THE ATTITUDE OF THE KAZAKH COMMUNITY TOWARDS THOSE DEPORTED FROM AJARA IN 1951–1952[1]

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Abstract: The article is devoted to the relationship between the Kazakh community and citizens deported from Ajara in 1951-1952, who found themselves in Kazakhstan as a result of forced resettlement. Many of them remained to live in Kazakhstan, side by side with their Kazakh neighbors, who saved them during the most severe trials of deportation. For them, deportation became a traumatic experience that shaped a collective trauma narrative, as evidenced by the recollections (interviews) of respondents - eyewitnesses to the events - whose narratives reflect real events preserved in collective memory. The tragedy of deportation ultimately became a starting point for the formation of a multinational Kazakh society.

Keywords: deportation, natives of Ajara, respondent, oral history, collective memory, everyday life

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Introduction. In recent decades, historical scholarship has increasingly emphasised the need to study the problems of social history and the history of everyday life. Contemporary research is characterised by a shift in focus from the study of socio-economic and political systems and large communities to the examination of small groups and the behavioural strategies of individuals within specific historical times and spaces. In the current historiographical context, an important role belongs to microhistorical research, distinguished by its depth and detailed penetration into the essence of social processes and the real lives of individuals, thereby bringing us closer to understanding and comprehensively interpreting the profound phenomena of a given era.

In conditions dominated by perceptions of the totalitarian character of Soviet society, only through microhistory is it possible to determine the extent to which the behaviour of the Soviet individual depended upon personal agency, public sentiment, or the state apparatus. Thus, the modern interpretation of history presupposes recognition of the importance not only of extraordinary political and economic events and the lives of prominent state and public figures, but also of the structures of everyday life that characterise the everyday human experience in its various contexts, placing the individual and his or her perception of events at the centre of analysis.

Although historians have extracted an enormous quantity of archival documents concerning the repressions of that period against representatives of various peoples, including the Adjarian Georgians, these sources do not eliminate all “blank spots”. Questions of adaptation, the attitude of the authorities and local population towards the deportees, issues of survival, mutual influence, and cultural interconnection remain insufficiently studied. The problem of researching the history of deported peoples remains highly politicised

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and is frequently used in the political sphere as an instrumental tool by various forces, further underscoring the necessity for deeper investigation into the history of mass ethnic repressions and the scale of the crimes of the totalitarian regime in the USSR.

Methods. By synthesising the experience and methodological approaches of micro- and macrohistory, historical anthropology, social and historical psychology, and utilising a wide range of contemporary sources (archival documents, oral history materials, personal testimonies, etc.), this study reconstructs a little-studied and largely unknown aspect of everyday life in post-Second World War Kazakhstan. This contributes not only to the enrichment of source studies and historiography but also contributes to the further development of national historiography through theoretical and methodological analysis of the phenomenon of political repression in historical scholarship. It introduces new documents necessary for understanding Stalinist stereotypes and for comprehending the causes, main tendencies, scale, and consequences of state repressive measures directed at various categories of the population, including Adjarian Georgians.

The methodological foundation of the work is based upon the principles of historicism, objectivity, and consistency.

Results. Due to the exhaustion of ideological approaches to studying the Soviet era, the study of everyday life, including during and after World War II, has acquired particular significance. While official history claims a continuous increase in public welfare and an improvement in living conditions in the country, everyday history allows us to see all the contradictions and complexities of the everyday life of the "little man" - victims of Soviet modernisation and ideological rigidity. Essentially, this offers the opportunity to uncover a different, sometimes alternative, system of people's values and to gather rich material for studying the positive experiences and negative precedents of previous generations, particularly in the Gulag system, which represented a "state within a state."

Kazakhstan was not chosen as a destination for the deportations by chance; several factors contributed to this: political, geographic, demographic, and economic. Georgian citizens were among the many groups who fell victim to the USSR's repressive policies. Initially, the deportations affected the Turks; a significant portion of these "Turks" consisted of partially Turkified Muslim Georgians - Meskhets and Javakhs. The rest were Karapapaks, Turkmens, Kurds, and Hemshils (Muslim Armenians). A small number were genuine Turks (Ottomans). In the late 1980s, they began to be referred to collectively as "Meskhetian Turks" who lived in Meskheti, i.e., in the southern and southwestern regions of Georgia. On July 31, 1944, the State Defence Committee issued a decree beginning the deportation of Turks. As a result, more than 27,000 "so-called Meskhetian Turks" (Kalybekova, 2008, p. 82) ended up in Kazakhstan. In 1949, Greeks, Turks, Dashnaks (persons of Armenian nationality), and others were deported from Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, the Krasnodar region, and the Black Sea coast (Odessa and Crimea). And the contingent "From Georgia in 1951-1952" were the so-called "hostile elements", which meant close relatives of emigrants, traitors to the homeland and defectors living abroad and conducting subversive work against the USSR, re-emigrants who arrived in Georgia from France, Iran and China in 1946-1949, former foreign travelers suspicious of connections with Turkish intelligence, etc. (under this category was also concealed the deportation of another people - the Assyrians) (Zemskov, 2010, p. 120). Among the Georgians expelled in 1951 were former prisoners of war, participants in the partisan movement and resistance. Those who had already gone through the Gulag in the 1930s and more than atoned for their guilt, if any, also fell victim to the repressions. Moreover, those families whose distant relatives left for abroad after the Sovietization of Georgia, and their traces were long lost (*Memories of the repressed – 1951*, 2022, p. 5) includes documentary evidence of the victims of the mass deportation of Georgians to Kazakhstan in 1951 - one of the most tragic episodes in Georgia's history, which even today cannot be read without pain and compassion. Today, according to the 2021 census, 5,394 Geor-

gians, 145,615 Azerbaijanis, 309 Assyrians, 14,022 Armenians, 572 Gagauz, 11,890 Greeks, 85,478 Turks, 102 Karaites, 47,880 Kurds live in Kazakhstan (Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms…, 2023, pp. 4-6). They arrived in Kazakhstan in a state of stress, without means of subsistence, and branded "enemies of the people." The resettlement itself took place in railway carriages, accompanied by armed guards to ensure that none of the settlers could escape. Here is what E. Arakelevsky says: "My family and my maternal grandparents were deported here to Kazakhstan in 1952. My grandfather, Ishkhan Arshakovich Kazarov (1918–1979), was drafted from Georgia to the front in 1942. He joined the army as a very young man. My grandfather was born into a middle-class family living in Armavir. His family traditionally dealt in tobacco products, and before the war, my grandfather worked as a tobacco technologist. My grandfather's ancestors came to the Krasnodar Territory from Kars, which was ceded to Turkey in 1921, during the Armenian Genocide in the Ottoman Empire. My grandmother's name was Eriknaz (1922–1991), and she was from Western Armenia, in the Mush province. My grandmother was a housewife. My grandparents married in 1938, before the war. They had two sons, Robert (born 1940) and Vladimir (born 1941). Around 1943, my grandfather was captured in Poland. He did not particularly like to talk about the war or his time in captivity. My mother recalled that the war had already ended, but my grandfather did not return home for a long time; he was considered missing in action. At the end of 1947, upon returning to his family in Georgia, he was immediately arrested and held until 1950, then deported to Kazakhstan. My grandfather, his wife, and their two sons were sent into exile; the rest of their relatives were left alone. The journey from Georgia to Kazakhstan took about two months. My grandmother recalled that there was also a Georgian family on the train with our relatives. Until the end of 1952, they lived in the Kyzyl-Kum district of the South Kazakhstan region. In 1951, Angela, my mother's sister, was born; she now lives in Tbilisi. My grandfather met the locals and made friends. Then, with the help of a Kazakh friend, my grandfather and his family moved to the village of Chemolgan in the Almaty region. He worked shifts, commuting from Chemolgan to Almaty two or three times a week. My grandfather was well versed in the tobacco industry and was a creative individual with a commercial flair. Even then, he had his own kiosk, sowing and selling some crops. Soon after Stalin's death, the special deportees began to be released, and the opportunity arose to return home. Our family had to travel to Almaty to complete the necessary paperwork. On June 4, 1953, my mother, Ofelia Ishkhanovna, was born right on the train. My mother's sister, Angela, recounted, based on my grandmother's account, that there was a commotion when my mother was born. Men took off their shirts and made a makeshift screen to separate the mother and baby. The train stopped at a station, and there my grandmother gave birth to my mother. My mother has a certificate and a witness statement from the engineer or conductor that she was born on the train. In the 1990s, an organisation or a German foundation emerged in Georgia that began paying my mother monthly compensation as a victim of the child of a former prisoner of war. My grandparents decided to stay in the Almaty region for a while. It was quite difficult for them to move to a new place with four small children. If I'm not mistaken, they decided to move to Georgia by the end of 1959. A compelling reason for my grandfather's family's return was the reunion with his parents and brother, Arshat Arshakovich Kazarov, a pilot and veteran of World War II. Life had been difficult for my grandfather's family in Georgia; they even considered returning to Kazakhstan. According to my mother's recollections, her parents spoke warmly of Kazakhstan and the Kazakhs, who had given them shelter during difficult times, and they missed the traditional Kazakh cuisine. They felt at home there. My grandfather wanted to return until the very end; his health didn't allow it, and four years in prison had taken their toll, making it difficult. My grandfather died in Tbilisi. My grandmother died of a stroke; she had a sad fate: she buried both her sons. My grandmother's ashes are buried in Tbilisi. I was born in Russia. My parents moved to the Stavropol Territory when they got married. In the early 2000s, my mother and I moved to Kazakhstan. I consider Kazakhstan my homeland; my

mother was born here, my family lives here, I have the opportunity to work and create. I know five languages: Armenian, Russian, Georgian, Chinese, English, and I also speak some Kazakh. We Armenians, like Kazakhs and other nationalities, honour our ancestors. Kazakhstan is a unique country, with unique natural conditions and the warmest people. Armenians and Kazakhs have much in common – both words and cultural customs" (*From the history of deportations*, 2024, pp. 685-687). The recollections of Kulparshyn Kulataeva (personal archive), born in 1948 and originally from Almaty, now resides in the village of Belbulak in the Talgar district of the Almaty region, confirm that despite the propaganda efforts among the population, Kazakhs provided significant assistance and support to the disadvantaged people who fell victim to the state's repressive policies. She recounts that, according to her mother, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, many people of various nationalities began to be brought to Almaty by train. It became common to see Germans, Poles, Koreans, Georgians, Turks, and Chechens became somewhat commonplace. Later, many Japanese were brought in; it was the first time we had seen them. They were all transported through the Almaty-1 railway station, where my father worked as a mechanic at the locomotive depot. He repeatedly asked to be sent to the front, but was mobilized into the Labour Army. Then, when her mother, Rabiga Sabalakova, and grandmother, Tapatai Kulataeva, learned from her father that many deportees and prisoners of war had been brought to work and were hungry, they baked corn cakes. They first dried and roasted the corn before grinding it in a hand mill. The flour was coarse, but they nevertheless baked a lot of cakes from this flour. They lived near the city at the time, in the village of Pervomayka in the Kaskelen district of the Almaty region. From there, the two of them would take the cakes to the Almaty-1 train station and distribute them to everyone, regardless of nationality. And they did this purely out of human motives, because they were people first and foremost, and whether they were prisoners of war or deportees - that was not a question they considered. It was hard for everyone, and it was not easy for us either, but they helped as best they could.

Thus, the institution of deportation of peoples, as it developed in the former USSR, was, from the very beginning, associated with massive violations of human rights. Firstly, a person, regardless of whether they had committed the crime imputed to them, was considered suspect. This placed all members of the deported peoples in a legally disadvantaged position. Secondly, the legal insecurity and vulnerability of all deportees was accompanied by further violations of their rights and freedoms (Deportees). Similarly, special settlers from Georgia were morally and socially disadvantaged and deprived of basic human rights from the very beginning of their deportation. In most cases, the right to the safety of personal property and belongings of special settlers was not guaranteed, although state documents stipulated that agricultural equipment, livestock, and grain fodder belonging to the special settlers were to be surrendered to special commissions, with subsequent compensation at the site of resettlement. Here is a vivid example from the memoirs of Mahomed Lumenovich Azizov (from the author's personal archive), born in 1928, an ethnic Turk who was deported with his parents as a child from the Aspindza region of the Georgian SSR, from the village of Aspindza: "We were gathered at 4 p.m. and told that we would be resettled 'in connection with the cleansing of Georgian territory of other nationalities, including Armenians.' We were given until the evening to prepare. Soldiers assisted us. From the village, we were transported to Baku in a freight car, and the train bore a sign reading 'Goods.'"

*This statement by the respondent is not accurate. It's possible that the respondent actually heard this statement from soldiers participating in the repressions. Without bothering to explain the reasons for the deportation in detail, he summarized them in this way, given his age at the time of the deportation: he was only 16 years old. Georgian Muslims, Turkmen, Kurds, and Muslim Armenians (Hemshilis, but not all Armenians) were deported from the border regions of Turkey for reasons of national security. This was precisely

the reason, not the cleansing of Georgian territory from non-Georgians. On the contrary, they contributed to the ethnic fragmentation of Georgia, as well as Kazakhstan. This was the policy of the time.

It was late November. They arrived in Alma-Ata only at the end of 1944. The 40-day journey from Baku to Alma-Ata left people exhausted, especially the elderly.

There was nowhere to go to the toilet. The train didn't stop, and people weren't escorted out of the carriage, so the elderly, to avoid going to the bathroom, didn't eat and starved themselves. They were embarrassed in front of us, the young people, and the children. And if you shook your jacket, lice would fall out like sand. There were four or five families in a carriage. When we arrived in Alma-Ata, the families were separated for 90 days. The elderly, women, and children were sent to a club, and we men, including teenagers (I was 16 at the time), were taken with our belongings to the city of Issyk, where we were assigned to collective farms. I ended up on the Amangeldy collective farm. Along with everyone else, I lost my family. I found out by chance through the first precinct (a woman said she had seen my family). That is how I got my family back together (my mother and five children). I was the eldest. My father was at the front, and then a funeral notice came, and that's how I became the breadwinner for a large family at 16. They provided us with housing and gave us 500 square meters of land. I was the commandant's assistant because I knew Russian. The district commandant would come three or four times a month, check if everything was alright, register our presence, and then go back. What we brought with us did not last long. The situation was dire. We couldn't adapt to the cold. Of the 30 families on the Amangeldy collective farm, one family and all its members died of hunger. The following year, each family was given five rams. We slaughtered one ram for food, sold four, and bought a cow. In the spring, I planted a vegetable garden and corn. That's how I fed my family. Our family had a large farm. Everything remained there - the house and the cattle. I saw the cow cry when they took us away.

Until the 1950s, there were no wages at all. Before that, we lived solely from our own gardens. Everyone wrote down their labor days. Everyone worked, mostly Kazakhs, Poles, and Turks. We lived on the farm from spring until late fall. The women worked in the fields until they gave birth. There were cases, often, of women giving birth right there in the fields. The women themselves attended the births. Then the mother in labor would swaddle the baby with the front of her dress and take her home. As a teenager, I witnessed such incidents more than once. I had to report them to the commandant; the baby was born alive, while others were stillborn. The whole scene is vivid in my mind; I can see it when I close my eyes. I will never forget it.

The local population welcomed us well. I lived on the Amangeldy collective farm for 21 years. I currently live in the village of Belbulak, Talgar district, Almaty region. I have no plans to move anywhere; my parents and relatives are buried here, and I've become accustomed to it. I have my own house, farm, and my children are well-off. Everything here feels like home. The villagers are good; we do not divide ourselves by nationality or religion. We have weathered all the hardships together. And we have become family. We often visit each other, especially when there's a wedding or a toi, everyone invites us, seats us like an aksakal in a place of honor. When we leave, the house is left unlocked; we leave it with the neighbours, or they ask. That's how we live. The only thing I ask is that our children not see everything we saw. And I also want to say that the laws of the state were strict back then. Theft of grain from 1 kg to 1 ton carried a penalty of 10 years in prison. And for 1 ton or more, the maximum penalty was death without trial-execution by firing squad.

Unfortunately, the ranks of living witnesses to history are thinning with each passing year. Almost none of our respondents remain alive, with the exception of Maria Rafailovna Baranova, born in 1935. Their recollections are so valuable, despite the fact that the human factor cannot be ruled out. Nevertheless, they are "history told" by a living eyewitness, a witness to what happened, someone who endured all the trials of fate. And someone who made history. Only by comparing the legal documents that guided state policy with

the accounts of living witnesses can one provide an objective assessment of historical processes or events. Maria Rafailovna Baranova, born on August 5, 1935 lives in the village of Belbulak, Talgar District, Almaty Region. She is now 91 years old. As a one-year-old child, she was deported with her parents in 1936 from the Ukrainian SSR to a special settlement in the Almaty Region. In 1951, upon reaching the age of 16, she was placed on a special register and was released in 1956. She was recognised as a victim of political repression and rehabilitated on April 14, 1993. This is what she says: “As I remember from conversations with my parents, grandparents, when they were travelling, my grandfather got off at the Alma-Ata station. He immediately liked it, there was a lot of greenery, fruit, apples. Kazakhs took them in, they were very hospitable. Thanks to them, we survived. They had no clothes or belongings, wearing only the clothes they had on. They didn’t bring anything with them. My parents worked all their lives on the collective farm. Then they began to acquire a little of their own. We lived here our whole lives, first in the village of Veselaya, then in the village of Michurin, now the aul of Belbulak, Talgar district, Almaty region. I have nothing but gratitude to the Kazakhs. My only friend is a Kazakh, Kulyash, and I don't need another. We've been friends since we were young, worked together, and now we're both retired, but we're still friends. The neighbors are very good; besides the Kazakhs, there are Turks, Georgians, and other peoples who ended up here at various times against their will. But my neighbor watered his garden, and Baba Maria says to me, "Let me ferry the water to you, and you can water your garden." Someone goes to the market and asks for something to buy. We'll go somewhere, leaving the door open. We ask each other to look after each other. That's how we live. We all celebrate weddings, inviting everyone. Here, we even forget our nationality. When someone dies, everyone comes to help. My daughter-in-law is Kazakh, my grandson married a Kazakh, and they live very well. Thanks to the help of the Kazakhs and our faith in God, we survived," she concluded another interview.

Conclusions. Kazakhstan, more than any other former Soviet republic, endured the full burden of mass resettlements of innocent peoples onto its territory. It not only provided shelter to the dispossessed but also absorbed the pain, humiliation, and suffering of deported communities. Today, representatives of more than one hundred nationalities live and work in Kazakhstan. For many, Kazakhstan has become a second homeland, offering a complete spiritual and social life without discrimination or restriction.

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