

## Stalinist Repression in Estonia: State of the Research and Open Questions

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### *Summary*

This article focuses on the research of Stalinist repression in Estonia, observing the work done within the past 25 years. Understandably, many studies have concentrated on victims and repressive institutions. The public concern for the topics in the 1990s has considerably declined in recent years. Although by today we have an excellent overview of committed acts of violence, there are numerous aspects that require in-depth research. It is necessary to notice not only the victims and perpetrators, but also common citizens' forms of action both in crucial and everyday situations. The engagement of fellow-citizens in various punishment operations, staging "guilt" and confrontation, and other similar maneuvers caused tensions in the population and as such facilitated the established control over society. Mapping various measures taken by the state and the experiences gained by different social groups is an essential stage in interpretation of tough times. This work needs to be continued.

*Keywords:* Sovietization, Political Violence, Mass Deportation, Source Criticism, NKGB

### **Introduction**

In the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union and subsequent archival revolution, the events that had been silenced for decades eventually managed to break through into public consciousness. Understandably, the first discussions focused on Soviet repression and questions about the damage done to the Estonian population. Now the historical events and facts, often twisted beyond recognition under the Soviet regime, as well as the hidden personal histories obtain a new meaning. A new period of the National Awakening has surfaced and a grand collection of historical heritage has been announced. The media has kept publishing classified documents to alleviate hunger for truthful information by the people who had only just been relieved of ideological restraints. In the 1990s, discussions sweeping all over society

and the opening of archives offered quite new perspectives for the interpretation of recent history (Rahi-Tamm, 2007).

This article will offer a brief overview of the research done during the past 25 years on Stalinist repression in Estonia, observing which topics were dealt with more thoroughly, which factors had a greater impact on the research carried out so far, and the aspects that need further study will be indicated. We start our analysis with cases such as the 1941 summer war, as well as the treatment, related memories and archival materials of the 1949 mass deportation. Likewise, records of the interrogations made by the People's Commissariat for State Security (NKGB) as materials of reference and their reflection of the behavior, not only of the interrogator and the person under interrogation, but also of the persons called to witness under critical situations, were used to find out Soviet mechanisms of re-educating the people. Political pressure exerted on the people by the Soviet authorities shows its after-effects to date, the estimation and interpretation of which continues to be topical.

### **The Emergence of the Topic of Repression**

Looking back at what was accomplished by the research, first of all we need to point to the work done in order to find out the names of the victims of political violence. Terror was the predominant characteristic of the Stalinist system; it might have hit anybody starting from political leaders, army officers, up to ordinary people, regardless of their age or gender. In the course of the Second World War, under Nazi and Soviet occupation authorities, Estonia lost 17.5% of its pre-war population (Katus, 2000: 20), including different categories of people, beginning with Baltic Germans (18,000 people) who were resettled to Germany, or 8,000 Coastal Swedes who were evacuated to Sweden, and refugees (70,000 people) who fled to the West in 1944, up to direct victims of the Nazi and Soviet regimes. In the years 1940-1941 and 1944-1953 circa 47,000 persons were arrested and 35,000 were deported by Soviets. In 1941 34,000 were mobilized into the Red Army and spent several months in labor camps with mortality rates of one-third. Numerous other categories of victims add up to them. Thus, roughly 12-14 percent of the population fell victim to Soviet persecution and four percent lost their life due to unbearable conditions, or were executed (Mertelsmann, Rahi-Tamm, 2009). For such a small nation like Estonians (circa 1 million inhabitants), it is a big number.

Since the deportations and arrests involved thousands of families, from newborn children to aged persons, it triggered a years-long debate about the number of the repressed, and in some places it is still going on today (Rahi-Tamm, 2005). The leading role in finding out and publishing the names of the repressed persons in Estonia has belonged to the association of repressed persons, "Memento". As an outcome of their work, 11 bulky volumes containing the personal data of thousands

have been published to date (Õispuu, 1996-2005).<sup>1</sup> Since finding out all the data about the persons who suffered, perished or were killed is time-consuming, along with “Memento”, numerous other commissions and projects have been engaged in the work.

The opening of the archives was anticipated with great anxiety and interest. In the autumn of 1991, archival stocks of the Estonian Communist Party (CP) began to open, but handing over of the documents of the central institutions of the Soviet repressive system proceeded with difficulties and in segments, thus slowing down their introduction into academic circulation. The work was started by several boards aiming to compile reports about the different damaging effects of Soviet rule to the Republic of Estonia, to its population, economy, environment, and culture. By now, most of the boards have completed their work, it has been carried on only by the Estonian Institute of Historical Memory, established by President Toomas Hendrik Ilves in 2009, and specialized to investigate violations of human rights committed in the Soviet period (Hiio, 2004).<sup>2</sup>

Compiling an acceptable overview on repressive actions by Soviet authorities became one of the most topical research tasks facing Estonian historians. The treatment of the party as a central institution of the Soviet regime along with the operative apparatus of the ministries of internal affairs and state security remained one of the key areas of research for years. In the mid-1990s the research topics began to expand. Resistance to the Soviet regime became one of the main topics, in the context of both the 1941 summer war and the postwar period. When the war broke out between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany in June 1941, it activated on-going repression and launched new forms. The practical application of Stalin’s “scorched land” tactics was entrusted to destroyer battalions who were licensed to fight against the civilian population. As a consequence, close to 2,000 persons were killed or perished (Laar, Tross, 1996). Driven by fear of Soviet violence many families were in hiding in Estonian forests. Likewise, the deserters from the Red Army, avoiders of recruiting, persons who had given up their work – all gathered in the forests and began to combine their forces in self-defense. The advance of the front encouraged them to start more militant activity, like attacks against Soviet institutions and activists, even against smaller Red Army and security units, so that Soviet rule had to surrender in a number of Estonian areas. Estonians’ hopes and attempts to restore independence were not meant to be fulfilled in the 1941 summer war (Noormets, 2003). In August, in a large part of Estonia, the Soviet occupation was replaced by the fascist occupation.

<sup>1</sup> See also: <http://www.memento.ee/trukised/memento-raamatud/> [accessed on 5 December 2016].

<sup>2</sup> See also: <http://www.mnemosyne.ee/> [accessed on 5 December 2016].

One of the nodal problems for the postwar Soviet Union was the suppression of resistance movements in western regions (Zubkova, 2008). Armed resistance against the Soviet occupation originated from an attempt to re-establish the Republic of Estonia after the retreat of German forces and before the invasion of the Red Army. After the retreat of German forces there were approximately 15,000-20,000 persons in Estonia who mainly hid themselves in forests and therefore were called forest brothers by the people (Laar, 1992; Kuusk, 2007). The number of active anti-Soviet partisans or brothers-in-arms is still debatable (Statiev, 2010: 115-138). Again, after occupying Estonia in the autumn of 1944, Soviet destroyer battalions were formed under the guidance of party committees and with the participation of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) in every county, larger towns and settlements. The core of the destroyer battalions was recruited from among the party, Soviet and Komsomol (Young Communist League) activists, reinforced later by demobilized military and new settlers. Participation in the destroyer battalions was interpreted as loyalty to the party and the Soviet regime. Fulfillment of directives and orders to the population, which caused a lot of anger and resistance, had to be quite often guaranteed by armed destroyers. During the decade (1944-1954) about 10,000 or more persons may have belonged to destroyer battalions. The materials in the collection of documents "Destroyers – Soviet destroyer battalions in Estonia in 1944-1954", issued in 2006 reveal the scope of their activity in operative-chekist operations, ambush, reconnaissance, constant terrorizing of supporters of forest brothers, and enforcing mob rule against the population (Noormets, Ohmann, 2006).

Thus the war in the Baltic countries continued for years after the end of the Second World War. The decline of the forest brothers' activity in Estonia was noticed in 1951 (Tannberg, 1999). After that, in 1955-1962 the resistance movement was carried on by underground students' and youth organizations as well as nationally-disposed intelligentsia (Niitsoo, 1997). Although the death of Stalin meant major changes in the Soviet Union, it did not bring about the liquidation of the repression apparatus, which was only somewhat reorganized. Reports on the Agent and Operative Work of the 4<sup>th</sup> Department of the Committee for State Security from 1954-1958 expressively describe their methods of work and the categories of persons who belonged in the security organs' sphere of interest (Ojamaa, Hion, 2005). Those were repatriates, refugees, "traitors of the homeland", persons returning from prison and exile, members of illegal youth organizations, clergymen, sectarians, etc. Foreign delegations visiting Estonia and persons travelling abroad were under close scrutiny, options of recruiting them as agents were tested. Special attention was paid to the nationally-disposed intelligentsia, owing to them, a separate 5<sup>th</sup> or ideological department was set up later in 1968. Enn Tarto, a member of the youth organization the Estonian Youth Brigade, established in 1956, who was a political prisoner three

times (1956-1960, 1962-1967, 1983-1988), emphasized that the system of Soviet prison-camps was less severe until 1960, but the so-called relatively free time gradually elapsed by 1962 (Tarto, 2006).

Estimating the state-of-the-art of research on Stalinist repression carried out in Estonia, we can admit that the scope, mechanisms and methods of the repression have been described and the time line of events, as well as the key persons and institutions related to the events, have been documented. At the same time numerous treatments prove that the material preserved in Estonia's archives is fragmentary. An essential part of documents reflecting the authorities' activity is preserved in Russia's state, regional or institutional archives, access to which is often restricted. Thus in the case of a number of topics the completeness of documentation in Estonia's archives remains questionable, it is not clear how much it interferes with shaping an integrated picture.

But the problems are not related to official documents only. In the course of re-establishing independence, it was only natural to turn to contemporaries of the events, and as a result their memories became a valuable historical source. However, soon enough reprimands were issued for trusting the memories implicitly and using them selectively, also factual errors, weak analysis, superfluous emotionality were mentioned – all of which made historians handle memories with greater caution (Jaago, Kõresaar, Rahi-Tamm, 2006). Undoubtedly, the information forwarded by immediate eyewitnesses of events may be of different value. The interpretation of suffering as a whole is a complicated process: in retrospect the experiences may obtain quite different meanings, therefore memories-based conclusions are not simple to draw (Kirss, Kõresaar, Lauristin, 2004; Kõresaar, 2011).

Caution when using memories has in turn led to criticism, complaining that historians focus too much on facts and documents and ignore human aspects of the events. "The terror was dealt with halfway: we have events, figures, dates, descriptions, but pain was left aside", said the journalist Vahur Afanasjev in March 2006, after having participated in the showing of Imbi Paju's film *Memories Denied* in the European Parliament in Brussels (Afanasjev, 2006). The same tendency was indicated by a number of creative persons, asserting that the painful patterns that remained in the people's soul and memory about those times were much deeper than we admitted. All of this refers to the need for research that interprets what was going on in Soviet society, more from an individual's point of view together with the after-effects of the events.

### **Engaging the People in the Recording of History**

Research on repression is not possible without bringing in respective participants. Soviet-period documentation is not only incomplete, but also strongly biased, ideo-

logically loaded and falsified. Thus memories as a research component can test the trustworthiness of the documents and their interpretation.

The Estonian people have eagerly recorded memories since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the spring of 1988 a newly formed Estonian Heritage Society (EMS) published their first call to gather stories about native places, parents, childhood, school, everyday life, sites of battles and burials, historical events, including the years 1939-1940 and the following crucial events, changes in the Soviet period, including memories about the victims of Soviet repression. During the first years of freedom about 1,700 stories were collected. Later the gathering of stories slowed down, but continued in different forms and campaigns until now. In 1996, an association “Estonian Life Histories” was set up to organize competitions of life histories which, with varying intensity, take place to date.<sup>3</sup> Memories were also gathered by several museums and memory institutions; one of the richest collections is preserved in the Estonian National Museum (ERM). Thus within two decades the source base has increased to a considerable size, amounting to more than 10,000 manuscripts on different topics (stories of repressed people were only one part of the collection) (Hinrikus, Kõresaar, 2004).

At the end of the 1980s, when the process of “giving history back to the people” was launched to start the so-called juridical period of the treatment of repression topics (December 1987 – January 1989) and to estimate the scale of repression as crimes against humanity, people took courage to tell their stories. Making instances of repression public was accompanied with a more active mutual interaction among the repressed themselves, particularly when organizing various commemoration ceremonies and remembrance events where sharing personal memories appeared to be part of reconstructing their common past (Anepaio, 2003: 209-211). Thus in a short time the repression topic was raised to focus on the culture of public memory, in the course of which, according to Maurice Halbwachs, the people’s former relatively confidential, individual memories were given social frames of collective memory (Assmann, 2010: 109-110).

By the mid-1990s, the initial euphoria over retelling all about hidden past events began to fade and the topic of repression lost a wider social response. In 1999, a questionnaire carried out by the newspaper “Eesti Ekpress” vividly indicated that the younger the person the less their interest in the topic of repression.<sup>4</sup> Those whose relations had not suffered did not have any interest in the topic, as a rule. Likewise, several former deportees complained that their descendants would

<sup>3</sup> See also: <http://www2.kirmus.ee/elulood/en/eng.html> [accessed on 5 December 2016].

<sup>4</sup> See also: <http://paber.ekspress.ee/Arhiiv/1999/12/Aosa/Uurimus.html> [accessed on 6 December 2016].

not listen to their memories. The change of common values in the fast-changing society, typical of former socialist-bloc states, set its primary aim to cope economically and to orient itself to the future. Society aims at fast developments, and getting rid of the hard painful past (Tart, 2012).

Numerous repressed people admitted that they had been upset and hurt by their fellow-citizens' indifference and reactions, which led them to the opinion that only fellow-sufferers with similar experiences could understand them. Such disregard causes not only a general disappointment, but can also be a reason for many unrevealed real-life incidents. As a consequence, many victims of political violence feel that once again their memories fall into oblivion, as was the case under Soviet rule when they were not allowed to speak out. Now, in contemporary times, nobody seems to be interested in their stories and their past once again belongs to silence (Rahi-Tamm, 2016).

However, the problem is not so drastic. There is evidence of the younger generation's own way of retelling the stories in a new form and via modern devices. Historical narratives are changing, influenced by the new media, and the young wish to discuss their ancestors' experiences together, not just individually or very privately. It is the third generation after the repressions discovering their family stories anew.<sup>5</sup> Undoubtedly, years after making memories public, reactions of society and many other factors influenced the content of such recollections (Kõresaar, 2016). The changing tonality in memories is well identifiable. Understandably, all the stories that were released from behind the wall of silence were free from the Soviet veto. The first narratives were full of deep tragedy, and the circumstances that had caused the deepest pain like death, injustice, unlawfulness, starvation, diseases, famine, shortage of food, humiliation, unjust accusations, hard labor in the severe climate and hard living conditions were surfacing. In the course of years, the stories began to include other topics also, such as the beautiful Siberian nature, friends, a strong will to live, the sense of belonging together with their fellow country people, hope and everything else that concerned their Gulag experience. Later written and gathered memories are more optimistic in tone than were those written and gathered earlier, at the end of the 1980s and in the early 1990s. Consequently, the range of attitudes of former victims has considerably extended. A plurality of opinions is caused by concrete historical situations, different possibilities, the age and characteristic features as well as the domestic way of life of those who remembered (Rahi-Tamm, 2015).

On the other hand, the processes depended on the temporal distance and dynamics of social memory. We could see how people wished to observe certain social

<sup>5</sup> See also: <https://kogumelugu.ee/en> [accessed on 6 December 2016].

norms. They preferred to share the past version that was often constructed together with their fellow-sufferers, and which offered some kind of protection. If there were uncertainties or the narrator hesitated, concerned with how the public might react to their activities, they avoided talking about several aspects and topics. The talk about the past greatly depends on the current situation (Assmann 2010). Within years, along with the revealed stories, those that remained unspoken begin to appear more clearly.

The topics that the deportees rather avoided were mainly related to surveillance: how the authorities supervised them in Siberia, how people were controlled, how families fell apart, how friendships broke up, or other kinds of betrayal. Many of those examples express deep personal traumas. They often face the question – how to tell or write to others on such a private topic (Rahi-Tamm, 2016)? However, these topics need to be talked about, because those questions could also disclose Soviet power strategies for manipulating people. Breaking up inter-personal relationships was a very sly tool, programmed into power strategies that allowed the Soviets to manipulate people (Gross, 2002: 114-122).

Observing the whole Soviet period, we find that the topics which people were reluctant to discuss included collaboration with Soviet power, relationships with Russians, career-related issues or various means, tricks on how to improve living standards, including also denying ideological influence (Rahi-Tamm, 2016). If after the collapse of the USSR it was believed possible to draw any recollection from the past without any problems, then the real situation proved different. Topics may be avoided due to a reluctance to re-live the trauma (Anepaio, 2003). Some experiences may be impossible to express with words (Kõresaar, 2001) under the impact of the hitherto historiography. In Estonian society there are many topics which lack a common understanding. The people find it hard and complicated to speak not only on forced situations, but also on all possible compromises, withdrawals and adaptation to situations. For fear of being misunderstood, many stories have remained untold. Hence, the more different and broader the viewpoints of history writing, the more open and varied feedback from the people.

In some cases people said directly that they were disturbed by too obviously black-and-white stories. Thus, for example, a number of teachers' life-stories, gathered in 2013 by the society "Estonian Life Histories" underlined that the Soviet period should be described in a more diverse manner than up to then. For example, one constant topic of the Soviet period was the joining of the CP. In the teachers' stories this problem was extremely tangible, it was mentioned by everyone, notwithstanding whether the author had been a party member or not. Motives for joining the party were mainly individual but often economically-related, driven by the wish to improve living standards. Many of them had been enticed by career or other



benefits (like study options, etc). A low standard of living often put off their ideology-related issues at the moment of decision. But quite often joining was motivated by strong pressure or coercion (Rahi-Tamm, Saleniece, 2016). This topic definitely needs more versatile treatment.

Thus we face a lot of unspoken stories, sometime compulsory actions, or a lack of options that may cause embarrassment even decades later, leaving many individuals vulnerable. However, these situations demand a deeper knowledge because only then is it possible to learn about the mechanisms and methods used to manipulate people by Soviet power. Here, in parallel, it is important to know not only an individual's behavior and strategies, but also those of the state. Getting to know the state strategies and political manipulation of the people enables us to understand those situations that cause confusion, misunderstanding and ignorance. Descriptions of different norms and examples of human behavior in the works of historians encourage people to open their own cases and assess their past on a broader scope.

### **In the Middle of Events: Whose Voice Was Heard?**

Understandably, the research done during our independence was focused on victims and their sufferings. When analyzing respective events we should also question the behavior of other social groups as well as the perpetrator's motives.

In the framework of political developments, the history of a number of central institutions (CP, Ministry of Internal Affairs and State Security, Council of Ministers, etc.) was under observation (Saueauek, 2015; Ohmann, 2001; Liivik, 2015; Tannberg, 2015). Research into the institutions mainly included their structure, fields of activity, but also chapters on their personnel, and employees (e.g., originating from Estonia or elsewhere from the Soviet Union, their education, age, etc.) (Hämäläinen, 2015). Existing archival materials enabled researchers to compile rather thorough overviews of the activity of Soviet repressive institutions which operated in the Estonian SSR in the 1940s-1960s, as for the later period there is hardly any sufficient material available in the Estonian archives, most of it being preserved in Russia.

In the victims' case we can use a bulky biographical source material based on memories, life stories, interviews, etc., but it is quite different in the case of perpetrators. Although a number of Estonian and Western historians attempted to interview the Soviet-period public figures, they mostly failed. Only a few books of memories were published by former party functionaries and employees of higher rank. Former representatives of Soviet rule had preferred the option of silence. Because of that we should lean on the research of existing documents of various institutions. We can describe the functions, structure, tasks or personnel of the institutions, but how are we to assess the behavior of those executing orders in the midst of

events, as there are only a few materials in the Estonian archives to draw from. For example, a rather detailed study into the events of the 1941 summer war was carried out. Here, researchers made use of testimonies gathered from arrested members of the destroyer battalions during interrogations by the German security police and memories which were collected in the Soviet rear during the war. The testimonies described in detail the atrocities against the civilian population, committed by members of the destroyer battalions, like detaining people, rape, massacre, robbing and burning households (Arold, 1994-1999). Concerning one county only, Saaremaa, in addition to the names of victims of red terror, the study also revealed the lists of CP members, militiamen, security agents, members of destroyer battalions, prison employees, agents and informers in that area. The author Endel Püüa tried to assess the involvement and behavior of these individuals in concrete situations, whether their motives had been voluntary or coerced. Likewise, the command line and eagerness of obeying the orders were observed. The study revealed that the most dangerous figures under those circumstances were often malicious and embittered common people. Based on their statements, many fellow-citizens were accused of words that they had said at the wrong time and in the wrong place, leading to very tragic consequences (Püüa, 2006).

The rulers needed people to carry out the aims of the regime. At first, the authorities relied mainly on different activists who sympathized with the new power; later, since the 1950s, more and more party and Komsomol members were engaged. To have control of the society the security apparatus needed an agent network. Various methods were applied to recruit the agents, but the usual method was to present the targeted individual with a choice supported by compromising materials – either prison camp (or death by a firing squad) or collaboration with the security organs. Vindictive informers and those who went along with the new order motivated by ambition and/or lust for power were also suitable agents. Agents varied, beginning with informers and completing the list with members of destroyer battalions. Forcibly recruited agents only rarely passed on valuable information, and consequently they themselves could come under surveillance by agents and be subject to arrest. It is not known how many individuals were successfully recruited as agents; data about them is still fragmentary (Weiner, Rahi-Tamm, 2012). Prior to the war more active recruitment was carried out among military personnel according to ascertained examples. Agents were mainly used to suppress various kinds of resistance. Since 1945, the agent network was increased and became more active among, basically, anti-Soviet-disposed intelligentsia and intellectual elite, also in the border zones. The liquidation of the forest brothers, amnesty and the process of legalization brought important changes in the agent network. Underground student and youth organizations, the nationalistically disposed intelligentsia and exiled communities, which required higher quality agents, emerged in the centre of attention

in the new conditions. In 1954-1956, the agent network personnel was audited and unnecessary “ballast” removed. The agents’ activity is described in various reports and personal files (Rahi-Tamm, Jansons, Kaasik, 2010).

Answers to the question how big the role of different persons was in carrying out Stalinist crimes have been sought by a number of authors. More general overviews in the form of reports “Estonia 1940-1945” and “Estonia since 1944” (Hiio, Maripuu, Paavle, 2006, 2009) are found in two bulky volumes, compiled by the Estonian International Commission for the Investigation of Crimes against Humanity. The aim of the reports was to discover crimes against humanity committed in Estonia and identify the persons and institutions responsible for them.

At the same time many authors admit that their main research aim was not to disclose concrete individuals, but rather to find out about the “handwriting of the system” which often led to an understanding that many more people could bear guilt. The question about to what extent, directly or indirectly, persons were related to the activity of security organs has aroused strong feelings. What did the collaboration consist of, was it unavoidable or not? Those facets emerge clearly in the example of the joint deportation operation “Priboi” (in English “Surf”) in March 1949, launched simultaneously in three Baltic republics and concerning approximately 91,000 persons.

We have an overview of how deportations were carried out, who gave orders, which institutions were involved, how an operation was prepared and fulfilled, how victims were chosen, what role was played by Moscow’s central power, and which tasks were performed by republican or local authorities. The operation involved a great number of participants, about 80,000 persons, approximately one deporting person per one deported person. As planned, for the deportation of 7,500 families (22,500 persons) from Estonia more than 2,000 operative groups were formed. One group was in charge of the deportation of four families. Operative groups were set up so that they also involved security officers and soldiers who had been transferred to the Baltic countries from elsewhere in the USSR (primarily from Leningrad, Karelia, Kazakhstan, Belo-Russia), alongside local officials and activists. The task of the soldiers in those groups was to guard the persons to be deported and their places of residence as well as to convoy the persons. Likewise, soldiers had to be ready for attacks by the forest brothers. Along with the military personnel, the political apparatus was also dispatched to the special assignment, they had to ensure the discipline of the soldiers and deal with the questions of ideological upbringing. At least one member of the CP or Komsomol was required to be in each operative group, in this way the party control was ensured over the military personnel. Also, members of operative groups were to check on each other’s activities (Rahi-Tamm, Kahar, 2009).

When listening to the deportees' memories, I was taken by surprise that a lot of soldiers were remembered without bitterness, often with kind words. At the same time the image of a Soviet soldier was generally negative. Suddenly, in the context of the 1949 deportation operation, the Soviet soldier appeared in another role. The following fragments from the deportees' memories illustrate it.

“For a while an elderly Russian soldier looked at Mother who had lost her head, put his rifle into the corner and poured out what Mother had gathered into a small sack. He ordered to bring big corn sacks and practically helped us to pack. He told Mother to take along all better clothes and things. Thanks to that kind person we also packed a saw and an axe, scissors and tongs, pots, pans, foodstuff and many other things that helped to restart life in Siberia” (Rahi, 1998: 48).

Or another fragment: “The Russian officer was not a cruel man. He was calm and showed us what kind of stuff we had to pack to take along, he allowed us to take everything. In the neighboring house Estonian supervisors had followed the instruction closely and their bags were a lot smaller than ours” (*ibid.*: 49). Soviet soldiers were well aware of what the deportation of civilians meant, what the situation was like where the people were taken and what they badly needed in the unknown of Siberia. Surely many of them came from families whose members had been repressed earlier in the 1930s. This is how the soldiers' position was distinguished from the rest of the executors of the operation. Reports of the security organs on the operation pointed out as the major drawback the expression of compassion to the deportees by the participants in the operation. In some places the orders were not fulfilled correctly, people were allowed to escape from homes as well as from the railway platforms. Many persons engaged in deportation turned up drunk, or slept at sentry posts, little willingness was shown in capturing fugitives. After the operation, a number of meetings were held to discuss persons' political-moral state and the strengthening of service discipline (Rahi-Tamm, Kahar, 2009).

But the deportees remembered most of all the behavior of local activists, they all knew the people. The engagement of local people in the fulfilling of the task made them accomplices in the operation. Party and Soviet activists, among whom some people were by chance out of lack of more eligible persons, were assigned to stay in the living rooms of the deportees to register all their property left behind and to hand it over to local authorities. Deported persons and their families often recalled how the local activists worked as guides and were writing down their property, and those moments were bitterly remembered by the descendants to date. It was a dirty trick to make local people participate in the punishment of their fellow-citizens as it caused tensions among the people, particularly in the village community, however, loss of mutual trust suited the strengthening of Soviet control (Hosking, 2014: 9-21). Various discords and conflicts were used to manipulate and influence people. Awareness

of the methods used by the authorities and explaining them more widely is particularly important in a post-conflict society (McCully, 2011), since there is yet a lot of ignorance to date, people often blame one another, not noticing how they were entangled and were driven into forced situations by the system.

Deportation, according to the principles of international law, is a timeless crime that obliges the judiciary to prosecute persons who participated in committing those crimes. In the years 1995–2008, the Board of Estonian Security Police investigated the events, thousands of documents were studied and hundreds of victims questioned. As a result, eight criminal cases, concerning episodes of the 1949 deportation, were taken to court, resulting in eight convictions. All the defendants were former field commissaries at the county level (security officials or militia officers), who were responsible for the deporting procedures. Although the men were declared guilty (sentenced to 3–8 years imprisonment), they were released of actual imprisonment, which was replaced with conditional imprisonment and sentenced probation (Arpo, 2004).<sup>6</sup>

Bringing to justice the deportation agents as aged men (born between 1918 and 1927) caused mixed opinions in society. While one group is focusing on forgiveness and understanding, another one places the principle of justice in the foreground (Mälksoo, 2001; Pettai and Pettai, 2015). Many people think that the truth concerning the past seemed to be established, but justice was not served. Most of the former agents did not plead guilty, claiming that they just obeyed orders. Such an attitude would not help ease tensions. By now, most of the persons are dead and the Security Police have concluded the investigation of the deportations. Although deportations were thoroughly analyzed in Estonia, there are a number of facets that need continuing clarifications, especially when related to behavior models in critical circumstances.

Interrogation transcripts are a historical source that draws out individuals' most different behavior patterns. Although debates continue about whether, and to what extent the material is useable because statements were made in fear, often combined with physical violence (beatings, etc.), and knowing that, the analyst of the transcripts must observe very high source-critical requirements, it is still a source that offers a unique insight into the nature of the Stalinist system and the detailed mechanism of re-educating people. Interrogation transcripts can and must be used alongside other sources to get the necessary information for the assessment of real individuals, background of situations, general conditions and other indicators. In addition to the fact that the records disclose the measures how the regime produced and constructed different kinds of "enemies" in the society, we find examples about

<sup>6</sup> See also: <https://www.kapo.ee/en/content/annual-reviews.html> [accessed on 6 December 2016].

the victim's colleagues, friends, family members, neighbors, acquaintances who were also questioned by interrogators. Thus the transcripts open various aspects, not just "we" and "they" or the interrogator and the interrogated, but also "the others" or different witnesses based on whose statements accusatory evidence was compiled. A summons to appear in court to testify was a touchstone of many friendships and moments of bitter disappointment.

Does the way we describe an activity and views of oneself, companions, friends, acquaintances, confirm something once said or done? Highly different strategies can be observed in those who were interrogated as well as in those who gave testimony. There are the people who immediately surrender to pressure as well as those who fight for their opinion and argue with the investigator, try to find arguments to defend themselves and the others. Some persons try to be evasive, dodge the question, or give no direct answers, but eventually they have to put up with the accusation, at least partly. Creative persons give typically longer and more descriptive statements which sometimes, particularly during their first interrogations are quite frank and, as such, are skillfully used by interrogators when compiling the accusation. The accusations of persons varied from actual armed resistance to imaginary acts proposed by the authorities (Rahi-Tamm, Saueauk, 2015).

"Dialogues" between the interrogator and the interrogated bring forth conflicts characteristic of misunderstanding between the "new" world of Soviets and the "old" world of the independent republic. During the "dialogues" people were made to renounce not only earlier values, but were forced to re-assess their whole previous life and activity. An employee of the History Museum Uno Ussisoo, who did not admit to being a "bourgeois nationalist", was answered by the interrogator: "if you lived in bourgeois Estonia for 20 years, then you are a bourgeois nationalist" (Annist, 2002: 49).

The interrogator was given a curious role of a re-educator. Some of them had explained at length and thoroughly what the correct Soviet way of thinking was like. Their use of language, questions and answers enable researchers to estimate the interrogators' principles of action, tactics and measures. The process of re-education is most genuinely expressed by assessments of a person's bonds of friendship. Good old friends and acquaintances had to be characterized as "poor company" who had had a "bad influence" on them. The statements which contained condemnation of a "bad influence" demonstrated the results of re-education, carried out by the interrogator. Ridiculing of a person's earlier life and bonds of friendship meant the ideological elimination of the enemy by the interrogator (Halfin, 2003). Soviet apprehension was able to shape a criminal episode on the basis of the most common phenomena. For instance, employees of Tartu University could commit an anti-Soviet act when visiting each other or sitting at the same table in a cafe. Work-

ing sessions were given the meaning of illegal gatherings, scientific presentations were regarded as anti-Soviet propaganda, etc. (Annist, 2002: 51). Numerous nonsensical examples could be given.

During interrogations a person had to be transformed into a criminal and deprived of their dignity, accompanied by inflicting the feeling of guilt and immortalizing the “guilt” for whatever reasons, sometimes accusations went back to the period of the First World War (Rahi-Tamm, Esse, 2014). Interrogators’ comments often revealed contempt for the persons’ earlier life experience and it was important to give their past a negative meaning in the Soviet regime. It also concerned the circles of friends and acquaintances whose meaning was depreciated. By making people unwillingly express derogatory opinions, they inflicted the feeling of guilt that could last for years. The lack of the former common social standards, complete disorder and confusion weakened trust in society as a whole.

The Soviet period left various traces on Estonian society. The feeling of guilt was well summarized by Katrina Kalda, an Estonian-descended young author who wrote a novel *Arithmetic of Gods*. The novel was first published in French in 2013, by the Gallimard Publishers. In the following extract the author’s grandmother’s friend Asta describes the people who lived under Soviet rule. “After the war we were taught in the Soviet Union that there had been no past, nor will there be any future, at least in the way we had believed it to be. We ourselves even had no right to exist. Some people did learn from it, some pretended as if they had learned, just a few succeeded in ignoring it all. I think that Ilmar [the narrator’s grandfather] learned it so well that he even did not dare to find out what he felt, what he was or what he had done; he knew only what he was expected to feel – guilt. At that time it was just like this: those who had suffered were ashamed of being victims, and those who had not suffered, for the same reason, were ashamed of belonging to the executors. Only those who had committed real crimes did not feel ashamed as they enjoyed power instead of having conscience and they said what everyone had to feel. It was our era itself that was guilty, but the burden of guilt was to be carried by those who lived in the era. Now things are different” (Kalda, 2013: 149-150).

The author hit on an important point of pain. Often, victims feel guilty, as do the people who feel that they had not sufficiently resisted Soviet ideology and made various compromises. At the same time, a number of persons who immediately carried out repression never pleaded guilty, admitting only that the time was like that and they had only obeyed orders. In order to assess all the various and versatile processes it is necessary to research the situations from different viewpoints. It is important to map the experiences of various social groups, including also those hidden so far or kept silent. Listening and understanding different voices enables historians to assess the meaning of events.

## **In Conclusion**

As do various source materials, so the whole current state of research on repressions refers to the necessity of paying more attention to other social groups because the majority of society still remains between the two opposing sides, the victims and the executors. The aim of the Soviet regime was to subject the whole society to Soviet norms, so various components were used, beginning with generating a paralyzing sense of fear in society up to enticing people to collaboration (Mertelsmann, 2016). Besides the immediate repression, many indirect measures of influence were practiced, like continuous intimidation, interference in one's personal and work life, dismissals, summoning to a "talk", humiliations at meetings, and various other restrictions. All those measures caused incomprehension and insecurity, which were expressed in different forms of resistance and adaptation practices. The Estonian literary scholar Peeter Olesk (1996) wrote: "The independent statehood required masters, in other words, strong personalities, but the revolutions of the year 1917 began to spread mass-person ideology, manipulating an individual. [...] The Soviet occupation time showed that an individual's primary trying experience could be not the freedom of self-realization but preserving one's own person through suffering and distress."

It was not possible to realize the pattern of Sovietization as planned in Moscow equally in all areas, therefore we can observe searches for compromises in the activity of both individuals and institutions (Tannberg, 2010; Zubkova, 2008). To understand what was going on in the society of the period it was important to know proportionally well both the steps taken by the state and individual reactions to those steps. In their memories, individuals as a rule do not interpret life as concrete strategies of coping which appear more often in comparisons to different times and situations. More commonly their descriptions cover the ways used to overcome the hardships of adaptation and bring the situation under control. Several vital processes and areas in which the state exerted pressure were often avoided in memories, the topics more widely acknowledged in society like work-related activity were preferred instead. At the same time, occupational and specialized activity provided more information about the general atmosphere in society than expected, for instance, sowing distrust in the community, various suspicions, or the ways former relationships were interrupted. Examples at the level of everyday life explain compromises and adaptations, like attempts of preserving earlier values and traditions. Retaining inner protest and carrying it forward throughout the Soviet period played a major role in maintaining our national cultural identity which laid the basis for the movement of re-establishing independence in Estonia. Thus, in treating the Soviet period, the historian faces a great number of research questions.



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