

**Voices from Riga:
Ethnic perspectives on a wartime city, 1914-1919¹**

by

Mark R. Hatlie

This paper will explore differing perceptions of Riga during the turmoil of war and revolution from 1914 to 1919 and put them in the context of the shifting political and military situation of the city. While Riga's fate was decided on the battlefield and negotiated in diplomatic conferences, newspapers, books, party meetings, secret cells and in various other settings, perspectives of the city and its role in history were being formulated at the ground level by eye-witnesses from differing ethno-religious and political groups.

Riga was a quintessential Eastern European "borderland" area. It was internally highly heterogeneous and hotly contested from both within and without, from below as well as from above, by empires, groups and individual imaginations. If "frontier regions are privileged sites for the articulation of national distinctions",² that is especially true for the frontiers of empires where entire nations have their territories. When those nations are born as states it is almost always wartime, a time when such national distinctions – those associated with the empires, with the emerging states, and with other minorities – draw different mental maps of where each individual, his family, his people and his city are in history and political geography. National distinctions also decide between life and death. Riga was that kind of space from 1914 to 1919. During that brief period, the city went through seven regime changes. It was the capital of the province of Livonia within the Russian Empire, part of the military district of Dvinsk, capital of the semi-

¹ Most of this article is pieced together from various chapters of my dissertation "Riga at War: 1914-1919" being completed at the *Institut für osteuropäische Geschichte und Landeskunde* at the Eberhard-Karl-Universität Tübingen. The ideas presented here overlap to no small degree with unpublished papers presented at the January, 2004 conference on religion and ethnicity hosted by the faculty of religion studies at the Freie Universität Berlin, the July, 2004 "Metropolitan Catastrophes" conference at the Centre for Metropolitan History in London and the June, 2006 "Riga and Tartu as Sites of Memory" conference at the University of Tartu. I would like to thank the FU Berlin, *Sonderforschungsbereich 437* funded by the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* and the University of Tartu for supporting my participation in those conferences.

² PETER SAHLINS referring to the Pyrenees, quoted by PATRICE M. DABROWSKI: "Discovering" the Galician Borderlands. The Case of the Eastern Carpathians, in: *Slavic Review* 64 (2005), 2, pp. 380-401, here p. 380.

autonomous province of Latvia, a German *Gouvernement* within the occupation regime of Ober Ost, the capital of a Latvian communist state closely aligned with Soviet Russia at the height of its civil war, the contested capital city in a three-way civil war, and finally the capital of an independent Latvian state. Riga lost its massive industrial base and half of its pre-war population to the large-scale evacuation of 1915. It was flooded with refugees, bombarded by airplanes, zeppelin airships and artillery, looted and set ablaze by retreating troops, and besieged by two armies. Witnesses who stayed in Riga throughout the entire period and recorded their thoughts are rare, but personal accounts covering some of the period are available.³

I have selected several such accounts which are especially vivid and give an impression of Riga changed places, re-labeled and redefined itself from the viewpoint of a Russian priest, a German woman and several Latvian writers. In each case, other accounts will be drawn into the discussion to give a more complete picture. In each section I have also included reference to a wartime sermon to show the various places religion could occupy in the articulation of place in history and community.

While these perspectives are as unique as any personal accounts, they are in some ways at least, typical for the different social groups of the city. The labeling of the sections according to ethnicities is by its very nature somewhat arbitrary. Depending on the period of the war, some of the perceptions described could well be those of other groups. The case of Riga shows how perspectives could be very, very different and very, very similar among diverse people within a narrow scope of space and time. Riga was perceived as the center and the frontier, both the center stage in a national drama and the remote corner of empire, both as liberated homeland and occupied hinterland. It's spaces (streets, churches, schools, parks, government buildings) changed not only their labels but their criteria of access with each succeeding catastrophe and triumph. That kind of heterogeneity of identity and experience is the hallmark of a borderland place. In this case, however, it is not a large and amorphous frontier zone, but a comparatively confined urban landscape claimed by two empires and an emerging nation state, each with its own constituencies inside the city. A single point on the map could be a borderland.

Riga was an ethnically diverse city of approximately 500,000 people at the outbreak of the war. The Germans made up only 13% of the population, but constituted the dominant nationality in the economic and political life of the city. Russians made up 18% and came from very diverse backgrounds,

³ I know of only one surviving diary that covers the entire period, that of ISA MASING, available at the archive of the Carl-Schirren-Gesellschaft in Lüneburg. There is as yet no monographic retelling of the history of the city during this period. There are several general histories of Latvia during the period, however, including VALDIS BĒRZIŅŠ: *Latvija pirmā pasaules kara laikā* [Latvia During the First World War], Rīga 1987, revised 1992, and EDGARS ANDERSONS: *Latvijas vēsture 1914-1920* [The History of Latvia], Daugava 1967.

consisting of industrial workers, tsarist officials, merchants and soldiers from the garrison. While most were rather recent arrivals, there had been a Russian Riga for centuries, including a sizeable community of Old Believers. Latvians made up a relative majority of 40%. They were mostly families which had not been in the city long, but had come to work in the factories. There was, however, also a growing and increasingly assertive middle class. Jews, Lithuanians and Poles made up between 5% and 10% each. There were no ghettos or ethnic quarters as such, only relative concentrations of some groups.⁴ This article will focus on the three dominant population groups: the Russians, Germans and Latvians. That is in part a purely pragmatic decision. These are, however, also the three national groups in the city which had states or state projects and ideologies as potential foci of their perception of Riga and its role.

A Russian Voice

The German offensive in Poland in spring, 1915 had sent hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing east and north into the interior of the Tsarist Empire, many of them passing through Riga. With the approach of the German armies in July, it was Riga's turn to evacuate and flee. The authorities had already given the order to evacuate the city's industry, schools, administration, and much of the population. Valuables of every kind from silverware to champagne to church bells and the keels of the yachts were being collected and transported into the interior of the Empire. Thousands were on the move. On the 19th of July, 1915, Russian Orthodox Riga was on its knees.

Showing up for the morning liturgy in the Cathedral, the massive building which the Russian state had placed as ostentatiously as possible near the center of the city, the Orthodox faithful found themselves in a half-empty church. Many of the icons and liturgical symbols had already been evacuated. Instead of the archbishop leading a liturgy, Shchukin, a priest from the seminary, came forward to speak a "sermon", not usually the strong point of a Russian Orthodox Sunday service.

The sermon⁵ included much that reflected the state-focused, imperial position of the church as well as elements of Orthodox end-times theology. Shchukin started with a dramatic account of the dangers posed by the approaching barbarian hordes of Germans who could, at any moment, enter

⁴ For a detailed breakdown of the population in 1913 and during the war, see MARK R. HATLIE: *Bevölkerungsverschiebungen in Riga während des Welt- und Bürgerkrieges 1914-1919*, in: *Der ethnische Wandel im Baltikum zwischen 1850-1950. Neun Beiträge zum 13. Baltischen Seminar 2001*, ed. by HEINRICH WITTRAM, Lüneburg 2005 (Baltische Seminare, 11), pp. 53-80.

⁵ A transcript was published in the *Rizhskie eparkhial'nye vedemosti*, No. 15-16, 1-15 August, 1915, and in SVYASHCH. V.V. SHCHUKIN: *Na zloby voennogo vremeni. Propovedi i besedy 1915-1916 gg.*, Nizh.-Novg. 1916, pp. 12-16.

the city and start an orgy of destruction and plunder. He then began his appeal to abandon the city and flee into Russia. He compared Riga to Jerusalem when it was under attack by the Romans. It is thanks to the Jews who fled, he argued, that Jewish and Christian religion survived. Similarly, the Orthodox citizens had a duty to preserve themselves for the survival of Russia. Why, he asked, must Riga be subjected to this terrible fate? Was it not, like Jerusalem, a place of sin, drunkenness, prostitution, crime and debauchery? Was it not a place where some lived in great wealth while others were starving or froze to death on the street? Were not the Commandments being ignored? Now Riga must face the wrath of God. There was no choice but to flee and pray for mercy. It was, he said, the duty of the faithful to their society and country to flee – flee now, without hesitation, flee anywhere possible. They were to take everything they could carry and destroy what they could not so as to leave nothing for the hated enemy.

In this analogy, the multiethnic character of the city and the Russians' place in it is only hinted at, and probably not intentionally. In the Jewish rebellion against Rome, the Jews fought and defended Jerusalem, many of them sharing the fate of the city when it was destroyed by the Romans, while the Christian minority did not, choosing flight. While this level of meaning was probably not intended, it is clear that the city itself, with its infrastructure, architecture, and local particularities was of little consequence to Shchukin.

The Riga Orthodox church had thus become a mouthpiece for the scorched-earth policy of the Russian military, a policy which had already uprooted hundreds of thousands of people and devastated wide areas of Poland, Lithuania, and western Russia. This panicked appeal probably contributed a great deal to the demographic losses that Russian Orthodox population suffered relative to other population groups in Riga over the course of the war.⁶

The shepherds had already left the city, so the flock had to follow. The Archbishop, Shchukin concluded, was already evacuated to Pskov where he was now fervently praying to the Wondrous Icon of the Mother of God "Umilenie" to petition the Lord for protection and the salvation of the city and an eventual return. Whether due to the intervention of the icon or not, Riga managed to hold two more years before falling to the German army in September of 1917.

Very little is known about the Russian Orthodox priest V. Shchukin. He lived and served in Riga during the opening years of the First World War, left the city with the other clergy in 1915, and continued to serve as part of the Riga archdiocese in other locations in Russia after that. He was an instructor at the seminary in Riga and editor of and frequent contributor to the official journal of the Riga archdiocese. We do not know his first name beyond the

⁶ See HATLIE: *Bevölkerungsverschiebungen* (cf. footnote 4). The Russians of Riga lost a disproportionately high percentage of their population to the evacuation.

'V', his age, or anything about his fate after 1917. Unlike many other Russian names that appear in the sources only once, however, he has left a paper trail. It includes articles and a sermon in the journal of the Riga archdiocese dating from the outbreak of the war through February, 1917, and a booklet of sermons published in Nizhny Novgorod, where the personnel of the archdiocese of Riga was then residing, late in the war. In October of 1914, he is also mentioned in a list of Riga priests who were assigned to attend to the wounded in the many military hospitals set up in Riga. It would appear that he was both directly involved in the day-to-day activities of the church in his capacity as priest as well as a representative of the public face of the church through his writing and his sermons on important occasions in Riga.⁷

Some of this material is formulaic and theological, and it is all meant for public consumption and is thus most certainly approved by the hierarchy. But much of it is not purely theological. It draws on or relates directly to wartime Riga, often from a rather personal, ground-level perspective. So it is possible to reconstruct, to some degree, how the Russian church in Riga experienced the war through the public statements of one of its members.

The Riga as reflected in these writings is a part of Russia, but has little in particular to recommend it. This is best reflected in Shchukin's sermon. The sanctuary was full of people, but otherwise empty. The candles, icons and symbols used for the service, all that which usually lend Orthodox churches their elaborate appearance and contemplative atmosphere, had been removed and brought to safety. No liturgy took place. Instead, Father Shchukin spoke and appealed to the people of Riga to flee, calling flight before the approaching German enemy the duty of every loyal citizen. More, he even appeals to the people of Riga to leave nothing of value to the barbarians – no property, no supplies, no laboring hands. A Riga that is given over to the Germans, even if only temporarily, should be featureless and empty.

Indeed, although the journal of the Russian Orthodox diocese in Riga did, in other, non-theological, strictly news-related contexts, follow the campaign of hatred against the local German minority, parroting the slander being spread about Baltic Germans in Petrograd newspapers, Shchukin does not mention them in his call to level the city and flee. He does not refer to Riga as a nest of Teutonic noblemen and German culture, economically and politically dominated by foreign elements, to be destroyed and abandoned, although that would have been a plausible enough approach. The enemy in his sermon is at the gates, not within the walls, a foreign element, like the Romans, coming to carry out God's judgement on a city of sin.

This attitude is evident in later writings as well when Shchukin, now residing in Dorpat (Tartu) with most of the rest of the Riga clergy, returns to

⁷ I was unable to follow his trail back in time for pre-war articles, so it is unclear how long he had been writing for the *Rizhskie eparkhial'nye vedomosti*. By pure chance I have stumbled across an article by a V. Shchukin in a newspaper from the turn of the century.

Riga for major church events and reports on those celebrations. His focus is without place,⁸ almost exclusively on the Russian Orthodox community, a community which appears totally unified and not as it was in fact, for example, part Russian and part Latvian. Where he does describe the city in general, as when he describes his nighttime train ride into Riga for the Christmas and New Years liturgies in the winter of 1915-1916 or when describing the mood of the city during a visit in August of 1916, his writing is very different from German descriptions of the same period. He fails to describe any special landmarks, tells no anecdotes about particular people or events other than the bishop and his liturgies and a few remarks about the mood of the worshippers. He refers to the "cherished city", but does not call it "*Heimat*" nor even ascribe any particular attributes to it at all (not even "Russian" or "besieged").

His account also differs markedly from that of Felichkin, the Russian police chief who was new to Riga in 1915.⁹ Felichkin's is a rare account outside the memoirs of revolutionaries where the writer describes his own active role in the struggle for power. In his memoirs, one sees him engaged in a struggle to combat wartime vice which he saw as pervasive in Riga: corruption and prostitution, especially that involving high-ranking Russian officers, alcohol consumption despite wartime prohibition, especially among his own police force, and spying for the Germans. His wartime experience in Riga is described as an active struggle to keep the city and the regime running properly and cleanly, but more because that was his job than because of any particular relationship to Riga. Felichkin had noted Riga's cleanliness and orderliness and appreciated the parks and gardens. He contrasted Riga favorably with the other Russian cities with which he was familiar (Odessa and Chita). While German accounts mention him unfavorably as someone who worked to root out German influence from 1915 to 1917, the campaign Felichkin himself described seems markedly un-ideological and un-emotional, aside from some humorous anecdotes. He conducted raids to break up brothels and stop alleged spying; he stood up to corrupt army commanders and vied with them for influence in higher places; he resigned from the police when the Revolution came and escaped when captured by revolutionary forces. He did his job as a policeman, chose legality over personal spite or profit, survival over martyrdom and published his account in a Riga paper 20 years later. This Russian account could *almost* have taken place elsewhere.

For the priest Shchukin, however, the city was as dark and blank as the cathedral's sanctuary walls, stripped of their icons. Considering the genre of

⁸ Dietrich Beyrau has noted the placelessness (*Ortlosigkeit*) of the Russian Orthodox priesthood. I see that observation confirmed in this example. See: DIETRICH BEYRAU: Projektionen, Imaginationen und Visionen. Die orthodoxe Militärgesellschaft im Einsatz für Glauben, Zar und Vaterland 1914-1917, in: Jahrbuch für die Geschichte Osteuropas 52 (2004), 3, pp. 402-420.

⁹ M.D. Felichkin serialized his memoirs as wartime chief of police in Riga in the Riga Russian newspaper *Segodnia vecherom* from September to November, 1934.

his writing, however, and the fact that some unsigned articles – perhaps by Shchukin – in the same journal do in fact put more of a face on the city, it would be unfair to belabor the point more than it deserves. It can be said, however, that the Riga he was experiencing was an integral part of Russia, valued primarily in the larger context of Russian life in the wide Empire, threatened by German invasion, stripped bare and laid almost willingly on the altar as a sacrifice for the greater good of the Orthodox people.¹⁰

Several years later, when Soviet Russia and the new Latvian state were signing their peace treaty and life was settling back into postwar normalcy, Riga had not, at least for some Russian visitors completely lost its Russian character.¹¹ This was no doubt at least in part due to the influx of émigrés who had fled Bolshevik power in Russia, however, and does not so much reflect a return to the pre-war Russian face of the city.

German Voices

In the spring of 1915, Frau Luise “Isa” Masing, 40 years old, mother of three, wife of a *Gymnasium* school teacher, relative of a member of the city administration, sister-in-law of the St. Gertrude church pastor – a typical member of the upper-class German Riga society – was still managing to maintain some of her bourgeois rhythm of activity.¹² This was extremely difficult, however. The economic pinch of wartime need and inflation (16

¹⁰ In fairness to Shchukin, his writing does give some clues about life among the Russian Orthodox community, his primary concern: the issue of the absence of the clergy. Expecting the city to fall, the clergy had joined the Russian military in promoting the evacuation and had left the city and gone to Dorpat (and later further east to Nizhny Novgorod). In the face of accusations that it had “abandoned its flock without necessary care, services and other requirements,” and had shown itself to be “below the priests and pastors of the other faiths, who had stayed behind,” the clergy was forced to justify its absence, a duty which Shchukin took on in the journal of the archdiocese in the August issue of 1916. He defended leaving the city on the 19th of July, arguing that it was obeying the orders of the civilian and military government. There were several other articles about the efforts being made to help the city, including regular visits by the clergy and the archbishop’s fervent and daily prayers in the Pchorsky monastery to save Riga from the Germans. See V. SHCHUKIN: Ostavat’sya ili bezhat’?, in: Rizhskie eparkial’nye vedomosti, No. 1, January 1916, pp. 59-65, 59; *ibidem*, No. 15-16, 1-15 August, 1915, pp. 436-439, and pp. 440-488.

¹¹ IGOR GRABAR’s description of Riga from January of 1921 shows him pleasantly surprised to be in such a Russian city. IGOR GRABAR’: Pis’ma 1917-1941 [Letters 1917-1941], Moskva 1977, pp. 42-46.

¹² The diary of Luise “Isa” Masing is our main source of information about her. The diary was never intended for publication and has not yet been published. Gabriele von Mickwitz (form. Sticinsky), a niece of Luise Masing, has the diaries and has typed them into a more readable form. She was kind enough to make me a copy for my research. It is now available at the archive of the Carl-Schirren-Gesellschaft in Lüneburg. The dates in parentheses refer to entry dates in the diary.

February, 1915)¹³ the fear of denunciations, and the prohibition on speaking German in public had begun to restrict and channel what had been normal life only a year before into an ever narrowing sphere of movement. By the spring of 1915, Luise Masing found herself forced to change her gymnastics class in February because "the others are becoming Russian" (4 February, 1915). Public readings in German having been cancelled, she attended readings and lectures in private homes among friends and acquaintances for a time (6 March, 1915). These were eventually cancelled as well, however, because it had become too expensive to properly serve the guests. Masing reported being cursed at by a Latvian in the Moscow suburb on the way to a Christmas church service in January of 1915, an incident typical of the period (2 January, 1915). Struggling throughout the war to keep a nanny on hire for her children, she was hearing the stories told by others of Latvian housemaids denouncing their German employers. The Germans, she reports, are afraid to fire them for fear of being denounced to the police (for example 4 December, 1914). In 1915, her children can no longer play in the *Schützengarten* public park because it has been closed: too many people had been speaking German there. She can send her children to the private yard of a relative, however. In 1916, her children can no longer ice skate on the Esplanade for fear of being denounced as German-speakers.

The war had not been raging for more than a few months when Riga's Germans began to feel the growing restrictions on their lives as *Germans*. Already in the examples taken from this woman's diary one can see that these restrictions had a spatial element to them. Her social existence was limited to the private sphere. Public life had become almost non-existent, limited to improvised or holiday gatherings of small circles of friends and relatives. Baltic Germans in Riga experienced the outbreak of the war and the two years that followed as a period of loss and alienation.¹⁴ The preceding several decades of Russification, dramatic socio-economic change and political upheaval had certainly marred their traditional position of comfort within the Baltic provinces. But the war put them under conditions that quickly resembled foreign occupation. They referred to the period as *die Russenzeit* or *die Maulkorbzeit* (the "Russian period" or the "Muzzle time").¹⁵

The sources often mention "measures [plural] taken to limit the privileged position of the Baltic Germans." But for the Baltic Germans one particular

¹³ ISA MASING diary, 16 February, 1915 is one example of many: She hordes cloth, sews garments herself, etc.

¹⁴ I have already published an account of the German wartime experience: MARK R. HATLIE: *Die Welt steht kopf. Die Kriegserfahrung der Deutschen in Riga, 1914-1920*, in: *Jahrbuch des baltischen Deutschtums* (2002), pp. 175-202. That essay covers the issues discussed here more broadly and in greater detail generally, but neglects coverage of the German occupation period 1917-1918.

¹⁵ There was even a book published in 1917 with this title. BERNHARD SEMENOW: *Der Balte im Maulkorb. Urkomische baltische Kriegs-Schnurren aus der russischen Maulkorbzeit*, Riga 1917.

measure was considered especially harsh: the restriction on the use of German. In the memoir literature about the war years and in the letters written at the time, the other trials of wartime life seem almost trivial in comparison. The prohibition to speak German "in public in a demonstrative fashion" went into effect in October of 1914¹⁶. The Germans considered it a ghastly insult considering the thousands of Baltic Germans who were already fighting and dying in the ranks of the Tsar's army. One Baltic woman wrote of it, "Language, the holy relic of man, the expression of that which is most part of one, of the most inner self, was suddenly taken away from us!"¹⁷ Soon it was also prohibited to write even private letters in German. Isa Masing's diary records the increasing "bitterness" brought on by these measures (16 January, 1915). She reports always looking over her shoulder to see if anyone was listening and that many are cursed at on the street for speaking German. The strategies employed to avoid the *Verbot* were indeed myriad. Another witness wrote that Riga Germans spoke French "as if it had been agreed in advance" (*wie auf Verabredung*). German signs were removed from shops as the law required, but they were not replaced with Russian signs. When the law was extended to telephone conversations, people simply stopped using the phone.¹⁸ But these tactics could not compensate for what was universally considered a deep insult: "If you haven't experienced it yourself, you can't imagine what a humiliation it means to be able to use your honest mother tongue while hiding as if one were committing a crime. The feeling of being raped returned again and again like an iron clamp on our mood."¹⁹

Some of their writing from the time demonstrates that the Baltic Germans had a strong sense of place about the city of Riga. The 1916 pamphlet, "*Mein Heimatland in schwerer Zeit*" (My Homeland in a Time of Trial), refers to Riga and makes virtually no mention of the surrounding area. The war chapter of a memoir by a member of the city administration was entitled "*Dienst an der Heimat im Weltkrieg*" (Service to Home During the World War).²⁰ Pastor Poelchau's account uses the word "*Heimat*" excessively, as does Percy Meyers "*Aus Rigas Schicksalsjahren*" (On Riga's Fateful Years),

¹⁶ The sources disagree. While some mention restrictions as early as October, archival evidence points to 18 December at the very latest: Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi Voenno-Istoricheskii Arkhiv 1932/2/102: Orders of the Dvinsk Military District, p. 21 and p. 45. The *Verbot* was sometimes referred to as a "Christmas gift", for example in P.H. POELCHAU: Um Volkstum und Glauben. Bilder aus dem Erleben der deutschsprachigen Balten, in: Bericht über die 67. Hauptversammlung des Evangelischen Vereins der Gustav Adolf-Stiftung abgehalten in Bremen am 20. und 21. September 1921, Leipzig 1921, pp. 45-61, here p. 48.

¹⁷ *Mein Heimatland in schwerer Zeit*. Riga 1914-1916, von einer Baltin, Berlin, 19??, p. 15.

¹⁸ MAX HILWEG: Verschiedene Welten. Erinnerungen eines alten Rigaschen Juristen aus dem Rechts- und Justizleben der Jahre 1884 bis 1919, Leipzig 1932, p. 50.

¹⁹ POELCHAU (cf. footnote 16), p. 48.

²⁰ HELMUTH STEGMAN: Aus meinen Erinnerungen. IV. Im Dienst der Stadt Riga während des 1. Weltkriegs, in: Baltische Hefte 17 (1971), pp. 206-249.

which even refers to the city in the title and to *Heimat* in the first chapter heading.²¹ Riga is typically characterized as the “*schöne alte Vaterstadt*” (beautiful old city of our fathers)²²; the name “Riga” appears in the titles of several memoirs. This reflects a local patriotism concentrated on the city of Riga itself which is not found in the Latvian and Russian accounts of the war period.²³ It is first of all the Germans who lament the arbitrary destruction of the economy through the evacuation. Their memoirs seem to show more attention to the interior contours of the urban landscape. Family roots were associated with the city in a way a peasant-born Latvian factory worker’s or second-generation Latvian urbanite’s simply could not be.

The outbreak of the war and the imposition of the strict military regime on the city resulted in an almost immediate shift of place for Isa Masing within the political landscape. She was both at home in her familiar Riga, but also living as if behind enemy lines, on foreign soil. Her involvement in ladies’ efforts to sew socks for soldiers was apparently limited to sewing for the needs of German POWs and German deportees (6 November, 4 December, 1914; 14 January, 1915). In December of 1914 she remarked that “Fortunately, the mood of sympathy [for Russian soldiers] has changed considerably”, implying that there had been some greater sense of loyalty to Russia in German circles at the start of the crisis (4 December, 1914). Throughout the spring of 1915 she complains about wartime collections in the streets, disgusted with the “sundry rabble” (*allerhand Pack*) selling collection pins and not able to understand why some Germans feel obligated to buy any. “[...] [I] walk past them all with an enraged expression and get by just fine” (6 March, 12 April, et al.). She could not go about her day in her own city without these intrusions and without a sense of trespassing.

While her war reporting in 1914 mentions very little save rumors of the harsh Russian treatment of the civilian population in occupied areas of Prussia (25 October, 1914), by spring Luise Masing was grasping at all

²¹ PERCY MEYER: *Aus Rigas Schicksalsjahren (1914 und Folge)*, Berlin 1922.

²² For example HILWEG (cf. footnote 18), p. 71.

²³ Other examples include BERTHA SCHEMAN: *Rigaer Eindrücke aus der Zeit des Zusammenbruchs*. Vortrag gehalten in der Frauengruppe der Deutschen Volkspartei in Wetzlar, Frühjahr 1920, Freiburg im Breisgau 1920, p. 8. An exception to the rule is the account of the February Revolution written in the form of a diary by Wilhelm Lieven. Neither the title nor the cover drawing give any clue that the book was written in Riga. The author’s perspective is also decidedly on “Russia”. He focuses more on the general military and political situation and reports more on events in the imperial capital than he does on Riga itself. Indeed, he often mentions “the city” and the reader cannot be immediately sure which city he refers to. His is also the only account where there is any indication at all that the author might identify with the Russian side, despite his clear German ethnicity. The Russian soldiers are “our” soldiers. His narrative leaves little doubt, however, that he fits in with the general German experience related here; he is frustrated by Russian rule and clearly happy to have the Russians gone in September of 1917. WILHELM LIEVEN: *Das rote Russland. Augenblicks-Bilder aus den Tagen der Großen Russischen Revolution*, Berlin 1918.

evidence of German progress and expressing disappointment in Russian successes. She recorded rumors of German troops near Warsaw in February of 1915 (4 February, 1915). In March of 1915 she remarked very negatively on the progress of Russian arms in Galicia, speculating that the Austrian fortress of Przemyśl could only have been taken "by treachery". She complained about the obligation to hang out a Russian flag to celebrate the victory and is disgusted by the attitudes displayed in the streets: "And how they now strut about with pride, days like this, when the Russians are so happy, that's not something I want to experience again" (13 March, 1915). With the German offensive in April, however, her mood became more confident (12 April, 1915) and she was quite pleased with reports of German victories in the newspapers, especially when Lemberg was retaken (15 June, 1915). When her husband left Riga for a few weeks in late 1915 to avoid being drafted into the Tsar's army ("nothing is worse than the thought of serving in this army" was her sentiment already in 1914), she was saddened by the thought of having to celebrate alone if the Germans would finally manage to take Riga (4 December, 1915).

The Riga Masing was experiencing was not part of Russia, but a German city full of foreigners, under occupation, awaiting liberation by the German army. She worked and lived day to day in the underground.

There were other signs that the war meant much more than a temporary curtailing of German rights. It was threatening the very fabric of their communal life beyond a mere chain reaction stemming from the restriction on the public use of German. The *Deutscher Verein* ("German Club" or "German Society") was closed. That meant more than the end of occasional dinner parties. All the subsidiary institutions which were run and funded by the *Deutscher Verein* were in grave danger: schools, including the schools of church congregations, were forced to close. Youth hostels and libraries were faced with bankruptcy. One witness wrote about it: "[They had closed] his association which had spread schools, libraries and nurseries over the entire country like a net! [...] A commission sent to Petersburg brought back the answer that no insult was intended, but germanophile *Bestrebungen* could not be tolerated. The *Verein* [they were told] should dissolve. That would save appearances. But we all knew that this was only the beginning and that we were faced with a grim future."²⁴

Other German schools were soon forced to teach only in Russian and to remove any and all imagery which could be associated with sympathy for Germany.²⁵ The state and city schools were evacuated into the "interior", usually to Dorpat (Tartu), often taking the teachers along but leaving the students behind. For the children now left without a school, attempts were

²⁴ Mein Heimatland in schwerer Zeit (cf. footnote 17), p. 7.

²⁵ There was a denunciation claiming that a German school displayed a portrait of Kaiser Wilhelm II. It turned out to be, like most of the other denunciations, totally unfounded. See Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii 270/1/91, vol. 2, p. 13.

made to organize secret German-language lessons. This was necessary because private lessons were prohibited for more than one pupil at a time.²⁶ An example of the Russification faced by the schools still operating was the *Börsenkommerzschnle* (the German city grammar school, now a museum near down town). All of the teachers and more than 91% of the student body were Germans. When the school re-opened in 1916 after being closed for a year, not only the formal teaching and lecturing, but every conversation between students or teachers had to be in Russian.²⁷ Social events of all kinds were prohibited. The teas of the German Women's Organization (*Frauenbund*) no longer took place.²⁸ German fraternity members from the University at Dorpat, the Riga Polytechnical Institute and the Veterinary Institute were not allowed to wear their colors and all meetings had to be conducted in and all records kept in Russian.

The restriction of German public life and space in Riga became more intrusive still with the democratization of violence brought on by the Revolution of spring, 1917, and reached extreme forms during the period of Bolshevik rule in the city in early 1919. With the Latvian riflemen roaming the streets as a police-militia with little to no controls on their behavior, occasionally arresting people, especially Germans²⁹, any sense of security brought on by political liberalization was kept strongly in check. Several memoir and diary writers remark about how unpleasant it now was to go outside – either because the *droszka* drivers were charging more or going on strike or because soldiers were crowding other people out of the streetcars which were still in operation.³⁰ Some Germans took comfort in the conflict between Latvian and Russian soldiers in and near the city. They felt they would be in grave danger if only the Latvians were nearby.³¹

This ethnic and political violation of private space was carried to new heights during the 1919 phase. An important reality in the experience of the German population during this period was the intrusion of strangers into their homes.³² They had lost sovereignty over their own four walls, an experience which exacerbated the already acute sense of danger. The houses of the well-to-do were subject to search at any time of day or night. All the memoirs record the horror felt by the victims of these arbitrary, spontaneous intrusions of armed Bolsheviks. The perpetrators are variously described as "Red Army

²⁶ Mein Heimatland in schwerer Zeit (cf. footnote 17), p. 7; A. SCHÖNFELDT: Das Städtische Deutsche Gymnasium zu Riga 1919-1934. Ein Rückblick, Riga 1934, pp. 9-10.

²⁷ SCHÖNFELDT (cf. footnote 26), pp. 9-10.

²⁸ Deutscher Frauenbund zu Riga 1905-1930, without place and date.

²⁹ For example WILHELM LIEVEN (cf. footnote 23), p. 46, mentions arrests.

³⁰ Ibidem, p. 112 et al.

³¹ Ibidem, p. 17.

³² GEORGE POPOFF: The City of the Red Plague. Soviet Rule in a Baltic Town, London 1932, even dedicates an entire chapter to this phenomenon, titled "The Attack on the Home" in the English translation. See chapter V.

soldiers", "militiamen" or "*Flintenweiber*" ("*Flintenweib*" is a derogatory term for "woman with a gun").

The prohibition on German from 1914 to 1917 had not extended to church services, a factor which probably contributed to the already increased church attendance and general sense of piety among the German population.³³ By all accounts, Sunday services became the highpoint of German daily life in the city.³⁴ Bolshevik church policy in 1919 thus represented the invasion of the final German space of refuge. This reached its highpoint in an incident which has all the trappings of a good myth: a heroic leader figure, courage, violent death and very little good, hard evidence about what really transpired. The pastor of the Riga St. Mary Lutheran Cathedral, Pastor August Eckhardt (1868-1919), was, according to a witness, the "ideal image of heroic manhood" (*Idealbild heroischen Mannesmutes*). While many of Riga's Germans had fled the city in January of 1919, he was among those who stayed behind. He had accepted his fate. "His only remaining wish was to be a foothold and a refuge for his congregation" (he had "*abgeschlossen mit dem Leben; er hatte nur noch den Wunsch, seiner Gemeinde Halt und Hort zu sein*").³⁵ Eckhardt kept the cathedral running as best he could under the Bolshevik regime until his time eventually ran out. Accounts vary or are vague about the exact date. According to one, it was Easter Sunday (April 20, 1919), according to another, it was "the beginning of May."³⁶ In Baroness von Korff's diary, she claims it was a confirmation sermon on 7 April, 1919.³⁷

It is not known what Eckhardt preached that day other than that it was about "the cross which should be borne, not dragged."³⁸ But during the service, a group of armed Bolsheviks³⁹ entered the Cathedral to arrest him. Accounts vary about what happened next. As Baroness von Korff reports, he was grabbed off the pulpit and whisked away to prison, barely managing to shout a few words of good-bye to his congregation.⁴⁰ According to another witness, he asked his tormentors for, and received, permission to say a *Vater Unser* with the congregation before being taken away.⁴¹ The accounts agree, however, on the most important part of the legend: While Pastor Eckhardt was being taken out of his church, the congregation stood and began to sing

³³ POELCHAU (cf. footnote 16), notes that many came to call on God who had not been believers before the war, p. 50.

³⁴ Ibidem; see also HILWEG (cf. footnote 18), pp. 50-51, on the meaning of church life for the Baltic Germans.

³⁵ SCHEMAN (cf. footnote 23), p. 20.

³⁶ POPOFF (cf. footnote 32), p. 270.

³⁷ ANGELIKA VON KORFF: Riga 1919, ein Tagebuch, Hannover-Döhren 1991, p. 78.

³⁸ POPOFF (cf. footnote 32), p. 273.

³⁹ VON KORFF (cf. footnote 37), p. 78; POPOFF (cf. footnote 32), p. 274.

⁴⁰ VON KORFF (cf. footnote 37), p. 78.

⁴¹ SCHEMAN (cf. footnote 23), p. 20.

together, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" (*Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*),⁴² a hymn which accurately sums up the role that their Lutheran religion and their church leadership had played for the German community since 1914, a song for the main foundation for German public life, a foundation that was now finally crumbling under their feet. Over the next few days, according to one witness, all the remaining clergy in Riga were rounded up and jailed in the Riga Central Prison. By all accounts there were approximately 30 pastors, most of them Germans, under arrest. After weeks in the Riga Central Prison, on the 22nd of May, during the liberation of the city by German forces, Pastor Eckhardt was dragged from his cell, along with a dozen other people, including eight other religious leaders, and machine gunned.⁴³

The Bolsheviks not only re-mapped the city by taking over administration, renaming streets after communist heroes, burying their dead on the Esplanade (which had been renamed "Commune Square"), and confiscating the churches. They re-labeled the people on class terms, including the forced registration of the German nobility at the beginning of May. They even resettled the wealthy from their homes and tried to reverse the social geography of the city – something only the German memoirs seem to recall. At the end of March during the first approach of the "Whites" – the German and Latvian army – on Riga, all people who were not classified as "workers of physical labor" and their family members, or those who did not work in factories or in the regime administration, and who lived along any of the main streets in or near down town were effected.⁴⁴ They were forced to move into empty working-class apartments near the edge of town or, in most cases, to move onto the islands in the river Daugava. Thousands were forced to move.⁴⁵ The island of Hasenholm (Zakusala), where many of the resettled were taken, was reported to be a "concentration camp" in some sources.⁴⁶ "Workers" were then allowed to move from their proletarian apartments and barracks into the center of town and take over the apartments of the rich. The city could not be moved across a border – although an attempt had been made to totally uproot the city in 1915 – but the internal geography and social demography could be violently re-mapped in a very short period of time.

The intervening period between the Russian time and the period of Bolshevik terror, there were 15 months of German domination in the city.

⁴² The most detailed account can be found in POPOFF (cf. footnote 32), pp. 270-275. See also SCHEMAN (cf. footnote 23), p. 20.

⁴³ Accounts of this incident can be found in VON KORFF (cf. footnote 37), p. 149.

⁴⁴ A. VON UNGERN-STERBERG: *Unsere Erlebnisse in der Zeit der Bolschewiken-Herrschaft in Riga vom 3. Januar bis zum 22. Mai 1919*, Riga 1929, p. 39; VON KORFF (cf. footnote 37), entries from 22 March to 6 April; POPOFF (cf. footnote 32), chapter XVII; *Rote Fahne*, 27 March, 1919. All these sources describe the relocation.

⁴⁵ According to POPOFF (cf. footnote 32), 20,000 people moved onto the Daugava islands (see chapter XVII).

⁴⁶ There are press reports in western sources to this effect as well as the memoir by POPOFF (cf. footnote 32), p. 256.

*Rigas deutscher Tag*⁴⁷ was the 3rd of September, 1917, when the German army finally came. For the Riga Germans it meant the beginning of a new era of normalcy, the opportunity to return to the way things had been, but with the recognition that only the German *Reich* could protect their status. The Baltic German accounts of the liberation are very vivid and offer a stark contrast to the mood of gloom, despondence and sarcasm which characterize the accounts of the preceding three years of war. It was a "miracle of redemption"⁴⁸ bringing forth "tears of joy" upon liberation.⁴⁹ Some of the witnesses tried to put the events of the day into historical perspective. For the jurist Hilweg, the advent of the German army meant the end of a Russian yoke which had been bearable from 1710 up into the reign of Alexander III, but had morphed into an unbearable form of Russian chauvinism. He saw it as a great irony that the Russian army should retreat from Riga as if they were evacuating conquered foreign territory, looting and plundering, with the population happy to see them leave.⁵⁰ German accounts of 22 May, 1919, when Riga was liberated from the Bolsheviks, are even more dramatic and have left a literature of their own as well as a culture of memories and memorials which lasted at least into the 1970s.⁵¹

During the periods of German rule in 1917-1918 and briefly in 1919, the anti-German measures were of course reversed and both public and private space re-conquered. German schools opened up again and began to teach in German. The theater was re-Germanized and clubs and schools re-opened in a re-conquest of public space. Baltic Germans now did not return Riga to the mental map of pre-war Russia, however, but overwhelmingly supported annexation by Germany. This found spontaneous expression in the acceptance of the German army as a liberating force, and concrete political expression in

⁴⁷ "*Rigas Deutscher Tag (3. September 1917)*" is the title of the chapter on the fall of Riga in MEYER (cf. footnote 21), p. 10.

⁴⁸ POELCHAU (cf. footnote 16), p. 54.

⁴⁹ STEGMAN (cf. footnote 20), p. 230.

⁵⁰ HILWEG (cf. footnote 18), pp. 58-60.

⁵¹ Stephan Zwicker has traced two traditions in the recounting of May 22nd, the Reich German which was exploited by the Nazis and emphasized the role of Schlageter, and the Baltic German. STEFAN ZWICKER: "Nationale Märtyrer": Albert Leo Schlageter und Julius Fučík. Heldenkult, Propaganda und Erinnerungskultur in Nationalsozialismus und Kommunismus, Paderborn u.a. 2006. There are many accounts of the capture of the city. For example MEYER (cf. footnote 21), pp. 38-41; EDGAR PINDING: Roter Sturm über dem Baltenland. Erlebtes und Erlittenes aus Rigas Schreckenstagen, Marburg (Lahn) 1935, pp. 55-61; A. HEDENSTRÖM: Rigaer Kommunistenchronik, in: *Rigasche Zeitung*, 27 May to 5 August, 1919; NIKOLAI BEREZHANSKII: Chetyre s polovinoi mesiatsa latyshskogo bol'shevizma [Four and a Half Months of Latvian Bolshevism], in: *Istori i Sovremennik*, vol. 4, Berlin 1923, pp. 274-278; ARNOLD BAUMEISTER: Bei der Stosstruppe auf dem Vormarsch nach Riga am 21., 22. Mai 1919, in the archive of the Carl-Schirren-Gesellschaft, Lüneburg; somewhat typical for the *Freikorps* literature is Hpt. VON MEDEM: *Stürmer von Riga. Die Geschichte eines Freikorps*, Leipzig – Wien 1935, pp. 56-88.

numerous projects and declarations backing annexation. It was reflected in the wartime city landscape by the overwhelming presence of the German military administration and the *Reich*-Germanization of some institutions, including the schools.

Latvian Voices

One of the most vivid accounts of wartime Riga by a Latvian witness is "*Dzelzs dūre*" (Iron Fist) by Anna Brigadere.⁵² Brigadere can hardly be considered a typical Riga Latvian. She is more typical of the perspective of the liberal, intellectual elite. Her account of Riga during the period between the February Revolution of 1917 and the fall of the city to the Bolsheviks almost two years later portrays a striking example of the Latvian liberal or national narrative, a narrative which contradicts the socialist or class narrative almost to the point of incompatibility. It is more a mirror image of the German experience than its opposite.

Brigadere was 56 years old in 1917 and was already long established as a writer of poems, plays and fairy tales. She grew up near Tērvete in Kurland where she was strongly influenced by her diligent and deeply religious father. She came to Riga at the age of 18, during the late 1870s, and remained there as an elementary school teacher for most of her life except for a two year period in Moscow in the 1880s. She died in 1933.⁵³

Her exact whereabouts during each phase of World War One cannot be exactly reconstructed, but it appears that she took part in the evacuation of 1915 and went to Moscow. While at least one reference puts her there until

⁵² While "Iron Fist" has been described as a novel or is listed, if at all, among her works of fiction without being referred to explicitly as autobiographical as some of her stories are, it lacks many of the attributes of a novel. There is no plot and there are no characters. There are no descriptions of people who are not anonymous representations of people the narrator has seen. The whole "story" reads like a reminiscence and is told from the ground-level perspective of a powerless but perceptive eye witness. The 1993 reprint lists it as a memoir, which is consistent with its style and point of view. It was first published in 1920. Before her death in 1933 Brigadere wrote several works for which her wartime experience was directly relevant. In 1928 she published "*Kvēlošā lokā*" (The Glowing Window), a novel about life during the Soviet period of 1918-1920 in Latvia. It reflected her "bourgeois" perspective, portraying the regime as a cruel and bloody barbarism, in much the same terms as the Baltic German accounts of their *Schreckenszeit* under the Bolshevik terror regime. Already in 1919 she published "*Uguns mīlna*" (Club of Fire), a patriotic epic poem about a 13th century Zemgalian (southern Latvian) tribal chief's patriotic struggle against the Germanic invaders. The parallels to the events unfolding at the time of publication would not have been lost on her readers. ANNA BRIGADERE: *Dzelzs dūre* [Iron Fist], Rīga 1993.

⁵³ *Latviešu literatūras vēsture*. Vol. 4: *Buržuāziski demokrātisko revolūciju periods*. No 20. gs. sākuma līdz 1917. gadam [The History of Latvian Literature. Vol. 4: The Period of Bourgeois Democratic Revolutions, from the Early 20th Century to 1917], Rīga 1957, pp. 192-194.

1918, another puts her in Moscow and Riga during the war. This last view is consistent with the work being discussed here, *Dzelzs dūre*.⁵⁴

Dzelzs dūre covers the period from shortly after the February Revolution of 1917 up to just before the fall of the city to the Bolsheviks in early January of 1919 and, with a few brief exceptions, stays within the urban setting of Riga. Thus, the entire period of German occupation in the city is covered and becomes the centerpiece of her account. Brigadere's memoir practically defines the Latvian nationalist narrative of the war with its strong ethnic perspective on people and events and the author's always perceptible and often explicit favoring of an idealized Latvian cause in the war. She is not uncritical of her fellow Latvians, however, and poignantly points out their shortcomings and failure to aspire to the ideal. She is perceptibly disappointed and distraught over the fault lines dividing her people.

Her ethnic perspective is evident from the very opening pages, when she describes a city, in the spring of 1917, still under the control of "the others." Ethnic and class perspectives blend. She describes the "others" as extravagantly clad "upper estate" people and Jews, well-dressed children, well-fed on milk and *pīrogs*, playing in the parks and the gardens – and contrasts this to Latvian children, who have neither the nourishment nor the access to green playing areas. Also, she shows disgust at betrayal within Latvian ranks: The women have "given up hope" and dress up and go to parties and balls. The implication seems to be that after almost three years of war they have given up hope of a normal life where they can find and marry Latvian men and are now taking what they can get.⁵⁵ These would be two major themes throughout her memoir – the alienation of the urban landscape by literal and perceived occupation and the failure of her fellow Latvians to seize the day and live up to the moment in history.

After the German capture of the city, Brigadere resents the return of a German face to the city under the auspices of German "*kultura*." For her, that *kultura* is the wealth of alcoholic beverages and parties at restaurants now opening where grocery stores close. City life has now concentrated on Chalk and Alexander Streets, which have blossomed, while the rest of the city mostly nailed up, all movement having ceased. Alexander Boulevard has become "*Unter den Linden*."⁵⁶ Public space is occupied by the "wooden Fritz," a wooden statue in front of the courthouse where people drive in nails for German war bonds purchased.⁵⁷ As an author she especially resents the Germanization of the schools, where Latvian children no longer learn Latvian folklore and songs.⁵⁸ If it ever was her city, it is not any more.

⁵⁴ Ibidem, p. 196.

⁵⁵ BRIGADERE: *Dzelzs dūre* (cf. footnote 52), pp. 7-8.

⁵⁶ Ibidem, pp. 87-88.

⁵⁷ Ibidem, p. 149.

⁵⁸ Ibidem, p. 100.

Her agony is evident as she describes the German plunder of the country, both in Riga itself and the trains of booty passing through from Livonia on their way to Germany, a sight which reminds her of the old chronicles describing the Crusader knights and their stealing of horses and cattle.⁵⁹ She lashes out at the local Germans, putting her finger squarely on the ambiguous loyalties of the Balts. They now stand by and go about life while others are being robbed of their last shirt. Their exaltation of foreigners (Germans from the *Reich*) she calls "uncivilized," she questions their so-called love of "*Heimat*," pointing out that they never loved it as the Latvians did, with sweat and blood. "How can you love two fatherlands with the same love? One of those loves is probably only a flirt."⁶⁰

And yet her fellow Latvians are not united against the oppressors, foreigners, be they Russian or German. During the Revolution of spring, 1917, the nation-centered narrative of wartime experience separates totally and finally from the social or class narrative. This is especially visible in Brigadere's accounts of the Latvian riflemen. The riflemen were now, after the Revolution, no longer the "consciousness and honor" of the people. They seemed only interested in agitation and propaganda and they were fraternizing with the enemy.⁶¹

Brigadere is expressing a sense of betrayal on two levels. The riflemen have left the fold, in a way betraying the Latvian people by no longer standing up to the Germans (although she back-treads a bit on this later, when she describes how Latvian soldiers promise her to not let Riga fall to the enemy).⁶² On the other hand, the riflemen themselves were betrayed on the battlefield outside Riga, ordered into bloody attacks and then left unsupported, "intentionally, like toys for the sake of slaughter, sent to their deaths. Like enemies, like foreign people sentenced to death," a heavy burden of guilt on those who were in charge of the war. "What did we do to deserve our judgment? And against whom? Who can answer that for us? That was also the betrayal which dug the cemeteries for Riga."⁶³

The political extremism of the Revolution was thus caused by the betrayals of 1916 to 1917. And that extremism was now poisoning Latvian society. Brigadere describes the Revolution as being full of "ghosts and phantoms" as the people try to build up in a few days what they have imagined for centuries. The impossibility of achieving the goals and the resulting frustration continually feed the omnipresent distrust looming over everyone's head like a

⁵⁹ Ibidem, pp. 62-64.

⁶⁰ Ibidem, p. 67.

⁶¹ Ibidem, p. 9.

⁶² Ibidem, p. 22. The soldiers are "red", not nationalists, but still intent on keeping Riga from the Germans.

⁶³ Ibidem, p. 11.

shadow, "like an epidemic that infects both the guilty and the innocent." The riflemen were now divided from the people by their politics.⁶⁴

Brigadere's portrayal of the Latvian people is ambiguous. They are at times as one, exchanging hopeful rumors about the battlefield successes of the western allies.⁶⁵ With their loyal riflemen now fighting for their liberation, they are invigorated by stories that their General Briedis is approaching with an army of 100,000.⁶⁶ She waxes poetic over a rumor that he has fallen, "at Ikšķile [Uexküll], where the riflemen had held like lions, but by the sudden German gas they stiffened and died with eyes open and outstretched arms, fallen in piles, and there Briedis also died. With Briedis, the people buried their hopes."⁶⁷ Hope returned when the rumors were dispelled. Latvians, she writes, were united by widespread if passive resistance: They would not ask for anything, did not complain about the constant humiliations of theft, arrest, threat of punishment, army passports which make Latvians look like criminals, the violent suppression of marches and demonstrations by bicycle troops (called "Cossacks"), and "Ost" money, referred to as "wooden money." "We [the Latvians, M.H.] know them, but they do not know us. That is our advantage. Oppressors never know the oppressed."⁶⁸ At other times, the Latvians seem complacent, willing to accept their fate, saying, "You cannot run your head through a wall," "Even with the Germans this way, that is better than the Bolsheviks," or "The Germans promise a lot. At least we can live with them."⁶⁹

Brigadere's descriptions of those upper-echelon Latvians who arguably collaborated with the Germans are, however, surprisingly distant. Without the bitterness of other passages, she notes how the German authorities pressure the local Germans to find "German-minded" Latvians and include them in decision-making and how the conservative Latvian politicians Krastkalns and Veinbergs join prominent Germans in requesting German imperial annexation of the Baltic in March, 1918, and similar calls by "German-minded" women.⁷⁰

Her disappointment in her fellow Latvians would return later in the year, however. After the German surrender and the Latvian declaration of independence in November of 1918, Brigadere is frustrated by the lingering

⁶⁴ Ibidem, p. 10. *Dzelzs dūre* does not mention the events of 1915, when, probably after Brigadere had left the city for Moscow, the recruitment of the first Latvian rifles and the burial of the first of them killed in battle a few weeks later were mass Latvian events in down town Riga.

⁶⁵ Ibidem, pp. 137-138.

⁶⁶ Ibidem, pp. 82, 103.

⁶⁷ Ibidem, p. 80.

⁶⁸ Ibidem, p. 95. The demonstrations are mentioned, but hardly described, on pages 98 (and an "endless" line of old men, pale women, children in sad procession for three hours with posters demanding peace and bread on the 27th of October, 1917) and 112 (includes the reference to "Cossacks").

⁶⁹ Ibidem, p. 112.

⁷⁰ Ibidem, pp. 112, 125, 128.

dominance of Germany and the complacency of the Latvians. The requisitioning (robbery) continued, the Germans were successfully recruiting a new armed force, the *Landeswehr*, in down-town offices, while the Democratic Block (a broad coalition of Latvian liberals which had formed under occupation) seemed to take no action. Latvian recruiting efforts, deprived of office space and banished to the edges of the city, became an utter failure, despite some patriotic feeling among the intelligentsia and the formation of an officers' company and student enlistment: "Riga is full of young men, but many are deaf to the call-ups. With shining boots and swinging their obligatory canes, they continue to escort their young ladies down the street." Unsure of the outcome, unwilling to cast their lot with the losing side, they wait. "Latvia – that is still to many, many just an empty word, for which it is not worth risking life and limb."⁷¹ Brigadere interprets the situation as a reflection of Latvian society itself. Many still hope to welcome the Red Army with its Latvian riflemen units on its approach to Riga. She understands the sentiment of those waiting for the return of husbands and brothers, of the men who "still wear the halo of old glory" (from 1915-1917). While the provisional government calls on the Latvian Bolshevik units approaching to lay down their arms, Riga is undefended, with "doors open as if they come as friends." She is fully conscious of the terrible ambiguity and concludes: "A deep cut runs through our people like a deadly wound [...] all sides have their warriors, their truth."⁷²

The Riga she is experiencing is not part of Russia or Germany, but not really Latvian either. It is still under occupation, sometimes awaiting liberation by the Latvian riflemen, sometimes dallying, too complacent for the seriousness of the historical moment.

Anna Brigadere makes a number of observations and remarks in her account that show a concern for her place, a Latvian woman's place, the urban landscape. She complains about the privileges of German children playing in green spaces within the city, much the same way that Isa Masing, the German witness, had complained of discrimination against German children before 1917. She notes the hostile or arrogant faces on the streets and associates them with particular nationalities in much the same way that Riga Germans portrayed the arrogance and triumphalism of the local Latvians in 1914 and 1917. She portrays a similar atmosphere of suspicion and discomfort. The Germanization of the city and its institutions and the triumphal tone of the German press distress her. Brigadere tells the story of loss and triumph and loss again in Riga, from German occupation, to independence, to the approach of the Bolshevik armies. Indeed it is only then, when faced with the physical approach of Bolshevism, that the German and Latvian narratives described here cease to be reflections of one another – very similar, but in different political contexts – and converge into one and the same perspective.

⁷¹ Ibidem, p. 166.

⁷² Ibidem, pp. 166-167.

Brigadere's descriptions of important events such as the declaration of Latvian independence in November of 1918⁷³, while clearly expressive of sentiment, are not anchored in Riga as a place with any particular verve or emphasis, however. There is mention of Riga as the political capital and some worry about its political and military fate, but it has not necessarily become a Latvian city or a city of and for the Latvians. There is no "*mūsu Rīga*" – "our Riga" or "*latviešu Rīga*" – "Latvian Riga", at least not yet. There is some hint at the war bringing a change in this regard, however, in Brigadere's reference to Latvians loving their homeland with blood and sweat.⁷⁴

Before 1917, even before 1919, there is little indication that Riga had the symbolic pride of place for Latvians that it did for the Germans even before the war.⁷⁵ While the German accounts, especially memoirs but also diaries, often extol the goodness and closeness of Riga as a *Heimat*, nothing similar can be found in Latvian accounts, at least not early on. It would take not only the war to change that, but the war coming into the city. Only when the decisive battle was fought in Riga itself, decisive both because it was in Riga and because of the constellation of sides fighting it with one side clearly "Latvian" and the other side clearly not, did the city take on the stature of a Latvian home and center.

That moment came in the summer and fall of 1919, when the army of Bermond-Avalov attacked Riga, ushering in not only the final battle with the hated German enemy, but the only prolonged fighting within the city itself during the whole war period. The military and political situation had also changed compared with earlier attacks that had swept over Riga, even though they too had involved Latvians and Latvian soldiers. From 1915 to 1917, Latvian troops defending the city were part of the Russian army – and had been "betrayed" by that army. In the earlier battles of 1919, Latvian troops had been on both sides of the issue. The battle of 22 May, as dramatic and liberating as it may have seemed to many Latvians as well as Germans and others in the city, was ambiguous in the context of Latvian national identity-building. Latvian independence had been declared months before, and Latvian troops were fighting alongside the victorious Baltic *Landeswehr*. But this was not a battle for the nation. The popular Latvian government was not involved, nor were Latvian troops directly involved in re-taking the city. Furthermore, most of the first victims of the *Landeswehr* regime were presumably Latvian. The situation was far too ambiguous in ethnic-national terms to be of much use in constructing a national mythology or rallying point.

⁷³ Ibidem, p. 157.

⁷⁴ Ibidem, p. 55.

⁷⁵ There had of course already been some fighting over the claim to the city and its history during the pre-war years. See Ulrike von Hirschhausen's discussion of the 700-year jubilee, for example, in: ULRIKE VON HIRSCHHAUSEN: *Die Grenzen der Gemeinsamkeit. Deutsche, Letten, Russen und Juden in Riga 1860-1914*, Göttingen 2006. The city elections were fought along ethnic lines as well.

Now, since the unification of the Latvian army after the battle of Cēsis and the return of Ulmanis to power, the cause was more clearly national. The army that faced them had everything this newly constituted Latvian clarity of cause could want in an enemy. Being predominantly German, it resembled the army they had risen up to fight from 1914-1917. There was a smattering of Russian as well for good measure.⁷⁶ These were the Baltic barons, the oppressors of seven centuries, led by a Russian, come to conquer and claim their land back. Finally, since the battle focused on the city of Riga, Riga finally found its place as the focal point of the Latvian struggle. Under the shells of Bermond-Avalov, Riga became a symbol worthy of being a national capital.

This found expression in the writings of several Latvian authors who found numerous allegories to give Riga a place in a new Latvian founding myth and, what is more, allow Riga to play the role of a knot tying the Latvian narrative of suffering and liberation more firmly than ever into western traditions. The most obvious expression of this new sentiment is by the author Kārlis Skalbe, a native of Riga who had spent most of the war at the front or as a journalist in Moscow. He had returned to Riga in the spring of 1919 and now left an account, "*Māzas piezīmes*" or "Short notes," of the period up to 1920 covering both political and more personal observations. In his account of the height of the siege in late October, we see the city take on the stature worthy of a national capital born of war. The buildings themselves take on human qualities of pride, the people as a whole are waging war and suffering, and the city itself is adorned with the particularly Latvian medal of heroism, the Order of Lāčplēsis. Skalbe observes explicitly that this is a new development and distinguishes between recent images of Riga associated with Germans and Jews, and the new Riga of the Latvians. He puts Riga at the center of Latvian national life, its "heart" and "soul" and "will" and not, as might have been the case a few years earlier, some rural theme or image. As if to emphasize the urban aspect, he mentions the streets as the conduits through which the strength of the people will flow.

"During these days I saw Latvian Riga. I had never seen it so proud and beautiful. What was it that made it seem that the buildings and towers were taller and stand stronger on the ground? It was not the stern statures of the soldiers which brought heroic glory into the streets. It seemed as if the people had also grown a head taller during that time. The whole city wages war. That is something to experience. The

⁷⁶ The Bermond army was a collection of German soldiers left over from the war (the "Iron Division"), *Freikorps* units, and Russian prisoners of war recruited to wage war against Soviet Russia. This army was south of Riga and tried to advance into and through Riga and on into Russia. The resulting armed clash took place mainly in and around Riga. See JÜRGEN VON HEHN: *Der baltische Freiheitskrieg. Umriss und Probleme 1918-1920*, in: *Von den baltischen Provinzen zu den baltischen Staaten. Beiträge zur Entstehungsgeschichte der Republiken Estland und Lettland 1918-1920*, ed. by IDEM, HANS VON RIMSCHA and HELLMUTH WEISS, Marburg 1977, pp. 1-43, here pp. 34-39, and ANDERSONS (cf. footnote 3), chapter 8.

whole city is at the front lines, women wage war, children wage war, about whom the newspapers have those simple, touching memorial words: 'Our little girl died from an enemy shell'. Shrapnel explodes among the buildings, but nobody complains, nobody says: we must leave Riga. The whole city wages war. On some days, it renews itself virtuously. [...] We see a young, heroic face. That is Latvian Riga. Up to now we had seen only a German and a Jewish Riga. During these days, Latvian Riga was born, which will be our heart, our soul, our will. [...]"⁷⁷

Skalbe's piece shows that Riga is not the only symbolic focus of Latvianness at this time, despite the battle. The city must compete with the ancient Latvian symbol of the Daugava River, the centerpiece of ancient Latvian mythology. The battle against Bermondt-Avalov was fought along its banks, not only in Riga, but at crossing points south of the city as well, and Skalbe skillfully draws on the mythology of Lāčplēsis' epic battle at the river's edge. Skalbe also mentions "our young army," a theme which goes back to the summer of 1915 and was compatible with Brigadere's pre-1919 notion's of the nation's sons in arms.

Latvian authors of late 1919 found other allegories for the city of Riga as well, outside the narrower canon of Latvian mythology to extend the war against Bermondt-Avalov back in time and widen its implications. They put their city into the wider context of European and world history. Edvarts Virza (1883-1940), a Latvian poet writing in late 1919, interpreted the battle for Riga as the climactic battle of the First World War, taking the symbolic position of the city for Latvians now in 1919 back into 1915 – either as a memory of what was felt then or, if one considers Skalbe's observations, as a projection back in time of what had now changed in Latvian perceptions of their city as a national capital under siege. Listed along side French and Belgian cities which had suffered under German guns in the Great War such as Verdun, Reims, and Ypres, Riga's fate is portrayed as yet more horrible. Virza notes that half the city is occupied by the enemy. Now one must stand by and watch as gun emplacements on one side of the river systematically destroy the rest of the city. Germany, the enemy of the world, was now throwing shells into the "gardens and boulevards, destroying everything which *Latvians had built over decades and centuries*."⁷⁸ Here, Riga is an ancient Latvian place and the Latvian author watches his city fall into ruin and experiencing loss of place with the same horror as German witnesses had been experiencing already for several years in the same city under different circumstances.

Further on, Virza describes the new generation which has grown out of the battles in Riga and along the Daugava, a generation which has shed naïve nationalism and willingness to compromise and is now fighting for its fatherland and freedom, "according to the great and classical examples set by

⁷⁷ KĀRLIS SKALBE: *Māzas piezīmes* [Short Notes], in: ANDREJS IKSENS: *Daugavas sargi*, Rīga 1999, pp. 95-96.

⁷⁸ EDVARTS VIRZA: *Varonīgā Rīga* [Heroic Riga], in: IKSENS (cf. footnote 77), pp. 117-118. Emphasis added, M.H.

old peoples of culture." Riga is Latvia's "Thermopylae and Verdun." In these analogies we can see the desire to place Latvia into the western and world-wide context. The nation was now fighting the world's enemy in a place worthy of comparison to the ancient and modern places, alongside other places which have fought the same battle through the ages.

Later, immediately following the Latvian counterattack which pushed the Germans back from the city, Virza again puts Riga at the center of Latvia's founding myth, adding Christian mythology to Skalbe's pagan imagery. Latvian Riga was "our Golgotha and place of victory!" having "gloriously gone into battle and, although destroyed, risen again, in order to live for eternity as a witness to all future Latvian achievements." He includes the Daugava as well as "our Savior": Latvia's mythical river martyred on now holy (urban) ground.⁷⁹

Kārlis Skalbe had also already used the Golgotha imagery to describe Riga in June, saying about the city: "Here is the way of our dreams. Here is our Golgotha. These are the streets where our people were lynched. This is the place where the loyalty of our soldiers was crucified and mocked."⁸⁰ This was after the experiences of Bolshevism and the brief but horrid "White Terror."⁸¹ He may have been referring to the terror, the false hopes aroused by the Revolution which had led the riflemen astray, or the mishandling of the Latvian contingents in the *Landeswehr* campaign to free Riga. But he may also be referring to the same betrayal that Anna Brigadere had bemoaned after the horrendous bloodletting during the botched Christmas battles at the gates of Riga in the winter of 1916-1917. It is vivid and current, but left so vague as to apply to any and all the various ethno-political constellations of the previous five years.

The Latvian Lutheran congregation of the St. Martin's church, like several other congregations in the city, lost its pastor to the Bolsheviks in the late spring of 1919. Pastor Pēteris Rosenbergs had been imprisoned and died shortly after his release. Gustavs Schaurums, a man in his late 30s who had arrived in Riga from Liepāja only shortly before as a deacon, now took over as pastor.⁸² Shortly after the Bermondtsiege was lifted, on the first

⁷⁹ IDEM: *Pa uzvaras pēdām* [Following the Traces of Victory], in: *IKSENS* (cf. footnote 77), pp. 213-215.

⁸⁰ KĀRLIS SKALBE: *Kopoti Raksti. Devītais sejmums* [Collected Works, vol. 9], Rīga 1939, p. 23.

⁸¹ In the immediate aftermath of the liberation of the city from the Bolsheviks in late May, 1919, several hundred people, according to Latvian sources mostly Latvians, were shot by the *Landeswehr* either on the spot or in mass executions after quick military trials. See ANDERSONS (cf. footnote 3), p. 441, and the testimony throughout Mahz. Andr. Needras Dr. T. Wankina un sw. adw. I. Ansberga prahwa. Otrā daļa [The Trial of Pastor Andrievs Niedra, Dr. T. Wankin and I. Ansbergs, Esq. Part two], Rīga 1924.

⁸² There is an entry for Schaurums in the *Latviešu konversācijas vārdnīca* [Latvian encyclopedia], vol. 21, p. 41534. See also *Die evangelischen Prediger Livlands bis*

anniversary of Latvian independence, on 18th November 1919, he tapped into an ancient Biblical narrative, linking Latvia's fate to that of other redeemed peoples throughout the ages. Preaching on Samuel (chap. 7), where the Israelites are defeated by their enemies until they return to worshipping the one true God, he said: "Why did God do a miracle and help us, as He did the Israelites? Because our government started to pay serious attention to spiritual matters which had been harshly neglected. A new consistory has been created, a department of spiritual affairs, our heroic soldiers are again hearing the Word of God, from pastors especially appointed for them, in a word, the government is obliging the people's spiritual needs. And look: God is shining His light on our Fatherland."⁸³ Where only a year before Brigadere had seen a divided people on the streets of Riga, Schaurums now rhetorically unites the Latvian people as all having fallen from grace through socialism and the state atheism of the Stučka regime and, now that the Latvian capital is free, all sharing in redemption through the graces of state-sponsored Lutheranism.

These were not the only Latvian voices and perspectives, however. There were numerous accounts written at various times but published around the 40th anniversary of the events during the thaw of the Khrushchev years. Good examples are the memoirs of Jānis Mirams,⁸⁴ the woman he married in Riga during the brief Bolshevik period in 1919, A. Pesa-Mirama,⁸⁵ and M. Krustinsone.⁸⁶ Mirams was a member of the Military Revolutionary Committee of the Riga Bolshevik Party organization and in charge of printing and distributing propaganda during the German occupation period. The two women were active communists both during and after the German occupation. On the surface, they mirror the rather stale, predictable tone of Soviet historical literature on the period. But despite the Soviet-era editing,⁸⁷ they match the "bourgeois" accounts in some points: the city-wide and sometimes even personal privations of wartime and frustration with fellow Latvians not engaged in the cause are two examples.

The core of their experience remains the ongoing revolutionary struggle, however. The revolutionary memoir authors give the urban landscape and its inhabitants contour shaped by their focus on proletarian struggle: During the

1918, ed. by MARTIN OTTOW et al., Köln – Wien 1977, p. 403. – Ibidem, p. 394, also for Rosenbergs.

⁸³ GUSTAVS SCHAURUMS: *Pārdaugavas garīgā dzīve* [Spiritual Life in the Pārdaugava], Umurga 1929, p. 53.

⁸⁴ J. MIRAMS: *LSD Rīgas komitejas tipogrāfija "Spartaks"* [The "Spartaks" Printer of the Riga Committee], in: *Par Padomju Latviju. Cīnītāju atmiņas 1918.-1919.*, Part 1, Rīgā 1958, pp. 30-42, and I. A. MIRAM: *Vooruzhennoe vosstanie v Rige 3 ianvaria 1919. goda (vospominanie)* [The Armed Uprising in Riga of 3 January, 1919], Riga 1959.

⁸⁵ A. PESA-MIRAMA: *Revolūcijas ierinda pagrīdes darba* [The Underground Work of the Revolutionary Front], ibidem, pp. 43-57.

⁸⁶ M. KRUSTINSONE: *Pirms četrdesmit gadiem* [Forty Years Ago], ibidem, pp. 341-358.

⁸⁷ The editor's forward to Miram's memoirs indicates that "material not related to the theme" was cut. MIRAM: *Vooruzhennoe vosstanie* (cf. footnote 84), p. 9.

German occupation, the city is divided into "rayons," with emphasis on the outlying working-class neighborhoods, with various cells and committees assigned to various regions for purposes of organizing the distribution of revolutionary propaganda and arming and training workers for revolt. The revolutionaries have moved under ground to inhabit a city of safe houses, illegal printing presses, secret meetings, curfews, police searches, arrests and jails. Channels of communication are poster campaigns quickly torn down by the police, secret messages sent through complicit prison guards, runners, quiet, secret meetings.

It is no challenge to read their efforts in terms of the struggle to conquer and occupy the public urban space first in the face of the armed German occupants, later against a state of siege by the "white" German armies attacking from without and domestic counter-revolutionaries hoarding food and sniping from windows. During the period of German overlordship (*virsvarmacība*), the revolutionaries subjected themselves to the danger of death and arrest in order to repeatedly put up thousands of poster proclamations all over the city. Doing so, they went out of their way to defiantly place leaflets and posters in key spaces such as near police stations and German barracks. Once they even managed to "enrage the local *Herren*" by distributing leaflets at a Saturday night performance in the main German theater.⁸⁸ They organized demonstrations with marches starting on the outskirts in the worker neighborhoods and points reminiscent of 1905, and aimed inward toward the city center, the center of power. The marches were then broken up by police and sometimes German soldiers.

In the early months of 1919, while the Bolsheviks under Pēteris Stučka actually controlled the city, the marking of the city continued: Pesa-Mirama described her work in the down-town party and government offices, the armed duty of her and her fellow Bolsheviks at key points around the city, in uncovering counter-revolutionary activity, and the funeral parades for fallen communist heroes take the mourners to the graves at the city center or to the forest cemetery at the edge of town to where the dead riflemen from the Great War also lay buried. The May Day parade of 1919 traced a path through several proletarian neighborhoods before ending in the city center. The accounts do not hide the fact that churches – specific ones named in the memoirs – were occupied for party meetings, speeches and rallies.⁸⁹

These actions defy the passivity of some of the non-revolutionary accounts in that they reflect the perspective of participation in an ongoing (worldwide and local) struggle. Wartime Riga was not a place to be endured as regimes and armies wash over. It was "Revolutionary Riga," a place to be contested, held, conquered, colored and shaped by participants. They saw themselves at the center of events. Brigadere and Skalbe describe what is happening around them, in the former case with a particularly aloof style. The German accounts

⁸⁸ MIRAMS (cf. footnote 84), p. 36.

⁸⁹ KRUSTINSONE (cf. footnote 86).

mention heroes (often pastors), but personal activity by the writers themselves is, if it is about power relationships at all, about victimization and suffering. Mirams and the other Bolsheviks tell a different story. They describe their participation in history in the making as their personal and revolutionary lives became one. Mirams and Pesa-Miram first worked to create "Revolutionary Riga" and then got married there in 1919. When the Germans recaptured the city in May of that year, A. Krustinsone retreated from Riga carrying her weapon in one hand and her viola in the other. The study of music was something she had dreamt of since childhood and could only finally begin under Soviet power – a power she went into armed combat to defend.⁹⁰

While the literature and some memoirs mention the barbed wire fence put up around Riga following the German conquest of the city, it is usually explained, if at all, as part of a general system of controlling the flow of goods and people, as much an economic and military measure for exploitation and control as anything else. Communist eye-witnesses, however, explain it in terms of Riga as a "revolutionary nest" that the German imperialists actively sought to isolate, to keep the revolutionary spirit of the city contained. Not unlike other Latvian authors, they see their experience in Riga as part of an international context, albeit a revolutionary, not necessarily only nationalist context. They actively seek to influence German working class soldiers, seek and sometimes find the support of German social democrats for their class struggle. While that runs counter to the purely foreign nature of the occupation as seen through the eyes of someone like Anna Brigadere, there is still some ambiguity in the revolutionary accounts between national and class-based language used to describe the enemy. The revolutionaries – the examples here are all Bolsheviks – repeatedly refer to the enemy as specifically German. They complain of attempts by fellow Latvians to fraternize with and get on the good side with the German occupiers (people they refer to "small-time herring sellers" – "*silku bodnieklī*"). They harshly condemn any complicity in German annexation plans, plans which run counter to what they espoused, an autonomous Latvia in a Soviet Russia. Indeed, the event which triggered the largest flurry of Latvian communist propaganda and the organization of the largest protest demonstration of the whole occupation period was only a tangent to the class struggle: the move to annexation in December 1917 and the assent given to those plans by some Latvian representatives in early January, 1918, sparked the quick organization of a mass protest on January 6th.⁹¹

Closing Remarks

The changing fate of the city was reflected in the changing narratives of the wartime population. While this may seem obvious enough, as we have

⁹⁰ Ibidem, p. 344.

⁹¹ For example on the protest MIRAMS (cf. footnote 84), p. 39-42.

seen it was not simply the case that competing ethnic groups stood by cheering or weeping as competing armies marched through under one banner or another. The activity or passivity, the focus of political and private attention, and most importantly the sense of place and of Riga as a place all changed over time and ethnicity depending on the course of the war. The perspectives recounted here, narratives written both during and after the conflict, are in a sense somewhat predictable. While it may seem odd to compare the perspective of a Russian priest with those of German *Bürger* and Latvian revolutionaries and literary figures, this choice follows the flow of the war in the city and, especially in the case of the Latvians, brings those voices to the fore most able to express the situation in terms that reflect the situation of that ethnicity: It is about the Russians leaving en masse to fight the war from deeper within their empire, surrendering the city to others. It is about the Germans suffering and re-aligning their *Heimat*-city. It is about the Latvians fighting for and claiming the city as their own space with their own political and historical labels as their wartime victory manifests itself in the embattled urban space. The Latvian story is arguably the most political, but they were also the ones with a political victory to narrate and participate in. These are stories told by particular people under particular circumstances, but circumstances easily integrated into wider themes and, in most cases, corroborated by the similar accounts of others. Together they create an image of a borderland at war.

The resulting ambiguous sense of place in a border region is exacerbated by the violence and uncertainty of wartime tension.⁹² Wartime is, however, also a time of clarity. Identities are more clearly defined and expressed, physical space is often more clearly labeled – by flags, guards, monuments, or even barbed wire. All the voices heard here reflect these themes. The violent repositioning of the map during wartime was reflected in the personal and collective repositioning of narratives and perspectives about Riga, places within Riga, and the city's position on the larger map of Europe and European history. Not all the voices express constant hostility or violence toward competing constituencies within the city, but all make competing claims about the city to shape its real and symbolic place in the world and the places within it.

⁹² Violence would appear to be a central category for the idea of “borderlands” when applied to eastern Europe, for example at the borderlands project at the Watson Institute for International Studies at Brown University, a project subtitled “Ethnicity, Identity, and Violence in the Shatter-Zone of Empires Since 1848.”

Zusammenfassung

Stimmen aus Riga. Ethnische Ansichten einer Stadt im Krieg, 1914-1919

Der Beitrag zeigt anhand einiger Beispiele aus drei verschiedenen Bevölkerungsgruppen der Stadt Riga, wie unterschiedlich die Wahrnehmung und die Deutung der Stadt in den Kriegsjahren waren. Riga war Grenzstadt zwischen zwei konkurrierenden Imperien und die Heimat von Ethnien mit konkurrierenden politischen und historischen Vorstellungen. Die Stadt war auch Schauplatz dramatischer politischer und militärischer Entwicklungen: Riga erlebte in den Jahren des Welt- und Befreiungskrieges (1914-1919) mehrere Regimewechsel, den Verlust der Hälfte der Bevölkerung, einen ökonomischen Niedergang und sogar Kampfhandlungen im Stadtgebiet. Im Tumult der militärischen und politischen Auseinandersetzungen nahm die Stadtbevölkerung diese Entwicklungen und Ereignisse aus völlig verschiedenen Perspektiven wahr, die hier exemplarisch am Beispiel von Russen, Deutschen und Letten dargelegt werden.

Der Aufruf eines russischen Priesters, die Stadt vor dem Einmarsch der Deutschen zu verlassen, die Sichtweisen und Kriegserfahrungen deutscher Bürger, rekonstruiert vor allem anhand von Tagebüchern und Memoiren, die Kriegsdeutungen lettischer Schriftsteller und die Erlebnisberichte lettischer Kommunisten werden hier nebeneinander gestellt. Das Resultat ist die Vorstellung Rigas als einer umkämpften Stadt – umkämpft in der Deutung ebenso wie auf dem Schlachtfeld –, wie sie für ein Grenzgebiet oder *borderland* typisch ist.