

WORLD WAR I AND LATVIAN RIFLEMEN IN THE COLLECTIVE MEMORY OF LATVIA¹

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The centenary of World War I in 2014 drew attention to the significance of this war in the history of Latvia. The aim of this article is to examine how one of the most vivid “sites of memory” of the war – the Latvian Riflemen – evolved and is still being used. The article reveals not only the preconditions and causes for the construction and development of the image of Latvian Riflemen, but also provides a framework which can be applied to analyse the genealogy of the public understanding of historicity and how our and foreign political elites have manipulated this historicity.

Key words: World War I, riflemen, collective memory.

THE CENTENARY

In 2014, the centenary of World War I was commemorated all over Europe with various remembrance events, exhibitions and conferences dedicated to the subject of the “Great War”. In Latvia too, the year 2014 passed with a peculiar remembrance atmosphere remembering World War I and forgetting other anniversaries which in the history of Latvia have been equally important. For example, Latvians neglected the 95th anniversary of the events of the War of Independence in Latvia, and 70 years since the memorandum of the Latvian Central Council was signed, the national resistance military groups were defeated and the reoccupation began. Instead, several conferences dedicated to the subject of World War I were held in Latvia,² accompanied by

respective exhibitions³ and public lectures.⁴ The great attention that was drawn to the beginning of World War I in Latvia can be explained both with the attempts to polish the image of Riga as the European Capital of Culture (2014), and with hopes to gradually decline from the nationally centred interpretation of the past, instead examining history in the context of the events that took place in Europe.

In 2014, several publications that were dedicated to the subject matter of the First World War were published. Overall, these publications illustrate the demand both of society and historiography to discuss such subjects. The Little Library series on Latvian History published Valdis Bērziņš' work *Latvian Riflemen in World War I (1915–1918)* (Latviešu strēlnieki Pirmajā pasaules karā (1915–1918))⁵; Colonel Jānis Hartmanis' book about the Riflemen's battles on the Nāves sala (The Island of Death) in 1916 was issued;⁶ the yearbook of the Latvian War Museum entailed the papers presented at the conference *Society, War and History: the Military, Political and Social Processes of World War I in the Baltic Region (1914–1918)*;⁷ the journal of the Institute of Latvian History⁸ was also dedicated to the subject of this war. Although some works undeniably enrich the range of historiography and enhance the knowledge and understanding of these questions, it must be concluded that World War I is not the key study subject for Latvian history scholars. It is a peculiar "twilight zone between history and memory", as defined by Eric Hobsbawm when referring to the situation where calm, passionless knowledge on something that has happened in the past still correlates to the emotionally meaningful presence of history in people's lives, when certain symbolic images may be brought up thanks to, for example, mass media or the atmosphere prevailing in the society.⁹ Perhaps, we can talk here of the transition of the communicative memory to the symbolic level – the level of cultural memory.¹⁰ The conferences, books and exhibitions dedicated to the centenary of the war are examples of such symbolisation acts, and they have little in common with a systematic research and representation of the past. As noted by Ēriks Jēkabsons, research

“only partially covers even the most important processes of World War I in the territory of Latvia.”¹¹

The collective memory of Latvia tackles the battle of representations of World War II. The collective memory draws a comparatively greater attention to the destruction of Latvia in 1940 or its incorporation into the Soviet Union in 1944–1945 as opposed to the processes that led to the foundation of the state at the end of World War I – on 18th November 1918.

World War I today in Latvia is represented through certain sites of memory. French historian Pierre Nora defines sites of memory (*Lieux de Mémoire*) as sites in the collective memory, where memory crystallizes and brings up those issues which make one realise that memory is ambiguous, while at the same time keeping the feeling of historical continuity. Memory is in a state of mutable evolution, open to the dialectics of memorising and forgetting. It is not aware of deformations and is subjected to all uses and manipulations. It can hibernate and it can be periodically revived.¹²

For the Latvian nation, there are two such symbolic sites of memory of World War I. Firstly, there is “the time of refugees”, when hundreds of thousands were forced to leave their home, migrating to Russia as a result of the German army’s attack in 1915.¹³ Secondly, there are the Latvian Riflemen. The ethnocentric history perspective squeezed out non-Latvian refugees from the memory, such as Jews and Baltic Germans, as well as the battles of the Russian Army in Latvia, etc. As noted by P. Nora, memory gets on only with those details which are comfortable, whereas the uncomfortable details are aborted.¹⁴ Since memory sacralises remembrance,¹⁵ the image of a Latvian refugee could represent the suffering of the nation during wartime, whereas the image of a rifleman provided an opportunity to demonstrate the heroic spirit of the nation. Later, the sacral motives appeared both in the respective metaphors referring to the events and remembrance rituals. For example, the battle of Ložmetējkalns, which took the lives of several thousand Latvian Riflemen in January 1917, was named the “Golgotha of Riflemen”, whereas the commemorative

ritualization was manifested in the Memorial Days of Riflemen, which has taken place at the Riga Brethren Cemetery since 1924.

The aim of this article is to examine the most outstanding “site of memory” of World War I – the genealogy and evolution of the image of Latvian Riflemen¹⁶ in the collective memory of Latvian society.

MEMORY

Historical events do not end with chronological records in the history textbook. They continue living and existing in memory and they continue affecting political, economic, cultural or social processes. When studying the collective memory, we not only understand the use and application of history, but also become aware of the mutual interaction mechanisms between society and power structures, an individual and a collective, the present and the past.

The collective memory is a theoretical generalization which scholars have used for several decades to unravel those issues that relate to the social use of the past. The collective memory, social memory, historical memory, cultural memory – these are only a few of the terms which are put in use in attempts to examine these phenomena. Jay Winter offers to replace the term “memory” with “remembering”, stating that the term “memory” can entail any attempt to get in touch with the past both at the individual and collective level. “Remembering”, on the other hand, reveals the strategy as to what, when, where and how the members of society remember.¹⁷

To my mind, the conception of four formations of memory (individual, social, political and cultural memory frames) offered by Aleida Assmann is the most appropriate framework that can be applied when studying the significance of Latvian Riflemen in the collective memory.

The individual memory is inevitably related to the stories or impressions of other people, therefore, especially in early memories, there are no strict boundaries between the individual

experience and the stories heard from others. An individual is tied with others not only by the means of language or other cultural elements, but also with the “memory frame”, as it was defined by Maurice Halbwachs, where certain events are selected and evaluated, emotionally saturated and socialized.¹⁸ The individual memory is communicative, it can last for the duration of three generations (80–100 years). Further on, its existence is endangered – it either is transferred at the level of cultural memory or it disappears. In fact, the memory of the Riflemen is at this point of intersection now – between disappearance or transition into a new quality.

Obviously, at the individual level in some families there are still circulated stories about the grandfather or great-grandfather’s experience as a rifleman; however, there is concern whether the youngest generation will also carry these memories along. For example, the film director Askolds Saulitis, who made a film about the Latvian Riflemen, admits that it was family history that served as a source of inspiration for the film:

“My grandmother Milda had a boyfriend. He was a rifleman. He went to Russia and was lost in the Perekop Battle. He was considered missing. Sort of alive, sort of dead. But she was waiting for him. My grandfather fell in love with her and persuaded her to forget the rifleman and marry him instead. [...] Milda replied that the guy must definitely be stuck at the border, because it was the beginning of the 1920s, when the agreement was adopted. Then Pēteris, my grandfather, said “Love has no borders”, and to prove that, he crossed the border of Latvia and Russia. He was caught and put in prison in Minsk. He was kept there for three months and then exchanged for a Soviet spy, who had been caught in Riga. [...] Then Milda said “yes” and my father was born from this marriage. Pēteris passed away very soon, but Milda waited for her rifleman for her entire life. When in the 1970s the museum of Latvian Red Riflemen opened [currently the Museum of Occupation of Latvia], she started working there hoping to meet him one day. [...] It never happened, she died.”¹⁹

When working with the life stories of Latvian inhabitants, it became clear that the stories and legends of Riflemen are still circulating at the level of communicative memory among the oldest and middle generations.

The social memory mostly lives at the communicative level²⁰ which exists while the eyewitnesses of the particular historical event are alive. The communicative memory is not static; it is constantly changing along with each social generation. Therefore, the memory is revised every 30 years when the new generation becomes the key representative of the past memory and takes public responsibility for it.²¹ As noted by P. Nora, there are as many social memories as social groups.²²

The political memory, similarly to the cultural memory, tends to manifest itself through symbols and material representations, it tends to establish intergenerational communication which uses both museums and archives, monuments and education, as well as the calendar of the public holidays and memorial days. The political memory tends to achieve homogeneous and self-contained seclusion; it excludes other social memories. Also, the political memory is not scattered and fragmentary; it is ordered in a certain narrative in terms of a plot, thus constructing the socio-political myth. This memory is stable and able to transmit the past not within one, but several generations.²³

The cultural memory could be defined as a strategy that is built to protect the continuously changing and collapsing individual and social memory. It can be manifested actively as a canon – all the canonized literary, visual, performing arts works, school curricula, memorial days, etc. Yet, it can also be manifested passively, as the memory of an archive which stores information on those issues which were denied, forgotten or excluded from the active memory but which are still considered important to preserve.²⁴ It is this ambivalent nature of the cultural memory which ensures renewal, change and reconfiguration. Contrary to the political memory, the symbolic system of cultural memory requires greater individual participation – reading, writing, studying, research, critique and appreciation.²⁵

Although the boundaries among these memories are rather blurry, they often overlap and duplicate. This concept, to my mind, can be used for collective memory studies. The centenary of World War I that was commemorated in August 2016 marks the end of the epoch of the communicative memory of these events and the transition of the memory to the level of cultural memory.

Before starting to discuss memory constructions, the use of the term “Latvian Rifleman” must be explained. If the political memory and historians strictly distinguish the first Riflemen (1915–1917) from the “Red Riflemen”, in the social and cultural memory a rifleman is a Latvian soldier who fought in the battalions of Latvian Riflemen from 1915 to 1920.

MEMORY CONSTRUCTIONS

World War I not only divided Europe into warring fronts, but also gave rise to very different memories and opinions about this war. If the narratives of collective memory in the West spoke about the tragedy of war and the absurdity of the number of victims, emphasizing that the key battles took place in the Western front,²⁶ in Eastern Europe the war was perceived as the prelude for the establishment of the nation states. From the perspective of the Polish and other East Europeans, this war is not perceived as an absurd slaughter of Europeans. As stated by Polish historian Kryzstof Ruchniewicz, it was a conflict that several generations had hoped for, opening the door to freedom.²⁷ As a result, there is a huge discrepancy between the voluminous studies of history and the abundance of visual evidence in the West and the relative lack of it in the East.²⁸

In Latvia after World War I (1914–1918) and the following War of Independence (1918–1920), the construction of political memory of the Republic of Latvia was initiated. The new political and military elite had to offer their own interpretation of the past, which would not only justify and strengthen the legitimacy of the regime and elite, but also consolidate society.

The political memory was constructed under the circumstances of the parliamentary democracy allowing rather liberal forms of historical representation of various social and political groups. The variety of these representations often offered crucially opposite interpretations of history, which we can refer to as “the wars of memories”. “The wars of memories” were based on the War of Independence or variations of interpretations of certain events from this war. The differing experiences of the Landesver and the Latvian army, the Northerners and the Southerners, the National Army and the Latvian Red Riflemen often gave rise to huge uproar in public, which was manifested not only as passionate disputes in the newspapers or at the Saeima, but also led to the vandalism of memorial sites and other extraordinary actions in the public sphere.²⁹

The political memory was dominated³⁰ by the War of Independence, memories, opinions and memorial events. It is not surprising, since this war was led for the state of Latvia, whereas the representations of World War I were of minor importance. Reflections about the events of World War I in Latvia evolved on various subject matters: migration of refugees, the German occupation of Courland, the year 1917 in Latvia, the project of the Baltic Duchy, origins of the idea of the independence of Latvia, etc.; however, in regards to their emotional and social potential and the intensity with which they were represented, they could not compete with the contradictoriness and emotional saturation that accompanied the Latvian Riflemen. For example, in literature and news the migration of refugees was treated as one of the reasons for the hatred that Latvians had against Germans. It was also interpreted as a catalyst for establishing battalions of riflemen. The history on Riflemen issued by the Latvian Riflemen's Union reveals: “Latvians fled not because they were less courageous than their neighbours the Lithuanians or Polish, but because they could not stand the victorious Germans in their vicinity.”³¹ One of the most prominent monuments of the Riflemen in literature – the novel *Dvēseļu putenis* (The Blizzard of Souls) by Aleksandrs Grīns – starts with the events surrounding

the main characters that made them flee the country and later join the newly-established battalions of Riflemen.³²

The attitude of the new state towards Latvian Riflemen after the War of Independence initially was reserved, which can be explained by the fact that the majority of Riflemen aligned with the Bolsheviks. Also, many of them moved to the military service of Soviet Russia and participated in the invasion of the Republic of Latvia in 1919 among Pēteris Stučka's Soviet Army of Latvia. Furthermore, Latvian leaders of opinion had not elaborated such a representation of Latvian Riflemen that would satisfy the numerous socio-political groups in the country. For example, when looking at the calendar for 1922, we will not find any memorial days dedicated to the memory of Riflemen or any mentioning of them in the chronological overview of the most important events in the Latvian past. Only the record of Ložmetējkalns as "a significant battle place between Latvian Riflemen and Germans" is an exception.³³

Attempts to bring forward and strengthen the role of Latvian Riflemen in the social memory, as well as attempts to include it in the political memory can be explained by several factors: 1) the task of the memory is to ensure the continuity of history, and the attachment of society to the past and future. Consequently, a need appeared to integrate the events of World War I in Latvia and the Latvian Riflemen into the collective memory.

2) The need to ensure that Latvian society did not divide into antagonistic groups. The political memory announced Germans as the main enemy. As a result, the image of the main enemy was referred to the Baltic Landeswehr and Imperial Germans units, and not the Riflemen under the control of Bolsheviks. Service in the Landeswehr was perceived as high treason, service in the Red Army as the irony of fate.³⁴

3) The need of the new military and political elite to emphasize their contribution in the fight "for the freedom of Latvia". In this case it is valuable to look at the biographies of the founders of the Latvian Riflemen's Union. The officers of the Latvian Riflemen Andrejs Auzāns (1871–1953) and Rūdolfs Bangerskis (1878–

1958) were important people in the battalions of Riflemen; however, they did not contribute to the battles for Latvian independence at all. General A. Auzāns from 1918 to 1923 served in the Red Army and lectured at the War Academy of the Red Army, whereas General R. Bangerskis served in Admiral A. Kolchak's³⁵ White Army and returned to Latvia only in 1921.³⁶ Both officers joined the service of the Latvian army and had a prominent status not only in public life, but also in the military service of the state. Many soldiers in Latvia had similar biographies. These men belonged to the so-called local elite groups in the cities, districts, army garrisons, etc. Corrections in the representation of the past enabled such inclusion of the representatives of the elite among the lines of "freedom fighters". As General Kārlis Goppers (1876–1941, who only returned to Latvia with the Imanta regiment in June 1920, wrote: "The Tīrelis Marsh, Ložmetējkalns, Nāves sala and other places of battle merge in the history, which will not distinguish these events in a separate episode, but will intertwine them with other battles under a joint title, *Battles for the Freedom of Latvia*."³⁷

A crucial aspect that allowed the memory of Riflemen to spread roots not only in the social, but also in the cultural memory was the fact that many artists, poets, writers, painters, actors, etc. either belonged to the battalions of Latvian Riflemen or were closely related to them.³⁸ This condition facilitated the establishment of the image of Riflemen and its approbation in literature and art.

Besides, in the 1920s–1930s were the first attempts to collect the memories about Riflemen and study the problematic issues related to them. In the beginning of the 1920s most of the books that were published on World War I were dedicated only to Riflemen, separating them from the processes of the War of Independence.³⁹ Perhaps the first to try to correlate the Riflemen's battles with the processes of the War of Independence was the writer and rifleman Jānis Akurāters (1876–1937), thus establishing an apparent continuity between the riflemen and the soldiers of the national army.⁴⁰ Poet Kārlis Skalbe (1879–1945) in his

work *Mazās piezīmes* (*The Little Notes*) writes: “Latvian battalions emerged as a new core of the people, who got attached to their country with all their hearts and did not want to leave their houses. We did not think about our country yet. But the permission to establish our own regiments was half of our independence. We had our own power to rely on. It was a high step towards independence. From here we could reach after the fruits of history.”⁴¹

The work on research and collection of memories was also initiated by the Latvian Riflemen’s Union. Although only the perspective and memories favoured by the Board of the Union were published (emphasizing the skills of certain Latvian military leaders, heroism of Riflemen and ignoring the unflattering critique), the activities of the Union must be seen as a positive phenomenon, contributing towards the so-called archival memories.⁴² The compilations published by the Union must be regarded as a peculiar attempt to introduce and strengthen the Riflemen at the level of the political memory – providing regular reminders about the merit of Riflemen for the sake of an independent Latvia.

The Latvian Riflemen’s Union played a crucial role in the construction of the memory of Riflemen. The Union was founded in December 1923 with an aim to “commemorate the Riflemen’s history and to cultivate their traditions and spirit”.⁴³ Politician Jānis Goldmanis (1875–1955), who was also the initiator of forming the Latvian Riflemen’s Battalions, was responsible for the organizational and ideological core of the Union. Numerous other high-ranking military officials contributed – Generals Andrejs Auzāns, Kārlis Goppers, Colonel Rūdolfs Bangerskis, etc.⁴⁴

One of the first tasks of the Union was to introduce a memorial day for the Riflemen. Celebration of the memorial day started already after the War of Independence,⁴⁵ yet, as noted by Rūdolfs Bangersikis in 1922, “due to various circumstances it lack[ed] the required splendour”.⁴⁶ The memorial day acquired that splendour in 1924, when the first serious celebration took place. It started with the “Holy flame” set by the state president Jānis Čakste on 5 January 1924 at the Riga Brethren Cemetery and the Riflemen’s

guard of honour dressed in winter clothing. On the next day – 6th January – a public procession honouring the Riflemen took place from the War Museum to the Brethren Cemetery accompanied by a solemn church service. The memorial day was concluded by the banquet at the Great Guild.⁴⁷

The leftist intellectual magazine *Domas* (Thoughts) wrote that in all these events and big articles in the newspapers “one can sense something which is feared to articulate”.⁴⁸ And this unarticulated idea is covered with certain resignation, sentiment and almost regret and forgiveness to Riflemen, somebody, who signed as MB, wrote in the magazine: “The Riflemen went to Russia without officers, or with a too small proportion of officers. The officers went to Russia without the Riflemen. The Riflemen in Russia fought **against** [original emphasis] the renewal of the tsarist, noble and undivided Russia organized by the old treacherous generals. The officers, especially at the highest ranks, acted and fought **for** the noble Russia, because neither the cadets,⁴⁹ nor Savinkovs⁵⁰ or Alekseyevs⁵¹ wanted to discuss the foundation of national autonomies (not to mention the foundation of countries!). This is the tragic moment in the drama and this is the unarticulated thought. The Riflemen for the revolution, the officers for the counterrevolution.” *Domas* wrote that it was not the death of Riflemen that gave rise to an independent Latvia, but their fight against the renewal of tsarist Russia in the Volga region and the Crimea. The Christmas Battles had separated the Riflemen from the officers, and the merit of the former leaders of the Riflemen should not be turned into heroic legends, but instead should be critically assessed if not as crime, then carelessness and short-sightedness.⁵² Such rhetoric and argumentation became an integral part of explaining the past of the politically left-wing.⁵³

However, in the next year the celebrations of the Riflemen’s memorial day had even greater splendour, not only in Riga but also in the provincial areas.⁵⁴ Emotional and solemn speeches were given, yet two of them are worth considering. General A. Auzāns’ answer to the greeting of the state president became a

peculiar testimony of loyalty to the state which had to terminate the existing prejudice against the Riflemen. Namely, A. Auzāns noted that “as soon as our homeland has some hardship again, we will listen to the first call of the state leader and go to the battlefield as quickly as we did [in the battles] at Ložmetējkalns”.⁵⁵

Whereas Colonel R. Bangerskis, who had become the Minister of Warfare, emphasized: “Now, when I am the leader of the warfare affairs, I can testify that the eagles of Tīrelpurvs have coalesced with the eagles of Venta. If we have to take our arms again, we will rise and fight against the enemy as one.”⁵⁶ Testimony of loyalty and gaining an equal status with the veterans of the War of Independence were the main targets of the social group represented by the Latvian Riflemen.

Both the Union and the Latvian intelligentsia constructed the mythical image of a Latvian rifleman. This image had no individuality, it was a collective who symbolized “us” and were ready to sacrifice their lives for the homeland and to listen to their leaders. Certain features of authoritarianism in the image of Riflemen ensured that it was later applied in the political rhetoric during the authoritarian years of Kārlis Ulmanis.

The “legend” of the Riflemen, as it was named by Jānis Akurāters, was based on the previously mentioned motives. Latvian Riflemen, as much as the soldiers of the national army, fought for the freedom of Latvia. The difference between both lies in the fact that the first fought “in a historical night, under the stars, whereas the national army – in the blood-red dawn and silver sunrise”.⁵⁷ The Christmas Battles were the apogee of the Riflemen’s battles, when under the leadership of their officers the Riflemen defeated the far superior German army. However, the Battles were a failure due to Russian indecisiveness and even treachery. Casualties were not in vain, since “the world got to know about the existence of a heroic community of 2 million people at the Baltic seashore.”⁵⁸ Latvians, too, came to know “what military genius was hiding in this peaceful nation of ploughmen”. They were “a common denominator and a healing factor in the sad and tragic days of refugees”.⁵⁹

In 1920 the highest military award of the Latvian state – the Order of Lāčplēsis – was given to the Riflemen for fighting in World War I. In 1927, the 1st grade Order of Lāčplēsis was given to Colonel Fridrihs Briedis⁶⁰ for the Christmas Battles.⁶¹ Thus, the state acknowledged the military merit of the non-Bolshevik Riflemen, not the political.

A crucial place for fusing the remembrance of the Riflemen and the soldiers of the War of Independence was not only the Latvian War Museum founded on the base of the Museum of Riflemen,⁶² but also the Brethren Cemetery which initially was a burial place for the Riflemen who had died on the Riga front, but later after the war was united with the remains of the soldiers who fought in the War of Independence, thus spatially creating a socio-political myth that the Latvian Riflemen of the tsarist army and the soldiers of the Latvian army fought for one goal – an independent Latvia. It is also emphasised by the date on the entrance gates “1915–1920”.

The legend of the Riflemen took on new importance in the middle of 1917, when the Russian revolution struck the nation and the intelligentsia aghast and the Riflemen surrendered to the counter-national Bolshevik propaganda.⁶³ In the 1920s this problem was hugely significant. First of all, it was important for the political memory to mark the chronological border after which the Latvian Riflemen turned into the Red Riflemen. Summoning the general meeting of the old Latvian Riflemen in November 1923, it was stipulated that those soldiers who were part of regiments until 1st October 1917 were Latvian Riflemen.⁶⁴ This date can also be found in the 1923 Law on the Allotted and to be Allotted Land of the State Land Fund, its Assessment and Selling for the Hereditary Possession or Hereditary Lease providing allowances for lawful and actual heirs of the soldiers killed in the Riflemen's battalions or the disabled Riflemen, by obtaining land for their possession.⁶⁵ However, the status of the freedom fighter and likening to the soldiers of the national army took five more years. Besides, the status and advantages in obtaining the land only referred to those Riflemen who had joined the regiments by

1st September 1917, and “if they had not served in the armies that fought against Latvia.”⁶⁶

Consequently, those who were responsible for the construction of Latvian political memory drew a boundary line. Withdrawal from Riga and battles at Mazā Jugla in the fall of 1917 served as a boundary which separated the “right” Riflemen from the “wrong” or Red Riflemen.

UNDER THE SPELL OF THE POLITICAL MYTH

In June 1940, the Latvian state was terminated by the Soviet Union. Its aim was not only to oppress society, but also its memory. The Soviet regime can be characterized by the prevalence of the political memory, which subordinated and transformed the individual, as well as the social and cultural memory corresponding to the political objectives.

In 1940, during the Soviet period, the last volume of the magazine *Latviešu Strēlnieki* (Latvian Riflemen) was issued, where the attempts to reconstruct the conception of the Riflemen’s memory can be observed. It was noted that the 1918–1919 Latvian Riflemen were more significant than the 1915–1917 Riflemen, emphasizing that there was a positive cooperation between the Red Riflemen and the Russian army. We can read in the editorial: “Since 1915 Latvian Riflemen have fought together with the Russian army in order to guard their country from the invaders. The Riflemen fought together with Russian regiments for their joint state, country and the Latvian people. Similar heroic battles took place in the next historical period, in the vast battlefields. Now again for the third time both armies have joined their hands for joint efforts and tasks. It all facilitates interest in the earlier cooperation and joint battles. It all increases our responsibility to portray these periods and to publish historical materials.”⁶⁷

The intention to offer the version of the Riflemen’s historicity that would be acceptable to the regime of occupation was not implemented. There were various reasons for that. The Soviet regime did not trust the Union and it was important for the new

regime to enforce their own historicity where the Latvian Riflemen did not have a place. During the 1937–1938 “Latvian campaign” in the USSR many Latvian Red Riflemen were wiped out. The questions related to the Riflemen could give rise to sensitive questions and unnecessary conclusions of the Soviet policy of the last few years. Therefore, the Latvian Riflemen’s Union was closed on 20th January 1941, and the activists were repressed. As noted by the scholar of Riflemen’s history Valdis Bērziņš, the very label “Latvian rifleman” was eradicated and exterminated. This situation remained until the “thaw” in the mid-1950s.

The most outstanding event during the “thaw” was the release of the Riga Film Studio film *Latviešu strēlnieku stāsts* (The story of Latvian Riflemen) in 1958,⁶⁸ where the Riflemen question was viewed through the prism of Soviet ideology. The Riflemen’s engagement in the imperialistic war led them towards the revolution as trustworthy comrades.⁶⁹ Despite the ideological content of the movie, which focused on a subject matter that had been forbidden to talk about for nearly 20 years, perhaps, Soviet authorities had planned to exchange the uncomfortable Latvian Riflemen of World War I for ideologically more correct Riflemen – namely, the image of the rifleman fighting in the 201st Riflemen’s division (the 43rd guard) of the Red Army actively participating in the German–USSR war, and later the image of the Rifleman of the 130th Latvian riflemen’s corps. However, the year 1959 and the defeat of the national communists did not allow it to be implemented.⁷⁰

As a result of the Soviet memory politics, Latvian Riflemen that had been concealed in the previous years became the symbol of history of the occupied or Soviet Latvia. Research in the 1960s was concluded with the study *The History of Latvian Riflemen, 1915–1920* and published in 1970.⁷¹

In 1965, “on the 25th anniversary of Soviet Latvia”, when “the manliness of Latvian Riflemen and inexorability in the fight for the ideals of the revolution, in aid of the international duty and Marxism Leninism” was celebrated, the square at the centre of Riga near the banks of the Daugava was named after the Latvian

Red Riflemen. The foundation stone was placed for the monument of Latvian Riflemen and a competition for the draft of the monument was announced.⁷² Next to that, in 1966 work was started to create the monument for the Red Riflemen at the centre of Riga.⁷³ The monument of Riflemen was opened in 1971 simultaneously with the Museum of Latvian Red Riflemen,⁷⁴ and over the Soviet stagnation years it became a peculiar representation place of Riga. It was a place to organise the so-called red neckerchief celebrations, when younger schoolchildren were admitted in the organisation of pioneers. The guards of honour were organised on the important dates of the Soviet regime. The visits to the museum and the monument were also offered to the official foreign guests of Riga.

The exhibitions at the Museum of Latvian Red Riflemen, as well as the many ideological stories of history gave rise to an ideologically perfect, yet “dead” image of Riflemen. To my mind, we can speak of a consciously constructed myth of Riflemen created by the political authorities, which could be more acceptable to the society as opposed to the image of a Rifleman of World War II, which was objected by the communicative memory of a great part of Latvian society. The documentary film *Strēlnieku zvaigznājs* (Sagittarius) by Juris Podnieks,⁷⁵ where the Latvian Riflemen who were still alive were interviewed and shown, was a brave step. The emotional level and the sharpness of the film to some degree created a huge contrast to the ideologically correct stories of history, which were offered to the inhabitants of Latvia by the Soviet regime. Next to the political memory were offered individual memory stories, which together created a significant and powerful artefact of cultural memory.

TRANSFORMATIONS AND DISAPPEARING FROM THE COMMUNICATIVE MEMORY

It is not surprising that during the reassessment of history, which was marked by the General Secretary of the Communist Party M. Gorbachev's perestroika (restructuring) and glasnost

(openness) policy, the Riflemen had to play the key role. Rewriting takes place not in the science of history, which is ideologically saturated and respectful of authority, but in culture; this time – in theatre. As noted by scholars, theatre feeds on memory because it shows the present experience, which is always located within the range of the past experience and associations. “The theatre of memories” is that space where one can recall the forgotten in order to understand the present, and perhaps choose the future.”⁷⁶

In 1987, the theatre performance *Mūžības skartie* (Touched by Eternity) directed by Kārlis Auškāps was staged at the Daile Theatre in Riga, in order to “return to the people” the heroic poem written by one of the most outstanding Latvian poets, Aleksandrs Čaks (1901–1950), “which for the entire Soviet period was kept in special archives of Latvian libraries”⁷⁷, as well as part of its history. The theatre performance offered not only an insight into the history of Riflemen and the creative oeuvre of the poet, but also offered numerous innovative concepts. It emphasised the heroism of the people and their efforts to set themselves free from the German and Russian oppressive forces. In the performance all enemies of the Riflemen were personified in one character of a Russian/German general, showing the hateful ethnic and political attitude of Germans and Russians towards Latvians. The red-white-red flag was allowed to be shown in a performance for the first time.⁷⁸ In 1989, A. Čaks’ poem became the basis for director Juris Rijnieks’ theatre performance *Psihiskais uzbrukums* (The Psychic Attack) at the Liepāja Theatre, interpreting the Riflemen issue in the context of the Russian Civil War, analysing and doubting the role of Riflemen, showing how they turned into blood-thirsty soldiers of the Civil War wrecking not only the Russian Empire, but also spirituality.⁷⁹ Also, the work by Jukums Vācietis *Latviešu strēlnieku vēsturiskā nozīme* (The Historical Meaning of Latvian Riflemen) written in 1922 in Moscow, was published in 1989.⁸⁰

The Cultural Foundation of Latvia established and led by the poet Imants Ziedonis (1933–2013) had intended to continue the

tradition started in the 1970s to find and look after the battlefields of the Riflemen.⁸¹ On 26th November 1988, in Piņķi near St. Jānis Church, a memorial stone created by sculptor Uldis Sterģis was opened as the Foundation's initiative. The memorial stone was dedicated to Colonel Jukums Vācietis – the commander of the 5th Latvian Riflemen's battalion of Zemgale, who had delivered a sermon to his soldiers before leaving for the front on 17th July 1916 in accordance with a “historical fact”.⁸² The fact was taken from the Aleksandrs Čaks' poem *Spreidīšis Piņķu dievnamā* (Sermon at the Piņķi Church)⁸³, which later became part of the epic *Mūžības skartie*, although historically nothing like that had happened.⁸⁴

Using the evidence provided by the contemporaries non-critically, especially the evidence provided by General Andrejs Auzāns,⁸⁵ as well as relying on A. Čaks' poetry, this episode was seen by contemporaries as an undeniable fact, which was introduced both in the exile historiography and the historiography of Soviet Latvia.⁸⁶ Many spectators in the audiences who went to see the theatre performance *Mūžības skartie* in 1987⁸⁷ at the Daile Theatre in Riga, perceived the lines of the patriotically charged poem *Spreidīšis Piņķu baznīcā* (Sermon at the Piņķi Church) as part of the Soviet “stolen history” which had deserved to be kept forever. In November 1988, in a service at the Piņķi Church, the lines were read by actor and rifleman Ēvalds Valters (1894–1994) with the national flags being waved, and *Dievs svētī Latviju!* (God, Bless Latvia) being sung, while a memorial stone was opened for “the great man from Courland, the first Commander-in-Chief of the Soviet forces, who said ‘yes’ to Lenin and October”.⁸⁸ In 1989, the film of six episodes *Zītaru dzimta*⁸⁹ (The Zītari Family) was released by Riga Film Studio, where J. Vācietis' sermon was relocated to January 1917 – before the Riflemen went to the famous Christmas Battles. The change of the function justifying the myth of Latvian Riflemen (the Riflemen as the fighters against the Soviet authorities) with the counter-presentable function (the Riflemen as the carriers of the national idea, as the victims of Stalinism) that could be observed at the period of

National Awakening,⁹⁰ failed despite the fact that initially it was perceived positively. Attempts to merge the Soviet ideological dogmas with the national explanation of history gave rise to peculiar accounts of history, however they were not destined to develop.

Today the stone is still situated next to the Piņķi Church and the information on the “historical service” can be found on the website of the congregation.⁹¹ As a real-life event praised in A. Čaks’ poetry, the service is also described in the textbooks for Latvian school children.⁹² There are several patriotic memorial events held near the church, although the image of Latvian Riflemen as national heroes has been replaced by Latvian Legionnaires.⁹³ The prevalence of the events of World War II in the Latvian political memory caused the forgetting not only of the Riflemen, but also of other memorial sites. The dominance of elements belonging to the cultural memory marked a certain transfer of this memory from the communicative memory to the cultural memory.

Since the regaining of independence in Latvia, the memory of the Riflemen has mostly been cultivated by several local social groups, for example, the municipality and various enthusiasts. Because the state has still been unable to offer the concept of the political memory of Latvia before World War II, the activities of these enthusiasts in preserving the memory of Riflemen are not systematically organised. Young people obtain information and understanding about Latvian Riflemen at school or visiting either the Latvian War Museum or the attractive Museum of Christmas Battles, or listening to the “black metal” band Skyforger’s album *Latviešu strēlnieki* (Latvian Riflemen).⁹⁴

In the collective memory, the memory of Riflemen is also commemorated by several memorial sites, for example, “The Altar of Heroes” was established to commemorate the battles of Mazā Jugla in 2005 by the Tinūži Elementary School. A special monument for Riflemen is the 2013 book *Pulcējaties zem latviešu karogiem!* (*Gather Under the Latvian Flags!*) edited by Andris Balcers, the leader of men’s group *Vilki* (Wolves). This book offers a broad visual heritage.⁹⁵ Certain interest in the subject

matter of Riflemen was raised in relation to the potential screen adaptation of A. Grīns' novel *Dvēseļu putenis* (*The Blizzard of Souls*).

Also, Egils Levits offered to restructure the subject matter of Riflemen for the needs of the political memory, initiating discussions in public regarding the necessity of a preamble to the constitution of the Republic of Latvia. He offered to look at the foundation of the 1915 Riflemen's unions as short-sighted Latvian engagement in useless warfare.⁹⁶ This thesis was not noticed in the public space and was not analysed enough, which allowed the image of Riflemen to be included in a new political myth.

CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW POLITICAL MYTH?

In 2015 a century had passed since the foundation of the Latvian Riflemen's battalions. On 1st August 2015, following the initiative of the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Latvia, the large *Celebrations of the People and the Army 'Latvian Riflemen 100'* took place. The Ministry of Defence chose this day, because on 1st August 1915 Commander-in-Chief of the Russian North-Eastern front Mikhail Alekseyev (1857–1918) had issued an order for the establishment of the first two voluntary battalions of Latvian Riflemen and the establishment of the Organizing Committee of the Battalion of Latvian Riflemen.

The celebrations started with the opening of the memorial plate at the building of the Organizing Committee, which was followed by a concert and a celebratory "procession of the people and the army" through Riga, which was concluded at 11th November Krastmala with a display of the Latvian National Armed Forces and a concert.⁹⁷ The President of Latvia Raimonds Vējonis said in his speech: "Today we celebrate in order to honour the Latvian soldier! The soldier from ancient times, the rifleman, the legionnaire – as well as the soldier, home guard and young guard from our times. The same way as Riflemen in those days went to battles from the Baltic Sea to the Urals, to the Black Sea, the Riflemen nowadays have also been in many places where inter-

national operations have taken place – in various hot spots.”⁹⁸ Whereas the Commander of the National Armed Forces Raimonds Graube noted that the state had two beginnings: “The spiritual awakening and the soldier’s awakening.” According to Graube, the memorial plate is “the reminder of the fact that our state was born in battle, with blood spilled and soldiers dying”.⁹⁹

The speeches and the conceptual context of the events provided grounds for obvious attempts to connect the image of a Latvian Rifleman with statehood and the Latvian armed forces. Both goals are historically unjustified and, we could even say, false. The president’s efforts to equate the Riflemen, Latvian Red Riflemen and Latvian SS Legion soldiers is not only incorrect, but speaks against the current state policy towards the legion soldiers.¹⁰⁰ However, the fact that the remembrance of the Riflemen is located in the previously mentioned “twilight zone”, ensures that this memory can be revived, filling it with a completely different content. It is a shame that the instrumentalization of the memory of Riflemen takes place without any public debates or discussions among historians. The instrumentalization of the memory of the Riflemen is also attested by the currently in production film *Dvēseļu putenis*, which did not attract funding from the state budget through the National Film Centre, but directly through the Saeima.¹⁰¹

Also, Askolds Saulītis directed a film on Latvian Riflemen entitled *Astoņas zvaigznes* (Eight Stars) with a leading motif portraying Latvian Riflemen as both the most outstanding and most tragic phenomenon of national awareness.¹⁰² The director admits that the film was a tool of research for himself, too, since he had been interested in this subject matter for a long time but he did not know much about it.¹⁰³ Perhaps, this approach encourages further questions which in the current social and political memory are not essential.

An interesting memorial monument is the 2016 monument in Smārde dedicated to the Finnish Jaeger troops who in World War I fought in the German Kaiser’s army and received a baptism of fire at the Smārde battles. The installation of the memorial

sign did not give rise to any objections. Besides, the installation of this sign was funded by the Finnish and the Finnish Minister of Defence, and it was the military management of the Finnish Army who participated in the opening ceremony. However, it is essential to draw attention to the representations by the media and Latvian officials at the opening of the monument. First of all, it was not mentioned that the Finnish Jaegers fought against the joint Latvian Riflemen's brigade, and the Latvian Riflemen who died in this battle were honoured with a monument by Kārlis Zāle in 1936. Second, instead of reflecting on various opportunities, which the "small nations" of the Russian Empire took advantage of in order to fight for their freedom in the years of World War I, it was used for events unrelated to diplomatic rhetoric.¹⁰⁴ This message was portrayed in the media, revealing that Latvia honoured the Finnish who defeated the USSR in the "Winter War", a narrative which, perhaps, was borrowed from the speech given by the Latvian Minister of Defence Raimods Bergmanis, who spoke about the joint mission of both nations, transferring the historical context to the Finnish "Winter War".¹⁰⁵ Of course, one can understand the diplomatic rhetoric, however, the "forgetting" of remembrance of Latvian Riflemen that the Ministry of Defence is currently taking care of leads to questions about ethics and consistency in using the remembrance of Latvian Riflemen for the needs of power rhetoric today.

CONCLUSION

The collective memory is not detached from the individual memory of an individual. Similar to the individual's memory, it also has its period of existence, after which it disappears. According to memory scholars, it can be revived under certain circumstances, yet even then the memory would not last forever.¹⁰⁶ The image of Riflemen in the framework of the communicative memory slowly but relentlessly passes. Whether the political and cultural memory will succeed in reviving the issue of Latvian Riflemen and achieving its reassessment, it becomes an instru-

mentalized tool of manipulation, or these memories vanish from the public memory altogether – only time will show.

After 1920, the memory of a small social group could become a significant part of the Latvian collective memory, also spread roots in the political and cultural memory of the Republic of Latvia. The year 1940 interrupted the development of this memory and the subject of Riflemen was tabooed up until the 1950s. After 1959, the myth of the Latvian Red Riflemen started to become stronger, eventually turning into the central element of the political memory of Soviet Latvia.

The rewriting and understanding of the past started in the late 1980s also affected the memory of the Latvian Riflemen. The instrumentalization of the elements of cultural memory marked some kind of departure of the collective memory from the zone of the communicative memory. After Latvia regained its independence, the main clashes of the communicative memory and representations of the past were focused on the processes of World War II casting a shadow on other sites of memory. The history of the Riflemen is closely related to the history of the establishment of the state. The only question is whether this connection will be forced in a non-critical and manipulative manner, or the role and significance of the Riflemen will be revised and reassessed. At a time when memory is disappearing from the level of communicative memory and when no “memory wars” are possible, unfortunately one must look sceptically at the prospect of any further development of this subject matter in the political and cultural memory.

The place of Latvian Riflemen in the collective memory of Latvia is very essential. It shows not only the genesis of the understanding of historicity, but also – how local and foreign political elites have manipulated this historicity. This article only maps the key issues related to the Riflemen and World War I. It has not examined the questions on the cultivation of the memory and remembrance of Riflemen beyond the geographical framework of Latvia, namely, in the 1920s–1930s in the USSR and in exile after World War II. These are subject matters which must be addressed,

but which, to my mind, have little affected the collective memory in Latvia. Likewise, individual studies focusing on the foundation and development of the memorial sites dedicated to the Riflemen both in spatial and cultural dimensions would be worth undertaking. It would be significant to examine this subject matter from the perspective of various representations (literature, film, theatre, etc.). We should not forget about the historical research of Riflemen, which so far has been as fragmentary as the collective memory. It should be emphasised that the researcher of the past, when examining how this past has affected the society in later periods, also participates in the formation of the collective memory.

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- ² Among the most important events one must mention the international conferences that took place in 2014. The Goethe-Institut Riga organised the conference *1914. War and Modernism* from 19th to 20th March 2014; another international conference Society, War and History: The Military, Political and Social Processes in the Baltic Region (1914–1918) took place from 26th to 27th June in Riga at the Latvian War Museum, but from 25th to 26th August the Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art of the University of Latvia organized the conference *War, Library and Cathedral*. See: Klāvs Zariņš (2014). Pirmā pasaules kara simtgadei veltīta konference Latvijas Kara muzejā. *Latvijas Vēstures Institūta Žurnāls*, 3, pp. 164–169. Video record of the conference *War, Library and Cathedral* is available on: <http://www.lfmi.lv/?id=656&r=foto:-kars,-biblioteka-un-katedrale:-pirmais-pasaules-kars-eiropas-kultura> (01.12.2016.). Collected articles: Pauls Daija, Deniss Hanovs, Ilze Jansone (eds.) (2015). *Civilizāciju karš? Pirmais pasaules karš ideoloģijās, mākslās un atmiņās. Latvijas versijas [The War of Civilizations? World War I in Ideologies, Arts and Memories. The Case Studies of Latvia]*. Rīga: Zinātne.
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- ¹² Pierre Nora (1989). *Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire. Representations*, 26, pp. 7–24, here pp. 7–8.
- ¹³ Sk. Vitālijs Šalda, Tatjana Bartele (2007). *Latviešu bēgļi Krievijā 1915–1922* [*Latvian Refugees in Russia 1915–1922*]. Daugavpils: Saule; Vitālijs Šalda (2005). “Bēgļu laiki” Latvijā jeb kurzemnieki Vidzemē 1915–1918 [*“The Times of Refugees” in Latvia or the Inhabitants of Courland in Vidzeme 1915–1918*]. Daugavpils: Saule.
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- During the civil war in Russia, the so called Imanta regiment and the Troicka battalion was formed. It consisted of those Riflemen who did not collaborate with the Bolsheviks and from Latvian refugees of Siberia. In 1920, these units started to evacuate to Latvia through Vladivostok’s harbor and upon return were either demobilized or incorporated into the Latvian Army.

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- ³⁵ Alexander Kolchak (Колчак, 1874–1920), Russian polar explorer, commander in the Imperial Russian Navy, who established the White army in Siberia and fought the Bolsheviks.
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- ⁴⁴ Ibid.
- ⁴⁵ These celebrations were organised by the periodically summoned steering committee of the Christmas Battles and the fallen heroes.
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- ⁴⁷ M. B. Veco latviešu strēlnieku svētki Rīgā [The celebrations of Latvian Riflemen in Riga]. *Jaunā Balss*, 12.01.1924., p. 4.

- ⁴⁸ S. N. (1924). *Piemīņa un strēlnieki*. *Domas*, 2, pp. 186–188, here p. 186.
- ⁴⁹ Cadets – members of the left liberal constitutionally democratic party of Russia.
- ⁵⁰ Boris Savinkov (*Савинков*, 1879–1925), a Russian politician and revolutionary. In 1918 he organised a counter-revolutionary organisation called the Society for the Defence of the Motherland and Freedom to overturn the Bolshevik Government. In this organization colonels Kārlis Goppers and Frīdrihs Briedis also participated.
- ⁵¹ Mihail Alekseyev (*Алексеев*, 1857–1918), Russian general, founder of the Volunteer Army to fight the Bolsheviks.
- ⁵² S. N. (1924). *Piemīņa un strēlnieki*. *Domas*, 2, pp. 186–188.
- ⁵³ For example, in the debates of the Saeima regarding the deletion of the Red Riflemen from the list of land owners, in 1929 the deputy of the Workers and Peasants group *Oskars Jankus (1905–1937)* emphasized that “the Red Riflemen are the ones that we should be grateful for the existence of Latvia. If the Red Riflemen had not defeated the armies of counter-revolution, Latvia would not exist. It would be under the boot of Nikolai Nikolayevich or some Kiril, and you most likely would lick this boot.” Hugo Kārklīš (ed.) (1929). *LR III Saeimas Stenogrammas. Ārkārtējā un IV sesija (no 1929. gada 16. augusta līdz 1929. gada 18. decembrim) [III transcripts of the Saeima of Republic of Latvia debates. Extraordinary and IV session (from 16 August 1929 to 18 December 1929)]*. Rīga: LR Saeima, 535. sl.
- ⁵⁴ G. Veco latviešu strēlnieku piemiņas svētki [Commemorative celebrations of the old Latvian Riflemen]. *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, 07.01.1925., p. 1; [b. a.] Strēlnieku svētki [Celebrations of Riflemen]. *Rīgas Ziņas*, 07.01.1925., p. 1; R. V. Veco latviešu strēlnieku piemiņas diena [The memorial day of old Latvian Riflemen]. *Latvijas Kareivis*, 08.01.1925., p. 1; -t. Veco Latv. strēlnieku svētki provincē [The celebrations of old Latvian Riflemen in the province]. *Latvijas Kareivis*, 08.01.1925., p. 2.
- ⁵⁵ R. V. Veco latviešu strēlnieku piemiņas diena. *Latvijas Kareivis*, 08.01.1925., p. 1.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁷ Jānis Akuraters. Gari un karogi [Spirits and flags]. *Jaunākās Ziņas*, 05.01.1937., p. 5.
- ⁵⁸ -ņš. Latviešu strēlnieki 1917.6.I. – 1937. *Tēvijas Sargs*, 01.01.1937., p. 6.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.
- ⁶⁰ The construction and exploitation of the image of Frīdrihs Briedis in the context of the Riflemen’s memory is a subject matter worth more research.
- ⁶¹ Order of 4 October 1927 of the state president to the army and fleet. *Valdības Vēstnesis*, 04.10.1927., p. 1.
- ⁶² Aija Fleja (2000). Latvijas Kara muzejs, 1916–1941 [The Latvian War Museum, 1916–1941]. In: Juris Ciganovs (ed.). *Latvijas Kara Muzeja gada-grāmata*. Rīga: LKM, pp. 8–14; Ilze Krīgere (2013). Latviešu strēlnieku piemiņu glabājot [Comemmorating Latvian Riflemen]. In: Andris Balcers (ed.). *Pulcējaties zem latviešu karogiem!*, pp. 351–352.

- ⁶³ Ernests Blanks (1926). *Nācija un valsts* [The nation and the state]. Vol. 2, Jelgava: Ed. Lācis, Ž. Šulcs un biedri, pp. 55–56.
- ⁶⁴ [B. a.]. Apskats [Overview]. *Policijas Vēstnesis*, 20.11.1923., p. 5.
- ⁶⁵ The Law of 23 April 1923 on the allotted and to be allotted land of the state land fund, its assessment and selling for the hereditary possession or giving for hereditary lease. In: Ernests Cīrulis, Roberts Mucinieks (ed.) (1924). *Agrārās iekārtas* [Agrarian Equipment]. Rīga: Sastādītāju apgādībā, p. 425.
- ⁶⁶ The Law of 26 May 1928 on the allotment of land to the Latvian freedom fighters. *Valdības Vēstnesis*, 26.05.1928., p. 1.
- ⁶⁷ Editorial (1940). Strēlnieku cīņas jauno dienu gaismā [The battles of riflemen in the light of the new times]. In: *Latviešu strēlnieki*, 34. Rīga: The Latvian Riflemen's Union, pp. 3369–3370.
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PIRMAIS PASAULES KARŠ UN LATVIEŠU STRĒLNIEMI LATVIJAS KOLEKTĪVAJĀ ATMIŅĀ

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Pirmā pasaules kara simtgade 2014. gadā aktualizēja šī kara nozīmi Latvijas vēsturē. Raksta mērķis ir izskatīt, kā veidojusies un tikusi un tiek izmantota

viena no spilgtākajām kara “atmiņu vietām” – latviešu strēlnieki. Rakstā atklāti ne tikai priekšnoteikumi un iemesli tam, kā latviešu strēlnieku tēls tika konstruēts un attīstījās, bet caur šo prizmu var vērot arī sabiedrības vēsturiskuma izpratnes ģenēzi un to, kā ar šo vēsturiskumu ir manipulējušas gan savas, gan svešas politiskās elites.

Atslēgas vārdi: Pirmais pasaules karš, strēlnieki, kolektīvā atmiņa.

Kopsavilkums

Raksts ir veltīts Pirmā pasaules kara laikā izveidoto latviešu strēlnieku bataljonu piederīgo tēlam Latvijas kolektīvajā atmiņā. Rakstā analizēts, kā tika veidots strēlnieku tēls Latvijā 20. gs. 20.–30. gados, padomju okupācijas laikā un pēc neatkarības atjaunošanas.

Latvijā pēc aizvadītā Pirmā pasaules kara (1914–1918) un tam sekojošā Neatkarības kara (1918–1920) sākās Latvijas Republikas politiskās atmiņas veidošana. Jaunajai politiskajai un militārajai elitei bija nepieciešams sniegt savu pagātnes reprezentāciju, kas ne tikai pamatotu un nostiprinātu režīma un elites leģitimitāti, bet arī konsolidētu sabiedrību. Attieksme pret latviešu strēlniekiem no jaunās valsts puses sākotnēji bija rezervēta, ko jāskaidro ar strēlnieku lielo boļševizāciju, daudzu pāriešanu Padomju Krievijas dienestā un daudzu piedalīšanos karagājienā pret Latvijas Republiku 1919. gadā Pētera Stučkas Padomju Latvijas armijas rindās.

Centieni aktualizēt, nostiprināt latviešu strēlnieku lomu sociālajā atmiņā un mēģinājumi to iekļaut arī politiskajā atmiņā būtu skaidrojami ar vairākiem faktoriem:

1. Atmiņas uzdevums ir nodrošināt vēstures kontinuitāti, nodrošināt sabiedrības sasaisti ar pagātņi un nākotni. Tādējādi parādījās vajadzība integrēt kolektīvajā atmiņā arī Pirmā pasaules kara notikumus Latvijā un latviešu strēlniekus.

2. Nepieciešamība nepieļaut latviešu sabiedrības nodalīšanos antagoniskās grupās. Politiskā atmiņa par galveno ienaidnieku pasludināja vāciešus, kā rezultātā galvenā ienaidnieka tēls tika attiecināts uz Baltijas landesvēru un valstsvāciešu vienībām, nevis boļševiku pusē esošajiem strēlniekiem. Dienests landesvērā tika uztverts kā valsts nodevība, savukārt dienests Sarkanajā armijā – kā likteņa ironija.

3. Jaunās militārās un politiskās elites nepieciešamība pamatot savus nopelnus cīņā “par Latvijas brīvību”.

Strēlnieku piemiņas dienas tradīcijas ieviešana, strēlnieku biedrību darbība spēja pārliecināt politisko eliti par strēlnieku sociālās atmiņas

pārņemšanu politiskajā. Pirmā pasaules kara kauju vietas Nāves salā vai Tīreļpurvā vēl pagājušā gadsimta 20.–30. gados tika padarītas par savdabīgām nācijas varoņu vietām. Rīgas Brāļu kapi, kas sākotnēji bija Rīgas frontē kritušo strēlnieku apbedījuma vieta, vēlāk tika apvienoti ar Neatkarības karā kritušo piēšiem, tādējādi telpiski radot sociālpolitisku mītu par to, ka cariskās armijas latviešu strēlnieki un Latvijas armijas karavīri cīnījās par vienu mērķi – neatkarīgu Latviju.

Valsts politika, vienādojot strēlniekus un Neatkarības kara karavīrus, izpaudās arī lokālu monumentu celtniecībā un patriotisku rituālu norisē valsts svētkos. Arī Latvijas valsts augstākais militārais apbalvojums – Lāčplēša Kara ordenis tika piešķirts arī strēlniekiem par cīņām Pirmajā pasaules karā.

Pēc 1920. gada šauras sociālas grupas – latviešu strēlnieku – atmiņa spēja kļūt par nozīmīgu Latvijas kolektīvās atmiņas sastāvdaļu, nostiprinoties arī Latvijas Republikas politiskajā un kultūras atmiņā. 1940. gads pārtrauca šīs atmiņas attīstību, un strēlnieku tēmu tabuizēja līdz pat 50. gadu vidum. Pēc 1959. gada, kad notika nacionālkomunistu sagrāve Latvijā, par politiski neviennozīmīgu kļuva Otrajā pasaules karā Sarkanajā armijā karojošās latviešu divīzijas veterāna tēls, jo nacionālkomunisti nāca no latviešu divīzijas aprindām. Tādējādi varai nācās nostiprināt sarkano latviešu strēlnieku mītu, kas ar laiku kļuva par Padomju Latvijas centrālo politiskās atmiņas elementu.

20. gs. 80. gadu beigās uzsāktā pagātnes pārrakstīšana un apjēgšana skāra arī atmiņu par latviešu strēlniekiem. Jau šajā laikā balstīšanās un operēšana ar kultūras atmiņas elementiem iezīmēja sava veida kolektīvās atmiņas aiziešanu no komunikatīvās atmiņas zonas. Pēc Latvijas neatkarības atgūšanas galvenās komunikatīvās atmiņas un pagātnes reprezentāciju sadursmes centrējas uz Otrā pasaules kara norisēm, aizēnojot citas atmiņu vietas.

No atmiņas “krēslas zonas” strēlniekus izcēla bataljonu formēšanas simtgades pasākumi, ko organizēja Latvijas Aizsardzības ministrija 2015. gadā. Pasākumi ideoloģiski iezīmējās ar centieniem saistīt latviešu strēlniekus ar Latvijas bruņotajiem spēkiem un valsts neatkarības ideju. Valsts finansējumu saņēmuši vairāki kultūras projekti par strēlniekiem, tomēr tajā pašā laikā nenotiek ne akadēmiskā problemātikas izpēte, ne arī plašākas diskusijas par strēlnieku lomu Latvijas vēsturē, kas rada bažas par strēlnieku tēla mitoloģizāciju un pakļaušanu politiskās atmiņas vajadzībām. Vai strēlnieku tēls tiks ideoloģizēts un instrumentalizēts vai arī nodots kārtējai aizmirstīšanai, par to šodien vēl ir agri spriest.