https://doi.org/10.22364/lviz.125.05
pp. 99–122

LATVIJAS VĒSTURES
INSTITŪTA ŽURNĀLS

1 (125) 2026

A PAST THAT DOES NOT WANT TO PASS AWAY? THE HOLOCAUST IN LATVIA IN GERMAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

Tilman Plath
0009-0005-1321-6841

This article analyses the historiography of the Holocaust in Latvia within German scholarship from the 1980s to the present. It argues that Latvia has repeatedly gained prominence at moments of major methodological and political transformation, ranging from the *Historikerstreit* and the archival turn after 1991 to perpetrator-focused research, debates on collaboration, memory politics, and postcolonial approaches. Rather than being studied as a historically specific society, Latvia often functioned as a reflective surface for broader debates about German responsibility and historical self-understanding. While historiographical controversies have gradually stabilised and scholarly output has slowed, conflicts surrounding the Holocaust in Latvia persist in the realm of memory culture, particularly in the context of contemporary geopolitical tensions.

Keywords: Holocaust in Latvia, German historiography, collaboration, memory politics, Eastern Europe

Introduction

From a German perspective, the Holocaust in Latvia has long occupied a recognisable place within Holocaust research. Several central figures and events firmly anchor Latvia in the mental and historiographical geography of the genocide. Rudolf Lange, commander of the Security Police and SD in Latvia, participated in the Wannsee Conference and thus stands at the intersection of local mass murder and central decision-making. Friedrich Jeckeln, one of the most notorious specialists in mass shootings, was responsible for the killings at Babi Yar and later for the Rumbula massacre near Riga – together these were among the largest mass shootings of the Holocaust. Jeckeln's headquarters were located in Riga, where

he was captured after the war and executed. In addition, approximately 25,000 so-called *Reich Jews* were deported from Germany, Austria, and the Protectorate to Riga and murdered there. These connections ensured that Latvia figured prominently in German narratives of perpetration, decision-making, and victimhood.

At the same time, this familiarity was highly selective. While Latvia appeared prominently as a site of German crimes and perpetrators, the cultural and social specificities of Jewish life in Latvia were rarely perceived from a German perspective. This omission is significant, as these specificities shaped both the dynamics of persecution and the local contexts in which questions of collaboration, bystander behaviour, and survival unfolded. A closer look at Latvian Jewish history reveals a markedly heterogeneous landscape. Jewish life in Latvia was culturally and historically tripartite. In Courland, Jewish communities were strongly shaped by German cultural influence and long-standing integration into Baltic-German urban society. Riga, as a major port city, was characterised by a distinctly urban, multilingual Jewish culture with strong transnational connections. In contrast, Jewish life in Latgale largely resembled that of so-called Litvaks and was closely connected to the religious, social, and cultural traditions of Lithuanian Jewry.[1] These internal differences also affected experiences of antisemitism, relations with non-Jewish neighbours, and responses to German occupation – and thus the local conditions under which collaboration during the Holocaust occurred – yet they were seldom reflected in German historical writing. The different regions of Latvia naturally shaped not only the Jewish population, so the varying circumstances surrounding the triangular relationship (Germans–Jews–Latvians) under German occupation should be given greater consideration in research. This applies particularly to the eastern region of Latgale.

This article does not seek to reconstruct the Holocaust in Latvia or to retell its regional specificities. Instead, it offers a historiographical contextualisation of how the Holocaust in Latvia has been researched, interpreted, and instrumentalised within German Holocaust scholarship from the 1980s to the present. It argues that Latvia has repeatedly functioned as a testing ground for broader methodological and political debates within German historiography, while its internal social and cultural complexity has remained largely marginalised. With reference to Ernst Nolte's infamous question of a "past that did not want to pass away", the article asks how research on the Holocaust in Latvia has developed within German historiography and whether this historiographical engagement has, in a certain sense, reached its limits. Methodologically, the article approaches

1 For the History of Jews in Latvia see Dribins 2002; Šteimanis 2002; Stranga 2008; Bogojavlenska 2012; Plath 2009.

German Holocaust historiography as both an academic field and a site of memory-cultural negotiation.

The First *Historikerstreit* and the Marginal Presence of Latvia

The modern phase of German Holocaust historiography emerged in the context of the *Historikerstreit* of the mid-1980s. Triggered by Ernst Nolte's attempt to relativise National Socialist crimes through comparison with Stalinist violence, the debate revolved around questions of historical uniqueness, causality, and responsibility.[2] Nolte's provocative phrase formulated in the title of his article in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* – "A past that does not want to pass away" – stands in stark contrast to the state of research on the Holocaust in Latvia at the time. In fact, serious scholarly engagement with the Holocaust in Latvia had barely begun. With regard to Latvia, one might therefore ask how a past could "pass" when historical research on it had not yet truly started.

Within this highly charged intellectual environment, the Holocaust was framed primarily as a German problem of memory, morality, and political identity. Eastern Europe – and Latvia in particular – played only a marginal role in these debates. During the Cold War, archives in Eastern Europe remained largely inaccessible behind the Iron Curtain, reinforcing a West German historiographical focus that privileged domestic debates over broader regional perspectives.

When Latvia appeared at all, it did so mainly as a site of execution rather than as a historical society. References to Riga, Rumbula, or the activities of the Einsatzgruppen served to illustrate the radical nature of Nazi violence, but they were rarely accompanied by sustained engagement with local conditions, social structures, or actors. The historiographical focus remained firmly on German decision-making processes and ideological motivations. This tendency reflected both the dominance of West German intellectual debates and the structural limitations imposed by restricted archival access.[3]

Reliance on judicial sources further shaped this perspective. Court proceedings against perpetrators such as Gerhard Kurt Maywald (1970) or members of Einsatzgruppe A (1947–48, 1958) provided important empirical material, but they also reinforced a legalistic framework that foregrounded individual guilt while marginalising broader social and historical contexts. Latvian Jews appeared

2 For the main texts see Augstein 1987; for an scientific evaluation see: Große-Kracht 2005.

3 Hilberg 1961; Reitlinger 1953.

largely as anonymous victims, while the roles of local auxiliaries, administrative structures, and pre-war antisemitic dynamics remained underexplored. In this sense, Latvia functioned primarily as a backdrop rather than as an analytical category in its own right.[4]

The marginalisation of Latvia during the *Historikerstreit* was therefore not accidental. The debate was deeply embedded in West German political culture and centred on questions of national self-understanding. Comparative perspectives were often regarded with suspicion, especially when they appeared to threaten the singularity of German responsibility. As a result, the Holocaust in the occupied Soviet territories was acknowledged but not integrated into a comprehensive interpretive framework. Latvia thus occupied an epistemic blind spot: known and cited yet not truly analysed. A telling indicator of this limited engagement was the muted response to early survivor accounts by figures such as Josef Katz, Jeanette Wolff, and Max Kaufmann.[5]

After 1991: new archives, radicalisation, and structural explanations

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the opening of archives in Eastern Europe fundamentally altered the landscape of Holocaust research. For the first time, German historians gained broader access to sources from the occupied Soviet territories, including Latvia. This archival turn coincided with ongoing methodological debates between intentionalist and functionalist interpretations of the Holocaust and gave renewed impetus to structural explanations of genocidal violence.[6]

In this context, Latvia acquired new historiographical significance. Research on the early mass shootings in the Baltic states challenged established chronologies that located the decisive turn towards genocide in the Wannsee Conference of January 1942. The killings in Riga and other Latvian locations during the summer and autumn of 1941 demonstrated that radicalised violence against Jews had already reached genocidal dimensions well before the establishment of centralised bureaucratic coordination. Latvia thus became a key case in arguments emphasising cumulative radicalisation (Hans Mommsen), situational dynamics, and the interaction of ideological conviction and contingent circumstances.[7]

4 The Maywald Case is documented in Rüter-Edelmann, Rüter 1979.

5 Kaufmann 1947; Wolff 1947; Katz 1958.

6 General overview in Browning 2003; Gerlach 1998.

7 Mommsen 2002; Denz 2018.

German scholarship increasingly framed the Holocaust in Latvia as part of a broader continuum of violence in Eastern Europe, shaped by anti-Bolshevik warfare, racial ideology, and the erosion of normative constraints under conditions of occupation and war. The region was no longer understood merely as a stage for German actions but as an integral component of Nazi occupation policy. Nevertheless, this shift did not immediately lead to a more nuanced understanding of local societies. Structural explanations continued to privilege German agency and institutional dynamics, while local participation was often treated as reactive, auxiliary, or derivative.[8]

Despite these limitations, the post-1991 phase marked an important historiographical turning point. Latvia emerged as an empirical challenge to linear and teleological models of genocide, compelling German historians to reconsider assumptions about planning, intention, and temporality. At the same time, the continued emphasis on German perpetrators revealed a persistent asymmetry of perspective – one that would increasingly be questioned in subsequent debates on collaboration, memory politics, and, later, postcolonial approaches.

One major step towards a more professionalised research landscape following the opening of the archives was Wolfgang Benz's 1998 edited volume of sources on the Holocaust in the Baltic States, which made a substantial body of previously inaccessible material available to a wider scholarly audience and helped anchor the Baltic region more firmly within German Holocaust research.[9]

The perpetrator turn: from SS / police to polyocracy

From the late 1990s onwards, German Holocaust historiography underwent a pronounced shift towards perpetrator-focused research. A key catalyst for this transformation was the debate sparked by the work of Christopher Browning and Daniel Goldhagen, which in many ways mirrored earlier discussions between intentionalist and functionalist approaches. While Browning emphasised situational pressures, group dynamics, and institutional contexts, Goldhagen foregrounded ideological conviction and a purportedly eliminationist antisemitism rooted in German political culture. Both shared a focus on the SS and police as the main perpetrators.[10]

8 An example of this tendency would be Piper 2005.

9 Benz 1998.

10 Goldhagen 1996; Browning 1993.

Within this debate, Latvia assumed a prominent – if ambivalent – role. The early and extreme violence carried out in Riga and its environs, most notably the mass shootings at Rumbula, provided powerful empirical material for both interpretive positions. For proponents of structural explanations, the Latvian case illustrated processes of cumulative radicalisation under wartime conditions, particularly in the context of the anti-Bolshevik campaign. For those emphasising ideology and agency, the brutality, initiative, and speed with which perpetrators acted seemed to confirm the centrality of antisemitic belief systems among German actors on the ground. Taken together, these discussions further concentrated scholarly attention on German perpetrators.[11]

Initially, perpetrator research focused primarily on the SS and police units. Foundational studies such as *Die Einsatzgruppe A* (1996) by Hans-Heinrich Wilhelm offered the first detailed reconstruction of the unit responsible for mass murder in the Baltic States and placed Latvia at the centre of early genocidal violence.[12] Wolfgang Curilla's comprehensive study *Die deutsche Ordnungspolizei und der Holocaust im Baltikum und in Weißrussland 1941–1944* (2006) further demonstrated the decisive role played by the *Ordnungspolizei* in the implementation of genocide in Latvia, significantly expanding knowledge about the breadth of German participation in mass violence in the region.[13] *Die Generation des Unbedingten* (2002) by Michael Wildt, though not focused exclusively on Latvia, provided a generational and sociological framework for understanding the socialisation, mentalities, and ideological commitment of many perpetrators such as Rudolf Lange and Walter Stahlecker, who operated there, and serves as another example for German academic interests in perpetrators from the SS.[14]

These academic developments were accompanied by intense public debates – most notably the wide-reaching impact of the Wehrmacht exhibitions of the 1990s, which instigated subsequent scholarship on the involvement of the Wehrmacht in the Holocaust, such as Dieter Pohl's work on the Wehrmacht in the occupied eastern territories.[15] Together, these discussions underscored that German interest remained primarily directed toward German perpetrators and questions of German responsibility, while simultaneously broadening the analytical focus beyond the SS and police to include the Wehrmacht and civilian administrators. Within this context, Latvia emerged as a key site for examining

11 Wippermann 1997.
12 Wilhelm 1996.
13 Curilla 2006.
14 Wildt 2002.
15 Heer, Naumann 1995; Pohl 2008.

the diffusion of responsibility across institutional boundaries. Research increasingly demonstrated that mass murder was not confined to specialised killing units but involved a wide range of actors operating within flexible and often improvised structures. This insight fundamentally challenged earlier narratives that had attributed genocidal violence primarily to a small group of ideological fanatics.

At the same time, the perpetrator turn often relied on older historiographical concepts, such as the influential polycratic model, to explain the involvement of non-SS actors in mass murder and to emphasise the alleged inefficiency of German occupation policies.[16] Studies by Zellhuber, Jüngerkes, and Plath, for example, explored competition among German institutions and the resulting fragmentation of authority, frequently framing genocidal violence as a product of overlapping competencies and structural dysfunction – although the thesis of systemic inefficiency has increasingly been questioned in recent scholarship.[17] By concentrating on German actors and their motivations, much of this research continued to treat Latvia primarily as a setting rather than as a social space shaped by its own historical trajectories. Local populations appeared mainly insofar as they intersected with German violence. While this approach substantially deepened understanding of German perpetrators, it also risked reproducing a one-sided perspective in which German agency eclipsed other forms of historical agency, effectively exporting a German internal debate onto the Latvian context.

In the broader tradition of German historiography concerned with German occupation policy in Eastern Europe, Christian Gerlach's landmark study on Belarus under German occupation also deserves mention. While methodologically rigorous and based on extensive source analysis, this work – like much of the perpetrator-centred scholarship of its time – paid comparatively limited attention to local agency.[18] By contrast, memoirs and survivor accounts such as *Judenmord in Riga* (1992) by Bernard Press,[19] alongside earlier works by Max Kaufmann, Jeanette Wolff, and Josef Katz, began to draw greater attention to the specific dynamics of Latvian antisemitism and local participation. Nevertheless, it took considerable time before these perspectives gained broader traction within German Holocaust historiography.

16 Based on Neumann 1977; Broszat 1969.

17 Zellhuber 2006; Jüngerkes 2010; Plath 2012.

18 Gerlach 1999.

19 Press 1992.

Collaboration and local agency

From the early 2000s onwards, the question of local collaboration moved to the centre of German and Western research on the Holocaust in Latvia. This development formed part of a broader shift within East Central and Eastern European studies, driven by both legal and historiographical impulses. The Demjanjuk case (2009), which reopened debates about individual responsibility and the role of auxiliary perpetrators,[20] as well as *Neighbors* (2001) by Jan T. Gross – which provoked a major scandal by confronting Polish society with local participation in the murder of Jews in Jedwabne – fundamentally altered the landscape of Holocaust research in the region.[21] Together, these developments underscored that genocide could not be explained solely as a German project imposed from outside, but required sustained engagement with local actors, motivations, and social dynamics.

Within this broader context, the Baltic states increasingly attracted scholarly attention. Comparative and regional approaches emerged that examined collaboration as a phenomenon shaped by occupation regimes, local power structures, and pre-war social tensions. Important impulses came from edited volumes by Joachim Tauber and David Gaunt, which addressed collaboration and violence in the Baltic region from a comparative perspective. These works highlighted both similarities and divergences among the Baltic states and helped situate Latvian developments within a wider regional framework, moving beyond nationally isolated narratives.[22]

For Latvia in particular, the publication of Andrew Ezergailis's comprehensive English-language study, *The Holocaust in Latvia 1941–1944* (1996), marked a decisive turning point. Ezergailis provided the first systematic reconstruction of German occupation policies, local participation, and the destruction of Latvian Jewry based on extensive archival research.[23] His work became a foundational reference point for subsequent debates on collaboration, both internationally and within German historiography. At the same time, the existence of Latvian SS and auxiliary formations – and the prominent role played by figures such as Viktors Arājs in the mass murder of Jews in 1941 – attracted considerable public attention, not least at the international level.[24] This focus, however, often

20 Benz 2011.

21 Gross 2001.

22 Tauber 2006; Gaunt 2004.

23 Ezergailis 1996.

24 Plavnieks 2018.

obscured rather than clarified historical realities, as contemporary political instrumentalisation frequently overlaid scholarly analysis. The establishment of the Latvian Historical Commission in 1998, as part of the country's path towards European Union membership, must be seen in this context as a political as well as a scholarly response to Western expectations regarding the confrontation with collaboration during the Holocaust.[25] Despite the important achievements of the Commission and subsequent research, it must be emphasised that to date no comprehensive scholarly monograph on Latvian SS and auxiliary formations has been published – a significant lacuna in the field.

From the mid-2000s onward, German scholarship increasingly engaged directly with the issue of Latvian collaboration. Studies by Katrin Reichelt and Björn Michael Felder played a particularly important role in this process. Their work examined the participation of Latvian auxiliary police units, locally recruited paramilitary formations, and local administrations in anti-Jewish violence, while carefully contextualising these actions within the experience of Soviet occupation, nationalist mobilisation, and pre-existing antisemitic structures, while Felder emphasised the political circumstances of the dual occupation a bit stronger, somewhat in the tradition of Browning and functionalists, whereas Reichelt slightly more underscored ideological reasons such as antisemitism, more in line with Goldhagen and the intentionalists.[26]

German historiography thus assumed a dual role. On the one hand, it challenged national apologetic narratives by demonstrating the extent and significance of local participation in genocide. On the other hand, it also shaped international perceptions of Latvian history, occasionally generating tensions as scholarly interpretations intersected with highly politicised memory debates within Latvia itself. Questions of agency, coercion, and moral responsibility became central points of contention, reflecting broader struggles over national identity and historical legitimacy.

These studies were also reviewed by Latvian scholars. While Kaspars Zellis argues very objectively, Kārlis Kangeris formulates his points in a more detached manner, though he remains objective. Andrievs (Andrew) Ezergailis undermines his own reputation through a polemical style that abandons the scientific framework and exemplifies the emotionality of the debate at that time.[27]

The growing emphasis on collaboration also exposed methodological dilemmas inherent in Holocaust research. While the inclusion of local actors enriched

25 Pettai 2015.

26 Reichelt 2011; Felder 2009.

27 Zellis 2009, 181–185; Kangeris 2012, 190–196; Ezergailis 2012, 197–203.

historical analysis, it raised difficult questions concerning evidentiary standards, moral judgement, and comparative framing. To what extent can collaboration in Latvia be meaningfully compared with developments in Poland, Lithuania, or Ukraine? How should historians balance structural explanations with individual accountability? These debates underscored the fundamentally political dimension of Holocaust historiography and reinforced Latvia's role as a key testing ground for negotiating the limits and possibilities of comparative approaches to genocide.

Regionalisation and survivor testimonies

Parallel to the growing focus on perpetrators and collaboration, German scholarship increasingly turned toward regional studies and survivor testimonies, influenced by a rising international interest in the Holocaust in the occupied Soviet territories. This shift was stimulated in particular by Patrick Desbois's concept of the *Holocaust by Bullets* and by Timothy Snyder's widely discussed synthesis *Bloodlands*.[28] Together, these works redirected scholarly attention to the spatial and experiential dimensions of mass violence in Eastern Europe. Analyses of specific ghettos, camps, and killing sites – such as Peter Klein and Andrej Angrick's study of the Riga Ghetto and Franziska Jahn's later work on the Kaiserwald concentration camp – offered more detailed insights into the lived experiences of victims and the local dynamics of persecution.[29] This process of regionalisation constituted an important corrective to earlier, more abstract and structurally oriented narratives.

Survivor accounts played a crucial role in this development. Following the broad international reception of testimonial literature – spurred by the publication of Victor Klemperer's diaries in 1995,[30] the enduring influence of Primo Levi, and the awarding of the Nobel Prize to Imre Kertész in 2002 – the Latvian context increasingly entered German historiographical and memory-cultural debates. Memoirs and collections of testimonies by Jewish survivors, such as those edited by Gertrude Schneider or by Wolfgang Scheffler and Diana Schulle, offered perspectives that challenged both legalistic and perpetrator-centred approaches.[31] These sources illuminated everyday strategies of survival, the importance of social networks, and the complex interactions between Jews, German occupiers,

28 Desbois 2008; Snyder 2010.

29 Angrick, Klein 2006; Jahn 2018.

30 Klemperer 1995.

31 Schneider 2001; Scheffler, Schulle 2003.

and local populations. At the same time, they underscored the diversity of Jewish experiences within Latvia, countering homogenising representations of victimhood.

Yet the integration of survivor testimonies into German historiography remained uneven. In particular, German Jews deported to Riga and their fate became disproportionately prominent in German research and memory culture when compared to Latvian Jews. Exhibitions in Hannover (2011) and Hamburg (2023) focusing on the Riga Ghetto exemplify this tendency.[32] Linguistic barriers, problems of translation, and differing scholarly traditions further limited the reception of Latvian and Russian-language testimonies. While some voices gained broader recognition – among them Gertrude Schneider, Alexander Bergmann (2009), Ruth Friedländer (2010), Frida Michelson (2020), and Edward Anders (2024) – others remained marginalised. Memoirs such as those by Elmārs Rivošs, for instance, have yet to be translated into German.[33] This selective reception reflects broader epistemic hierarchies within Holocaust studies, in which German-language scholarship continues to occupy a dominant position. In this regard, a German translation of the extensive research and memoir-based work of the Latvian-Jewish survivor and Holocaust scholar Marģers Vestermanis would be of particular importance in addressing existing imbalances.[34] His own 1998 article on Nazi camps in the territory of Latvia preceded the interest in local sites of persecution described above and serves as an example that translations into German did not guarantee immediate reflection in German historiography.[35] The same goes for the limited reception of the German translation of Menachem Barkahan's edited volume on the Holocaust in Latvia (2008).[36]

Despite these limitations, the regional and testimonial turn significantly enriched the understanding of the Holocaust in Latvia. It shifted scholarly attention from abstract explanatory models toward concrete human experiences and highlighted the importance of place-specific analysis. At the same time, it raised new questions about representation, authority, and the ethics of historiography – questions that would become even more pressing in subsequent debates on memory politics and postcolonial perspectives.

32 Berlit-Jackstien, Kreter 2011; Wrochem 2022.

33 Bergmann 2009; Fridlendere 2010; Michelson 2020; Anders 2024; Rivošs 2006.

34 Vestermanis 2025.

35 Vestermanis 1998, 472–492.

36 Barkahan 2008.

Memory politics and European integration

Due to the controversies surrounding collaboration in the Holocaust and ongoing conflicts with Russia over commemoration practices, German historiography on the Holocaust in Latvia has, since the early 2000s, become increasingly intertwined with questions of memory politics and European integration. Early contributions by Eva-Clarita Pettai, in 2003, marked an important starting point for this line of inquiry and were followed by a growing body of scholarship,[37] including studies by Sebastian Lehmann (2012),[38] Katja Wezel (2016),[39] Paula Oppermann (2018),[40] and Tilman Plath (2018).[41] Latvia's accession to the European Union in 2004 constituted a decisive turning point in the internationalisation of its Holocaust history. German scholars were no longer engaging solely with the post-Soviet space, but with a member state of the European Union, subject to shared but contested normative frameworks of remembrance, commemoration, and historical responsibility.[42]

This transformation profoundly affected the ways in which the Holocaust in Latvia was discussed and represented. Transnational initiatives such as the Riga Committee, joint commemorative practices, and collaborative research projects brought German, Latvian, and international actors into closer dialogue. At the same time, these developments exposed persistent tensions between Europeanised memory norms and national narratives that emphasised Latvia's dual experience of Nazi and Soviet occupation, as is the case, for example, with Inesis Feldmanis.[43] German historiography often positioned itself as a mediating voice within these debates, advocating the recognition of Jewish victimhood while remaining cautious about narratives that risked relativising the Holocaust through comparisons with Soviet crimes,[44] which, however, was perceived from a Latvian perspective as moralising interference.[45]

Exhibition projects, memorial controversies, and public debates – particularly those surrounding Waffen-SS commemorations or the status of Soviet war memorials – illustrated how historiography, politics, and public memory became

37 Pettai 2003.
38 Lehmann 2012.
39 Wezel 2016.
40 Oppermann 2018.
41 Plath 2018a, 479–487.
42 Subotic 2019.
43 Feldmanis 2012.
44 Leggewie 2011.
45 Kangeris 2010, 189–198.

increasingly entangled. Latvia emerged as a highly visible arena in which broader European struggles over historical interpretation were negotiated. For German scholars, engagement with Latvian memory politics also prompted renewed reflection on the relationship between scholarship and moral intervention, and between analytical distance and normative commitment.

Alongside academic historiography, recent years have witnessed a growing interest within the German public sphere in the Holocaust in Latvia, especially in the form of autobiographical, documentary, or semi-literary publications. A notable example is Uta von Arnim's *Das Institut in Riga* (2021),[46] which can be situated within a broader strand of German memory literature shaped by the implicit concern that "my grandfather wasn't a Nazi".[47] Comparable to journalistic-historical works such as those by Lorenz Hemicker about his grandfather's role in the mass killings at Rumbula,[48] these publications focus on individual biographies, family histories, and moral ambiguities within German perpetrator and bystander narratives.

Such works testify to a genuine public interest in Latvia as a site of German occupation and mass violence. At the same time, they remain largely disconnected from professional historiography. The specific historical conditions of Latvian society – such as the experience of Soviet rule, local social dynamics, and the complex histories of antisemitism and collaboration – are rarely analysed in depth. Instead, Latvia often functions primarily as a backdrop for German self-reflection rather than as a historically specific social space. As a result, this strand of memory literature tends to reproduce epistemic asymmetries that academic research has increasingly sought to overcome.

Historikerstreit 2.0, postcolonial perspectives, and the war in Ukraine

In recent years, German debates on the Holocaust in Latvia have been reshaped by two interconnected developments: the emergence of postcolonial approaches within Holocaust studies and the geopolitical rupture caused by Russia's war against Ukraine. The so-called *Historikerstreit 2.0*, triggered by Dirk Moses's critique of German Holocaust discourse in *The German Catechism*,[49] revived fundamental questions of comparison, hierarchy, and singularity. These debates were

46 Arnim 2021.
47 For the context see Welzer 2002.
48 Hemicker 2025.
49 Moses 2023.

now articulated through the conceptual language of colonialism, racism, and global violence, thereby reframing earlier controversies in new theoretical terms.

With regard to research on the Holocaust in Latvia, however, the repercussions of this postcolonial turn have remained limited. While postcolonial vocabularies and analytical frameworks have been more readily adopted in Anglophone scholarship – most notably in studies of German occupation policies in Ukraine, such as those by Wendy Lower[50] – their application to Latvia within German historiography has remained largely programmatic and shallow. Yet the contextualisation of German rule in Latvia within broader histories of European colonialism, as suggested in the wake of the *Historikerstreit 2.0*, would offer considerable analytical potential. In order to avoid any relativisation of the Holocaust, Michael Rothberg's concept of multidirectional memory could provide a useful framework for the Latvian case.[51] Such an approach appears all the more necessary given that important victim groups of German occupation remain insufficiently researched, including Soviet prisoners of war[52] and Russian refugees arriving after 1943, forced labourers from Latgale, Roma and patients of psychiatric hospitals[53]. Moreover, the interconnections between different strands of German annihilation policies in 1941 continue to offer a promising field for future research.

Against this backdrop of a limited historiographical reception of postcolonial approaches, calls for "decolonisation" have increasingly emerged in response to a different contemporary catalyst. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 added a new layer of urgency to debates over history and memory in Eastern Europe.[54] The removal of Soviet-era monuments in Latvia – most prominently the dismantling of the Victory Monument in central Riga in 2022 – and the intensified confrontation with Russian historical narratives underscored the continued political relevance of the past.[55] German historiography has increasingly grappled with the instrumentalisation of history in contemporary conflicts, recognising that interpretations of the Holocaust, Soviet occupation, and imperial violence are not merely academic concerns but integral elements of ongoing geopolitical struggles. Within academia, these developments have fuelled demands to decolonise the traditions of Eastern European studies, with direct implications for approaches to the regional history of East Central Europe, including Latvia.

50 Lower 2005.

51 Rothberg 2021.

52 An exception to the rule Kangeris 2020, 126–192; Strods 2021.

53 Plath 2018b, 76–88.

54 Kravchenko, Stech 2024.

55 Kaprāns 2023, 4–9.

A recent publication that has once again drawn attention to long-contested issues is *Thundercross* (2025) by Paula Oppermann.[56] The book addresses the sensitive topic of Latvian antisemitism, a subject that provoked intense controversy in the 1990s and early 2000s. From a historiographical perspective, however, it appears unlikely that the study will trigger a major scholarly backlash, as research on antisemitism in Latvia has become more differentiated and methodologically grounded over time. The fact that the monograph was published in English, among other things, suggests that the publication has international relevance. The numerous transnational references, as well as the examination of gender aspects, also demonstrate its relevance to contemporary international discourse.

Its public impact, by contrast, is likely to be considerable. In the context of Russian propaganda narratives portraying Latvia as a society of "fascists", the topic remains highly politicised. At the same time, renewed global attention to antisemitism – shaped both by the war in Israel since 7 October 2023 and by debates surrounding the *Historikerstreit 2.0* – has heightened public sensitivity to the issue. Within this constellation, Latvia once again risks becoming a projection surface in which scholarly arguments, memory politics, and geopolitical instrumentalisation intersect.

This dynamic reinforces the central argument of this article: while historiographical debates on the Holocaust in Latvia have become more nuanced, professionalised, and internationally integrated, the past continues to exert a powerful influence within the public sphere. It may no longer occupy a central position within academic research agendas, but it remains deeply embedded in contemporary political and moral conflicts.

Conclusion: Latvia as a mirror of German Holocaust historiography

German historiography on the Holocaust in Latvia reveals a distinctive pattern: at key moments of methodological and political transformation within German Holocaust studies, Latvia has repeatedly re-emerged as a focal point of debate. From its marginal presence during the first *Historikerstreit*, through the archival turn and the perpetrator-centred paradigm, to later discussions of collaboration and memory politics, the Latvian case has functioned less as an object of sustained regional analysis than as a mirror reflecting broader shifts in German historical self-understanding.

56 Oppermann 2025.

This trajectory highlights both the achievements and the limitations of German scholarship. Research on Latvia has contributed significantly to dismantling teleological narratives of the "Final Solution", demonstrating the early radicalisation of genocidal violence, and foregrounding the diffusion of agency across institutional and social boundaries in occupied Eastern Europe. At the same time, persistent asymmetries remain evident. German-language historiography has long dominated interpretive frameworks, while Latvian, Jewish, and Slavic perspectives have been integrated selectively and unevenly. Latvia was more often been approached as a site of German action than as a historically specific social and cultural space with its own internal dynamics.

In recent years, however, the historiographical dynamics surrounding the Holocaust in Latvia have changed in a more fundamental way. Not only have earlier polemics over collaboration and responsibility largely subsided, but scholarly production on the topic has also noticeably slowed. While specialised studies continue to appear, the field no longer occupies a central position within German Holocaust research. Notably, the postcolonial turn – despite its prominence in broader debates within Holocaust and genocide studies – has had only limited impact on concrete historiographical work on Latvia. As a result, the analytical potential of postcolonial perspectives has thus far remained largely unrealised in this field.

This relative stabilisation of German historiography contrasts sharply with developments in the realm of memory culture. Beyond academia, the Holocaust in Latvia remains contested. Conflicts surrounding public commemoration, symbolic figures such as Herberts Cukurs, and international controversies such as the memorial dispute in Zedelgem in Belgium demonstrate that the past continues to provoke intense emotional and political reactions.[57] These tensions have been further amplified by contemporary geopolitical developments, particularly Russia's instrumentalisation of historical narratives in the context of its war against Ukraine. In this setting, Latvia once again becomes a symbolic battleground in which questions of fascism, collaboration, and victimhood are mobilised for present-day political purposes – developments that have also resonated within German public and academic debates.[58]

In sum, despite ongoing specialised research, the intense polemical charge that once surrounded the Holocaust in Latvia has gradually diminished. Since the mid-2010s, the subject has become increasingly integrated into established

57 Kaprāns, Tomaševskis 2023, 108–135.

58 Chrupalla sorgt mit Russland-Aussagen für Ärger in der AfD (13.11.2025). *Spiegel*. See also: *Baltische Rundschau*.

scholarly frameworks, and Latvian research has been more fully incorporated into Western academic discourse. In an unintended sense, Ernst Nolte's dictum of a past that "did not want to pass away" appears – at least within historiography – to have been partially fulfilled: the topic has lost much of its former explosive character. Yet this apparent normalisation remains fragile. Whenever historiography intersects with memory politics and contemporary geopolitical conflicts, the unresolved tensions of the past resurface, reminding us that historical closure is never purely an academic achievement and the past close to Russia remains unpredictable.

BIBLIOGRAPHY / BIBLIOGRĀFIJA

Anders, Edward (2024). *Unter Letten während des Holocaust. Meine Biographie*. Berlin: Stiftung Denkmal für die Ermordeten Juden Europas.

Angrick, Andrej; Klein, Peter (2006). *Die „Endlösung" in Riga. Ausbeutung und Vernichtung 1941–1944*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.

Arnim, Uta von (2021). *Das Institut in Riga. Die Geschichte eines NS-Arztes und seiner „Forschung". Eine Spurensuche*. Zürich: Nagel & Kimche.

Augstein, Rudolf, ed. (1987). *Historikerstreit. Die Dokumentation der Kontroverse um die Einzigartigkeit der nationalsozialistischen Judenvernichtung*. München: Piper.

Barkahan, Menachem (2008). *Die Vernichtung der Juden in Lettland 1941–1944*. Riga: Šamir.

Benz, Angelika (2012). *Der Henkersknecht. Der Prozess gegen John (Iwan) Demjanuk in München*. Berlin: Metropol.

Benz, Wolfgang, ed. (1998). *Einsatz im „Reichskommissariat Ostland". Dokumente zum Völkermord im Baltikum und in Weißrußland 1941–1944*. Berlin: Metropol.

Bergmann, Alexander (2009). *Aufzeichnungen eines Untermenschen. Ein Bericht über das Ghetto in Riga und die Konzentrationslager in Deutschland*. Bremen: Edition Temmen.

Berlit-Jackstien, Julia; Kreter, Karljosef, eds. (2011). *Abgeschoben in den Tod. Die Deportation von 1001 jüdischen Hannoveranerinnen und Hannoveranern am 15. Dezember 1941 nach Riga*. Hannover: Hahn.

Bogojavlenska, Svetlana (2012). *Die jüdische Gesellschaft in Kurland und Riga 1795–1915*. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh.

Broszat, Martin (1969). *Der Staat Hitlers. Grundlegung und Entwicklung seiner inneren Verfassung*. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch-Verlag.

Browning, Christopher (1993). *Ganz normale Männer. Das Reserve-Polizeibataillon 101 und die „Endlösung" in Polen*. Hamburg: Rowohlt.

Browning, Christopher (2003). *Die Entfesselung der „Endlösung". Nationalsozialistische Judenpolitik 1939–1942*. München: Propyläen.

Chrupalla sorgt mit Russland-Aussagen für Ärger in der AfD (13.11.2025). *Spiegel*.

Curilla, Wolfgang (2006). *Die deutsche Ordnungspolizei und der Holocaust im Baltikum und in Weißrussland 1941–1944*. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh.

Desbois, Patrick (2008). *Holocaust by Bullets. A Priest's Journey to Uncover the Truth behind the Murder of 1.5 Million Jews*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Denz, Walter (2018). *Kumulative Radikalisierung und Völkermord*. München: GRIN Verlag.

Dribins, Leo (2002). *Ebreji Latvijā*. Rīga: Latvijas Universitāte.

Ezergailis, Andrew (1996). *The Holocaust in Latvia 1941–1944*. Riga: Historical Institute of Latvia.

Ezergailis, Andrievs (2012). Polemika. Vācijas vēsturnieki par holokaustu Latvijā: "Gebelsa skola". *Latvijas Vēstures Institūta Žurnāls*, 1, pp. 197–203.

Felder, Björn Michael (2009). *Lettland im Zweiten Weltkrieg. Zwischen sowjetischen und deutschen Besatzern 1940–1946*. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh.

Feldmanis, Inesis (2012). *Latvija Otrajā pasaules karā (1941-1945): jauns konceptuāls skatījums*. Rīga: LU Akadēmiskais apgāds.

Fridlendere, Ruth (2010). *„Aber wenn ich werd schreien, wird besser sein?" Die Lebensgeschichte der lettischen Jüdin Ruth Fridlendere*. Hamburg: KVV Konkret.

Gaunt, David, ed. (2004). *Collaboration and Resistance during the Holocaust. Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania*. Frankfurt am Main: Lang.

Gerlach, Christian (1998). *Krieg, Ernährung, Völkermord. Forschungen zur deutschen Vernichtungspolitik im Zweiten Weltkrieg*. Hamburg: Hamburger Edition.

Gerlach, Christian (1999). *Kalkulierte Morde. Die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weißrussland 1941–1944*. Hamburg: Hamburger Edition.

Goldhagen, Daniel (1996). *Hitlers willige Vollstrecker. Ganz gewöhnliche Deutsche und der Holocaust*. Berlin: Siedler.

Große Kracht, Klaus (2005). *Die zankende Zunft. Historische Kontroversen in Deutschland nach 1945*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Gross, Jan T (2001). *Neighbors. The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Heer, Hannes; Naumann, Klaus, eds. (1995). *Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941–1944*. Hamburg: Hamburger Edition.

Hemicker, Lorenz (2025). *Mein Großvater der Täter. Eine Spurensuche*. Berlin: Rowohlt.

Hilberg, Raul (1961). *The Destruction of the European Jews*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Jahn, Franziska (2018). *Das KZ Kaiserwald und seine Außenlager 1943–1944*. Berlin: Metropol.

Jüngerkes, Sven (2010). *Deutsche Besatzungsverwaltung in Lettland. Eine Kommunikations- und Kulturgeschichte nationalsozialistischer Organisationen*. Konstanz: UVK-Verlags-Gesellschaft.

Kangeris, Kārlis (2010). Western Pressure in the Writing of Latvian History after 1991. *Inheriting the 1990s: The Baltic Countries*. Ed. by Baiba Metuzāle-Kangere. Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, pp. 189–198.

Kangeris, Kārlis (2012). Review on: Reichelt, Katrin, Lettland unter deutscher Besatzung 1941–1944, Berlin 2011. *Latvijas Vēstures Institūta Žurnāls*, 1, pp. 190–196.

Kangeris, Kārlis (2020). Padomju karagūstekņu nometnes "Stalag-350" palīgnometne Salaspilī 1941–1944. *Daugavas muzeja raksti*. Sast. Mārtiņš Mintaurs et al. Rīga: Mantojums, pp. 126–192.

Kaprāns, Mārtiņš (2023). Dismantling the Victory Monument: The End of Soviet Hegemony in Latvia's Public Space? *Baltic Worlds*, 16, 1–2, pp. 4–9.

Kaprāns, Mārtiņš; Tomaševskis, Jānis (2023). Latviešu karagūstekņi Zedelgemā: vēsture, atmiņa, konflikts. *Letonica*, 53, pp. 108–135.

Katz, Josef (1958). *Ein Schicksal, das man nicht vergisst. Tagebuchaufzeichnungen eines Überlebenden der Ghettos und Konzentrationslager*. Lübeck.

Kaufmann, Max (1947). *Die Vernichtung der Juden Lettlands. Churbn Lettland. Erinnerungen*. München: Self-published.

Klemperer, Viktor (1995). *Ich will Zeugnis ablegen. Tagebücher 1933–1945*. Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag.

Kravchenko, Volodymyr; Stech, Marko Robert, eds. (2024). *Reshaping Russian, Ukrainian and East European Studies*. Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press.

Leggewie, Claus (2011). *Der Kampf um die europäische Erinnerung*. München: C. H. Beck.

Lehmann, Sebastian et al., eds. (2012). *Reichskommissariat Ostland. Tatort und Erinnerungsobjekt*. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh.

Lower, Wendy (2005). *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Michelson, Frida (2020). *Ich überlebte Rumbula*. Hamburg: Europäische Verlagsanstalt.

Mommsen, Hans (2002). *Auschwitz, 17. Juli 1942. Der Weg zur europäischen „Endlösung der Judenfrage"*. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch-Verlag.

Moses, Dirk (2023). *Nach dem Genozid. Grundlagen für eine neue Erinnerungskultur*. Berlin: Matthes und Seitz.

Neumann, Franz (1977). *Behemoth. Struktur und Praxis des Nationalsozialismus 1933–1944*. Frankfurt am Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt.

Oppermann, Paula (2018). A Dual Legacy: Reviewing the New Exhibition at the Former Nazi Camp Salaspils. *Cultures of History Forum*.

Oppermann, Paula (2025). *Thunder Cross. Fascist Antisemitism in 20th Century Latvia*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Pettai, Eva-Clarita (2003). *Demokratisierung der Geschichte in Lettland. Staatsbürgerliches Bewusstsein und Geschichtspolitik im ersten Jahrzehnt der Unabhängigkeit*. Hamburg: Reinhold Krämer-Verlag.

Pettai, Eva-Clarita (2015). Negotiating History for Reconciliation: A Comparative Evaluation of the Baltic Presidential Commissions. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 67, 7, pp. 1079–1101.

Piper, Ernst (2005). *Alfred Rosenberg. Hitlers Chefideologe*. München: Blessing.

Plath, Tilman (2009). Juden unter Ulmanis. *Jahrbuch des Baltischen Deutschtums*, pp. 99–119.

Plath, Tilman (2012). *Zwischen Schonung und Menschenjagden. Arbeitseinsatzpolitik in den baltischen Generalbezirken des Reichskommissariats Ostland*. Essen: Klartext-Verlag.

Plath, Tilman (2018a). Uncomfortable Heroes. Comparing Thoughts about Latvian Riflemen and SS-Legionnaires in Latvian Memorial Culture 1920–2017. *Vestnik Sankt-Peterburgskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta*, 63, 2, pp. 479–487.

Plath, Tilman (2018b). Lettland unter deutscher Besatzung 1941–1944/45. *Lettland 1918–2018. Ein Jahrhundert Staatlichkeit*. Ed. by Ivars Ījabs et al. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, pp. 76–88.

Plavnieks, Richard (2018). *Nazi Collaborators on trial during the Cold War. Viktors Arajs and the Latvian Auxiliary Security Police*. Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Pohl, Dieter (2008). *Die Herrschaft der Wehrmacht. Deutsche Militärbesatzung und einheimische Bevölkerung in der Sowjetunion 1941–1944*. München: Oldenbourg.

Press, Bernhard (1992). *Judenmord in Lettland 1941–1945*. Berlin: Metropol.

Reichelt, Katrin (2011). *Lettland unter deutscher Besatzung 1941–1944. Der lettische Anteil am Holocaust*. Berlin: Metropol.

Reitlinger, Gerald (1953). *Die Vernichtung der europäischen Juden*. München: Kindler.

Rivošs, Elmārs (2006). *Piezīmes*. Rīga: Rīgas Ebreju Kopiena.

Rothberg, Michael (2021). *Multidirektionale Erinnerung. Holocaustgedenken im Zeitalter der Dekolonisierung*. Berlin: Metropol.

Rüter-Edelmann, Adelheid L.; Rüter, C. F., eds. (1979). *Justiz und NS-Verbrechen. Sammlung deutscher Strafurteile wegen nationalsozialistischer Tötungsverbrechen 1945-1966*. Vol. 20–21. Amsterdam: University Press Amsterdam.

Scheffler, Wolfgang; Schulle, Diana, eds. (2003). *Buch der Erinnerung. Die ins Baltikum deportierten deutschen, österreichischen und tschechoslowakischen Juden*. München: Saur.

Schneider, Gertrude (2003). *Journey into Terror. Story of the Riga Ghetto*. Westport: Praeger.

Snyder, Timothy (2010). *Bloodlands. Europe between Hitler and Stalin*. New York: Basic Books.

Stranga, Aivars (2008). *Ebreji Baltijā*. Rīga: Zinātne.

Šteimanis, Josifs (2002). *History of Latvian Jews*. Boulder: East European Monographs.

Strods, Kaspars, ed. (2021). *Mēs visi esam gūstekņi: Stalag 347 padumju karagūstekņa dienasgrāmata*. Rīga: Latvijas Mediji.

Subotic, Jelena (2019). *Red Star, Red Star: Holocaust Remembrance after Communism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Tauber, Joachim, ed. (2006). *„Kollaboration" in Nordosteuropa. Erscheinungsformen und Deutungen im 20. Jahrhundert*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

Vestermanis, Margers (1998). Die nationalsozialistischen Haftstätten und Todeslager im okkupierten Lettland (1941–1945). *Die nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager (1933–1945)*. Ed. by Ulrich Herbert et al. Göttingen: Wallstein-Verlag.

Vestermanis, Marģers (2025). *Cilvēcība tomēr nebija mirusi*. Rīga: Zinātne.

Welzer, Harald (2022). *„Opa war kein Nazi!" Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis*. Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer-Taschenbuch-Verlag.

Wezel, Katja (2016). *Geschichte als Politikum. Lettland und die Aufarbeitung nach der Diktatur*. Berlin: Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag.

Wildt, Michael (2002). *Die Generation des Unbedingten. Das Führungskorps des Reichssicherheitshauptamtes*. Hamburg: Hamburger Edition.

Wilhelm, Hans Heinrich (1996). *Die Einsatzgruppe A der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD 1941–1942*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.

Wippermann, Wolfgang (1997). *Wessen Schuld? Vom Historikerstreit zur Goldhagen-Kontroverse*. Berlin: Elefanten Press.

Wolff, Jeanette (1947). *Sadismus oder Wahnsinn. Erlebnisse in den deutschen Konzentrationslagern im Osten*. Dresden: Sachsenverlag.

Wrochem, Oliver, ed. (2022). *Der Tod ist ständig unter uns. Die Deportationen nach Riga und der Holocaust im deutsch besetzten Lettland*. Berlin: Metropol.

Zellhuber, Andreas (2006). *„Unsere Verwaltung treibt einer Katastrophe zu…". Das Reichsministerium für die besetzten Ostgebiete und die deutsche Besatzungsherrschaft in der Sowjetunion 1941–1944*. München: Vögel.

Zellis, Kaspars (2009). Review on: Felder, Björn M. Lettland im Zweiten Weltkrieg, Paderborn 2009. *Latvijas Vēstures Institūta Žurnāls*, 4, pp. 181–185.

PAGĀTNE, KAS NEVĒLAS PAZUST? HOLOKAUSTS LATVIJĀ VĀCU HISTORIOGRĀFIJĀ

Tilman Plath

Rakstā analizēta holokausta izpēte Latvijā vācu historiogrāfijā no 20. gadsimta 80. gadiem līdz mūsdienām. Tajā parādīts, ka Latvija vācu holokausta pētniecībā atkārtoti nonākusi uzmanības centrā nozīmīgu metodoloģisku un politisku pārmaiņu brīžos – sākot ar *Historikerstreit* (vēsturnieku strīdu), turpinot ar arhīvu atvēršanu pēc 1991. gada, vainīgo pētniecības paradigmas nostiprināšanos, līdz diskusijām par kolaborāciju, atmiņu politiku un postkoloniālām pieejām. Tiek argumentēts, ka Latvija vācu historiogrāfijā bieži kalpojusi kā vācu paškritiskas refleksijas telpa, kamēr vietējās sabiedrības sociālā un kultūras specifika palikusi perifēra. Vienlaikus tiek parādīts, ka, lai gan historiogrāfiskās polemikas pēdējos gados ir mazinājušās, atmiņas kultūrā holokausta tēma Latvijā joprojām ir politiski un emocionāli konfliktējoša.

Atslēgas vārdi: holokausts Latvijā, vācu historiogrāfija, kolaborācija, atmiņu politika, Austrumeiropa

Kopsavilkums

Šajā rakstā analizēts, kā holokausts Latvijā ticis pētīts, interpretēts un atspoguļots vācu historiogrāfijā no 20. gadsimta 80. gadiem līdz mūsdienām. Pētījuma centrā ir nevis holokausts Latvijā, bet gan jautājums par to, kā vācu vēsturnieki dažādos laikposmos ir skatījušies uz šo notikumu un kādas metodoloģiskās, politiskās un sabiedriskās debates ietekmējušas viņu interpretācijas. Raksta galvenā tēze ir, ka Latvija vairākkārt kļuvusi par nozīmīgu atskaites punktu brīžos, kad Vācijā notikušas būtiskas pārmaiņas holokausta pētniecībā. Tādējādi Latvija bieži kalpojusi ne tikai kā vēsturisku notikumu norises lauks, bet arī kā spogulis, kurā atspoguļojušās Vācijas debates par vainu, atbildību, piemiņu un nacionālo identitāti.

Latvijai ir īpaša vieta vācu priekšstatos par holokaustu. Otrā pasaules kara laikā Latvija kļuva par vienu no svarīgākajām nacistiskās iznīcināšanas politikas norises vietām Austrumeiropā. Šeit darbojās tādi augsta ranga nacistu funkcionāri kā Frīdrihs Jekelns un Rūdolfs Lange, bet uz Rīgu tika deportēti tūkstošiem ebreju no Vācijas, Austrijas un Čehijas zemēm. Šie apstākļi nodrošināja Latvijai redzamu vietu vācu atmiņas kultūrā. Vienlaikus vācu historiogrāfija ilgu laiku pievērsās galvenokārt vācu vaininiekiem un no Vācijas deportēto ebreju likteņiem, bet daudz mazāk interesējās par Latvijas sabiedrības vēsturi, Latvijas ebreju kopienu vai vietējo sociālo kontekstu.

Rakstā aplūkots, kā aukstā kara laikā holokausta pētniecību ietekmēja ierobežotā pieeja avotiem. 20. gadsimta 80. gados, *Historikerstreit* jeb vācu vēsturnieku strīda laikā,

holokausts tika interpretēts galvenokārt kā Vācijas vēstures un politiskās kultūras problēma. Debates koncentrējās uz nacisma vietu Vācijas vēsturē, uz jautājumu par nacistu noziegumu unikalitāti un to salīdzināmību ar staļinismu. Latvija šajā kontekstā parādījās tikai kā viena no masu slepkavību vietām, savukārt tās sabiedrība un vietējie procesi lielākoties palika ārpus uzmanības loka.

Būtiskas pārmaiņas notika pēc Padomju Savienības sabrukuma. Arhīvu atvēršana Baltijas valstīs, Krievijā un citur Austrumeiropā radīja pilnīgi jaunas iespējas pētniecībai. Vācu vēsturnieki ieguva pieeju plašam dokumentu klāstam, kas ļāva detalizētāk analizēt notikumus Latvijā. Šajā laikā Latvija kļuva īpaši svarīga diskusijās par holokausta attīstību, jo pētījumi par 1941. gada masu slepkavībām pierādīja, ka genocīds bija sasniedzis milzīgus apmērus jau pirms Vanzē konferences. Tas veicināja jaunas interpretācijas par holokausta izcelsmi, uzsverot radikalizācijas procesu, kara apstākļu nozīmi un vietējo iniciatīvu lomu.

No 20. gadsimta 90. gadu beigām vācu historiogrāfijā nostiprinājās tā sauktais "vaininieku pagrieziens". Pētnieki arvien vairāk pievērsās nacistu izpildītājiem, viņu motivācijām, institūcijām un darbības mehānismiem. Latvija ieņēma nozīmīgu vietu šajos pētījumos, jo tieši šeit tika īstenotas vienas no agrīnākajām un visplašākajām masu slepkavībām okupētajā Eiropā. Vairāki ievērojami vācu vēsturnieki analizēja Drošības policijas, SD, SS un Kārtības policijas darbību Latvijā, palīdzot precīzāk izprast vācu vaininieku lomu genocīdā. Tomēr arī šajā posmā Latvija nereti tika skatīta galvenokārt kā vide vācu darbībai, nevis kā patstāvīgs vēsturisks un sociāls konteksts.

Īpaši nozīmīga kļuva kolaborācijas problemātika. Starptautiskās diskusijas par vietējo iedzīvotāju līdzdalību holokaustā veicināja interesi par Baltijas valstīm. Šajā sakarā liela nozīme bija Andrievam Ezergailim, kura pētījumi par holokaustu Latvijā kļuva par vienu no svarīgākajiem atskaites punktiem turpmākajā pētniecībā. Vācu autori analizēja latviešu palīgpolicijas vienības, vietējo administrāciju, nacionālistiskās organizācijas un citus vietējos aktorus, cenšoties saprast, kā vācu okupācijas politika mijiedarbojās ar vietējiem sociālajiem un politiskajiem apstākļiem. Šie pētījumi palīdzēja pārvarēt vienkāršotus priekšstatus par vainu un atbildību, vienlaikus izraisot asas diskusijas Latvijas atmiņas politikā.

Rakstā aplūkota arī pieaugošā interese par izdzīvojušo liecībām un reģionālajiem pētījumiem. Ietekmējoties no tādiem autoriem kā Patriks Debuā un Timotijs Snaiders, pētnieki arvien biežāk pievērsās konkrētām vietām, lokālajām sabiedrībām un individuālajai pieredzei. Lielāku ievērību ieguva tādu holokaustu pārdzīvojušo cilvēku atmiņas kā Frīda Mihelsone, Gertrūde Šneidere un Aleksandrs Bergmans. Tomēr arī šajā jomā saglabājās zināma disproporcija: vācu sabiedrībā un historiogrāfijā bieži lielāka uzmanība tika pievērsta no Vācijas deportēto ebreju pieredzei nekā Latvijas ebreju vēsturei.

Svarīga raksta daļa veltīta atmiņu politikas jautājumiem. Latvijas pievienošanās Eiropas Savienībai 2004. gadā mainīja diskusiju kontekstu un ciešāk sasaistīja holokausta izpēti ar Eiropas atmiņas kultūras debatēm. Latvija kļuva par nozīmīgu piemēru diskusijās par nacisma un komunisma noziegumu attiecībām, par "divu totalitārismu" koncepciju un par holokausta vietu Eiropas kopīgajā vēsturiskajā atmiņā. Vācu vēsturnieki bieži

iesaistījās šajās debatēs, cenšoties līdzsvarot holokausta centrālo vietu Eiropas atmiņā ar Austrumeiropas pieredzi padomju okupācijas un represiju kontekstā.

Raksta noslēgumā aplūkotas jaunākās tendences, tostarp *Historikerstreit 2.0*, postkoloniālās pieejas un Krievijas kara pret Ukrainu ietekme uz vēstures interpretācijām. Krievijas agresija ir radījusi jaunu interesi par impēriju vēsturi, koloniālismu un Austrumeiropas pieredzi. Šajā kontekstā Latvija atkal kļuvusi par nozīmīgu piemēru debatēs par okupāciju, dekolonizāciju, atmiņu politiku un vēsturisko taisnīgumu.

Raksta secinājums ir, ka vācu historiogrāfija par holokaustu Latvijā pēdējās desmitgadēs kļuvusi ievērojami niansētāka, profesionālāka un starptautiski integrētāka. Vienlaikus Latvija tajā bieži tikusi izmantota kā vieta, kur vācu sabiedrība reflektē par savām vēsturiskajām problēmām. Lai gan akadēmiskās diskusijas ir izvērtušās daudzveidīgākas un sarežģītākas, atmiņu politikas konflikti nav pazuduši. Tādēļ holokausts Latvijā joprojām ir ne tikai vēstures pētniecības objekts, bet arī svarīgs jautājums Eiropas kolektīvajā atmiņā.

Iesniegts / Submitted 02.12.2025.

© 2026 Tilman Plath, Latvijas Universitāte
Raksts publicēts brīvpieejā saskaņā ar Creative Commons Attiecinājuma-Nekomerciāls 4.0 Starptautisko licenci (CC BY-NC 4.0)
This is an open access article licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0) (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)