

the families of imprisoned “enemies of the people” and my father knew it. Following a person’s arrest, it was common practice to confiscate the house or apartment and the furniture of the arrestee and throw the family out or assign them to a single room irrespective of their number. Indeed, so many families were shattered, so many orphaned children were left in the discriminatory care of the government with the label “son of a traitor” or “daughter of an anti-revolutionary” metaphorically stamped on their forehead during the Stalinist persecutions. Nor did it matter if the family left behind officially renounced the arrestee and disowned the husband or father who was an “enemy of the people,” “a poisonous weed” deserving eradication, “a saboteur,” “the agent of a foreign power,” as the rhetoric of Stalinist propaganda went.⁸ Children were taught to hate their imprisoned parent. Teachers inculcated the idea that, unlike the parents of other children who were heroes on the side of Stalin, their own parent was on the side of Hitler and associated enemies, and that idea took root in their childish minds.

Tales of these aftershocks are many. In the reminiscences of Hrach Simonyan, the Armenian protagonist in Arshak’s novel, «Գնչուհին» (The gypsy woman), his childhood memories are shrouded in the oppression of the Stalin era. Every night after his father’s arrest, he, a young boy, accompanied his mother to the

8 One of the most painful of such disclaimers was that of Vahan Totovents’ wife and young son. Despite renouncing her husband, Lusik Totovents was arrested and imprisoned. Their son, Levon Totovents, a promising young artist, was shot in the battle of Kerch in 1943.