

ԵՐԵՎԱՆԻ ՊԵՏԱԿԱՆ ՀԱՄԱԼՍԱՐԱՆ  
ՔԱՂԱՔԱԿՐԹԱԿԱՆ ԵՎ ՄՇԱԿՈՒԹԱՅԻՆ  
ՀԵՏԱԶՈՏՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՆԵՐԻ ԿԵՆՏՐՈՆ

Վերլուծական տեղեկագիր

ՀԱՅ-ՎՐԱՑԱԿԱՆ ԱԿԱԴԵՄԻԱԿԱՆ ԵՒ ՈՒՍԱՆՈՂԱԿԱՆ  
ՀԱՄԱԳՈՐԾԱԿՑՈՒԹՅՈՒՆ

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Հրատարակվում է ԵՊՀ Քաղաքակրթական և  
մշակութային հետազոտությունների կենտրոնի  
գիտական խորհրդի որոշմամբ

Խմբագրական խորհուրդ՝

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## ԲՈՎԱՆԴԱԿՈՒԹՅՈՒՆ

ՆԱԽԱԲԱՆ. ԳԻՏԱԿԱՆ ՑԱՆՑԵՐԸ ԵՎ ՀԱՅ-ՎՐԱՑԱԿԱՆ  
ՀԱՄԱԼՍԱՐԱՆԱԿԱՆ ՀԱՄԱԳՈՐԾԱԿՑՈՒԹՅՈՒՆԸ.....9-11

*Արաշիձե Արշիլ, Ղարիբյան Անահիտ*  
ՀԱՅԱՍՏԱՆԻ ԵՎ ՎՐԱՍՏԱՆԻ ԸՆՏՐԱԿԱՆ ԳՈՐԾԸՆԹԱՑՆԵՐԻ  
ՀԱՄԵՄԱՏԱԿԱՆ ՎԵՐԼՈՒԾՈՒԹՅՈՒՆ.....12-46

*Բիլանիշվիլի Սոֆիո*  
ՀԱՂԹԱՀԱՐԵԼ, ԹԵ ՄՈՌԱՆԱԼ, ԹԲԲԼԻՍԻՈՒՄ ԽՈՐՀՐԴԱՅԻՆ  
ԽՈՐՀՐԴԱՆՇԱՆՆԵՐԻ ԵՎ ԿԱՌՈՒՅՑՆԵՐԻ ՎԵՐԱԲԵՐՅԱԼ  
ՀԱՆՐԱՅԻՆ ՔՆՆԱՐԿՈՒՄԸ.....47-64

*Դալարյան Աննա*  
ՀԱՅԱՍՏԱՆԻՑ ԵՎ ՎՐԱՍՏԱՆԻՑ ՄԻԳՐԱՑԻԱՅԻ  
ՆՊԱՏԱԿԱԴՐՈՒՄՆԵՐԻ ՎՐԱ ԱԶԴՈՂ  
ԳՈՐԾՈՆՆԵՐԻ ՎԵՐԼՈՒԾՈՒԹՅՈՒՆ  
ԸՍՏ ԿՈՎԿԱՍՑԱՆ ԲԱՐՈՄԵՏՐԻ 2015.....65-85

*Էփաձե Քեթևան*  
ՏԵՂ ՓՆՏՐԵԼՈՎ. ԱԲԽԱԶԻԱՅԻ ՆԵՐՔԻՆ ՏԵՂԱՀԱՆՎԱԾՆԵՐԻ  
ԴԵՊՔԻ ՈՒՍՈՒՄՆԱՍԻՐՈՒԹՅՈՒՆ.....86-103

*Ղարիբաշվիլի Մարիկա*  
ՍԵՐՈՒՆԴԸ ՆՇԱՆԱԿՈՒԹՅՈՒՆ ՈՒՆԻ. ՀԱՅԿԱԿԱՆ  
ԸՆՏԱՆԻՔՆԵՐԸ ԹԲԲԼԻՍԻՈՒՄ  
(Հավլաբարի բալետից մեկուս).....104-125

*Հակոբյան Աշխեն*

«ԱՌԱՋԱՎՈՐ» ԸՆԿԵՐՆԵՐ. «ԻԴԵԱԼԱԿԱՆ» ՔԱՂԱՔԱՑՈՒ  
ԿԵՐՊԱՐԸ ԸՍՏ ԽՈՐՀՐԴԱՅԻՆ ՀԱՅԱՍՏԱՆԻՑ 1949 Թ.  
ԱՔՍՈՐՎԱԾՆԵՐԻ ԴԻՄՈՒՄ-ԲՈՂՈՔՆԵՐԻ .....126-147

*Հարությունյան Արևիկ*

ԱՎՍՏՐՈ-ՀՈՒՆԳԱՐԱԿԱՆ ԿԱՅՍՐՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՈՒՄ ԱՌԱՋԻՆ  
ՀԱՄԱՇԽԱՐՀԱՅԻՆ ՊԱՏԵՐԱԶՄԻ ԱԶԳՈՒԹՅԱՄԲ ՀԱՅ  
ԳԵՐԻՆԵՐԻ ՀԵՏՔԵՐՈՎ .....148-160

*Կոմախիձե Բորիս*

ՀԱՂԹԱՀԱՐԵԼՈՎ ԳԱՂԱՓԱՐԱԿԱՆ ՃՆՇՈՒՄԸ.  
ԽՈՐՀՐԴԱՅԻՆ ԺԱՄԱՆԱԿԱՇՐՁԱՆՈՒՄ ՎԵՐԱ  
ԲԱՐԴԱՎԵԼԻՁԵԻ ՄԱՍՆԱՎՈՐ ԵՎ ՄԱՍՆԱԳԻՏԱԿԱՆ  
ԿՅԱՆՔԻ ՀԱՐԱԲԵՐԱԿՑՈՒԹՅՈՒՆԸ .....161-180

*Քոսակյան Լուսինե*

ՔԱՅԼ ԱՌԱՋ, ՔԱՅԼ ՀԵՏ. ԻՐԱՆԻ ՏՆՏԵՍԱԿԱՆ  
ՔԱՂԱՔԱԿԱՆՈՒԹՅՈՒՆԸ ՀԱՐԱՎԱՅԻՆ ԿՈՎԿԱՍՈՒՄ  
ՍԱՆԿՅԻԱՆԵՐԻ ՎԵՐԱՑՈՒՄԻՑ ՀԵՏՈ .....181-197

*Սոզիաշվիլի Թինաթին*

ՀԱՅՈՑ ԼԵԶՎԻ ԵՎ ՄՇԱԿՈՒՅԹԻ ԴԱՍԱՎԱՆԴՈՒՄԸ  
ՎՐԱՍՏԱՆՈՒՄ. ԹԲԻԼԻՍԻ ՊԵՏԱԿԱՆ  
ՀԱՄԱԼՍԱՐԱՆԻ (ԹՊՀ) ՕՐԻՆԱԿԸ .....198-211

*Սուքիասյան Սոնա*

ԴՊՐՈՑՆԵՐ, ՄԶԿԻԹՆԵՐ ԵՎ ՌԵՍՏՈՐԱՆՆԵՐ. ՀԱՄԿԱՆԱԼՈՎ  
ԹՈՒՐՔԻԱՅԻ ՓԱՓՈՒԿ ՈՒԺԸ ԱԶԱՐԻԱՑՈՒՄ .....212-234

## CONTENT

FOREWARD: SCIENTIFIC NETWORKS AND ARMENIAN-GEORGIAN COOPERATION ON UNIVERSITY LEVELS .....	9-11
<i>Abashidze Archil, Gharibyan Anahit</i> A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ELECTORAL PROCESSES IN ARMENIA AND GEORGIA .....	12-46
<i>Bilanishvili Sophio</i> OVERCOMING OR FORGETTING? PUBLIC DEBATE ABOUT SOVIET SYMBOLS AND MONUMENTS IN TBILISI .....	47-64
<i>Dalaryan Anna</i> ANALYSIS OF FACTORS INFLUENCING THE INTENTIONS TO MIGRATE FROM RURAL AREAS OF ARMENIA AND GEORGIA USING CAUCASUS BAROMETER 2015 .....	65-85
<i>Epadze Ketevan</i> SEARCHING FOR A PLACE: THE CASE OF IDPS OF ABKHAZIA .....	86-103
<i>Gharibashvili Marika</i> THE GENERATION MATTERS: ARMENIAN FAMILIES IN TBILISI (A yard in Avlabari) .....	104-125
<i>Hakobyan Ashkhen</i> “PEREDOVIE” COMRADES: THE IMAGE OF AN “IDEAL” SOVIET CITIZEN ACCORDING TO LETTERS OF COMPLAINT WRITTEN BY ARMENIAN DEPORTEES FROM 1949 .....	126-147

*Harutyunyan Arevik*

TRACING THE HEIRS OF ARMENIAN WWI

PRISONERS IN THE AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN EMPIRE.....148-160

Komakhidze Boris

OVERCOMING IDEOLOGICAL PRESSURE:

PRIVATE VS. PROFESSIONAL LIFE OF

VERA BARDAVELIDZE DURING THE SOVIET ERA.....161-180

Kosakyan Lusine

ONE STEP FORWARD, ONE STEP BACK:

IRAN'S ECONOMIC POLICY TOWARDS THE SOUTH

CAUCASUS AFTER LIFTING THE SANCTIONS.....181-197

Soziashvili Tinatin

TEACHING ARMENIAN LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

AT TBILISI STATE UNIVERSITY (TSU).....198-211

Sukiasyan Sona

SCHOOLS, MOSQUES AND RESTAURANTS:

UNDERSTANDING TURKEY'S "SOFT POWER"

IN AJARA.....212-234



**“PEREDOVIE” COMRADES: THE IMAGE OF AN “IDEAL”  
SOVIET CITIZEN ACCORDING TO LETTERS OF COMPLAINT  
WRITTEN BY ARMENIAN DEPORTEES FROM 1949**

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**Key words:** *Comrades, Complaint-letter, Armenian deportees, Soviet Armenia, “Father Stalin”, Petitions, Soviet language, “ideal” Soviet citizen, Political repressions.*

**Abstract**

This paper is an attempt to define an approximate image of a “right” citizen of the late Stalin era in the perceptions of Soviet Armenians. The research materials that utilized in this paper are the complaints of deportees from Soviet Armenia to the Altai region in 1949. The letters were addressed to Soviet leaders to gain permission to return to their former homes. The absence of official information available on deportation decision-making and the social groups that fall under the categories to be deported cause people to self-reflect, fabricate possible crimes, then try to justify themselves in that given context. This situation provides more opportunities to understand their perceptions about the Soviet “black and white.” The vibrations in political course, staff changes in NKVD, different propagated ideas had “created” flexible citizens able to present these ideas in written texts in a required Soviet language in order to succeed in avoiding repressions. Based on the letters analyzed in this study, they believed that possessing certain skills could guarantee their freedom from special resettlement. As a result, each of them tried their best to be accepted as an “ideal” citizen and fit the requirements of the authorities when describing their lives and the circumstances in which they had possibly appeared in the lists of people liable to deportation. These texts contain much deeper signals of social and cultural processes of this period than it has been revealed in the framed of this paper and are worth exploring in

future studies. The main themes addressed in this paper are the Soviet language, the ways of referring to and addressing the leader in letters, the discussions on family, and political past issues.

With regard to the developing cultural process in the USSR, there was limited information available; testimonies from older generations were accessible upon receiving an offer to study repressed peoples personal documents during the Soviet period. After collaborating with a group of researchers, a database covering all of the victims of Soviet repressions in Armenia was created<sup>1</sup>.

The team registered basic information about each deportee after uncovering all of the accessible cases. Each individual case was large in volume and contained differing; they remained outside the scope of the basic information included in the database insofar as the latter only included the statistical and exclusively quantitative data. Meanwhile, the cases contained a vast amount of qualitative information. To this research, the predominately attractive parts of the documents were the complaints written by deportees addressing the leaders who, in their opinion, were responsible for their deportation and/or could influence the Ministry of State Security’s decision-making process.<sup>2</sup>

In most of the individual cases within the personal documents presented, the style and content were of particular interest and therefore required special attention with regard to writing this paper, 12 petitions were used after reading approximately 120 within the 1,5000 total documents in the database. Throughout this research, Dr. Nino Chikovani served as a significant mentor who made huge efforts to improve my personally collected database and findings to follow. The professors who read and commented on this paper, Hranush Kharatyan, Satenik Mkrtychyan

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<sup>1</sup> In the frames of the project implemented by the Armenian Center for Ethnological Studies “Hazarashen” – Armenia Totalitar(is), a database was created with the information about all victims of political repressions in Soviet Armenia.

<sup>2</sup>The decision for deporting a certain family was made by the Ministry of State Security without any judicial process and was launched about one or two years after the operation.

and Gayane Shagoyan, also deserve special recognition as they were vital in reviewing this project.

Petitions, complaints, or pardon letters addressed to the authorities naturally occurred the Soviet Union, the previous century, and beyond. Such letters were used as research materials repeatedly because they reveal several aspects of social thinking and provide important information about the country's political life, on the lines of contact between the citizens and the authorities or between the subjects and the empire. Typically, the content differs from each other depending on the political situation in the country. Some accept accusations and ask for mercy by writing "pardon letters," while other letters tell stories that prove their innocence. Historian Oguz Cizgem describes the petitions in the Ottoman empire addressed to Sultan Hamid II. Rather than disproving their guilt, these petitions attempted to negotiate with the authority by accepting the accusations and showing regret (Cizgem, 2013, p. 19). Author Natalie Z. Davis also shows how the accused tried to highlight some features such as innocence and unpremeditated situations (i.e. composing fiction tales) in order to legitimize their actions (Davis, 1990)<sup>3</sup>. In these complaint-letters, there are both the regret and plea for pardon, cases of fictional stories and several other variants due to the complicated situation set forth by an unexpected deportation. Soviet writing practices combined with specific local perceptions significantly impacted the situation. Letters to the authorities and letter-writing practices were widely discussed and studied. Sending letters to the editorials of newspapers was very common and utilized as an accepted method of voicing their problems or speaking out against illegal actions previously witnessed. There is a monography of Mikhail Rozhanski about such letters sent during the last years of the USSR (Рожанский, 2014). Using this letter-writing method was strongly encouraged as a means of communication between the people and authorities. Author Sheila Fitzpatrick writes that both the citizens and authorities were convinced that writing letters to higher ranked officials was a type of democratic practice that brought the citizens closer to their government (Fitzpatrick, 2000, p.

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<sup>3</sup> Seen at Cizgem, p. 18.

211). No matter how successful and democratic this communication was, to this end, the time-period covered in this paper – the late Stalin stage – still applies in the case of Armenian deportees.

The National Archives of Armenia documents state that on June 14, 1949, around 2,678 families (12.500 people) were deported from Armenia to the Altai region of Russia<sup>4</sup>. Overall, the order of operation is quite general. It does not provide proper information about the families choice that were liable to deportation. The operation<sup>5</sup> was prepared in secret and withheld from the families beforehand. It was held in the evening, and each family had approximately 2 hours to prepare for the “trip” without knowing why and where they were moving. The official accusation was made toward the head of the family, while the others were deported as his/her family members. The Special Councils (Особое Совещание) decisions were “organized” between 1949-1954; months or years following the deportation. The registration categories were as follows: Dashnak<sup>6</sup> nationalist, and members of the Armenian Legion in the German Army. As a result, the majority of these people lived in suspense, prompting them to write petitions, which ranged from short complaint-letters or long stories addressed to different officials. It became such a common practice that Arpenik Aleksanyan in her diary describes how she helped other deportees to compose their texts (Алексян, Ереван, стр. 149). The number of letters per person sometimes could exceed twelve.

These letters are diverse and extremely detailed. Oftentimes, they are addressed to Stalin as the leader and to other influential Soviet officials, and occasionally to NKVD officials. Fitzpatrick calls other influential Soviet officials “Little Stalins” because she argues that Stalin was not the only leader with a cult; there were other leaders, of which she mentions some Politburo members such as Ordzhonikidze, Molotov, and Nikolai Ezhov, head of the NKVD, etc. (Fitzpatrick, 2000, p. 30)<sup>7</sup>. The second

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<sup>4</sup> National Archives of Armenia, fond 1191, list 6.

<sup>55</sup> The operation was called Волна/valna/, meaning a wave.

<sup>6</sup> Member of Social Democratic party “Dashnaktsutyun”.

<sup>7</sup>In the frames of this research, in the mentioned period of time and in the case of this certain group of people the most popular political leader is Anastas Mikoyan,

collection of letters -- those addressed to Soviet officials -- include practical application letters, while the first group only contains letters expressing the people's hope to restore "justice," often imparting pity and attempt to resolve their problems in a multitude of approaches.

However, such dialogues letters are supposed to reflect the propagated ideas and values that were prominent during this time-period. The ideas suggested in Party rhetoric are reflected in these application letters. The reason behind this conformity is obvious as the latter indicates the "flexibility" of the truth. It is evident that this practice was far from being a democratic or rational way of promoting societal and daily life i.e. the so-called "socialist" society, according to the political tone and content of the letters. In citing Kotkin, Elza-Bair Guchinova mentions that speaking out is in the obligatory language of self-identification; it is "to speak in the Bolshevik way." Such language serves as a measure of political loyalty (Guchinova, 2016, p. 105).

The goal of this paper is to discover what the "ideal" Soviet citizen looked like based on the letters of deported families from Armenia to Siberia in 1949.<sup>8</sup> It aims to identify the main characteristics of a person living in this time-period was supposed to possess and to show how Soviet citizens could perceive the ideological messages coming from above. The discussion includes the typical indicators of the officially constructed Soviet citizen in the USSR, particularly in Armenia, and the behavior that this type of citizen was likely to display in public sphere. The chosen period (from 1949 to 1953) is especially relevant for portraying the changes that Soviet rule brought about and Stalin's influence. The main focus of this research includes a review of how people adapted to the regime and eventually fit the ideological requirements to their individual understanding. Although the research is mainly based on archival material - particularly on the complaint letters in the individual files of the deported people - documents concerning the Big Terror (1930s,) and interviews with

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Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union. This is mostly connected to his Armenian origin.

<sup>8</sup> See the detailed description of the deportation in Н. Л. Поболь, П. М. Полян, Сталинские Депортации 1928-1953, Москва, "Материк", 2005.

the former deportees from 2015 as a supporting material were also used in order to display the evolution of people’s perception of Soviet ideology. This ideology itself has undergone some changes in conjunction with the political course.

### **The “Soviet language” in the petitions**

The language which was used to write these petitions, no matter Armenian or Russian, is undoubtedly a “Soviet” one with prominent hints of the local perspective (thoughts, perceptions, etc.) Y. V. Surovtseva classifies the letters addressed to the Soviet Russian leaders according to their genres. One of these categories is letter-complaint/plea/apology: the author explains their progress by strengthening restrictions and persecutions against the intelligentsia (Суворцева, 2010, p. 44). In this case, the letters belong to the same genre but include those written by the intelligentsia, among others. The texts (complaint letters to the leaders of the USSR) will be observed as complaint letters or petitions, even though they contain staunch differences in their style and content. The majority of the letters are entitled as applications (заявление) and a considerable amount of letters are complaints. In other cases, the authors give their text different titles such as asking «просьба», begging «мольба», etc., in order to stress their inclinations from the very beginning of their words. Sometimes, this emphasis is used to prompt the certain content to be discussed or to create a specific attitude of the reader. The complaint letters were addressed to Josef Stalin, Anastas Mikoyan, Lavrenti Beria, Nikolay Shvernik, some delegates of Supreme Council, and occasionally to the Ministry of Internal Affairs sans mentioning a single person, The Special Meeting («Особое Совещание»), The Prosecutor’s Office, and to other authorities.

It is impossible to outline the complete image of the Soviet citizen in one single article because the rhetoric changed during over time, along with the changes occurring within the political elite. Although Soviet propaganda had a significant influence on the society, it could not produce the expected outcomes due to the gigantic size and stature of the Soviet state with highly diverse cultural communities. The ultimate goal of Soviet

propaganda was to create a society comprised of people with certain qualities, for the same ideology, rhetoric, and support for common propaganda. Therefore, it could not have the same effect for an audience with a heterogeneous background. The ideas, the orating practices, the perception and interpretation of Soviet socialism naturally were localized in Armenia in a special manner. This can be explained by several factors such as the means of societal awareness and personal perception. General information sources were newspapers and local party propaganda. Most people did not read newspapers and attend party meetings; they could only listen to other people talking about it. This is how most of the people became aware of the “Soviet good” and “Soviet bad.” At the same time, in 1949, people under 30 were the ones who attended the Soviet schools and were carrying the strong influence of Soviet propaganda. When writing their complaints, they would use certain tools to improve their writing. When trying to prove their righteousness they did the following:

- create citations from the words of Stalin or Lenin;
- mention their input in building a “socialist society”;
- describe their “pure” past life, that is to say - never having been involved in any party activities other than the Communist Party.

With regards to the late Soviet period, A. Yurchak describes the public action as supportive of the official rhetoric and slogans without technically believing in them (Yurchak, 2005, pp. 26-28). In the late 1940s and early 1950s, people pretended to support the ideology without understanding its meaning.

The Soviet revolutionary ideology was to reject the old society and create a new one. The idea of creating a new person (a new kind of human being) was a key task in the entire utopian Ideology. Therefore, the values obtained during the Soviet period were especially relevant, despite having some controversy about the pre-Soviet period: the society formerly discussed it in a negative tone or failed to mention it entirely unless they had led a “trivial” life as poor peasants suffering in the hands of the Soviet exploiters. A Soviet citizen, demonstrating his/her biography in a complaint letter, was to establish the essence of the ideology once more. Creating a new person implied that there must be a change of the old one. Another

important factor was the flat-out rejection of the past, glorification of the present, and belief in the “bright future.”

Although almost three decades had already passed following the formation of the USSR, the government infrequently positioned as revolutionary, calling the anti-revolutionaries “people’s enemies.” Similarly, the process of forming the “Soviet Person” persisted. In one of his interviews, S. Khodorovich stated that the ideology stipulated that the Soviet citizen had to be free from ethnic affiliations, have no affiliation with private property, always be prepared to sacrifice oneself for society to benefit, have no doubts that he/she originated from an ape and that nothing will remain of after death. In other words, one must be one-hundred percent materialist and atheist and know that the meaning of life is defined by the personal utility in a society where the supreme goal is to guarantee an improved, wealthier, and happier life for future generations. To this end, one would necessarily be happy (Khodorovich, p. 2). This idea of “usefulness to the society” is clearly apparent in the petitions:

*“After getting my education I have started working as an economist in the Yerevan shoe factory N1. I have been true and faithful towards all the works assigned to me, I was connected to our Soviet social work about which I can provide appropriate arguments.”<sup>9</sup>*

In Soviet bureaucratic slang, the aforementioned phenomenon is referred to as “organising a letter,” which means finding people who would write the required texts or copy a prepared one in order to demonstrate their loyalty to the government in conjunction with maintaining absolute confidence in the local party (Гучинова, 2016, p. 105).

Even at the initial observation, some distinguishing features in the target application letters are extremely noticeable: beautiful handwriting, cautious wording, and artistic style – some of them sound as if they were short epistolary stories.

As it was described in the case of the Japanese prisoners of war letters (Гучинова, 2016), the complaint letters of the politically repressed people from Armenia contained content that was mostly in line with the

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<sup>9</sup> NAA, fond 1191, list 6, document 763, p. 27, 28.



government's expectations, except in the event when the writer was unaware of such expectations. There are numerous letters where it is clear that people raise similar facts to prove that they are not guilty: when somebody did not use standard expressions and vocabulary, he/she was most likely a repatriate<sup>10</sup> and was not adapted to living in the USSR. Sometimes, they did not manage to integrate into the recipient society and learn the "rules of the game." Aside from the repatriates, there were people not integrated into the regime.

Repeating content and general ideas - which were discussed in the texts - apart from the party rhetoric, and school and newspaper propaganda, were due to previous experiences; they were not always personal experiences but often were secondhand accounts of other people. Many of them wrote what they had thought about the Soviet state and its leaders, and described their attitude towards them. It is quite strange that one would try to make his/her argument stronger by sharing his/her thoughts about the USSR. Before and after the World War II, many people were imprisoned, exiled, or shot and killed for expressing their opinions about German army and the resolution of the War. These opinions were interpreted as anti-Soviet or anti-revolutionary<sup>11</sup>. Another common topic was their pre-Soviet life. According to the texts, there were two types of people during this time: kulak exploiters and poor peasants. All of the mentioned variants of explanations for deportation occurred due to the lack of information. In cases of individual repression, people were arrested and interviewed: there was a judicial process, during which they were told why they were arrested and details of their sentence. There were closed sessions where they were unable to defend themselves, but at the very least, they understood the reason behind their arrest. This deportation was unique as it was organized secretly. Within a few hours, the families were forced to prepare to leave.

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<sup>10</sup> This is a term, which was used to speak about Armenians who moved to Soviet Armenia for a permanent stay from 1946-1949 in the frames of a government project.

<sup>11</sup> NAA, fond 1191, list 19, document 1598; list 7, document 1950, list 15, documents 2, 13, 323, 324.

They were taken to stations and sent to Altai in closed cargo coaches having no idea where they were going and what they were going to do.

In the letters' texts, one of the most interesting features that does not fit in the frames of the “Soviet language” is the “presence of God,” especially of those addressed to Stalin. The form of speech sounds as if it was addressed to God, with elements expressing equal caution and praise just as religious texts are written. As Guchinova represents the application letters of Japanese prisoners of war, she observes that the letters' content and structure similarly resemble religious rituals and liturgical elements. (Гучинова, 2016).

The texts were developed and controlled by the current political discourse; they were guided by the developments in Soviet political rhetoric and ideology as a guarantee to success. In each of the texts, the demonstrated caution in the content and narrative to be corresponding to the expectations of the authorities is quite noticeable. This causes a dissonance such that these texts were written as complaints, disagreements, and demands to reestablish the “justice” whereas there was a large necessity to appease the authorities. To combine and to overcome (1) how to express faithfulness to the system and, (2) how to complain about the acts carried out as a result of the system various methods were used. The Soviet country, its leader, ideology, and the recipient of the letter are praised, sometimes even worshiped, while the complaint and the irritation have no addresser. In specific cases, they go to a single local officer or a common person. Evidently, it was often a game with the authorities: sometimes it was a serious distortion of the reality in order to present themselves at their best. Other times, there were silently agreed ways of meeting the expectations of the authorities.

### **How to call**

In Stalin period, it was quite natural to refer to the country's central figures in a dignified and paternal way, as seen in the texts referring to Stalin. Stalin is greeted with words and phrases such as ‘*Father Stalin,*’ ‘*dear father,*’ ‘*lovely father,*’ ‘*Great Stalin,*’ ‘*General,*’ and even as ‘*Your Majesty,*’ as if he was a king. Sometimes, the author used all of his/her

vocabulary to praise the recipient. Stalin's image is portrayed as an adorable leader, and not as one who held and presented ideas like Lenin. Stalin is depicted as a symbol of a multifunctional supra-manager who put ideas into practice in reality and controlled everything that was taking place domestically. It is clear how this attitude was dictated by the media. On nearly every page of "Soviet Armenia,"<sup>12</sup> one can read the following expression: "Under Lenin's banner, under Stalin's leadership." To this end, Stalin was developing and implementing what Lenin had previously established. The usage of the expression "Stalin's sun" is not occasional either: it indicates that the sun belongs to Stalin or, perhaps, shined the way Stalin wanted the sun to shine. Everything positive that took place during the Soviet Union was attributed to Stalin. In the late 1940s, the daily newspapers contained columns entitled "Reports to comrade Stalin. Thus, it can be concluded that every citizen generally behaved well in order to please the leader. Some parallels can be drawn between this situation and the religious perceptions of how to behave in order to please God.

The following passage is written by a former NKVD agent and an administrative officer:

*I am turning to you with pleading and tears, Father Shvernik<sup>13</sup>. I am asking you in the name of Our Beloved Leader and Teacher, Dear Father Stalin – to give us mercy, do a disposal, and return me and my family to my native hearth where my bones will find peace<sup>14</sup>.*

In another letter, an 11-year old girl writes:

*Our Great Father Stalin,*

*I hope you will not reject my plea. I am 11 years old. I have a sister who is 9 years old. We have neither father nor mother... I have read many books and learned that our Great Father Stalin loves kids. Many kids like my sister and me now suffer in Siberia. If our parents have committed a crime, let them suffer. Let us return to our studies and remember our father Stalin forever. Please forgive us.*

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<sup>12</sup> January 7, 1949, N 5 (8464)

<sup>13</sup> Nikolay Mikhailovich Shvernik - Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet from 1946 to 1953.

<sup>14</sup>NAA, fond 1191, list 6, document 278.

*I kindly ask your Majesty to order your subordinates to consider our case*<sup>15</sup>.

It is evident that the letter is not from the child directly. Speaking via children was a widespread strategy during the Soviet Union. In the aforementioned case, it is clear that the author constructs her speech like a prayer to God, in which she says that she has learned much about Stalin from reading. To this end, she attempted to stress that she had been raised according to Soviet ideology. Another interesting aspect of this case is that the child asked Stalin to forgive her without having committed any crimes. This can be seen in many petitions, proving that those writing them committed no crimes but were apologetic and begged for mercy anyway. As a result, these two mixed positions demonstrate uncertainty about why they were subject to punishment and the author uses all the possible methods to properly be aligned with the reader. Finally, the most paradoxical phrase in these petitions is "Your Majesty," as it belongs neither to the Soviet vocabulary nor to a religious one. It is usually used when referring to a king. This term somehow disabled the attempts to show the role of religious perceptions in the personality cult years, once again proving that the group of people writing such texts had an urge and need to please the addressee. Each of them used their knowledge and skills not only to speak in the "Soviet way," but also to demand justice without knowing its actual meaning. As a result, there is a clash of values and traditions, which stems from the initial, pre-Soviet identity and the intermixture of imposed and dictated values and rules.

Context aside, there are spectacular handwriting patterns that deserve special attention. Written with careful attention to detail, the handwriting in these petitions utilize certain tools to make them look nicer and neater. Aside from the aesthetic features, some tricks were used in order to catch the readers' attention such as writing the leader's name in bold or all capital letters, which could be interpreted as a way to stress the love and respect towards the leaders.

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<sup>15</sup>NAA, fond 1191, list 6, document 682.

*“You, the only rescuer of people, dear Father STALIN, our family is innocent, we haven’t committed any crime against our country and we cannot carry the stamp of being deported.”<sup>16</sup>*

The leader’s actions were above the discussion and critic, some other circumstances were to blame (Ստեփանյան, 2015). Oftentimes, it is difficult to identify complaints in these texts that indicate that the leader – the one who was responsible for the issues at hand, and is a multifunctional figure – was actually praised and even worshiped. It is clear that there was widespread discontent, but neither the leader nor the system was held responsible for the situation. Thus, the complaint sometimes remained unaddressed; people occasionally blamed themselves or local officials.

### **The USSR as the World**

People living in a closed country often perceived it as the whole world. It is seen in the expressions used when speaking about their country. Soviet leaders were referred to as leaders of the world, and the people were sure that all the democrats of the world follow Lenin and Stalin.

*“In 1946 it was published in newspapers that all the Armenian migrants are allowed to return to Armenia. I happened to know about it with a great happiness. Me, as a physically demanding worker, hereditary and true-blooded proletarian will finally be living in a country where there is my dearest proletarian Soviet Power, where there is no exploitation of workers, where the Muslims are not going to slaughter me, where there are peace, equality, and brotherhood of nations... I am asking for a petition for the first time in 5 years of being exiled. I am a proletarian and it is all the same to me where I work, but I am a Southerner by nature and the strict climate of Altai influenced disastrously on me and my relatives.”<sup>17</sup>*

This is a letter written by a repatriate of 1946 from Bulgaria, who describes the country as the best place for proletarians to live. He does not even consider his right to choose where to live inside the Soviet territory and only asks to let him return because of the climate being too severe for

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<sup>16</sup> NAA, fond 1191, list 6, document 730.

<sup>17</sup> NAA, fond 1191, list 6, document 754, p. 21.

his health. There is a strange representation of love and patriotism towards the Soviet Union: the author only lived there for 2-3 years and was deported to the special settlements staying there without a right to move. The author provided a lengthy description of how he saw the USSR and provided further thoughts on it. He was a newcomer to have had such experience, but he could have heard that people were arrested for even thinking incorrectly. For example, in 1945, many people were exiled due to expressing hesitation on the victory of the USSR in the War. In 1937 and 1938, many people were arrested for sharing their negative thoughts on Stalin. It is also evident that the author tries to prove that despite his deportation, he was not expressing discontent and he was writing the petition due to climate problems. As seen in the aforementioned experience, here is another accusation delivered by a dissatisfied person as the two testimonies share the element of dissatisfaction (недовольный элемент). Nevertheless, these authors are actually unsatisfied with the country. The author proved in many ways that he was satisfied and loved the USSR and knew why he adored it so much.

*“I am asking you, Great Stalin, to send your fatherly hand to free our innocent family to live in the cities and villages under the bright Soviet sun.”<sup>18</sup>*

In this sentence, it is clearly shown which is the country: There is no Armenia, but the Soviet Union. Additionally, it is universalized by saying the “Soviet sun”, as if it is a different geographical unit not on Earth.

### **An “Ideal family” Suitable for the Country**

In Soviet times, a typical Soviet citizen’s life widely depended on his/her family and parental connections. With regards to the previously discussed texts, there are family deportations in question, and only the head of the family (generally a male) was responsible for them being targeted as socially dangerous elements. Furthermore, the family relationships were widely discussed in the texts and were in the scope of this research. It is difficult to understand whether the repressions had an impact on family life

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<sup>18</sup> NAA, fond 1191, list 6, document 730, p. 22.

and changed it for the worse. As seen in most cases, scenes containing these elements were common in order to save the rest of their family. For example:

*“My father was imprisoned in 1937 and we do not know why, we do not have any information from him, and if our father was dishonest, what is our guilt?”<sup>19</sup>*

Aside from paternal disownment cases, one can see the deported people pretending to be divorced, which portrays some of the reasons why they were married in the first place:

*“I married him because of the pleadings of my relatives, I swear that everything I am saying now, is true. I married him officially and divorced officially. I am not a member of his family, and only his family told me that he had died in Kazakhstan.”<sup>20</sup>*

In this example, a woman tries to save her family by proving her loyalty to Soviet authorities and rejecting having any ties to people who are considered untrustworthy by the authorities. Similarly:

*“In 1924, I was in cohabitation with a man named Galustyan, without our marriage being officially registered. In 1926, he was arrested for political reasons and exiled.... I cut off every connection with that person ever since, considering him a non-Soviet person, and, therefore, a person harming the reputation of me and my children.”<sup>21</sup>*

In the aforementioned case, family relationships are somewhat politicized, as if a non-Soviet person could not be a husband or a father, mainly because he damages his family's reputation. Evidently, one's reputation was a vital factor in Soviet daily life as the authorities made every effort to isolate the so-called “unfamiliar elements,” only to find that they were ignored by the authorities *and* by the community itself. The extent of how undesirable it was to have a family member who was not trusted by the authorities is very clear in the following example:

*“... Why did you make me exile in my early 18<sup>th</sup> year? Why I, a glorious young girl gifted with all the benefits of nature, should not be able*

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<sup>19</sup>NAA, fond 1191, list 6, document 387, p. 24-28.

<sup>20</sup>NAA, fond 1191, list 6, document 389, p. 44.

<sup>21</sup>NAA, fond 1191, list 6, document 297, p. 24.

*to make a courageous choice for marriage? Why should not I be able to marry a military officer or a party member, only because I'm exiled?"*<sup>22</sup>

Fitzpatrick states that petitions were a lottery and significant numbers of them were successful; the author provides an example of a woman writing a letter of complaint against her expulsion from kolkhoz because of her father-in-law, with whom she had had no connection and “couldn’t have been infected with his ideology.” (Fitzpatrick, 2000, p. 129) In this case, there is the exact same experience of deported people who tried to prove that they had no connection with their accused family member of which was commonly deemed as a traitor, kulak, clergyman, Dashnak, etc. Furthermore, petitions were not successful in this example. Although no quantitative research was conducted regarding the balance of successful complaint letters, it can be concluded that complaint letters were unsuccessful. The information provided in the petitions were used for their benefit only in the release process (1954 to 1956) when all of them were allowed to return to their homeland.

While analyzing such situations, it is important to consider all of the details of each circumstance. Despite the fact that it is difficult to find the objective reality via only reading the archival papers, the following can still be observed: in cases where the author did not justify or whitewash his/her family member, but denied any affiliation, then that family member was either elsewhere or dead in order to prevent the author from inflicting any harm on the aforementioned family member. In rare cases when the family member was alive and lived with his family, it is obvious that the position was arranged in a complex way in order to protect the younger family members. Eventually, there is no such a task to discover the “reality,” but to present the “ideal” meant that they would provide their own testimonies.

### **“Pure Past” and an Origin to Boast for**

A person’s past<sup>23</sup> (origin) was a key factor for his/her future during the Soviet period, especially during the repressions period. It is interesting to

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<sup>22</sup> NAA, fond 1191, list 6, document 763, p. 118.

<sup>23</sup> More often used as “Political past” which include activities carried in the past within the scope of the interest of the authorities either during the Soviet period or



observe what was hidden and what was emphasized to be shown, which were the cases when they were (1) proud of their father or of their past, and (2) when they refused to accept their biological father as a parent and hide whatever they had been busy with in the past.

This example demonstrates how one could be proud of his/her past and use information to prove his/her positive qualities:

*“In 1918 my father was imprisoned because of expressing his international ideas and because of suggesting to stop the hatred between Armenians and Azerbaijani people. There he was infected with typhus and died.”<sup>24</sup>*

The conflicts and eventual suffering under the Dashnaks<sup>25</sup> served as a great advantage because being an enemy of the Dashnaks meant that he/she was to an insider for the communists. The strongest piece of evidence of being a true Bolshevik was that his/her father was imprisoned due to his international statement. The author had other solid arguments, one of which was the possession of the “Soviet language.” He transmitted the very ideas that were in a central position in usual rhetoric speech: international statements, negative sides of Dashnaks, and the Armenian-Azerbaijani problem:

*“From the wife of a lost soldier*

*In 1921 my elder brother went to the war of Finland and sacrificed his life for the protection of our fatherland. In 1941 my second brother (a party member) who was working as a kolkhoz director, started serving in the Red Army and sacrificed his life in Kerch, for liberating the Crimea. In 1942 my only son went to the front too and fought for 4 years as a hero and during the last years of the war sacrificed his life for his country.*

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the pre-Soviet times. In the case of Soviet Armenia the general seeking information was the belongingness to the political party “Dashnaktsutyun” and the financial and social status.

<sup>24</sup> NAA, fond 1191, list 6, document 727, p. 19-22.

<sup>25</sup> Social Democratic party Armenian Revolutionary Federation - Dashnaktsutyun ruled in the Republic of Armenia, which was formed in 1918 and existed until 1920. The party was officially cancelled in Soviet Armenia in 1923. While it continued its activities abroad, in Armenia the party reestablished only after the independence of the country.

*Dear father Stalin, today we do not suffer from the loss of our son as much as we do from the pain that we are sent here.*”<sup>26</sup>

As seen in the passage above, the problem of being accepted is revealed in this example. Acceptance by the authorities stipulated acceptance by the society: at least the authorities were doing their best to provide this connection. The woman who lost two brothers and one son during the war wrote that she was more apologetic being exiled than having lost her closest loved ones. The reason behind this was that she was esteemed, while in the other scenario, she was condemned.

The methods of rejecting the past were as follows: (1) hiding their former occupation, and (2) “confessing” and proving that they have changed. As seen in many newspaper articles,<sup>27</sup> the horrible conditions of exploitation and slavery were prominent. These articles also tracked the progression from being a slave to being an active social worker.

### **Conclusion**

During the time-period focused on in this article, vivid examples of Soviet life were used to attempt to portray the perception of an acceptable Soviet citizen. There are very few letters that stray from the general trends in analyzing content, approach, and style. Regardless of the content and style, the majority of the testimonies shared one common feature: the efforts made display oneself as an “ideal Soviet citizen.” The following image is conclusive of an ideal Soviet Citizen:

- Being a Patriot
- Having no doubts that the Soviet Union was the most powerful and fair country in the world
- Respecting and loving the leader
- Obeying and admiring the actions of the authorities without discussing them
- Being proud of the proletarian origin
- Making a family life based on the political changes

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<sup>26</sup> NAA, fond 1191, list 6, document 730, p. 23-24.

<sup>27</sup> Սովետական Հայաստան, 6 հունվարի, 1949, N 4 (8463):

All of the aforementioned qualities were supposed to occur naturally – without force. Being a good citizen was behavioral, and was not supposed to depend on emotional patterns, as people do not have control over their feelings or thoughts. It is evident that there were dictated values, which people pretended to live and abide by. This occurrence is conditioned by both structural and institutional factors. For example, during the wartime years, people were arrested for praising the power of the German army. In 1949, people learned “to speak:” favoring the officials was both imposed/forced, and voluntary, and they were left with little decision-making rights. The lack of trust and support by the authorities could be due to ones origin, something that cannot be changed or controlled. This caused them to lie about their identity or pretend to be someone else, which was often obvious to the addressee, but nevertheless was still accepted. To this end, one was bound contractually with the authorities in order to solve vital issues.

It should be noted that attempting to be depicted as a good citizen was not the only method of self-justification. Numerous people described themselves as unintelligent and illiterate, and politically unaware to prove that they could pose no threat to the Soviet State.

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«ԱՌԱՋԱՎՈՐ» ԸՆԿԵՐՆԵՐ. «ԻԴԵԱԼԱԿԱՆ» ՔԱՂԱՔԱՑՈՒ  
ԿԵՐՊԱՐԸ ԸՍՏ ԽՈՐՀՐԴԱՅԻՆ ՀԱՅԱՍՏԱՆԻՑ 1949 Թ.

ԱՔՍՈՐՎԱԾՆԵՐԻ ԴԻՄՈՒՄ-ԲՈՂՈՔՆԵՐԻ

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«Հայր Ստալին», խորհրդային լեզու, իդեալական խորհրդային  
քաղաքացի, քաղաքական բռնաճնշումներ:*

Հոդվածը մի փորձ է դուրս բերել այն «ճիշտ» քաղաքացու կերպարը, որին ձգտում էր նմանվել Խորհրդային Հայաստանում՝ ստալինյան ժամանակաշրջանում ապրող մարդը: Հոդվածում շրջանառվել են 1949 թ. Խորհրդային Հայաստանից դեպի Ալթայի երկրամաս աքսորված անձանց բողոք-դիմումների տեքստերը: Դիմումներն ուղղված էին Խորհրդային վերնախավին՝ խնդրանքով թույլ տալ վերադառնալ իրենց նախկին բնակավայրերը: Աքսորի որոշման մասին տեղեկության բացակայությունը և անտեղյակությունը, թե որ սոցիալական խմբի մարդիկ են ենթակա աքսորի, մարդկանց դրդում էր ինքնուրույն դատել և ենթադրել կամ հնարել հավանական մեղքեր և ապա արդարացնել սեփական անձը այդ համատեքստում: Այս իրավիճակը հնարավորություն է տալիս հասկանալու նրանց ընկալումները Խորհրդային «սև ու սպիտակ»-ի մասին: Քաղաքական կուրսի, ՆԳԺԿ պաշտոնյաների և քարոզվող գաղափարների փոփոխականությունը քաղաքացիներին դարձրել էր բավականին ճկուն և հարմարվող, որոնք հմուտ էին նույն գաղափարները շրջանառելով կազմել «Խորհրդային լեզվով» գրված տեքստեր՝ փորձելով ճանապարհ

հարթել իրենց համար: Դատելով նշված տեքստերից՝ իրենք հավատացած էին, որ նման հմտությունների տիրապետելը կարող էր դառնալ հատուկ բնակեցումից ազատվելու գրավականը: Այս տրամաբանությամբ աքսորվածների մեծ մասը, նկարագրելով իրենց անցած կյանքը և այն հավանական հանգամանքները, որի արդյունքում իրենք հայտնվել էին աքսորի ցուցակներում, ջանք չէին խնայում ներկայացնել իրենց որպես «իդեալական» քաղաքացիներ՝ միանգամայն համապատասխան իշխանությունների ակնկալիքներին: Այս տեքստերը պարունակում են տվյալ ժամանակաշրջանի սոցիալ-մշակութային գործընթացների մասին շատ ավելի խորը նշաններ, քան այն, ինչ հաջողվել է վերականգնել, և հետևաբար անհրաժեշտություն կա կրկին անդրադառնալ այս նյութին: Հիմնական ոլորտները, որոնց անդրադարձ է արվել հոդվածում, առաջնորդին դիմելու ձևերն են, ընտանիքի և սոցիալական ծագման վերաբերյալ քննարկումները: