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The Great Return: The Gulag Survivor and the Soviet System
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The Return of the Repressed

The title of this section refers to one of Freud’s basic hypotheses regarding the cause and treatment of mental disorders in individuals. In the context of this discussion, however, the term will be used to describe how a dysfunctional social system deals with disowned parts of itself.

Briefly, Freud’s hypothesis is that people regularly experience forbidden thoughts, feelings, or impulses and instead of finding socially acceptable ways to express or satisfy them, they repress them. They become "forgotten" by being relegated to an amnestic section of the mind. There, these forbidden impulses persist, exerting constant pressure to have their demands satisfied. In consequence, it requires considerable mental energy to continually keep them from intruding into consciousness. The individual’s peace of mind depended on preventing "the return of the repressed," and when the repressed impulses break through the ego’s mechanisms of defense, the person experiences psychiatric symptoms and is at risk for decompensating.

Freud’s hypothesis is being appropriated here for use in the social and political arena. The "return of the repressed" refers to the victims of the Soviet system who were repressed by the state, incarcerated in the Gulag, and then returned to Soviet society. Freud’s concept is useful in understanding both the cause and the result of this political process because Gulag returnees were not just people, they were also living memories that could no longer be denied. Writing on the Holocaust in 1971 Ernest Rappaport asserts: "survivors of the camp were treated as unwelcome disturbers of a lulled world conscience and their persistent mental anguish after liberation was shrugged off as their resistance against adjustment." He further describes the "preferred attitude of
forgetting" that the victims resisted. The "return of the repressed" is not just an exploration of individual memories. It is an examination of the tension created by the constant struggle between the Soviet system's efforts to repress its citizens and the citizens' efforts to express themselves. Organizations like Memorial were able to force a recognition of both the repressed people and their repressed history. This eventually led to a crescendo of revelations during Gorbachev's de-Stalinization.

Though repression was the Soviet way of functioning, we will investigate the deeper meaning of the Soviet returnee question within the theoretical framework of a dysfunctional social system with its recurring conflict between the repressed and the repressive forces. Our examination will begin with the period of exile of the late forties, since this commenced the first significant wave of returnees to society. These returnees were mostly the prisoners who had gotten ten-year sentences in 1937. Their experiences are an important indicator of society's sentiment toward their "politically criminal" fellow countrymen. Prisoners were freed from the confines of their prison, but as their stories will attest, their new status could hardly be called liberated. Commenting on release in the pre-Khrushchev years, Solzhenitsyn aptly observed:

There is a curse on those 'released' under the joyless sky of the Archipelago, and as they move into freedom the clouds will grow darker.... Release is arrest all over again, the same sort of punishing transition from state to state, shattering your breast, the structure of your life and your ideas, and promising nothing in return. (Solzhenitsyn's comment could also be applied to the Khrushchev years, as later returnee tales will evidence.) In terms of the ex-prisoners' personal freedom, exile effectively constituted a prison without walls. With his characteristic grim irony, Solzhenitsyn reminded his countrymen that exile was supposed to be among "the inventory of instruments of oppression which the glorious revolution was to sweep away..."
forever". In The Gulag Archipelago, he points out that exiles did not intimately discuss things past, as was common practice in prisons, nor did they make photographs, lest they be suspected of organizing anti-Soviet activities. For these reasons, Solzhenitsyn found it difficult to collect stories about the lives of those in exile. However, these stories were eventually incorporated into memoirs that were published in samizdat or later collected in the eighties. They comprise a rich store for our reconstruction of Soviet attitudes toward Gulag returnees.

In this section we will explore a number of stories about the returnee experience in exile. These stories include their living conditions, family relationships, working conditions, contact with and mutual attitude toward Soviet authorities, their (realistic) fear of re-arrest, and their sense of self. Enduring problems associated with all of these issues were to be recurrent themes in the life of returnees even as late as the seventies. This will be amplified later.

Return to Soviet society began at the moment of release, but the reception that awaited the returnees varied with the historical period. While the releases at the end of the thirties and the beginning of World War II will not be dealt with extensively here, some of the patterns established at that time were to become standard practice for the release and rehabilitation experience of later years. For example, Medvedev has chronicled the fact that important military men such as Rokossovsky and Meretskov, and well-known civilians such as Tupolev and Korolyov belonged to this category of returnees, and received complete rehabilitation. They returned to work and were given high positions. But, according to Roy Medvedev, their comfortable status was accompanied by a warning:

Give your signature that you will never tell anyone what you saw and what you know. Otherwise, you will end up in camp. You saw terrible things. You don’t want them to happen to you again. You don’t want that?--Then be silent! Don’t even tell your wives in bed anything about
the camp. Don’t say anything about the torture! Don’t say anything about the interrogation! Then you will do whatever you want: work, the army, the front, battle, work as People’s commissars, ministers. You will be trusted." 6

Silence in exchange for rehabilitation -- "a bargain with the devil" as it were, was initiated here and later employed under Khrushchev. While release with rehabilitation was possible, the practice was not widespread. In those unusual circumstances when it did occur, the sentence was revoked, the case was closed, and the rights were restored. As release and return became a more common practice, the procedure became more complicated. Most prisoners were released because their term had expired unless their sentence was arbitrarily extended; others were pardoned under an amnesty, but this did not mean that they were exonerated. The increasingly institutionalized and bureaucratized rehabilitation process can be used as an important gauge for measuring the Soviet system’s adaptation to repression. It reflected the ability of the system to tolerate its mistakes.

Medvedev’s description of the conspiracy of silence is confirmed by a number of stories from early returnees. Their stories are sometimes reminiscent of Josef K.’s visit to The Lawyer’s residence in Kafka’s Der Prozess. There he makes the acquaintance of another "accused" man, a long-time client, who is desperately employing every possible measure to extricate himself. He tells K. that he has hired five additional lawyers to work on his case.7 Innocence cannot be assumed and must be proven against an overwhelming assumption of guilt. (One ex-prisoner employed the old folk saying "prove that you are not a camel" to describe this principle of "Stalinist justice".8) Furthermore, innocence is of little consequence.

Soviet reality frequently echoed Kafka’s eloquent descriptions. The modus operandi of the Soviet system was often characterized by two contradictory messages: the first is that you probably cannot reach your goal (justice, employment, acquisition of proper housing, etc.); the second
is that you are expected to continue to behave as if you think you can. These contradictions can coexist because they employ different levels of communication -- action and words. Their coexistence is also maintained by implicitly discouraging the participants from acknowledging the contradiction.

In the post-Khrushchev era, one of the only ways available for dealing publicly with the camp experience and the plight of the returnee was through the use of fiction. By employing the literary mode, real life stories could be presented as if they were fiction and if they were sufficiently artful they could contain messages critical of the Soviet system. In Pushkinsky Dom, written in the seventies, Andrei Bitov presents such a work of fiction. The novel tells the life story of Lyova, whose father and grandfather were returnees. One of the characters is "Uncle Mitya", a relative who has returned from prison in the post-war period, and is in reality Lyova's father. We do not learn much else about Uncle Mitya. One of the main points in the plot is that Lyova did not know for a long time that his father was a prisoner. After his return, the father remained separated from his family, only visiting under the disguised name of "Uncle Mitya". This family was not reunited out of fear of the effect that having a returnee father would have on the boy.

Lyova's grandfather "Ded" is a more dramatic character with a more poignant story of personal tragedy following his return, and because of his return. Ded's tale focuses on some very significant questions with regard to returnees. He tells Lyova that he became a broken man only after his return, and that the return was the greatest humiliation in his life: "I don't belong to those good-for-nothings, those without pride, who were first undeservedly incarcerated and now deservedly liberated.... The authorities are what they are. If I were in their position, I would have jailed me. [He was apparently arrested on real charges of active political opposition.] But what I do not deserve is this insult of rehabilitation". Ded was given an apartment and a pension as if it were some kind
of gift, not something that he had earned. He cannot be bought by these things, he explains, because he is a changed man. He becomes ill after his return, cannot find any peace, starts to fall apart, and begins drinking. "It is cruel to do that to a person twice!" he exclaims to his grandson, referring to the punishment of incarceration and the subsequent punishment of rehabilitation. Ded makes the analogy of operating on a virgin after she has been raped to make it appear as if she were still a virgin. Ded tells how in camp he had a purpose in life -- to get out. Now his life is empty. Ded could not readjust to living with the family and eventually returned to the exile settlement where he had been. There he remarried, and refused his family's request to return to them with his new wife. He subsequently dies of a heart attack.

Though a number of issues are illustrated by this story, Bitov's dramatization of the impact of return and the difficulty of re-adapting to society as an ex-prisoner is particularly insightful. He is especially articulate in criticizing the state for granting forgiveness to the returnee rather than asking forgiveness from the returnee. This perspective challenges the self-serving, self-righteous official view of rehabilitation.

Witness the following Kafkaesque circumstance of one early returnee. Moisey Aronovich Panich, a Jewish military engineer, was arrested in 1938 at age 36 on article 58-10 (anti-Soviet agitation) and sentenced by the OSO (Special Conference), that is, without trial, to three years in Ivdellag in the Northern Urals. Upon release in February 1941, with the "terrible disgraceful label 'enemy of the people'" he was forbidden to live in provincial and city capitals, as well as in a number of administrative centers. He had no family of his own, no home, and could not see his brothers and sisters because it would endanger them. Panich decided to go to Moscow and fight to rid himself of the stigma of being a political criminal.

After finally gaining entrance to the Military Procuracy,
Moisey Panich was told that his case would be looked into at some point, but whatever the outcome, the official advised him to forget everything, "No one is pushing you to say where you have been ... you have a diploma, a passport, your last military service certificate says that you were demobilized without any details on the reason. So go, live and work." Though his friends in Moscow received him well, and were even willing to write letters to the Military Procuracy on his behalf, Panich was unsuccessful in accelerating the process, and was forced to leave the Soviet capital under threat of arrest for transgression of his passport regime.

His efforts to find work as an electrical engineer met with failure as soon as his potential employer became acquainted with his history. The ex-prisoner finally went to the head of the local branch of the NKVD and demanded either to be given work or to be re-arrested. Employment was arranged in a local factory, but a few months later, the Germans invaded, and he had to quickly abandon both his work and the city of Mariupol where he had settled. As a suspicious element, he was not taken into the army, and he was consistently reproached for talking about his background: "Why remember your whole past now? Who is pushing you to tell about it?" In order to survive, Panich found it necessary to change his biography. Thereafter he got a job in a Kuznetsk metallurgical plant where he worked until 1962. Despite the stability he had found, he lamented in his memoirs, "I simply could not reconcile myself with this situation and could not prevail upon myself to forget everything. I only adapted to life. I could not reconcile myself with the fact that I should be ashamed of my past, and even more so, ashamed of heroic pages of my history." As long as he was willing to repress his memory, the system was willing to accept him, because this repressed person was apparently too much of a reminder of the system’s repressed history and its repressive nature. Fortunately, for this particular ex-zek, as a former military engineer, he had a higher status than many others, so he was officially aided in
his amnesia about his past.

Interestingly, Panich was among many of the incarcerated who paradoxically maintained a strong belief in the Party. Hence, the earnest effort to appeal to the Party to expose the truth and correct injustices was understandable. Panich’s individual struggle to suppress his personal history in order to adapt to the demands of the present, mirrored similar efforts and similar failures by the larger society. The past could not be wished away because its consequences were always present. The distortions required for this futile attempt were dysfunctional at both the individual and the societal level.

Exile

One of the dysfunctional consequences of the Soviet system’s repressive nature was that it was riddled with contradictions and inconsistencies. For example, the system itself was not always willing to put aside the past, even for those who were able to repress their memories or at least their disclosures. There were numerous instances in which individuals were urged not to talk about their pasts while at the same time officials doggedly pushed to expose them. In the following section we present unvarnished stories of exile that speak eloquently about the impact of the "ex-prisoner" status on the lives of these early returnees. Though there is a certain amount of uniformity in their experiences, each of these stories has been selected to illustrate a particular aspect of the returnee experience: the exile’s (former) profession, patriotism, devotion to the Party, etc. They fill in some of the blank spots of this part of Soviet history.

It is also useful at this juncture to reflect on the phenomenon of prisoners who remained at work in the Gulag or voluntarily maintained contact with their former supervisors (i.e., jailers), even after liberation. One woman who was released in 1940 from the women’s labor camp in Akmolinsk returned with a letter of recommendation from her former camp
surpervisor, to head an MVD technological project at a local factory. This illustrates the way in which "the camp" and "the outside (Soviet world)" overlapped and merged with each other. This is not surprising when we recognize that the culture of the camp reflected that of the Soviet system. As such, some prisoners enjoyed special privileges. For example, those who were attached to the regime had better jobs. For its part, the repressive Soviet system was in many ways a prison camp with wider boundaries. Consequently, the camp experience largely determined adaptation to society after release. Stephen Kotkin asks, "How much longer will the massive gulag, with all its horrors and paradoxes, continue to be treated as entirely apart from the rest of Soviet society and at the same time as the defining institution and experience of the USSR?" For heuristic purposes our present discussion will treat the zone (the camp) and the outside world as separate entities, but it is important to recognize that in practice (i.e., in the Soviet scenario of socialism) this distinction was blurred. We must, in either case, view the Gulag as the integral mechanism of the Soviet system's adaptation to repression.

Maria Maksimovna Galner was stripped of her Party membership in 1936 and incarcerated in the Karlag and Dolinka from 1937-1946 for being a family member of a traitor to the motherland. Her husband had been shot in 1936 for participation in the "Trotskyite-Zinovievite terrorist center". Galner's imprisonment started in the Butyrka, where a cell originally built for forty housed one hundred women. Among her cell-mates were the wife of the editor-in-chief of Vechernyaya Moskva and the second wife of Tukhachevsky. Once in camp, Galner met and befriended various women prisoners -- artists, ballerinas, singers, teachers, wives of high military officers and government officials -- who shared the common lot of manual labor under miserable conditions. Despite their separation from loved ones, heavy work, and poor food, they still maintained their belief in the country, as expressed in a patriotic song they liked to sing, "My country, my Moscow --
you are most precious". In short, its message was "despite our grief ... we have to believe in our marvelous country". Gainer eventually got a good job in the camp working as a lathe operator. She even remained at this job as a free worker for a year after her sentence had expired.

When Gainer left the camp, she went to Ryazan, but was unable to find work. She joined some former camp-mates in a town 100 kilometers from Moscow. Though a professional translator, the ex-zek did not even attempt to find work in her field, since former prisoners were not given "ideological" work. Instead, she went to factories looking for employment as a lathe operator. Gainer despaired, "Lathe operators were needed everywhere, but as soon as they saw my camp certificate, they rejected me". She eventually did get a job at a factory whose director sympathized with former prisoners. Every subsequent move created the same problems with work. Only in 1966, thirty years after her arrest, was Gainer able to find work without any restrictions. Despite limitations, she was relatively fortunate in that she did manage to get hired.

The intention of the policy governing the release into exile of political prisoners seems to have been "that no prisoner should ever taste freedom again". Accordingly, a February 1948 ukaz (decree) of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet ordered "political offenders and individuals presenting a danger on account of their anti-Soviet ties [to be] exiled indefinitely" when their prison terms were up. A March 1948 order of the Ministry of State Security further specified the remote regions (eastern Siberia, Kazakhstan, etc.) to which these exiles were to be sent for settlement.

A typical example of release into exile can be found in the following story. Grigory Grigoryevich Budagov, a railroad engineer (a suspect profession that by Stalinist definition often implied "Trotskyite-Japanese sabotage"), was arrested in 1930 and taken to Moscow’s Butyrka prison. His journey through the prisons and camps ended when his term was
completed in 1948. He waited three days, then walked sixteen kilometers to the train station and headed for Novosibirsk. At this destination, he was picked up by authorities and taken to prison. He waited four days and then went on a hunger strike to protest being held illegally. It was finally explained to the prisoner that they had "lost" him and were thus obligated to send him for consignment. Then he learned that all article 58ers were being sent to remote places in Siberia for "permanent settlement". Dozens of others were in the same situation, all waiting to be dispatched:

Under convoy two officers took us to the village of Chumakovo in Novosibirsk province ... where I was reminded of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. It was something like a slave auction. All the big bosses of the region came: the director of a production plant, ... the chairmen of kolkhozes, etc. I was chosen by the head of the regional community services (raikomkhoz), who took me right away, telling me along the way that he did not have a technical engineer, and if the chairman of the regional executive committee (RIK) gives permission, then he would engage me in this function. After his visit to the chairman of the RIK, the head of the raikomkhoz reported the former's answer: 'Give him the heaviest physical work'.... I dragged logs for a week.21

That particular chairman was later charged with corruption and removed from office. His successor allowed the ex-zek to work as a technical engineer. Problems remained, however, in his living circumstances. The locals, as a rule, did not allow exiles in their homes, because they considered them "enemies of the people".22

Every ten days, Budagov was obliged to report to the MVD where he was told that any attempt to transgress his prescribed borders would be considered an escape and would be punished with ten years of incarceration. His experience and his conclusions were not uncommon among the population of exiled former prisoners:

Soon I began to sense that in the Tomsk camp I felt better than in exile. Here, with every step the local inhabitants made me understand that I was an 'enemy of the people'. Whereas in camp I enjoyed some authority by virtue of my engineering work, here my title and skills
Yet another disheartened exile, Aleksandr Dmitrievich Yegorov, writes in anguish in his memoirs, "Exile was incomprehensible and clearly unfounded and monstrously illegal". This former prisoner, a physician, worked as a doctor on the front in World War I. He was arrested in Ufa in 1940 on article 58-10&11 and sentenced to six years of deprivation of liberty with three years loss of rights. He was freed in 1946 and re-arrested in 1950 (at age 62) whereupon he was sent for 'eternal settlement' to Krasnoyarsky Krai. Transport to the region was in the notorious Stolypin cars with no space, no sanitation, little food and no water. A thief who was placed in the same wagon stole what little bread Yegorov had. His money had already been confiscated during the search prior to the journey, and so he arrived at his destination with no food and no means. He ended up having to spend the first two months of his exile in the hospital as a patient, after which he could remain temporarily as a physician, working for a salary. The ex-zek describes his search for work in his profession:

There was an announcement that applications were being taken for employment [at a local hospital or clinic], but I was rejected because [they said] there were no vacancies. They were afraid to hire us; discrimination was tolerated with regard to us exiles, even though the procurator and the examining magistrate in Ufa assured me that a decree was issued on the unhindered acceptance [of exiles] for employment, but it was deception, indeed it was the very same procurator who did not allow me to receive my doctor's diploma from home, and without a diploma, he well knew, one is not hired as a doctor.\(^{25}\)

The procurator's office elevated obfuscation, deception and passive resistance to a fine art. Witness Yegorov's attempt to find work in his specialty: ear, nose, and throat. It is testimony to the prevalent attitude toward exiles -- they were feared, but they were also undesired, outcast. After somehow managing to obtain a copy of his diploma, the physician applied to the Krai Health Department. They replied
that they had no positions available. "If I were to show this answer in Moscow," the doctor mused, "they would be horrified, amazed and surprised that the whole of Krasnoyarsky Krai is saturated with ear, nose and throat specialists, though it is well known that there aren't even enough in Krasnoyarsk alone." (This reference to a 'reasonable Moscow' seems ironically out of place from someone who was already a long-time victim of a system that was engineered from the capital.) The doctor's plight only confirmed that as bad as things are, the procurators can make them worse.

The next year (1951) Yegorov asked for a transfer to be closer to European Russia, and was granted a move to Kazakhstan. Change in location did not change the local attitudes. When there was not enough bread at bakeries, he would overhear the order, "Don't give exiles or Russians any bread!". Yegorov eventually found some work in his specialty there. When he was freed from exile in 1954, the doctor experienced new problems as an ex-exile. Officials wanted to keep him in Kazakhstan for work, and so they systematically set up obstacles to hinder his release. Reflecting on his life as an exile, Yegorov recalled that he did not experience humiliation, but rather melancholy, loneliness, and a sense of feeling abandoned.

Indeed, as long as there was no blanket condemnation of Stalin and Stalinism (an idea approached at the XX and XXII Party Congresses, but not fully realized or lasting), the presumption of guilt generally characterized society's approach to ex-prisoners. Consequently, the re-assimilation of "political offenders" into what was claimed to be a legitimate system was a complex and exceedingly difficult task. If exiles transgressed their prescribed boundaries in their search for better work, living conditions, and families, they were automatically subject to re-arrest and sentences of up to 25 years of hard labor. Most of these individuals had already served years of prison terms. To ensure limited movement of these "dangerous elements", they were required to check in at local MVD headquarters every ten days.
After her release Nina Georgievna Bardina struggled with both the experience of having been incarcerated and with her status as a returnee. In 1975 she writes that forty years had passed since the moment of her arrest, which was followed by seven years in camp and seven years in exile, and "(n)ot once, not in any circumstances, did I allow a single episode from that life to enter my mind"\(^{28}\) (a statement contradicted by the length and richness of her memoirs). Bardina explains that the period after release was the most painful time of her life: "it seems that the transition from imprisonment to liberty, to free life, is much more difficult than that from freedom to jail".\(^{29}\) In a long discourse, she contends that though it is extremely traumatic for an innocent person to end up in prison, it is not alienating because everyone else [among the politicals] is experiencing the same bitter fate. The prisoner does not see his family, but neither do his fellow inmates; the prisoner is deprived of his rights, but so, too are the others, etc. There are no hopes that can be dashed -- life is expected to be rough. The transition, however, from incarceration to liberty, with its limited rights for ex-zeks and the burden of charges from which most were not cleared was in its own way more difficult. The liberated prisoner, in Bardina's words, "is constantly confronted with his inadequacy. Instead of a passport he has a simple piece of paper ... everyone has a passport and you have a paper! When people see this paper, the expressions on their faces change, fear appears in their eyes".\(^{30}\) During this period, it was rarely possible to conceal one's history from, for example, a potential employer.

Bardina describes the frustration of ex-zeks who have to live in restricted places, who lose connections with friends, acquaintances, and former colleagues, and who feel compelled to invent something to tell others about where they have been. Though no one high or low was immune to the same fate, their sense of estrangement was compounded by the circumstance that if they disclosed their past they were branded as "enemies of the people" and shunned by society; if they tried to hide it
they were alienated from themselves.

In 1942, Bardina was a chemistry student at Moscow State University when she was arrested by the NKVD in the dean’s office.\textsuperscript{31} Seven years later, after her release, that same dean told her that she was not allowed to study, not even as a non-matriculated student, because she did not have the right to stay in Moscow where she had come to be with her mother. They went to Kaluga, where the returnee and her mother had to move from one house to another, as local police informed their landlords of their status. The work situation was no better. Bardina lost every job she was given because of her passport. Ultimately, like Panich, she went to the supervisor of the local Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) and explained that she could not find a place in this new life. She requested that she be sent back to camp.\textsuperscript{32} By severely limiting the vocational and geographical options of returnees the prison camp life often came to appear to be the least bad among worse alternatives.

As we have also seen, there was some compassion for these victims (officially perpetrators), even among the ranks of the MVD. In this particular case, Bardina was offered work in her field in a secret military factory (the year was 1950), and told not to show her passport. The MVD 'benefactor' could at least be assured that she would work hard, since prisoners were accustomed to little else.

**Family Ties**

In all societies, the incarceration of a family member exposes the family to varying degrees of stress. In the Soviet Union, politics raised the degree of stress to the level of physical danger. All relatives were stigmatized by their association with "enemies of the people" and were themselves at risk for arrest. Let us briefly explore the impact of arrest on the family, since family reunion was to be one of the most crucial questions for returnees.

In the early fifties, Harvard University conducted an
extensive and unique project on the Soviet social system, utilizing interviews and questionnaires of 3,000 refugees and displaced persons who had left the Soviet Union during and after World War II. This was a group of people who had not re-assimilated and were not necessarily direct victims of the terror. Their attitudes, at least those expressed during the interviews, were decidedly anti-Soviet -- a feature not common to the group examined in the present study. This sample provides a useful contrast to the ex-prisoner returnees.

Oral interviews revealed a variety of reactions of the family to the arrest of a member. While they ranged from clinging together to dissolution to denouncement of the arrestee, one of the researchers, H.K. Geiger, reported that the average family reaction was to become more close-knit, which he interpreted as a "survival response" at some level. He suggests that this bonding may have been a "psychological adaptation to being rejected by the system. The family becomes a place of psychological refuge for a person rejected by the system." According to this early study, family cohesion, rather than disintegration, was the most common reaction to the arrest of one of its members. Family members were unable to lead a normal life because they were rejected by the system (economic restrictions, feeling outcast by the community), and so they responded by developing anger toward the regime. These interviewees also appeared willing to forgive and forget the regime's actions if only they could resume normal lives. However, the possibility of resuming a normal life for the stigmatized family members of Soviet returnees was very remote.

Numerous memoirs that have become available in subsequent decades, particularly in the late eighties, contest Geiger's conclusions on family cohesion. Rather, these memoirs suggest that family ties with prisoners were systematically, and often successfully, discouraged. (It should be noted that some wives and children of "enemies of the people" were summarily shot in the 1930s. Still others were kept alive to become co-conspirators and adult defendants.) If a potential arrestee
were to denounce her husband, she might be able to avoid incarceration, though denunciation of others was by no means a guarantee against one's own imprisonment. One memoir writer quotes the following letter received by a camp-mate:

Dear husband, I heard that you miss me. Don't miss me and don't write to me anymore, because I have been living with another man for a year and a daughter was born to us one month ago. I only learned about life after you were put in prison... I learned about what rights women are given in the USSR, and you concealed these rights from me, and never read me Vechernyaya Moskva, [you acted like] a class enemy. 37

Another memoir author describes the financial incentives provided to the spouses of victims to dissolve the relationship. Normally divorce cost five-hundred rubles, but divorce from a prisoner cost only three rubles -- the equivalent of two portions of ice cream. 38

It was the common experience of the returnees that even initially solid personal relationships would erode under the stress of stigmatization, threats, and long separation, especially when there is no reassurance of reunion. Perhaps the separation is also driven by a sentiment the narrator expresses in Shalamov's Graphite: "I wouldn't want to go back to my family. They wouldn't understand me, they couldn't.... No man should see or know the things I have seen and known." 39

1948 and its aftermath

Soviet repressive policies have been characterized by freezes and relative thaws, by periods of repression followed by periods of retrenchment from these policies. And so it was that at the end of the forties a new cycle of repression began. Evgeniya Ginzburg refers to the "house of cards" in which ex-zeks then lived, and she writes about sensing the dread approach of 1949, "twin brother of 1937". 40 Ginzburg, at the time was working in a kindergarten as an exile when she was picked up by the authorities on suspicion of continuing
her terrorist activities. Outraged at the absurdity of the new trumped-up charge, she exclaimed: "Am I supposed to have continued with my terrorist activity in the kindergarten?". This period was not ultimately to become the twin in terror of 1937, but prisoners did not know that and feared the worst. In many cases the purpose of their detention was only to change their status to that of "permanent, lifelong" exiles by decision of the Special Conference of the MGB.

Some ex-prisoners -- exiles -- were picked up and sent to new places of settlement. The previously mentioned ukaz of February 21, 1948 stipulated that those "especially dangerous state criminals," who had already served prison or camp terms, and were released, now would be sent into bessrochnaya ssylka (unlimited or eternal exile). In the words of the Council of Ministers, this category was comprised of: "spies, diversants, terrorists, Trotskyites, rightists, Mensheviks, SR's, anarchists, nationalists, White emigrés, participants of other anti-Soviet organizations, and groups or individuals presenting a danger because of their anti-Soviet hostile activities". This category also included those "state criminals" who were released from incarceration at the end of the war. Those who were arrested under this directive were prosecuted under the same article for which they had already served and completed sentences, thus being punished twice for the same alleged offence. An October 1948 instruction recommended that MGB supervisors arrest and interrogate particularly suspicious individuals in the above-mentioned category of "criminals".

Newly accessible archival materials provide some insight into the scope of this wave of repression. By order of "Division A" of the MGB, without the decision of the OSO (Special Conference), 37,951 individuals were sent into unlimited exile in the years between 1948 and 1953. Additionally, another 20,267 ex-prisoners were dispatched to far places by decision of the Special Conference in the period between 1949 and 1953.
Zoya Dmitrievna Marchenko was arrested three times, the first time in 1931, the second time in 1937, and the third time in 1949. Her brother had been a Trotskyite who was arrested in 1929 and sentenced to ten years in the Solovetsky camps for his alleged attempt on Stalin’s life. On the only visit she had with her brother after his arrest, Marchenko asked what he was in for. He responded that he was "for purity of the Leninist line". He was shot on Solovki in 1937. Zoya Marchenko’s first arrest was for possession of "anti-Soviet literature" — notes from the parting conversation with her brother in which he told of the torture during his interrogation. She was initially held in the Butyrka where she eventually worked as a stenographer. Then she was sent to Svitlag (acronym for the Northeastern Correctional Labor camps), where she also continued stenographic work for the remainder of her three-year sentence. Marchenko contends that she knew she would be arrested again, since (superstitious as Russians are) she turned around and looked at the prison when she left it. In view of the contrived charges that the Soviet authorities routinely used to justify their arrests, this reasoning was not so unusual.

In the interim between arrests, Marchenko met and married the chief engineer of a construction enterprise, German Iosifovich Staubenberger. He was subsequently arrested in 1936 and died during incarceration. Marchenko’s second arrest, in 1937, was for refusal to sign a false deposition against her husband, and also for counter-revolutionary Trotskyite activity. She spent the first year in prison, was sentenced to eight years in Kolyma, and was held there for an additional year after her term expired. Regarding her ability to survive the notorious journey by boat from Vladivostok to the North and the subsequent years of incarceration in the harshest of labor camps, she reflected, "Our organism has more strength than we think". At age 89 she claimed that her goal for living was a certain responsibility, "for the sake of remembering, preserving, and passing on ... that which [she]
Zoya Dmitrievna was released in 1946 with a "minus" in her passport. She was not allowed to live in big cities, but she could return to her native Ukraine. She stayed at the same job where she had worked her last year as a prisoner, and lived in a dormitory in Magadan, outside the camp zone. In 1948 Marchenko went to live with her parents in the province in Ukraine, but not for long. She was arrested again in 1949, "they let you out of camp too early," she was told. The Special Conference first sent her to Sumy, where she had to endure an internal prison coupled with interrogations. Under such circumstances, being sentenced to unlimited exile to Krasnoyarsky Krai near the Arctic Circle came as a relief. Otherwise, Marchenko contends, she would have committed suicide.

The liberty of Krasnoyarsky Krai was relative, since travelling outside the boundaries of this region was punishable by 25 years of hard labor. There Marchenko worked as an economist on the "dead roads", an expensive wasteful forced labor project that was abandoned after Stalin's death. In 1954 Marchenko moved to Krasnoyarsk where she married an ethnic German, who was also a returnee with a minus in his passport. As exiles, wherever they went, they had to check in every ten days with the local authorities. One day they were told that their documents had been received, and that their exile was over. They still were not allowed to live in major cities.

Returnees were constantly plagued by the threat of renewed repression. To the authorities, the fact that someone had once been incarcerated made them almost automatic suspects. This suspicion spread to the social network. Marchenko explained that after her arrest, a number of her friends believed that she was indeed a criminal, and avoided her after release. Others who understood the inequity of her predicament tried to help her after release, even at their own risk. Some old friends got together with the ex-prisoner, but carefully avoided any mention of the past. Marchenko had a
deep sense of feeling like an outcast and was ashamed to tell others about her past, lest she scare people away.\textsuperscript{52} Considering the pervasive attitude of fear and blame toward returnees, Marchenko was so grateful toward the Siberian geologists who "dared give [her] work" after release that she still maintained contact with them in the nineties. Marchenko was rehabilitated in 1956, and many of her (non ex-prisoner) acquaintances whose "eyes were suddenly opened" by the XX Party Congress sought her friendship. However, her circle of friends remained comprised exclusively of returnees. A group of ex-Kolyma prisoners was created, they corresponded with each other, and held regular meetings in Moscow. In short, they formed their own support network. The feeling of being second-class citizens was lessened by the XX Party Congress, but it never fully went away. Moreover, the fear of renewed repression was to pervade the lives of many ex-prisoners. Even in 1978, when passports were being changed, Marchenko recalls how she and her friends stayed up all night, afraid, asking themselves: "What letter or number [of the Criminal Code] will we get now?"\textsuperscript{53}

Incarceration was a defining experience in Zoya Dmitrievna Marchenko’s life. Her identification was with ex-prisoners who shared the common experience of first being labelled political criminals, and after years of imprisonment, having the charges cleared. This was a central theme of her existence. Marchenko, like many others, felt a sense of loss for her own broken life, as well as a certain responsibility (and perhaps guilt) for those who did not survive. Hence, she was motivated to undertake such tasks (in the Gorbachev era) as typing Anna Akhmatova’s "Requiem", an ode to prisoners of the Gulag, as well as writing her own memoirs.\textsuperscript{54} In the late eighties and nineties, Marchenko became an active participant in the organizations "Vozvrashchenie" (Return) and Memorial.

As has already been described, exile was for some a phase of liberation, while for others it was another period of incarceration. But there were still others for whom exile was
the first experience of deprivation of liberty. This category came to include family members of convicted (and generally executed) "enemies of the people" who were sentenced under article 7-35 as "socially dangerous elements". To the extent that this group of exiles are not returnees, their experience in exile is outside the scope of this study. However, in order to look at the exile experience from another perspective, we will briefly examine one such example.

**Zayara Artyomevna Vesyolaya**

One of the reasons for the contradictions and inconsistencies in the Soviet system of repression was that while it used laws to repress people, the system was less a rule of law than of men. These men often exercised their power when and how they saw fit. One of many examples is the policy toward children of the repressed. Stalin’s popular words, "children are not responsible for their parents" were only applied when they were convenient, which was not much of the time. In 1949, Zayara and Gayara Artyomovna Vesyolaya, teenage daughters of the executed writer Artyom Vesyoly, were arrested under article 7-35 (similar to 58-10). They were convinced that their father was not an "enemy of the people", and they read and loved his books. Despite their knowledge of his arrest and imprisonment (but not his fate at the time), Zayara contends that even though the interrogator assumed that they harbored an anti-Soviet attitude, neither in the immediate aftermath of their father’s arrest, nor later did she feel any hostility toward the Soviet system, or even toward the organs (of the NKVD). "I loved the Soviet regime even when I was in exile, I cried bitterly in March 1953. My attitude changed only after the XX Party Congress," she later recalled. At that time, Zayara assumed that her father was mistakenly imprisoned during the big sweep of spies and diversants. The other prisoners in the Lubyanka guessed that Zayara and her sister would be let through the gates, and given a choice of Siberian cities in which to settle for a short time. This was not to be the case. After being transferred to the Butyrka, Zayara received a sentence of five years of exile in
Novosibirsk -- a seeming eternity to the teenager. Her mother had been sentenced to eight years in a labor camp. She said that the hardest blow was that her sister, Gayara, was unexpectedly sent for her term of exile to Karaganda. As we have already discussed, one of the goals of arrest was to weaken or break family ties. Individuals would then presumably look to the state for support, become beholden to the system, and become more compliant subjects.

Zayara returned to Moscow in 1953, released under an amnesty, only to find that her status as a former exile prevented her from getting a job. After repeated rejections, she decided to try the literary channel. She applied for work to the editor-in-chief of a publisher of technical literature. Fortunately, this man had met her father, and his conscience did not permit him to reject her. Zayara was hired with the warning that her co-workers were not to find out that she had been in exile, otherwise her boss could get into trouble. At first it was easy to maintain this secret, since her co-workers did not ask anything about Vesyolaya’s past. It was not until she was invited to apply for membership in a trade-union that she was once more confronted with the illegitimacy of her past. At a meeting, at which her benefactor editor-in-chief was present, Zayara was asked to reveal her biography. She refused without explanation, causing a scandal at the meeting. The purpose of the refusal was not only to protect her boss, but to protect herself from ostracism.

Vesyolaya recalls that event as being the second occasion on which she wanted to disappear into the floor. The first was in 1949 when she was marched under armed escort through Novosibirsk together with German prisoners of war. People stood on the sidewalks, recalls Zayara, "I don't know with what expressions they were looking at us -- I didn't see anyone, I clenched my teeth, not moving my eyes from the yellow and gray back [in front of her]." In later years, Zayara wrote memoirs and directed her energy toward helping the organization "Vozvrashchenie".
Returnees were not viewed by everyone with fear or suspicion. They were sometimes even aided in escaping impending re-arrest. One ex-zek, employed as a 'free worker' in a factory in 1949, was warned by its director: "The organs [MGB] called, they were interested in you, whether you were at the factory, whether you had left. I'm very afraid for you, because there are rumors that they have started picking up people again." He left immediately for another city -- Karaganda -- where a friend had remained after liberation from camp. Upon arrival he called his former employer, who confirmed that the authorities did indeed come to arrest him. This ex-zek was able to work as an engineer in a Karaganda factory for a year. Then the rumors came again. The MGB had its own agenda, with which local political organizations did not always agree. In this case, the secretary of the Party Committee warned the hassled returnee that the organs had started inquiring about him. And so he was constantly on the move to escape arrest until 1953. Many of his friends were in the same position. The 'organs' even caught up with one in 1956, re-arresting him and sending him to Akmolinsk.

Fortunately for some of the ex-prisoners, bureaucrats sometimes put their own personal interest as well as humanitarian feelings above the party policy. There are tales of ex-prisoners whose movement and means were restricted but who were able to trade services for tickets to take them away from the camp zone. One ex-zek, Arkady Grigoryevich Grosman, worked as a head mechanic in the same factory where he had labored as a prisoner. His supervisor offered him a flight to Khabarovsk, since he knew the crew of this route, in exchange for the repair of a friend's car. The ex-prisoner agreed and carried out the work. Though his papers were in order, he did not have permission to leave Magadan, so when the plane made an unexpected stop there to pick up passengers, he faced the threat of "violation of [his] passport regime" -- three years of incarceration. While other passengers' documents were checked, Grosman smoked with the crew, nervously anticipating
exposure of his status and a new sentence. But he was assumed to be a crew member and left alone by the authorities. Later, en route to Khabarovsk, one of the pilots approached the ex-prisoner with the request for money so that the crew could eat and drink in Khabarovsk. Though his services had already been rendered, Grosman could not refuse the request, remembering the fear he had experienced in Magadan and knowing on what a delicate balance his state of liberty rested. Their vulnerable status made ex-zeks easy to exploit.

During this period, there was apparently a directive prohibiting supervisors from giving former prisoners decent work. For example, in 1950 engineers who had served terms of incarceration under article 58 were fired from their positions by orders from above. The work-related problems occurred both early and late and were always a potential threat to the ex-zeks. Much of the behavior toward ex-zeks was governed by unwritten laws. One memoirist claims that many supervisors utilized both written and unwritten instructions to exploit former prisoners. Another returnee calls attention to the duplicity of the system, "By law exiles were not deprived of voting rights; moreover, an exile could even be elected to a Council of Workers' Deputies. The reader understands, of course, that no single exile was ever a deputy." The achievement of high positions, even for those who were rehabilitated in the Khrushchev years and beyond, remained problematic. The truth about how the Soviet system dealt with the absorption, and rehabilitation of "political offenders" was not contained in official rhetoric or in official decrees, so it may have been hidden from the general populace. It was, however, an open secret to the ex-zeks whose efforts were frustrated by the Office of the Procuracy (see Chapter III) at every turn. These problems persisted under Khrushchev and will be re-examined in relationship to his policies.

It was relatively easy in the late forties and early fifties to find work if the ex-zek was a manual laborer, chauffeur, mechanic, electrician, accountant, or even a
The article under which one was sentenced also could play a role in obtaining employment. But keeping one's job, or advancing in one's position, was another issue. As one ex-accountant explains, "In these years [the early fifties] the question constantly arose as to why a former 'enemy of the people' could work as a chief accountant". He was fired and hired elsewhere, with the same responsibilities, but without the title or salary of chief accountant. On the other hand, teachers and journalists, as conveyers of knowledge and information, found it almost impossible to get work in their fields of specialization. Friends in high places sometimes tried to help. One former prisoner writes about how he and his mother were supported by their old friend, Dmitry Shostakovich, who attempted to help them with acquiring work and university admittance. The authorities tried to subvert this relationship. The mother (wife of an "enemy of the people") was offered work -- as an informant. She was to divulge information about Shostakovich, his loved ones, his friends, and his acquaintances. She categorically refused the job. She was eventually re-arrested for "anti-Soviet agitation" -- as evidenced by her belief in her husband's innocence. The former prisoner described the cumulative impact of the repressive measures on his life in September of 1953: "the stigma that has been placed upon me can neither be washed off nor masked and everything that I succeed in doing will cost tremendous effort."

There were few cases in which the "return of the repressed" did not evoke some degree of fear, anger, shame, loathing, or anxiety from officials and society. However, it would be inaccurate to claim that these accounts present a complete picture of the experience of returnees in their first post-camp years, prior to Stalin's death. Some additional information should be added here. Not all prisoners felt victimized by the system while in camp because while they did not like what was happening to them, they subscribed to the ideology that it was for a greater good. They considered
themselves participants in the construction of socialism. Their attitude was expressed in the Russian saying, "when you cut wood, chips fly" -- oft-quoted in the memoirs of those who maintained their belief in the system. Some prisoners were released from labor camp with award certificates for their industry and initiative. They were granted honors for their industry and initiative. We can assume that their process of re-adaptation to society went smoother than that of the majority of returnees who were broken when they left the camps.

It is also the case that not all prisoners felt victimized by the system after the Gulag. There were even instances in which honors for achievement were granted to returnees whose criminal charges were yet to be revoked. One woman, the family member of a "traitor to the motherland", was sentenced in 1938 to eight years of corrective labor camp by the Special Conference. She was conditionally released in 1942, worked in a Karaganda sovkhoz, and received a Stalin prize in 1951 for her work on the creation of a new breed of livestock. Her sentence, however, was not revoked until 1952, and official rehabilitation did not follow until 1956. We can also assume in her case that she was not persecuted as a result of her returnee status.

Yet another category of prisoner-survivors is comprised of those who felt that they were both innocent victims of the regime, and involuntary participants in the terror. This group consisted of those who covertly cooperated with the "organs" while in camp, primarily in the role of informants. This enabled them to get lighter work. Some files on these prisoners were preserved, but according to Roy Medvedev, millions of the dossiers on which was written "to be preserved forever" were burned under Khrushchev.

In this chapter we have discussed how the political atmosphere in the country prior to Stalin's death was reflected in attitudes toward returnees. During the same period, other forces were stirring. New pressure was being applied from above as the "Doctors Plot" -- aimed primarily at Jews -- was launched. The journal Kommunist published an
article promoting "vigilance against internal enemies" (meaning Jews), and in January 1953 it was announced that a group of 'terrorist doctors' had been arrested. A massive purge was being prepared. In this wave of anti-Semitism, Beria was suspected of partiality to Jewish interests, and a case was already being made against his associates by MGB chief Abakumov. At the same time, prisoner unrest and insubordination were erupting in Kazakhstan and at Vorkuta (already in 1952). The atmosphere of rebellion had not yet reached the proportions that it would in Norilsk and Vorkuta in the summer of 1953, or in Kengir in the summer of 1954, but something was brewing.

An additional source of instability was the death of Stalin on March 5, 1953. Even though Malenkov, Beria, and Khrushchev had already arrived on the scene, Stalin apparently laid for a number of hours without medical help after a blood vessel burst in his brain. The circumstances surrounding this delay are still somewhat mysterious, though it is likely that there was fear if Stalin recovered, they would be blamed for his inadequate medical treatment. To be sure, the leaders had their own personal motivations as well. The event of Stalin's death marked the beginning of de-Stalinization. His legacy was to linger for decades. John Keep asserts that "the whole issue of Stalin and Stalinism served as a talisman by which one could judge the attitude towards reform of particular individuals." But that was not the only indicator of which way the political winds were blowing. The re-assimilation and rehabilitation of political prisoners was also a talisman. It served as a measure of how much of its past errors the Soviet system could acknowledge, and in acknowledging, make restitution and learn from its mistakes.
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5. Ibid., p. 383.


8. Isaak Solomonovich Shur, "Pod kolesom istorii (Khronika nezabyvaemykh dnei)", chast’ 1, Memorial, f. 2, op. 1, d. 138, l. 0008 3111 0424.


10. Memorial, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3500, l. 0026 1901 0129. This memoir was also contributed to the Russian Center for Preservation and Study of Documents of Recent History (RTsKhIDNI, former Central Party Archive in the Institute of Marxism-Leninism), f. 560, op. 1, d. 30.

11. Memorial, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3500, l. 0132.

12. Ibid., l. 0133.

13. Marianna Lazarevna Antsis, "Vospominaniiia," Memorial, f. 2, op. 1, d. 5 11. 0001 2909 511-531.

14. Professor Isaak Moiseevich Fil'shtinskii, interview held at his Moscow home, April 20, 1995.


17. Ibid., l. 1144.

19. *Istochnik* 2 (1994): 92-92; TsKhSD, f. 89, op. 18, d. 26, l. 1


21. Grigorii Grigorievich Budagov, "Zapiski...," Memorial, f. 2, op. 1, d. 30, l. 0001 2909 516.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid., l. 517.


25. Ibid., l. 0451.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid., l. 0457.


29. Ibid., l. 2160.

30. Ibid., l. 2161.

31. She mistakenly called the NKVD the KGB in her memoirs.

32. Ibid., l. 2177.


34. Ibid., pp. 8, 10.

35. Ibid., p. 8.


38. Mikhail Davidovich Baital'skii, "Tetradi dlya vnukov," Memorial, f. 2, op. 1, d. 8, l. 0001 2909 950.


40. Ginzburg, p. 279.

41. Ibid., p. 293.

42. Ibid., p. 294.

43. TsKhSD, f. 89, op. 18, d. 26, l. 1.

44. Tsentral'nyi Arkhiv Ministerstva bezopasnosti Rossiiskoi Federatsii, kollektsiia rassekrechennykh prikazov, prikaz ot 26 oktabrya 1948.

45. TsKhSD, f. 89, op. 18, d. 26, l. 2.

46. Throughout this book, sub-chapters are generally designated in cases where personal interviews or extensive questionnaire responses are involved.

47. Zoia Dmitrievna Marchenko, response to questionnaire designed for this project, p. 1.

48. Id., interview held at her Moscow home, April 6, 1995.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid.

51. Id., questionnaire, p. 1.

52. Id., interview held at her Moscow home, April 12, 1995.

53. Letters like SOE (socially dangerous element), KRTD (counter-revolutionary Trotskyite activity), ChSIR (family member of a traitor to the motherland), also called 'liter', were often used before numbers (like 58-10) started to be employed for criminal articles.


55. The posthumous rehabilitation certificate of 1956 indicated December 2, 1939 as Vesëlyi's date of death. In 1988, the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the USSR revealed that he had been shot on April 8, 1938. Zaiara Vesëlaia, 7-35, (Moscow: Moskovskii Rabochii, 1990), p. 13.
56. Vesëlaia, response to a questionnaire specially designed for this project, December 1995.


58. Ibid., pp. 56-57.

59. Ibid., p. 58.


61. Ibid., p. 8.

62. Arkadii Grigor’evich Grosman, "Pust’ ne povtoritsia nikogda (povest’ o perezhitom)," Memorial, f. 2, op. 1, d. 50, l. 1993 0511 0215.

63. Ibid., l. 0218.

64. Viacheslav Viacheslavovich Dombrovskii, "Sovsem obychnaia zhizn’", avtobiograficheskaia povest’, Memorial, f. 2, op. 1, d. 56, l. 1993 0511 0985.

65. V.V. Lapshin, "Vsë techet, vsë izmeniaetsa...," Memorial, f. 2, op. 1, d. 80, l. 1993 0810 0691.


68. Memorial, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3481, l. 0025 1701 1871.

69. V.V. Dombrovskii, Memorial, f. 2, op. 1, d. 56, l. 1993 0511 0985.

70. Ibid., l. 0987

71. Ibid., l. 0989.

72. Ibid., l. 0991.

73. Memorial f. 1, op. 1, d. 948, l. 0013 0612 0720.

74. Ibid., d. 2620, l1. 0021 0401 1389, 1415, 1417, 1418, 1419, 1420.


76. Keep, p. 36.

77. Ibid., pp. 37-38.

78. Ibid., p. 60.