

# SHOCK WAVE OF RUSSIAN EMIGRATION AND SELF- REFLECTION OF ITS REPRESENTATIVES

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**This essay introduces the notion of the shock wave of Russian emigration, applicable to those Russian citizens who strongly opposed the outbreak of military aggression against Ukraine and chose to leave Russia within the first weeks of the beginning of the full-scale invasion on February 24, 2022. Based on the data collected from in-depth interviews, the study of the shock wave gives an overview of the spectrum of the respondents' personal motivations for leaving the country, fears and expectations that were driving them, and their deeper reflection on their experiences where metaphors and imagery play a very prominent role.**

**Keywords:** Migration; Emigration; Russia-Ukraine War; Trauma; Protest

After February 24, 2022, thousands of Russians have lost their homes. Most of them not literally, but the illusion that they were living in a country that was part of the global community and that, despite certain shortcomings, they still had a future in it was gone. Since repressive laws against protesting or even discussing the war were promptly implemented in early March 2022, many had to leave their country out of actual fear for their safety and freedom, and many others for moral reasons, choosing emigration as a peculiar and costly form of protest (where all other forms were prohibited): preferring to step into the unknown over watching the familiar world rapidly coming undone.

In the study of what I call the shock wave of Russian emigration to describe those who left Russia during the first two weeks of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, in a state of psychological distress and without time for thoughtful preparation, I have come across recurring attempts of the recent emigrants to come up with metaphorical narratives aimed at rationalizing what was perceived by many as the abandonment of normal rationality. (Even the majority of Russian political and social scientists failed to predict Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.) The aim of this essay is to look into how well-educated people, many previously engaged in creative and intellectual spheres, who seem to comprise the core of the early wave of emigration, created their personal symbolic narratives trying to explain the reality of their country going into frontal war, the broad support for it, and their experience of sudden displacement.

## FIRST RESPONDERS

This study was conceived and implemented in collaboration with Alevtina Borodulina; however, she did not participate in the writing of this text. Alevtina and I both identify as social/cultural anthropologists and were ourselves émigrés when this research was conducted in March–September 2022. Alevtina left Russia in early March 2022 due to the outbreak of military aggression, which also makes her a part of the shock wave, while I already had almost a decade-long experience of living abroad. Being based in Istanbul, Turkey, Alevtina and I got involved in the work of the Ark (Kovcheg), an organization which itself was established in early March in order to help those who were leaving Russia because of the war and persecution for their anti-war position. So this study bears marks of both activist anthropology and self-ethnography.

Presently, it is commonly perceived to be more appropriate to refer to the events of February 24, 2022, as the beginning of “the full-scale invasion” instead of simply “the war”—in order not to dismiss the military conflict in Eastern Ukraine that was ongoing since 2014. Yet, during 2022 for Russian speakers and citizens of Russia talking of “the war” was rather an act of defiance and freedom that can only be exercised in private conversations with trusted interlocutors or, if uttered publicly, by those who were no longer in the country and had no plans of traveling back. So in the discussions surrounding this study and the interviews conducted for it, the situation was casually referred to as simply “the war” (the beginning of which was placed in 2022); however, I have mostly adjusted the language of this essay to avoid the phrasing that seems no longer adequate.

Within the study that was meant to be a quick response to the emergence of the new wave of emigration, we conducted 29 semistructured in-depth interviews with 31 participants (in two cases people who left as a couple were interviewed together), two offline and one online focus groups, and a number of expert interviews with psychologists. The age of the respondents ranged between 21 and 43 (but with only six participants being in their late 30s or early 40s). Their occupations varied from medium- or small-business owners and IT workers to professionals in various creative spheres (e.g., museum curators, screenwriters), journalists, academics, and unemployed lawyers or human rights defenders. Expert psychologists that we consulted were themselves going through the experience of an unplanned emigration while at the same time theorizing about it. Nine of our respondents were receiving direct help from the Ark (which was offering an opportunity to stay in Istanbul rent-free to those who could not afford even the most modest types of accommodation); others were found through random or snowball sampling.

The initial intent of this research, which we began in mid-March 2022, was to look into the values and political beliefs of our interlocutors: what were the exact events that had already occurred or were feared yet to happen that pushed them out of the country, and also what were their prior attitudes toward the possibility of emigration and experiences of already having lived abroad. However, it turned out, most of the respondents were more enthusiastic to talk about their mental state rather than purely political matters. Our semistructured interviews were conducted in a way that all the participants were expected to respond to the same set of ques-

tions, but were also encouraged to share anything else they felt was significant. Thus, when asked to recall how they learned and received the news about Russia's attack on Ukraine on February 24, the informants could choose to speak of mundane details of them waking up on that morning or about how they were already closely following and trying to analyze the situation during the preceding days and even weeks, or, indeed, to describe their emotional state.

The majority of the respondents listed symptoms of psychological distress such as inability to focus, oftentimes even eat or sleep, sudden tears, return of various bad habits, and so forth. Remarkable and also indicative of deeply traumatic experience was the fact that even several months later most of the respondents were able to describe living through February 24 and the following days in great detail.

Also worth pointing out is that many informants reported how the act of emigration—itsself stressful and potentially traumatic—had a positive effect on their psychological state. Having made it out of Russia, people were starting to feel more at ease, and while there were a lot of new challenges and issues to deal with, they felt more capable of enacting some change (even if only in their personal circumstances), compared to just sleeplessly, helplessly following the news from inside of Russia:

There was no immediate threat to me, it was just that I felt terribly uncomfortable [being in Russia]. Just on such a visceral level. It made me feel sick, nauseated. . . . And it was a constant feeling until I left. (male respondent, 32, Moscow–Istanbul)

Besides the emotional aspects, many of the respondents turned out to be quite creative at coming up with metaphorical narratives to describe what and how they felt about the beginning of the full-scale war and their rushed, unplanned emigration, which made them leave their past lives with all social connections behind:

You were climbing a mountain, and—boom—the mountain had suddenly collapsed underneath you. And you are just left hanging on a rope. But there is no mountain anymore. So how could you keep crawling? There's just emptiness. Nothing to hold onto. (male respondent, 21, Saint Petersburg–Osh–Bishkek–Istanbul–Berlin)<sup>1</sup>

Thus, this essay's main aim is to describe and discuss such personal narratives of the recent political emigrants.

## AIMING WESTWARD

For the early 2022 wave of emigration (certain trends were different for the second wave triggered by the mobilization after September 21, 2022) Istanbul appeared to be one of the three main destinations, the other two being Yerevan in Armenia and Tbilisi in Georgia. The appeal of these particular countries can be explained by the

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<sup>1</sup> It seems important to list all the stops on our respondents' journeys up to the moment the text of this essay was being finalized in August 2023.

simplicity of their visa and residency regulations. Russian citizens did not need a visa to enter any of these countries; the visa-free period in Georgia is as long as one year, and in Turkey and Armenia it was relatively simple to apply for residency permits.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, Armenia can even be entered with just an internal Russian passport and does not require documents that a usual travel abroad would.<sup>3</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to significantly lower mobility of the new emigrants: with most of the travel being restricted in 2020–2022 due to health safety reasons, many people's travel passports or Schengen visas (in case they held them) expired.

Yet, by March 2022 the travel options for Russian citizens got even more limited as all flights between the European Union countries and Russia ended due to the sanctions. But there were still direct flights from Russia to Armenia and Turkey. Also, Georgia and Armenia offered a more familiar environment of the post-Soviet states where Russian language was still widely spoken, while all three countries were popular tourist destinations prior to 2022 and were known for a comparatively low cost of living (however, Russian anti-war emigration had since dramatically reshaped the real estate markets in Armenia and Georgia, and Turkey's own troubled economy has also significantly driven up the cost of living).

While most of the interviews were conducted in Istanbul (a few were later collected by Alevtina Borodulina in Armenia and Georgia), most of the participants had more complex itineraries: many had traveled through other counties in the Caucasus or Central Asia, and many have since departed further West after being able to obtain a work, student, or humanitarian visa. Yet, not everybody was always successful at realizing their plans. To the best of our knowledge, only 12 out of 31 of our respondents have since moved to Western countries, while the rest, even a year and a half later, still remain in the visa-free ones, whether out of their own choice or for the lack thereof.

Whereas the majority of those who were leaving Russia early on aspired to go to the European Union or the United States, many were unable to move to the West. While some chose to remain in Turkey—with its advantages of a lower cost of living and seeming absence of anti-Russian sentiments—many others simply got stuck there as in some sort of limbo between Europe and Asia, East and West, a safe haven from Russian regime's repressions yet also a country with a poor human rights record and led by an unchangeable authoritarian leader.

For the reasons discussed previously, our sample did not include those emigrants who were able to travel to Europe right away, as they seem to represent only a small, privileged minority. While some news outlets (e.g., Gessen 2022) were representing

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<sup>2</sup> The situation in Turkey changed dramatically by December 2022 when a lot of residency applications started to be rejected without any formal announcement of a change in rules and requirements.

<sup>3</sup> In Russia a domestic ID that every citizen over the age of 14 is required to have is also called a passport. The document is identical in size and has a similar burgundy-colored cover (although of a darker shade) as the Russian travel passport. Instead of visas and entry stamps, its pages contain information on the citizens' address of registration, family status, and for men, their status regarding military conscription.

Russian anti-war emigration as something that only well-to-do people with good connections can afford, our experience, especially when volunteering for the Ark, has shown that people of all walks of life and in different economic situations were choosing to leave Russia. In this light, emigration can be seen as both a rather costly form of protest in a society where all other ways and forms have been already suppressed and a way to regain agency, to deal with the trauma by subjecting oneself to another challenging experience of starting life anew in a new country.

In the language of Albert Hirschman (1970), who proposed the triad of exit, voice, and loyalty, those leaving Russia were choosing the first option, considering how thoroughly the state was suppressing the voicing of any dissent. Although in his 1970 book Hirschman talked of the exit strategy, if easily available, as undermining voice, he later admitted that if applied not to free-market economy but to nondemocratic regimes that lack basic freedoms (like the GDR he was discussing) exit (emigration) and voice (protest demonstrations against the regime) can work in tandem to reinforce each other (1993:177). In our case, again, the exit strategy can be seen as a way to preserve or regain voice, rather than to maintain the silent loyalty forcibly imposed on those remaining in the country by the old and new repressive laws. This trend toward voice after exit was noted as characteristic of political emigration from Russia even prior to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine (Fomina 2019). And the interviews collected for this study showed the same tendency:

When I got to Istanbul, I went to the protest.<sup>4</sup> That was literally the first thing I did. I sent the suitcase with my friends and came to the protest. . . . And, yes, it became a relief. [Those in Russia who are getting fired or detained because of their position] have their lives ruined; they cannot say anything about it. If, with the privilege of all this freedom, I also remain silent. . . Well, I simply do not have the moral right to. For the sake of my friends. (male respondent, 21, Saint Petersburg–Osh–Bishkek–Istanbul–Berlin)

## IMAGINING UNIMAGINABLE

Our sample of emigrants, which we labeled the shock wave of Russian emigration, comprises the people who left Russia during the first two weeks following the outburst of Russian military aggression against Ukraine. That was the period when the feeling of shock caused by the turn of the events was at its highest: many did not see the invasion coming or were unable to accept that a frontal war in Europe in the twenty-first century was indeed possible. All our respondents were not just quite shaken by the events that had already occurred but also feared the uncertainty and unpredictability of even the nearest future. It is also worth mentioning that the literal cost of leaving was at its highest (with numerous flights out of Russia being canceled and the remaining ones costing many times the usual price):

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<sup>4</sup> Since the beginning of March 2022, the Ukrainian community with the backing of the consulate has been holding anti-war protests in Istanbul on daily basis.

We were considering the most terrible options; back then it seemed that anything had become possible. Now that the war had started, the next thing you know—the sky just falls to the earth, and no one will feel even slightly surprised. You live your life, and suddenly you see how a warlock rides on a chupacabra. . . and then flies away on a broomstick. And that's it; after this moment, all the books that you've read go to hell. You've seen something like that, after it, the laws of physics are no longer the same. Anything can happen next. (female respondent, 24, Moscow–Antalya–Istanbul–Malta)

This is how one respondent described her process of decision-making on whether to stay in Russia or leave. The image of a magical character riding a monstrous creature<sup>5</sup>—also possibly a singular allusion to the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse<sup>6</sup>—seemed like a fitting metaphor for the times of great uncertainty when it was getting increasingly harder to draw a line between rational predictions and irrational fears.

In the early weeks and months of the full-scale war, the feeling of the abandonment of normal rationality was among the most frequently discussed topics. For many people accustomed to reflection and making a living through intellectual pursuits the tragedy of the war was not solely about the death and destruction it was bringing<sup>7</sup>—which goes without saying—but it was also perceived as a tragedy of a thinking person who cannot rely on their own knowledge and skills of critical analysis to predict what to expect next. So nobody was certain how to differentiate between paranoia bordering on insanity and not baseless concerns that rumors or images from the totalitarian Soviet past would become reality.

The chupacabra rider also embodies the two most prominent sources of metaphors—religion/mythology and popular culture—coming together. Alongside the uncertainty of the future, the precarity of the respondents' current position was also something to reflect upon. In this case, the limbo appeared to be the most frequently used and fitting metaphor (the same trend was occurring in the study of emigration to the South Caucasus [see the essay by Vlada Baranova and Verena Podolsky in this issue]):

It's incredibly warm in Antalya; the evenings are warm most of the time [the interview was conducted in April]. So we started to call it a kind of limbo that is slightly resembling heaven. . . . It is a very suspended state; there really is no line of fate that can be traced forward; such uncertainty. It is neither a part of

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<sup>5</sup> Chupacabra is a vampiric creature from Latin American folklore not infrequently featured in popular culture, including well-known cartoons and TV series.

<sup>6</sup> The images of and somewhat ironic references to the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse at some point became rather prominent on the internet, with the first horseman being Pestilence (i.e., COVID) and the second one being War.

<sup>7</sup> It is worth pointing out that many respondents, while having immense sympathy for Ukraine, perceived the war as an existential threat to Russia itself, at least to the Russia they knew and loved; the war appeared to be a singular event to undo all the progress ever achieved during the three post-Soviet decades.

hell nor a part of the afterlife; it is an entrance hall, a foyer from which it is still uncertain where you will go afterward. A misty foyer. (male respondent, 29, Moscow–Sharm El-Sheikh–Antalya–London)<sup>8</sup>

Besides the generally shared fear of the unpredictability of future events, many interlocutors spoke of other, more concrete fears that had prompted them to leave. Men were concerned about military draft or mobilization (the fear that indeed came true months later when an extremely loosely interpreted “partial” mobilization was declared in September).

On [February] 24 I realized that the whole country had turned into a military conscription office [*voenkomat*, lit., military commissariat]. I don’t like those. It’s a government agency that I hate the most. Even though I’ve never been in actual danger of being conscripted. It is that they can do whatever they want with your body: mobilize, put you in jail—whatever. (male respondent, 27, Moscow–Istanbul–Moscow–Istanbul)

Some of the respondents cited rumors about the Russian Security Council meeting to be held on March 4 that might result in the declaration of martial law. Instead, on that very date a new law (Federal Law No. 32) against “fake news” was introduced. It made the dissemination of “unreliable” information about the Russian Armed Forces and their operations punishable by imprisonment for up to 15 years. In other words, this law made simply speaking about the ongoing events as a war (the official state rhetoric was using the language of a “special military operation”) prohibited and potentially punishable by real prison time. While the law did not have retroactive power, it was applicable to the cases of “continuous crime” (*dliashcheesia pravonarushenie*), which might include social media posts that had been created prior to the law’s introduction and were not since deleted or were deleted but remained in search engines’ caches and internet archives. So, because of the characteristic vagueness of its formulation and the ways in which Russian courts had been working in the past years—with politically motivated cases virtually never resulting in acquittal—the law against “fake news” made a lot of people believe they might be in danger.

This law has silenced most of the anti-war protests inside the country. And while it was clear that the state does not have the capacity to come after every user who had ever posted anything against the war on social media, the logic of the Putin regime’s repressions is that they are deliberately random and a case could be open against a high-profile public persona as well as some private citizen with a very modest online presence and social media following. So, while it was impossible to imagine everybody being held accountable according to the new law, it was expected that it could happen to just about anybody.

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<sup>8</sup> This interview was conducted in Istanbul during the respondent’s short visit while he was still living in Antalya.

In this political climate besides the fears for their personal safety and freedom, for some activists and journalists emigration was the only opportunity to carry on with their activities—to have voice after exit, instead of putting themselves in danger or keeping quiet if they were to remain in Russia. As one of our interlocutors, a blogger and human rights advocate, summed it up:

I had a choice: either I immediately delete everything and sit quietly until the end, until everything somehow is resolved, or I leave and thus can say what I find necessary. What I believe is the right thing to say. (male respondent, 40, Moscow–Istanbul–Cologne)

He had neither savings nor experience of traveling abroad farther than some of the post-Soviet countries, yet he made a choice to leave Russia, as that seemed to be the only option to still have a voice.

While only a few of our respondents have left to escape possible persecution for their involvement in political activities, for the majority, as they reflected upon it, there was never one single motive. While there were people who left for what seemed to be economic reasons—international companies they worked with or for were leaving the Russian market, or their job simply ceased to exist—they always brought up moral reasons and their strong opposition to the war as another driving force:

Every day spent in the aggressor country felt like torture to me. I realized that I had flown out right on time. Another week and I don't even know. . . . I was terrified of losing myself, really. War is evil enough as it is; anyways it is killing people directly. But sort of indirectly as well it still killed, keeps killing everyone who is living in Russia. They live under such pressure, such stress. . . . You have to keep on living. So at some point you, well, transform to accept it. (female respondent, 36, Saint Petersburg–Istanbul)

After the law against “fake news” was introduced but even before it, the general fear of expanding repressions was also one of the main concerns driving people out of the country. And memories of the Soviet past and intimate knowledge of its history were making the turn of the post–February 24 events only more disturbing. Yet it should be noted that with the average age of the anti-war emigrants being 32 (according to an independent survey attempted by the participants of the OutRush project [Kamalov, Kostenko, and Zavadskaya 2022]), the majority had no personal experience of having lived even in the late Soviet Union. Only four of our respondents (aged 40–43) were among those who had started elementary school before the Soviet Union's collapse—although it was already during perestroika. So most of our interlocutors should owe their fears of the Soviet-style repressions to the collective trauma passed down through culture and history or to the memories of the traumatic past preserved in the family.

Nonetheless, almost every interviewee brought up fear of Soviet times and specifically Stalin's repressions coming back, as well as the idea of the Iron Curtain. If the country was difficult to escape in its not-so-distant past, why not expect the return of the same in the nearest future? Exactly this image of the borders being shut and rigorously guarded from the inside made getting out of the country so pressing.



When developing the research questions and design, we were interested to see if there was any connection between prior experience of living abroad, plans to emigrate even before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and intention to come back to Russia (at least after the regime change). But our respondents proved to have quite a wide variety of attitudes and strategies toward emigration. There were people who had lived and worked abroad but chose to come back to Russia because of a stronger connection they felt to their homeland compared to any other country; people who were considering or already planning to leave Russia, for whom the full-scale war just accelerated these events (although the actual move was usually not in the direction that they originally had in mind); people who never wanted to leave Russia before February 24 but now were not considering returning even after Vladimir Putin is gone—so strong were their feelings about their compatriots who had shown support for the war and who would remain part of the society even after the change of the regime.

One of the respondents aptly formulated her reasons:

People who used to make me happy to be back to Russia, they are no longer in Russia themselves. Russia, according to my understanding, the one that I deliberately came back to after living abroad—something I was very happy about—it's like stopping to exist on the territory of the Russian Federation. It is being relocated to Yerevan, Tbilisi, and Istanbul. (female respondent, 33, Moscow–Antalya–Istanbul–Prague–New York)

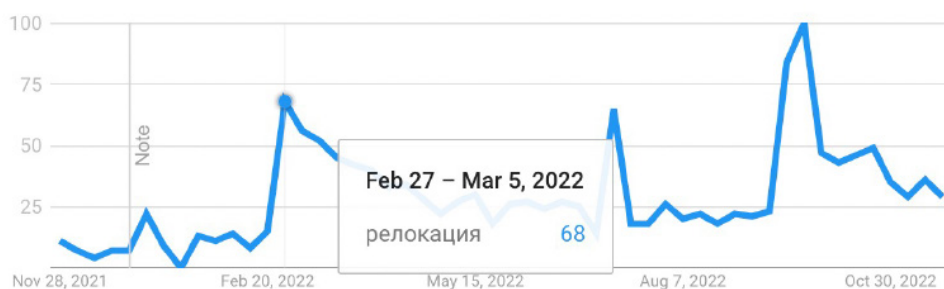
Some respondents, in contrast, pointed out how in the past they considered emigrating for good and focusing on building their career abroad but now felt responsibility and urgency for what their field of expertise—for example, history—could contribute to building post-Putin democratic Russia and what kind of work needed to be done on debunking the previous regime's propaganda and reflecting upon the problematic past.

## NAMING MATTERS

While I am using the term “emigration” when referring to the phenomenon under consideration (so that it can be easier paralleled with the earlier waves of Russian emigration and any scholarship on it), the matter of naming and self-definition was not that simple for many of our respondents. Some were quite eager to draw a line between their own experiences and those of the previous waves of Russian emigration—or any instances of emigration in the past at all—even though references to certain themes from the century-old past became quite a common place not to bring them up (even for those who never agreed with the adequacy of any historical parallels). These reference points included the 1920 evacuation of the remnants of the defeated White Army to what was still Constantinople back then (Lykova 2007) and the so-called philosophers' ships of 1922—a name given to the Soviet Russia's initiative to send dozens of non-loyal intellectuals abroad instead of imprisoning or executing them (Finkel 2003).

[This] is not emigration. I don't know what I would call this state. I wasn't trying to come up with a word for it. I have left. That's the right word. I have left for long. . . . Yet I have not severed ties with Russia; I am not a refugee. Neither am I an emigrant. I am not this. . . "relocant" or whatever it's called. I just left for the time being. I don't know what to call that. (male respondent, 34, Moscow–Istanbul–Bordeaux)

### Interest over time



**Figure 1.** Google Trends: dynamics of the search requests for the word “relocation” in Russian

While some of the respondents were simply uncertain about how to label their experience, a prominent alternative to “emigration” emerged. Google Trends shows a surge of popularity of the search requests for “relocation” in the week between February 27 and March 5, 2022 (however, the peak was not during the first wave but in the weeks between September 18 and October 1, after the mobilization was declared). “Relocation” was also selected among the words of the year (it took the third position after “war” and “mobilization”) by an independent board of Russian social sciences and humanities experts (see Turkova 2022). At the same time the word “emigration” was nowhere to be found on that list. An updated version of *kovcheg.live*, the website of the Ark (one of the major organizations working with and for the Russian anti-war emigrants), which was launched in August 2022, appears to be using the words “relocant” and “emigrant” interchangeably.

Still, there is a certain difference in connotations between “emigration” and “relocation”:

[In my case] well, it's an escape. I don't know, emigration is something deliberate. It's still something caused by an emergency, yes. But something deliberate. . . . Yes, it can also be with one backpack of stuff, but this is some kind of decision that takes a certain time [to make]. . . . Well, although, now, again, probably, yes, probably there are people who precisely migrate, who relocate. “To relocate” is quite fancy, I reckon. (male respondent, 21, Saint Petersburg–Osh–Bishkek–Istanbul–Berlin)

This is a quote from a respondent who described his own departure from Saint Petersburg on March 4 in terms of “escaping” or “fleeing.” His case highlighted how even people following the same route out of the country can perform different kinds of actions. He was fleeing, yet traveling together with friends who had a job offer in one of the EU countries and just needed time to get the paperwork for the whole family in order. Indeed “relocation” is often associated with moving for a job or with a job, such as an international company moving its office elsewhere or people relocating their own businesses out of Russia.

The whole issue of class or simply financial well-being not surprisingly played an important role in how people were attesting to their experiences. Those who had good savings, still maintained their sources of income while being able to work remotely, or believed in their ability to start a new business from scratch in a new place were more likely to describe their case of leaving Russia in terms of a “journey” or even “adventure.”

## INCONVENIENT PRESENT

We were joking that it was in the previous season—the wars were in the previous season. This season we were promised aliens, an uprising of the machines. . . What the heck again?! (female respondent, 24, Moscow–Antalya–Istanbul–Malta)

This is how one of the interlocutors was trying to reframe dramatic events that were happening before her eyes as if she was merely watching a TV series.

Undoubtedly, the colorful metaphors that many of the respondents were coming up with have a lot to do with their cultural and professional backgrounds. Other studies besides ours show that many of the representatives of the early wave of anti-war emigration were very well educated (Zavadskaya et al. 2023) and employed in the education, humanities, and creative spheres (the trend that changed during the far more diverse, mobilization-triggered emigration in September). The survey by the OutRush project has shown that about 80 percent of those who left Russia in late February–early March 2022 had higher education (Kamalov et al. 2022). Even if quick quantitative (OutRush) or small-scale qualitative studies (like this one) might not be perfectly representative, the tendency toward a much higher level of education in the earliest wave of anti-war emigration compared to the average in Russia—27 percent (Kamalov et al. 2022)—is undeniable.

But making references to mythology or popular culture while describing very real lived experiences can also be seen as a way to build a certain distance between the self and an inconvenient present we all found ourselves living through. Nikolai Epple’s book titled *Inconvenient Past* (2020) had quite a resonance at the time it came out and even greater one since the beginning of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Its subtitle reads “Memory of State Crimes in Russia and Other Countries.” But while Epple wrote about history, we and our interlocutors were living in it, with the country we were all born and grew up in committing war crimes in real time. Thus,

the desire to build at least some imaginary distance between the self and the ongoing events might be seen as a natural act of self-preservation.

Yet it can be also considered as an implementation of the defamiliarization (or estrangement, *ostranenie*) effect—a notion introduced by the writer and literary critic Viktor Shklovsky (1929) and further developed by the playwright Bertolt Brecht ([1936] 1961).<sup>9</sup> Defamiliarization is an artistic technique aimed at unsettling habitual ways of seeing the world in order to get a new and clearer look at the issues everybody takes for granted. And while the most canonical utilization of the estrangement would have been to look at the war through the eyes of the chupacabra rider, in this case, the war itself or Putin's seemingly irrational decision to start it was envisioned as an encounter with an eerie supernatural creature that nobody previously believed to exist. So the use of metaphors can be perceived not only as an attempt to escape from the terror of real life into an imaginary world but also as a way to utilize the lens and power of imagination exactly to take a closer look at reality.

## CONCLUSION

The sense of shock caused by the dramatic (and unexpected for many) turn of events on February 24, 2022, was indeed a dominant emotion among our respondents, whom we labeled a shock wave of Russian emigration. This sample comprised the people who left Russia within the first two weeks of the full-scale war and whose choices of a route were mostly limited to the visa-free countries. Among the reasons to take an immediate course of action most frequently mentioned were strong disagreement with state politics and the inability to affect it in any way, as well as the general sense of the unpredictability of the future combined with the expectations that the political and economic situation in Russia would continue to deteriorate. Many spoke of a general sense that it was no longer possible to fully rely on rational thinking for predicting any future developments.

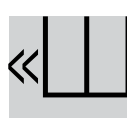
While many of the respondents reported different symptoms of emotional distress, individual economic circumstances seemed to play a prominent role in how they were attesting to their experiences: those who maintained some sense of economic stability (still working in their jobs remotely or believing that they will be able to start a new business abroad) were more likely to describe their situation in more positive terms, to the extent of labeling their emigration as an adventure or a journey. And what proved to be the most remarkable part of the data gathered through the in-depth interviews was the wide use of imagination and metaphors to describe the trauma of witnessing the sudden outbreak of the war from the side of the aggressor country and of being forced into a rushed and unplanned emigration because of it. Such metaphors could be interpreted in two ways: as an attempt to build some distance between the self and the troubling historical events unraveling in real time or, on the contrary, to take a close, undiverted look at the “inconvenient present” by employing the defamiliarization effect as a tool of reflection.

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<sup>9</sup> In Brecht's case it is more frequently translated as “alienation.”

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## «ШОКОВАЯ ВОЛНА» РОССИЙСКОЙ ЭМИГРАЦИИ И САМОРЕФЛЕКСИЯ ЕЕ ПРЕДСТАВИТЕЛЕЙ

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В этом эссе вводится понятие «шоковой волны» российской эмиграции, применимое к гражданам, идентифицировавшим себя как категорических противников полномасштабного вторжения в Украину и выбравшим покинуть Россию в течение первых недель после 24 февраля 2022 года. Основываясь на глубинных интервью, автор предлагает обзор индивидуальных мотивов эмиграции, связанных с ними страхов и ожиданий, а также примеров рефлексии над собственным опытом проживания трагического исторического момента, где, как оказывается, важную роль играют образы и метафоры.

**Ключевые слова:** миграция; эмиграция; Российско-украинская война; травма; протест