

ESCAPE TO THE WEST IN THE MEMORIES OF ESTONIANS IN ARGENTINA: THE HISTORICAL, SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTEXT

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This article presents memories and interpretations of the mass escape of 1944 based on the experiences of Estonians in Argentina. The aim is, first and foremost, to analyse how people remember the events they experienced and what influence historical, social and psychological contexts could have had in interpreting these memories. A further aim is to open the functions of the escape story: The reasons why people talked about the escape and also the reasons why they might remain silent about it. Attention is also paid to intrapersonal processes, emotions that triggered traumatic events and the influence these could have had on narrative interaction in the Argentinean immigrant community.

ESCAPE TO THE WEST

Mass escape was an event in Estonian history where tens of thousands of Estonians left for the West. Although there had already been people leaving earlier, the mass escape is usually dated as autumn 1944,¹ when Soviet troops reoccupied Estonia. One escape route was to Sweden, where, by the spring of 1945, 27,000 people had already arrived from Estonia.² The second direction was to Germany, together with Austria and Denmark, where a large number of those who did not manage to escape to Sweden went and who, with retreating German troops, were evacuated to Germany. According to the refugees themselves, over 35,000 Estonians escaped to Germany.³ According to Mart Laar, in September 1944, 37,831 soldiers were evacuated from Estonia to Germany, 13,049 wounded

¹ E.g., **Jürjo, I.** Pagulus ja Nõukogude Eesti. Vaateid KGB, EKP ja VEKSA arhiividokumentide põhjal. Umara, Tallinn, 1996, 7.

² **Kumer-Haukanõmm, K.** Eestlaste Teisest maailmasõjast tingitud põgenemine läände. – In: Suur põgenemine 1944. Eestlaste lahkumine läände ning selle mõjud. Eds K. Kumer-Haukanõmm, T. Rosenberg, T. Tammaru. Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, Tartu, 2006, 18.

³ **Ernits, E.** Põgenikud sõjaaegsel Saksamaal. – In: Eesti saatusaastad, IV. EMP, Stockholm, 1966, 7.

and 20,418 civilians.⁴ The majority of those who arrived in Germany and Sweden continued their journey to other Western countries, including Argentina.

Estonians were already living in Argentina, even before WW II. They were mostly voluntary emigrants who had arrived in the 1920s for economic reasons. Before WW II, the number of Estonians reached its peak in 1933, when there were about 400–500 of them living there.⁵ A large number of Estonians arrived in Argentina after WW II. Although there are big discrepancies between authors in terms of the number of Estonians in Argentina after WW II,⁶ H. Kulu is probably the most realistic with an estimate of 800–900.⁷ During the late 1950s and in the 1960s, a large number of Estonians, who at that time were living in Argentina, migrated further to the USA and Canada. Today there are less than 50 people speaking Estonian in Argentina,⁸ most of them war refugees and their descendants. Among these people I conducted 29 interviews in 2007. The interviews dealt with emigrating from Estonia, life in camps, arriving in Argentina and adjusting to life in the new homeland. In the present article, I concentrate specifically on the events of the war and the escape from Estonia in the memories of Estonians living in Argentina.

The majority of war refugees, who are still alive, were children when they experienced these events. Some interviews were also conducted with those who were born in refugee camps in Sweden, Germany or Denmark, some even later, in Argentina – in these cases we are not talking about direct, but passed-on, memories. In addition, the author had access to some interviews that were conducted with those who were already adults at the time of the escape. These materials are supported by some written and published memoirs.

TALKING ABOUT THE ESCAPE

In connection with mass emigration, one has emphasised that we are dealing with a so-called foundation tale in exiled Estonian communities, which is also the

⁴ **Laar, M.** Eesti Teises maailmasõjas. Grenader, Tallinn, 2005, 67.

⁵ **Laurits, K.** Eestlased Lõuna-Ameerikas 20. sajandi algusest kuni II maailmasõjani. BA thesis. Tartu Ülikool, 2003, 82.

⁶ J. Madise gives 201 as the number of Estonian war refugees who had officially arrived in Argentina from Germany (**Madise, J.** Emigratsioon Saksamaalt. – In: Eesti saatusaastad, IV (1945–1960). Poliitilised põgenikud. EMP, Stockholm, 1966, 188). It is not known whether the above figure also includes refugees from Denmark and Austria – as is known, one Germany was occupied, the other ‘united’. Surely this number does not include those who had resettled in Argentina from Sweden, who were a considerable number. According to P. Poljan, there were 42 Estonians in Argentina on 1 January 1952 (**Полян П.** Жертвы двух диктатур: жизнь, труд, унижение и смерть советских военнопленных и остарбайтеров на чужбине и на родине. Москва, 2002, 824). This figure is surely too low.

⁷ **Kulu, H.** Eestlased maailmas. Ülevaade arvukusest ja paiknemisest. Tartu Ülikool, Tartu, 1992, 100.

⁸ The majority of the s.c. ‘old Estonians’ have assimilated.

basis of the mission of exiled Estonians: To preserve Estonian culture, to carry it forward and fight for freedom. Traumatization of the events into a canonical tale of suffering took place.⁹ It is natural that this tale is being told earlier and, even today, it expresses the reasons and process of leaving. Ellen Liiv, who later arrived in Argentina as a refugee describes in her memoir the fatal days in the autumn of 1944, when Soviet troops were approaching, and the Germans were preparing to leave Estonia. As a young woman, she worked in Viljandi, when the front was approaching:

We all were soon seized by an approaching realisation of the inevitable – a depressing inkling of the unavoidable was lying heavily on everything: The surroundings, farmhouses that were half neglected facing their fate... Our work, in the senselessness of which we were increasingly convinced... Occasionally we heard, in our earth mounds when we were working in the open air, the rumble of cannons and we tried to estimate approximately the distance to the front by that. According to our calculations, it should not be that near; when the weather was clear and windless, the rumble of cannons sounded very far away.

Completely cut off from the rest of the world – away from the capital and all sources of news, in an unfamiliar countryside – we were living in complete ignorance in terms of developing events. From the German soldiers, who we met at work, there was no point in asking for clarification of the situation; they either did not know much more than us or, if they did, then they were not allowed to talk openly about it with the natives of the country.

Our earthworks in Viljandi county ended suddenly and unexpectedly before the set date. When we had been labouring there for ten days, we were suddenly woken up around two in the morning with the news that the Russians were only four kilometres from us. The messenger was a German officer who had raced here on a horse and who also told us that we were now free and everyone could immediately go wherever they liked.¹⁰

Such biographical scenes open a window on the contradictory nature of the events of that time – the author of the excerpt suddenly chooses the word ‘freedom’ to describe the situation that had arisen, the accent of which in the given context seems to be ironic rather than anything else and it expresses vividly the absurd dilemma that tens, if not hundreds or thousands of inhabitants of Estonia were faced with at that time. The war made people to choose: Either to remain in the homeland, to wait ‘voluntarily’ for possible repression or to escape ‘voluntarily’ to the West, to face an unknown future.

I knowingly emphasise the word ‘voluntarily’ in this context: In migration studies the dichotomy of voluntary and forcibly has long been the topic of lively discussion.¹¹ Some authors find that, on the scale of voluntary – forcibly, there is

⁹ Kirss, T. Eessõna. – In: Rändlindude pesad. Ed. T. Kirss. Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum, Toronto Ülikooli Eesti Õppetool, Tartu, 2006, 11; Kirss, T. Põgenemistekonnad ja põgenemislood. – In: Rändlindude pesad. Ed. T. Kirss. Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum, Toronto Ülikooli Eesti Õppetool, Tartu, 2006, 617, 624.

¹⁰ Liiv, E. Põhjast lõunasse. Mälestusi ja kommentaare. Kirjastus Välis-Eesti & EMP, Stockholm, 1992, 8.

¹¹ See Jürgenson, A. Vabatahtliku ja sunniviisilise migratsiooni dihhotoomiast migratsiooni makro- ja mikroteooriate valguses. – Acta Historica Tallinnensia, 2008, 13, 92–117.

little reason to distinguish refugees from, for example, migrant workers.¹² This claim is a brave one, its weakness is the fact that it emphasises, in a person's decision to migrate, too much of an economic argument and neglects other, more personal and situational factors. The strong point of this claim is, however, that it brings out the need to distinguish, for example, refugees from those who were deported. With deportation, the person has no choice; a refugee has a choice, although between two unsavoury options: Either to stay put and succumb to the power of the oppressor, or to flee abroad.

In reaction to these traumatic events, one can distinguish age-related discrepancies. Earlier, in connection with the 1944 mass emigration,¹³ I referred to the amazing similarity of gender and age distinction of refugees, to the data of a typical voluntary migration: In both cases, the majority is made up of young males. As both women and the elderly obviously suffer from oppression similarly with men and the young, one needs to look for selective processes from statistics of this kind.

In many interviews conducted with the Estonians in Argentina, an important emphasis is on the farewell with parents who stayed behind.

I remember when my father... in the evening my maternal uncle came and said we should go. And then, what did we have? Father took a loaf of rye bread and a suitcase. And nothing else. And we went to say farewell to my mum... my grandmother and grandfather and... mum went also – this is what I still remember – mum was at the neighbours, who had just made me a plush black coat and my other grandfather – paternal grandfather stayed – he lived with us – that stayed... stayed there on his own, he was nearly ninety years old (woman, born 1938).

[M]y grandmother remained – when we went to Finland – then grandmother remained waiting for us to return, right. And of course later she was not let out so that she... that she could join us. Not to Finland, not to Sweden (man, born 1938).

Those that left were mainly the young, who have a greater readiness to start again in a new country. And although many emphasise in interviews that they hoped to return home soon, they could not be sure of this.

Ellen Liiv, with whose words I began this chapter, writes elsewhere:

That beautiful night of early autumn. The train rushed through the wavy landscape of Central Estonia, I suddenly remembered an old march 'In Karksi hills'. We must have been very young at that time as we did not manage to take things really tragically.¹⁴

Several interviews interpreted the events of that time not so tragically as the canonical reception of this event would prescribe. For example, in the descriptions of one woman, now 80 years old, the war was one big adventure. She described vividly how she, together with her girl friends in 1942, left for the work service

¹² **Richmond, Anthony H.** Sociological theories of international migration: the case of refugees. – *Current Sociology*, 1988, **36**, 2, 17; **Lucassen, J., Lucassen, L.** Migration, migration history, history: old paradigms and new perspectives. – In: *Migration, Migration History, History*. Comp. J. Lucassen, L. Lucassen. Peter Lang, Bern, 1997, 16.

¹³ **Jürgenson, A.** Vabatahtliku ja sunniviisilise migratsiooni dihhotoomiast, 112–113.

¹⁴ **Liiv, E.** Põhjast lõunasse, 11.

(RAD – *Reichsarbeitsdienst*),¹⁵ how they quite soon got bored with this and so left Germany unauthorised, by train in the beginning, then through Lithuania and Latvia, at times on foot, or at hitch-hiking. She related how someone in Lithuania gave them money and how they finally arrived in Estonia. The panic that their parents felt because of their missing daughters makes the storyteller laugh now. She also describes her rehabilitation in Estonia and going to the front again as a nurse. About the boat trip that took her to Danzig, when German troops were leaving Estonia, she says laconically:

The boat stopped and the mines sunk.

She laughs at this, and after talks about another ship that sunk, adding:

I have always been lucky in life.

And she laughs again (woman, born 1926).

This example is surely not suitable for generalisations – the perception of mass escape in exile and also in Estonia after gaining independence depicts the events of that time uniformly as tragic. With this example I would like to emphasise the need to take concrete personal contexts into consideration. The same informant talked about her parents' divorce, about how her mother found a new husband during the war and indicated that she felt as if she was "surplus to requirements". In migration literature the fact has been brought to attention how the decision to leave can be influenced by distancing oneself from the family, either in terms of generation or culture, which, in its own turn, is amplified by the historical context and political situation.¹⁶

The problem can also be viewed more widely: Subjectively people were influenced differently by their social, cultural and physical environment – the frightening events of the war were upon everybody, but not everybody had to leave because of this. The migration literature brings to our attention several factors that influenced a person's decision to either stay or leave. It is worth here pausing to emphasise the importance of the attachment to place: The connections with a certain place have an important meaning in the decision of a person either to stay or to leave.¹⁷

¹⁵ For young German men and women a six-month alternative service was compulsory, for the youth of occupied nations, voluntary. In invitations to the state alternative service it was emphasised that the service teaches the youth necessary discipline, gives an experience for a responsible life and adds a possibility to meet people of the same age from all social strata. Also, excursions to places of natural beauty in Germany were used as an attraction. Most girls who completed the alternative service (RAD) also completed a nursing course, they were appointed to hospitals and field hospitals (see **Vainomäe, A.** Eessõna. – In: Labida ja relvaga. Eestlastest töööl ja võitluses II maailmasõjas. Comp. L. Kosenkranius. Esto RADi Ajaloo toimkond, Tartu, 2005, 7–8).

¹⁶ See **Freund, A.** Aufbrüche nach dem Zusammenbruch. Die deutsche Nordamerika-Wanderung nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg. V&R Uniperss, Göttingen, 2004, 105.

¹⁷ For more detail, see **Jürgenson, A.** Vabatahtliku ja sunniviisilise migratsiooni dihhotoomiast, 99–100.

The decision to leave was usually taken at the very last moment, an obvious sign of the fact that leaving home was not taken lightly.

Because when the Russians came in for the second time, the Russians were already shouting by the boat, when we were escaping from there by boat... At sea they already cast a light over us but still we managed to get to the shores of Finland. We started our journey in the evening and straight to the sea and then the rays were moving here and there and lighted everything up. Well, then the day started dawning already, then the Finnish customs boat came to meet us and they shouted: Hei, viru pojad, onko teil korvo mukana? Well, they wanted vodka. Well, it was not in short supply (woman, born 1920).

Our luggage was left on the quay almost, only one suitcase came along. This was the last set of boats that came out, we got the bombing and then the boats left (Juta, born 1933).

Woldemar Mettus, a figure in the Estonian theatrical world, who came to Argentina later, similarly describes the so-called leaving at the last minute:

In the harbour the Russian spotter planes flew over us but the anti-aircraft defence chased them away. At 4pm our boat got to the roadstead. We cast a farewell glance at Tallinn. The town was grey and gloomy. On Pikk Hermann tower there flew a friendly but strange flag to us (Mettus 1969, 265).

A person who has had to make a rapid decision has no time for doubts. Fear, sadness, unfamiliarity, resignation, and surely also hope – the cluster of emotions that influences an individual in making a significant decision in their life, cannot be measured; neither at the moment of making the decision, nor several decades later. Thus there is no hope that the former refugees and their descendants today describe those fatal days and months precisely and analyse them satisfactorily. Someone had a school to finish, another had just finished a new house, one was due to give birth, yet another had to look after an elderly grandmother or a newborn baby – this is just a brief list of all the connecting factors that might possibly influence the strength of a person's attachment to a place. But all these different factors of everyday life and the feelings connected to these reflect, if not directly then indirectly, different degrees of the vague and hard-to-define scale of loyalty and belonging. They tell us about people's family and other social or cultural connections.

The changing factors are many and the vast majority of them are not quantifiable – from this stems a problem that has always worried migration researchers: Why in the same social and economic conditions, some people left their homeland and the rest stayed? The author of the current article finds that the conditions in which people live are never exactly 'the same'.

For example, a woman born in 1924 who worked for the occupying power during the war, found this in itself sufficient reason to decide to leave Estonia.

I also worked during a time in the Estonian... Estonian criminal police when it was the German time. And I heard that we were supposed to have a ship there. And I went there and I looked for it – see, if you are upset, then you do not see. And on this side of the quay there was a ship that went to Stockholm and I went on this one. This was closer to me, and this went to Germany. So, I went to Germany but I had prepared papers already in Estonia to go to Sweden. And then I went [in Germany] to the Swedish embassy and handed in an application and for that long I had to be in Germany. I was more in the Polish area... Polish... Poznan, yes, Poznan (woman, born 1924).

In what follows, I give a description by a man who is currently living in Argentina. This is remembered through a child's eyes and with a child's understanding. This description has probably been polished during the years spent in exile, as a sequence of memories remembered and corrected collectively. The text has been presented in its entirety as editing it would distort the whole impression.

This is so, that when the Russians came in, the first Russian occupation, then my dad was, as we say at present – a capitalist. Because he was not a worker, he was a master. And they nationalised our enterprise. But see, as I remember it, at that time Russians were not interested in mobilising Estonians for the war. Because I think that they had such a policy, that there are enough Russians for the war and they did not have much faith in the inhabitants of the occupied countries. Because – this was logical, that Russians are as someone who broke in – let's say so – to Estonia. So and the majority of Estonians are against them. This is always like this in a war that those, who occupy a country, are Russians. And those, who come after that, they occupy the same country, they are friends. Those actually are the same Russians as... the first occupants. So that my father was put to our company as... an accountant or let's say – he... See, it was like this, that one Estonian, who earlier worked in Pärnu city council, I remember his name – Rapp. Rapp was already earlier a member of the Communist party. And when the Russians came in, Rapp was put as commissar for our company. But then – because Rapp did not know anything about accountancy or buying and selling, my father was like a director in his previous company. And it was like this, some time passed on and he was on very good terms with Rapp. I remember that one day – father said at home – I heard this conversation, that last night I was in the office and he came in from the door, he was sweaty and looked at my father and said: 'You do not know yet but will understand in the near future what I did for you today.' And he turned around and left. And of course we at home did not... did not understand very well what it meant. But a day later they started deporting Estonians to Russia. And the very first ones were those who we now call capitalists. As my father was the previous owner of a company, he surely was also in this list. But we were not touched. And my parents thought that it was surely thanks to Rapp, that he explained that my parents' family was not to be touched. And so we remained in Estonia. Many people were taken to other places by train. And then suddenly there was such a thing that Germans came to occupy Estonia in their turn. This went very quickly, this was as if for Germans – the Germans called it Blitzkrieg – lightning war. One day suddenly we say that there were Russian soldiers on the fields and they were digging fosses and putting machine guns there. We did not know much about what was happening as the radio was, everything was controlled. And we did not know much about what was happening politically in the world between the Germans and the Russians. And then suddenly we saw German motorcyclists on the streets and orders were given through the radio that all windows must be closed with curtains and people should not look out of the windows to see what is happening on the streets. Of course, this was an order but we were still looking at what was happening on the street. So the Germans came quickly to Pärnu but they probably did not have things organised well, so that they could have resisted the Russians for long. So, a defence army was organised quickly by the Estonians. So, we could say, almost overnight we were, instead of belonging to the Russians, under the Germans. Then of course everything in connection with retail and foodstuff was reorganised and... Now let us go back a little again – some years maybe. My father's relationship with the banks was very good. Right, and when the Russians came and occupied Estonia, we had heard about it a few days earlier and my father did something that other merchants thought was insanity. He went to the banks and settled all his accounts. So that he did not owe anything to anyone. Other merchants had told him that he was insane to do so. We are, in a couple of days will belong to another country and everyone wants to get – collect as much

money as possible. To borrow or take loans from banks as much as possible. And you do the exact opposite! You, instead of trying to get some money for yourself, you give everything away and settle all your accounts in the banks. But that – later we saw this was the wisest thing for a person to do at that moment. Because when banks started working again, then we were on their lists as trustworthy people – does not matter to which state. But economically we did not owe anything to anyone. And so a couple of years passed. I myself was, when I started to go to school – this was during the Estonian Republic time. But I do not remember whether I was in the first year or in the second when the Russians came in. When the Russians came in then all the teaching was rearranged. It was still an Estonian school but it was under Russian order. So that I remember, when I was a young boy, I had to have something at home that was called ‘a red corner’. I remember that there was a little table on which was a photo of Stalin and a hammer and sickle, and on the wall there was a red flag there, definitely. And suddenly when the Germans came in then instead of that... see, let’s go back again a little. That same... at school I remember they always asked whether I have a red corner at home. Those who were against it were already looked upon negatively and they were scared of deportation. So I had a red corner. But we were not communists. And when the Germans came in then we had to take off that red corner and replace it with another corner with Hitler’s photo and swastika and they asked at school whether I had a photo of the Führer and swastika at home and I was supposed to say yes. Of course – this is such a political thing that children do according to orders. That is not true when they say that those who had a red corner at home they were communists. Or that those who had Hitler’s photo at home were Nazis. This was such changing of histo..., say history. And then, our business did very well. Because my father had very good relations with the Germans. And later I understood that all this good relationship was exactly because we did not have any problems with the banks. And we were seen – say from the point of trade – as honest people. Not those other merchants who had taken loans to get money for themselves exactly in order to save money. Trading is dangerous. When my parents were not in Estonia, as others said, good merchants, they were, according to other merchants, bad merchants. But that saved our lives. And I think that this was why I never wanted to start trading. Later of course, many years later, father wanted to start trading again and father is father. What he says, one has to do. When we got to know that the Germans were not doing well on the Russian front, then of course, my father probably got to know this news earlier because he was an officer in the Estonian or German army. And there was an opportunity to travel to Germany by ship. As refugees, because other officers told my father, that see, you are behind the frontline, we are on the frontline. You have a chance to escape, we do not have the chance to escape. Because you, maybe you will be sent to the front, do sort your papers out and pay the salaries, maybe in approximately a month’s time. So that you have a chance to escape – do this. Even these things were said not only by Estonian soldiers but also by German officers: Don’t be stupid, don’t stay here because we cannot stop that Russian attack. They are much more numerous than we are. So that at the beginning my parents planned to go to Germany by boat because many Estonians travelled to Germany as refugees. But there were also German officers who said they would try not to go to Germany. Because when Estonia falls, not because it is Estonia but this also means that we have lost. And when we have lost and you are in Germany, it will be much worse for you there than now in Estonia. So that we took... of course I say ‘we took’. I was too young at that time – I was ten years old. My parents collected all the things, they were put on two horse-drawn carts and we drove to the seaside. Because my father was a trader, he was also on very good terms with certain seamen, who were buying from his shop, who lived on islands – maybe on Saaremaa or... And we got on a motor boat... See, when that escape happened, then these two cart-loads of things were the dearest ones that we could take with us. Good clothes and fine bone china – not foodstuffs. Foodstuffs, we realised, were not possible to take. So that

my father could rent two motor boats to take us to Kihnu Island. And from Kihnu Island we were supposed to travel on somehow. On Kihnu Island, we also knew that German ships stopped there and maybe if we cannot flee to Sweden, maybe we can go to Germany. When we got to Kihnu Island, then the next day the Russians were already in Pärnu. We saw, the sky was red because of the fires that were in Pärnu town and – they were bombing Pärnu. But the Russians did not have boats to travel to Kihnu Island. So they could not attack any further than the seashore. There they had this provisional halting place. On Kihnu Island there were some other ships as well – Estonian... At that time there were more sailors. Also, such ships were going between the islands and transported stone and other building materials. They were without an engine, only sails but not those sport boats, they were cargo boats – such wide ones and with one sail. One sail and a fokker was at the front. Then there was another ship with two masts there. Father knew the captain of that ship and by boat he went to the ship and the captain said: ‘See Meschin, for you, if you have gold, there is space. If you have no gold, there is no space.’¹⁸ That was an Estonian, not a Russian, not a German but an Estonian. I do not know who that was. And my father had a little bit of gold and we went back to the island. Before that, on one island, I do not remember where it was, but it was a common thing there at that time: They made a big hole in the ground and all the treasures that people had were put in that hole and they covered it with soil. And then I remember that it was so many meters north from the shore and so many meters away from a big tree. Because we were sure we could go back to Estonia after a short while. And when we were travelling again there by boat, onto that sailor, we also had our aunt with us who worked in my father’s shop and my mother’s brother. And the captain said: ‘I said only... that for you and your family. Your sister and your wife’s brother cannot get on because there is no space.’ Then my father got angry and said that if there is no room for them, then there is no room for us. And we turned around and went back to the island. So that my father lost that gold that he gave to the captain and that boat took off. Then there was another small boat, such a cargo boat. We got onto that one. That cargo space that was in the ship was already full of people, so that there was no room for us. We were the last ones that got onto that ship. So that we were there up – there was a small cabin there, where the captain was – for the captain – and the mate. So that we got up there instead of being down there together with all those people, we were in the captain’s cabin. But my father’s sister and mother’s brother did not get on because they were not on the same boat as we were. But later it came out that they also managed to flee to Sweden. Because in Sweden we met them. Swedish speed boats came, the army speed boats came to the islands to evacuate people, those who had stayed there on the islands and who did not have the opportunity to travel further. The captain said, let’s go towards Gotland, the Gotland island which was the nearest point in Sweden. But there was a big storm at sea and the sail broke. They made something that was called a drift anchor. It was a kind of equipment, like a wooden box that was thrown in the water and was attached with ropes to our sailor. This was because the waves kept our boat – say the nose – against the waves. It was like a kind of steer. Only the foresail – the little sail in front of the boat was working. I remember, the waves were big, big waves were there. When I was looking out of that captain’s cabin, then the waves were like mountains. Suddenly we were on top of that mountain and were looking down and suddenly we were down and were looking up at the waves. At sea we met a motor boat that also had come from the islands. On that motor boat there were three men. One of them was very sea sick. Of course – with that shouting they

¹⁸ There were also people who saw a business opportunity in transporting refugees. As German ‘Ost Marks’ were considered worthless, travellers were charged in gold, silver or other valuables. In Swedish currency, the price for a trip was between 300 and 1200 crowns (**Andrä, C. G.** *Rootsi ja suur põgenemine Eestist 1943–1944*. Olion, Tallinn, 2005, 97–98).

understood – they exchanged data with our captain. Yes, and then threw a rope onto our boat. And that – say, the owner of that motor boat climbed onto our boat holding onto that rope to see whether a mechanic could fix the engine of his motor boat. But there were no mechanics on our boat. And the rope broke – so that we lost that motor boat. Later in Sweden we got to know somehow – I do not know how that this motor boat, at long last, got to Sweden and those two who had stayed in that boat also escaped. That storm drifted us towards the north. And at last we got to land at Grisslehamn – it was a Swedish harbour. Before we got there, we saw a Swedish border guard boat that came right next to our boat and all the people could climb to the Swedish boat. And the Swedish boat linked us to them in order to take us to the shore. Of course, when we were at that boat, then... We were there for three days – it took three days to get from Kihnu Island until we reached Grisslehamn. That – when we set off the captain told us we would be in Gotland in one day. But instead of one day, we were there in three days. The worst was down there, in the big cargo room of the boat because there wasn't even sweet water for drinking. So that those people who were down there, many of them were seasick. They were sick and everything. All in all, we were a hundred and one, hundred and one people on that boat. One went insane during the storm – climbed to the top of the mast and jumped into the sea head first. Killed himself. There was a lack of drinking water – so that we were drinking salt water, where, whoever had it, put lingonberry jam, put into that water in order not to taste the salt. And so we got to Sweden. Three or four days later that sailor that we got to Sweden with sunk at the harbour because one of the boards could not cope with the pressure of the water any more and... so that if we had spent five or six hours longer at sea, we had... everything had sunk. This is the story of how we got to Sweden (man, born 1934).

The person remembering the events has built up a thick body of events around the escape story of his family. The purpose is to provide answers to several questions. First, why did his father and the whole family fare relatively well during the first Soviet occupation when thousands of Estonians were deported but their family was not touched, although they were, as the informant says, capitalists. The second question is analogical. Why did they also do well during the Nazi occupation, despite the fact that they appeared, formally, to be loyal to the Soviet power. With this background, the informant finds it necessary to emphasise his father's political neutrality: We were neither communists nor Nazis. In addition to the events of the time, he also explains why he never wanted to start working in business. And of course the main question: Why after all, did they decide to leave Estonia? Also, he shows that the decision to flee to Sweden and not to Germany was a conscious and thoroughly weighed decision. The detailed description of the boat journey over the stormy Baltic Sea – surely this can be explained by the heightened perception of a child, but by emphasising numerous dangers it is as if this brings forth the good luck of their family: Despite the recurrent danger of sinking, they arrive in Sweden, after which, as if to set a figurative full stop to the escape journey, the boat sank in the harbour.

Also, in the next description one survivor expresses their thoughts as if, during the escape, death passed in front of their eyes:

Mother, my brother Enno, who is dead now – he was younger – and then in Tallinn we met another family there, the Kolts, the man was in the army as well and he helped us onto an army ship, where there were all those young boys, recently mobilised, young boys, sixteen, seventeen-year-olds, who... The bottom of the ship was full of ammunition and on the top we were all on

the deck. And then I do not know how many ships there were in that fleet, that were setting off. Then we got, there was bombing, the next day when we were near Latvia. Our boat had... a torpedo passed by, under the boat luckily. So that nothing happened but then from the weapons on board, some people were killed as well. But then we went to Copenhagen from there and we were in a camp then and from there they moved us again, we were in a camp in Poznan (woman, born 1933).

Similarly, illustrating how people felt the breath of death but still escaped, Woldemar Mettus describes his journey towards Germany, where, at Memel, they became the target for planes:

Suddenly some people who were on the deck, showed us the approaching planes. The anti-aircraft defence started firing, the people started to go under the deck. I saw how a plane that had come towards us quite near us launched either a bomb or a torpedo but which fell in the sea and created a water pillar. Soon, after even I had gone downstairs, there was a second attack. The ship was shivering due to the fierce firing but of course nothing happened to it.¹⁹

It is probable that such tales were formed later in exile, considering their attention to detail, wording and emphasis on dangers, when people had learned about the boats that had sunk and those that had carried emigrants and the hundreds of victims on board – knowledge against which your own escape felt like a lucky coincidence.

In the tales of escape there are at least two dimensions: On the one side, they help to fit memories into a meaningful biography and through this to formulate and identify; on the other hand, they give people an opportunity to compare whether there are parallels in their fates. In recognising such an alternative, there does not always need to be a positive influence. Being aware of the alternative does not always have a liberating, but rather a saddening effect. Thus the biographies have yet another function: To illustrate that there were, actually, no alternatives.

The existence of alternatives cannot be overestimated – the rapid change of events diminished the number of realistic choices. Political events that had, unexpectedly, broken into people's lives could cast people into situations that, for decades, could not be foreseen at all. The decisive moment could be one lost day, sometimes only a few hours. Did people manage to escape from the attacking front or not? Was there space on the boat or not? To get to the status of a native or exiled Estonian depended not only on a quickly-made decision, but also on luck and chance and on whether people got to Germany or Sweden after their journey. In one of the previous excerpts we saw how a confused refugee mixed up the boats and reached Germany instead of Sweden. Based on everyone's fantasy, one can continue the story, how a single mistake could decide the pattern of one's future life. The number of choices occasionally diminished by the hour.

In Ellen Liiv's memoir we see that she arrived in Germany (not Sweden), not out of personal choice but due to logistics: When travelling from Viljandi county

¹⁹ **Mettus, W.** Soovimata külalised. Pagulaspõlve mälestusi Saksast ja Taanist. Eesti Kirjanike Kooperatiiv, Lund, 1971, 9.

to Pärnu the refugees, of which she was one, heard it was not possible to travel to Tallinn or elsewhere in the north from Pärnu. The Russians had already entered Tallinn a couple of days earlier and consequently there was no contact with the capital. That information was passed on by some people who had fled over land. There was no choice but to move towards Riga, from where it was possible to travel on to Germany.²⁰

It is useful to pause at Ellen Liiv's memories here for a while – she has expressed her thoughts with a literary talent but they are lacking in one characteristic: A vast amount of other analogical memories. Namely, she does not emphasise the canonical side of the reception of escape (fear, pain of loss), rather, she distances herself from them. At the beginning she gives an example of an escape over land in Estonia, away from the attacking Soviet troops. When they reached Riga, and travelled onward from there towards Danzig by boat, there is also no tragic aspect when describing that journey.

But there did not follow a bigger storm nor happened to us during the three days we spent at sea, nor were we subjected to air attack while we were at sea. The water around us remained calm and the sky above us was mainly steel grey. Only sometimes there shone some autumn sun through the clouds. Often we could hear from afar, the noise of aircraft flying above the clouds somewhere afar, which did not necessarily indicate war activity. If I had not been surrounded by some thousand people in uniform, I could even forget about the war for a while. Those days at sea, we spent as if outside of everything that was happening in the world.²¹

As told, this description lacks the usual emphasis on danger. Here the attention is, rather, on another level and, considering the given context, on a very important moment. In understanding the deeper meaning, the last sentence gives us the key: After getting to the sea in a situation, where, figuratively, the old world has been left behind and the new one has not yet been reached, almost as if they were outside this world. Perhaps we are dealing with an aspect of ritual, where participants move to reach the status of refugees. But, as said before, the memories of Ellen Liiv are exceptional in their tone, usually people emphasise the danger they faced in their escape and the luck that saved them from certain death.

Stories about escape are social, collective events. It has been referred to earlier, that in refugee communities these stories are compared with one another, at times reshaped and possibly based on stories read from a newspaper, i.e. personal stories shaped according to a general explanation. In telling and listening to the stories one also learns what, and how, to remember and tell. Therefore, in the stories of people from similar cultural contexts, despite all the differences, tales are uniform in terms of certain content, form and also view on the events.²² In an earlier paper²³, I have shown the function that stories of escape from Estonia had

²⁰ Liiv, E. Põhjast lõunasse, 15 f.

²¹ Ibid., 19.

²² Lehmann, A. Erzählstruktur und Lebenslauf. Autobiographische Untersuchungen. Campus Verlag GmbH, Frankfurt am Main, 1983, 26.

²³ Jürgenson, A. Vabatahtliku ja sunniviisilise migratsiooni dihhotoomiast, 110.

to fill: One had to find as strong a justification as possible for leaving in order to consider past events as right and necessary, in order to explain their own fate to themselves. One can talk about canonising past traumatic events of exiled Estonian communities into a Passion, retold as if a holy story, i.e. a story that presumes utmost respect from both the teller and the listener. That so-called holiness of the text has another aspect: With its emotional charge, the Passion could be placed in that sector of Holy where one could not talk about it, but had to keep silent.

REMAINING SILENT ABOUT THE ESCAPE

It has to be admitted that I succeeded in collecting only relatively few detailed stories of escape. One reason could, of course, be the fact that the majority of Estonians in Argentina, for example those who were either born in exile or were young children during the escape, were at an age where they would not, retrospectively, remember very much. This is illustrated in the following:

Our life journey was from Estonia... I do not remember much, I do not remember. I do not remember anything about Estonia. When I separated from Estonia, then I was already a year and half old, right (man, born 1943).

The parents of those people, from whom it would be possible to hear personal memories of events of that time, have now mostly passed away. Detailed descriptions are from those who were children at the time, but reasonably old enough in order to thematically arrange the events of that time through their own memory prism and were generally ten years old or older. The younger ones can remember events only very fragmentally and schematically, for example:

They escaped because they were afraid of the Russians, an understanding to which one has arrived through the collective tradition of remembering.

Here the question might arise: Did parents fail to tell their children about the events of that time? And if not, then why not?

Children were able to talk in detail about their journeys of escape and had deep memories of the stormy seas and the new places, people and events seen in Sweden and Germany. However, their knowledge of the preparations for escape, about their parents' internal contradictory struggle, in other words something especially interesting for scholars of migration studies, and about the motives for leaving, young children did not know much about and could not talk about retrospectively. Very often parents just did not talk about these things. Keeping silent about certain tragic and shocking events is a familiar phenomenon in migration studies. Several Estonians in Argentina, with whom I conducted interviews, justified their ignorance about these events by blaming silent parents.

My mother, why I asked – mum, tell me stories [about war events and escape] and... did not want to know (man, born 1943).

In the following extract it becomes evident how keeping silent about an escape could be far more expressive than actually talking about it. One lady, born in Argentina after the war, but whose upbringing was in the Estonian spirit, illustrates this with her story: expressing the trauma experienced by parents during the escape.

My father never said a word about the war. Very little he talked, very little he talked. But I do not forget. I say, I do not remember what I was doing this morning. That I do not remember. At that moment when you [points to her mum] had been here for twenty five years, I do not know, I might have been sixteen, seventeen years old. And we were there, in my room, and my Godfather and my father, that came [to Argentina] together my father had bought a bottle of whiskey and said – or he was given it or something – he said, when there is twenty five years, that I have been here, I will open this. And of course, when it was twenty five years, there was a big party at home and we opened... father opened. And one moment my father and my Godfather went to sit in a room and started talking. I remember it was the first time, the only time, I heard how my Godfather and my father talked about those years. This was something terrible! How they had to go... My Godfather, I remember, Ruudi, started... Godfather started to cry. Godfather was eighteen years old when he left Estonia. And I did not know what he hoped for. My father was thirty three. He said: 'I trust in my Heavenly Father and he brings me where he needs to.' He... with a Bible and Heavenly Father and... went. Godfather was eighteen. They were babies and they came here! I remember how they were talking among themselves about what had happened.

When you ask from Mati [the informant's godfather's son]: Listen, has your father told you anything? Mati will surely say not. They did not talk about it! They did not talk about this! This is... this is so difficult for them I stayed looking at him and heard, I thought: Well, this cannot be possible! And only one time! Only one time father talked about Estonia. Only one time – this was with my first husband. He said... I do not know how it was... Daniel [the informant's Argentinean husband] started to ask that, well, how was it that war. And father said, they were bombing, and then suddenly said: And then the bombs started falling and I went to a place that was protection for bombs and how I did not manage to be there inside *pero* [but]... *porque* [because] I did not like to be there down like this, and I went to the door. When they finished bombing... the bombing in Tallinn, when there was a big bombing. He said *bueno* [good] they finished bombing. He looked on the floor – at that moment he smoked. Twenty cigarettes were there. And then he said to my husband, my first husband: '*Como fume!*' How I smoked! The only thing he said! (woman, born 1952).

All this expressive description of the past is, once more, summarised by the interviewee:

All this things, these things... these little things, few things; they were not many that my father and mother have told me, I simply hate Russians. This is bigger than myself because, thanks to them, I do not have a grandmother. I have a photo of my grandmother, I have a photo of my grandfather but I have never known them. I do not know what is... I had such a big thing, when I saw that my girl friends: 'Oh, yes, I'll go to my grandmother's.' Maybe grandmother was the biggest *porquería* [obscenity] let's say so. She was the biggest arse – *pero* [but] she was grandmother! She had a grandmother, she had a grandfather, she had an uncle, she had an aunt, she had a family. I told to Helju or Kalju: 'Hola, uncle Kalju!', 'Hola, aunt Helju!', but they were not my aunt or uncle. I have no family. My only family were my mother and my father. Part – I just hate Russians! Russians, not the Communists, Russians! I think that all Russians are the same things. Maybe Russians... there are some Russians who are not Communists and hate Communists. I hate Russians! I simply hate! (woman, born 1952).

This quote convinces the reader that although escape has been a consolidating story in refugee Estonian communities, the traumatic nature of the events and the memories they left have shifted the story to a certain sphere of taboos. In specialist literature, there are references to the fact that trauma causes a process of memory suppression, i.e. certain processes in the subconscious preclude the traumatic memories from entering the consciousness. Also mentioned are the ‘silent memories’, those that are voluntarily forgotten.²⁴ I still believe that in many such cases, instead of memory lapses we are dealing with the taboo of talking about them.

For example, in connection with the Jewish holocaust there are descriptions of how traumatic events have been kept silent for several decades and only then people have started to talk about them. A notable result of such peculiar behaviour is the fact that the children of those participating in the events know no details of the events, but grandchildren do because they have become listeners at a time when events are at a distance. The suppressed collective trauma needs time to exit the sphere of taboo. I believe this can also explain the afore-mentioned, i.e. in some Argentinean Estonian families one did not talk, for years, about the war or about escape. So the same traumatic event can affect people differently: Some talk about it, forming a canonical version of the story over time, while others remain silent and start talking about these events only, at best, decades later.

EMOTIONS AND THEIR CONNECTION WITH THE NARRATIVE

Remembering is not only a purely cognitive process that takes place in the isolation of the brain of a specific person. It would be more meaningful to use terms like ‘collective memory’ or ‘social memory’ to show that the remembering of events is transferred socially and culturally and is influenced by communication between people.

In anthropology, the so-called experience of sudden loss has been well studied and the reconstruction of traumatic experiences and interpretation has been analysed through narrative. One possibility for analysis is to take the concept of the trauma of choice as the basis: The suppressed collective trauma has a strong influence on the supra-generational processes of creating an identity. Reconstructing the traumatic event through retelling is an important step in treating victims of trauma. It helps victims to interpret the past, to build up the traumatised Ego again. The concept of ‘trauma of choice’ helps ‘to describe the collective memory that the ancestors of a group have once experienced’.²⁵ The concept of trauma of choice

²⁴ See, e.g., **Anepaio, T.** Trauma ja mälu. Mineviku ületamisest repressioonide kogemuses. – In: *Kultuur ja mälu: konverentsi materjale*. Ed. E. Kõresaar. Tartu Ülikool, Tartu, 2001, 202.

²⁵ **Svashak, M.** Gewähltes Trauma: der erinnerten (wieder-)erfahrenen Emotion. – In: *Zur Ikonographie des Heimwehs*. Hrsg. von E. Fendl. Johannes-Künzig-Institut für ostdeutsche Volkskunde, Freiburg, 2002, 59–60.

can also be used in anthropology in analysing what role trauma plays in the process of identity. On the basis of Sudeten Germans, M. Svashek has shown that the generation that experienced the trauma has also tried to pass their experiences and feelings on to subsequent generations, and has constructed certain patterns of retelling.²⁶

The stories of people who left Estonia are similar, regardless of the generation. In answering the questions about the reasons for the escape, people mainly cited fear of the Russians and justify it with the events that took place in Estonia in 1940–1941: Arrests, executions, deportations, expropriation of assets. In short, repression,²⁷ which left people with little or no choice. In justifying their leaving, rhetoric, which tries to show Estonians as a group that react and behave uniformly, has been used. As one informant expressed in justifying the events: ‘All Estonians knew what they were fleeing from’ (see Jürgenson 2008, 106). These and similar, analogically categorised and worded statements about escape present evidence about the escape canon that has been selected over the years. Undoubtedly such a canon was passed on to following generations, together with the appropriate emotional background. Or to use the words of Jüri Linask at the symposium of the Global Estonian Central Council that took place in Tallinn on 3 April 2009, a ‘holy wreath’ was what carried the exiled Estonian mentality forward during the post-war decades – a holy wreath to what happened in Estonia during 1940s. Or, as in the form of poetry, Marie Under had said years before: ‘A lot has been taken from us / still we kept / our pride, honour and wreath – / let us stand strong.’²⁸ Emotional attitudes can also perhaps be inherited without a narrative formulated in detail as illustrated by the interview presented in the preceding section.

It has been noted in memory studies how receptive people are to influences and suggestion. Especially susceptible are children. Thus, being convinced that their knowledge is true can actually be a result of suggestion. Studies have shown that it is possible to be very convinced by the truthfulness of a ‘memory’, even when the event has not actually taken place.²⁹ Although there are no grounds to

²⁶ Ibid., 60.

²⁷ According to Mart Laar, during 1940–1941 52,750 people were repressed in Estonia (**Laar, M.** Punane terror. Nõukogude okupatsioonivõimu repressioonid Eestis. Grenader, Tallinn, 2005, 35).

²⁸ **Under, M.** Punane aasta. – In: Eesti riik ja rahvas II Maailmasõjas, III. Punane aasta. EMP, Stockholm, 1956. Title page.

²⁹ **Siegel, D. J.** Entwicklungspsychologische, interpersonelle und neurobiologische Dimensionen des Gedächtnisses. Ein Überblick. – In: Warum Menschen sich erinnern können. Hrsg. von H. Welzer, H. J. Markowitsch. Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart, 2006, 42; **Nelson, K.** Über Erinnerungen reden: Ein soziokultureller Zugang zur Entwicklung des autobiographischen Gedächtnisses. – In: Warum Menschen sich erinnern können. Hrsg. von H. Welzer, H. J. Markowitsch. Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart, 2006, 88 f.; **Assmann, A.** Wie wahr sind unsere Erinnerungen? – In: Warum Menschen sich erinnern können. Hrsg. von H. Welzer, H. J. Markowitsch. Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart, 2006, 106.

doubt the truthfulness of the story presented by the interviewee in the preceding section, one needs to emphasise the emotional background that parents can pass on to their children.

A non-reflective memory expresses the events of the past but should not include the emotions of the acting subject as personal experience. From here, in a round-about way, we get back to the role of interaction in passing on memories, while this interaction can also pass on information through silence. If the participant starts talking about events only after years of silence, then this background of previous silence can acquire a dimension unexpectedly full of information. Parents passing memories on to children show the child a model about how to react to memories. Even if in that model silence has a large role, it is still a narrative model. This not only passes on the chronological sequence of events and justification for your reactions, but what has also been called a landscape of consciousness: Feelings, convictions, desires, judgements – all these express what the event signifies for the participating person, or persons. As Katherine Nelson noted, it is as if the narrative style of the parents gives children an opportunity to participate in history.³⁰

Feelings are not just an intra-psychological phenomenon, studying these does not necessarily require a condition-controlled experiment. Feelings, emotions, cognitions, affectations can also be studied through the social processes taking place in day-to-day lives. Even if one considers not only how big an influence and emotional meaning talking has for a person, but also the act of keeping silent.

Thus, it has to be said that memories as well as feelings are constructed, reconstructed, experienced and re-experienced actively in concrete socio-historic connections and that social memories influence emotional dynamics and vice versa.

M. Svashek, mentioned previously, distinguishes among others, *re-experienced* feelings. These are feelings that evoke, under the influence of the memory, emotional re-experiencing of a past situation, despite the fact that the feelings of the time are not interpreted or explained by anyone (Svashek 2002, 62–63). From here we come to another level in the meaning of the escape story for the refugees of that time. Memories of the traumas during and after the war, the loss of their homeland, are experienced over and over again with ritualistic connections. The information network created by exiled Estonians, in post-war Europe and elsewhere in the world, emphasises the tragedy of escape in the published media, in the scout movement, on social and church life. State and national festivals periodically helped to relive the trauma of escape and losing their homeland. For example, the 1941 June deportation anniversary has been celebrated in many, if not all, refugee communities for several decades. On that day speeches were held and memorial

³⁰ Nelson, K. Über Erinnerungen reden, 86.

church services conducted.³¹ June 14 was probably celebrated not as a day of violence towards the Estonian people. How else can we explain the fact that the 1949 March deportation has no such importance in refugee communities? Rather, 14 June was a day for refugees, the traumatic memory of which pushed people to leave Estonia in the autumn of 1944, when the new occupiers arrived.

As mentioned earlier, the escape story has been a ground-setting story in exiled Estonian communities, onto which the refugee identity leans. This is the reason why, in refugee printed media and other printed materials, those versions of the escape story which served these purposes best were soon selected, and developed into archetypical schemas.³² The deeper ‘rationalising’ of the reasons for escape can be seen in several texts, already written, in refugee camps. During the difficult times of this period, for the first years of separation from the homeland, the question constantly asked was: Why did I leave?

Ellen Liiv, who later lived in Argentina, presents an exact description of a situation from that time. She shows how tightly in the consciousness of the refugees the escape was bound to an earlier event, the deportation of June 1941. In a refugee camp in Italy (Reggio-Emilia DP Refugee Centre 13) she started to talk to a local peasant who could not understand why people would *flee from home*.

He could not believe that honest people are leaving their homeland behind. When he was reminded that Italians have also gone abroad, then he said that Italians who travel abroad have been poor people who do not have work or food at home. But why did a prosperous person have to go out into the wide world? When someone did that, they must have had some sort of guilt. Why were people afraid of Communists? Or Russians? Communists or not Communists, Russians or others, let there be whatever government, a person who has not done any evil, stays put and lives in his home... ‘See, that’s it, people were not left in their homes!’ We picked up from the thoughts of the person believing in truth. If he has not been able to travel Westwards at the right time, he will, soon be taken by force in the opposite direction, ‘to the big homeland’.³³

A similar pattern of retelling becomes evident in the memories of Woldemar Mettus, when he describes an event that took place on the boat *Wartheland*³⁴ that was heading towards Germany from Tallinn, carrying evacuees:

³¹ For example in a sermon during a service for the deported, held on 15 June 1958 in EELK Buenos Aires Reformation Congregation, the pastor Karl Laantee likened the deportations of Estonians to the deportation of the Israelites during the reign of the Assyrian King Sargon II (721 BC) and the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar II (586 b. Chr.) (see **Laantee, K.** Lootus vabaduse taevavõlvi ülalhooldjana: kõnesid ja kirjutisi vabaduse, inimõiguste, iseseisvuse, rahvuslikel ja rahvusvaheliste suhete teemadel ajadokumentidena aastatest 1948–1994. Greif, Tartu, 1994, 48).

³² **Kirss, T.** Eessõna; **Kirss, T.** Põgenemisteekonnad ja põgenemislood, 624.

³³ **Liiv, E.** Põhjast lõunasse, 157–158.

³⁴ A month before that, on August 19, 1944, the German ship “Wartheland” had brought to Estonia 200 fighters from the infantry regiment who were returning from Finland (see **Laar, M.** Eesti Teises maailmasõjas, 57).

Those who were leaving their homeland were serious of course but in general, they were managing their feelings well. Only one young mother, who had a baby in a pram and whose husband, as became evident from her overly excited speech, was on the front, swore hysterically on Adolf Hitler, Nazis, Germany and the German army. But I was asking myself: What would have happened to the young mother under Soviet rule? Surely she would have been calmed, but in a different way.³⁵

Also here, through describing the situation, one suggests there were no serious alternatives to fleeing to the West; a schema that helped the refugee community, in their own eyes at least, to legitimise leaving Estonia.

CONCLUSIONS

Retelling is a cultural technique which helps people to get over pain and loss. A glance at how much refugee Estonians have written memoirs, newspaper articles, poems etc, on the topic shows that the written word is an important medium in coping with tragedy.

Escape forms something of an anchor of identity for the refugee communities, and this topic shines through practically all aspects of refugee community life: The formation of communities, the development of self-identification, the settling in among the adopted country communities and other topics. Time and again one comes back to the experience of mass escape.

The main question in migration studies is: Why do people emigrate? Many complex migration models and theories have been suggested that, in different ways, try to answer this question. Based mainly on economic analysis, migration researchers have traditionally concentrated on the economic trigger for emigration in analysing the decision of emigrants. They take as their basis the fact that the main trigger for a person is to better their economic welfare. Connected to this, one has to deal with quantifying socio-economic changes from a macro-perspective that influence the emigration process. Furthermore, as I indicated earlier, some authors have tried to show that, in migration that can be called forcible, the same motives dominate in the decision to emigrate. From a micro-perspective one emphasises cognitive, i.e. subjective, changes that trigger persons or families to emigrate. As the economic trigger has been taken as the main basis for the analysis of the decision, it is no wonder that these decisions are projected as rational. Recent studies of migration decisions, based on narrated interviews, leave the rationality of the decision aside and show this is often a misleading conclusion. It has been shown that the more important a decision is, the more things are to be considered, and the less it is possible to make a decision rationally.³⁶ In the first place, the decision-maker is overloaded by various factors influencing their

³⁵ **Mettus, W.** Mask ja nägu. Mälupilte kahest okupatsioonist. Eesti Kirjanike Kooperatiiv, Lund, 1969, 265.

³⁶ See **Freund, A.** Aufbrüche nach dem Zusammenbruch, 266–267.

decision and, in the second, usually some not-so-clearly recognised motive comes into play. In 1944, the traditional homeland of the Estonians was torn by war and, in addition, occupied by a foreign power who had severely repressed the native population before the war. Would this repression continue after the war? Will it concern me? People who were planning to leave Estonia in those complicated conditions had to calculate what they had to win. Whatever this decision, it could not be utterly rational, because the decision-makers did not know what the further consequences of one or other decision might be. I have shown in my article that at least part of the motive stems from the individual, psychological and biographical development of the person.

In the memory of the refugee community, in the passion that was canonised after the war, fear of the Russians and of possible repression undoubtedly played the main part as a motive for escape. In the analysis, which I conducted based on the questionnaires that came to the Estonian National Museum,³⁷ it became evident there was a greater variety of actual motives for escape. Also, the examples given in this article about Argentinean Estonians show, that the motives for escape could vary, depending on the context, although in stories one justifies leaving mainly within the canonical escape story.

³⁷ See **Freund, A.** Aufbrüche nach dem Zusammenbruch, 266–267.

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LÄÄNDE PÕGENEMINE ARGENTINA EESTLASTE MÄLESTUSTES: AJALOO LINE, SOTSIAALNE JA PSÜHHOLOOGILINE KONTEKST

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Suurpõgenemine oli Eesti ajaloos sündmus, mille käigus lahkus Läände kümneid tuhandeid eestlasi. Üheks lahkumise suunaks oli Rootsi, teiseks Saksamaa, kuhu siirdus suur osa nendest, kellel ei õnnestunud Rootsi minevatel paatidel ja laevadel kohta leida ning kes koos taganevate Saksa vägedega evakueerusid Saksamaale. Enamik Saksamaale ja suur osa Rootsi jõudnutest siirdus pärast sõda teistesse lääneriikidesse, sh Argentinasse.

Eestlasi elas Argentinast juba ka enne II maailmasõda. Peamiselt oli tegu 1920. aastatel majanduslikel põhjustel saabunud vabatahtlikult väljarännanuteaga. Enne sõda saavutas eestlaste arv Argentinast kõrgpunkti 1933. aastal, mil neid elas seal 400–500. Pärast II maailmasõda saabus Argentinasse 800–900 Eesti päritolu

inimest. 1950. aastate teisel poolel ja 1960. aastatel rändas suur osa tollal Argentinas elanud eestlastest edasi USA-sse ning Kanadasse. Tänapäeval elab Argentinas alla poolesaja eesti keelt kõneleva inimese, kellest suurema osa moodustavad sõjapõgenikud ja nende järglased. Nendelt võttis autor 2007. aastal intervjuud, mis puudutasid Eestist põgenemist, elu laagrites, saabumist Argentinasse ja kohanemist uuel asukohamaal. Artiklis on keskendutud just sõjasündmustele ja Eestist põgenemisele Argentina eestlaste mälestustes. On analüüsitud eelkõige seda, kuidas inimesed suurpõgenemist mäletavad ja missugune mõju oli mälestustele ning nende tõlgendamisele ajaloolisel, sotsiaalsel ja psühholoogilisel kontekstil. Samuti on avatud põgenemisloo funktsioone: seda, miks põgenemisest räägiti, aga ka seda, miks sellest võidi vaikida. Tähelepanu on pööratud ka intrapersonaalsetele protsessidele, traumaatiliste sündmuste vallandatud emotsioonidele ja mõjule, mida need võisid avaldada narratiivsele interaktsioonile Argentina pagulasühiskonnas.

Pagulasühiskonna mälus pärast sõda kanoniseerunud kannatusloos on hirmul venelaste ja võimalike repressioonide ees põgenemise motiivina kahtlemata suurim osa. Ka artiklis toodud näited Argentina eestlaste kohta veenavad, et põgenemise motiivid võisid kontekstist tulenevalt varieeruda, kuigi narratiivides põhjendatakse lahkumist valdavalt põgenemisloo kanoonilise variandi raames.