

BETWEEN EMPIRE AND NATIONHOOD: COMPETING NARRATIVES ON THE LATVIAN WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

Alina Romanovska, Žans Badins, Evita Badina

Institute of the Humanities and Social Sciences, Daugavpils University, Latvia

Abstract

The article examines competing narratives about the Latvian War of Independence through the lens of memoirs by Andrievs Niedra and Pavel Bermond-Avalov. The study aims to demonstrate how personal and collective memories are constructed within autobiographical texts and function as tools in the symbolic struggle for historical legitimacy. The methods of memoir and narratology are employed as the methodological foundation.

The research materials - two sets of memoirs written by the authors in the 1920s and 1930s - enable us to trace how each narrator selects and organises facts, appealing to different cultural frameworks: Latvian national memory and Russian emigration discourse. Narratological analysis shows that the choice of emplotment influences the ideological tone: in one case, the events are depicted as a tragic struggle of a 'traitor of the people,' while in another, as a heroic tribute to anti-Bolshevism.

The results of the study demonstrate that memoirs are not passive accounts but active shapers of historical reality, where personal memory is 'stitched' together using cultural codes and collective myths. The processes of self-representation and ideological selectivity, through which authors aim to justify their positions, are uncovered.

Keywords: *Latvian War of Independence, memoirs, individual and collective memory, narratology, Niedra, Bermond-Avalov.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The period of Latvian statehood formation is one of the most complex and contradictory periods in Latvian history. The time before the official recognition of the Republic of Latvia can rightly be called a 'troubled time', when various political forces proposed (and sometimes forcibly imposed) their visions of the future on the people of Latvia, influencing both their way of thinking and everyday behaviour. Several strategic plans were attempted in the territory of Latvia:

- The 'Imperial' plan was realised within the framework of two paradigms - German and Russian; it involved the incorporation of Latvian lands into either Germany or the Russian Empire, excluding the creation of a Latvian state or, at best, leaving the Latvians with only the possibility of cultural autonomy;
- The Bolshevik plan envisioned implementing social-democratic ideas, which held a negative stance towards the concept of a nation-state, prioritising the active involvement of the Latvian proletariat in the global struggle for internationalist ideals. In the *Declaration on the Self-Determination of Latvia*, the Central Committee of the Latvian Social Democrats and the Executive Committee of Workers, Soldiers and Landless of Latvia (Iskolat) explicitly stated that the Latvian proletariat *could neither desire nor request the strangulation of its narrow homeland within the borders of an independent state* [1];
- The third strategy envisaged the creation of an independent national Latvian state.

The fight for independence in Latvia started shortly after the declaration of the Republic of Latvia on 18 November 1918 and ended with the signing of the Treaty of Riga between Latvia and Soviet Russia on 11 August 1920. During this time, complex military and political battles occurred, involving the Republic of Latvia, Soviet Russia, Germany, Poland, Lithuania, Estonia, and several other nations, all pursuing their own political goals. Fourteen armies from three governments clashed on Latvian soil [2].

The timeframe from 18 November 1918 to August 1920 remains somewhat ambiguously defined in Latvian historiography. Barba Ekmane, a historian at the Military Museum, notes that after the recognition of the Republic of Latvia, the military operations occurring on Latvian territory did not receive a single name: *Even if we look at the awards of the 1920s or documents on agrarian reform for the land allocation, each document uses its own name – the struggle for freedom, the liberation of Latvia, the war of liberation or the struggle for freedom. Also, if we look at the memoirs of those who participated in those events, they do not use a single name* [3]. A similar trend has taken hold in academic research. Some authors preferred to refer to this historical period as the ‘War of Liberation’ (‘Atbrīvošanas karš’) [4], [5], others as the ‘Liberation of Latvia’ (‘Latvijas atbrīvošana’) [6], while some used the term ‘Struggle for Freedom’ (‘Brīvības cīņa’) [7], [8], [9] or ‘Liberation Struggle’ (‘Atbrīvošanas cīņa’) [10]. Aldis Minins’ Master’s Thesis employs the less common term ‘Civil War in Latvia’ (‘Latvijas pilsoņu karš’) [11]. During the Soviet era, the most widely used name was the ‘Struggle for Soviet Power in Latvia’ (‘Cīņa par padomju varu Latvijā’) [12], notably emphasising that the conflict occurred amid foreign intervention.

In recent years, the term ‘War of Independence of Latvia’ (‘Latvijas Neatkarības karš’) has been most frequently used in Latvian academic circles. It is also the title of an article dedicated to the events in question in *The Latvian National Encyclopedia*, published to commemorate the centenary of the proclamation of independence of the Republic of Latvia [13].

It should be noted that Soviet historians focused more on events and facts related to the establishment of Soviet power in Latvia, so topics concerning their opponents were only touched on superficially. Historians of modern Latvia (like their colleagues from the period 1918–1940) primarily concentrate on the history of the Latvian army, while the history of Russian anti-Bolshevik military units has scarcely been discussed in any book or article. This has resulted in a peculiar ‘division of labour’: Russian authors rely solely on materials from Russian archives, while Latvian authors mainly use documents from Latvian archives. At the same time, as Russian historian A. Chapenko rightly points out, *it is wrong to talk exclusively about the war for independence, separating it from the revolution and civil war. [...] The struggle was particularly difficult in Latvia, where, along with social upheaval and the struggle for independence, there were factors such as the conflict between the local Baltic German and Latvian populations, the occupation of a significant part of the Baltic provinces by the German army during World War I, the lack of real prerequisites for the Latvian part of the population to independently create its own statehood, as well as the orientation of the Russian forces of the anti-Bolshevik bloc exclusively towards Germany* [14].

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Materials

In this context, memoirs of those who directly experienced the events are particularly significant, as they serve both as direct evidence and offer insights into the authors’ subjective perspectives. Memoirs represent a unique genre that can be examined from various viewpoints – literary, historical, psychological, sociocultural, and others. As is well known, history is often written by the victors, while the perspectives of the defeated are frequently marginalised or entirely overlooked. This study specifically concentrates on analysing the memoirs of the vanquished.

The article examines the memoirs of two authors – Andrievs Niedra (1871–1942) and Pavel Bermond-Avalov (1877–1974) – who, during Latvia’s War of Independence, led the forces opposing the creation of an independent Latvian Republic. It is significant that both authors wrote their memoirs relatively soon after the events, within four to six years. The first volume of Niedra’s memoirs was published in 1923, while Bermond-Avalov’s memoirs were first issued in 1925. Notably, when describing military operations in Latvia, both Niedra and Bermond-Avalov avoid using precise military terminology. They likely could not employ terms such as ‘war for independence’ or ‘liberation struggle’ and instead centred on recounting specific events and analysing their causes and consequences.

2.2. Methods

To analyse the contrasting narratives of these two authors regarding the war for Latvia's liberation, it is effective to employ memory studies as the primary method and narratology as a supplementary approach. Memoirs are written recollections by direct participants, infused with a subjective view and a consciously constructed narrative. They offer a 'nuanced perspective' on events and reveal how the author interprets the past [15]. By analysing them through the concepts of collective memory and narratology, we can trace how historical identities are formed: which aspects of the past are included in the 'correct' narrative and which are excluded; how the author positions themselves and the characters; and how the personal 'I' aligns with or conflicts with the collective 'we'. This provides a comprehensive methodological tool for understanding the competing historical narratives of the War of Independence, and the ways in which the memory of the war is legitimised or contested within society [16], [17], [18].

In contemporary memory studies, memoirs are viewed not just as reliable accounts of events, but as retrospective narratives that shape collective and cultural consciousness. According to Maurice Halbwachs, memory is always socially constructed: individuals' memories are organised by the 'memory frames' of social groups and institutions [19]. Institutions actively select and suppress elements of the past that align with or oppose the dominant narrative, thereby constructing a narrative that enhances social cohesion or legitimises political power [16].

The study of collective memory demonstrates how different groups utilise shared memories to construct and sustain social identity, fostering a sense of belonging and continuity [20], [21]. According to Jan Assmann, cultural memory includes 'fixed points' (significant events and texts) that maintain the significance of the past and stabilise collective identity [21]. Therefore, memoirs as a genre 'yield' to cultural memory: they are typically created after events and serve not only the author's personal 'communicative' memory but also a broader audience. In this context, memoirs appeal to state or national 'cultural memory' — to those figures and myths of the past that support national identity [16]. Simultaneously, memory remains contested: the conflict between different versions of the past represents a struggle for the legitimacy of the historical narrative [19].

The narratological approach helps us understand how authors shape their memories as a narrative and what ideological meanings they assign to their stories. According to Paul Ricoeur, any biography constructs the author's 'narrative identity': our 'I' is formed by the story we tell about ourselves [17]. A memoir can be seen as an act of self-representation: the author places themselves at the centre (as hero or victim) and arranges events in a specific order to highlight desirable traits – courage, righteousness, dedication to ideals, etc.

Hayden White demonstrated that authors of history 'integrate' facts into plot schemes (tropes): romantic, tragic, comic, or satirical [22], [18]. The choice of emplotment influences the narrative's ideological perspective: style becomes the content, and the discourse tropes shape the facts rather than merely reflecting them [18]. For example, in the memoirs examined, authors might depict themselves or their comrades as heroes, describe events as an epic struggle for an idea, and thus legitimise their actions.

It is important to identify ideological selection and heroisation: for example, which events are neglected and which are described in detail, and which characters are demonised. The narratological approach enables us to identify these techniques. As researchers emphasise, applying narratological categories to factual narratives (such as history and autobiography) helps to 'reveal stylistic and rhetorical effects and thus identify ideological layers that would otherwise remain unnoticed' [23], [18]. In individual narratives, personal and collective memory are closely intertwined. Autobiographical stories are always written against the backdrop of cultural myths and official histories; authors rely on 'templates' familiar to readers while simultaneously attempting to fit their own versions into the broader framework. Aleida Assmann notes that cultural memory interacts with personal memory — it sets the framework for perception (such as formative texts, rituals, and holidays) and at the same time is enriched by the stories of individual eyewitnesses [16]. According to Ricoeur, collective memory, 'shared in the past,' forms the basis of common identity, while isolated individual memories lose their meaning outside of a socio-cultural context [17]. Considering these theoretical ideas, let us examine how the authors' opinions conflict with each other and how they relate to the official version of events.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Both authors speak respectfully and sympathetically about each other's roles during the relevant period. Niedra dedicates one of the chapters of his memoirs to Bermond, who, in turn, mentions Niedra several times and devotes a separate chapter to the military formation known as the *Baltic Landeswehr*. Niedra includes biographical information about Bermond's parents and adoptive father in his memoirs and describes the formation of the Western Volunteer Army in considerable detail. The author pays particular attention to various negotiations and political intrigues. It is curious that in these intrigues, Niedra considers Bermond to be merely a tool in the hands of the Germans, whose goal is to gain power over Latvia and Russia. Bermond-Avalov himself is assessed neutrally and even, one might say, with some sympathy. Among his most characteristic traits, Niedra particularly highlights his monarchism, openness in communication, and devotion to friendship.

Bermond's monarchism is compared to bee patriotism: just as bees start to look for a new queen after their old one dies, so Bermond, according to Niedra, was fascinated by the idea of restoring the monarchy in Russia after the tsarist regime was overthrown. The revival of the Russian Empire within its former borders was the main reason behind all his decisions and actions.

In Niedra's memoirs, Bermond-Avalov is portrayed as an open and approachable individual. He greets and welcomes everyone who comes to him warmly and politely, which Niedra attributes to the customs of Caucasian hospitality. Niedra states that his openness often causes Bermond to fall victim to deception, but these same qualities help him earn the trust of his friends and soldiers under his command. According to Niedra, Bermond resembles a romantic hero, a kind of noble robber who, rather than hoarding, mostly distributed the material goods he captured among his comrades and was willing to fight for his friends to the very end.

Although he clearly sympathised with Bermond-Avalov as a person, Niedra regarded him as his ideological and political adversary. Moreover, Niedra aimed to control Latvia, so Bermond was also inconvenient for him from this perspective. However, it should be noted that for a time, Niedra was willing to cooperate with Bermond. On 6 October, when Bermond established the Baltenland government in Jelgava under the leadership of Count Konstantin von der Pahlen, A. Niedra served as head of the chancellery, drafting an appeal against the Ulmanis government.

In turn, Bermond-Avalov describes the *Baltic Landeswehr* as one of the few genuine allies of his own army in the fight against the Bolsheviks. Bermond views the attitude of the White movement's leadership towards the *Baltic Landeswehr* troops—whose successful actions led to the formation of the Niedra government—as one of the gravest mistakes. He writes that [...] *if the correct decision had been made at that time [after the liberation of Riga from the Bolsheviks], neither Estonia nor Latvia would have come into existence, only Russian national troops would be on the Baltic region's territory, and he [Yudenich] would not have had to complain to his chief commander, General Denikin, about the slogans 'Great, United and Indivisible Russia'* [24, p.254]. Colonel Rodzianko and Captain Prince Lieven unquestioningly followed all orders from the Allies, believing them to be in Russia's best interest, while all initiatives by Bermond's forces were seen as German provocation.

Niedra's book *Memoirs of a Traitor to the People* covers the period from 1917 to 1919 and is a sort of diary in three parts, published in 1923, 1924, and 1930, respectively. The memoirs were written in the heat of the moment, with the author in quite challenging and limited circumstances, even spending some time in prison. Niedra openly states that tough life circumstances influenced the creation of this work, its artistic style, and mood, and that *in such difficult times, he was guided not by faith in life, but by a desire to defy fate* [25, p.35].

The political views of the author of *Memoirs of a Traitor to the People* were always at odds with the prevailing ideology and public sentiment in Latvia. After the fall of the tsarist regime in 1917, Niedra actively engaged in Latvian political life, consistently forming and expressing views that opposed the stance of the future Prime Minister of Latvia, Kārlis Ulmanis. It was therefore no coincidence that he became Prime Minister of the Latvian Provisional Government in April 1919, a position he held until June of that year. Following the defeat of Bermond's troops, Niedra emigrated from Latvia to Germany. In 1920, Ulmanis's government prosecuted Niedra on charges of anti-state activities, supporting the

German nobility, and having ties to Bermondts. After returning to Latvia in 1924, Niedra was arrested and expelled from the country in 1926.

In his memoirs, Niedra aims to explain in detail how his position, later labelled ‘treason against the people’ by the Latvian government, came about. He recounts a series of tragic events in his life that shaped his ideological stance and naturally led to the situation in 1919 when he agreed to form his own government (*A. Niedras ministru kabinets*) in collaboration with the Germans. The memoirs begin with a description of his service as a pastor in Kalsnava, where he promoted a peaceful policy, helped war victims, and called for prayers for the Latvian state. However, according to him, it was very soon, upon witnessing the arbitrariness of the Bolsheviks, that he began to actively engage in political life. He found himself at the centre of political intrigues and developed his own political strategy, in which the economic prosperity of Latvia was crucial. According to Niedra, it was essential to cooperate with neighbouring states, including Russia and Germany, to achieve this. He endeavours to implement this cooperation through various means. Niedra defends his political position in detail and with logic, describing the drama of the era and his own experiences in depth, thereby leaving readers in no doubt as to the legitimacy of his actions.

The relatively short interval between writing the memoirs and the actual events affects the overall level of detail in the text. Another feature of Niedra’s book is that some parts of the memoirs were written later than the main sections. This time gap creates a unique ‘memory filter’ through which information passes in the author’s mind – the longer the gap, the less detailed the memories are. Naturally, over time, the author’s view on certain events also changes. When publishing the third chapter of his memoirs seven years after the first, Niedra mentions this aspect with a comment: *This chapter was written about 7 years ago (around 1923). Now my opinion on some issues raised here is somewhat different* [25, p.291]. Therefore, he emphasises that three or four years after the events, his views and attitudes remained consistent; any changes in his understanding and evaluation of certain events occurred later, after the initial parts of the memoirs had been published.

Niedra’s authorial approach involves an almost documentary-style depiction of various everyday details, including recording and analysing military actions, political events, and portraits of key historical figures. By recreating significant moments in Latvian history, such as *the coup d’état* of 16 April 1919, the author provides detailed descriptions of the actions and motivations of different groups, individual politicians, and military leaders. Additionally, Niedra focuses on describing his own thoughts and feelings in various life situations, which are influenced by both the social environment and subjective motivations shaped by the author’s professional and political roles, upbringing, and moral beliefs. Many of these details remain in the memoirist’s memory due to the short interval between the events and the writing of the book, which also increases the reader’s trust in the author.

One of the paradoxes in Bermondts-Avalov’s memoirs, titled *In the Struggle Against Bolshevism*, is that his troops never fired a single shot at the Bolsheviks during his entire period of command. Anti-Bolshevik sentiment in Latvia at that time was supported by various political forces, including Germans, Baltic Germans, Latvians who aimed to establish their own independent state, and representatives of the White movement. While the first three groups sought to prevent the establishment of Soviet power in Latvia and its integration into Russia, the latter tried to realise the White movement’s ideas as part of an offensive strategy, aiming to eliminate Bolshevik power throughout the former Russian Empire.

Bermondts-Avalov’s memoirs caused great confusion among Russian émigrés. Some even suggested that the memoirs were not written by Pavel himself, but rather by one of his staff officers or a German professor [14]. What was particularly surprising was the complete discrepancy between the title of the memoirs and the actual content of the book.

Bermondts-Avalov dedicates eleven chapters to the events unfolding in Latvia, with the first titled *The Formation of My Volunteer Forces in Mitau*. The chapter’s title clearly reflects the overall tone of the memoirs: by emphasising the possessive pronoun ‘my,’ Bermondts-Avalov aims to underscore the significance of his own role in this military campaign.

Mitau, which during the War of Independence received the status of the capital of Bermondts-Avalov, is described by him as: *a quiet, peaceful, ancient city on the banks of the Aa River in Courland, the*

residence of the famous Russian regent Biron [24, p.149]. The reader cannot help but draw parallels between these two personalities – Biron and Bermond-Avalov. Ultimately, Bermond-Avalov proved to be just as much of a regent, only on a much smaller scale in history. In the very first lines, Bermond expresses his attitude towards Mitau: *All of us officers and soldiers landed here in Latvia as if on our native soil, for each of us saw that sooner or later all these small newly created 'states' would be reunited with Great Russia* [24, p.149]. At the same time, the city's strategic importance as a railway junction blocking the route from Russia to the ports on the Baltic Sea and from Germany to the Baltic States is highlighted. Therefore, the troops stationed in Mitau had plenty of opportunities to operate in both directions.

One of the key themes in the Latvian section of Bermond's memoirs is the portrayal of peaceful city life. At the end of the ninth chapter, he dedicates several paragraphs to cultural and educational activities, which, of course, were organised under Bermond's direct oversight: *Wishing to increase and broaden my soldiers' interest in theatre, newspapers, cultural evenings, and so forth, the cultural and educational section formed at the corps on my orders organised a series of musical and vocal evenings and theatrical performances for this purpose, which they (like the German soldiers) attended very willingly [...]. Attending these evenings, I became convinced that they were undoubtedly beneficial—that distracting soldiers from preparatory drill work into a small, accessible realm of art refreshes their spirits and – with the tasks ahead, which they are aware of, not troubling them – enables them to live creatively every day* [24, p.161].

In this section of his memoirs, the author offers an engaging yet somewhat biased portrayal. He provides readers with numerous sketches of idyllic provincial life, intertwined with scenes of Russians and Germans fraternising despite not sharing a common language, yet communicating through facial expressions and gestures. The city's atmosphere is enriched by the sounds of women's laughter, brass band music, solemn receptions, and parades. The description of life in Mitau under Bermond contrasts with scenes from other cities devastated by the horrors of civil war, especially those that fell under Bolshevik control.

Another notable aspect of Bermond's authorial approach is that his memoir, *In the Struggle Against Bolshevism*, serves as a kind of panegyric to the German-Russian alliance in the Baltic states. Interestingly, in this section of the memoir, criticism of Bolshevism is overshadowed by negative comments about the Latvians and their allies (mainly the British), who, having supported the Latvians against Bermond's Russian-German army, are viewed by the author as accomplices of Bolshevism.

Bermond-Avalov simplifies the quite complex political situation that developed in Europe, especially in Russia, during the final years of World War I into a straightforward paradigm: Bolsheviks versus anti-Bolsheviks. No third option is considered. Accordingly, attitudes towards Latvia and Latvians directly depended on their stance on the 'Bolshevik question'. Describing the early period of forming 'his own army,' Bermond writes: *The Latvian population gravitated towards the Bolsheviks, and therefore it was expected that their attitude towards the German troops would worsen, along with their attitude towards the Russian units that had linked their fate to them* [24, p.150]. At the same time, Ulmanis' government signed an agreement with Germany, which included a clause stating that the liberation of Latvia (specifically the Courland province, according to Bermond) would be rewarded with land grants. This led many, due to their landless status in Germany, to agree to continue the war. Bermond states that this agreement was breached by Latvian Minister Mejerovics, and *the bloodshed in defence of Courland was regarded as worthless water* [24, p.157]. In one of the chapters of his memoirs, Bermond-Avalov describes the work of the Latvian Riflemen in Russia as *a Cain-like deed* and depicts the Latvian army as *bandit troops* [24, p.218].

The main criticism Bermond-Avalov directed at Ulmanis' Latvian government was that it was entirely focused on the Entente (Britain and France), viewing these countries as defenders of its state's independence. It is worth noting that in the summer of 1919, Bermond-Avalov felt compelled to address the Latvians on several occasions. In his first address, he solemnly assured them: *The Russian troops gathering in Latvia are on their way to their Homeland* [24, p.158]. It should be noted that Bermond's 50,000-strong army consisted of 40,000 Germans and 10,000 Russians. Neither the Baltic states, nor the

Entente powers, nor, most likely, the German government could perceive this military formation as solely 'Russian'.

The appeal made an emotional plea for unity between Russians and Latvians, who had fought side by side in bloody battles, sharing food from the same pot and sheltering under the same greatcoat. *In war, Russians and Latvians became brothers. [...] Russian soldiers do not wish to burden their Latvian brothers* [24, p.158].

The Latvians (it is unclear whether this refers to the Latvian state) began to play a significant role in Bermond-Avalov's strategic plans, being tasked with providing a strong rear during the planned campaign against Bolshevism. It is notable that this appeal ends with the words *May God bless Latvia* [24, p.159], which is a translation of the first line of the anthem of the Republic of Latvia – *Dievs svētī Latviju*.

The situation was not as optimistic as it is portrayed in this address. Had there been no problems or conflicts, such an appeal would not have been necessary. The persistent negative attitude of the Latvians towards his army is explained by Bermond-Avalov solely as the result of Bolshevik agents' actions, inciting Latvians, Russians, and Germans against each other.

While giving due credit to Latvian generals Bergs and Balodis, Bermond speaks disparagingly of Kārlis Ulmanis. The negative portrayal is shaped through physical and behavioral characteristics: *coarse, with broad cheekbones; lisping, with an uncertain smile, and getting underfoot during meetings*—Ulmanis is depicted as a weak-willed pawn and an impersonal figure [24, p.173]. One of the reasons for the military campaign against Riga was not only the 'betrayal' by the Latvians and Estonians but, above all, the actions of the Ulmanis government, which, in Bermond-Avalov's opinion, *had not strayed far in its views from the Bolsheviks* [24, p.218].

The events of November 11, 1919, are described in Bermond-Avalov's memoirs in a very brief and plain manner. It states that his army units were ordered to leave Torenberg and gather in the Mitau area. The conflict with the Entente, losses, and the closing of the German border impacted both the morale and resources of the troops.

The inglorious campaign of Bermond concluded in early winter 1919. Particularly tragicomic, considering these and subsequent events, is Bermond-Avalov's acceptance on December 1, 1919, of the rank of major general. According to the *Order of the Western Volunteer Army*, the rank was awarded *for outstanding vision and personal leadership in extremely difficult circumstances [...] for your constant and unwavering concern for all ranks of the Army...* [24, p.223]. The order also made special note of His Serene Highness's *natural modesty*. On December 2, the Western Volunteer Army was renamed *the Military Group of Prince Avalov*.

The final address to the officers and soldiers, dated December 24, 1919, is the quintessence of Prince Avalov's ego-manifesto. *I did everything..., I tried..., I asked..., I pleaded..., I argued the necessity..., I wanted to make them respect us...* and so forth. This repeated sequence of *I*-statements forms the main rhetorical device in Bermond-Avalov's memoir strategy.

At the end of his memoirs, Bermond-Avalov melodramatically portrays himself as a misunderstood hero, caught in a *one-against-all* situation. For the first time, he acknowledges a personal mistake and assumes responsibility for the outcome of events in Latvia: *I yielded—and that was my greatest mistake. I accept responsibility for it, for I should have insisted on taking Riga; the Latvians should have been dealt a decisive blow, without stopping halfway, and forced to submit to the demands of Russian national policy. This was not done ...* [24, p.218].

4. CONCLUSIONS

Thus, the fates of two very different individuals—Pastor Niedra and Russian army officer Bermond-Avalov—are intriguingly intertwined during the Latvian War of Independence. In their political views, both looked to Germany for guidance, opposed Bolshevik ideology, and criticised the Ulmanis government. Having suffered defeat not only in the ideological struggle but also on the battlefield,

Niedra became known as a ‘traitor to the people,’ while Bermond-Avalov earned the label of an ‘adventurer.’ Both ultimately ended up in Germany.

Applying the methodology of memory studies, we observe that both authors appeal to the cultural memory of their respective communities. Niedra draws on the ‘frames of memory’ of the Latvian nation, attempting to place himself within the canon of the struggle for independence, although he perceives it very differently from the dominant canon. This is because he emphasises Latvia’s economic dependence on Germany and Russia, which leads him to covertly cooperate with these countries. Meanwhile, Bermond-Avalov relies on the ‘fixed points’ of the White émigré discourse, seeking to legitimise his vision of a ‘great, indivisible Russia.’

In this way, examining the memoirs of two opponents of Latvian statehood reveals how personal and collective memory intersect and compete. Memoir texts act as a site of symbolic struggle for historical legitimacy: they do not merely record events but also shape strategies of self-representation through which the authors aim to justify their place in history.

REFERENCES

1. Latvijas Sociāldemokrātijas CK un Latvijas Strādnieku, kareivju un bezzemnieku deputātu padomes Izpildkomiteja (Iskolata) 1918, “Deklarācija par Latvijas pašnoteikšanos (6.1.1918.)”, viewed 30 June 2025, <https://www.historia.lv/dokumenti/latvijas-socialdemokratijas-ck-un-latvijas-stradnieku-kareivju-un-bezzemnieku-deputatu>.
2. Jēkabsons, Ē 2015, “Ārvalstu armijas Latvijas neatkarības karā (I)”, viewed 30 June 2025, <https://lvportals.lv/norises/273760-arvalstu-armijas-latvijas-neatkaribas-kara-i-2015>.
3. Ekmanis, B 2017, “Fakti, kas tev ir jāzina: Latvijas neatkarību izcīnīja Latvijas iedzīvotāji ar ieročiem rokās”, viewed 30 June 2025, <https://www.apollo.lv/6010271/fakti-kas-tev-ir-jazina-latvijas-neatkaribu-izcinija-latvijas-iedzivotaji-ar-ierociem-rokas>.
4. Radziņš, P 1921, *Latvijas atbrīvošanas karš 1918–1920*, A. Gulbja apgādība, Rīga.
5. Peniķis, M 1938, *Latvijas atbrīvošanas kara vēsture*, Literatūra, Rīga.
6. Plensners, A 1929, *Latvijas atbrīvošanās*, A. Gulbja apgādība, Rīga.
7. Bērziņš, P 1928, *Latvijas brīvības cīņas 1918–1920*, A. Gulbja apgādība, Rīga.
8. *Latvju varoņu gaitas: brīvības cīņu hrestomātija* 1938, Literatūra, Rīga.
9. Ščerbinskis, V 1997, “Ziemeļvalstu brīvprātīgie un Latvijas brīvības cīņas”, *Latvijas vēsture*, vol. 1, pp. 78–85.
10. Ciganovs, J 2009, “Latvijas armija Atbrīvošanas cīņu pirmajos mēnešos”, *Latvijas vēstures institūta žurnāls*, vol. 1, pp. 89–103.
11. Miņins, A 2008, *Latvijas pilsoņu karš (1918–1919.): teorētiskās problēmas un viedokļi vēstures literatūrā*, Maģistra darbs, Latvijas Universitāte, Rīga.
12. Drīzulis, A & Krastiņš, J 1967, *Cīņa par padomju varu Latvijā*, Zinātne, Rīga.
13. Jēkabsons, Ē last updated 2025, *Latvijas Neatkarības karš*, viewed 30 June 2025, <https://enciklopedija.lv/skirklis/22216-Latvijas-Neatkar%C4%ABbas-kar%C5%A1>.
14. Чапенко, А 2002, “Русское антибольшевистское движение на территории Латвии в период Гражданской войны в России: 1918–1919 гг.”, Мурманск, viewed 30 June 2025, <https://www.dissercat.com/content/russkoe-antibolshevistskoe-dvizhenie-na-territorii-latvii-v-period-grazhdanskoi-voiny-v-ross>.
15. Erll, A 2011, *Memory in Culture*, trans. S.B. Young, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke.

16. Assmann, A 2011, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
17. Ricoeur, P 1984–1985, *Time and Narrative*, vols. 1–3, trans. K. McLaughlin & D. Pellauer, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
18. White, H 1987, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore.
19. Halbwachs, M 1992, *On Collective Memory*, ed. & trans. L.A. Coser, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
20. Assmann, J 1995, “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity”, *New German Critique*, vol. 65, pp. 125–133.
21. Assmann, J 2008, “Communicative and Cultural Memory”, in Erll, A & Nünning, A (eds.), *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, De Gruyter, Berlin, pp. 109–118.
22. White, H 1973, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore.
23. Fludernik, M 1996, *Towards a ‘Natural’ Narratology*, Routledge, London.
24. Бермондт-Авалов, П 1925, *В борьбе с большевизмом*, Вече, Гамбург.
25. Niedra, A 1998, *Tautas nodevēja atmiņas*, Zinātne, Rīga.