

INTRODUCTION

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It is with great excitement that we present a collection of articles by international scholars on the topic of political activities of Latvian diaspora from the beginning to the middle of the 20th century. In the effort to bring together these studies, we were driven by a general idea that the time has come to assess Latvian or Latvia's diaspora and its politics in a broader and yet more nuanced way. The call for articles that generated these studies asked researchers to discuss Latvian and Latvia's diaspora in the context of national and international politics and at various points in its history. We invited submissions that discussed diverse instances of either self-identified Latvians or groups from Latvia that resided outside Latvia's territory as they engaged in political processes in their host countries and on international scale. In recent years, we have seen growth in research on the activities of Latvian emigrant groups as they were related to the formation of Latvia's statehood both after World War I and in the late 1980s and early 1990s. But as we learn more about the activities of Latvian and Latvia's diaspora, a different question has begun to arise, namely, to what extent these groups were engaged with or acted in response to the political processes in their host countries? Moreover, is it possibly too limiting a view when we look at the politics of diaspora only from the vantage point of its relation to politics inside Latvia? With this collection of articles, we put forward an argument that there is a distinct need for historians and sociologists to begin digging deeper into the actual experience of diaspora itself

and explore how their political vision, values and strategies were connected to the realities around them in their host country. There is great potential in approaching diaspora as a political agent in its own right, that is, as having its own goals, internal logic, agendas, allies and enemies. Without understanding diaspora from its own point of view, our analyses will continue to miss the motivations and political choices of diaspora. It will continue to limit our ability to fully appreciate the processes taking place among Latvians or former Latvia's residents who find themselves outside of Latvia.

Although there are many different angles from which to pursue a contextualized study of Latvian or Latvia's diaspora, this particular group of articles focuses on political activities in diaspora. And one should not be surprised about this decision. As eloquently demonstrated in Elga Zālīte's article about the early Latvian emigration in Northern California, Latvian diasporic communities most often formed due to political reasons (such as the 1905 Revolution or Soviet occupation). Furthermore, they persisted due to strong political convictions. In fact, politics played a crucial part in keeping the emigrant communities together and sustaining their resistance to assimilation. However, Zālīte's article points out that emigrants' political views were ultimately inconsistent across different communities or even within them. The small, but vociferous community of Latvian Social Democrats and Socialists in Northern California had internal differences, but it also had strong disagreements with other Latvian socialist groups in the United States. Finally, this article makes an important contribution to our understanding of the development of radical political ideas in the US in the period before and right after World War I and helps us understand the role of immigrants in this process.

Pauli Heikkilä's work broadens the conversation about diaspora and politics by studying the ideas of Baltic and European unification among the post-World War II Baltic, not just Latvian, émigrés. According to Heikkilä, Baltic and Latvian émigré politicians and intellectuals were deeply involved in the conversations about

the future of Europe before and after WWII, while showing that their plans and ideas were greatly divergent and they were not likely to agree on a plan for the Baltic States, let alone Europe. Heikkilä notes that these differences among the various models at least to some extent were determined by the political context of the host countries in which the individual émigrés found themselves. This offers us an invaluable insight into the complex dynamic between the host country and émigrés political ideas about their homeland.

Jonathan L'Hommedieu's article advances this idea further as he takes us to the next major cross-roads in the political activities of Latvian diaspora, namely, the period of Détente and its consequences in the US. By illustrating the way in which groups of Baltic, including Latvian, émigré communities fought for the continuation of the Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty service, he documents the compromises that émigré communities had to make to account for the context of American-Soviet relations between the mid-1950s to mid-1970s. While diaspora communities struggled to hold on to their ideals, they also were faced with the need to become more mature and realistic in their interactions with political realities in the US. The article thus compellingly demonstrates how important it is to understand diaspora's relation to their host country as not only a place of (presumably temporal) residence, but also a major influence on the identity, ideas and actions of the emigration.

Taken together, the three articles expose us to political struggles of at least three different generations of Latvian diaspora. They allow us to observe the complex relationship that these émigré groups had with their homeland and how they navigated politics of the day in their host countries. They also come from an international and interesting group of young scholars exploring Latvian and Baltic history through the complex lens of world-wide political realities. It is our hope that the research presented here will generate further interest among historians and sociologists to study different types of Latvian or Latvia-related diaspora. Just as it is important to study

Latvian and Latvia's diaspora at different points of its history and at different sites, we also should begin to break the concentration on Latvians alone and instead look at diaspora of various ethnic groups originating in Latvia.