

THE MEMORY OF THE SHOAH IN THE POST-SOVIET LATVIA

Bella Zisere

Since gaining independence in 1991, Latvia has implemented a number of important political decisions to mark its secession from the former Soviet system. Many of these involve the Shoah and its memory. The Shoah itself remains one of the most difficult historical events not only for the Latvian Jewish population, but for ethnic Latvians as well. Approximately 80,000 Latvian Jews were annihilated on Latvian soil in 1941–42, and over 100,000 Jews from Western European countries were taken to Latvia to share their fate. This article explores the transformations that have taken place in the study and interpretation of these events in independent Latvia. It examines the attitudes of Latvian society as a whole and, more specifically, the changes that have occurred in the attitude of the Latvian Jewish community.

A brief historical review is necessary. The territory comprising Latvia was a part of the Russian Empire until 1918, when Latvia became independent after the Brest-Litovsk Treaty. It was a parliamentary republic in the period 1918–34. Latvian legislation concerning the rights of minorities and the freedom of worship was relatively flexible, dealing primarily with public education. No steps were taken to combat manifestations of everyday Antisemitism. The year 1934 was a crucial one in Latvian history, marking the end of the first Latvian Republic and the beginning of the six-year dictatorship of Karlis Ulmanis. During these years, the official political slogan was “Latvia to Latvians,” which resulted in economic repression of the Jewish population along with other minorities. Today, there is a strong tendency within Latvian population to idealize the periods of the First Republic and the Dictatorship and to view them with a certain nostalgia.

In June 1940, Latvia was occupied by troops of the Soviet Union. The working-class population, including Jews, was positive about this change. The latter had an additional reason to welcome the Soviets: a hope that this would ensure protection against Nazi Germany. The year 1940 and the Soviet presence brought radical changes, ranging from the elimination of all independent political life, to repression of all forms of religious belief, nationalization of real estate and private companies, and the massive deportation of the “kulaks”¹ to Siberia. It is important to note that out of approximately 30,000 deported Soviet Latvian citizens, over 4000 were Jews. The year 1940 marked Latvian collective historical memory as the year of violence and blood, and is today referred to by Latvians as “Baigais gads” (The Terrible Year). In contemporary Latvia, these deportations to Siberia are often described as “the genocide of the Latvian people.”

After 13 months of Soviet rule, Latvia was occupied by the German army in July 1941. Some segments of the local population considered this to be a liberation from the Soviet

regime and welcomed the Nazis. After the Red Army fled, many Latvians joined the Latvian police. The far-right group Perkonkrusts (originally established in the early 1930s by Latvian ultra-nationalistic young intellectuals, and officially outlawed after 1934) and the group Araja brigade volunteered to help the Germans to solve the Jewish question in Latvia.

As far as the extermination of the Jewish population is concerned, what happened was not very different from the typical scenario in many other Eastern European countries. In the first days of the war, Jews, mostly men, in Riga and in many smaller towns were taken away by the Latvian police. Many of them were murdered in the Riga prison. A few months later, ghettos were created in Riga and in other Latvian cities, such as Daugavpils and Libau (Liepaja). People from smaller villages were either taken to these ghettos or murdered in the nearby forests. Most of the Latvian Jewish population was annihilated during the *Aktionen* (collective killings) in 1941 and early 1942. By the end of 1941, the Jewish population was reduced to 6000 at the most.² By November 1943, when the Latvian ghettos were liquidated, the remaining 4550 Latvian and 7784 Central and Western European Jews were transferred to the central concentration camp Kaiserwald Riga.³ Many young “productive” Jews were placed into work camps in Latvia and Estonia, such as AEG, Lenta, and Nereda. Between September and October 1944, when the Red Army was approaching Latvian territory, the remaining Jews were evacuated by the Germans. Some were taken to Hamburg or to Liepaja, but most people were shipped from Riga to Danzig and then to German camps, notably Stutthof.⁴ From there, some of them were taken to work in German work camps, and others were directed to other camps. The few survivors, who numbered around 1000, either escaped from the death marches or were liberated by the Allies in the spring of 1945.

During the decades of Soviet occupation, the memory of the Shoah was a suppressed subject, which was never publicly evoked in Latvia. Those rare memorials which were erected on the sites of mass killings were dedicated “To the victims of the fascist barbarity,” even when the majority of the victims were Jews. Thus, no opportunity was given for a specific Jewish tragedy to occupy a space in the Soviet collective memory. Instead, official politics insisted on glorifying generic “Soviet” heroes, in the person of partisans and the Red Army. Yet for Jews the memory of the war and the Shoah became a crucial element of their identity. In the 1970s, many Jews associated the authorities’ reluctance to recognize the Shoah with their refusal to deliver exit visas to Jews; taken together, this provoked an even stronger desire for emigration. Regular memorial gatherings in Rumbula (the site of the murder of approximately 25,000 Jews from the Riga ghetto) attracted a growing number of Latvian Jews, despite the threat that such participation presented to the tranquillity of their professional and private lives.

Since the fall of the USSR and the opening of many Soviet-era archives in Latvia, it has become apparent that the only aspect of the Shoah legacy to which the Soviet authorities paid some attention was hunting down and condemning Nazi collaborators, whose number in the Baltic countries was quite significant.

Post-Communist Latvia

Today’s Latvia would appear to be completely different from the Latvia of the Soviet era. On the one hand, the Shoah is no longer repressed. Indeed, it has been officially recognized as part of Latvian history, and new memorials have been erected all over the Republic. July 4 was proclaimed “Holocaust Victims’ Remembrance Day,” and on that day leading articles about the Latvian Shoah feature in national newspapers. At the same time,

the question of collaboration remains a problematic issue. In particular, Efraim Zuroff, the director of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles, who is currently trying to find surviving Nazi collaborators in post-Soviet countries, has stated that he encounters strong resistance and negative attitudes from the local population in Latvia.

The Latvian government, conscious of the image of the country on the international scene and in particular in the European Union, has undertaken a number of measures to ensure Shoah recognition in Latvia. It has undeniably increased the level of overall awareness of Latvians regarding the Shoah. Except for a small percentage of far-right nationalists, the Latvian population does not contest the Jewish genocide, at least publicly.

Since the fall of the USSR, a number of Latvian scholars have published works on this issue. Many of them target mainstream readers, while some present a more academic and scientific analysis.⁵ Annual conferences, such as "Jews in the Changing World" and "Symposium of the Commission of the Historians of Latvia," pay much attention to shedding light on the Shoah in Latvia. Nevertheless, during field studies, we discovered that many Latvians are reluctant to accept the officially acknowledged version of what happened in Latvia during the Second World War. Moreover, the great majority of Latvian civil society, often including the intelligentsia, is still prisoner to numerous stereotypes and omissions regarding Latvian history. What are some of the elements that slow down Holocaust recognition within Latvian society and create a clash between the Jewish community and the rest of the Latvian population?

One of these elements concerns nostalgia towards pre-war Latvia. Popular discourse, including the work of some eminent scholars, claims that pre-war Latvia was a profoundly Philosemitic country. For instance, Andrew Ezergailis, an American historian born in Latvia, and one of the first historians to have worked on the Shoah in Latvia, claims that Antisemitism in Latvia appeared only during the German occupation. Notably, he argues that "pre-war Latvia was not a society impregnated with anti-Semitism ... Latvia grew from multi-cultural and multi-linguistic Russia, but if the tradition of tolerance got lost in Russia, it survived in Latvia."⁶ According to another Latvian historian, Leo Dribins, "in Latvia, Antisemitism wasn't developed. It was not fostered by any Republican administration, nor the Saeima [Latvian Parliament]."⁷ Aivars Stranga, Director of the Department of History in the University of Latvia, on the other hand, opposes this opinion, which has become widespread. According to him, "Latvia could hardly be called a philo-Semitic country: there were no philo-Semitic countries in Europe, except for Lithuania in the very beginning of the XXth century."⁸

The representation of Latvian history in school textbooks is another topical question for contemporary Latvia. Since the fall of the USSR, Latvia has made considerable progress on this issue. Political mistakes as bad as when the former Latvian President, Guntis Ulmanis, publicly offered to a Latvian school a history textbook by Alfred Shilde (a Latvian far-right historian, who propagated virulently Antisemitic ideas on the eve of the Second World War) are unthinkable today. The introduction of some elements concerning the Shoah into the school curriculum is considered an important achievement, especially in comparison with the Soviet era. It is nevertheless important to mention that this measure was undertaken due to the pressure of international (notably European) organizations and it met (and still often meets) a negative reaction from the population of Latvia. We will only mention in passing the violently critical reaction of far-right Latvian newspapers, such as *DDD*, *Patriots*, or *A Latvian in Latvia*, as well as of some blogs and internet forums on Latvian news portals.⁹

Another item of contention with regard to the Latvian approach to Holocaust studies is its tendency to generalize. For example, several years ago, a group of Latvian scholars

created a teaching manual¹⁰ with a student textbook¹¹ to study the Shoah. These books make striking generalizations. The genocide is introduced as a very remote historical event; there is little content on the Shoah in Latvia.

A complete survey of Latvian post-Soviet school history textbooks within the framework of this article is impossible, but, for example, one of the most recent textbooks, *The History of Latvia in the XXth Century*, from Jumava publishing house in Riga (2004), caused an international scandal. In this book, Salaspils concentration camp (the prisoners of which, mostly Jews and Russian prisoners of war, were subjected to medical experiments) was called "Salaspils extended prison and work re-education camp," and no further detail was given.

A very thorough and complete analysis of the Shoah as presented in Latvian school textbooks was published by the Latvian political science academic Juris Dubrovskij. In his conclusion, he states that

The fact that problems still exist in Latvia can be attested to by final examinations in high schools. We can underline general tendencies in the answers of students studying in Russian or in Latvian. While the former idealize the USSR and today's Latvia is shown as a country of apartheid, the works of Latvian-speaking schoolchildren present "eternal Latvia", that is constantly being occupied ... and Latvians were and still are victims of History. New methods of teaching history are only just being implemented. The nation is being formed not only by teaching about the success, but also, and maybe even more, about the tragedies, turning them from tragedies of distinct groups into national historical memory. Unfortunately, the essence of the tragedy is sometimes being transformed.

... These questions are important for any democratic State and society. But the most important is the question of moral responsibility of what is happening in a country; Is there any possibility to educate a feeling of responsibility for a State while ... partially remaining silent about difficult issues? Probably not. Without also educating a feeling of responsibility Latvia can hardly become a real democratic state.¹²

This conclusion shows both the progress and the shortfalls of Holocaust education in Latvian secondary schools.

Jews and Soviet Power in Latvia

Another historical issue, often discussed in academic research and in the media, concerns the myth of Jewish support for Soviet rule in 1940. For instance, an international historical conference on Latvia during the Second World War took place at the University of Latvia in June 2004. During the conference, a long and animated debate focused on the question of whether Latvian Jews were *tanku buchotaji* ("tank kissers"). The allusion refers to the events of June 1940, when Soviet troops occupied Latvia. According to received opinion, Latvian Jews were the ones who most welcomed the advent of Soviet power and therefore betrayed independent Latvia. In particular, one of the participants of the conference related her personal memories of 1940, including accounts of every Jew running to the streets to welcome the Soviets. Her account contradicts interviews with Latvian Jewish survivors of the Shoah. They almost unanimously maintain that while working-class Jews, along with many working-class Latvians, welcomed Soviet rule, wealthier Jews, especially from Latvian-speaking and German-speaking environments, were not looking forward to joining the USSR. Moreover, on the eve of WWII, some of the Jews preferred the prospect of

being occupied by the Germans, rather than by the Soviets, considering the Germans a more culturally and intellectually developed nation.

The assumption that most Jews received benefits from Soviet control is subject to debate: Jewish property was nationalized, the practice of Judaism was restricted and many bourgeois Jewish families were sent to Siberia. The only measurable benefit consisted in the abolition of ethnic discrimination in the civil service, which was the case in independent Latvia. Many of the interviewees also mention the fact that the word *Zhids*, which means "Jew" in old Latvian language, but in Russian sounds offensive, was forbidden under the Soviets.

Far-right newspapers, such as *Latvietis Latvija*, *Patriots*, and *DDD*, uphold the belief that Jews were responsible for the Soviet terror in 1940 ("The Terrible Year"). However, the only well-known Jew involved in the deportations of 1940 was Semjon Shustin, a member of the Soviet secret police, the majority of whose members were of Russian or Latvian origin. Latvian popular opinion in general is less radical about Jewish participation in the Soviet terror. Nevertheless, a prevalent opinion is that most Latvians collaborating with the Nazis did so as a consequence of the resentment they felt about Jewish collaboration with the Soviets. This idea is not new; even during the Soviet era emigrant Latvian authors expressed similar convictions.¹³ Nevertheless, it is disappointing to observe that this myth, common to many Eastern European countries, is still propagated in democratic post-Soviet Latvia.

Another element concerning the memory of the Shoah in Latvia is the use and abuse of the famous dichotomy Nazism / Stalinism.¹⁴ Decades of the Soviet totalitarian regime in Latvia are represented as a tremendous trauma to the Latvian people (at the same time, the people tend to neutralize, if not to idealize, the radical character of the pre-war dictatorship of Karlis Ulmanis, which was also a totalitarian regime). Consequently, after the fall of the Soviet Union, Communism in general and "The Terrible Year" in particular, tended to be among the most discussed and investigated issues of modern Latvian history. The Museum of Occupation was opened in Riga. Films about that epoch were made (for example, *Baiga Vasara [A Terrible Summer]*, 1999, telling a love story in the context of the eruption of the Second World War in Latvia).

These events are frequently compared to the Jewish Genocide during the Shoah. One of the most recent political disputes between the Latvian government and the Jewish community occurred when Sandra Kalniete, the Foreign Minister, suggested in public that dying in Soviet Gulags in Siberia was as terrible as being killed in Nazi concentration camps. This assumption outraged some Latvian Jews, who also maintain that the few Latvian Jewish survivors of the war were the Jews deported to Siberia and therefore beyond the reach of the Nazis and their collaborators. This phenomenon of bringing together the crimes of "Auschwitz and Kolyma" is described notably by French scholar Tzvetan Todorov.¹⁵ He suggests that this parallel is usually rejected by the victims of Fascism, but used both by victims of Stalinism and by Fascist executioners. For the latter, bringing together these concepts can be used as a justification for their acts, whereas the victims of the Communist regime use it as an accusation. In this perspective, it is clear that making a parallel creates a conflict of interests and of social representations of these two ethnic groups: Jews and ethnic Latvians.

Shoah Memory among Latvians and Latvian Jews

Having demonstrated the problems of remembering the Shoah in contemporary Latvia, it is important to mention also a considerable breakthrough that has taken place in

the Latvian Republic during the last few years. In the first years of independence, most scholars researching the Shoah belonged to Jewish organizations. More recently, the University of Latvia has produced a number of non-Jewish scholars whose work focuses on Jewish history in Latvia and, more specifically, on the Shoah. These Latvian researchers include Rudite Viksne, Svetlana Bogojavlenska, Irene Shneider, Dzintars Erglis, Aigars Urtans and Arturs Zhvinklis. In particular, Rudite Viksne's article on the Arajs Kommando members as seen in the KGB trial files was a fruit of thorough analysis of the newly opened KGB archives.¹⁶ The same can be said about her research on the extermination of Jews in the town of Venstpils, in 1941. In addition, the newspaper articles written by young Latvian journalists on memorial dates are more in-depth and rigorously researched than articles that appeared in the first years of independence.

No exhaustive conclusion can be made regarding the perception of the Shoah in contemporary Latvian civil society. On one hand, progress has evidently been made in comparison with the Soviet era and the years of Perestroika and early independence. On the other hand, public discourse in Latvia often remains either hostile or uninformed about what took place. Some of the important aspects of Latvian history are still being omitted or misinterpreted. Nevertheless, if in the first years of independence we could only talk about the progress on the governmental level, the most recent progress is represented by the emergence of a number of young, "post-Soviet" Latvian political scientists and historians who are willing to study the issue of the Shoah in Latvia. Even though this new-found interest may also be fostered by the possibility of obtaining grants from international organizations, the first important step, i.e. the assimilation of the issue by at least part of the Latvian intellectual elite, has probably been accomplished.

While this process occurs among Latvian elites, how has the memory of the Shoah been transformed within the Jewish community of Latvia?

During the Soviet era, the memory of the Shoah became one of the most important elements of Jewish identity in Latvia. The post-war generation, educated under the doctrine of scientific atheism, generally didn't maintain Jewish traditions. A sense of victimhood was accentuated by the officially Antisemitic politics of the Soviet administration. Refusal of the Soviet state to accept the Shoah as part of Jewish memory, refusal to authorize Jewish emigration from the USSR, and anti-Israeli policies were encompassed in the more general phenomenon of state Antisemitism. Soviet Jewish identity was therefore shaped as a response to these three issues.

The elderly, who themselves witnessed the Shoah in Latvia, were often reluctant to talk about it, either afraid of troubles that doing so could cause in Soviet Latvia, or traumatized by their experiences. Nevertheless, even their vocabulary often contained allusions to the genocide. For instance, one of our interviewees remembers her mother referring to people she really hated as "Arajs" (an allusion to the Aja brigade).¹⁷

During the decades of Soviet rule, Latvian Jews organized regular meetings in Rumbula (the site of a massacre of approximately 25,000 Latvian Jews). Most Latvian Jews listened to the songs of Soviet dissident bards about the Jewish genocide, and read *The Diary of Anne Frank*, one of the rare books related to the Shoah published in the USSR.¹⁸ At the same time, as mentioned above, the majority of them never talked about the Shoah in public, afraid of trouble from the authorities. While refusing to forget, many Latvian Jews nonetheless conformed to the Soviet policy of official silence.

As the official regime changed after Perestroika, what happened to Jewish self-determination in Latvia?

As already noted, during the Soviet regime Jewish identity was shaped by negative and positive features. On the negative side were official Antisemitism, the non-recognition of the Shoah and the refusal to let Jews emigrate. Unifying elements were the memory of the Shoah, attachment to the State of Israel, and a sense of exclusiveness resulting from the discrimination. In independent Latvia, the situation is different. Official Antisemitism amongst Latvia is insignificant; therefore, my hypothesis is that the level of perceived Antisemitism amongst Latvian Jews has decreased dramatically since the fall of the USSR. As far as the bond to the State of Israel and the desire to emigrate is concerned, since most Jews who felt a profound bond with Israel emigrated during the "great emigration" in the 1990s, attachment to Israel is less central for contemporary Latvian Jewish identity than it was several decades before.¹⁹

As far as collective memory is concerned, the situation is more complicated. After the independence of Latvia in 1990, the relationship between Latvian Jews and their collective memory changed. On the one hand, Latvia recognized their right to remember the Shoah: people who participated in commemorations and talked about the genocide in public no longer risked their careers. Monuments to the victims of the Shoah were erected, the latter no longer hidden behind the denomination of "peaceful Soviet citizens."

On the other hand, the recognition of the Shoah in Latvia coincided with a certain re-evaluation of the Latvian past. What was considered impossible during the Soviet era became accepted in independent Latvia. For instance, the word *Zhids* (translated from Latvian as "Jew" but also as "Kike") was considered offensive and was removed from the Latvian language. The debate on re-introducing this word emerged in Latvia several years ago, with numerous Latvian politicians and intellectuals involved. For Latvian Jews, this word is associated with Latvian Antisemitism on the eve of the Second World War, and, consequently, with the Shoah.

After the fall of the USSR, former members of the Latvian Legion (part of the German *Waffen SS*, either conscripted or having freely volunteered during the war) have organized annual parades in the centre of Riga since independence. These parades are usually held with the authorization of the authorities. As recently as March 2005 the Legionnaires received permission to parade in the center of Riga.

Such events refresh the memory of the genocide within the Jewish community, and provide an incentive for Latvian Jews to continue the work of memory and show the importance of this work in contemporary Latvia. Moreover, this activity is nowadays perfectly legitimate. Therefore, it could be hypothesized that the memory of the Shoah might occupy a different place in Latvian Jewish identity in the post-Communist era. Instead of being a part of "Jewish response," often clandestine, to the Antisemitic authorities, it might be transformed into an epistemological interest, a kind of "civic religion," based on reading and research, as is often the case in Western European countries.

Our field studies, conducted over the past three years in Latvia, tend to refute this hypothesis. Most Latvian Jews claim that Shoah memory is a crucial element of their Jewishness.²⁰ The rare representatives of the Jewish community for whom the memory of the Shoah is no longer framed by Soviet ideology, are either scholars working on the question or religiously orthodox Jews. Religious Jews claim that the memory of the Shoah is not an important element of their Jewishness, in comparison with Judaism. Since such individuals are numerically insignificant in Latvia (there are usually no more than 10–20 people in the Riga synagogue on Shabbat and no more than ten people in the Riga Beit Midrash or study hall, their response would appear anomalous for Latvian Jewry as a whole.

As far as the so-called intellectual elite are concerned, a number of Jews started studying the issue thoroughly after the fall of the USSR. It is noteworthy that the Jewish museum in Riga was created thanks to the efforts of Latvian historian Margers Vestermanis and other activists. It is important to observe that in recent years Jewish and non-Jewish scholars have begun to work together, notably in the Riga Jewish Museum and in the Center of Judaic Studies at the University of Latvia. For instance, they insisted on erecting a monument to the most famous Latvian savior of Jews, Zhanis Lipke.²¹ Besides that, thanks to their efforts, the Riga municipality agreed, after long debate, to inscribe a remark about "local collaborators" on the monument in Rumbula forest, erected in 2002.²²

As for the rest of the population, interviews showed that Latvian Jews remain, to a great extent, prisoners of Soviet logic. Most of the interviewed Latvian Jews claimed that memory of the Shoah was important for them. However, the surprising paradox was the fact that this memory was still inseparable from the perception of oneself as a foreigner, in some way excluded from the rest of the society. For example, a survivor, H.F., admits,

I don't like when they talk about Jews, even if it is linked to the parades of the legionnaires. It doesn't make any sense. I don't like talking about it in the public. For my son, it's not a problem. For me, it is.²³

R.S., also a survivor of the Shoah, declares,

I don't think that trials against Nazi collaborators have to take place now. The Wiesenthal Center is often chasing people who already were sentenced during the Soviet era, and above all, it fosters Antisemitism ... I think that in Jewish schools, there should be a subject about the memory of the Shoah. In Latvian schools some information might be introduced. Kids know so little, what can a common teacher teach them? ... The most important: it should not cause any Antisemitism.²⁴

S.P., born after the Second World War, is active in the community. She organizes guided tours to Jewish memorials in Latvia and monitors the course on the Shoah in Europe which is offered by Hebrew University for Latvian Jewish students. Her point of view is similar:

The important thing is not to get involved into politics if you are Jewish. ... I think that guided tours to Jewish memorials should not be organized for non-Jews. You never know what Gentiles are thinking about when they are listening. They are potentially dangerous. Especially Latvians. Russians, at least, are more sincere, even if it can mean less polite, not to say ruder.

The *perceived* Antisemitism among members of the Jewish community is thus dramatically higher than the level of actual Antisemitism in contemporary Latvia.

It is clear that members of the Jewish community of Latvia attach much importance to the memory of the Shoah. At the same time, only a very limited part of the community produces any real work of memory, publishing articles, organizing conferences, talking about the Shoah in public and negotiating with the government (like, for example, the group of young Jewish students, preoccupied by the memory of their community, who participated in renovation of the old Jewish cemetery in Riga).

The remaining majority is either ruminating about the past without talking about it in public (as is the case mainly of elderly people) or more or less ignorant of the question (mainly the younger generation). For many Latvian Jews, memory of the Shoah, undeniably important, is tightly linked to the Antisemitism of the surrounding society. Moreover, it

corresponds to a subject that should not be discussed in public and definitely not with non-Jews. The opinion that talking about the Shoah and teaching schoolchildren about what happened can only harm the Jewish community of Latvia, who are assumed to be living in a hostile society, is widespread. This is not a surprising conclusion considering that elderly people constitute the majority of the Latvian Jewish community.

Conclusion

The transformation of the memory of the Shoah in Latvia after the fall of the USSR is quite paradoxical. We can observe a certain number of positive changes and measures implemented in order to promote the work of memory of the Shoah in Latvia. If in the first years of independence, these activities were motivated solely by international organizations, today we can observe that some work is being performed by the native intellectual elite.

At the same time, the great majority of people remain prisoners of a subjective and partial vision of the Shoah. The majority of ethnic Latvians (including intellectuals) still adopt a nostalgic approach to the past and do not contest the myth of Jewish Communist power on the eve of the Second World War. They often generalize the Shoah, repress the details and fail to separate the Jewish genocide from the wave of deportations of Latvians to Siberia in 1940.

Most Latvian Jews, in turn, remain generally inactive, reluctant to discuss or promote the issue, or to support education about the Shoah in Latvian schools. Many of those who join the Association of Former Prisoners of the Ghetto do so exclusively in order to receive its financial benefits. They perceive themselves as being implicitly excluded from a wider society that is Antisemitic in its essence and therefore potentially dangerous.

Yet steps forward have undoubtedly been made in recent years. A number of people, generally from academia and usually born after the Second World War, are increasingly involved in producing real work of memory in Latvia. It is unimportant whether their zeal is stimulated by their personal background, mere curiosity or the availability of financial grants. As for the masses, Latvian or Jewish (if the Latvian Jewish population of approximately 12,000 people can be called "masses"), the issue of the Shoah remains a source of misunderstanding and latent inter-communal conflict. Still central for Latvian Jewish identity, still embarrassing for Latvian collective memory, the Jewish genocide in Latvia remains the issue where research and logic are often replaced by passion and omission.

NOTES

1. From Russian *kulak* (fist), a word used to mark out prosperous peasants, who were considered "class enemies."
2. Levin, "Some Basic Facts on Latvian Jewry."
3. Ibid.
4. Ezergailis, *Holokausts vacu okupetaja Latvija*.
5. For example, Leo Dribins's historical works on Antisemitism in Latvia and on Latvian–Jewish relations.
6. Ezergailis, *Holokausts vacu okupetaja Latvija*. This and all other translations from the Latvian are my own.
7. Dribins et al., *Latviesu ebreju kopiena*, 41.
8. Stranga, *Ebreji un diktaturas Baltija*, 154.

9. See, notably, internet forums of the leading Latvian news portal Delfi ((rus.delfi.lv) and (www.delfi.lv)) in Russian and in Latvian. Articles concerning the Holocaust in Latvian school manuals (for instance, an article by Lato Lapsa on January 28, 2005, available online at (http://www.delfi.lv/news/comment/comment/article.php?id=10194386) (accessed 7 November 2005) have provoked animated debate.
10. Ieva, *Holokausts*.
11. Ieva et al., *Holokausts*.
12. Juris, *Kholokost v latviiskikh uéebnikakh istorii*.
13. For instance, see Lejins, *Latvian–Jewish Relations*.
14. On the dichotomy Nazism/Stalinism, see notably Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism* and *Le système totalitaire*.
15. Todorov, *Abuse of the Memory*.
16. Rudite, "Arāja komandas dalībnieks pēc padomju tiesas prāvu materiāliem."
17. Interview with F. in Riga, July 2003.
18. For example, Alexander Galitch, whose songs about the Shoah became extremely popular among Soviet, and, particularly, Latvian Jews.
19. Field studies show that attachment to Israel remains nevertheless relatively significant for members of today's Latvian Jewish community. Most of the interviewees claim that they feel a special bond with Israel and consider that it is important to help the State of Israel. This claim is often linked to the affirmation that one must remember the Shoah. This interesting paradox was revealed by James E. Young in his article "Holocaust Memorials in America," explaining this phenomenon using the example of American Jewry:

In fact, without the traditional pillars of Torah, faith and language to bind them, the majority of Jews in America turned increasingly to the Holocaust as their vicariously shared memory ... For many Jewish Americans, the point of common identification with the Jews of Israel seemed to lie in their potential destruction. In a perverse way, love of Israel and Holocaust memory now seemed to be two sides of the same coin: the more acute the Holocaust memory, the greater the fear that Israel now stood on the brink of another Holocaust.

This observation can also be made about Latvian Jews.

20. This phenomenon seems to persist in other countries of the former Soviet Union. Zvi Gitelman, in his article "Thinking about Being Jewish in Russia and Ukraine," shows that "remembering the Holocaust" remains more important for Russian and Ukrainian Jews than any other identity referent, except for "defending Jewish honour and dignity" and "being proud of one's nationality."
21. Zhanis Lipke, a labourer from Riga, saved several dozens of Jews from the Riga ghetto and Riga Kaiserwald concentration camp. He was awarded the title of Righteous among Nations.
22. The inscription on the Rumbula monument today reads, 'Here in the forest of Rumbula, on November 30 and December 8 1941, Nazis and their local collaborators shot dead more than 25000 Jews, the prisoners of the Riga ghetto—children, women, and old people.'
23. Interview with H.F., Riga, June 2004.
24. Interview with R.S., Riga, June 2004.

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Bella Zisere is a native of Riga, Latvia. She is a PhD candidate in Political Science at the Sciences Po Paris where she is researching "Memory of Latvian Shoah Survivors in Post-Soviet Latvia, Israel, and the USA." She has been a Visiting Fellow at the Yale International Center for Area Studies.