”; at no point, however, does Chubar’s name appear to have been mentioned during the extraordinary summons.⁶⁵¹ According to the handwritten record of the meeting, Khrushchev demanded that Rodos explain how Postyshev and Kosior came to be “declared enemies.”⁶⁵² Although Rodos’ answer was not noted, in Khrushchev’s account of the exchange, as presented in the

⁶⁴⁷ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4575, l. 1-2. Compared to the figure of 20-odd rehabilitees from the Tbilisi trial, this number is a testament both to Rodos’ grim efficiency as well as the degree to which posthumous rehabilitations had advanced from the autumn of 1955 to the year’s end.

⁶⁴⁸ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4575, l. 3.

⁶⁴⁹ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4575, ll. 38-43.

⁶⁵⁰ In an early draft of “On the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences,” Khrushchev and his staff rendered Rodos’ name as “Rodes”; see K. Aimermakher et al, eds., *Doklad N. S. Khrushcheva o kul’te lichnosti Stalina na XX s’ezde KPSS: dokumenty* (Moskva: ROSSPEN, 2002), 138. Kathleen Smith suggests that Khrushchev stage-managed the audience with Rodos to “[raise] the heat” on his fellow Presidium members, though there is no indication in the archival record of who actually proposed bringing Rodos in to speak to the Party bigwigs; see Smith, *Moscow 1956*, 37.

⁶⁵¹ Khrushchev, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, 119.

⁶⁵² Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 1, 308.

Secret Speech, he replied that he received his orders directly from the Party – meaning Stalin – and upon being told the two Ukrainian leaders were enemies, his duty as an investigator was “to collect facts, to extract admissions, that they were enemies.”⁶⁵³

In response to this candor Khrushchev declared that the “guilty are higher up. Semi-criminal elements were involved in the conduct of such cases. Stalin is guilty,” prompting Central Committee secretary Averkii Borisovich Aristov to wonder aloud whether the assembled Party leadership “possess[ed] the courage to tell the truth?”⁶⁵⁴ While the ensuing debate failed to resolve what could or would be revealed about Stalin’s role in initiating and guiding the destruction of much of the Old Bolshevik elite, once broached the issue would not easily be laid to rest.⁶⁵⁵ The Presidium was able to agree, though, that Rodos should not be allowed to issue the kind of allegations he had just made to a wider audience. That same day it resolved that his case would be heard in a closed session of the Military Collegium, denying Rodos the opportunity that Rapava and Rukhadze had – and that Bagirov would have – to publicly defend himself against charges of having been one of Beria’s most prolific collaborators.⁶⁵⁶

While Khrushchev denounced Rodos as a “small person, who even with a primary education had the mental outlook of a chicken (*kurinym krugozorom*)” and bemoaned the

⁶⁵³ Ibid., 369.

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid. Both Naumov and Taubman incorrectly attribute this pointed question to Khrushchev himself, likely confusing it with his enjoinder following the release of Petr Pospelov’s report that the Presidium needed to “show the courage to tell the truth”; see Naumov, “Repression and Rehabilitation,” 100; Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 279; Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 1, 349.

⁶⁵⁵ It acquired even greater urgency a week later following the release of the “Pospelov Report” on mass repressions against Central Committee members and candidates elected at the 17th Party Congress; for the text of the report, see Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia*, 317-348; for the ensuing debate, see *idem.*, 349-351.

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid., 310. Khrushchev described his reaction to Rodos’ statement as follows: “it made me angry and at the same time filled me with sorrow. I didn’t even know how to react. We [meaning the Presidium] decided to carry out an investigation of this investigator and to sentence him for having conducted such an investigation.” Though this characterization distorts the actual timeline of events, as Rudenko’s reports make it clear that the inquiry into Rodos had been largely completed prior to his being brought before the Presidium, it provides further confirmation that the verdicts in the trials under consideration were the product of political edicts rather than jurisprudence; see Khrushchev, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, 119-120.

fates of the recently-rehabilitated Kosior, Chubar', Postyshev, and Kosarev to the after-hours gathering of Soviet delegates of the 20th Party Congress on February 24, 1956, Rodos was on trial for his life.⁶⁵⁷ From February 21 to 26 Lev Smirnov – fresh off of the Gogoberidze investigation – argued the government's case before a session of the Military Collegium chaired by Viktor Borisoglebskii. Although neither the bill of indictment nor any firsthand account of the hearing have been made available to researchers, witness testimony, Smirnov's notes, the verdict, as well as documents relating to Rodos' request for clemency provide sufficient detail to reconstruct the salient points of what transpired within the Military Collegium's building, situated between Red Square and the Lubianka.

In a memorandum composed prior to the trial, Smirnov outlined Rodos' enthusiastic participation in the criminal conspiracy at the heart of Soviet state security that had cost the lives of dozens of valued Bolsheviks whose reputations had since been redeemed. Rodos' conduct was said to have been “especially severe and sadistic” during investigations into “cases that were of the greatest importance to Beria,” a trait that earned him Bogdan Kobulov's admiration.⁶⁵⁸ Kobulov frequently called upon Rodos to “correct” interrogation transcripts – spinning fully-formed intrigues from the smallest shreds of information – and instruct junior NKVD operatives in the art of so-called “French wrestling,” meaning grappling with prisoners and placing them in various stress

⁶⁵⁷ Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 1, 369. Rodos was the only member of Beria's putative “gang,” besides Beria himself and Abakumov, to warrant specific mention in the Secret Speech. On the topic of Rodos' intellect, one of the judges in his trial, D. A. Rybkin, was reputed to have asked the defendant if he knew the occupation of the “certain Babel” he was accused of beating; Rodos replied, “I was told he's a writer.” Asked if he had read a single line of Babel', Rodos answered with his own question: “What for?” See Arkadii Vaksberg, “Protsessy,” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, May 4, 1988, 12.

⁶⁵⁸ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4575, l. 52.

positions until they confessed.⁶⁵⁹ The full array of Rodos' handiwork was on display in the handling of Kosarev's case, as described by KGB colonel Anatolii Sergeevich Kozlov, who was present during multiple questioning sessions.⁶⁶⁰

As Kosarev's rehabilitation report maintained, his undoing was a top priority of Beria's, and Rodos' presence in the interrogation chamber was therefore taken as proof positive of the trust that the NKVD chief vested in him. When Kozlov first saw the onetime Komsomol leader he "was laying on the floor upside down (*lezhal na polu vniz golovoi*) and wheezing. Makarov held him by the legs, Rodos – by the head, and Shvartsman beat him with a rubber strap... That time Kosarev did not give evidence, which I learned about a few days later from Rodos."⁶⁶¹ Kosarev later confided in Kozlov that immediately after his arrest he was brought before Beria, Kobulov, and Shvartsman, and instructed to confess to belonging to a Rightist-Trotskyite organization; were he to "to recant this during the investigation," Beria warned, he would be "dealt with as an enemy and beaten."⁶⁶² Kosarev was then turned over to Shvartsman, who, along with Rodos and Makarov, proceeded to "soundly beat him, though they failed to elicit a

⁶⁵⁹ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4575, l. 53. The passage referring to "French wrestling" (the Russian term for Greco-Roman wrestling) originally appeared in a report Rudenko assembled in which he alleged that Beria first introduced illegal investigative methods into the All-Union NKVD's repertoire when he came to Moscow from Georgia; see GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3289, ll. 117, 121. I am grateful to David Brandenberger for providing me with a copy of this document.

⁶⁶⁰ Kozlov had been a member of the task force Kobulov assembled to liquidate the Komsomol leadership; Valentina Pikina, the only Komsomol official to survive the Terror years, recalled Kozlov to Boris Viktorov as one of the operatives who threatened her with mock execution. Over the course of 1955 Kozlov was repeatedly questioned regarding the Komsomol case, and at the end of the year he wrote a lengthy letter to Chief Military Procurator E. I. Varskoi – likely as a means of getting ahead of any potential charges against him – outlining everything he knew about the affair. He went on to enjoy a career in the KGB lasting well into the 1960s. See Viktorov, *Bez grifa "Sekretno,"* 12; GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4575, ll. 62-68; Nikita Petrov, *Kto rukovodil organami gosbezopasnosti, 1941-1954: Spravochnik* (Moskva: "Zven'ia," 2010), 472-473.

⁶⁶¹ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4575, l. 55.

⁶⁶² *Ibid.*

confession.⁶⁶³ Another of Rodos' former comrades further accused him of having "corrected" the resulting testimony from these ordeals alongside Shvartsman.⁶⁶⁴ In the words of the Military Collegium's verdict, by persecuting Kosarev, Rodos played a critical role in "realizing Beria and his accomplices criminal designs," reinforcing the notion that the purge of the Komsomol leadership was concocted purely at the whim of the vindictive secret police chief.⁶⁶⁵

Chubar' and Postyshev's cases were also counted among those "against prominent Communist Party figures in whose destruction Beria was interested" that were entrusted to Rodos.⁶⁶⁶ While Chubar' was being held at Lefortovo prison, Rodos "applied systematic beatings" to him and synthesized the results of 35 separate interrogations into two typed transcripts, giving the false impression that Chubar' was only questioned twice.⁶⁶⁷ I. V. Ivliev, who Rodos cross-examined during a confrontation alongside Chubar' weeks before the latter's execution in February 1939, described the outward effects of this prolonged torment: "Upon entering the office, I did not immediately recognize Chubar'. He completely changed his appearance. Before me sat a thin and pale man with a haggard face and a drooping stare, and only when I closely considered him (*vnimatel'no k nemu prismotrelsia*) did I see that before me sat Chubar' himself."⁶⁶⁸ Rodos officially ordered that Postyshev "be remanded into custody" over a year after his actual arrest on the grounds that he had been a longtime member of the Rightist-Trotskyite Center in Ukraine, and an agent of Japanese intelligence since 1920.⁶⁶⁹

⁶⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁴ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4575, l. 56.

⁶⁶⁵ Mozokhin, *Politbiuro i delo Beria*, 861.

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid., 860.

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid., 860-861.

⁶⁶⁸ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4575, ll. 54-55.

⁶⁶⁹ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4575, l. 54.

Smirnov asserted in court – and the verdict reiterated – that at this time Rodos was cognizant of the fact that Postyshev’s confession was extracted via physical force, as he was supposedly aware of Tserpento’s admission, cited in Postyshev’s rehabilitation report, that he and another NKVD agent had written the document entirely themselves.⁶⁷⁰

In his appeal for clemency addressed to the Supreme Soviet, Rodos prominently and repeatedly rejected responsibility for Postyshev, Chubar’, and other Party officials’ persecution, reflecting both the centrality of the posthumously rehabilitated to the state’s case against him and his own recognition of how accounts of their abuse factored into his death sentence. As strenuously as he refuted the charges pressed against him, Rodos tellingly diverged from the account he previously gave the Presidium.⁶⁷¹ Rather than an executor of the Party and Stalin’s will, Rodos depicted himself as merely a “blind instrument” in the hands of the former NKVD leadership.⁶⁷² The man who, in sullen defiance of his captors, had articulated what was previously inadmissible and inadvertently provided Khrushchev with the fodder to begin dethroning Stalin, had retreated to the relative safety of the dominant line on Beria as the architect of the Terror in the vain hope that he could spare himself the fate to which he had consigned dozens of others. Yet Rodos’ (outward) recognition of the acceptable narrative did nothing to diminish the severity of his transgressions against loyal Party cadres in the eyes of the

⁶⁷⁰ Mozokhin, *Politbiuro i delo Beriia*, 861. Rodos complained that Smirnov “repeatedly stressed” the point that he was supposedly aware of the false nature of Postyshev, Chubar’, and others’ confessions. Rodos also resented being held uniquely responsible for falsifying Chubar’ and Postyshev’s cases, as Ezhov, Frinovskii, Tsesarskii, Zhurbenko, and Glebov had interrogated Chubar’ before him, though he failed to note that all these men had in turn been executed. See *idem.*, 869-870.

⁶⁷¹ Rodos took particular issue with the allegation made by retired MGB Major General Leonid Fokeevich Bashtakov that in Sukhanovo prison at Beria’s urging he brutalized former Siberian Party head Robert Indrikovich Eikhe – who Khrushchev lionized extensively in the Secret Speech – to the point that one of Eikhe’s eyes was gouged out; Rodos denied having ever been at Sukhanovo with Beria, and – in a poor choice of phrase – insisted that he “never laid eyes on Eikhe.” See Mozokhin, *Politbiuro i delo Beriia*, 871.

⁶⁷² *Ibid.*, 863, 869.

Supreme Soviet. His plea was rejected, and on April 20 he was shot and subsequently buried in obscurity at Donskoi Cemetery alongside the remains of Kosarev, Postyshev, Chubar', and Babel'.⁶⁷³

“I Demand the Execution of All the Accused, To a Man”: Judgment in Baku

The Baku trial represented the apotheosis of the post-Stalin Communist Party's retribution efforts against the organs of state security, and information relating to the posthumously rehabilitated rested at the heart of the case against Bagirov and his confederates. Building off of strategies first employed in the Tbilisi and Moscow tribunals, the Baku indictment undertook to demonstrate that Bagirov – working both on Beria's and his own behalf – misdirected the state's repressive capacities against perceived threats not only within Beria and his fiefdoms of Georgia and Azerbaijan, but also union-wide. As rehabilitated Old Bolsheviks featured ever more prominently in the judiciary's arsenal targeting remnants of Beria's network, the Procuracy began to advocate the exoneration of the onetime Party faithful by explicitly connecting them to perpetrators' forthcoming prosecution. Thus Rudenko's deputy Pavel Baranov opened his October 4, 1955 recommendation to the Central Committee on behalf of Rukhulla Akhundov by noting that the charges against the Azeri Party activist and translator had been unraveled “in the course of investigating the case against Bagirov and others”; Bagirov was portrayed in the report as having orchestrated of a campaign of personal

⁶⁷³ Petrov, *Palachi*, 148. The same day as Rodos' execution, the Ukrainian Central Committee compiled a list of questions from those who had been acquainted with “On the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences,” and one of the inquires concerned what was to be done with “Rodom [*sic*]; see Aimermakher et al, *Doklad N. S. Khrushcheva*, 478. So little was known of Rodos until *glasnost*' that Robert Conquest conjectured that Khrushchev had actually intended to refer to Stanislav Redens; see “Correspondence,” *Problems of Communism* 12, 2 (March-April 1963): 107.

animus against Akhundov that ensnared other Party stalwarts.⁶⁷⁴ The following month Baranov and Rudenko similarly endorsed the posthumous rehabilitations of Ali Geidar Karaev, Levon Mirzoian, Sultan-Medzhid Efendiev, and Usein Rakhmanov, all of whom would figure heavily in the Baku hearing; some of the excerpted documents Baranov cited in support of Akhundov and Efendiev eventually reappeared in the Baku indictment.⁶⁷⁵ Thereby the judiciary transitioned from re-appropriating materials unearthed in previously concluded investigations to actively putting forward candidates for rehabilitation in the interest of bolstering its prosecution of the former Azerbaijani leader and his secret police retinue.⁶⁷⁶

Rehabilitation also provided a point of entry for certain members of the Soviet leadership onto the preparations for Bagirov's trial. The day after Rodos' fateful audience before the Presidium Mikoian received a unique personal briefing from Rudenko, during which the Procurator General apprised him of developments relating to one of Bagirov's foes, Ivan Ivanovich Anashkin, whose rehabilitation Mikoian had thrown his weight behind. In response to a mid-1955 appeal from Anashkin's children, Mikoian recalled his

⁶⁷⁴ Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 1, 267-270.

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid., 276-278, 280-283; GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4001, 235-237. Although Akhundov was the first of this group to be put forward for rehabilitation, the Central Committee perplexingly did not sign off on his case until November 29, several days after it approved the other proposals. See RGANI f. 3, op. 8, d. 345, l. 43.

⁶⁷⁶ A figure who figured prominently in Akhundov's rehabilitation report and received prominent mention in those of Mirzoian and Efendiev was Iuvelian Davidovich Sumbatov-Topuridze, People's Commissar for Internal Affairs of Azerbaijan during the height of the Terror, and in many respects Bagirov's right-hand man. Sumbatov (as he was commonly known) was supposed to have been indicted alongside Bagirov, but in the lead-up to the trial Sumbatov began to manifest signs of mental instability, and rather than proceed with his prosecution the Procuracy opted to "suspend the case against the accused in light of his illness," and he was subsequently confined to a psychiatric facility, where he died in 1960. It is unclear whether the authorities actually took his mental state into consideration when making this decision, or if they were foisting a *compos mentis* but uncooperative and potentially disruptive individual onto the psychiatric system, which was common practice at the time. See GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4576, l. 5; Alter Litvin and John Keep, *Stalinism: Russian and Western Views at the Turn of the Millennium* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 68.

erstwhile comrade to Rudenko as having been a “good Communist.”⁶⁷⁷ Rudenko in turn revealed the calumnies that his subordinates had uncovered, including Anashkin’s arrest by Iuvelian Sumbatov-Topuridze in October 1937, his decision to confess to counterrevolutionary crimes after Isai Dovlatov – another Baku Old Bolshevik – persuaded him that they would be spared, and his ultimate execution that December. Rudenko was sure to point out that “Bagirov’s accomplice [Timofei] Borshchev” signed off on Anashkin’s indictment, as well as his wife’s, under which she was sentenced to eight years of corrective labor.⁶⁷⁸ Both Anashkin and his wife had been “fully” rehabilitated by the time of the report, and Rudenko assured Mikoian that the “terroristic reprisals against Anashkin are described at length in the indictment against Bagirov and others.”⁶⁷⁹ Despite this pledge Anashkin’s name appeared only twice in the expansive document, though the Baku indictment used Bagirov’s own Civil War record as a window onto his extensive history of anti-Soviet affiliations.

In keeping with his status as Beria’s closest ally, Bagirov faced a host of incriminatory accusations regarding his activities during the heady days of the Baku Commune in the spring and summer of 1918, which cast him into disrepute and tarnished his self-presentation as an early and faithful adherent of Soviet power. Under interrogation, Bagirov admitted that along with four compatriots he had joined the Armenian brigade led by Amazasp, and while a member thereof had been a “passive

⁶⁷⁷ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1168, l. 21.

⁶⁷⁸ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4001, ll. 243-244. Information regarding the effects of torture on Anashkin and his belief that he would be allowed to live once he confessed apparently came from one of his former cellmates who was interviewed during the course of the investigation.

⁶⁷⁹ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4001, l. 245.

witness to butchery and plunder (*rezni i grabazhei*).⁶⁸⁰ Similarly to Beria, Bagirov maintained that he did not volunteer for the unit, but was instead “dispatched to this detachment by the Old Bolshevik Naneishvili [...] as a Communist to see to it that there were fewer atrocities.”⁶⁸¹ However, investigators in the 1950s established that Bagirov was not a Party member at the time, “and therefore could not have been sent to the Amazasp detachment in the capacity of a representative of the Party organization.”⁶⁸² As mentioned during Bagirov’s 1954 hearing before the KPK, he and his four associates were arrested and imprisoned by none other than Levan Gogoberidze; why and how they were released remained unclear, but Bagirov allegedly admitted his “mistake” to Gogoberidze, and in July was freed by a “company of Russians (*rota iz russkikh*).”⁶⁸³ Such an early run-in with an individual who would figure so heavily into the government’s efforts to discredit Beria and his entourage stood out as a particularly black mark on Bagirov’s record, speaking not only to his counterrevolutionary affiliations and actions, but also to his vested interest in ensuring that individuals like Gogoberidze were prevented from disseminating what they knew of his Civil War-era activities. In this way, Bagirov perfectly fit the profile for membership in Beria’s negative trust conspiracy: bound to his patron by past indiscretions and offences, Bagirov was subsequently invested with responsibility for compiling and destroying materials that incriminated Beria, as well as individuals who could attest to the inconvenient details of his and others’ biographies.

⁶⁸⁰ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4576, l. 12. As with Beria’s service in the pan-Turkic Musavat government, no mention was made of the apparent contradiction inherent in Bagirov, an Azeri, taking up arms with a band of Armenians engaged in the ethnic cleansing of Baku and the surrounding region.

⁶⁸¹ Ibid. Here Bagirov was likely referring to Victor Naneishvili, father of Pavel and Mariia.

⁶⁸² GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4576, ll. 12-13.

⁶⁸³ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4576, l. 13.

Over 90 pages of the 300-page Baku indictment were dedicated to the issue of the defendants' persecution of innocent Party and government figures.⁶⁸⁴ In the section given over to illustrating the "criminal ties of the accused Bagirov with Beria," the revolutionary old guard in Baku – including Mikoian's friends Anashkin and Dovlatov – was presented as having threatened the pair's larger aspirations through first-hand knowledge of their Civil War-era activities. The Procuracy "[e]stablished that Bagirov disposed of (*raspravilsia*) certain old Communists who knew about Beria's service in the Musavat counterintelligence and expressed their political mistrust of him."⁶⁸⁵ One veteran of the Baku underground, M.Ts. Manucharov, who survived to serve as a witness in Baku, voiced his conviction that "all of the arrests of old Party members carried out by the Azerbaijan NKVD were done at Beria and Bagirov's direct order to eliminate witnesses to their sordid past."⁶⁸⁶ Another witness, a former Azeri NKVD officer named Klimenchich, recalled "in my presence Bagirov instructed that the prisoner Dovlatov Isai be beaten...Bagirov ordered the investigator at his side Gabrielian, who headed Dovlatov's case, to beat Dovlatov, and in Bagirov's presence Gabrielian began to beat Dovlatov"; Dovlatov was subsequently shot based on "falsified materials," but the Supreme Court had since restored his good name.⁶⁸⁷ This settling of scores with Baku's tight-knit community of Old Bolsheviks was depicted as a precursor to Beria and Bagirov's more ambitious and destructive joint campaign against Ordzhonikidze's kinship and patronage network.

⁶⁸⁴ For purposes of comparison, the entire bill of indictment in Tbilisi ran to about 120 pages.

⁶⁸⁵ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4576, l. 20.

⁶⁸⁶ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4576, l. 21.

⁶⁸⁷ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4576, ll. 24-26.

Based on its experiences from Tbilisi, the Soviet judiciary found the stories of the Georgian Old Bolsheviks sufficiently compelling to repackage them for use against Bagirov and his co-defendants. Detailing Beria and Bagirov's joint subversive dealings, the Procuracy "established that Bagirov and the other defendants in the present case took direct part in the collection of slanderous materials relating to the prominent figure of the Communist Party and Soviet state Sergo Ordzhonikidze undertaken by Beria and his accomplices."⁶⁸⁸ Following his death,

participants in the conspiracy carried out a series of terroristic reprisals against Sergo Ordzhonikidze's family members and friends. Thus the former Secretary of the *Zakkraikom* of the Communist Party Mamiia Orakhelashvili, Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia Mikhail Kakhiani, Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia Levon [*sic*] Gogoberidze, Sergo Ordzhonikidze's brothers Papuliia and Dmitrii and other individuals were killed.⁶⁸⁹

Having demonstrated that Bagirov was actively involved in collecting prejudicial materials against those who could frustrate his and Beria's ambitions, the indictment turned to the case of Kosarev – also employed to apparent effect against Rodos – and his extended family, which was presented as a "a typical example, indicative of the close criminal ties between Beria and Bagirov," illustrative of their ability to inflict suffering beyond the periphery.⁶⁹⁰

⁶⁸⁸ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4576, l. 26.

⁶⁸⁹ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4576, ll. 26-27. Sergo's "brother Dmitrii" was in actuality his cousin, whose wife broke down on the stand in Tbilisi. Bagirov had his own sharp confrontations with members of the Georgian Old Bolshevik group early in his career when he clashed with the *Zakkraikom* leadership. According to witness V. I. Sokhatskii, who had worked alongside Bagirov for an extended period, the latter purportedly complained that "Mamiia Orakhelashvili did not love him" before denouncing the entire committee as "bastards" and vowing that "he would make short work of them." See GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4576, l. 97

⁶⁹⁰ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4576, l. 31.

Called to serve as a witness for the prosecution, in her deposition Mariia Naneishvili-Kosareva recounted the most detailed version yet of the story she had been expressly flown out of Noril'sk to recount to Cheptsov and Kitaev nearly two years prior:

Bagirov came with my husband to our apartment or rather to the dacha in Volynskoe (near Moscow on the Mozhaiskoe highway), which was, as I recall, the only time that Bagirov came to our house. I don't know what the occasion for this visit was... And that evening over dinner in Bagirov's presence my husband proposed the following toast: "To true leadership in Transcaucasia, which does not currently exist there." Bagirov said nothing, clinked glasses and drank. After dinner Bagirov quickly left. After this incident some time passed and one day my husband came home from work upset, and told me that Bagirov informed Beria of the contents of the toast that he proposed at our place over dinner.⁶⁹¹

Bagirov's involvement in Kosarev's undoing did not end with his betrayal of his host's confidence. His codefendant Borshchev testified that in the course of interrogations Azerbaijani NKVD operatives obtained compromising statements about "a number of leading workers in the center, including Kosarev. Before long Sumbatov was dispatched to Beria in Tbilisi with all these materials [...] For what purpose Sumbatov brought all these materials to Beria Borshchev supposedly does not know, as all of this was kept in strict secrecy."⁶⁹² Given his position, Borshchev deemed it impossible for Bagirov to have been unaware of the collecting of *kompromat* on Kosarev, or of Sumbatov's mission to Tbilisi. In the indictment's terms, the aid that Bagirov rendered Beria in dealing with such "problematic" persons as members of Ordzhonikidze's circle and Kosarev did not represent simple tributes owed by a client to a patron: "If Bagirov, knowing about

⁶⁹¹ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4576, l. 32. The journey of Naneishvili-Kosareva's account of this inauspicious gathering, from a recollection penned in exile to a component of her husband's rehabilitation to featured testimony in the state's case against a former Party secretary, demonstrates the avidness with which the Soviet government seized upon and legitimized narratives that vilified the final batch of "enemies of the people."

⁶⁹² GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4576, l. 33.

Beriia's Musavat past, helped Beriia in every way to hide his crimes," the Procuracy observed, "then Beriia, in turn, covered Bagirov's crimes."⁶⁹³

The Procuracy sought to demonstrate that personal enmity existed between Bagirov and many of the figures he targeted, further casting the Terror in the Caucasus as the product of clannish feuds and individual resentments. During his tenures as both chief of state security and Party Secretary of Azerbaijan Bagirov accumulated a host of adversaries, including many of those who had preceded and succeeded him in his various posts. Upon being dismissed from the position of chairman of the Azerbaijan GPU in 1927 as an "intriguer and troublemaker (*sklochnik*)" at the initiative of the then-Party Secretary, Karaev, Bagirov complained to the Azeri Central Committee and the *Zakkraikom* about his replacement, Novruz Rizaev, and Karaev.⁶⁹⁴ In the spring of the following year the Presidium of the Azeri Central Committee, chaired by Karaev, rejected Bagirov's insinuations as "in tone and content unacceptable and totally unfounded," and urged him to put an end to "the squabbling surrounding the Azeri GPU."⁶⁹⁵ However, rather than acceding to the Party's demands, Bagirov instead forwarded his grievances to Beriia, through whom they presumably made their way to Moscow; at the time Beriia also wrote a "special letter" in support of Bagirov to Ordzhonikidze, in which he alleged that Orakhelashvili and the rest of the *Zakkraikom* were conducting a campaign of "provocation" against Bagirov.⁶⁹⁶ The Procuracy pointedly observed that within a decade all of the major players in this controversy,

⁶⁹³ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4576, l. 35. Rudenko also detailed Bagirov's efforts to bring down Osval'd Nodev. See GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4576, ll. 33-35.

⁶⁹⁴ Karaev is perhaps best known today for his pronouncement at the 9th Party Congress in 1919 that "the enemy is everywhere (*vrag est' vezde*)," which provided the title for Jörg Baberowski's monograph on Bolshevism in the Caucasus.

⁶⁹⁵ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4576, l. 95.

⁶⁹⁶ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4576, l. 37.

including Orakhelashvili, Karaev, and *Zakkraikom* members Levon Mirzoian and Dadash Buniat-Zade, had been arrested and executed at Beria and Bagirov's directive.⁶⁹⁷

The animus that Bagirov harbored for Buniat-Zade purportedly dated back to 1918 or 1919, when, according to Markarian, the two first encountered each other in Astrakhan: "Some sort of dispute transpired between them there, and afterward Bagirov grew to hate Buniat-Zade."⁶⁹⁸ From that point on Bagirov considered Buniat-Zade "his personal enemy," something that he made no effort to conceal.⁶⁹⁹ A rivalry of more recent vintage was to be found in Bagirov's dealings with Sultan Medzhid Efendiev, the chairman of the Central Executive Committee of Azerbaijan, whom he also openly reviled. Bagirov chose the 13th Congress of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan in June 1937 as the venue to go public with his threats against Efendiev, exclaiming that "Efendiev wants us to allow him to openly take the floor while armed (*chtoby my pozvolili emu otkryto s oruzhiem vystupit*'). You'll croak (*sdokhnesh*'), but we won't tolerate it, we'll be done with you then and make short work of you."⁷⁰⁰ Bagirov was apparently offended that Efendiev had sent his "so-called relatives, in quotation marks," to Moscow, "having giving them applications for the leadership of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan, to bait (*na travliu*) us."⁷⁰¹ The indictment treated Bagirov's promises to settle accounts with his adversaries as far more than idle chatter,

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid. By 1961, the Party Control Committee was laying blame for Mirzoian's arrest at the feet of Beria's rival Stanislav Redens, though there does exist concrete evidence tying Redens to Mirzoian's persecution in the form of a telegram he sent to Ezhov, which was forwarded to Stalin, accusing Mirzoian of leading the Rightist-Trotskyites in Kazakhstan. See Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 2, 393; Khaustov et al, *Lubianka*, 513-515.

⁶⁹⁸ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4576, l. 117.

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁰ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4576, l. 100.

⁷⁰¹ Ibid.

claiming that he deployed the forces at his disposal to harass and ultimately liquidate the cadres that stood against him.⁷⁰²

In a lengthy section of the indictment entitled “Criminal Cases against Innocent People Falsified by the Accused,” Rudenko foregrounded some 17 Party and state figures from Azerbaijan whose clashes with Bagirov had precipitated their downfalls. Drawing extensively upon the same materials that were cited in rehabilitation reports submitted to the Central Committee, Rudenko assiduously noted at the end of each man’s profile that he had been “fully posthumously rehabilitated.” Just as Akhundov’s rehabilitation constituted the nucleus of the vindication of Azerbaijan’s early Soviet leadership, the Procuracy depicted him in court as the linchpin for the repressions in Azerbaijan. Taken into custody on December 17, 1936 and expelled from the Party at Bagirov’s initiative for Trotskyism and introducing “personal Arabism and Ottomanism” into his translations of Lenin and Stalin, Akhundov’s forced confessions implicated dozens of individuals at all levels of the republic’s political, governmental, cultural, and agricultural sectors.⁷⁰³

One former NKVD officer testified that Akhundov had the unfortunate distinction of being the first person upon whom the rubber truncheon was employed “as an instrument of torture”; another provided the following recollection of Akhundov’s physical condition: “R. Akhundov was beaten to the point that after interrogations he was literally carried out of Sumbatov’s office on a stretcher... We even wondered how he, a sickly man, endured all the torments to which he was subjected.”⁷⁰⁴ The indictment made it clear that Bagirov was behind Akhundov’s arrest and had a particular interest in seeing

⁷⁰² On the course of the Terror in Azerbaijan, see El’dar Ismailov, *Istoriia bol’shogo terrora” v Azerbaidzhane* (Moskva: ROSSPEN, 2015).

⁷⁰³ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4576, ll. 85-86.

⁷⁰⁴ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4576, ll. 86-87.

his resolve broken by citing a third onetime local NKVD officer, who maintained that at a daily briefing in the summer of 1937 the investigators handling Akhundov's case "gave the following instructions word-for-word: 'an order came from the boss (i.e. Bagirov) to obtain a confession of membership in a counterrevolutionary organization from R. Akhundov over the course of the next 24 hours by any means.'"⁷⁰⁵ Bagirov's ultimatum yielded the intended effect, as it was "precisely in summer 1937 [that] Akhundov confessed and named many workers from Transcaucasia as members of counterrevolutionary organizations while under interrogation by Sumbatov, Gerasimov and Tsinman."⁷⁰⁶ Though Akhundov quickly attempted to recant, the authorities in Baku had the evidence they required to initiate a wide-ranging purge that swept up the republic's elites and regular workers alike.

Most of the accused counterrevolutionaries were rounded up in the aftermath of the 13th Azeri Party Congress during the early summer of 1937. Taken into NKVD custody on July 1, Karaev stood accused of having plotted "on Rukhulla Akhundov's orders [...] a terroristic act against Bagirov."⁷⁰⁷ Karaev assiduously denied these charges for five months, until he, in the words of former special investigator G. G. Sarkisov, "was beaten senseless (*do pocherti soznaniia*). Not confessing to anything, Karaev was forced under the influence of beatings to state: 'Write what you want. I will sign.'"⁷⁰⁸ When pressed to account for such actions, Borshchev recounted his work with seemingly clinical detachment: "I beat Buniat-Zade with one of the field officers, perhaps Meshcheriakov. I personally hit him with my hands, while the field officer struck him

⁷⁰⁵ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4576, l. 89.

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁷ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4576, l. 99.

⁷⁰⁸ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4576, l. 98.

with a rubber truncheon. Sumbatov, who was in attendance, also beat Buniat-Zade.”⁷⁰⁹ Efendiev, arrested a week before Karaev and shortly after Buniat-Zade, was subjected to a particularly harsh regime of physical coercion and derision – he was said to have been beaten “so severely that after interrogations he could only lie down,” and was “doused [...] with water to bring him back to his senses.”⁷¹⁰ Compounding the humiliation – as two NKVD agents attested – during such ordeals “Tsinman insulted Efendiev, contemptuously calling him ‘president’ [...] when Efendiev filed a complaint with Sumbatov against the investigators’ malicious insults Sumbatov punched Efendiev in the face and left, and the beatings continued.”⁷¹¹ The indictment catalogued the litany of indignities to which these men were subjected as a means of illustrating the depravity of Azerbaijani state security, as well as the Bagirov’s personal vindictiveness toward those who challenged his unchecked authority.

Bagirov insisted he knew nothing of the plan to detain Usein Rakhmanov– the Komsomol leader-turned chairman of the *Sovnarkom* of Azerbaijan – at a Moscow hospital while both men were on assignment in the capital, but the Procuracy claimed to have evidence revealing that in addition to arranging Rakhmanov’s abduction Bagirov “took direct part” in beatings.⁷¹² Following interrogations administered by Sumbatov, Tsinman, and Bagirov, Rakhmanov and his fellow prisoners “could not walk themselves out of the office, they were dragged out by their arms (*ikh uvodili pod ruki*).”⁷¹³ A former Azerbaijani NKVD operative spoke of efforts to stifle Rakhmanov’s cries during one particular session: “Usein Rakhmanov lay on the floor in one of the offices of the secret-

⁷⁰⁹ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4576, l. 118.

⁷¹⁰ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4576, ll. 101-102.

⁷¹¹ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4576, l. 103.

⁷¹² GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4576, l. 119.

⁷¹³ *Ibid.*

political department and was brutally beaten by 3-4 field officers [...] in order to ensure that Rakhmanov didn't scream, one of the field officers present held a pillow over his head while the rest beat him.”⁷¹⁴ Although Rakhmanov eventually capitulated and began detailing his associations with Akhundov, he attempted to explain that the “center” into which he was recruited was dedicated to changing Azerbaijan's leadership within the framework of the Party, a distinction that did nothing to shield him, given that Akhundov, Karaev, and Efendiev had already named Rakhmanov a principal participant in their conspiracy.⁷¹⁵

Akhundov and Karaev, along with the Old Bolsheviks Pleshakov and Dovlatov, also implicated Levon Mirzoian under duress, which the indictment alleged brought about his arrest in May 1938; he then, in turn, confirmed after being tortured that he had been aware since 1926 or 1927 of the existence of a “counterrevolutionary nationalist organization” within Azerbaijan comprised of his accusers.⁷¹⁶ The Procuracy suggested that Bagirov's animus toward Mirzoian survived the latter's death in February 1939, as Novruz Rizaev's second arrest in January 1940 was attributed to his close association with Mirzoian.⁷¹⁷ Markarian testified “[of] course I know well that Bagirov hated Rizaev, for the very least because in 1927 upon Mirzoian's recommendation and with his support Rizaev was assigned to the post of chairman of the Azeri *Cheka* in Bagirov's place, and afterward Bagirov had to leave Azerbaijan and go to Tbilisi.”⁷¹⁸ Borshchev seconded

⁷¹⁴ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4576, l. 120.

⁷¹⁵ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4576, ll. 120-121.

⁷¹⁶ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4576, l. 113.

⁷¹⁷ Rizaev was initially arrested in October 1937 in Alma-Ata; according to his wife, who testified for the prosecution in 1956, Rizaev at the time said “This is Baku's doing (*bakinskaia rabota*), Bagirov is settling accounts with me because I sat in his place.” Cleared almost two years later by a military tribunal in Kazakhstan, Rizaev was once again taken into custody when he briefly returned to Baku to visit his mother and children. See GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4576, ll. 104-105.

⁷¹⁸ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4576, l. 107.

Makarian's impressions, noting that when Rizaev was first arrested Bagirov "wanted to deal with Rizaev personally, as a supporter of Levon Mirzoian [...] Bagirov obviously decided to take vengeance (*otomstit'*) on [Rizaev] and Mirzoian."⁷¹⁹

When Bagirov became aware of Rizaev's return to Baku after being acquitted of charges in Kazakhstan he "was very indignant that Rizaev, being one of Mirzoian's people, would turn up in Baku," and ordered him taken in.⁷²⁰ Rizaev resisted attempts to induce him to incriminate himself or others through the usual repertoire of what he called in May 1940 "cursing with the most vulgar words, threats of arresting my family and, finally, beating of the most inhumane and brutal manner (with a rubber truncheon)," so Grigorian, Markarian, and Emelianov enlisted the Military Collegium to overrule Rizaev's acquittal.⁷²¹ Rizaev's execution in early July 1941 made him one of the last of Bagirov's adversaries to face the firing squad. Thus the indictment laid out how the handful of cases fabricated at Bagirov's behest spun out to encompass and ultimately devastate the first generation of Azerbaijan's Party faithful, portraying the extreme violence unleashed against these men as the product of personal enmity, rather than Stalin's systemic drive to destroy the vestiges of the Party that forged the Soviet state.

When the Baku hearing opened on April 12, 1956 it brought back together many of the principal actors from seven months prior: Cheptsov chaired the visiting session of the Military Collegium, Rudenko stepped back into the role of public prosecutor, Nikolai Smirnov again served as acting secretary, and even the lead defense attorney, V. N. Gavrilov, repeated his role from Tbilisi. In his opening remarks, Rudenko drew direct parallels between the proceedings against Rapava and Rukhadze and the case he was

⁷¹⁹ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4576, l. 109.

⁷²⁰ Ibid.

⁷²¹ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4576, l. 110.

about to argue, noting that all the defendants were bound together through their complicity in Beria's criminal conspiracy. In the early 1920s, he pointed out, Bagirov had been Beria's immediate superior in the Azerbaijani *Cheka*, and it was only through gross violations of legal and political norms – abetted by Beria – that he had managed to hold on to power for so long. Rudenko further emphasized Bagirov's subordinates' willingness to falsify at their boss' behest investigations against "prominent" Party and Soviet figures and Old Bolsheviks who could oppose his machinations. In line with the baleful consequences of their actions, Rudenko closed his speech by "demand[ing] the execution of all the accused, to a man."⁷²² It is difficult to determine whether this was intended as a genuine call for all of the defendants to receive capital punishment or a rhetorical flourish, as the two junior-most *chekisty*, Atakishiev and Emel'ianov, received camp terms of 25 years, but given the Party Central Committee's degree of involvement in plotting out the judicial spectacles in Tbilisi and Baku it seems highly doubtful that Cheptsov and the other two justices of the Military Collegium would have so openly defied the Party's will in the matter. That said, there was discord within the Kremlin regarding the wisdom of carrying out Bagirov's and his fellows' death sentences.

Though Deputy Procurator Baranov and Cheptsov claimed in their report to the Central Committee from May 4, 1956 that the "over seven hundred" people in attendance at the Dzerzhinskii Palace of Culture met witness testimony, Rudenko's speech, and the reading of the sentences with "unanimous approval," at least one member of the

⁷²² Smirnov, *Anti-stalinskie protsessy*, 268-270. For his part, Gavrilov argued that repressions were common to the entire Soviet Union in 1937 and 1938, and it was therefore unjust to hold his client, Bagirov, singularly responsible for such widespread abuses; see *idem.*, 270-271.

Presidium was not convinced of the need to do away with Bagirov.⁷²³ During a meeting three days later to confirm Bagirov's sentence, Mikoian – who of all the leaders present counted the most friends among those repressed at Bagirov's sanction – averred that “the current international situation is such that we should wait two years” before proceeding with the execution.⁷²⁴ While it is not entirely clear whether Mikoian was referring to the political fallout from the Secret Speech or the potential optics of putting to death the only leader from a Muslim-majority republic to rise to the heights of the Party's inner circle, his caution was not groundless, as Bagirov's arrest had already roiled non-Muslim Georgia. Among the demands read out during the so-called “March Events” in Tbilisi, when Georgian nationalist students took to the streets in protest against the new anti-Stalin Party line and the perceived marginalization of Caucasians at the center, was a call for Bagirov to be released and restored to his previous position.⁷²⁵

Mikoian may also have been disquieted at the prospect of further bloodshed in the name of restoring the Party's primacy, and harbored the vain hope that with the passage of time, Bagirov's death sentence might be quietly commuted. The likelihood of such a reprieve was exceedingly slim, however, given the lengths to which the Procuracy went to demonstrate that the defendants had been intractable foes of Soviet power both before

⁷²³ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4577, l. 205. Baranov and Cheptsov noted that the convicts' guilt had been proven through documentary evidence as well as the testimony of many witnesses, including “victims of crimes (*poterpevsikh ot prestuplenii*) who are now rehabilitated,” drawing a sharp distinction between the judiciary's methods of investigation and the *chekisty*'s reliance on forced confessions.

⁷²⁴ A. A. Fursenko, et al, eds., *Prezidium TsK KPSS 1954-1964, tom 1: Chernovye protokol'nye zapisi zasedanii. Stenogrammy* (Moskva: ROSSPEN, 2015), 145.

⁷²⁵ Timothy Blauvelt, “Status Shift and Ethnic Mobilisation in the March 1956 Events in Georgia,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 61, 4 (June 2009): 656. See also Timothy Blauvelt and Jeremy Smith, eds., *Georgia after Stalin: Nationalism and Soviet Power* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 6, 43. As Yoram Gorlizki has shown, Bagirov and Emel'ianov proved extremely popular in the South Caucasus thanks to their ability to shrug off representatives from the center's attempts to interfere in Azerbaijani affairs through the systematic exploitation of *kompromat*, rendering any threats to their person a major liability for the new authorities, whose legitimacy could easily have been undercut by open revolt in the restive region; see Gorlizki, “Structures of Trust after Stalin,” 137-138.

and after their induction into Beria's criminal conspiracy. The Presidium overwhelmingly approved Bagirov's punishment and resolved that the trial's verdict be announced in the Azerbaijani press, and later that month the Supreme Soviet duly denied all four defendants' requests for clemency. The announcement of the results of the hearing, published in *Bakinskii rabochii* on May 27, listed over twenty individuals from Azerbaijan's Party and state elite – including Akhundov, Mirzoian, Karaev, and Mikoian's comrade Anashkin – who had been killed under Bagirov's watch and since judicially rehabilitated.⁷²⁶ This dramatic expansion of the discussion of posthumous rehabilitees' in the press – albeit in Azerbaijan's official Russian-language newspaper – represented the Soviet government's increasing reliance upon exonerated figures from the past to incriminate elements from the organs of state security while ensuring that the Party and its leadership remained entirely insulated from any hint of culpability, even following Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin's legacy.⁷²⁷

Aftermath: A Farewell to Terror

Though the Tbilisi and Baku proceedings were only publicized within their respective republics, their results attracted the attention of foreign press outlets, which wasted little time in speculating about the wider implications of these affairs that

⁷²⁶ “V verkhovnom sude SSSR,” *Bakinskii rabochii*, May 27, 1956, 1. For the draft version, see Mozokhin, *Politbiuro i delo Beria*, 900-902; an English translation appears in Conquest, *Power and Policy*, 451-453. The press release used the somewhat euphemistic term “*umershchvlenye*,” meaning “killed,” to describe the rehabilitees' fate, rather than the more direct “*rassstreliany*,” meaning “executed,” reflecting the fact that the government was still not completely forthright about the nature of these individuals' deaths.

⁷²⁷ For examples of post-Baku cases in which the posthumously rehabilitated were extensively referenced to discredit former secret policemen, see the Procuracy's materials from June 1956 related to I. I. Dolgikh, the onetime head of the investigative department of the Southern Railway's NKVD, and those from August 1957 regarding NKVD operative V. M. Kazakevich, who had been questioned in connection with M. E. Mikhailov's rehabilitation. Although Rudenko floated the idea of trying Dolgikh in court, neither of the two men were judicially sanctioned, but both were stripped of their military rank and all attendant privileges. See GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4578, ll. 201-211; GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 5067, ll. 129-132.

bookended the more dramatic revelations of the 20th Party Congress. The Tbilisi trial appeared to be, in the words of a *New York Times* editorial, “a means of warning potential dissenters of the consequences of opposition”; the same publication described the “Bloodshed in Baku” the following year as yet another instance of “white [becoming] black by fiat of the Kremlin rulers” in reference to Bagirov’s precipitous fall from grace.⁷²⁸ With these ominous turns of phrase the *Times* sought to situate the developments in Tbilisi and Baku within the Soviet purge paradigm, preparing its readership for further upheaval at the highest levels of power. Similarly, *The Spectator* labeled Bagirov’s execution “a striking actuality to set against the torrent of fine words which has led some people to imagine that the Soviet Union is being liberalised,” and suggested that “there are signs that the purge might spread.”⁷²⁹

Despite the Western media’s prognostications, no new spate of killings directed against suspect elites materialized in the months and years following the 20th Party Congress, and even amidst serious challenges to Khrushchev’s authority from factions within the Party, Bagirov remained the final former member of the ruling clique to face the firing squad. This development was not purely circumstantial – the lessons that Khrushchev and his supporters gleaned from the trials against Beria’s accused collaborators were used to mediate power struggles in the years that followed. Perhaps the clearest example of this new mode of politics can be found in the struggle with the so-called “Anti-Party Group” composed of Molotov, Malenkov, and Kaganovich, which unsuccessfully attempted to unseat Khrushchev in June 1957. Khrushchev parried by calling a Party plenum – stacked with his appointees to the Central Committee – at which

⁷²⁸ “Soviet Executions,” *New York Times*, November 24, 1955, 28; “Bloodshed in Baku,” *New York Times*, May 31, 1956, 26.

⁷²⁹ “A Spectator’s Notebook,” *The Spectator*, June 1, 1956, 752.

the plotters were assailed for their complicity in the purges, including a particularly ferocious speech on the part of Minister of Defense Georgii Zhukov, in which he revealed that between February 27, 1937 and November 12, 1938, Molotov and Kaganovich signed off on lists of nearly 39,000 people to be sentenced to death by the Military Collegium.⁷³⁰ In his address to the gathering, Komsomol First Secretary and soon-to-be KGB Chairman Aleksandr Nikolaevich Shelepin laid into the Stalinist trio for having “done away” with his predecessor, Kosarev, explaining the latter’s demise through the narrative introduced to the wider public in Baku: “Why was this case cooked up (*sostriapali*)? Only because Kosarev, while resting in the South, badmouthed Beria in Bagirov’s presence.”⁷³¹ Tellingly, by moving the action from the western Moscow suburbs to the nondescript “South” – presumably meaning the Caucasus – Shelepin reinforced the perception of Kosarev’s repression as the product of a regional vendetta, even as he attempted to implicate figures from the center in the commission of the crime.

Rudenko managed to incorporate a direct allusion to the Tbilisi proceedings into his denunciation of the Anti-Party Group. Opening his attack upon Khrushchev’s rivals, Rudenko described an exchange between himself and Kaganovich from September 1955, when the latter chaired the Presidium while Khrushchev was vacationing. The question of amnesties and the reopening of old cases was raised, to which Kaganovich “tossed out” the following “remark (*brosili repliku*)”: “You are now bringing to account those who previously arrested [others], but we will bring you in for those you are freeing, if you do

⁷³⁰ Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 314-324; N. Kovaleva et al, eds., *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich. 1957: Stenogramma iun'skogo plenuma TsK KPSS i drugie dokumenty* (Moskva: Mezhdunarodnyi fond “Demokratiia,” 1998), 33-41.

⁷³¹ Kovaleva et al, *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich*, 342.

free them.”⁷³² Rudenko took exception to this characterization of the Procuracy’s work, but opted to wait until the following day to call Kaganovich, just prior to his scheduled departure for Tbilisi; Kaganovich explained to the Procurator General that he did not “blame [him] personally.”⁷³³ Regarding this exchange, Khrushchev interjected that Kaganovich had raised such objections in order to prevent the “disclosure of all the crimes [the Anti-Party Group] committed against innocent people who must be rehabilitated.”⁷³⁴ Rudenko’s pointed reference to his role in the prosecution of Rapava and Rukhadze in the context of his dispute with Kaganovich underscored the putative parallels between Beria’s confederates and the Anti-Party Group: all had reason to fear revelations emerging from the rehabilitation process.

The constructed affinity between the executed *cheksity* and the Anti-Party Group was made even more explicit during the 22nd Party Congress in October 1961. In his remarks before the assembly, Nuritdin Mukhitdinov, a Presidium member from Uzbekistan, decried the lawlessness that had previously been allowed to proliferate in the outlying republics:

In some republics bankrupt people of Bagirov’s type, riding the coattails of Malenkov, Kaganovich and Molotov, and occasionally at their direct order, perpetrated despotism and lawlessness. The representatives of Central Asian, Transcaucasian and other republics present here at the congress remember well how many senior officials and representatives of the intelligentsia were undone in the republics at that time.⁷³⁵

Employing Bagirov as a synecdoche for all the Stalinist potentates who ruled the southern and eastern reaches of the Soviet Union with impunity, Mukhitdinov portrayed

⁷³² Ibid., 417-418.

⁷³³ Ibid., 418.

⁷³⁴ Ibid.

⁷³⁵ *XXII s’ezd kommunisticheskoi partii sovetskogo soiuza. 17-31 oktiabria 1961 goda. Stenograficheskii otchet*, vol. 2 (Moskva: Gosudarstvenoe izdatel’stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1962), 149.

the Anti-Party Group's members as their enablers in Moscow. Despite such attempts to link Molotov, Malenkov, and Kaganovich to the parties held legally accountable for much of the Terror, there was no corresponding call for them to face similar punishment.⁷³⁶ All of the participants in the Anti-Party Group were expelled from their posts, but continued to live freely, albeit far from Moscow. This pattern held in subsequent years: after Khrushchev's ouster in October 1964, he too was permitted to live out his days in relatively comfortable exile. Although no guarantees of mutual security were ever officially given, following the excision of a relatively small number of secret policemen, having used the example of posthumously rehabilitated Bolsheviks as the grounds for conviction, the post-Stalin rulers of the Soviet Union set aside lethal force as a means of deciding conflicts within the halls of power.

Conclusion

The palace coup against Lavrentii Beria and his closest confederates is generally depicted as marking the beginning of – in Anna Akhmatova's terms – one of the Soviet Union's "vegetarian periods," during which domestic disputes were not resolved through killing and mass repression.⁷³⁷ Yet as this chapter has demonstrated, even as state terror was reined in during the early post-Stalin years, the party-state maintained a decidedly carnivorous approach toward certain state security officers who were made to answer for the decimation of the Party's old guard during the latter Terror years. The peace that Khrushchev and his contemporaries forged at the top levels of the government was not the product of a single, decisive strike against Beria, but rather of judicially-sanctioned

⁷³⁶ Aleksei Kosygin explained that he supported Khrushchev in June 1957 because, had Molotov come out on top, "blood would have flowed again." Quoted from Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 324.

⁷³⁷ My thanks to David Brandenberger for suggesting this particular framing device.

violent retribution that took the form of several trials against designated scapegoats. Mobilizing the information it had gathered through the rehabilitation process, the Procuracy used the posthumously exonerated to substantiate the narrative that Beria had perverted the organs of state security to enact revenge on his adversaries and conceal his perfidious past, crimes in which the Party remained blameless. Even following Khrushchev's decision to air Rodos' admission that his orders came directly from Stalin, the takeaway message from the trials of *chekisty* in Tbilisi, Moscow, and Baku was that the Party, embodied by posthumously rehabilitated figures, was the victim of Beria's lawlessness. As the Party and judiciary made use of their husbands' and fathers' stories of martyrdom to justify the execution of a new cohort of "enemies of the people," the survivors of several of the Old Bolsheviks invoked during the trials found themselves among the earliest beneficiaries of policies designed to make restitution for housing, property, and other privileges that had been denied them in connection with their families' repression.

Chapter Five – The Commissars’ Upright Piano: Restitution of Elite Housing, Property, and Privileges

*Property restitution is therefore, like Kundera’s proverbial struggle of memory against forgetting, a struggle of certain groups and persons to tie property down against others who would keep its edges flexible, uncertain, amorphous. It is a struggle of particularization against abstraction [...] and of particular individuals and families, reasserting thereby their specificity against a collectivist order that had sought to efface it.*⁷³⁸

In December 1957 Soviet cyberneticist Mikhail – born “Melik” – Samuilovich Agurskii telephoned the Party Control Committee in Moscow to complain about the handling of an appeal he filed that September. Agurskii had requested that he and his family be assigned a larger apartment in Moscow than the 16 square meter space they currently occupied, which had replaced the one of 30 square meters they lost while in evacuation between 1941 and 1951. Agurskii pointed to the fact that his father – former *Evseksiia* (the Jewish section of the early Communist Party) historian Samuil Khaimovich Agurskii – had been posthumously rehabilitated the previous year to argue that his family deserved priority consideration in their housing assignment. Yet as the KPK determined, in conjunction with the Moscow City Council, the case was not as straightforward as Agurskii initially suggested: at the time of his arrest, Samuil Agurskii had been working and living in Minsk, while most his family remained in Moscow. It was only Agurskii’s Minsk residence that was seized in connection with his repression, and the party-state refused to assume any responsibility for replacing an apartment that the surviving Agurskiis were deprived of thanks to their wartime flight.⁷³⁹ This

⁷³⁸ Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 135.

⁷³⁹ RGANI, f. 6, op. 6, d. 1721, l. 24. Throughout the cited report the KPK mistakenly referred to Mikhail Agurskii by his father’s name. Samuil Agurskii is distinct from the other figures discussed in this

distinction reflects the opaque hierarchy of needs and obligations constructed by Soviet authorities as they grappled with the persistent aftereffects of the purges that ravaged the ranks of early Communist stalwarts.

For early Soviet elite families, whose material comforts distinguished them from the rest of society, the property confiscations they incurred as “enemies of the people” loomed large in their reactions to and recollections of Stalinist repression.⁷⁴⁰ Property restitution consequently emerged as a pressing concern when the post-Stalin government began posthumously exonerating high-ranking figures purged in the late-1930s and early-1940s. Having lost the most – in material terms – at the hands of Stalin-era courts and NKVD investigators members of Soviet leading cadres and their relatives stood to regain the most once the party-state assumed responsibility for compensating survivors of the Terror.

To date, the issue of such reparations in the Soviet Union has attracted comparatively little scholarly attention; recent works on property rights in the postwar USSR have obliquely touched upon the challenges of providing housing to rehabilitees, while those dealing with former political prisoners have either elided or deemphasized their subjects’ ability to reclaim seized possessions.⁷⁴¹ Through documents generated by

dissertation in that he survived his prison sentence only to die in exile in 1948. On his career and demise see A. S. Makhnach, ed., *Vozvrashchennye imena: Sotrudniki AN Belarusi postradavshie v period stalinskikh repressii* (Minsk: Navuka i Tekhnika, 1992), 15-16; see also Mikhail Agursky, “My Father and the Great Terror,” *Soviet Jewish Affairs* 5, 2 (1975): 90-93. On housing dilemmas engendered by wartime evacuations, see Rebecca Manley, ““Where should we resettle the comrades next?”: The adjudication of housing claims and the construction of the post-war order,” in *Late Stalinist Russia*, 233-246.

⁷⁴⁰ A common codicil to sentences of capital punishment and long camp terms was “with confiscation of all owned property (*s konfiskatsiei vsego prinadlezhashchego imushchestva*),” which included personal belongings, from clothing and jewelry to typewriters, as well as state-owned resources like apartments, dachas, and chauffeured automobiles that were distributed to individuals commensurate to their contributions to Soviet power.

⁷⁴¹ For discussions of property issues in established works on Gulag returnees, see Adler, *The Gulag Survivor*, 152-155, 186-190, and Cohen, *The Victims Return*, 74-76. A notable exception to this trend is

the Soviet judiciary, administrative bodies of the USSR Council of Ministers (*Sovmin*), as well as citizens' appeals, this chapter considers efforts on the part of the families of the posthumously rehabilitated to attain restitution of and compensation for their confiscated housing and property alongside measures that authorities pursued in granting – or denying – them redress. By engaging in this early form of restorative justice for the families of the posthumously rehabilitated the Soviet government afforded them the opportunity to dramatically improve their material standing while reconstructing a semblance of the privileged identities that had been shattered by state violence.

The drive to restore the trappings of their former status to rehabilitated families coincided with a singular moment in the Soviet experiment with individual property rights and mass housing. On the one hand, the Soviet Union of the immediate post-Stalin period was a polity still wracked by endemic shortages due to the triple ravages of rapid industrialization, existential war, and repeated famine; on the other, the “consensus” among the new leadership, according to Sheila Fitzpatrick, was that “living standards had to be radically and swiftly increased.”⁷⁴² Though the regime aspired to promote this objective through collective ownership of consumer goods, in keeping with the mission of building Communism, in practice Khrushchev and his circle “put an ever increasing quantity and array of goods into individual or household hands.”⁷⁴³

This trend was exemplified by the massive housing construction initiatives undertaken in the mid-1950s through the 1960s, which enabled tens of millions of

Christine Varga-Harris, *Stories of House and Home: Soviet Apartment Life during the Khrushchev Years* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), Chapter 6.

⁷⁴² Sheila Fitzpatrick, “Things Under Socialism: The Soviet Experience,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption*, ed. Frank Trentmann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 460. On the dismal sanitary conditions in most postwar Soviet cities, see Donald Filtzer, *The Hazards of Urban Life in Late Stalinist Russia: Health, Hygiene, and Living Standards, 1943-1953* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁷⁴³ *Ibid.*

urbanites to escape the crowded conditions of Stalinist *kommunalki* in favor of single-family units.⁷⁴⁴ The transition from living cheek by jowl with one's neighbors to having a modicum of seclusion engendered the well documented and widely studied emergence of a private sphere under mature socialism.⁷⁴⁵ As revolutionary as these developments may have been for the vast majority of Soviet citizens, to former elites allowed back into their previous cities of residence for the first time in decades it marked a broader dissemination of the conditions to which they had grown accustomed prior to their falls from grace and their attendant loss of status.⁷⁴⁶

As historian Yuri Slezkine writes, the “extraordinary thing about the living conditions of high Soviet officials in the 1920s was how extraordinary they were by Soviet standards.”⁷⁴⁷ The single edifice that perhaps best encapsulates this remove of early “builders of socialism” from those over whom they ruled – and a space that lies at the heart of this chapter, as well as Slezkine’s work – is the complex at 2 *ulitsa Serafimovicha*, directly across the Moskva River from the Kremlin, which at the time of

⁷⁴⁴ On housing under Stalin and afterward, see Mark B. Smith, *Property of Communists: The Urban Housing Program from Stalin to Khrushchev* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010); Steven E. Harris, *Communism on Tomorrow Street: Mass Housing and Everyday Life After Stalin* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2013); Varga-Harris, *Stories of House and Home*.

⁷⁴⁵ In July 1957 Khrushchev announced his determination to provide every family in the USSR with its own separate apartment; see Varga-Harris, *Stories of House and Home*, 2. On private housing and the public sphere, particularly in relation to women’s perceptions and roles in society, see Susan E. Reid, “The Meaning of Home: ‘The Only Bit of the World You Can Have to Yourself,’” in *Borders of Socialism: Private Spheres of Soviet Russia*, ed. Lewis H. Siegelbaum (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 145-170; Lynne Attwood, *Gender and Housing in Soviet Russia: Private Life in a Public Space* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), Chapters 9 and 10.

⁷⁴⁶ As much as petitioners’ notions of domestic normality were bound up with the array of perquisites to which their families had enjoyed almost exclusive access for much of the 1920s and 1930s, they were also informed by the concept of *kul’turnost’* – roughly meaning “cultivation” – which, starting in the 1930s, presented individual refinement and acquisitiveness not as bourgeois holdovers, but instead as healthy signs of the Soviet populace’s rising cultural level. On the ties between *kul’turnost’* and consumption, see Vadim Volkov, “The Concept of *Kul’turnost’*: Notes on the Stalinist civilizing process,” in *Stalinism: New Directions*, ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 210-230; David L. Hoffmann, *Cultivating the Masses: Modern State Practices and Soviet Socialism, 1914-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), Chapter 4.

⁷⁴⁷ Slezkine, *House of Government*, 189.

its construction was the largest apartment building in Europe. Built to house the Party, state, and cultural elite, provide them with day-to-day essentials and recreation, and keep them under close watch, it was officially dubbed both the Government House and First House of the Soviets, but is today known popularly as the “House on the Embankment” thanks to Iurii Trifonov’s autobiographical 1978 novella. At a time when the average Muscovite had between 4 and 5.5 square meters of living space to him or herself in either a dormitory or *kommunalka*, the families selected to take up residence in the Government House enjoyed multi-room apartments that often afforded individuals two to four times the typical amount of space.⁷⁴⁸ Yet in their recollections of the Government House and similarly luxurious environs, some surviving spouses and children of repressed cadre members insisted that they did not harbor any proprietary feelings toward these abodes and the objects that filled them, as everything “belonged to the state”; apartments were disbursed by official bodies, and most pieces of furniture came from state warehouses with “brass tags with inventory numbers on them.”⁷⁴⁹

Sheila Fitzpatrick, citing Pierre Bourdieu, characterizes such assertions as clear expressions of “misrecognition” of privilege on the part of Soviet elites. To avoid acknowledging that they constituted a new nobility of sorts, members of the *nomenklatura* abjured any interest in material concerns; that they did not technically own

⁷⁴⁸ Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, 46. The immense pride of many of the building’s longtime residents, compounded by others’ fascination with its literary heritage and the domestic lives of the ill-fated and infamous notables who passed through its gates, has spawned a Russian-language corpus that encompasses memoir, popular history, and lurid rumor. See Mikhail Korshunov and Viktoriia Terekhova, *Tainy i legendy Doma na naberezhnoi* (Moskva: Slovo, 2002); T. I. Shmidt, *Dom na naberezhnoi: Liudi i Sud’by* (Moskva: Vozvrashchenie, 2009); idem, *Vremia, liudi, sud’by Doma na naberezhnoi: dokumental’naia povest’* (Moskva: Vozvrashchenie, 2015); Andrei Tarasov, *Domovaia kniga epokhi* (Moskva: Novaia elita, 2011); Ol’ga Trifonova, *Dom na naberezhnoi i ego obitateli* (Moskva: Galeriia, 2015). Slezkine’s recent monograph serves as a more scholarly – but by no means less dramatic or ambitious – compliment to these works.

⁷⁴⁹ Fruma Treivas, “We Were Fighting for an Idea!” in *In the Shadow of Revolution: Life Stories of Russian Women from 1917 to the Second World War*, ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick and Yuri Slezkine (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 326; Inna Shikheeva-Gaister, “A Family Chronicle,” idem., 376.

the apartments, furnishings, and vehicles they were assigned or that were placed at their disposal made such distancing all the easier.⁷⁵⁰ While memoirs of Stalin-era elite life may tell one story about their authors' indifference to material possessions and other perquisites, archival documents from the post-Stalin years reveal that this cohort related to its belongings – mourning their loss and actively seeking their return – in ways that run counter to the ascetic image that they cultivated. The appeals to Anastas Mikoian and the Housing Directorate of the USSR Council of Ministers' Administrative Department (*Khoziastvennoe upravlenie Upravleniia delami Soveta Ministrov SSSR*) – which managed official residences such as the Government House – that constitute the source base for much of this chapter evince clear attachment to certain buildings and personally-owned items that the state seized from purported counterrevolutionaries.⁷⁵¹ The Stalinist regime's leveraging of property rights as a reward for service to the state and a cudgel against those accused of disloyalty put it well within the vein of its tsarist and early Bolshevik forebears,⁷⁵² what distinguished the post-Stalin authorities from their predecessors was their willingness to make significant restitution to those who were wrongfully targeted in the past.

In his study of the various mechanisms by which states have acknowledged and attempted to make amends for mass atrocities and injustices since the Second World War,

⁷⁵⁰ Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, 107.

⁷⁵¹ Several of the main *dela* from the *Sovmin* Administrative Department records cited herein are also referenced – albeit in passing – in Miriam Sprau, “Zhizn’ posle GULAGa: Molodezh’ posle lagerei i repressii,” *Neprikosnovennyi zapas* 1, 87 (2013), available at <http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2013/1/s14-pr.html> (accessed October 11, 2016); most of the letters to Mikoian were inaccessible to researchers until quite recently.

⁷⁵² On post-Petrine property rights, see Lee A. Farrow, *Between Clan and Crown: The Struggle to Define Noble Property Rights in Imperial Russia* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004); on the 19th-century debate over property and the public interest, see Ekaterina Pravilova, *A Public Empire: Property and the Quest for the Common Good in Imperial Russia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); on property in early Soviet Russia, see Anne O’Donnell, “A Noah’s Ark: Material Life and the Foundations of Soviet Governance, 1916-1922” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2014).

Elazar Barkan distinguishes between two leading models of redress: restitution and reparations. The latter “refers to some form of material recompense for that which cannot be returned, such as human life, a flourishing culture and economy, and identity,” and therefore serves as a type of indemnity, providing compensation – almost always to groups – for intangible losses, irrespective of the recipients’ former socio-economic standing.⁷⁵³ The leading example of this approach that Barkan highlights is West Germany’s payments to Jewish survivors of the Nazi Final Solution, which he deems a “Faustian predicament” due to the Federal Republic’s need to rehabilitate its image, particularly in the United States, and some Jews’ reluctance to see their communal aspirations financed with German “blood money.”⁷⁵⁴ Conversely, restitution occurs in response to individual demands for the “return of the specific actual belongings that were confiscated, seized, or stolen,” and is therefore predicated on restoring a violated, but recognized property regime.⁷⁵⁵

For most of the Khrushchev and early Brezhnev years, the Soviet government’s approach to providing rehabilitees and their survivors recompense remained largely within Barkan’s mode of restitution: financial and material assistance was predominantly calculated based not on the length or severity of one’s sentence, nor the urgency of one’s need, but on one’s prior salary and standing, as well as the amount and quality of confiscated articles. By dint of their exceptional service to the state, leading Soviet cadres were afforded access to a far broader variety of goods than most of the populace; such luxury items were appropriated almost without exception upon an “enemy of the

⁷⁵³ Elazar Barkan, *The Guilt of Nations: Restitution and Negotiating Historical Injustices* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), xix.

⁷⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, Chapter 1.

⁷⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, xix.

people's" conviction. This put them in a position to make extensive restitution claims on the government, provided that they could document their ownership of the items in question, which at times proved impossible, as NKVD operatives frequently put together incomplete and falsified inventories during apartment searches.⁷⁵⁶ Posthumous rehabilitation engendered its own array of complications in the realm of property reclamation. Because service to the state was the primary criterion for determining an individual's standard of living, it was not immediately evident that the wives and children of men who were long-dead and no longer fulfilling any official function could expect, post-rehabilitation, to resume living in the manner to which they had become accustomed while the heads of their households were still alive. By taking considerable pains to ensure the material comfort of select elite survivors, whose deceased breadwinners could no longer directly contribute to the cause of Soviet power, the party-state reinforced an understanding of social status that, like the property that came with it, was inheritable across generations.⁷⁵⁷

Although posthumous rehabilitation in the Soviet Union was in many respects a prime example of restorative justice, it has yet to be meaningfully incorporated into the literature on this subject. This can be attributed – to some extent – to the lack of scholarly familiarity with conditions in the USSR, but also largely stems from the supposition that

⁷⁵⁶ The question of these inventories is discussed at length later in the chapter.

⁷⁵⁷ As Marcie Crowley has shown through her study of inheritance disputes under Stalin, as early as the 1930s, "family members of privileged individuals felt entitled to inherit property even though the wealth they inherited had been accumulated by someone else (a husband, for the most part)." What distinguishes the source base of this chapter from the cases that Crowley studies is that the property in question had been seized by the state before the question of its inheritance could be raised. On the enshrinement of inheritance law under Stalin, see Marcie K. Cowley, "The Right of Inheritance and the Stalin Revolution," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 15, 1 (Winter 2014): 103-123.

only democratizing states engage in such practices.⁷⁵⁸ Yet as the present chapter demonstrates, the comparative lessons of restorative justice are immediately applicable to the Soviet case, which in turn shows that such studies need not exclude illiberal, authoritarian states from their frameworks. Barkan observes that by “accepting a policy of restitution, governments implicitly or explicitly accept a mechanism by which [victim] group identity receives growing recognition.”⁷⁵⁹ Based on this understanding, one can argue that the Soviet government’s indulgence of rehabilitees’ demands transformed them, over the course of the 1950s and 1960s, into what Mark Edele has termed, in reference to veterans of the Great Patriotic War, an “entitlement community,” defined by its “*claim* to the right to special treatment by the wider community.”⁷⁶⁰

Perhaps the most important perspective here, however, is drawn from the work of the historian of European material culture Leora Auslander. In a seminal article, Auslander analyzes the importance for French Jews returning to Paris of compiling inventories of property seized by the Nazis as a means of articulating a sense of “home” and belonging in the postwar Republic.⁷⁶¹ While the circumstances surrounding the homecomings Auslander discusses are quite distinct from those that the survivors of purged Old Bolsheviks faced, and the nature of property ownership in these two cases was utterly dissimilar, the roles that specific places and objects played in reconstituting

⁷⁵⁸ See, for example, Pablo De Greiff, ed., *The Handbook of Reparations* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006). In his concluding proposal of a theory of restitution, Barkan posits the acceptance of Enlightenment-inspired, liberal notions of human rights as a precondition for state-driven restitution; see Barkan, *The Guilt of Nations*, 308-350.

⁷⁵⁹ Barkan, *The Guilt of Nations*, xx.

⁷⁶⁰ Mark Edele, *Soviet Veterans of the Second World War: A Popular Movement in an Authoritarian Society, 1941-1991* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 185. Cynthia Hooper notes, though, that rehabilitees were never able to form interest groups as veterans had done, and that former servicemen constituted the element within Soviet society most hostile to Gulag returnees and dredging up past atrocities; see Hooper, “Terror from Within,” 409-411.

⁷⁶¹ Leora Auslander, “Coming Home? Jews in Postwar Paris,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 40, 2 (April 2005): 237-259.

traumatized selves in both cases are readily evident from the available sources. The post-Stalin authorities contributed significant resources – in terms of housing stock, moveable property, funds, and manpower – to ameliorating the material condition of the families of posthumously rehabilitated luminaries; in doing so, they reconfirmed the elite identities of individuals who over the past two decades had been ostracized and penalized for the putative transgressions of their husbands, fathers, and brothers. Yet, as with other efforts associated with the expansion of the Soviet welfare state under Khrushchev, the state's professed goals for providing relief to the rehabilitated ultimately outstripped its capacity for – or commitment to – meeting citizens' demands and expectations, leaving many without recourse in resolving socio-economic issues that were rooted in Stalin-era repressions.

Kith and Clan: The Paternalistic Genesis of Posthumous Restitution

When the Presidium took up the resolution endorsing Mikhail Kaganovich's full rehabilitation on May 7, 1953, two of the decree's three articles concerned financial arrangements for Mikhail's widow, Tsitsiliia Iul'evna. The Party's inner circle granted her a one-time payment of 50,000 rubles – an amount unmatched by any subsequent rehabilitation-related single disbursement – as well as an additional lifetime pension of 2,000 rubles per month.⁷⁶² While as previously noted this extremely early instance of posthumous rehabilitation was remarkable in that its subject had never faced formal legal charges, and could therefore be officially cleared by Party fiat, with the collusion of Beria's MVD, it was also emblematic of the vein in which instances of restitution would operate over the next two-odd years. Though the Soviet government's internal discourse

⁷⁶² Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 1, 38-39. An earlier, unadopted version of this text was less generous in its provisions; see RGANI f. 3, op. 8, d. 25, l. 123.

surrounding rehabilitation shifted dramatically once Beria and his “accomplices” within the Party and organs of state security were deposed, the informal mechanism in place for making compensation to survivors of the “unlawfully repressed” remained largely unchanged through the autumn of 1955.

It stands to reason that the families of Beria’s adversaries – who were some of the first to undergo posthumous rehabilitation – were also among the initial beneficiaries of the Soviet government’s largesse; as the new ruling clique embraced stories of their martyrdom at the hands of Beria’s band, it began to entertain requests for material assistance on a case-by-case basis.⁷⁶³ Sergo’s cousin Dmitrii Georgievich Ordzhonikidze was officially exonerated on April 24, 1954 after his daughter, Meri, appealed to Malenkov in February – a remarkably quick turnaround, even at that early juncture – and that December Procurator General Rudenko addressed himself to the Council of Ministers on behalf of Dmitrii Georgievich’s widow – the same Mariia Minaeva whom Gazarian later recalled breaking down on the stand in Tbilisi:

Following D. G. Ordzhonikidze’s conviction the organs of the NKVD of Georgia confiscated his personally-owned property. Moreover, D. G. Ordzhonikidze’s family was moved from the good apartment they occupied into a damp apartment located in a basement room [...]. Ordzhonikidze D. G.’s family has presently returned to their previous apartment and taken measures toward compensation for the value of the confiscated property.⁷⁶⁴

Despite these developments, hardship continued to stalk the family; as a result of their dire living conditions after 1937, the eldest son was “absolutely deaf,” while the youngest

⁷⁶³ Mariia Dmitievna Vasina was a Russian-language editor and censor in Georgia who, having crossed Beria, spent 17 years in camps and exile. In March 1954, following her rehabilitation, Rudenko proposed to Malenkov that she be paid 10,000 rubles in assistance. It is unclear why Vasina warranted such largesse in Rudenko’s eyes, or whether she ultimately received any state funds. See GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3287, l. 89.

⁷⁶⁴ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3288, l. 253.

suffered from tuberculosis of the vertebrae, and they all, including Dmitrii Georgievich's 91-year-old mother, subsisted solely on the eldest son's salary of 700 rubles a month. Having enumerated these challenges in a letter to Rudenko, Mariia Minaeva "request[ed] that material help be rendered and a pension allocated for her and her husband's mother," which he considered "possible to support."⁷⁶⁵ Although the Procuracy's files do not indicate what, if any response was proposed by the Council of Ministers – which controlled the Committee for the Establishment of Personal Pensions – given the high premium placed on the Ordzhonikidze name at the time it seems unlikely that the authorities would allow any members of the extended clan to continue to languish without aid.⁷⁶⁶ Other cases of restitution to the survivors of Beria's opponents from this period further evince the piecemeal, and in some instances quite informal channels through which such measures were enacted, along with the importance of highly-placed patronage ties.

Rehabilitated and summoned back to Moscow from her Noril'sk exile in the spring of 1954, Mariia Naneishvili-Kosareva quickly reached out to Mikoian. She informed him on July 16 that although the Administrative Department of the USSR Council of Ministers had apportioned her a room in a *kommunalka* near Sokolniki Park on the capital's outskirts, as a rehabilitated individual she was "entitled to the living space [she] previously occupied," which she had not seen since November 1938 when Beria appeared in person at the Government House to oversee the Kosarevs' arrest.⁷⁶⁷ In support her claim Naneishvili-Kosareva cited Resolution 1 of the USSR Supreme Court Plenum from January 22, 1954, which abrogated key articles of the body's December 12,

⁷⁶⁵ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 3288, l. 254.

⁷⁶⁶ On material assistance to other Ordzhonikidze relatives, see Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 1, 78.

⁷⁶⁷ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1100, l. 162.

1940 decree that allowed for tenants who received housing through their places of work to be evicted upon termination of employment; she presumably deduced that, having been exonerated, her status as a worker in good standing had been restored and therefore the grounds for both her dismissal and dislodgment were null and void.⁷⁶⁸ Naneishvili-Kosareva's situation was further complicated by the fact that she was living with her daughter and son-in-law, and she contended that – barring the return of their former home – the trio would be “more comfortable in a space of at least the same area,” as their current lodgings, “but divided into two rooms.”⁷⁶⁹ Mikoian's instruction to I. I. Makarov at the Council of Ministers' Administrative Department – sent only five days later – to “fulfill Naneishvili-Kosareva's request” helped to guarantee that her family's accommodations improved, as such a direct order from the *Sovmin's* deputy chairman would not go unfulfilled by one of the body's functionaries, though there is no indication that they were able to further press their claim to reoccupy their erstwhile apartment.⁷⁷⁰

The direct manner in which Naneishvili-Kosareva attempted to mobilize her rehabilitation stands in stark contrast to the dynamic that historian Christine Varga-Harris has observed among rehabilitees in Leningrad, who were reluctant to foreground their legal status.⁷⁷¹ This distinction could be attributed to Naneishvili-Kosareva's

⁷⁶⁸ See N. K. Morozov, *Sbornik deistvuiushchikh postanovlenii plenuma Verkhovnogo Suda SSSR, 1924-1957* (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo iuridicheskoi literatury, 1958), 128-137.

⁷⁶⁹ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1100, l. 162. Naneishvili-Kosareva's daughter, Elena Aleksandrovna, had been sentenced at the age of nineteen to ten years in the Gulag during the postwar roundup of “enemy” relatives in 1949; Rudenko singled out her case during a report on case reviews of those sentenced for counterrevolutionary crimes to the Central Committee in June 1954; see Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 1, 156-157.

⁷⁷⁰ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1100, l. 162. Around this time Naneishvili-Kosareva also received financial compensation for some of her family's seized property, though Kosarev's pistol collection and his library of over 1,200 books, as well as the sedan that had been assigned to her had disappeared without a trace in the intervening years. See Anton Antonov-Ovseenko, *Beriia* (Sukhum: “Dom pechati,” 2007), 163.

⁷⁷¹ Varga-Harris encountered a “negligible” number of rehabilitation-related appeals, suggesting that “because rehabilitation was a sensitive matter, petitions predicated upon it perhaps ended up in files other than those of the Leningrad city soviet. Clearly, however, individuals *were* reluctant to raise or forefront

revolutionary pedigree, or the fact that she was writing to Mikoian, a sympathetic family friend, rather than an anonymous bureaucrat, though local political realities may also help to account for this apparent disparity. Varga-Harris' research is drawn from Leningrad, where much of the city's *apparatus* proved openly hostile to former political prisoners' interests: the *oblast*' Party boss, Frol Romanovich Kozlov, stated "outright" that his committee would not consider pension claims from the rehabilitated, while housing officials viewed former political prisoners as interlopers and "opportunists," and conspired to keep them off waiting lists for apartments.⁷⁷² While such suspicion toward returnees was undoubtedly present in other municipalities, it does not appear to have been sufficiently prevalent in the capital to dissuade housing-seekers from prominently identifying themselves as rehabilitees, as Naneishvili-Kosareva was by no means anomalous in her readiness to cite her exoneration as grounds for improving her living situation.

Once he was fully rehabilitated in October 1954, Mariia Naneishvili-Kosareva's brother Pavel similarly ventured to Moscow in an attempt to claim an apartment comparable to the 33-square-meter room he had occupied between 1926 and 1936 at the 27th House of the Soviets – formerly the Hotel International at the corner of *ulitsa Gor'kogo* (today's *Tverskaia*) and *Otkhotnyi riad*, which was demolished to make way for the Council of Ministers building, presently the home of the State Duma. Yet Naneishvili was rebuffed the following month by both the Administrative Department of

their rehabilitation when requesting better housing"; see Christine Varga-Harris, "Forging Citizenship on the Home Front: Reviving the Socialist Contract and Constructing Soviet Identity during the Thaw," in *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization*, 108-109.

⁷⁷² Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer*, 54, 87; Harris, *Communism on Tomorrow Street*, 129-130. Harris notes that one functionary, A. I. Sokolov, made exceptions for rehabilitees who were seen to have social merit, such as professors, but most were treated as "undesirable."

the Council of Ministers and the Moscow City Council for lack of formal proof that he had ever been a resident of the building in question. Like his sister he pointed to the January 22 ruling by the Supreme Court Plenum as grounds for his claim, yet in the absence of the requisite documentation the Administrative Department informed him that all the former denizens of the “International” had been transferred to the purview of other organizations, demonstrating that property restitution remained compartmentalized from the legal work of rehabilitation.⁷⁷³ Although Pavel Naneishvili had lost his home due to decisions enforced by the Soviet judiciary, the courts were under no apparent obligation to aid his resettlement efforts, and without hard evidence of his having been a leaseholder at the 27th House of the Soviets, the Administrative Department was similarly free to pass on his case. Thwarted by official avenues of redress, Naneishvili also drew upon his family’s relationship with Mikoian.

In a letter dated December 21, Pavel bemoaned the loss of his apartment and his inability to secure a replacement because “during my 18 years of forced absence from Moscow I didn’t preserve, and was unable to preserve formal proof that I had a room in this building.”⁷⁷⁴ He requested that Mikoian intercede in the matter, provided that it was “not a hindrance” for him, as it would “allow [him] the opportunity to leave Noril’sk in the future.”⁷⁷⁵ Mikoian once again reached out to Makarov and instructed him to “consider Naneishvili P. V.’s petition and call me” on January 12, 1955; less than two weeks later he was informed that “the Moscow City Executive Committee (*Mosgorispolkom*) plans in January of this year to provide Comrade Naneishvili with an apartment of 16-18 square meters,” twice the sanitary norm of nine square meters per

⁷⁷³ GARF f. 9542, op. 1, f. 155, ll. 23-27.

⁷⁷⁴ GARF f. 9542, op. 1, d. 155, l. 28.

⁷⁷⁵ GARF f. 9542, op. 1, d. 155, l. 28ob.

person set by the authorities.⁷⁷⁶ These cases' swift resolution testified not only to Mikoian's ability to procure resources for his clients, but also to the Soviet state's willingness to divert scarce resources to those whose experiences dovetailed with the Party's new anti-Berija narrative.

A month prior to Pavel Naneishvili's legal exoneration, the Gogoberidzes attempted a similar gambit to lay claim to the apartment in the Government House where Levan and Lana had lived for the first half of the 1930s, with little apparent success. The family enlisted two intimates – former Deputy Foreign Commissar Sergei Kavtaradze and Elena Davydovna's husband, noted author and translator Evgenii Germanovich Lundberg – to attest before the People's Court of the *Leningradskii* district that Levan and Lana were registered in apartment 112 at 2 *ulitsa Serafimovicha* until the former's arrest; the family also appended a copy of Levan's rehabilitation certificate and a rough diagram of the apartment's layout, presumably to demonstrate their familiarity with the space in question.⁷⁷⁷ However, at such an early juncture in the post-Stalin period the official channels that mediated such demands were ill-disposed – or ill-prepared – toward the ghosts of the old *nomenklatura*, as indicated by the response Pavel Naneishvili received, and based on the lack of subsequent documentation it appears that in this regard the Gogoberidzes also failed to gain traction with the responsible parties.

Lana Gogoberidze did not go homeless in Moscow for long, however. “One splendid day (*odin prekrasnyi den'*),” as she recalled, Mikoian's secretariat telephoned her and reported that she had been granted, at Mikoian's “initiative,” a one-room apartment in the Council of Ministers' new building on *Frunzenskaia naberezhnaia* in

⁷⁷⁶ GARF f. 9542, op. 1, d. 155, ll. 29-30.

⁷⁷⁷ GARF f. 9542, op. 1, d. 155, ll. 19-22.

place of her previous home at the Government House.⁷⁷⁸ Furthermore, Mikoian dispatched an official car to ferry Lana around Moscow, and, according to his son Stepan, secured her a position at the Institute of Cinematography.⁷⁷⁹ Lana attributed this attentiveness to Mikoian's feelings of "guilt" toward the family of his fallen "comrade," sentiments that evidently were not shared by the new raft of Party heads in Tbilisi around this time.⁷⁸⁰ In an irate letter from August 1955 – the same one in which she discussed the possibility of Kakhiani having survived his captivity – Elena Gogoberidze wrote to lament "yet again" about the state in which Levan's widow, Nutsa, found herself: "Our officials have done absolutely nothing for her (*Nashi nichego, nichego ne sdelali dlia neë*), and she is helpless and morally depressed following her exile, because of judicial humiliations (truly!) in housing issues, and above all, because of her shattered personal life."⁷⁸¹ Without an apartment to call her own years after having returned to Tbilisi from the distant camps, Nutsa was living, unofficially, with her sister, and given her frequent illness and the "tone of relations that has arisen here (*po sozdavshemusia zdes' tonu otnoshenii*), she is hesitant to pursue anything."⁷⁸² As the Georgian leadership had gathered in Moscow for the Party plenum, Elena urged Mikoian – if he happened to see them – to "remember" Nutsa.⁷⁸³ This stark reminder of the dire conditions faced by the majority of former political prisoners also underscores one of the underlying reasons that rehabilitees from outlying republics directed their appeals to the Soviet center, besides Moscow's ultimate control over resource allocations: local elites, who had risen to

⁷⁷⁸ L. Gogoberidze questionnaire.

⁷⁷⁹ Ibid.; Stepan Anastovich Mikoian, *Vospominaniia voennogo letchika-ispytatelia* (Moskva: Tsentrpoligraf, 2014), 45. Stepan independently confirms that his father intervened to find Lana housing.

⁷⁸⁰ L. Gogoberidze questionnaire.

⁷⁸¹ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1168, l. 97.

⁷⁸² Ibid.

⁷⁸³ Ibid.

prominence during late Stalinism, had little to no incentive to advocate for the interests of the survivors of those whom they had supplanted.

One of the most prevalent themes across requests for improved housing and material assistance was the desperate need of formerly repressed family units to reestablish “normal” conditions of existence.⁷⁸⁴ What went unarticulated in these appeals, however, was what precisely constituted “normality.” This question was particularly pronounced for survivors of posthumously rehabilitated elites, as over the previous two decades they had experienced vertiginous shifts in their standard of living. Many went from occupying elaborately furnished multi-room apartments to confinement in unheated Gulag barracks, and upon their release and return to Soviet urban centers often found themselves in squalid *kommunalki*, crammed alongside ordinary workers and their families. In bemoaning their housing arrangements, petitioners to Mikoian implied that living conditions that were the quotidian reality for most Soviet city-dwellers were not only unacceptable, but posed a direct hindrance to the resumption of the life trajectories that they had been on prior to their relatives’ illegal arrest and execution. This suggests that even in the wake of extraordinary privation, elite returnees’ sense of entitlement remained largely unshaken.

Pavla Galkina, who originally contacted Mikoian in February 1954 regarding her late husband Artak Stamboltsian, reached out to him again in late November of that same year with a litany of complaints regarding her current living arrangements. In Galkina’s words, “extreme necessity” compelled her to seek Mikoian’s aid “in obtaining housing

⁷⁸⁴ As Fitzpatrick notes, the demand for “normal living conditions” was a staple of requests addressed to Soviet government officials from their elite clients dating back to the 1920s and 1930s, reflecting the distributive function of patronage. See Fitzpatrick, *Tear Off the Masks*, 160.

suitable for normal existence.”⁷⁸⁵ At the time, Galkina was working as an assistant director at a research institute while writing her doctoral dissertation, and was living along with her university student daughter and septuagenarian mother in “an old wooden building that lacks the most basic amenities – running water, plumbing, or a separate or shared kitchen. The three of us occupy one fifteen square-meter room, which serves as a living space, kitchen, pantry, and a study space.”⁷⁸⁶ The discomfort of these cramped quarters was compounded by the fact that their room was “entirely pervious to sound (*zvukopronitsaema*) because it is separated from neighboring apartments and the shared corridor only by plank partitions; the daughter’s efforts to practice violin were met by the neighbors turning up their radios “to drown [her] out,” forcing her to stop, “sobbing in despair.”⁷⁸⁷ Similarly, the constant noise in the building hindered Galkina’s scholarship, and her mother was “denied repose” by the “light and rustling” resulting from Galkina and her daughter’s need to work at home “every day until at least 1 am.”⁷⁸⁸ Galkina expressed dismay as to why she, who “never sullied [herself] in social-political life, being a member of the Komsomol since 1919 and in the Party since 1927,” the wife of an Old Bolshevik who had been “undone (*pogublen*) by enemies of the people in 1937” and had since “been fully posthumously rehabilitated,” could not “obtain normal conditions of existence.”⁷⁸⁹

The desire for a “normal existence” was the most prominent recurring theme in Galkina’s appeal, as she insisted to Mikoian – somewhat hyperbolically – that she and her family were not after material “comfort (we’ve never known it), but the opportunity

⁷⁸⁵ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1168, l. 106.

⁷⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁷ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1168, ll. 106-107.

⁷⁸⁸ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1168, l. 107.

⁷⁸⁹ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1168, ll. 106-107.

to live and work normally, as intellectual work can never be confined by the limits of work hours and facilities.”⁷⁹⁰ However, in light of the living conditions described by Galkina, which would have been immediately familiar to denizens of Moscow’s postwar *kommunalki*, and the privileged position that she had enjoyed as member of Stamboltsian’s family, it appears that comfort – at least relative to the living standards enjoyed by most Soviet urbanites – is precisely what she was seeking. Her notion of what constituted “normal” life was indelibly informed by the perquisites she enjoyed prior to her husband’s repression, and she was determined to leverage his rehabilitation as a means of securing the concessions to which she had been accustomed.

Galkina’s previous requests to city and regional housing authorities, filed under the aegis of the Ministry of Culture, had all been denied because her current space’s meterage was regarded as “around the norms” assigned to a three-person family unit, and for the “hackneyed (*trafaretnyi*)” reason of “lack of available housing.”⁷⁹¹ Galkina – confident of Mikoian’s ability to circumvent such bureaucratic obstacles based on his handling of Stamboltsian’s rehabilitation – approached him with the request to resolve her domestic dilemma, and, in keeping with his past conduct, Mikoian took notice. At the end of December Moscow City Executive Committee Chairman Mikhail Alekseevich Iasnov received a directive to “satisfy Comrade Galkina’s request,” Mikoian’s imprimatur signaling that that her expectations were not out of line with what the state – or at least one of its most powerful representatives – considered reasonable.⁷⁹² The issue of restoring normality – and the tension over what that term constituted for the families of

⁷⁹⁰ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1168, l. 107.

⁷⁹¹ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1168, ll. 106-107.

⁷⁹² GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1168, l. 106. A Union-level pension in Stamboltsian’s name was also created on January 1, 1956; see GARF, f. 10249, op. 4, d. 2715.

repressed elites – would be articulated in subsequent appeals to the authorities from others in Galkina’s position.

At the time of her appeal to Mikoian in April 1955 both Ketevan Mamieevna Orakhelashvili-Mikeladze and her parents, Mamiia and Mariia Orakhelashvili, had been legally rehabilitated, but she had not seen her native city of Tbilisi for nearly eighteen years. In early November 1937, shortly after her parents’ arrests, Ketevan and her husband – the artistic director of the Georgian State Opera and Ballet Theater Evgenii Semenovich Mikeladze – were also taken into custody by the Georgian NKVD, leaving behind their three-year-old daughter and infant son. The children were promptly evicted from the family apartment and their belongings seized without any provision being made for their future housing. Orakhelashvili-Mikeladze’s sister-in-law, Tamara Mikeladze, sheltered them for the next fifteen years, until the adolescents were reunited with their mother in Kazakh exile.⁷⁹³ Though the Mikeladze children and their aunt returned to Tbilisi in 1954, the exonerated Orakhelashvili-Mikeladze was prevented from doing so by the fact that the charges against her second husband – whom she married while in exile – had yet to be dismissed.⁷⁹⁴

Writing from the settlement of Taincha in Northern Kazakhstan, Orakhelashvili-Mikeladze’s primary concern was for the welfare of her immediate family in the

⁷⁹³ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1170, l. 67. Ketevan Orakhelashvili-Mikeladze led one of the more star-crossed lives of early Soviet history: a renowned Kremlin beauty in the 1920s, she was intended – according to Miklós Kun – to marry Stalin’s son from his first marriage, Iakov Dzhugashvili, but tired of the shy, retiring Iakov and married Mikeladze instead. Later in life she appeared in Lana Gogoberidze’s film *Several Interviews on Personal Questions*, and provided the inspiration for the lead character in the *glasnost*’ film *Repentance*. See Miklós Kun, *Stalin: An Unknown Portrait* (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2003), 346-348.

⁷⁹⁴ Orlando Figes mistakenly claims that while imprisoned at *ALZhIR* Orakhelashvili-Mikeladze entered into a relationship and began a family with a camp guard, when in actuality her second husband was a fellow prisoner and former agronomist – one of her reasons for writing to Mikoian was to help secure his rehabilitation. See Orlando Figes, *The Whisperers: Private Life in Stalin’s Russia* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007), 364-365.

Georgian capital, who were living “in a small room that belongs to [Tamara Mikeladze] with no daylight or heating, without even basic necessities (*predmetov pervoi neobkhodimosti*), seeing as when they were deported from Georgia on December 26, 1951 all of their ‘property’ was inventoried and valued at 3,600 rubles.”⁷⁹⁵ To ameliorate this dire situation, Orakhelashvili-Mikeladze requested the restoration of her family’s “illegally seized” apartment in Tbilisi and their “illegally confiscated property and valuables, or suitable compensation,” and that the state “provide financial help to my children [...] until the completion of their educations, taking into account the fact that their father, whom they lost as a result of the criminal actions of Beria’s gang, undoubtedly would have provided them a normal life and good upbringing, as would have my parents Orakhelashvili M. D. and Orakhelashvili M. O., had they not suffered the same fate.”⁷⁹⁶

Here Orakhelashvili-Mikeladze made explicit the paternalistic rationale behind restitution with the contention that her children would have enjoyed a certain standard of living and cultivation had their family not been subjected to repression that “already extended to the third generation of [her] family”⁷⁹⁷; it therefore fell to the authorities to set this disruption to rights. Orakhelashvili-Mikeladze signed off by explaining that she had turned specifically to Mikoian “in the hope that in the past you knew my parents better than others and that you must have warm memories of them (*ne mozhete ne imet’ o nikh teplykh vospominanii*) as honest people who were dedicated to the Party,” a trenchant reminder of the ties of obligation that bound Mikoian to the fate of the

⁷⁹⁵ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1170, l. 68.

⁷⁹⁶ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1170, ll. 68-69.

⁷⁹⁷ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1170, l. 67.

remaining Orakhelashvilis.⁷⁹⁸ After meeting with Orakhelashvili-Mikeladze in person, Mikoian drafted an order to the Georgian Council of Ministers' chairman requesting that he "consider K. M. Orakhelashvili-Mikeladze's petition to grant Mikeladze's children pensions until they complete university."⁷⁹⁹ In this way the Soviet government assumed responsibility for the uplift and education of a select few whose lives had been derailed by the Terror.

Although Mikhail and Igor' Kedrov were two of the first individuals to be posthumously exculpated for having stood against Beria, their survivors – including Mikhail's eldest son, the philosopher Bonifatii Kedrov, Igor's wife Raisa Fedorovna Melikhova, and their children Boris and Natal'ia – still acutely felt the effects of the privations to which they had been subjected as part of Beria's "reprisals." In a secret memorandum from August 1, 1955 to Petr Georgievich Moskatov, Chairman of the Council of Ministers' Personal Pension Committee, Rudenko outlined the dire conditions in which Melikhova and her teenage children found themselves and proposed a remedy:

Melikhova R. F. is in a difficult financial situation, as she underwent breast cancer surgery, after which [she] was declared an invalid of the second group [...] Given Melikhova's difficult financial situation, her practical inability to work, and also the special role of Kedrov M. S. and Kedrov I. M. in exposing the enemy of the people Beria, I am petitioning that Melikhova R. F. be allocated a pension for life, and Kedrov B. I. and Kedrova N. I. until they complete their higher education.⁸⁰⁰

The pension committee took up Rudenko's recommendation four days later and resolved "to establish from August 1, 1955 a Union-level personal pension for the family of the deceased Kedrov I. M. in the amount" of 600 rubles per month for Melikhova "for

⁷⁹⁸ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1170, l. 69.

⁷⁹⁹ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1170, ll. 72, 66. Presumably the funds for these pensions were to be provided by the Georgian *Sovmin*, though Mikoian did not specify the source.

⁸⁰⁰ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4001, l. 45.

the duration of her disability” and 400 rubles per month each for Boris and Natal’ia until they either finished their educations or reached the age of 23.⁸⁰¹ In the absence of a *paterfamilias* whose personal contribution to the Soviet project should have guaranteed his family financial security and comfort, the state took it upon itself to provide for the needs of Igor’s wife and children for as long as they would have been dependent on him, had he survived Beria’s wrath. This was entirely in keeping with established Soviet practice, as beginning in July 1920 individuals who “rendered particular services” to the Bolshevik cause were entitled to retirement pensions in the event of illness or infirmity; these benefits would go “to their families in case of their death.”⁸⁰² Though the financial provisions of such pensions were modified extensively over the following decades, the grounds remained consistent. In Igor’ Kedrov’s case, it was only after his innocence had been established, years following his death, that his “particular service” to the state in the form of the “special role” he played in documenting Beria’s crimes came to be appreciated, thereby obliging the Soviet government to make provisions for his family’s welfare.

Sanitary Norms: Luxury Housing as the Site of Recuperation

The acute medical crisis that Rudenko cited to secure financial aid for Raisa Melikhova found analogous expression in Mikoian’s clients’ demands for the restoration of their erstwhile abodes. As Polly Jones has aptly described, the public culture of Khrushchev’s “Thaw” was suffused with concern for healing the psychic wounds and

⁸⁰¹ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4001, l. 46.

⁸⁰² Mervyn Matthews, *Privilege in the Soviet Union: A Study of Elite Life-Styles under Communism* (Florence, US: Routledge, 2013), 86. It should be noted that the rate Melikova received of 600 rubles per month was the maximum under regulations introduced in 1949; see *idem.*, 104.

other traumas of the Terror years.⁸⁰³ Christine Varga-Harris has built upon Jones' analysis, which is primarily concerned with the literary world, and extended it to the housing sphere, noting that for housing-seekers in Leningrad "the opportunity to 'settle down' would enable them, as well as their family members, to restore or create the sense of place they needed to 'move forward' with their lives."⁸⁰⁴ For a large number of those who had been driven out of the desirable homes during the Terror and since returned to Moscow, one of the most enduring holdovers of their repression was continued physical infirmity, and the clearest path to recovery lay behind the walls of *Sovmin*-administered apartment buildings, with financial security assured through government payouts.

On January 20, 1955 the daughter of Mark Levitin, a former deputy of Mikoian's at the People's Commissariat of the Food Industry, expressed concern about the wellbeing of her mother, F. A. Dorfman, who had only recently returned to Moscow after her own exoneration and was "completely unable to work (*nerabotosposobna*)," requiring "long periods of bed rest."⁸⁰⁵ According to Levitina, the only way to restore her mother's health was through "a significant improvement in our living conditions," which at the time consisted of a single room for the whole family; Dorfman had already solicited "the return of our apartment in the Government House" or the provision of "a different apartment in exchange" from Makarov at the Housing Directorate, but no response was forthcoming.⁸⁰⁶ In late February Mikoian brought Levitina's case to the attention of Dmitrii Vasil'evich Krupin and Anatolii Vasil'evich Korobov, the chief administrators (*upravliaiushchii delami*) of the Central Committee and USSR Council of

⁸⁰³ Polly Jones, "Memories of Terror or Terrorizing Memories? Terror, Trauma and Survival in Soviet Culture of the Thaw," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 86, 2 (April 2008): 346-371.

⁸⁰⁴ Varga-Harris, *Stories of House and Home*, 162.

⁸⁰⁵ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1169, l. 79.

⁸⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

Ministers, respectively, as they were best positioned to effect immediate change in Dorfman and Levitina's domestic arrangements. Though there is no immediate indication of how Krupin and Korobov responded to this mandate, Levitina's conflation of her mother's wellbeing with the resumption of their residence at the Government House or a suitable replacement exemplifies the presumption common to former members of the *nomenklatura* that they would most readily be restored to full health in the peace and solitude of their apartment.

In a lengthy letter from May 17, 1955, Mariia Abramovna Maksimova related how the arrest of her husband, Konstantin Gordeevich Maksimov – another Mikoian comrade – resulted in her and her daughter being deprived of their health and any semblance of security. The Maksimov's daughter, Zinaida, was left in the care of a nanny after her parents' were arrested in late 1937, at which point she fell ill with pulmonary tuberculosis, was evicted from the family apartment, and “denied her effects, furniture, and any sort (*kakoi-libo*) of material or emotional aid.”⁸⁰⁷ Mother and daughter were reunited upon the former's release from a camp in 1940, and Mariia Abramovna, a doctor by training, was able to secure treatment for Zinaida, who at the time was “dying of tuberculosis”; in 1953 she had an operation to remove her left lung, which allowed her health to improve to the point that she was later able to enroll in the Institute of Foreign Languages, but that same year heart disease forced Mariia Abramovna to retire her commission as a military medical officer and she went on pension as a second-category invalid.⁸⁰⁸ Maksimova made it clear to Mikoian that inactivity did not suit her: “My illness oppresses me – before I was never weak and always worked. I understand that my

⁸⁰⁷ GARF f. 9542, op. 1, d. 155, l. 54.

⁸⁰⁸ GARF f. 9542, op. 1, d. 155, l. 54-55.

ailment (*nedug*) is tied to suffering (*perezhitim*), and upon being cured I could once again be useful, as I have thirty years' experience in medical and scientific work.”⁸⁰⁹ For Maksimova, her ability to transcend the lingering effects of the Terror and once again become a contributing member of society was intimately bound up with reoccupying a familiar space in Moscow.

Following Maksimovs' rehabilitations (posthumous in Konstantin Gordeevich's case, though this was still unknown to his wife), Mariia Abramovna was “advised to apply (*vozbudit' khodataistvo*) for the return of our former apartment,” which was occupied by one Ryzhenkov, an employee of the *Sovmin*'s Administrative Department.⁸¹⁰ The *Sovetskii* district people's judge summoned Maksimova and Ryzhenkov to make them both aware of her right to the apartment, and the Party Control Committee reiterated these instructions. With evident discomfort Mariia Abramovna reported that despite Ryzhenkov's “warm” treatment of her and his assurance that he would “take care of everything,” he had yet to take “energetic measures because he is otherwise occupied (*iz-za zaniatnosti*).”⁸¹¹ Maksimova found it “somewhat awkward (*nelovko*)” to “hurry” Ryzhenkov out of the apartment, but she cast his inactivity as a direct impediment to her and her daughter's recovery: “the housing conditions in which we're currently living are very difficult (*tiazhely*) and our installation at our former hearth and home (*pepelishche*) will help us, to a certain extent, to physically and emotionally recuperate (*okrepnut'*).”⁸¹² This sentiment is directly in line with Auslander's observation that Jewish returnees to

⁸⁰⁹ GARF f. 9542, op. 1, d. 155, l. 56.

⁸¹⁰ Ibid. Maksimova's first request was that Mikoian assist her in finding her husband, who by then was dead nearly eighteen years. Ryzhenkov's presence in a presumably desirable apartment previously assigned to an Old Bolshevik family suggests that Housing Directorate workers reserved some of the most coveted spaces seized during the purges for their own use.

⁸¹¹ Ibid.

⁸¹² Ibid.

Paris “cited the trauma of flight and the intense desire and need to reclaim their homes in order to both mourn past lost lives and imagine future ones.”⁸¹³ With this in mind Maksimova pressed Mikoian “to instruct Comrade Ryzhenkov to expedite our move ‘home,’” the strategically placed quotation marks suggesting that she herself understood that in this context the term implied far more than a physical space.⁸¹⁴

To further speed along their convalescence, Maksimova bade Mikoian to arrange for her and Zinaida to receive treatment in a sanatorium, which her “meager means and limited opportunities [did] not permit,” reminding him that Zinaida had “been on the edge of life and death because of extensive (*obshirnogo*) lung disease.”⁸¹⁵ Maksimova’s final request involved her daughter’s education: Zinaida had only been well enough to enroll at an institute in 1954, and required four more years of study to receive her diploma. However, her academic pursuits had been disrupted by “the presence in our family of yet another dependent – a profoundly aged (*glubokoi starushki*)” 85-year-old female relative, which obliged Zinaida to “work, and as a teacher at that” to support the entire household.⁸¹⁶ Operating within the paternalistic logic of the moment, Maksimova made the “major request” of Mikoian to arrange a pension for Zinaida, “the daughter of an Old Bolshevik [...] even for the period of her study at the Institute, so she can complete her education and feel solid ground under her feet.”⁸¹⁷ Once again, in the absence of a father figure, it was hoped that the party-state would serve as a surrogate source of stability.

⁸¹³ Auslander, “Coming Home?,” 258. Varga-Harris makes a similar observation: “in addition to qualitatively improving their daily life, the opportunity to ‘settle down’ would enable [petitioners], as well as their family members, to restore or create the sense of place they needed to ‘move forward’ with their lives.” Varga-Harris, *Stories of House and Home*, 162.

⁸¹⁴ GARF f. 9542, op. 1, d. 155, l. 56. Maksimova took pains to note that the apartment did “exceed existing housing-sanitary norms, and I am not asking for one meter more than what is our due (*chto nam polagaetsia*).”

⁸¹⁵ Ibid.

⁸¹⁶ Ibid.

⁸¹⁷ GARF f. 9542, op. 1, d. 155, l. 57.

Late that July Mikoian forwarded Maksimova's petition to Moskatov at the Personal Pension Committee, recalling Maksimov as "a good worker from the USSR People's Commissariat of Internal and Foreign Trade," and recommending that Moskatov consider providing Zinaida a pension; at the beginning of the following month a Union-level pension was established in Maksimov's name.⁸¹⁸ That a copy of Maksimova's letter was found in the Administrative Department's files suggests that Mikoian also sought to ameliorate their housing situation, and though there is no indication of how, or whether this particular issue was resolved, the fact that the Administrative Department was at least partially under Mikoian's purview suggests that this claim could not have gone entirely ignored.⁸¹⁹

The imperative of securing assistance from the party-state led some survivors to air mental health struggles that under most circumstances would have been considered taboo in Soviet society. Rozaliia Isaakovna Lipskaia's husband, Nikolai Pavlovich Chaplin, had been an early First Secretary of the Komsomol Central Committee who also put in time in the Transcaucasian Party *apparatus* prior to his repression. Mikoian took an active hand in securing Chaplin's posthumous rehabilitation; even though the extended Chaplin family had addressed its story of "woe" to Khrushchev, it was Mikoian who signed off on it with Rudenko.⁸²⁰ In her July 19, 1955 letter, Lipskaia noted how "deeply touched" she was by Mikoian's "warmth and concern," and effusively assured that his

⁸¹⁸ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1169, l. 108; GARF f. 10249, op. 4, d. 982. Earlier that year Moskatov had recommended that pensions for rehabilitees and their survivors be made more generous, and that the system for awarding them be standardized. The Presidium accepted his first proposal, but rejected the second, with Suslov stating that "each case should be considered on its own merits, with careful attention paid to the particular circumstances of the individual in question." See Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer*, 55.

⁸¹⁹ Mikoian remained engaged with the Maksimov family through at least 1964, when he recommended that the Central Committee's Ideological Department comply with Maksimova's request to arrange the publication of an article in honor of what would have been her husband's 70th birthday. See RGANI f. 5, op. 55, d. 67, ll. 155-175.

⁸²⁰ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4001, l. 7.

“heartfelt response (*serdechnoe otnoshenie*) to the Chaplin family’s woe will never be forgotten.”⁸²¹ Prompted by Mikoian’s “sensitivity,” Rozaliia Abramovna ventured to address “things that in my position are uncomfortable and difficult to call to mind” with him.⁸²² She was confident that Mikoian would not “condemn” her for stating that in light of her own infirmity and the “constrictions” on the lives of her children, particularly her daughter, a patient at a psychiatric clinic who “after a grave illness was rendered an invalid,” the provision of a one-time payment and pensions for her family would do much to ease their misery, and inquired whether there was anything he could do to bring about such benefits.⁸²³ Presumably prompted by Mikoian, or those on his staff, Lipskaia reproduced the major points of this correspondence three days later in a concise, officially-worded petition still addressed to Mikoian, but stripped of all the previous iteration’s endearments.⁸²⁴ What carried through, though, was the emphasis on the family’s unwarranted impoverishment and its consequences for their wellbeing:

From the moment of my husband’s arrest until the present time, in addition to emotional suffering, I have endured great material hardships. I have two children – a son Boris, who just graduated from the Mining Institute, and a sick daughter Klara, who is registered at the Kiev District Psychiatric Clinic. I myself suffer from angina and with difficulty work as a nurse at the Moscow Council Polyclinic No. 13.

I ask you to lend me assistance by issuing a one-time payment.⁸²⁵

Within several days of receiving Lipskaia’s revised missive Mikoian forwarded copies to Moscatov regarding the pensions and Krupin for the lump sum assistance; in memos to

⁸²¹ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1169, l. 65.

⁸²² Ibid.

⁸²³ Ibid.

⁸²⁴ This is immediately reminiscent of the pair of appeals from Rita Kornblium cited in Chapter One. It is possible that Mikoian believed an impersonal appeal was more likely to sit well with functionaries, though he also might have been concerned about perceptions of excessive favoritism.

⁸²⁵ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1169, l. 63.

both he identified Chaplin as a “former candidate member of the Central Committee.”⁸²⁶ With this action, Mikoian gave tacit endorsement to the notion that the physiological and psychological wounds of the state’s betrayal of its loyal servitors warranted could be mitigated through financial recompense.

As with Maksimova, Aleksandra Konstantinovna Volkova – writing to Mikoian in December 1955 – envisaged a return to the luxurious environs of the domiciles built for the Soviet elite as key to surmounting the enduring consequences of state repression. In the aftermath of the arrests of Volkova’s husband – onetime deputy to the People’s Commissar of Light Industry Petr Iakovlevich Volkov – and herself, all of her family’s “property and belongings were seized and confiscated from our sealed apartment at our previous place of residence,” apartment 351 in the Government House.⁸²⁷ In response to her inquiries about the disposition of her property, Volkova was informed that “a portion of the property [had been] sold based on the first estimate at very cheap, obviously low prices,” while their “major property was not included on the inventory, thus nothing was left from the apartment.”⁸²⁸

Without any meaningful assets to her name, Volkova “fervently ask[ed]” Mikoian to “order” the provision of relief to her family of six in the form of “a living space, preferably in the USSR *Sovmin* building in Moscow at 110/120 *Frunzenskaia naberezhnaia*, or in the Government House at 2 *ulitsa Serafimovicha*, which would make our difficult lives easier, as in this building we would be guaranteed complete calm and peace of mind after enduring serious trauma.”⁸²⁹ Additionally necessary to efface this

⁸²⁶ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1169, ll. 63-64.

⁸²⁷ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1168, l 77.

⁸²⁸ Ibid.

⁸²⁹ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1168, ll. 77-78.

past, in Volkova's estimation, was "monetary assistance for the acquisition of clothes, belongings and property that my family and I need [...] the establishment of a personal pension for me through my husband" and "required [medical] treatment" for herself and her immediate relatives.⁸³⁰ Perhaps as a means of securing Mikoian's compliance – or as a reflection of his prior track record with other rehabilitees – Volkova closed with an expression "in advance" of "deep appreciation and gratitude for your sympathetic, kind treatment of and help for my children and me – the family of a rehabilitated Communist."⁸³¹ Mikoian quickly determined that her claims warranted support, and before the year was out he mandated that Moscatov "expedite" Volkova's pension application and that Korobov "fulfill as possible (*po vozmozhnosti udovletvorit*)" her housing requirements.⁸³²

Remarkably – though as other cases will demonstrate, not uniquely – Volkova's stated preference for being rehoused at the official Council of Ministers residence on *Frunzenskaia naberezhnaia* was deemed within the realm of possibility and ultimately honored. A memorandum written by the deputy chief of the Administrative Department from late August 1956 ordered the Moscow police (*militsiia*) passport division to register (*propisat*) Volkova and her daughter, along with the latter's two children, in apartment 177 of this fashionable building, while her mother and son were allowed to maintain their residency at the space that all six members of the extended family previously occupied.⁸³³ While it was rare that rehabilitees were able to dictate the terms of their own restitution to the point that Volkova did, the outcome of Volkova's overture to Mikoian indicates that

⁸³⁰ GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1168, l. 78.

⁸³¹ Ibid.

⁸³² GARF f. 5446, op. 120, d. 1168, l. 77.

⁸³³ GARF f. 9542, op. 1, d. 155, l. 90.

the Party leaders and bureaucrats responsible for administering and directing the Soviet state's massive distributive apparatus proved – albeit in limited circumstances – to be unexpectedly attuned and responsive to the specifics of entreaties from Old Bolsheviks' survivors for relocation.

Regimes of Redress: Courts, Bureaucrats, and the *Kvartirnyi vopros*

While the previously cited sources suggest that many if not most requests for housing were handled without judicial intervention, in some instances Soviet courts did indeed mediate between the recently rehabilitated and the current occupants of disputed dwellings.⁸³⁴ Through December 1937, the Latvian Civil War-era Red Army commander Reingol'd Berzin, his wife Gil'degart Dimze, and their daughters Ariia and Margarita lived in two rooms at 13 *ulitsa Vesnina* (near the present-day Italian embassy on what is now *Denezhnyi pereulok*), but were dispossessed in connection with Berzin's arrest and subsequent execution in March 1938.⁸³⁵ Despite their parents' status as enemies of the people the daughters were allowed to remain in the building, but moved into a single room less than half the size of their previous domicile.⁸³⁶ Following her own imprisonment – but prior to her husband's exoneration – Dimze brought suit to evict the current residents, one A. G. Trofimova and her family, from her former apartment. Dimze

⁸³⁴ The RSFSR Supreme Court ruled in 1962 that because members of dacha cooperatives did not actually own the structures, but only had a right to their use, that the son of the posthumously rehabilitated Savitskii was denied the return of the dacha where his family previously stayed, and was only entitled to a reimbursement equal to the value of his father's share in the cooperative. See Donald D. Barry, "Soviet Housing Law: The Norms and Their Application," in *Soviet Law after Stalin, Part I: The Citizen and the State in Contemporary Soviet Law*, ed. Donald D. Barry, George Ginsburgs, and Peter B. Maggs (Leyden: A. W. Sijthoff, 1977), 17.

⁸³⁵ Reingol'd Berzin is frequently conflated in historical works with fellow Latvian Bolshevik Edouard Berzin, who was an early commandant of the Dal'stroy camp at Kolyma, though the former never worked in the Gulag system. The title of Ariia's memoir of the period prior to her father's arrest, which was posted by a (purported) relative on a Russian art web forum, is entitled "Dom nomer trinadtsat'."

⁸³⁶ GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 138, l. 28. Berzin's two rooms together measured some 46.79 square meters, while the single room that Ariia and Margarita were granted was only 21.4 square meters; these figures became a point of contention as the case progressed over the course of 1955.

invoked the same January 1954 Supreme Court Plenum decree Naneishvili-Kosareva named to support her claim, which the people's court in Moscow's Kiev District apparently found persuasive. On December 18, the court upheld Dimze's suit, and ordered that Trofimova be displaced and resettled into the single room that Dimze's daughters occupied, with the understanding that she would be apportioned a larger living space elsewhere.⁸³⁷ Dimze's victory was short-lived, however, as procedural errors led the verdict to be overturned the following September.

In March 1955 Trofimova contacted the Moscow Department of Registration and Allocation of Living Space to complain that the 25-square-meter apartment she had been promised in the court's decision had yet to materialize. Previously unaware of the lawsuit and the relevant ruling, the department made its displeasure evident in a memo to USSR Supreme Court Chairman Anatolii Volin from July 29. The department's deputy chief urged Volin to sign on to his organization's protest to overturn the lower court's ruling on the grounds that its representatives had been improperly excluded from the earlier proceedings.⁸³⁸ Although the department raised no objections to Trofimova's initial eviction, because she was living in a space deemed sufficient for one adult and two children and registering her in a different region would "lead to a violation of the passport regime," it pushed Volin to "[rescind] the contested decision with regard to the portion referring to the department's obligation to provide Trofimova a second room."⁸³⁹

The Moscow City Court Presidium heard Trofimova's appeal on September 27 and overturned the December 1954 verdict on the grounds that the exclusion of the Department of Registration and Allocation of Living Space from the previous trial

⁸³⁷ GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 138, l. 26.

⁸³⁸ GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 138, ll. 26-27.

⁸³⁹ GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 138, l. 27.

constituted a breach of the RSFSR Code of Civil Procedure. The case was remanded to the people's court for final adjudication, with the understanding that the Moscow City Executive Committee's housing department would be involved in deliberations.⁸⁴⁰ The Dimze family, which now consisted of five members, had enjoyed nine months of relative comfort in their reclaimed home when they were informed on October 6 that they once again had to vacate the premises and return to the single, 21-square-meter room. Ariia brought this situation to the attention of Kliment Voroshilov, who had served with her father during the Civil War and took an active part in his rehabilitation – even going so far as to provide a photograph of Berzin to his surviving relatives – in the hope that he could either intervene in the People's Court hearing or help the family secure a suitable domicile in the event that the judge did not decide in their favor.⁸⁴¹ Though it is unclear how precisely the court ruled, the Dimzes' judicial frustrations are emblematic of the inconsistently applied policies, confusion, and infighting among various state organs that marred early Soviet restitution efforts to the families of the posthumously exculpated.

The absence of a standardized policy outlining the Soviet government's obligations before rehabilitated individuals afforded bureaucrats a great deal of leeway in reviewing petitions, frustrating the ambitions of appellants who had what appeared to be strong grounds for recompense. In keeping with his status as a leading figure within the Soviet judiciary, onetime Procurator General People's Commissar of Justice Nikolai Krylenko, his second wife, Zinadia Zhelezniak, and their children were housed in the 1930s at the famed Constructivist *Narkomfin* (People's Commissariat of Finance) building, just outside Moscow's Garden Ring. However, Krylenko ran afoul of one of his

⁸⁴⁰ GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 138, l. 28-29. The presidium transferred the case from the Second District of the People's Court to its Third, likely to avoid potential conflicts of interest.

⁸⁴¹ GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 138, ll. 30-31.

successors as head of the Procuracy, Andrei Vyshinskii, and was arrested at the height of the Terror in January 1938; the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court sentenced him to death on July 29 that same year.⁸⁴² Following Krylenko's conviction his remaining family was ejected from their desirable apartment as "family members of an enemy of the people." In October 1954 his widow appealed to the Central Committee seeking his rehabilitation, which was ultimately realized the following August; that same month Rudenko addressed himself to Korobov at the *Sovmin* on Zhelezniak's behalf.⁸⁴³ When informed of her husband's exoneration, Zhelezniak made a point of emphasizing to Rudenko the "dire conditions" in which she and her family of four were living.⁸⁴⁴ Apparently eager to intervene on behalf of one of his fallen predecessors, who already in the early 1930s had warned of concentrating too much power in the hands of the secret police, the procurator general requested that Korobov "render N. V. KRYLENKO's family help in obtaining the requisite living space."⁸⁴⁵

At this same time Rudenko's deputy Vladimir Afanas'evich Boldyrev wrote to Minister of Higher Education Viacheslav Petrovich Eliutin with a further complaint from Zhelezniak. One of her sons with Krylenko, Sergei— who was living under his mother's last name to avoid association with his "criminal" father — had attempted to enroll the previous year at Moscow's Ordzhonikidze Geological Prospecting Institute, but was

⁸⁴² GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4001, l. 116. On the dispute between Vyshinskii and Krylenko, see Eugene Huskey, "Vyshinskii, Krylenko, and the Shaping of the Soviet Legal Order," *Slavic Review* 3/4 (Autumn – Winter 1987): 414-428.

⁸⁴³ Aleksandr Zviagintsev and Iurii Orlov, *Prokurory dvukh epokh: Andrei Vyshinskii i Roman Rudenko* (Moskva: OLMA-PRESS, 2001), 108; for Rudenko's report to the Central Committee on Krylenko's case from May 11, 1955, see Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 1, 217-218, 403 fn19.

⁸⁴⁴ GARF f. 8131, op 32, d. 4001, l. 116.

⁸⁴⁵ Ibid. On Krylenko's opposition to the "Chekaization" of the police, see David Shearer, *Policing Stalin's Socialism: Repression and Social Order in the Soviet Union, 1924-1953* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 109. This is not to suggest that Krylenko was a principled opponent of state terror, as he vigorously prosecuted Oppositionists and other perceived threats, but his tenure was held up in the 1950s and 1960s as exemplary of socialist legality prior to Beria et al's corruption.

prevented from doing so by the mandatory committee when it was discovered that his father had been “convicted of anti-Soviet activities.”⁸⁴⁶ Boldyrev explained that because Krylenko’s conviction was predicated on “falsified materials” the Military Collegium had “fully rehabilitated him,” and therefore asked that Eliutin “consider the possibility” of allowing Sergei Zhelezniak to matriculate at the Geological Prospecting Institute; it bears mentioning that Boldyrev did not object to such stigmatization in principle, only to its application in the case of a now-undeserving subject.⁸⁴⁷ Although there is no response from the Ministry of Higher Education on the matter preserved in the Procuracy’s *fond*, the Council of Ministers’ Administrative Department’s handling of Rudenko’s initial petition demonstrates the difficulties faced even by those who received direct support from the highest levels of the Soviet state.

In a blunt memo dated August 29, 1955, a representative of the *Sovmin* Administrative Department rejected outright Rudenko’s proposal to find suitable housing for Zhelezniak as “impossible (*ne imeet vozmozhnosti*).”⁸⁴⁸ No further explanation was provided for the dismissal, and there is no indication that the Procuracy pursued the matter past this point. Even though Krylenko’s prior residency at the *Narkomfin* building could have easily been established, once the Administrative Department made its unwillingness to cooperate evident the Zhelezniaks’ appeal was rendered a dead letter. It is unclear whether Zhelezniak and her children were able to successfully press their claim at a later juncture, but the Procuracy continued to keep tabs on Krylenko’s direct relations. A report from October 1956 drafted by the Chief Military Procuracy detailed the fates of Krylenko’s siblings, including a brother who also faced execution and three

⁸⁴⁶ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4001, 118.

⁸⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁸ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4001, l. 117.

sisters, two of whom were sentenced to eight years in the Gulag, and one of whom was confined to a psychiatric hospital. Even though the courts eventually cleared both of the sisters who “sat” for eight years of any supposed wrongdoing neither was able to secure a living space in Moscow, and both were staying “in private apartments or with acquaintances.”⁸⁴⁹ In this way, injustices acknowledged by the central authorities continued to severely disrupt the lives of those who had been wrongfully persecuted for the better part of two decades. In an attempt to rectify this situation, Party and state bodies collaborated over the course of 1954 and 1955 to draft a decree that committed the government to honor certain claims from the rehabilitated and their families.

Introduced into force on September 8, 1955, the Council of Ministers’ Resolution 1655, “On Seniority, Employment and Provision of Pensions for Citizens Who Were Unjustly Prosecuted and Subsequently Rehabilitated” was intended to address the material needs of Gulag returnees and the families of the posthumously rehabilitated. As early as the autumn of 1954, the Council of Ministers Procuracy, Ministries of Justice and Finance, and All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions were debating the merits of various proposals intended to meet the needs of wrongfully convicted workers who were filtering back into Soviet society in huge numbers. These men and women sought employment commensurate with their qualifications and experience, but were often thwarted in resuming their former posts, which had been filled upon their arrests. The trade unions maintained that such laborers’ work history should not show a gap regardless of the duration of their imprisonment, that their previous housing should be returned to them via the courts, and that they should be granted a one-time payment

⁸⁴⁹ GARF f. 8131, op. 32, d. 4001, ll. 117a-117b.

equivalent to two months' salary at their last place of employment.⁸⁵⁰ This final point was included in deference to the Lenin-era labor code, which included a provision allowing employees to claim two-months' back pay from their places of work in the event that they were arrested and either cleared before trial or acquitted in court; none of the framers of the labor code anticipated the possibility that Soviet citizens would be unjustly incarcerated for decades.⁸⁵¹ Rudenko opined that existing legislation, including the Supreme Court Plenum degree of January 22, was sufficient to resolve these issues, and the Ministry of Finance – which would have been on the hook to come up with the requisite funds – agreed that it was inadvisable to change the existing laws.⁸⁵²

Despite this resistance, the trade unions continued to advocate for some sort of amelioration of rehabilitees' standing, putting forward a series of recommendations over the course of 1955 that came under the withering scrutiny of the Justice and Finance ministries for supposedly replicating existing measures or failing to clarify how vital issues, such as whether workers were entitled to their former positions, would be dealt with.⁸⁵³ Nearly two years after the matter was first raised, though, the Council of Ministers finally settled on a document that addressed the trade unionists' concerns, albeit in less ambitious fashion than initially proposed. Resolution 1655 incorporated the 1922 labor code's stipulation on two-months' pay, underscoring the government's position that rehabilitees were not due reparations for the extreme disruption to their lives, but it allowed time served in prison, camps, or exile to be counted toward work

⁸⁵⁰ GARF f. 8131, op. 28, d. 1965, ll. 196-197.

⁸⁵¹ Elie, "Les anciens détenus," 360.

⁸⁵² GARF f. 8131, op. 28, d. 1965, ll. 192-199.

⁸⁵³ GARF f. 5451, op. 43, d. 1220, ll. 16-26.

seniority and pension calculations.⁸⁵⁴ There was no mention of courts' involvement in mediating housing issues; rather, the rehabilitated were to be assigned housing "as a matter of priority," which in practice created special waiting lists for exonerated former prisoners without any actual guarantee that such people would receive new dwellings in a timely fashion.⁸⁵⁵ The posthumously rehabilitated appear to have been included in the measure as something of an afterthought, given that a version drafted short months before its introduction made no mention of accommodating the survivors of workers who died in custody.⁸⁵⁶ The resolution in its final form confirmed that in the event of posthumous rehabilitation families members were entitled to the back pay and pensions that their relatives would have received, had they lived.

The Council of Ministers did not seek to widely publicize Resolution 1655 – it bore the heading "not for publication," and only 680 copies were distributed.⁸⁵⁷ Yet, through mechanisms that remain largely opaque, knowledge of the degree disseminated among the populace. In some cases, it was representatives of the Party, judiciary, or state security who informed rehabilitees of their newfound rights, while in other instances it appears that unions and workplaces assumed the burden of ensuring that the major

⁸⁵⁴ E. A. Zaitsev, ed., *Sbornik zakonodatel'nykh i normativnykh aktov o repressiiakh i rehabilitatsii zhertv politicheskikh repressii* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo "Respublika," 1993), 168-170. Estimates based on the number of rehabilitation recipients as of August 1955 – prior to the surge in numbers that met the 20th Party Congress – suggested that the two-month payments would total between 30 and 35 million rubles; see GARF f. 9474, op. 10, d. 122, l. 22. For those who held "responsible positions" in the Party and state, including most of the figures discussed in this chapter, receipt of a Union-level pension befitting their station was dependent upon the restoration of their Party membership. Thus, even though Levan Gogoberidze was legally exculpated in March 1954, it was not until two years later, when his Party card was returned, that a pension was established in his name. See GARF f. 10249, op. 4, d. 2825.

⁸⁵⁵ Zaitsev, ed., *Sbornik zakonodatel'nykh i normativnykh aktov*, 170. Mark B. Smith notes that in Rostov in 1961 249 rehabilitees were awaiting apartments, but only 42 were lucky enough to receive lodgings, and most of the spaces were drawn from the city's old housing stock; see Smith, *Property of Communists*, 132.

⁸⁵⁶ GARF f. 9474, op. 10, d. 122, ll. 23-25.

⁸⁵⁷ Elie, "Les anciens détenus," 360.

provisions were met.⁸⁵⁸ The September 8 ruling served to broaden the pool of those eligible for restitution far beyond the small clique that had up to that point been able to take advantage of the state's largess, and additionally revised the grounds upon which such claims were to be made. Appellants for housing and financial aid were no longer required to justify themselves based on their relatives' exceptional service or the hardships they had endured since their repression. Rather, the restoration of property and privileges became an obligatory transaction between the state and its citizens. However, as documents from the Administrative Department of the Council of Minister attest, elite families continued to be afforded a far greater degree of access to amenities and services than that of the average *homo Sovieticus*, and increased demand for already-scarce resources served to further pit the rehabilitated against other Soviet welfare-seekers.

Among the first individuals to take advantage of the regime Resolution 1655 put into place were the sons of Vlas Chubar', who would become one of the most frequently invoked posthumously rehabilitated figures. Chubar's descendants wasted little time in asserting their reclaimed status as privileged members of society. In a petition to the chairman of the Party Control Committee written a month after Chubar' was restored to full Party membership that was eventually forwarded to Korobov, Aleksei and Vladimir Vlasovich Chubar' detailed the path their lives had followed since the upheavals of 1938. Orphaned at the ages of 9 and 5, respectively, by the arrest of both parents Aleksei and

⁸⁵⁸ Tamara Tanina, the widow of Mikhail Aleksandrovich Tanin, one of Khrushchev's deputies at the Moscow Party Committee, first learned of her right to a pension and back-pay from the functionary at the Central Committee who was handling Tanin's Party rehabilitation; though she went on to receive a 600-ruble monthly pension, housing, and free rest stays in Crimea, she was critical of Khrushchev for not having taken a greater interest in the welfare of former subordinate's family; see RGASPI, f. 560, op. 1, d. 37, tom 2, ll. 214, 220-221. At a June 1956 meeting that restored several authors –including Isaak Babel' – to membership in the Soviet Writers' Union, the union also agreed to make onetime payments of between 3,000 and 5,000 rubles, drawn from the USSR Literary Fund, to the men's families, and to request that the *Sovmin* establish pensions on behalf of some of them; see RGALI f. 631, op. 30, d. 549, ll. 4-5.

Vladimir sought refuge with their infirm grandmother. The brothers remained with her until 1941 when they were evacuated from Moscow, at which point they were taken in by their maternal aunt, El'vis Ivanovna Adrianova, herself a political exile.⁸⁵⁹ Yet the “stain” of their family name continued to haunt Chubar’s sons into the postwar years: between 1948 and 1950 both were “ripped from the training” they were receiving at vocational schools and sent to Dzhabul (today’s Taraz, Kazakhstan).⁸⁶⁰ The ensuing years were marked, in their words, by “great emotional torment [...] and material hardship.”⁸⁶¹ Determined to overcome the legacy of their time as “children of enemies of the people” Aleksei and Vladimir presented the Party Control Committee with a list of demands for assistance that they believed were their due in late December 1955.

The brothers first requested that the Party make provisions for Aleksei to complete his interrupted education in the Department of Radio at the Krasin Electro-Mechanical Technical School and provide them both with increased stipends through the duration of their studies. On the domestic front, they sought an apartment large enough for themselves, Aleksei’s wife, as well as their aunt and uncle to live together comfortably, and “in accordance with Resolution 1655 of the USSR Council of Ministers,” the two months’ back-pay they were owed as their father’s heirs – most likely a generous sum, given the lofty positions Chubar’ held at the time of his arrest.⁸⁶² In early February the Council of Ministers announced a plan to displace one of its own employees who lived in a 40.31 square meter apartment in the Arbat district, but this was evidently insufficient for the extended Chubar’ family’s needs, as a week later Korobov instructed

⁸⁵⁹ GARF f. 9542, op. 1, d. 166, l. 2.

⁸⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁶¹ Ibid.

⁸⁶² Ibid.

his assistants to give them apartment 171 at the Government House where the brothers had previously lived; this unit had an additional room and was larger by some 17 square meters.⁸⁶³ On February 9 Korobov received a briefing from his deputy on the fulfillment of his orders: the Chubar' family had successfully relocated to the Government House, Moskatov at the Personal Pension Committee confirmed that both brothers would receive funding while still in school, and they had received payments from both of their parents' workplaces.⁸⁶⁴ As remarkable a case as this proved to be, given the fact that the Chubar' family was granted more compensation by the authorities than they initially sought, it is emblematic of the ways in which the Administrative Department understood its obligations before the relatives of those notables who were newly returned to grace.⁸⁶⁵

From Personal Belongings to State Furnishings: Challenges in Reclaiming Elite Property

Despite her setbacks in the courtroom, Gil'degart Dimze ultimately obtained remuneration for some of the substantial losses her family incurred as a result of Reingol'd Berzin's arrest and execution. In December 1955 Voroshilov received a report from the KGB – in response to his own directive – detailing the measures taken to satisfy Dimze's request for the restoration of her and Berzin's belongings. After combing its files, the KGB established that the organs of state security had seized a broad array of items from Berzin, including unspecified “furniture, an upright piano, a typewriter, a

⁸⁶³ GARF f. 9542, op. 1, d. 166, ll. 3-4.

⁸⁶⁴ GARF f. 9542, op. 1, d. 166, l. 5. There is no indication from either *Sovmin* Administrative Department documents or the files of the Pension Committee that a pension was created in Vlas Chubar's name, though one might have been established through alternate channels.

⁸⁶⁵ In addition to the Chubar' siblings only three other pre-Terror residents successfully returned to *2 ulitsa Serafimovicha*: M. P. Goreva (the widow of Aleksei Chernosvitov, an employee of the *Sovnarkom* Administrative Department), F. M. Zarkhi, and A. Z. Peters. See Shmidt, *Dom na naberezhnoi*, 91. Malenkov offered the widow and daughter of Red Air Force General Iakov Smushkevich their former apartment in the Government House, but they refused in order to avoid the painful memories within. See Adler, *The Gulag Survivor*, 155.

camera, two radio receivers, hunting rifles, a bicycle, 16 pocket watches and other valuables, 3,500 books, two rugs, two bolts of wool, men's garments, shoes, and several household items, and also 13,815 rubles' worth of bank deposits and 4,395 rubles in government bonds"; at the time of its expropriation, the Moscow City Financial Department estimated the property's value at 41,222 rubles in total.⁸⁶⁶

The report noted that of this hefty sum Dimze had already been remitted 36,582 rubles – nearly ninety percent, presumably at the KGB's expense – and the financial department assured the KGB that in "the near future" Dimze would "be issued the remaining amount, and the cash deposits from the savings books will be restored and the government bonds returned."⁸⁶⁷ Apparently no provisions were to be made, however, for to Berzin's onetime domiciles: the 20-square-meter room that was sealed upon his arrest had since been "inhabited by order of the Moscow City Council Housing Department," and there was no available information as to the seizure of his dacha.⁸⁶⁸ Though Dimze was unable to wrest back her longtime home, this did not impede her efforts to obtain significant financial concessions – with Voroshilov's help – from the Soviet state.

In mid-April 1955 Aleksandra Ivanovna Proskurova sought Voroshilov's assistance in locating items that had been taken from her apartment after the arrest of her husband, Red Army Air Force Lieutenant General Ivan Proskurov, almost immediately following the Nazi invasion in late June 1941. Proskurova expressed her appreciation to the party-state for its "responsiveness (*chutkosti*) and fairness" in restoring Proskurov's good name and seeing to her needs after years in prison, camps, and exile, but she was

⁸⁶⁶ GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 138, l. 34.

⁸⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁸ Ibid. It is unclear whether the room mentioned referred to a portion of the discussed apartment on *ulitsa Vesnina* or another living space that Berzin had been granted in connection with his position.

dismayed at her inability to obtain compensation for the vast majority of her household belongings.⁸⁶⁹ State security had already remitted over 12,500 rubles to Proskurova for various confiscated items, but she maintained that this represented a fraction of the articles that had gone missing. To substantiate her claim, Proskurova prepared a list “from memory” of nearly 50 categories of objects, including a sedan “with a full complement of spare parts and registration,” a pair of daggers, three bicycles, 250-300 phonograph records, and two quilts that remained unaccounted for.⁸⁷⁰ Voroshilov forwarded the dossier to Serov at the KGB, who responded in late May 1955 with a memo that absolved his organization of any obligations in the matter on the grounds that the Proskurovs’ missing property “was neither seized nor confiscated by the organs of state security.”⁸⁷¹ Upon Proskurov’s arrest his property was “formally taken into custody” but “left in A.I. Proskurova’s keeping.”⁸⁷² The Nazis’ rapid advance on Moscow forestalled any plans that the NKVD might have had for Proskurov’s belongings, and when she was evacuated to Kuibyshev along with the rest of the buildings’ residents all of their possessions remained in the apartment. Then-superintendent Bobkov and his assistants seized upon this opportunity to “plunder” the homes of the elite; the KGB estimated that in autumn 1941 they “helped themselves to a sum total of around one million rubles’ worth of evacuees’ property.”⁸⁷³ Because of this malfeasance the KGB was able to absolve itself and the Administrative Department of any duty to compensate

⁸⁶⁹ GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 123, l. 49

⁸⁷⁰ GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 123, ll. 51ob-53. Proskurova’s act of composing an inventory of her property from memory is immediately reminiscent of the processes Auslander describes in “Coming Home?”

⁸⁷¹ GARF f. 7523, op. 107, d. 123, l. 54.

⁸⁷² Ibid.

⁸⁷³ Ibid. Serov’s memo closed with the terse observation that “[t]he criminals were convicted.” Slezkine notes that the culprits also included members of a special NKVD unit billeted at the Government House, and that they showed “a particular preference for watches, razors, revolvers, hunting rifles, leather coats, gramophone records, and sewing machines.” See Slezkine, *House of Government*, 924.

Proskurova, either monetarily or in kind, thereby denying her recourse with regard to her vanished articles.

Theft of a related, though far more widespread and pernicious variant prevented other rehabilitees from pressing their claims on the government. As many historians have noted, NKVD officers involved in property confiscations during the 1930s and 1940s treated the execution of their duties as an opportunity to enrich themselves, misappropriating all manner of goods and on occasion even taking up residence in the already-furnished apartments previously occupied by their targets.⁸⁷⁴ In order to divvy up spoils amongst themselves without leaving any trace of their offenses against “socialist property” responsible *chekisty* deliberately falsified inventories drawn up during confiscations, omitting items that they coveted.⁸⁷⁵ Anton Antonov-Ovseenko ruefully recalled the NKVD inventory of items belonging to his father, Vladimir, which falsely gave the impression of a “used-clothing shop”:

He had a very valuable collection of books, as you’d expect of an active writer fluent in several European languages. But his library was not placed on the list. The same with the original etchings by famous artists, the typewriter, the phonograph with eight albums of records, his wife’s jewelry, her squirrel coat, expensive French perfumes purchased in Paris on the way home from Spain, and much, much more.⁸⁷⁶

⁸⁷⁴ See Rogovin, *Stalin’s Terror*, 288; for a particular account of NKVD property theft and its consequences in the Moscow region, see Vatlin, *Agents of Terror*, 58-68. It was not the first time that many of the objects concerned had been expropriated, as much of the material plenty that the Soviet state disbursed to the Party faithful had been seized from its previous, bourgeois owners. My thanks to Juliane Fürst for this observation.

⁸⁷⁵ Agnessa Mironovna-Korol, the wife of leading secret policeman Sergei Mironov, branded the NKVD officers who rifled through her family apartment in the Government House “bandits,” who “seemed to have the right to leave with full pockets of our valuable things – little boxes, pens, souvenirs.” See Mironovna-Korol, *Agnessa*, 125.

⁸⁷⁶ See Anton Antonov-Ovseyenko, *The Time of Stalin: Portrait of a Tyranny*, trans. George Saunders (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 152-153. Despite the disappearance of these coveted items, Antonov-Ovseenko and his siblings were able to claim significant concessions from the state on behalf of their deceased parents. In September 1956 when Vladimir’s sister, Galina, traveled from Vladivostok to Moscow to meet with D. P. Terekhov at the Chief Military Procuracy, the Pacific Ocean Fleet Procuracy paid her 210 ruble train fare; the following August all three Antonov-Ovseenko children were acknowledged as their parents’ heirs, entitling them to the formers’ bank accounts with accrued interest, accumulated shares

In this same vein, Adler quotes the wife of a posthumously rehabilitated Old Bolshevik who noted incredulously when shown the NKVD's list of items from her home, "[j]udging by this description, we were sitting on stools and eating from earthen bowls with tin spoons."⁸⁷⁷ Once erased from official existence, though, plundered objects could not be redeemed through Soviet bureaucratic means, which depended entirely on state-generated documents to substantiate ownership.⁸⁷⁸

Izabella Emmanuilovna Belaia-Iakir's ambition to be reunited with some of her most valued possessions was frustrated by such misrepresentation. The sister of renowned Red Army tactician Iona Iakir and wife of Moscow City Committee secretary Semen Korytnyi, upon her return from Magadan Belaia-Iakir was uniquely positioned to take advantage of the reformist efforts spearheaded by the post-Stalin leadership.⁸⁷⁹ By April 1955, at which point both Belaia-Iakir and Korytnyi had been rehabilitated – the latter posthumously – Belaia-Iakir enjoyed a standard of living far higher than that of most former *zeks*. She and her daughter had been provided an apartment on the Garden Ring (*ulitsa Sadovo-Sukharevskaiia*), and afforded access to the inventory prepared by the NKVD in 1939 when her apartment and personal belongings therein were expropriated. However, in an indignant letter to the *Sovmin* Administrative Department she sharply

in the "Workers of Science and Art" dacha-building cooperative worth 18,041 rubles, and the copyright to their fathers' writings. This last provision was particularly significant, as in May 1957 the *Sovmin* introduced a resolution stating that the descendants of posthumously rehabilitated authors could claim copyright on their relatives' work starting from the date they were notified of the latter's rehabilitation; this provided heirs with a major boon, as copyright typically expired 15 years after an authors' death. See GARF f. 8415, op. 2, d. 2, ll. 4, 7; Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 2, 273; Serge L. Levitsky, *Introduction to Soviet Copyright Law* (Leyden: A. W. Sijthoff, 1964), 129.

⁸⁷⁷ Adler, *The Gulag Survivor*, 187. This quotation, as well as Antonov-Ovseenko's, underscores the persistent mental divide between Soviet elites and ordinary citizens, as the material conditions that the claimant dismissed as insultingly primitive were the quotidian reality for many millions across the USSR.

⁸⁷⁸ This dilemma was only acknowledged by the legal establishment in 1963; see E. Efimov, "Pravovye voprosy vozvrata konfiskovannogo imushchestva reabilitirovannym grazhdanam ili ikh naslednikam," *Sotsialisticheskaia zakonnost'* 8 (1963): 26-31.

⁸⁷⁹ On Khrushchev's relationship with the Korytnyis and Iakir, see Chapter 3.

questioned the omission of several treasured items from the list, including a mirrored cabinet and a dressing table.⁸⁸⁰ After pointedly noting that she could not understand how certain of her possessions had come to be left off the NKVD's register, she entreated the Administrative Department to issue "instructions" mandating the return of her furniture.⁸⁸¹

The head of the Administrative Department's Housing Directorate apprised Belaia-Iakir in early September 1955 that his organization did "not possess any documents confirming the presence of your furniture at 2 *ulitsa Serafimovicha*."⁸⁸² Inherent in this abdication of responsibility for the items in question was tacit acknowledgment of a *force majeure* that prevented the Administrative Department from meeting the demands even of former luminaries like Belaia-Iakir. A thoroughgoing effort to recover the disappeared furniture would have necessitated a confrontation with the KGB, which jealously guarded its institutional prerogatives from encroachment by other state organs, and would likely have generated little additional information in light of NKVD officers' extensive fabrications. Given that the file on Belaia-Iakir's petition ends with the denial from the Housing Directorate it is doubtful that she pressed the issue any further with the Administrative Department, and while she may have found an alternate route for forwarding her claim through her ties to Khrushchev, even his influence might not have been sufficient to surmount the combined effects of malfeasance and bureaucratic inertia.

Even when official records attested to expropriated objects' existence *Sovmin* employees often exploited the porous distinctions between private and state property

⁸⁸⁰ GARF f. 9542, op. 1, d. 163, ll. 1-2.

⁸⁸¹ GARF f. 9542, op. 1, d. 163, l. 2.

⁸⁸² GARF f. 9542, op. 1, d. 163, l. 4.

engendered by Stalin-era purges to stonewall those seeking restitution. By spring 1955 Mariia Abramovna Demchenko-Shmaenok, the widow of former Kiev and Khar'kov Party *obkom* head Nikolai Demchenko, had been resettled in the TASS apartment building on today's *Prospekt Mira* (then 1st *Meshchanskaia ulitsa*) and promised compensation for at least a portion of her family's confiscated effects.⁸⁸³ While at the Lubianka to collect payment a KGB officer "familiarized" Demchenko-Shmaenok with the list prepared by the NKVD when apartment 349 of the Government House was inventoried in February 1938, over six months after the Demchenkos' arrest. Demchenko-Shmaenok was dismayed to learn that some 48 items— including fourteen oak chairs, seven soft leather-covered chairs, and four mahogany armchairs — had at the time been turned over to the complex's management, as she maintained that all of the furnishings belonged to her family, and that they had not "take[n] a single thing from the building management."⁸⁸⁴ On these grounds Demchenko-Shmaenok petitioned for the "immediate return" of the disputed furniture.⁸⁸⁵ Having produced copies of the questioned inventory and an accompanying receipt signed by the Housing Directorate's deputy commandant "stating that the listed items belong to the building management," superintendent Grigorii Zhuravlev informed Demchenko-Shmaenok that it was "clear from the documents" that all the furniture in apartment 349 was the Government House's property, and that in the intervening years it had been moved around the complex "as

⁸⁸³ The apartment that the Administrative Department granted Demchenko-Shmaenok previously belonged to the musician and composer Mikhail Fikhtengol'ts, who sold it the previous year upon moving into the Government House to live with the family of his wife, Iuliia Kaganovich, daughter of Mikhail Kaganovich. See GARF f. 9542, op. 1, d. 53, l. 147.

⁸⁸⁴ GARF f. 9542, op. 1, d. 155, l. 37. Slezkine maintains that all the Government House's residents received some furniture from the woodworking shop in the building's basement, but confirms that many households supplemented such pieces with property of their own to which they were particularly attached. See Slezkine, *House of Government*, 389, 488.

⁸⁸⁵ GARF f. 9542, op. 1, d. 155, l. 37.

needed (*po prinadlezhnosti*)”; the prospect of returning pieces that could be located went unacknowledged.⁸⁸⁶

Undeterred by Zhuravlev’s obstructionism, over the next two years Demchenko-Shmaenok wrote multiple letters to the building management, assiduously maintaining that none of her furniture had been drawn from the Government House’s stock and that it was described as such on the inventory due to either “malice or haste (*zloupotrebleniia ili speshki*).”⁸⁸⁷ Eventually, in March 1957 Zhuravlev tersely informed Demchenko-Shmaenok that there were “no grounds to honor [her] request,” because the building management could produce no documentation suggesting that it had taken possession of any personally owned property from apartment 349; a memo addressed to the Administrative Department written the following month confirmed that the matter was considered “settled,” cutting Demchenko-Shmaenok off from any further recourse.⁸⁸⁸ However, despite Zhuravlev’s assurances to the contrary, recently uncovered records attest to the validity of Demchenko-Shmaenok’s claim: a 1938 Housing Directorate report itemizing “property received without compensation (*bezvozmezdno*) from organizations outside our system” – i.e., taken from repressed families – listed Nikolai Demchenko as one of the largest contributors to the state’s new store of appointments.⁸⁸⁹ This revelation suggests that as apparently benevolent as *Sovmin* organs may have been in their dealings with some rehabilitees, the imperative to conceal past transgressions and

⁸⁸⁶ GARF f. 9542, op. 1, d. 155, ll. 38, 40.

⁸⁸⁷ GARF f. 9542, op. 1, d. 155, ll. 41-42, 50-51.

⁸⁸⁸ GARF f. 9542, op. 1, d. 155, ll. 48, 53.

⁸⁸⁹ Shmidt, *Dom na naberezhnoi*, 92 fn36.

retain items that had since been disbursed to current-day residents of the Government House often superseded considerations of former enemies of the peoples' welfare.⁸⁹⁰

Although Resolution 1655 did not deal explicitly with moveable property restitution, in the aftermath of its introduction – and the 20th Party Congress shortly thereafter – the administration of the Government House proved somewhat more accommodating of petitions for the restoration of individuals' effects.⁸⁹¹ One such beneficiary of this turn was Margarita Levitskaia, whose father, Konstantin Levitskii had been an early Social Democratic activist, while her husband, Ivan Kleimenov, was a former protégé of Mikhail Tukhachevskii's within the USSR's nascent rocketry program.⁸⁹² Following her and Kleimenov's rehabilitations in mid-1955 – which were expedited thanks to the intervention of author Mikhail Sholokhov, whose novel *And Quiet Flows the Don* was edited by Levitskaia's mother – Levitskaia returned to *2 ulitsa Serafimovicha* in search of tangible vestiges of her former life there.⁸⁹³ As narrated in a series of exchanges from late February and March of 1956 between the *Sovmin* Administrative Department and the housing complex's representatives, Levitskaia wrote to the building's management once she was allowed back into Moscow in reference to several pieces of furniture belonging to her that had remained in apartment number 475

⁸⁹⁰ An analogous case from the spring through fall of 1957, that of Elizaveta Veller-Gurevich (wife of Gosplan deputy Aleksandr Gurevich), is noteworthy for the quarter from which Veller-Gurevich received support in pressing her claim. Based on its own records the KGB repeatedly pressured the Housing Directorate to look into Veller-Gurevich's demand for the return of a cupboard, wardrobe, and several bookshelves and bedframes, but was also rebuffed on the (likely false) grounds that the items in question were government issue, though she was paid over 10,000 rubles in compensation. See GARF f. 9542, op. 1, d. 155, ll. 107-112.

⁸⁹¹ Guidelines regarding the protocol for compensating rehabilitees for their confiscated property were only introduced by the KGB and Ministry of Finance in the autumn of the following year. See Artizov et al, *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 2, 181-183, 194-197.

⁸⁹² On Kleimenov's career and downfall see Asif A. Siddiqi, "The Rockets' Red Glare: Technology, Conflict, and Terror in the Soviet Union," *Technology and Culture* 44, 3 (July 2003): 470-501.

⁸⁹³ Sholokhov visited the Chief Military Procuracy and personally requested that Kleimenov and Levitskaia's cases be reopened. See Viktorov, *Bez grifa "Sekretno,"* 276.

when she was arrested, including a bookshelf, a writing table, a rifle cabinet, and an armchair.⁸⁹⁴ An examination of the apartment revealed that the bookshelf and writing table were “on temporary loan (*vo vremennom pol'zovanii*) to the current occupants” and were listed in the building’s inventory, while the other two furnishings remained to be found.⁸⁹⁵

Having reported the results of investigation into Levitskaia’s seized property to his superiors at the Administrative Department, Zhuravlev, the Government House superintendent, requested instruction as to how to proceed. Administrative Department bureaucrats proposed that the bookshelf and writing table be written off from the building’s inventory and returned to Levitskaia, along with a cabinet and armchair selected from the building’s stock to replace the items that had gone missing between 1937 and 1956.⁸⁹⁶ Having uncovered documents that attested to the fact that the rifle cabinet and armchair had “indeed been turned over to the house management” the Administrative Department instructed Zhuravlev to proceed with the plan.⁸⁹⁷ Thus, in this instance, the state bodies involved in property restitution not only returned items that had been confiscated nearly twenty years prior, but also took pains to uncover documentary evidence that compelled them to provide suitable substitutes for possessions that had gone missing in that interval.

By the time Liia Vladimirovna Polonskaia and her brother, Vladimir Vladimirovich, demanded the restoration of the Miul’bakh upright piano that had belonged to their family the instrument itself had passed through a rather storied

⁸⁹⁴ GARF f. 9542, op. 1, d. 155, l. 69.

⁸⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁹⁶ GARF f. 9542, op. 1, d. 155, l. 70.

⁸⁹⁷ GARF f. 9542, op. 1, d. 155, l. 71.

assortment of hands. A relic of Russia's pre-Revolutionary years, the piano was manufactured by the noted Miul'bakh firm in Saint Petersburg and managed to survive the chaotic years of world war, revolution, and civil war before it made its way to the Government House.⁸⁹⁸ It was apparently one of the Polonskiis' most valued possessions while they lived in apartment 233, but was confiscated along with the rest of their property following the arrest of their father – the career revolutionary and onetime Party Secretary of Azerbaijan Vladimir Ivanovich Polonskii – in June 1937.⁸⁹⁹ The piano remained in the apartment, where Mikhail Kaganovich and his family took up residence; although the surviving Kaganoviches were not dispossessed after Mikhail's 1941 suicide, the piano was eventually moved down the hall to apartment 235 in 1943, and it thus became the property of the Ukrainian author Aleksandr Korneichuk.⁹⁰⁰ By June 1952 the piano had once again passed into new hands, those of one I. O. Smol'ko, who was so taken with the instrument that he purchased it from the building for the handsome sum of 3,500 rubles, even though it was only valued at 3,000 rubles according to the building's inventory.⁹⁰¹ All these details emerged as representatives of the Government House' functionaries attempted to locate the piano; when it became evident that it was no longer

⁸⁹⁸ Slezkine notes that there were two obligatory items in every elite apartment at the Government House: a large table for hosting gatherings, and a piano; Slezkine, *House of Government*, 490.

⁸⁹⁹ Some books from Polonskii's private collection were eventually incorporated into the holdings of the Lenin Library, though it is unclear if these were voluntary donations; see GARF f. 7907, op. 1, d. 7. On the younger Vladimir Polonskii's experiences in exile in Kazakhstan, see Vladimir Polonskii, "'Doroga v piat' let v Kazakhstan i obratno': Zapiski ssyl'nogo,'" *Istochnik* 1 (1996): 66-77.

⁹⁰⁰ GARF f. 9542, op. 1, d. 155, ll. 120, 123.

⁹⁰¹ Ibid. There is one other mention in the Housing Directorate files consulted of a resident, a certain R. B. Afanas'eva, being allowed to purchase furniture from a *Sovmin*-run building on an installment plan, showing that furnishings held by the Housing Directorate could occasionally end up in private hands, for the right price; see GARF f. 9542, op. 1, d. 155, l. 97. Numerous accounts also exist of Stalin-era authorities using property seized from repressed people as a source of revenue; Lev Razgon recalled encountering his repressed father-in-law's furniture in a store in the center of Moscow, and Markoosha Fischer wrote of stores on the city's outskirts filled articles that had belonged to "enemies of the people." See Lev Razgon, *Plen v svoem otechestve* (Moskva: "Knizhnyi sad," 1994), 80-81; Markoosha Fischer, *My Lives in Russia* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944), 159. My thanks to Brigid O'Keeffe for bringing the Fischer memoir to my attention.

in their possession, they resolved to compensate the surviving Polonskiis monetarily, an arrangement the two siblings accepted in June 1956, but with which they eventually took exception when it became apparent that they had been shortchanged.

Because the payment to Liia and Vladimir Vladimirovich was calculated based on the piano's value as listed in the building's inventory, rather than its sale price, they were only issued 3,000 rubles.⁹⁰² In a joint letter dated May 20, 1958 they complained that in the time since the deal had been transacted it had become "absolutely clear that the money restored to us represents a small part of the upright piano's value."⁹⁰³ The Polonskiis demanded that the Administrative Department review its decision from June 1956 and either pay them the outstanding balance or "return the instrument to us upon the condition that we refund the three thousand rubles we received."⁹⁰⁴ Once made aware of this discrepancy, the Administrative Department again set out to make amends, and Zhuravlev was ordered to remit the difference to the Polonskiis.⁹⁰⁵ Though the additional five hundred rubles the Polonskii siblings received in 1958 was likely far less than they anticipated, the steps taken by the Council of Ministers' subsidiary bodies to redress this situation are indicative of the emphasis that was placed upon making restitution to certain onetime members of the early Soviet elite, though much of the success that some heritors experienced appears to have come down to the luck of the draw, as families that theoretically should have enjoyed particular favor – such as the Demchenkos with their ties to Khrushchev – encountered their share of prolonged frustrations. This haphazardly

⁹⁰² GARF f. 9542, op. 1, d. 155, l. 121.

⁹⁰³ GARF f. 9542, op. 1, d. 155, l. 119. The source of this impression is unclear, as is the amount that the Polonskiis thought they were due.

⁹⁰⁴ GARF f. 9542, op. 1, d. 155, l. 119ob.

⁹⁰⁵ GARF f. 9542, op. 1, d. 155, l. 124. The following explanatory note was handwritten on this undated memo: "their piano was sold for 3500 rubles, they were paid 3000 rubles."

applied policy reaffirmed – for those fortunate enough to receive relief – that rehabilitees were entitled to expect the restoration of key elements of their pre-repression living standards. However, by that same token, individuals repeatedly denied recompense or dissatisfied with the terms of their restitution were consistently reminded of the fact that much of Soviet society had moved on from the founding years of state socialism and the Terror, and for all their protestations, neither their status as survivors of honored servitors of the Bolshevik project nor the letter of the law could guarantee them the exact manner of compensation they believed they were owed.

The Frustrated and the Neglected

Recipients of aid under Resolution 1655 did not shy away from expressing their dissatisfaction with the compensation afforded to them when it fell short of their expectations, which were predicated on the benefits to which they had been entitled prior to their repression. The most pointed critique preserved in the *Sovmin*'s files came from Ekaterina Arkad'evna Kuznetsova, the widow of former USSR Deputy Commissar of Trade Zakhar Samuilovich Bolotin. In a letter to Korobov from May 23, 1956 Kuznetsova wasted no time in asserting her rights as an aggrieved party. On February 23 of that year, one day after receiving word of her husband's posthumous rehabilitation from the Military Collegium, Kuznetsova presented herself at Bolotin's former workplace "with all the requisite documents to receive a so-called 'stipend.'"⁹⁰⁶ By May 11 the Ministry of Trade had "settled up (*rasplatilos*')" with Kuznetsova, an accounting that she found inadequate.⁹⁰⁷

⁹⁰⁶ GARF f. 9542, op. 1, d. 155, l. 74.

⁹⁰⁷ Ibid.

Apparently Bolotin's two months of back-pay had been calculated according to the "'harsh' rate (*po zhestokoi stavke*)" of 4,000 rubles per month; Kuznetsova was surprised to discover that income tax had been withheld from this amount, "given as a 'stipend' for the lives of innocently killed people," and observed that the Ministry of Trade had failed to factor the length of Bolotin's service into its calculation of the payment, as she claimed Resolution 1655 obliged.⁹⁰⁸ Apparently the most galling omission, though, was the Ministry of Trade's failure to pay the contents of the infamous "second 'packet,'" a supplemental sum provided to responsible Party members equal to anywhere between half and their entire monthly salary.⁹⁰⁹ Kuznetsova could not "find room in [her] mind for the notion that for people who have not suffered these 'envelopes' are necessary, while for those who for long years unjustly bore the yoke of 'enemy of the people' they are not in order."⁹¹⁰ She thus understood Bolotin's rehabilitation as a means not only of making amends for the injustices of previous decades, but also as a way to restore the pre-Terror socio-economic status quo.

Kuznetsova likewise gave voice to frustration over the apparent indifference and parsimoniousness with which state functionaries responsible for dispensing aid performed their duties. While taking delivery of Bolotin's rehabilitation paperwork, Kuznetsova was twice asked whether she was receiving a personal pension; when she replied that she did not have enough time on the job, she was made aware that the pension was dependent on her husband's former position.⁹¹¹ Kuznetsova thus took issue

⁹⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁰⁹ Ibid.; on the "packet" system, see Matthews, *Privilege in the Soviet Union*, 37.

⁹¹⁰ GARF f. 9542, op. 1, d. 155, l. 74.

⁹¹¹ Ibid.

with the fact that no one at the Ministry of Trade offered to assist her in claiming her rights:

The cashier window opened, the cashier's generous hand passed the "stipend" in the amount of 2 months' salary with income tax deducted and THAT'S IT! And regarding how I feel, or whether I need something – likewise no one took an interest.

We talk a lot about sensitivity (*chutkosti*), but where is it?⁹¹²

Rejecting the notion that she was a "greedy person (*korystoliubiva*)," Kuznetsova insisted that her dissatisfaction was born out of a desire to "defend [her] rights," condemning those "who so zealously guard the state's 'kopek' while infringing on the interests of traumatized people" for "committing an anti-political act (*delaiut antipoliticheskoe delo*)."⁹¹³ Though it remains unclear whether Korobov heeded Kuznetsova's call to "do all that you are obliged to by the PARTY" – a pension was created for Bolotin that July – Kuznetsova's impassioned rhetoric speaks to the resilience of deeply ingrained notions of privilege even in the face of the privations and indignities of decades of state terror, and the degree to which such perceptions continued to inform former elites' individual prerogatives.⁹¹⁴

The experiences of one former *ChSIR* whose housing claims were repeatedly denied provide a stark counterexample to accounts of successful resettlement and property restitution narrated in many of the documents cited in this chapter. Tat'iana

⁹¹² GARF f. 9542, op. 1, d. 155, ll. 74-74ob. This apparent indifference on the part of the Ministry of Trade's employees can likely be attributed to the fact that pensions fell under the Council of Ministers' purview.

⁹¹³ GARF f. 9542, op. 1, d. 155, l. 74ob.

⁹¹⁴ Ibid.; GARF f. 10249, op. 4, d. 5519. As determined as Kuznetsova was to secure the state benefits owed her, in at least one documented instance a ranking Party member's survivor declined such assistance. Nataliia Il'ichna Sats, the children's theater director and wife of USSR Commissar of Internal Trade Izrail' Iakovlevich Veitser, recalled that she was offered a "large pension as the wife, or more precisely, the widow of a fully rehabilitated member of the government." Though tempted by the prospect of receiving a subsistence allowance without having to work, Sats ultimately opted to decline the pension, as she was convinced that idleness would be detrimental to her mental state. See Nataliia Sats, *Zhizn', iavlenie polosatoe* (Moskva: Novosti, 1991), 490.

Petrovna Ivanova – whose husband Colonel Petr Ivanovich Ivanov served as the Soviet Union’s military attaché in Finland from 1933 until the spring of 1938 – remained trapped in a sort of interminable exile nearly a decade following her exculpation. Upon being recalled to Moscow from Helsinki in 1938 the Ivanovs were placed in temporary accommodations at the Hotel National – directly across *Manezh* Square from the Kremlin – which, as Ivanova later deduced, was where military envoys returning from postings abroad were “deliberately concentrated” before being taken into NKVD custody.⁹¹⁵ Shortly after her husband’s arrest at the end of April Ivanova was herself imprisoned and eventually transferred to a labor camp; after serving her sentence she settled to the northeast of Moscow in the village of Petrovo-Gorodishche, near Suzdal’. It was there that Ivanova first received confirmation of her husband’s death, though she noted that the form provided contained a significant error: a functionary had mistakenly listed Ivanov’s place of residence as Petrovo-Gorodishche, though neither he nor Ivanova – both lifelong Muscovites before being dispatched to Finland – had ever been there prior to his arrest.⁹¹⁶ When Ivanova brought this fact to the attention of the local state security officials she was assured that “the error would be corrected, however to date this has not been done.”⁹¹⁷ This uncorrected typo, among other issues, ultimately cost Ivanova her ability to reclaim residency in the capital, to which she was entitled as a fully rehabilitated person.

Following her release from the labor camp system but prior to her rehabilitation Ivanova – like all former *zeks* – was prohibited from entering Moscow for reasons of “social undesirability.” Yet from autumn 1956, when she and Ivanov were both

⁹¹⁵ RGALI, f. 2528, op. 5, d. 283, l. 50.

⁹¹⁶ Ibid.

⁹¹⁷ Ibid.

exculpated, Ivanova was determined to exercise her prerogative to return to her native city and reestablish residence there. Undaunted by the fact that the house in Moscow where her father had lived and raised her son while she was incarcerated had been demolished, Ivanova maintained that “according to the USSR Council of Ministers’ Resolution 1655 from September 8, 1955, I, like many other innocent victims (*nevinno postradavshie*), received the right to residence in Moscow, i.e. returning to our permanent residence, and was granted the right to priority access to living space.”⁹¹⁸ Ivanova assumed that this guaranteed an end to her years of displacement, but as she soon discovered her “suffering and torment began anew with regard to registering in Moscow and receiving a living space.”⁹¹⁹

Beginning in 1957 Ivanova turned to various agencies for redress, but in each instance her overtures were automatically forwarded to the Moscow City Council, where she came up against a strain of “callous bureaucratism (*bezdushnyi biurokratizm*) on the part of those comrades who are entrusted with examining such petitions.”⁹²⁰ Ivanova alleged that workers at the city council did not “want to see the long-suffering (*mnogovystradavshego*) person behind the petition”; instead, they deferred to the “formal, dry letter of the law, contriving all manner of reasons just to answer with a rejection.”⁹²¹ When told that one denial was due to the “acute shortage of space in Moscow” Ivanova bristled: how could such an issue apply to her, “a rehabilitated person who before her

⁹¹⁸ RGALI f. 2528, op. 5, d. 238, l. 51. Ivanova’s understanding of Resolution 1655 was actually somewhat faulty, as Elie notes that the degree included no location-specific provisions, and many former Muscovites and Leningraders ended up stuck in provincial backwaters. See Elie, “Rehabilitation in the Soviet Union,” 34-35.

⁹¹⁹ RGALI f. 2528, op. 5, d. 238, l. 51.

⁹²⁰ Ibid.

⁹²¹ Ibid.

arrest lived in Moscow since childhood and who, like all rehabilitated persons, is covered by Resolution 1655 of the USSR Council of Ministers?”⁹²²

Ivanova saw the obduracy of Moscow’s civil servants, compounded by the unresolved confusion over Ivanov’s actual residence, as the source of a bureaucratic impasse that she believed Minister of Defense Rodion Iakovlevich Malinovskii – to whom she directed her appeal in March 1965 – might be able brush aside and thereby bring her “woe” to an end.⁹²³ Unfortunately for her, it appears as though Malinovskii proved similarly inattentive, as her letter was found among the personal papers of the writer Sergei Sergeevich Smirnov, to whom a mutual friend had forwarded it in the hope that he might be able to help break this impasse. In the absence of any additional documentation, it seems unlikely that any progress on Ivanova’s behalf was made at this relatively late juncture. This serves as a stark reminder that the guarantees enshrined in decrees such as Resolution 1655 ultimately hinged on individual functionaries’ willingness and ability to carry them out, without which there was little to distinguish the lot of a rehabilitated person from that of someone who remained an enemy in the eyes of the party-state.

Conclusion

In February 1957, as the widow of the posthumously rehabilitated Komsomol Secretary Kosarev, Mariia Naneishvili-Kosareva was assigned a small plot of land from the state forestry fund. After initial interagency haggling between the *Sovmin* Administrative Department and the Ministry of Defense, which controlled the land in question, a parcel of .12 hectares near the village of Istra northwest of Moscow was

⁹²² Ibid.

⁹²³ RGALI f. 2528, op. 5, d. 238, ll. 51-52.

settled upon. There, Naneishvili-Kosareva was to build her family a new dacha, to replace the fabled one where 20 years prior her husband made the impolitic comment that allegedly cost their family so dearly, but later served as her ticket out of perpetual exile.⁹²⁴ Naneishvili-Kosareva would be responsible for covering the construction costs herself – frowned upon by the *nomenklatura* of the time, who availed themselves of state-owned dachas lest they be suspected of “petty bourgeois materialism” – but once completed the structure would indisputably belong to her and her family.⁹²⁵

The decision to grant Naneishvili-Kosareva the lot on which to build the new dacha, narrated in two short memoranda written by the Administrative Department’s chief, is a small but deceptively significant component of the Soviet government’s attempt to provide once-privileged families with the trappings of their former existences. In the years before Kosarev’s fall from grace, his access to a dacha symbolized his responsible role within the Party leadership; during the Terror, it was a site of intriguing and ultimately of loss, when it was seized with the rest of his possessions. That the authorities facilitated Naneishvili-Kosareva’s acquisition of a substitute dacha by dint of her marriage to Kosarev, and the suffering that she incurred as a result of his arrest, eloquently reveals the material significance with which posthumous rehabilitation was vested. For the surviving Kosarevs it represented, to a certain extent, the saga of their experience of state repression having come full circle.

At the most pragmatic level, the Soviet government’s property restitution efforts provided returnees with housing and material comforts at a time of profound shortages and increasing demand on the state’s welfare system. Yet the adoption of this policy also

⁹²⁴ GARF f. 9542, op. 1, d. 155, ll. 32-33.

⁹²⁵ Stephen Lovell, *Summerfolk: A History of the Dacha, 1710-2000* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2000), 171-172.

held deep personal significance for the families of the posthumously rehabilitated. Demands for the return of items that were of little apparent use to people who had spent the better part of the past two decades in Gulag camps – such as rifle cabinets, upright pianos, and overstuffed armchairs – were not only exercises in sentimentality, but also constituted a central element in the reconstruction of elite identity. The notions of normality of erstwhile denizens of the Government House and other exclusive dwellings were indelibly shaped by their experiences within these edifices' walls, and by the coveted objects with which they surrounded themselves. As much as these buildings may have been haunted by the specters of past violence and trauma, their attraction for former residents remained undiminished.

If returnees could not occupy the actual physical spaces where they lived prior to their repression, or reclaim many of the seized objects that previously distinguished them from the vast majority of the Soviet populace, by acknowledging that they were entitled to, and making compensation – albeit capriciously – for these possessions, the Soviet government offered them the opportunity to re-inhabit the privileged status that they had been afforded and suddenly denied under Stalin. Conversely, by obstructing other rehabilitees' efforts to recover property that had vanished in the 1930s, the authorities reinforced their marginality and prevented them from attaining “rehabilitation” in the fullest sense of the term. This suggests that even under Soviet state socialism – which nominally sought to promote state and collective ownership of immovable property and consumer goods – individuals' homes and the objects within them were understood both by citizens and the party-state as factors central to the fashioning, maintenance, and reconstruction of the self.

Conclusion

*When Stalin was removed from the Mausoleum and buried at the Kremlin Wall, a wreath appeared at his grave with the inscription: "To the posthumously repressed, from the posthumously rehabilitated."*⁹²⁶

On September 24, 1967, the Central Committee received an open letter from “the surviving children of Communists wrongfully repressed by Stalin.” Though Stalin’s corpse had been disinterred from the mausoleum it shared with Lenin’s remains following the 22nd Party Congress in October 1961, the letter’s drafters perceived a softening of the Party line on the disgraced dictator since Leonid Brezhnev assumed the post of General Secretary of the Communist Party. In anticipation of the fiftieth anniversary of the October Revolution, this group cautioned against any official backsliding on Stalin’s place in history, which would be an affront to “the memory of people who perished in the hellish machinery of the cult of personality.”⁹²⁷ Among the 43 signatories were a considerable number of individuals whose families had been direct beneficiaries of Khrushchev-era posthumous rehabilitation policies. These included Petr Iakir, the tormented son of Iona Iakir and likely initiator of the open letter, along with his daughter Irina and son-in-law Iulii Kim, Anton Antonov-Ovseenko, Ariia Dimze-Berzin, the daughters of Gleb Bokii and Valerian Osinskii-Obolenskii, and the sons of Ivan

⁹²⁶ Vladimir Bukovskii, *“I vozvrashchaetsia veter...” Pis'ma russkogo puteshestvennika* (Moskva: Demokraticheskaia Rossiia, 1990), 108. My thanks to Benjamin Nathans for bringing this *anekdot* to my attention.

⁹²⁷ “Pis'mo 43 detei kommunistov, neobosnovanno repressirovannykh Stalinyu, v TsK KPSS ob opasnosti neostalinizma, 24 sentiabria 1967 g.,” *Sobranie dokumentov samizdata*, vol. 1, AS no. 134 (New York, Radio Liberty Committee, 1972), 1-2. These concerns largely echoes those articulated in the so-called “Letter of the 25” written the previous year to coincide with the 23rd Party Congress and signed by notable academics, writers, and artists, including Petr Kapitsa, Kornei Chukovskii, and, in one of his first acts of open dissent, Andrei Sakharov. See Artizov et al, eds., *Reabilitatsiia*, vol. 2, 485-487. It warrants mention that at this time there were also popular expressions of support for Stalin’s rehabilitation; see, for example, the collection of letters and poems also from 1967 sent to A. N. Kosygin in GARF f. 5446, op. 101, d. 1423.

Akulov, Vasilii Shmidt, Nikolai Demchenko, and Osip Piatnitskii.⁹²⁸ The overlap between this cohort and those who successfully reclaimed vestiges of their pre-repression lives speaks to these privileged survivors' determination to harness the state's readmission of their relatives into the ranks of the Bolshevik faithful as a source of moral, political, and at times even legal authority.⁹²⁹

Despite some scholars' insistence that widespread social disaffection over living standards and unrest among Gulag prisoners obliged Stalin's successors to reform an untenably punitive system, there were no demands from below that necessitated that they pursue posthumous rehabilitation at all, let alone in the particular manner that they did.⁹³⁰ Like other rulers who participated in and subsequently inherited legacies of violence, they could have refused to readjudicate the outrages of previous decades, trusting in the ability of a state that had recently survived the existential threat of Nazism to weather a power transition. This approach would not have been without considerable liabilities, insofar as it likely would have required the maintenance of a high level of state coercion, and could have occasioned further bloodshed at the top of the Party, but such challenges were already familiar to those who had built their political careers under Stalin. Instead, though, the new collective leadership opted to wrestle with the demons of the recent past,

⁹²⁸ Ibid., 2-3.

⁹²⁹ Two years after (presumably) spearheading the letter to the Central Committee, Petr Iakir composed an open missive to Party's ideological organ *Kommunist*, in which he charged that, according to the logic of posthumous rehabilitation, Stalin could, and should, be held posthumously criminally responsible for the offenses imputed to him at the 22nd Party Congress; Polly Jones argues that Iakir's "'indictment' [...] exhibited 'radical obedience' to party and state discourse, but also claimed the right to individual moral judgment, no doubt partially fuelled by his own family history of repression." See P. Iakir, "Otkrytoe pis'mo v redaktsiiu zhurnala 'Kommunist' o reabilitatsii Stalina, 2 marta 1969 g.," *Sobranie dokumentov samizdata*, vol. 1, AS no. 99 (New York, Radio Liberty Committee, 1972), 1-11; Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma*, 246.

⁹³⁰ Vladimir Naumov offers a version of this thesis, in which he suggests that the new collective leadership was impelled by disaffection over substandard living conditions and ideological malaise to embark upon reforms that could revitalize the regime while preserving its "essence." See Naumov, "Repression and Rehabilitation," 102-103.

hoping to extract some lessons of value from the years of bloodshed and betrayal. The decision to plumb the depths of the cannibalistic 1930s and 1940s – insofar as they affected the Party – markedly diverged from both Soviet precedent and the conduct of other authoritarian regimes.⁹³¹

Marc Elie has dubbed rehabilitation in the post-Stalin Soviet Union “a policy unachieved,” and in many respects this characterization is apt.⁹³² Even the most generous estimates of nearly one million completed legal exonerations prior to October 1964 – a significant number of which, it should be noted, involved individuals arrested in the late 1950s for anti-Soviet agitation and quickly rehabilitated – left millions of falsely charged former political prisoners whose appeals went unheard or were denied outright.⁹³³

Authorities took few steps to demystify the rehabilitation process for the populace at large, and in critical matters such as death dates they actively obfuscated; promised social benefits at times failed to materialize, or were seen as stinting, and acceptance of former *zeks* among the wider populace was rarely forthcoming. Yet in the midst of these evident shortcomings, rehabilitation was a transformative process that indelibly shaped the Soviet Union and its successor states’ relationships to mass violence, justice, and the haunted past by creating a mechanism through which the authorities acknowledged certain

atrocities, made partial amends, and opened grounds upon which the state’s history could

⁹³¹ A particularly telling, and still-controversial example of a state attempting to leave behind its authoritarian past is the so-called “Pact of Forgetting” in post-Franco Spain, in which all involved parties opted for “amnesia” over indemnities. See Paloma Aguilar, “Justice, Politics, and Memory in the Spanish Transition,” in *The Politics of Memory*, 92-118.

⁹³² See Elie, “Rehabilitation in the Soviet Union,” 25-45.

⁹³³ The figure Elie cites for the total number of rehabilitees, 960,000, accounted for only one third of the people estimated at the time to have been repressed on political charges, and presumably does not include members of ethnic groups subjected to collective punishment; see Elie, “Rehabilitation in the Soviet Union,” 25. On the preponderance of Khrushchev-era prisoners as recipients of rehabilitation and other forms of clemency in the late-1950s and early-1960s, see Hornsby, *Protest, Reform, and Repression*, 232-235, and V. A. Kozlov and S. V. Mironenko, eds., 58¹⁰. *Nadzornye proizvodstva Prokuratury SSSR po delam ob antisovetskoi agitatsii i propagande. Mart 1953-1991. Annotirovannyi katalog* (Moskva: Mezhdunarodnyi fond “Demokratiia,” 1999).

be reassessed. Survivors of the rehabilitated as well as the regime itself took seriously the categories that the legal and political processes created, and in the case of the former, they sought to capitalize on their parents' status as a means of influencing the trajectory of Soviet political developments. Although such developments stand as a far cry from what the Presidium's members could have foreseen when they endorsed the first posthumous rehabilitations in November 1953, the process largely functioned as intended and its overarching objectives were met: the secret police no longer threatened the primacy of the Party, the question of Khrushchev and his allies' culpability in the Terror was shunted aside, and Soviet power endured for nearly forty years after Stalin's demise. Thus, as much as the rehabilitation process may have failed to achieve the broader and more abstract goals of promoting truth and reconciliation within Soviet society, it ultimately succeeded in protecting the interests of those who first conceived it, and demonstrably improved the lot of some of the most stigmatized families in the USSR.

While the early Brezhnev years have been depicted as a period of retreat from Khrushchev-era policies that favored rehabilitees, the historical record suggests a more nuanced picture.⁹³⁴ Though the number of rehabilitations indeed declined precipitously over the course of the 1960s, this trend began before Brezhnev's tenure as General Secretary, and the winding down of the judiciary and Party Control Committee's work in this sphere did not curtail the public recognition of figures who had already been posthumously rehabilitated.⁹³⁵ Articles marking significant birthdates of "loyal sons of"

⁹³⁴ On the notion that rehabilitees fell out of "fashion," see Cohen, *The Victims Return*, Chapter 5.

⁹³⁵ Jane Shapiro notes that a prime reason rehabilitation lost much of its urgency with the rise of Brezhnev, Kosygin, and others of their generation is the fact that "none of the aspirants to succeed Khrushchev was an important party leader during the Great Purge," and therefore no one stood to gain from issuing charges of complicity against other challengers. See Jane Shapiro, "Rehabilitation Policy under the Post-Khrushchev Leadership," *Soviet Studies* 20, 4 (April 1969): 495.

and “fighters for” the Party – many of whose names had already been brought up during the proceedings against Beria’s confederates or at Party Congresses – appeared with regularity in Soviet press outlets alongside those of dignitaries who had never fallen into disgrace, though they were devoted almost entirely to their subjects’ revolutionary exploits, and denuded of the grim details of their demise.⁹³⁶ Streets were renamed in honor of onetime pariahs, and memorial plaques were erected on certain buildings where they previously lived; some of their visages would grace postage stamps. Works by rehabilitated authors were returned to print – a potential boon for their heirs – and laudatory accounts of rehabilitees’ lives could be found on the shelves of bookshops and libraries. Rather than disappearing from view, posthumously rehabilitated notables whom Khrushchev and others had named in moments of political extremis were gradually, but surely, woven back into the fabric of Soviet daily life.⁹³⁷

This is not to suggest, however, that the controversy over posthumous rehabilitation had been settled. Mikhail Gorbachev’s resurrection of rehabilitation as a legal and political concern defied key precedents set in the 1950s. By exonerating almost all of the lead defendants from the Moscow show trials, Gorbachev crossed the Rubicon

⁹³⁶ An exemplary such article in *Pravda* marking Mamiia Orakhelashvili’s 80th birthday was actually published two years late due to an error in his official Party biography, though this was corrected in subsequent recognitions of his 90th and 100th birthdays published in *Izvestiia*; see L. Shaumian, “Vernyi boets leninskoi partii,” *Pravda*, June 10, 1963, 4. For the Central Committee Ideological Commission’s discussions of commemorating the posthumously rehabilitated, including Orakhelashvili, see RGANI f. 5, op. 55, dd. 9, 68, 69, 102, 124.

⁹³⁷ Perhaps the single best encapsulation of this trend is the prominent featuring of Vladimir Kirshon’s poem “I Asked the Ash Tree (*Ia sprosil u iasenia*),” set to music by Mikael Tariverdiev, in the 1975 film *The Irony of Fate, or Enjoy Your Steambath! (Ironiia sud’by, ili S legkym parom!)*, which has become a staple of New Year’s Eve celebrations across the Russian-speaking world. Kirshon is credited as the piece’s lyricist in the film’s opening credits, but it seems unlikely that most of the song’s fans were or are aware of its author’s violent death 37 years before the film’s release, or that his entire oeuvre had been suppressed prior to 1956. For the degree to which Kirshon has become associated with the song, see Ekaterina Kovalevskaia, “Ironiia sud’by: za chto rasstreliali avtora pesni ‘Ia sprosil u iasenia...,’” *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, June 29, 2015, available at <https://rg.ru/2015/06/29/reg-skfo/kirshon.html> (accessed March 14, 2018); Ol’ga Kuz’mina, “On sprosil u Stalina,” *Vechernaia Moskva*, January 17, 2018, available at <http://vm.ru/news/452502.html> (accessed March 14, 2018).

that Khrushchev and his councilors could not ford, declaring that opposition to Stalin's general line was neither inherently criminal, nor did it constitute grounds for expulsion from the Party.⁹³⁸ Furthermore, in the interest of radical truth-telling the authorities began to abandon the pretense that executed persons had died while serving out camp sentences, laying bare the scale of extermination during the Terror, and divesting functionaries of the burden of misleading petitioners that had spawned so much confusion, turmoil, and anger. Most significantly, a 1988 resolution opened all cases initiated under Stalin's rule to judicial scrutiny, regardless of whether a protest had been filed, and in 1989 the Politburo issued a blanket decree rendering all verdicts imposed extrajudicially null and void, and automatically rehabilitating all who had been repressed by bodies such as NKVD *troikas* and the Special Board.⁹³⁹ In one fell swoop some 850,000 people were exonerated, fulfilling the judiciary's longstanding desire to rid itself of responsibility for extrajudicial cases, and – arguably – realizing Mikoian's fear of what such a thoroughgoing reprieve might reveal about the nature of the Soviet regime.⁹⁴⁰

As Gorbachev lost his grip on power and the Soviet Union splintered into its constituent republics, rehabilitation emerged as a wedge issue between the ascendant Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic and the All-Union establishment; the 1991 law “On the Rehabilitation of Victims of Political Repression” was introduced by the RSFSR Supreme Soviet and signed by the republican President Boris El'tsin. In recognizing any individual who had suffered repression “for class, social, national,

⁹³⁸ Although there were many calls for Trotsky to be rehabilitated at this time as well, because he was never officially convicted in Soviet court Trotsky was not eligible for official exoneration as Bukharin, Kamenev, and Zinov'ev were. Also, as David Remnick notes, unlike Bukharin, whose attempts to resolve Marxism-Leninism with market forces presaged Gorbachev's *perestroika*, Trotsky's vision of permanent, global revolution held no appeal for the reformers of the 1980s; see David Remnick, “Trotsky in Afterlife,” *The Washington Post*, August 20, 1990.

⁹³⁹ Smith, *Remembering Stalin's Victims*, 53.

⁹⁴⁰ For the figure of 850,000 rehabilitated in 1989, see GARF f. 9474, op. 10, d. 1062, ll. 80-82.

religious, or other reasons” as eligible for rehabilitation, the measure cast Communist state violence in most of its permutations as illegitimate, and it supplanted the existing restitution regime by affirming victims’ rights to the restoration of seized property and onetime residences, financial compensation calculated against time served up to 100 months, and priority access to medical treatment.⁹⁴¹ Critically, for the first time rehabilitees and their survivors were granted access to their archival investigative files. This shattered the jealously guarded monopoly over information relating to the purges that had defined almost every aspect of the rehabilitation process of the 1950s and 1960s. Although citizens still had to go through the organs of state security, rather than having curated details doled out by secret policemen, they were empowered to personally examine unredacted documents, and draw their own conclusions from the grim contents therein.⁹⁴² While the newly independent Russian Federation relinquished its exclusive authority over materials that had served as the basis for the destruction and subsequent expiation of hundreds of thousands of innocents, it retained control over the legal processes by which suspect cases from the past were adjudicated.

In addition to ruling on rehabilitations that went unheard in previous decades or were denied for procedural reasons, the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation continues to act as arbiter of who does not merit consideration for exoneration, thereby serving as custodian of the Soviet legacy. In the years since the USSR’s dissolution the Supreme Court has repeatedly been called upon to consider whether perpetrators of state

⁹⁴¹ Smith, *Remembering Stalin’s Victims*, 200-201; Cathy A. Frierson, “Russia’s Law ‘On Rehabilitation of Victims of Political Repression’: 1991-2011, An Enduring Artifact of Transitional Justice,” NCEEER Working Paper, 2014, 6-7; Nanci Adler, “In Search of Identity: The Collapse of the Soviet Union and the Recreation of Russia,” in *The Politics of Memory*, 288.

⁹⁴² By the close of the 20th century, over 115,000 individuals had availed themselves of this opportunity. See Frierson, “Russia’s Law,” 43.

repression who were themselves executed between the late-1930s and mid-1950s are now eligible for legal rehabilitation. Though in a handful of cases the court has revised individuals' sentences – as it did with Viktor Abakumov, commuting his capital punishment to 25 years' imprisonment *ex post facto* – it has consistently refused to reprieve state security chiefs such as Iagoda, Ezhov, Frinovskii, and Beriia, despite having dismissed charges of treason, espionage, and conspiracy against the first three.⁹⁴³ Applying reasoning with strong echoes of that used to bar Izrail' Dagin from attaining rehabilitation forty years prior, the Supreme Court found that even though there was no evidence to link these men to the concocted charges with which they had been impugned, their demonstrable abuses of office were sufficiently egregious to disqualify them from judicial absolution; succinctly put, the right men were killed, but for the wrong reasons.⁹⁴⁴ The October 1991 law excludes individuals who have “committed offenses against justice” from rehabilitation, but as Russian historian Alter Litvin notes, the legislation does not specify the conception of justice to which it refers.⁹⁴⁵ As a result, the present-day Russian judiciary, bound by precedents set during the 1950s and 1960s, continues to operate within a framework of responsibility for the Terror that endorses the results – if not the rationale – of Soviet-era proceedings against secret police perpetrators,

⁹⁴³ Litvin and Keep, *Stalinism*, 71; Jansen and Petrov, *Stalin's Loyal Executioner*, 190-191. Until a recent overhaul, the website of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation featured an online docket of rulings from recent years that included numerous denials of rehabilitation for prominent NKVD officers; unfortunately this information appears to have been completely scrubbed from the website, and there are no cached or archived versions forthcoming.

⁹⁴⁴ A counterpart to this trend can be detected in the January 2010 ruling by the Kyiv Court of Appeal that held the Soviet leadership of the early 1930s – including Stalin, Molotov, Kaganovich, Postyshev, and Kosior – criminally responsible for the Ukrainian famine of 1932-1933, though the court declined to pursue the charges further in light of the deaths of the accused. Postyshev and Kosior were thus effectively “dehabilitated” in eyes of Ukrainian justice for their roles in an atrocity that has persistently remained outside the bounds of Soviet terror as recognized by the contemporary Russian government, reflecting the leading role that the disputed past plays in the growing divide between the two states. See “Ruling in the criminal proceedings over genocide in Ukraine in 1932-1933,” Human Rights in Ukraine, available at <http://khpg.org/en/index.php?id=1265217823> (accessed March 12, 2018).

⁹⁴⁵ Litvin and Keep, *Stalinism*, 71-72.

while eliding Stalin's guiding hand. Much in the same way that Stalin remained largely invisible at critical junctures during rehabilitations in the Khrushchev years, in contemporary Russia his responsibility for unleashing the Terror is obscured by the state's ongoing deference to its Soviet forebears.

Born out of the perceived need to tar Beria's reputation in the interest of asserting the Party's supremacy over state security, posthumous rehabilitation quickly assumed dimensions far beyond its fairly limited tactical aims. As surviving relatives of the disappeared clamored for some indication of the fates that had befallen their loved ones and relief from the stigma that hounded them, the authorities concocted a patchwork of responses that at once reaffirmed some of their most underhanded behaviors while simultaneously extending consideration and privileges to families far beyond what most citizens expected from the government. The archival record shows a strong correlation between the men whom Khrushchev and his allies invoked to discredit and condemn their rivals, and the survivors who had the most success in extracting concessions from the state. Though the figures involved in this process were by no means benevolent actors, the image of the state that emerges through the study of early posthumous rehabilitations is one that was at times responsive to and invested in restoring patterns of duty and privilege that dated to the Soviet Union's formative years that were seemingly splintered by the Great Terror. This readmission of onetime "enemies of the people" and their descendants into the ranks of the valorized revolutionary elite figures among the most enduring legacies of the post-Stalin revisionist project: just as posthumous rehabilitation showed that physical death was no impediment to the restoration of an individual's reputation, or his ability to be of service to the party-state, so too did it underscore the

persistence of notions of inheritance – in terms of both personal obligations and property. In the post-Stalin Soviet government's quest for a redemptive narrative of the recent past, posthumous rehabilitation of Old Bolsheviks repressed by the regime they helped build proved a compelling and enduring means of overcoming state violence and its aftereffects.

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