Imbi Paju 10.04.2014

Firstly I would like to thank the organisers of this event and it's a privilege for me to participate here in this seminar in Tel Aviv. There has been a great deal of interesting information shared here regarding the Estonian Jewish culture prior to the war. I am not a historian, but rather a film producer and writer. I came here not only to present but I am also here in the capacity of a journalist, film maker and newspaper reporter. Israel has been a source of much inspiration for me. It is here that one can feel the Jewish peoples' zest for life and creative abilities. It is here too one feels the vibrations of reflective thought and much remembering. Here, in this land, the essence of the Estonian Jewish culture and memory assemble via the cultures of Israel, Estonia and Europe. This is a beautiful land.

For me, history represents peoples' lives. History is full of psychology and memory. A difficult history of ostracized memories: memories that you weren't allowed to remember. 2014 marks the seventy-fifth year when Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union agreed mutually in the notorious Molotov- Ribbentrop Pact to have the Baltic countries remain in the Soviet Union. Seventy-five years' ago the war in Europe ignited when both Hitler and Stalin marched into Poland, and immediately afterwards Stalin invaded Finland and Hitler continued on his conquest of Europe. The Soviet Union occupied Estonia in 1940. Then, Nazi Germany took over and occupied Estonia in 1941. And finally the Soviet Union re-occupied Estonia in 1944.

Once Estonia was taken over all volunteer organisations were shut down. These enterprises had provided people with a great deal of life sustaining vitality. When 32 Jewish organisations were immediately liquidated one can only imagine how that must have affected the community.

It wasn't until 1998 that I learned about similar collaborative Jewish organisations in Finland. The Finnish minister Max Jakobson told me about his annual trips to Estonia every summer before World War 2 to learn German. He said that many Jewish Estonian and Finnish athletes organised sports events between them where they visited each other as well. During the Cold War it was forbidden in Finland to talk about these times. Even in the Finnish libraries any reference to an independent Estonia prior to the war had to be destroyed in order to appease the Soviet Union.

In 2008 I produced my documentary film about the sisters of the Baltic Sea. The focus of the film was to reveal the pre-war cooperation for civil defense between Finnish and Estonian women. This organisation was called Lotta in Finland and in Estonia, the Womens' Homeguard. These were citizen volunteer organisations and their goal was to be prepared for any crisis situation and to prevent war. Any Finnish and Estonian citizen was free to become a member.

Estonian and Finnish Jews were also members. They were typically active in their respective Jewish

organisations but there were also active Jewish members in the Womens' Homeguard.

We have very little information on this subject since right after the 1940 Soviet occupation of Estonia, this organisation was proclaimed as anti-Soviet Union and was later labeled as fascist. The Estonian doctor and psychologist and survivor of the gulag prisons Heino Noor told me that in western Estonia, in Haapsalu where he was from, his mother's girlfriend, a Jewish doctor named Mrs. Klas, was also a member of the womens' homeguard.

Together they attended several womens' homeguard courses that offered instruction in food preparation in crisis situations. Mrs. Klas taught Estonian women how to provide medical services during a crisis situation.

In 1941 many of the women directors of these womens' organisations were sent to forced labor camps in Siberia or were simply shot. After the war, the Finnish Lotta organisation was considered a fascist element.
In 2008 I met the Finnish Jewish lady Hanna Eckerd in Finland who had been a member of the Lotta organisation. Her parents had strong ties with the Jewish organisations in Estonia. Her sister became friends with a young Estonian Jewish man during a Jewish youth sports event in Helsinki. They had planned on getting maried before the war broke out. Unfortunately, she remembers very little from that period of her life since she was already ninety when I interviewed her.

In 1941, four hundred influential Jewish people as well as many activists were deported to Siberia. In fact, just about all the Estonian ministers, members of Parliament, the President, the police, officers and their families etc. were sent to death camps in Russia. Thirty million books were destroyed. The republic of Estonia came to an end and no longer existed. Then came the German occupation. Germans together with their collaboraters brought almost 1000 Estonian Jews to their death. With this came a period of great fear. People became silent and didn't speak about their previous lives and still they were brought to their death.

During the Soviet period we never spoke about the Holocaust, the anti Jewish terrorist campaign carried out by the Nazis. During the Soviet period we were told that the Nazis created the deportation camps in Estonia and Soviet people perished there. Everything that we've spoken about today is thanks to the fact that Estonia is free and the state of Israel exists. Hanna Eckherd states at the end of my film that the Finns remained free but they had to subjugate themselves to the Soviet demands. They did not acknowledge independent Estonia since Estonia was now a closed nation. Hanna Eckherd said in the film that the Finns were also fearful. Today, with this memory reinstated, let's restore value and worth and connect via memory all peoples and cultures. Let's create empathy. This is what we have done here today. Thanks to Mark Rybak we now have an Estonian Jewish museum. This is an example how the citizen's of societies can preserve themselves.

In conclusion there will be additional clips from my film where Hanna Eckert says a few words. Thank you.