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## Analyzing Migration across Literature: Russian Émigré Literature in the Texts of A. Averchenko and Z. Shakhovskaya

Erdem Erinç<sup>‡</sup>

### Abstract

*This paper uses historical resources, extensively, from the texts of Russian émigré authors A. Averchenko and Z. Shakhovskaya who both wrote on two of the main refugee migrant evacuations out of Russia to Istanbul. The aim was to reveal the role of literary texts in forming a better understanding of the dynamics of such evacuations. The main reason for choosing the above authors' texts (Notes of a Fool by A. Averchenko and Life Style from the book "Takov moi vek" by Z. Shakhovskaya) was that they were written about two very different evacuations, although both took place during the same first wave of Russian migration. The first is known as General Denikin's and the second as General Wrangel's evacuation. The authors were also chosen because of their different age and gender. Analyzing author's literary texts about differing types, refugee migrant evacuations provides an opportunity to evaluate the dynamics of such evacuations, as well providing an opportunity to read history from another perspective, utilizing various factors and variables such as time, generation and gender.*

**Keywords:** Emigre Literature; Russian Emigre Literature; evacuations; migration

### Introduction

Studying the refugee migrant evacuations that took place at the end of the Russian Civil War (1917 – 1922) through literary texts is the main focus of this paper. Its aim is to disclose the impacts of two of the large 20<sup>th</sup> century Russian evacuations through analytical reading and interpretation of Russian émigré literature texts. In order to attain this aim, texts of two Russian émigré writers on the first wave of Russian evacuations was analysed. The choice of authors was not based on any assumption that they were the most popular writers of Russian émigré literature but rather that their works have major differences in the way they were written due, in

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<sup>‡</sup> Dr Erdem Erinç, Assistant Professor in Department of Russian Language and Literature, Erciyes University, Kayseri, Turkey. E-mail: erinc@erciyes.edu.tr.

<sup>1</sup> Different years are given for the beginning of Russian Civil War in different sources. However, general approach of the recent years' historical studies about this war is to take 1917's October Revolution as the beginning of Russian Civil War (Mawdsley, 2011: 8).



part, to the age gap between and gender of both authors' but also because of the literary orientations if one makes a study in the comparison of their works. Thus they were chosen to provide more effective and reliable sources of text for analysis. The first author, Arkady Averchenko, was one of the most popular satirists of Russian literature at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, Averchenko was already a famous author before leaving Russia in the twenties. The other writer, Zinaida Shakhovskaya was a female writer who had a career of memoir writing and also was known as an editor of popular Russian émigré periodicals. She was fourteen when she migrated as one of the evacuee out of Russia to Istanbul. One of the texts used for analysis was written in 1921 (*Notes of a Fool*, A. Averchenko), the other one was written in 1965 (*Life Style*, Z. Shakhovskaya).

The main aim of this paper is to reveal, by literary analysis of the above mentioned texts, the differences between the two refugee migrations that took place during the Russian emigration's first wave. Some of the burden of establishing a more accurate historical account of the migration of two Russian White Army general refugees (General Anton Denikin and General Pyotr Wrangel), is lifted by utilizing the literary texts. The perception of the social and economic differences between the refugee migrations and their functionality to understand the historical facts were therefore studied. Furthermore, the impact of the authors' different ages, sex and literary orientation towards the perception of images of Russian emigration of 20<sup>th</sup> century is also discussed.

## **TWO WRITERS TWO REFUGEE MIGRATIONS**

### **Zinaida Shakhovskaya**

Shakhovskaya was a writer, a poet and editor of Russian émigré periodicals who was born in 1906 in Moscow. She is mostly known as the writer of a memoir about the popular – maybe the most popular – Russian émigré author Vladimir Nabokov. In 1920, when the writer was fourteen years old she took refuge and moved from Novorossiysk to Istanbul. However, leaving her country at such a young age did not fade away her memories of it. On the contrary, both in memoirs and in her fictional works, her country of birth has a very significant place in her writings. One of the wealthiest aristocrat families in the Russian Empire, 'Shakhovskie', had three estates. One of them, Matovo, was the one most remembered and most reflected on by her in her literary works. (Shakhovskaya, 1991: 231). In *Lights and Shadows*, which includes her early life from the street where she was born to the city in which she spent her last days in Russia, she describes both locations in some considerable detail. (Shakhovskaya, 2008: 5-207). She



also made room in her story, *Dying Like a Dog*, (which includes autobiographical references), for a detailed account of the Matovo estate (Shakhovskaya, 1991: 108 – 116). In her work *Searching Nabokov*, written by her as a critic and as an editor, we are made apparent that she was in touch with a number of Russian émigré authors all of whom had differing approaches when writing their literacy work contributions. However, she took one step further and strived to make Russian émigré literature a sub-discipline in the same way as her contemporary, Gleb Struve had done.

Zinaida Shakhovskaya's past travels earned her the title of being an emigrant. From Istanbul, having received part of her education there since 1920, she moved to Marseille in 1923. From there she then went to Paris and Brussels where she lived until 1926 (Shakhovskaya, 2008: 240). After that she spent the next two years in the Congo (Shakhovskaya, 2008: 287-313). Before the Second World War she lived in various cities of Europe but mostly in Belgium. At the beginning of the Second World War she joined the resistance movement in Belgium, from 1945 to 1948 worked for Agence France-Presse in London (Shakhovskaya, 2008: 313-368). At first, she worked as an editor for local émigré periodicals but then she became editor in chief of broadcasts about Russia on French radio and television stations. Shakhovskaya died in 2001 in Sainte-Geniève-des-Bois, which became a popular place with Russian émigrés as a place where they could meet up in its nursing home and cemetery ([http://hrono.ru/biograf/bio\\_sh/shahovskaya.php](http://hrono.ru/biograf/bio_sh/shahovskaya.php)).

Shakhovskaya wrote thirteen works in different literary genres during her life. These works were written as poetry and prose in French and Russian. Her first books were poetry works. In her final years, she used her artistic literary talents mostly on memoirs and literary studies.

### **Arkady Averchenko**

Averchenko is remembered as one of the most significant writers of Russian satirical literature. He was born in Sevastopol in 1880. He began his work life early as a clerk in sea transport and mine companies. In 1902 his first stories were published in local newspapers and journals. In the following years with debuts in popular national papers he became a famous satirist of Russian Literature (Milenko, 2010: 322)

In 1908, along with a group of famous Russian satirists like Nadezhda Teffi, Sasha Cherniy and Nikolay Remizov, he published a journal named *Satirikon* which gave Russian satire literature a new sense of direction. He continued to write prolifically until 1918 but in that same year the journal



he published after *Satirikon*, *Noviy Satirikon*, was banned when the Bolsheviks seized power after the October Revolution (Milenko, 2010: 323).

Averchenko then found himself caught up in the migration process and from the end of 1918 to the beginning of 1919 he lived in various cities such as Kiev, Kharkov, Rostov on Don and Melitopol. He ended up in Sevastopol and it was there that he began to work for a journal supporting the White Army *Yug (South)*. Although the conditions were tough, he managed to publish two story compilations and stage a play. His stories published in *Yug* were subjected to military censorship. However, because he got on well with General Wrangel, this relationship helped him get round such difficulties and by establishing a new journal, *Yug Rossii (South of Russia)* (Milenko, 2010: 323) censorship scrutiny was, for the most part, avoided.

In 1921 Averchenko escaped to Istanbul as part of Wrangel's refugee migration (Milenko, 2010: 215). His stories and feuilletons then began to be published in a émigré journal based in Istanbul, called *Zarnitsy*. His work on experiencing immigration, *Notes of a Fool*, was also published in Istanbul as well. In the same year his sensational book *Twelve Knives on the Back of Revolution* was republished in Paris. After responses by Lenin's directed towards Averchenko and his book, his popularity rose among the émigré community.

From 1922 to 1925 Averchenko lived in various cities of Europe (Sofia, Belgrade, Zagreb, Prague, Berlin) and continued to publish his works until his death in Prague in 1925.

### **Russian Civil War and Evacuations**

In order to understand historical facts across the literary texts, we have to know the general conditions in which the literary texts were written. Those conditions are essential in order to accurately interpret and find an orientation for the texts. Interpreting these texts in this way assists in the internalization of the related historical facts. From the outset, when we discuss the works of Russian émigré writers such as A. Averchenko and Z. Shakhovskaya, we have to establish the circumstantial background facts that lead them to become émigré writers in the first place. Without doubt, it was due to the Russian Civil War which began with the October Revolution in 1917.

It would not be an exaggeration in defining the Russian Civil War as being one of the most catastrophic events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was between two military powers of Russia, the Red Army and voluntary White Army that lasted from 1917 to 1922 and caused the death of approximately 1, 500, 000 people (Krivosheev, 1997: 7-38).



Contrary to popular belief, the White Army and its opponents cannot be homogenised. In other words, all those who formed resistance against the Red Army and the ones who emigrated from Russia because of the civil war were not supporters of monarchy (Dağlar Macar & Macar, 2010: 21).

Even though the Russian Civil War - and the migration that followed - started in 1917 and ended in 1922, both the war and the migration grew to reach and involve the wider masses during 1920. Like in every war, the eras and the frontiers are named after the commanders in Russian Civil War. Names like Lavr Kornilov, Mikhail Alekseyev and Nikolai Yudenich come to mind when talking about the first years of the Russian Civil War, while names like General Kolchak come to mind for the Siberian and Eastern frontiers. However, only two names emerged at the end of the civil war: General Anton Denikin and General Pyotr Wrangel.

Out of all the White Army generals, Anton Denikin had the greatest military success in pushing and expanding the front line borders of the command fields. During the time that he commanded the White Army resistance against the Reds, all Russian soil up as far as the city of Tula, just south of Moscow, was captured under his leadership. However the White Army the retreat was as fast as its military expansion.

The first number of retreats started in December 1919 and at the same time and in line with the direction and pace of the retreats, the evacuations occurred mostly from the northern port cities of the Black Sea to Istanbul. These ports included Odessa, Novorossiysk and various ports in the Crimea. Even the beginning and end of the retreat process had differing characteristics. It would not be inaccurate to say that wealthy émigrés were the first to flee and during this period, “many counts, countesses and princes came to Istanbul” (Bakar, 2012). As the number of emigres fleeing the country rose, people from different social classes started to emigrate. As reported in the Ottoman press, in January 1920, the incoming number of people from the northern Black Sea cities of Russia to Istanbul had become more frequent. Following the resignation of Denikin in April 1920 with Wrangel taking charge thereafter, the reality of Russian emigres became an every day part of life in Istanbul (Bakar, 2012). One of the best texts summarising class distinctions of the first evacuees was an anonymous news article published in the Ottoman newspaper, *Alemdar*, which quoted a piece from *The Daily Telegraph* newspaper:

*“There can not be a stranger situation than the Russian émigré crowds coming here everyday. You would see fur-clad princes; Cossacks carrying empty cartridges on their belts, and women who would remind Parisian balls with their grace and posture but with so much blush on their face that would put a European women into shame. You can see Russian*



*women wearing large earrings. The lavender scents they put on their skin creates a sensation inside one's body. You can see poor Russian women wearing old, dirty jackets as well. Some of them would wear real or fake uniforms, long boots and marine uniforms and carry a line of medals on their chest" (Alemdar Newspaper, 1920).*

General Pyotr Wrangel undertook the post of supreme commander when General Anton Denikin resigned on 4<sup>th</sup> of April 1920. The large recapture of land by the Red Army at the end of Denikin's command period forced Wrangel to adopt a different strategy. Wrangel designated his war strategy as saving Crimea and establishing there an independent state (Sokolov, 2009). He took advantage of the armed struggle between the Polish and Bolsheviks. When the conflict between two opposing armies ended at the end of October 1920, Wrangel started to lose authoritative control of his power. After just one month, evacuations during Wrangel's military leadership began (Bakar, 2012). When these evacuations are compared with the evacuations under Denikin, they stand out by the short period of time they took and the unorganised way in which they were carried out. In other words, if the first mass of people who left Russian soil, (mainly civilians) did so with deliberate intent and in an organised way, the evaqueees during Wrangel's military leadership, in stark contrast, included civilians and soldiers and they all took place at a time when the last areas of land under White Army control were lost. This made the evacuations decidedly more chaotic. When one refers to relevant texts of that time period, one begins to understand, more clearly, the different characteristics of the two evacuations:

*"Horror, staring at Russian ships makes one horrified. Black ships full of black people that do not and cannot move. Coast-guard ship is getting closer, approaching, what should we do? It is impossible to climb on to deck. Elisabeth will never forget the screams rising from the deck: 'Bread, water...' They are standing on their feet for three days since they departed from Crimea. They did not eat or drink anything. There are pregnant women among them; some have their stomach crushed. There are too many dead people. The small boats of Greek and Armenian merchants surround Russian ships. Just like the flies that are crowding on a sick lion. They are selling bread. Elisabeth sees Russians that are tying a ring, even their engagement rings to the end of a rope or a belt and dangle over small boats. Rings are untied; foods are taking their places. For a ring - a loaf of bread, for a shirt - a bottle of water" (Dumesnil, 1993: 21).*



The above lines were written by a Russian woman, Vera Dumesnil who was married to a French admiral serving time in Istanbul at the time of occupation. Conspicuous points in that quotation (such as the abundance of ships and the distress of the people in them) underline vividly the characteristics of the evacuation referred to above (i.e. the shortness of time, the acute hardship of overloading too many people on ships making the migration perilous and uncomfortable and under the harshest conditions) These two texts give us some clues enabling one to perceive how the evacuations, from a sociological perspective affected the image of the city. However, the origins of these texts are stylistically different and it is this point in particular that perhaps demonstrates the texts shortcomings and this, in turn, it could be argued, reduces our opportunity to make the right sociological determinations. However, we will see how the aforementioned emigre authors texts, provide us with a real chance to make literary comparisons and thus help to perceive the truth of such historical facts.

### **CATEGORIZING THE EVACUATIONS OF RUSSIAN EMIGRATION**

Before making an analysis on how the texts of the two writers can enable one to reflect more accurately on the characteristics of the evacuations and emigration, it is possible to categorize the two evacuations mentioned above from a theoretical perspective. Turkish sociologist İlhan Tekeli offers four types of migration in his work “Migration and Beyond” (Göç ve Ötesi, İlhan Tekeli, 2008). Having studied the facts of each particular emigration, Tekeli then divides them into four different types of social phenomenon. Thus, in the first group, migration is taken as being a mechanism that resupplies the broken balances of a social system. In the second group, he categories certain migrations as being an adaptation process that moves in a parallel way in the form of a transformation during the evolution of a society. On the other hand, the third group, is discussed from a factual view point that every migration sets off another one, even where there is no apparent deviation from the balance or evolutionary progress within a society. The last one relates to migrations that are created as a result of migration policies initiated and enforced by political processes (Tekeli, 2008: 11)

An evaluative comparison of the differences between the two Russian migration evacuations provides us with an opportunity to categorize both of them into one of the above four migration types. If we define the characteristics of the Denikin evacuation as diffusive, defining the émigrés as a group mass that is not influenced or harmed too much by the Civil War



and further, again, as a group mass, is able to retain its social class, then, the characteristics of the Wrangel evacuation clearly reflect the direct opposite. Thus, in stark comparison, it is possible to define the characteristics of the Wrangel evacuation as a mass group, totally harmed by the effects of the Civil War socially and economically, where, because of the dire circumstances, regardless of class, the mass group has been stripped of all privileges. From the categories offered by Tekeli, we can deduce that Denikin's evacuation falls more appropriately into the type of "migration that is an adaptation process that moves in a parallel way with transformation during the evolution of society". Whereas, Wrangel's evacuation is clearly more in line with the type of "migration that is taken as a mechanism that resupplies the broken balances of a social system".

However, it is argued that categorizing the evacuations using the above theoretical characteristics alone, is insufficient and inconclusive. One method of providing further and more accurate proof and guidance is to analyse the texts that were written by those who actually experienced the evacuations. This approach, it is summarized, enables the dynamics of the unexplored characteristics of such migrations/evacuations to be revealed.

### **Projection of Evacuations through the Texts**

At the beginning of this paper, we mentioned that Zinaida Shakhovskaya was a member of a migrant family, which could preserve, not its wealth but its socio-economic condition for a while. She tells how their life came to be normalized after a short dissolution at the beginning of their evacuation from the passage below:

*"Our lives got normalized gradually. In a big hotel named 'Splendid' my mother with the other Russian ladies set up a tearoom. Its income will be used for the benefit of Red Cross. My sister Natasha who was a brilliant contralto sang there romances. The daughters of reputable families were serving tea and pastries. Sometimes they were sustained to the unconventional questions and inappropriate proposals. Hence the mothers were always aware, essentially the girls could defend themselves too. When a rude one was asking 'Lady, do you have a boyfriend?' the waitress was answering 'I think you mean do I have any admirers, yes I have, and they are very well educated people'" (Shakhovskaya, 2008: 211).*

Some of the component parts of texts such as these, provide a clear indication that the people who are written about may not have been living a wealthy life but they are complicit enough to take charitable work.





Nevertheless their exposure to ‘rudeness’ not previously encountered before shows the unknown and unfamiliar side of life that, up until the emigration, they were not aware of or not used to addressing. After the Wrangel evacuation that eroded the whole demographic structure of Istanbul, these kinds of interactions with the waitresses could be interpreted as being very ‘kind’. This is reflected in the texts of Arkady Averchenko:

*“A woman with waitress apron approached us with a menu on her hand. ‘You honoured us, countess’ said my friend in a canine manner, ‘If you let me, I want to introduce you with my writer friend’ ‘I already know him’ said the Countess with a sweet smile on her face ‘when my husband was a minister, every evening we read each other your stories’” (Averchehko, 1921)*

These two brief examples shed light on and help us to reflect on the socio-cultural and economic aspects of both evacuations. The clarity of indication and insight that one gains becomes increasingly possible time after time by the reading and examination of such texts, where aspects of theory and fiction are ‘drip fed’ and filtered into by the authors’ authentic and real life experiences. This in turn makes comparison far easier.

These comparative differences become even more apparent when the texts touch on the theme concerning the demographic structure of Istanbul. When Shakhovskaya, (from the Denikin evacuation), interprets everyday life in Istanbul in the first part of her text, she approaches all the ethnicities in a nonchalant way. However, comparatively this not apparent or even possible in the case of Averchenko’s works.

*“The little Babylon of my youth, mixture of races and languages, the Prinkipo Island had been a place for me where a never ending play was shown. When evening comes colourful people of the island were tying their fishing boats and little freighters, which are used for two way journeys from Islands to Constantinople, to the dock. All youth were getting together there: Greeks, Turks, English officers with the packages on their hands, soldiers in their perfectly sewed uniforms, young Greek women with their magnificent eyes and fat legs, young Russian women who could wear something fashionable with their humble conditions (...) Here one could hear whispers, screams and laughs at the same time, just like the world was full of hope and joy” (Shakhovskaya, 2008: 210).*

At the time that Averchenko’s Notes of a Fool was written, it was clearly possible to perceive and follow the same demographic diversity but it is



evidently clear that the same nonchalant approach of Shakhovskaya was not apparent this time:

*“When all Russia is transferred from Crimea to Istanbul, everyone help Russia (Turks, Armenians, French, English people, everyone...) except the Greeks... Only the Greeks did what they could do: they increase the price of their rooms in their homes twice and rent them to the Russians. Every nation has good ones and bad ones, but the Greeks. Every one of them is just like the one and one is just like every one. They loved Russians too, but in their own way. They loved the immensity of the Russian soul. The more the soul is immense, the more they could swindle them” (Averchenko, 1921).*

When we compare these passages from another view point, it is possible to say that Shakhovskaya even enjoyed the time that she spent in Istanbul as an émigré. Of course, it would almost certainly be inaccurate to assume that only the émigrés of the Denikin evacuation had the same experience or even that all of the émigrés ‘enjoyed’ being in Istanbul. There are however more significant factors that can be relied with a higher degree of certainty. One such factor is the different ages of the writers’, but the other and perhaps most important factor is the time when the texts are written. Shakhovskaya wrote her book that includes the Istanbul memoirs *Life Style*, in Paris in 1965 where she set up a stable life for herself. This subsequent and comparative stability in her life, by itself, could have given her the chance to reflect and reconsider the events and life experiences she had in a different light even, perhaps, with a sense of fondness.

### **TO CREATE A LITERARY PROFILE OF A CITY**

When we follow the course of these evacuations by using and analysing the texts, we can see how the people who came to Istanbul via Denikin’s evacuations got poorer and eventually at some point in time, became equals with those emigrees who were subjected to the hardships of the Wrangel evacuations. It is possible to deduce that the first of these evacuations – as Tekeli mentions – tries to realize an evolutionary balance, whereas, the other one tries to bring its own chaos to the city. Excepting this hypothesis, in the light of the above texts, one can see how Russian perception of and attitude towards Istanbul and its people was created or changed. Consequently, we can conclude that the Russian image or perception of the inhabitants of Istanbul changed during and after the course of the two different evacuations.



When analysis is made of those writers' texts who came to Istanbul at the beginning of their migration, age and literary orientation are important but the contrasting factors of both evacuations play a decisive role too and are of equal importance when considering Istanbul as the place of first impression in the texts.

The discipline of carrying out a comparative analysis of different texts is not simply about finding the differences between them, rather it is about finding an alternative for history as a discipline (Nichanian, 2011). Sources of information that can be gleaned from historical writing refer to the facts but these facts alone cannot provide a permanent and extensive area of knowledge in the imagery of a person, a group of people or a race of people. It is submitted that, at this point, the help of literary text is necessarily needed to illuminate the past. It is through the use of this methodology, firstly, with the help of the literary texts of two writers that belong to different age and sex group and secondly, for example, from the study of two different evacuations that one can determine the place of history in fictional imagery.

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