

I came close to penetrating the mystery after I reread Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*, this time with intensely focused attention. And there it was: isolated prison camps throughout the archipelago known as sharashkas or "paradise islands" where political prisoners—biologists, chemists, physicists and nuclear engineers—were put to work on top-secret projects.²¹ That was all I could find. Apparently, the climate in those sharashkas was less intolerable.

The Stalinist purges of 1937–1938 were proportionally the harshest and most cruel in the small Soviet Republic of Armenia. More people were arrested, exiled or executed in Armenia than in any other republic, even Russia. Speaking of the year 1937, Silva Kaputikyan said, "In our republic, we tried to cut down more people than anyone, and we cut deeper than anyone."²² Denunciation was rampant: people were falsely informing on their neighbors or coworkers out of fear, coercion or jealousy. Old Bolsheviks with a long history of leadership in the Communist Party and a record of outstanding revolutionary activism in the service of securing Bolshevik hegemony throughout the Empire, even those who had spent years in tsarist prisons, were being arrested. In his memoir, Suren Ghazaryan named the names of fellow Armenian inmates who were staunch Bolsheviks.²³

21 Solzhenitsyn, *Gulag Archipelago*, p. 590.

22 In the monthly *Garun* (Yerevan), 1994, No. 10, p. 22, quoted in *Pakine*, 1995, No. 7–8–9, p. 60.

23 Ghazaryan, «Դա չպետք է կրկնվի» (That should not be repeated), p. 10.