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# Everyday Antisemitism in Interwar Latvia

Experiences and Expressions through the Lens of Oral History

## Abstract

This article examines forms of antisemitism in interwar Latvia. Based mainly on testimonies from Jewish and non-Jewish witnesses, it investigates how exclusionary practices by non-Jews were expressed and impacted on people in their everyday life. Latvia had no antisemitic legislation in the 1920s and 1930s, but state structures facilitated societal antisemitism, which was more widespread than scholarship has recognised. The Jews in Latvia were affected regardless of societal standing, linguistic, or religious affiliation. Animosity existed among all ethnic groups to a degree, but attacks against Jews were of a different quality. Despite frequent interaction which sometimes turned into 'inter-ethnic' affection, the majority of society did not perceive the Jews as fellow compatriots.

## Introduction

When asked about their youth in Latvia before World War II, Jewish<sup>1</sup> survivors of the Holocaust often articulated diametrically opposed memories. While Frank Gordon recalled that "the two decades of independent Latvia's existence are remembered by both Latvians and Jews as the 'good years'",<sup>2</sup> Ruvin Fridman was convinced that antisemitism "was taken as part of the – of the – of, of the scene ... We never felt in Eastern Europe, no Jew ever felt that he was home, never".<sup>3</sup> How can two men who were born in the same decade and grew up in the same city express such different memories of their home country?

The question about the level, quality, and endurance of antisemitism in Latvia before World War II has been tackled by historians for decades. The phenomenon has too often, however, been marginalised as a pretext to the events that followed during the Soviet and German occupations. Those scholars who have investigated interwar antisemitism have mostly focussed on the radicalisation of political elites. This article examines forms and expressions of antisemitic attitudes among the Latvian general public and how or whether exclusionary practices impacted on people in their everyday lives.

1 Defining people through the ethnic categories of 'Jews', 'Germans' or 'Latvians' is problematic, but the terms will be deployed here according to how the witnesses defined themselves and others. I thereby follow Max Weber's approach, which does not try to discuss whether ethnic communities exist but acknowledges the fact that people perceive themselves as being part of these. Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft. Grundriss der Verstehenden Soziologie, Zwei Teile in einem Band, Die Zweitausendeins Klassiker-Bibliothek*, Frankfurt am Main 2010, 307. Since Weber, the discussions about ethnicity and race have exploded, but his approach is still acknowledged by experts in the field. Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity, Race, and Nationalism*, in: *Annual Review of Sociology* 35 (2009) 1, 21-42.

2 Frank Gordon, *Latvians and Jews between Germany and Russia*, Stockholm 1990, 15-16.

3 USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive (VHA), Ruvin Fridman, Interview 6348, Segment 29, 1995.

## Historiography and Research Questions

When research on the Holocaust and its prehistory in the Baltics intensified in the 1990s, it was argued that the majority society had been indifferent or positive towards the Jews before World War II.<sup>4</sup> Andrew Ezergailis assumed so because, after Latvia established its independence in 1918, there was little physical violence,<sup>5</sup> no anti-Jewish legislation, and Latvia welcomed refugees from Germany and the annexed territories after 1933.<sup>6</sup> Mārgers Vestermanis considered antisemitism to have been mainly an urban phenomenon among intellectuals.<sup>7</sup> Katrin Reichelt saw a fragile, but mostly friendly, coexistence among Jews and Latvians and claimed that antisemitism was usually limited to verbal attacks.<sup>8</sup> This rather harmonious picture was not drawn by Aivars Stranga and Leo Dribins, who provided studies about antisemitism and Jews in Latvia and revealed waves of violence during the Latvian War of Independence from 1918 to 1920. They also illustrated the rise of antisemitic organisations from the mid-1920s and analysed antisemitic newspapers that were widespread before the coup d'état of the nationalist Farmers' Union of Kārlis Ulmanis in 1934.<sup>9</sup> The two scholars emphasised that, while Latvians historically had a negative attitude towards Germans, only Jews became victims of physical violence.<sup>10</sup>

Recognising that Latvia was not free of antisemitism, scholars attempted to qualify the kind of antisemitism that was to be found in Latvia in the interwar period. Vestermanis emphasised the economic greed of the Latvian bourgeoisie.<sup>11</sup> Dribins defined a political, religious, and economic antisemitism among intellectual circles, and Aivars Stranga elaborated on the difference between the racial antisemitism of the Latvian fascists and the political antisemitism of the authoritarian regime.<sup>12</sup> Matthew Kott examined how the fascist organisation Pērkonkrusts (Thunder Cross) that was founded in the early 1930s based its ideology on a *Völkisch* racism and antisemitism.<sup>13</sup> Inesis Feldmanis scrutinised the antisemitism of the Baltic German National Socialist movement after Hitler gained power in Germany.<sup>14</sup> These works provide an essential understanding of mechanisms of Latvian politics in the interwar period, but they deal mostly with intellectuals.

One reason for this focus on public intellectuals and politicians is that the most frequently used sources – newspapers and official documents – mainly illustrate dis-

4 Dov Levin, On the Relations Between the Baltic Peoples and their Jewish Neighbours before, during and after World War II, in: *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 5 (1990) 1, 235; Ezra Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe between the World Wars*, Bloomington 1983, 253.

5 Andrew Ezergailis, *The Holocaust in Latvia, 1941–1944. The Missing Center*, Riga/Washington, D.C. 1996, 65.

6 *Ibid.*, 80.

7 Mārgers Vestermanis, Der lettische Anteil an der "Endlösung". Versuch einer Antwort, in: Uwe Backes/Eckhard Jesse/Rainer Zitelmann (ed.), *Die Schatten der Vergangenheit. Impulse zur Historisierung des Nationalsozialismus*, Frankfurt am Main 1992, 438–441.

8 Katrin Reichelt, *Lettland unter deutscher Besatzung 1941–1944. Der lettische Anteil am Holocaust (= Dokumente, Texte, Materialien 78)*, Berlin 2011, 37–52.

9 Aivars Stranga, *Ebreji un Diktatūras Baltijā 1926–1940 [Jews and Dictatorships in the Baltics 1926–1940]*, Riga 1997, 413–421; Leo Dribins, *Antisemitisms un tā Izpausmes Latvijā. Vēstures Atskats [Antisemitism and its Manifestations in Latvia. Historical Review] (= Symposium of the Commission of the Historians of Latvia 4)*, Riga 2002, 84.

10 Dribins, *Antisemitisms*, 85.

11 Vestermanis, *Der lettische Anteil*, 438.

12 Svetlana Bogojavlenska summarised the discussion among historians about the level and nature of Latvian antisemitism in her book *Die jüdische Gesellschaft in Kurland und Riga. 1795–1915*, Paderborn 2012, 2–3.

13 Matthew Kott, *Latvia's Pērkonkrusts. Anti-German National Socialism in a Fascistogenic Milieu*, in: *Fascism* 4 (2015) 2.

14 Inesis Feldmanis, *Die Deutschbalten. Ihre Einstellung zum Nationalsozialismus und ihr Verhältnis zum Staat Lettland (1933–1939)*, in: *Nordost-Archiv. Zeitschrift für Regionalgeschichte* 5 (1996) 2, 363–386.

courses among an elite and its attempts to approach an audience.<sup>15</sup> The use of testimonies has often been limited to Jewish memoirs and remains very focussed on published autobiographies. These tend to represent selected perceptions of the mostly German-speaking, intellectual middle class.<sup>16</sup> Many witnesses, however, did not have the means to write about and publish their experiences. In an attempt to make also their voices heard, the use of oral history has become more popular in research on Latvian history. Ilze Boldane and Irena Saleniece studied the attitude of Latvians towards other ethnic groups and based their investigations on interviews. Saleniece concluded that “contemporaries bear witness to the positive attitude of Latvians towards Jews in Latvia before World War II, when these ‘others’ were perceived more as ‘one of us’ than as strangers”.<sup>17</sup> Boldane came to a similar conclusion that Latvians tended to see Jews as part of their local community since they were very present in social and economic life.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, however, they perceived them as different – a phenomenon which Boldane calls “*citādie savējie*”, meaning ‘own others’.<sup>19</sup>

While these two authors revealed the non-Jewish perspective, Iosif Rochko examined memories of different inhabitants of the city of Daugavpils in the eastern province of Latgale. Non-Jewish witnesses remembered relations as positive, but additional sources document frequent cases of vandalism, street fights, the desecration of cemeteries, and antisemitism among Latvians as well as Poles.<sup>20</sup> Rochko’s work demonstrates that memories were diametrically opposed among Jews and non-Jews. Since the focus of his study was on memories of World War II, he only briefly looked into the interwar period. His work is the starting point for this article, which will illustrate the attitude between Latvia’s Jewish and non-Jewish citizens in the 1930s. Beyond exploring individual perceptions, the article will reveal patterns of exclusionary practices in various spheres of everyday life.

## Methodological Implications and Sources

Oral history projects as efforts to reveal history ‘from below’ have received increasing attention since the 1980s, and historians have come to acknowledge interviews as valuable additional sources.<sup>21</sup> Conversations with witnesses of past events can provide evidence not contained in official documentation. They can serve to correct information given in other sources and, perhaps most importantly, shed light on how witnesses perceive and describe experiences.<sup>22</sup> Since it is the aim of this article to

15 There are exceptions, such as the broad neglect of a referendum to change the law on citizenship in 1927, which was directed mainly against Jews. Dribins interprets this as evidence that, while it was very present, antisemitic hate speech was most often not supported by the majority population. Dribins, *Antisemitisms*, 93.

16 In her evaluation of the interwar period, Reichelt relies upon five written memoirs, arguing that others mentioning problems between Jews and Latvians have to be considered with reservations. Reichelt, *Lettland*, 51.

17 Irēna Saleniece, *Latviešu Rakstura Iezīmes Stāstos par Ebrejiem Pirmskara Latvijā* [Features of Latvian Character in Stories about Jews in Pre-War Latvia], in: Māra Zirnīte (ed.), *Dzīvesstāsti. Vēsture, Kultūra, Sabiedrība* [Life Stories. History, Culture, Society], Riga 2007, 317.

18 Ilze Boldāne, *Etnisko Stereotipu Veidošanās Apstākļi Latvijā. 1850–2004* [Conditions for the Formation of Ethnic Stereotypes in Latvia. 1850–2004], PhD Thesis, Riga 2011, 88.

19 Boldāne, *Etnisko Stereotipu Veidošanās*, 90.

20 Iosif Rochko, “Они были нашими соседями...” из истории холокоста в Даугавпилсе [“They Were Our Neighbours ...” From the History of the Holocaust in Daugavpils], in: *Евреи в меняющемся мире. Материалы 6-й международной конференции* [Jews in a Changing World. Materials from the 6<sup>th</sup> International Conference], Riga 2009, 351–381, here 353.

21 For an overview, see: Sonja Niehaus, *Nichtjüdische Deutsche in Erinnerungsinterviews mit Überlebenden des Holocaust*, PhD Thesis, Berlin 2013, 5.

22 Omer Bartov, *Wartime Lies and Other Testimonies. Jewish-Christian Relations in Buczac, 1939–1944*, in: *East European Politics and Societies* 25 (2011) 3, 487.

illustrate how Latvia's Jewish citizens perceived and interacted with their non-Jewish neighbours, the article is based on a first-hand analysis of oral history interviews, with few additions from secondary literature. In order to gain a nuanced picture, interviews with Jewish and non-Jewish witnesses were juxtaposed. After a thorough examination of interviews from the collections of different institutions, testimonies were selected as case studies if the interviewees were born or grew up in Latvia and if the testimonies provided extended insights into the interviewees' lives before World War II. Furthermore, a gender balance was desired. Since Latvia was in the interwar period a multi-ethnic state, interviews with witnesses who defined themselves as Russian and Polish were also included.

Twelve interviews from the USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive (VHA)<sup>23</sup> and five from the Fortunoff Archive serve as case studies in this article.<sup>24</sup> The VHA has become one of the largest and most widely used archives of its kind. Its benefits and weaknesses have been discussed extensively. Due to the strict structure, predefined questions, short duration, and sometimes ill-informed interviewers, the conversations often lack depth and space for the witnesses to provide detailed information, problems which were also encountered in the research for this article.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, the high level of structuring makes the interviews easier to compare. The approach of the Fortunoff Archive, which has only in recent years raised more interest thanks to the digitisation of its collection, is different. The setting and more conversational style of questioning provides the interviewees with space to express what seems important to them, and some interviews even last several hours.<sup>26</sup>

The interviews from the aforementioned collections represent mainly Jewish survivors from the western parts of Latvia. Since it is the aim of this article to provide information about the situation in the whole country, interviews from the eastern region of Latgale have had to be included. Three such interviews were found in the collections of the Jewish Holocaust Centre (JHC) in Melbourne. The interviews were conducted by Philipp Maisel, a Holocaust survivor from Vilna.<sup>27</sup> It was the declared aim of his project not only to document the genocide, but to rescue the "lost world" of Jewish life in Europe.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, Maisel asked detailed questions about Jewish and communal life as well as political events in the years before the war, which made the interviews particularly useful for this article. The conversations are more structured than the Fortunoff Archive interviews but similarly open towards the survivors' narratives – and equally as long.

In order to understand how differently people experienced coexistence in Latvia before the war, the interviews with Jewish survivors were juxtaposed with interviews with non-Jewish witnesses. Ever since Claude Lanzman depicted Polish peasants in

23 Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the research was limited to those interviews that were accessible online or had been analysed by the author in previous projects.

24 The Fortunoff Archive does not disclose interviewees' surnames. Therefore, this article only provides abbreviated surnames when referring to testimonies from this collection. This is not the case with the other archives, which provide full names that are accordingly referred to in this article.

25 A detailed analysis was presented, among others, by Christopher Browning, <http://www.cornell.edu/video/holocaust-historian-christopher-browning-starachowice-factory-slave-labor-camp> (1 November 2020).

26 Browning also discusses the Fortunoff Archive interviews. For an in-depth study of material from this archive, see: Nikolaus Hagen's article in this volume.

27 For more information about Maisel and the project, see: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-05-27/holocaust-victim-philipp-maisel-documents-ales-of-survival/8561922> (18 August 2021).

28 Michele Langfield, "Lost Worlds". Reflections on Home and Belonging in Jewish Holocaust Survivor Testimonies, in: *Jewish Culture and History* 2 (2007) 9, 45-46.

his film *Shoah*, the role of ‘neighbours’ has received more attention.<sup>29</sup> Among the most well-known undertakings to document non-Jews’ memories of the Holocaust is the project *Yahad-In Unum* (Together-In One). Under the guidance of the French priest Patrick Debois, the project has since the early 2000s conducted interviews with non-Jewish witnesses.<sup>30</sup> Around the same time, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) started a similar project. Its collection “Oral History Interviews of the Latvia Documentation Project” holds more than 70 interviews with non-Jewish witnesses, conducted from 2003 to 2016. It was the declared aim of the project to ask how these people remembered the fate of the Jews in Latvia during the war. The interviewees were of value solely in their role as witnesses of the Holocaust. They were hardly asked about personal loss, fear, forced labour, or other forms of violence that they experienced, or about their life before and after the war. The interviews rarely last longer than an hour. Only nine of these interviews were selected for this article because they contain more information about the interwar period. Despite its deficiencies, the USHMM collection remains one of the few providing information about interactions between non-Jews and Jews from a non-Jewish perspective.

In the USHMM collection, interviewees from the western parts of Latvia and Riga were underrepresented. In order to analyse how non-Jews from these areas remembered the past, other collections were examined. Interviews with non-Jewish and Jewish survivors were retrieved from the collection “Mans dzīvesstāsts” (My Life Story) of the University of Latvia and from the audiovisual collection of the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia in Riga, which have been collected since the 1970s<sup>31</sup> and the 1990s, respectively.<sup>32</sup> The collections contain more than 8,000 interviews and, for this article, four conversations with witnesses from Riga and western Latvia were selected. The interviews are loosely structured and the interviewer gave the interviewees much time to talk about aspects they considered important. Since the witnesses were not directly asked about interactions with Jews, not all interviews contain such information. The interviews thereby reflect whether people mentioned Jews as part of their life stories or not, so sometimes the memories revealed stereotypes, or the lack of such.

A statistical exploration of the source material revealed some implications that require reflection, namely the age of the interviewees and the time of the interview. The majority of the Jewish witnesses were born earlier than the non-Jewish witnesses (Fig. 1). Thus, while the former experienced the war and pre-war periods as adolescents or adults, many of the latter were children. This has an impact on individual perceptions, as children less likely experienced or understood political topics or institutional limitations. On the other hand, recollections of children’s games, schooling, and interactions among parents are highly valuable for the examination of everyday antisemitism, as will be elaborated.

The collections with non-Jewish interviewees were mostly created in the 2000s, while the first interviews with Jewish survivors date back to the late 1980s (Fig. 2).

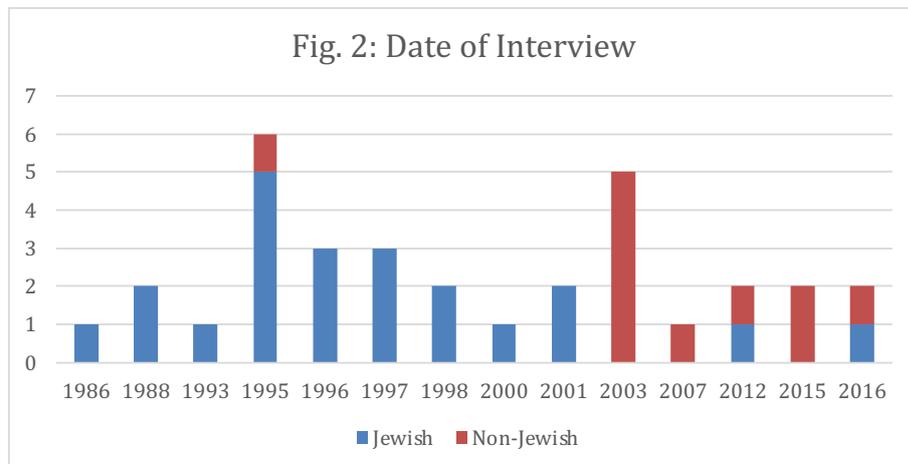
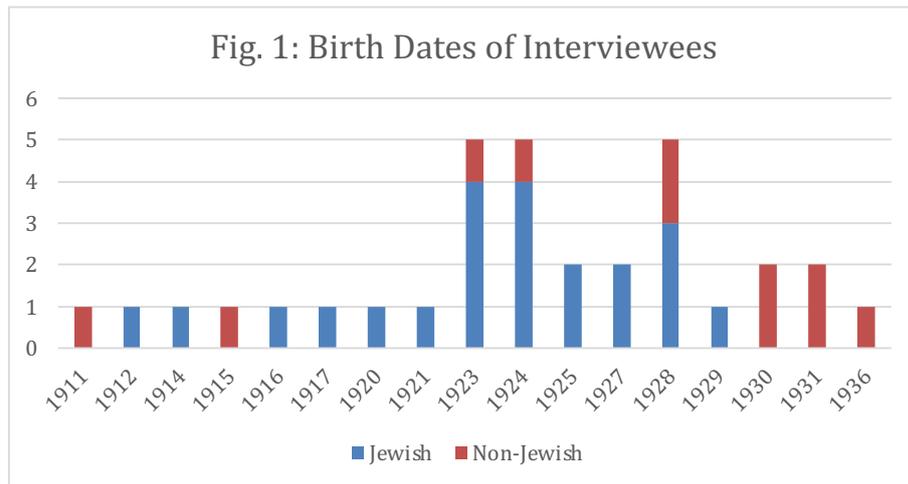
29 Among the best known and controversial is Jan T. Gross’ study on the town of Jedwabne in occupied Poland. Jan Tomasz Gross, *Sąsiedzi. Historia Zagłady Żydowskiego Miasteczka* [Neighbours. The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne], Sejny 2000.

30 <http://www.yahadinunum.org> (15 November 2020). The interviews from Latvia are not yet accessible and could not be used for this article.

31 The collection is part of the project “Nacionālā Mutvārdu Vēsture” [National Oral History] (NMV), <http://lostvolume.wixsite.com/celvedis> (23 October 2020).

32 <http://exhibits.stanford.edu/baltic-video/feature/the-museum-of-the-occupation-of-latvia-audiovisual-archive> (23 October 2020).

Since the Jewish interviewees were on average older, the age at the time of the interview does not differ considerably between the two groups. Jewish witnesses were on average 77 years old, while the average age of the non-Jewish witnesses was 81. The date of the interview meant, however, that at the time of the earliest interview with a Jewish survivor the war had happened some 40 years before, while for the last non-Jewish interviewee there was a gap of over 70 years. This time span increases the possibility of blurred or superimposed memories.<sup>33</sup>



### Jews in Latvia and Antisemitism in the Interwar Period

The territory of modern Latvia has historically been a multi-ethnic environment, with power relations running along ethnic lines.<sup>34</sup> From the Middle Ages, German landowners ruled over a Latvian peasant majority, and a Russian-speaking upper class gained influence during the eighteenth century. Jewish life began in Latvia in the late Middle Ages and was shaped by the distinct circumstances of the different regions. Those Jews in the eastern region of Latgale were in large part refugees who had escaped the pogroms in the south-eastern parts of the Russian Empire. They were often less educated, poorer, and more religious than those in the western region

<sup>33</sup> Examples of this phenomenon are presented by Nikolaus Hagen in his article published in this volume.

<sup>34</sup> Matthew Kott, *The Roots of Radicalism: Persistent Problems of Class and Ethnicity in Latvia's Politics*, in: David J. Smith (ed.), *Latvia – A Work in Progress? 100 Years of State- and Nation-Building (= Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society 142)* Stuttgart 2017, 279-313.

of Kurzeme, whose ancestors came from Poland and Lithuania and, most of all, the German-speaking lands.<sup>35</sup> While the former spoke Yiddish, the latter spoke mainly German. While the German and Jewish upper classes tended to mingle, interaction between ethnic Latvians and Jews happened to a large part in the rural areas, among Latvian farmers and Jewish small traders and artisans.<sup>36</sup>

In the nineteenth century, a small minority of Latvians managed to climb the economic ladder and ended up assimilating into the German elite.<sup>37</sup> Among their descendants were the initiators of Latvian nationalism, which was based strongly on anti-German sentiment.<sup>38</sup> While this nascent Latvian nationalism entailed elements of ethnic nationalism,<sup>39</sup> most of the early Latvian nationalists were not antisemites. In fact, a considerable number of them were motivated by socialist ideas, and when it came to the revolutionary struggle in 1905, Jewish and Latvian workers rebelled unitedly against the German and Russian ruling elites.<sup>40</sup> From 1918 to 1920, Jewish soldiers fought together with Latvians for independence, and Jewish representatives convened at the constitutional assembly in 1918.<sup>41</sup> Jews contributed to the building of the new state, which granted cultural autonomy to its national minorities. In the interwar Republic of Latvia, Jews ran their own political and cultural organisations, had their own schools, and Jewish politicians were members of parliament.<sup>42</sup> Holocaust survivors from Riga and from western Latvia in particular remembered a vivid Jewish social life at this time.<sup>43</sup> As noted above, however, Jews remained targets of harassment and violence. Officially there was no antisemitism in the Republic of Latvia, but regulations and structures offered means of exclusion in state administration and institutions, as the example of the University of Latvia reflects.

### Institutions and Antisemitism

The University of Latvia was established in 1919 and was an essential pillar of state-building.<sup>44</sup> Different to other countries, there was no numerus clausus to prevent non-Latvians from entering higher education and, in fact, Jewish students were proportionately well represented. Antisemitism was nevertheless present at the university. It culminated in December 1922, when Latvian students attacked and harassed Jewish classmates and collected more than 2000 signatures from students to

<sup>35</sup> The refugees were not allowed to settle there.

<sup>36</sup> Bogojavlenska, *Die jüdische Gesellschaft*, 259.

<sup>37</sup> Kott, *Roots of Radicalism*, 260-261.

<sup>38</sup> Leo Dribins, *Nationalismus als soziokulturelle Emanzipation*, in: Ulrike von Hirschhausen/Jörn Leonhard (ed.), *Nationalismen in Europa. West- und Osteuropa im Vergleich*, Göttingen 2001, 401; Ieva Zake, *Inventing Culture and Nation. Intellectuals and Early Latvian Nationalism*, in: *National Identities* 9 (2007) 4, 313.

<sup>39</sup> Marina Germane, *Civic or Ethnic Nation? Two Competing Concepts in Interwar Latvia*, in: *Nations and Nationalism* 18 (2012) 3, 439-460.

<sup>40</sup> Kott, *Roots of Radicalism*, 285.

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.mfa.gov.lv/ministrija/publikacijas/latvijas-ebreju-kopiena-vesture-tragedija-atdzimsana#krustnesi> (5 October 2020).

<sup>42</sup> Dribins, *Latvijas Ebreju Kopienas*.

<sup>43</sup> VHA, Shoshana Kahn, Interview 16106, Segment 4-6, 1996 (23 November 2020); Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies (FVA), Eva G., *Holocaust Testimony*, 8 December 1988 (15 November 2020); Jewish Holocaust Centre (JHC), Jascha Landman, *Survivor Testimony*, Interview by Phillip Maisel, 29 April 1993, JHCAVA0336, Phillip Maisel Testimonies Project (20 November 2020).

<sup>44</sup> For the role of the University of Latvia in state-building, see: Per Bolin, *Between National and Academic Agendas. Ethnic Politics and 'National Disciplines' at the University of Latvia 1919-1940* (= *Södertörn Studies in History* 51), Huddinge 2012.

demand a limit on the number of Jewish students at the university.<sup>45</sup> Considering that, in October 1922, 4,213 students at the university were ‘ethnically’ Latvian, the number of signatures collected was a significant outcome.<sup>46</sup>

A numerus clausus was never completely introduced, but restrictions for students who had not been citizens before 1919 and language tests were applied. This resulted in a decrease of Jewish students – many of whom spoke German or Russian as their native language – from twelve per cent in 1922 to nine per cent in 1923 and 1924.<sup>47</sup> Also, the implementation of oral exams exacerbated the situation for Jews, as there was little control over the decisions of the examiners, such as those of the professor of linguistics Juris Plāķis.<sup>48</sup> Plāķis was an ardent antisemite and very popular among the Latvian fraternities. As in other countries,<sup>49</sup> the fraternities played a major role in antisemitic activities, for example by excluding the Jewish fraternities from their umbrella organisation.<sup>50</sup> Outside of the fraternity circles, it seems that life on campus was shaped by indifference among Jewish and non-Jewish students. Zeldā-Rivka Hait recalled that, during her studies, she was only with Jewish students because Latvians were all antisemitic and the two groups had nothing in common.<sup>51</sup> Isaac Z., who studied at the Teachers Institute in Riga, had mainly Russian and no Latvian friends.<sup>52</sup>

The passive exclusion of Jews also permeated other sectors of public life, and the situation in the army and state institutions stands out in survivors’ memories. The interviewees often recalled the years after the coup d’état of Kārlis Ulmanis, the leader of the nationalist Farmers’ Union. After taking power on 15 May 1934, Ulmanis established an authoritarian regime, nationalised businesses, introduced strict censorship of the media, and incarcerated political opponents from the left and the right. Jewish life was severely impacted by the nationalisation politics of the regime, but at the same time Ulmanis established strict measures against antisemitic activities and closed chauvinist periodicals.<sup>53</sup> The discussion about the character of Ulmanis’ regime and the impact on Jewish life is ongoing,<sup>54</sup> and it is also reflected in the survivors’ memories.

Bernhard Press, who was born in Riga in 1917, summarised that antisemitism in Latvia

“was rather that the Jews were separated from the rest of the life of the state. That is, they could have their schools, practice their religion, have their newspapers, have theatres, and so on and so on. But they could not work in the public service; there were practically, with very few exceptions, no Jewish

45 Latvijas Valsts Vēstures Arhīvs [Latvian State Historical Archive] (LVVA), F 1632\_A 2\_L 661\_Lpp.105, Visvaldis Jankaus/Felikss Krusa/Jānis Lapiņš/Indriķis Pone, Letter to the University Council, Riga 20 December 1922.

46 Bolin, *Between National*, 138.

47 *Ibid.*, 158.

48 Aivars Stranga, *Kārļa Ulmaņa Režīms un Ebreji* [The Regime of Kārlis Ulmanis and the Jews], Museum ‘Jews in Latvia’, Riga, 20 October 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dtAPwday02w> (18 November 2020).

49 For an overview, see: Regina Fritz/Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe/Jana Starek (ed.), *Alma Mater Antisemitica. Akademisches Milieu, Juden und Antisemitismus an den Universitäten Europas zwischen 1918 und 1939* (= *Beiträge zur Holocaustforschung des Wiener Wiesenthal Instituts für Holocaust-Studien* 3), Vienna 2016.

50 Valters Šcerbinskis, *The Latvian Student Corps and Politics in the Inter-War Period of the Twentieth Century*, in: *Journal of Baltic Studies* 36 (2007) 2, 163.

51 VHA, Zeldā-Rivka Hait, 26792, Segments 22-23, Interview by Nina Elazar-Wolff, 25 February 1997 (3 January 2021).

52 FVA, Isaac Z., *Holocaust Testimony*, 1 August 1990 (2 December 2020).

53 Stranga, *Kārļa Ulmaņa Režīms*.

54 Aivars Stranga notes that, while Ulmanis’ politics were not outwardly antisemitic, his private writings reflected increasing radicalisation against Jews. *Ibid.*

police officers, no Jewish post employees, no judges, no doctors in, in state – state hospitals ... So they were excluded from public life.”<sup>55</sup>

Other survivors also noted the absence of Jews in state positions and the fact that there was just one Jewish policeman in the whole of Latvia.<sup>56</sup> Margers Vestermanis, born in Riga in 1925 and a pioneer of Holocaust research in Latvia, remembered that “for the only time in the history of Latvia, which then existed already for 20 years, in the independent state, there was only one Jewish policeman, a participant of the War of Independence, as it was called at the time. The boys ran after him: ‘look, a Jew, a Jewish cop!’”<sup>57</sup>

The absence of Jews in state positions has been confirmed by scholars.<sup>58</sup> Andrew Ezergailis considered the explanation to lie in the fact that recruitment for the civil service was based on nepotism within the Latvian fraternities, and because of this other minorities were also underrepresented.<sup>59</sup> The absence of Jewish policemen in particular caused insecurity among the Jewish community, especially as the Latvian police was not free of anti-Jewish sentiment. It especially monitored Jewish activities<sup>60</sup> and would sometimes, instead of helping Jews, arrest them when they were in trouble with local antisemites.<sup>61</sup> “You could feel it [antisemitism] everywhere, if you had to go to a police station, or – everywhere you could feel it”, remembered Jakob Basner.<sup>62</sup>

The examples provided reflect that, although officially the Latvian state granted equality and freedom to the Jewish minority, there were public spheres that they could not enter. The political structure gave way for individual and social anti-semitic deeds, but not all survivors would later recall this. Such ‘forgetting’ results from the hidden character of this antisemitism, but it might also be explained by the age of the interviewees. For those who were children in the interwar period, other forms of exclusion were much more present.

## Social Interaction and Social Antisemitism

Many memories were connected to school and education. The school system in Latvia was shaped by its mixed character: cultural autonomy for the minorities entailed supervision of schools, so next to the state-run schools there were those teaching in German, Hebrew, or Russian.<sup>63</sup> Parents’ choice of a school was influenced not only by religious or linguistic affiliations. Frank Gordon, for example, went to the prestigious Riga French Lycée, a state school that was attended by children from various backgrounds.<sup>64</sup> A good education was often a reason for Jewish parents to

55 VHA, Bernhard Press, 15652, Tape 2, Interview by Bertel Thorn Prikker, 27 May 1996 (24 August 2021).

56 Landman, Survivor Testimony; Jakob Basner, 6277, Interview by Mary Kasdan, 4 December 1995; Bernhard Press, *Judenmord in Lettland: 1941–1945* (= *Dokumente, Texte, Materialien*, 4), Berlin 1992, 23. Katrin Reichelt disqualifies Press’ memory as exaggerating the difficulties for Jews. Reichelt, *Lettland unter deutscher*, 46.

57 <http://www.rigaslaiks.lv/zurnals/sarunas/eju-tumsa-meza-ka-majas-18802> (6 January 2021).

58 Geoff Swain, *Between Stalin and Hitler. Class War and Race War on the Dvina, 1940–46* (= *BASEES/RoutledgeCurzon Series on Russian and East European Studies* 15), London/New York 2004, 11.

59 Ezergailis, *The Holocaust in Latvia*, 106–107.

60 <http://www.rigaslaiks.lv/zurnals/sarunas/ilga-pauze-klusums-19947> (12 December 2020).

61 Paula Oppermann, *More Than a Means to an End. Pērkonkrusts’ Antisemitism and Attacks on Democracy in the Early 1930s*, in: Siobhan Hearne/Matthew Kott/Michael Loader (ed.), *Defining Latvia. Recent Explorations in History, Culture, and Politics*, Budapest 2021.

62 Basner, Interview, Segment 16–17.

63 Mendelsohn, *The Jews*, 251.

64 Gordon, *Latvians and Jews*, 20.

send their children to schools with German as the main language of instruction. For many of those among the German-speaking Jewish upper-middle class circles in Kurzeme and Riga who considered themselves as part of the German culture, it was also a natural choice.<sup>65</sup>

Jewish interviewees think of their time in German schools overall positively, but they also mention experiences of antisemitism. Jazeps Eiduss was on good terms with his German classmates in a prestigious German gymnasium. Nevertheless, he and his Jewish peers were reminded regularly by teachers that “you are only guests in this school and you should behave like guests”.<sup>66</sup> Other witnesses remembered the radicalisation after the rise of the Nazi Party in Germany. Morris Halle attended the First German Primary School in Riga. He recalled that there were always “small problems”, but that his parents considered this the “introduction to life” for him. After 1933, however, it got so bad that his parents decided to send him to a Jewish school.<sup>67</sup> None of the survivors provide details about what was done to them, but Percy Gurwitz recalled that “a ring of icy cold soon closed around the Jews, which made it unbearable for them to stay”.<sup>68</sup>

The rise of the National Socialist ideology in German schools coincided with the establishment of the authoritarian regime in Latvia. After the coup d'état in May 1934, all schools were centralised under one administrative body that oversaw education politics. The minorities were allowed to send one representative to this council. This was a problem for the Jewish community, which was not only linguistically heterogeneous but also had different religious and political currents. Beforehand, different Jewish schools had taught different interpretations of Judaism. Now they could only send one representative from the Agudas Jisroel (Union of Israel), a conservative religious organisation. After the coup, it was the only Jewish body that was allowed to operate and to organise Jewish school life.<sup>69</sup> Agudas Jisroel represented a minority in the Jewish community, and some liberal parents preferred to send their children to Latvian schools instead.<sup>70</sup> There, the children were also targets of anti-semitic bullying. A non-Jewish witness recalled that they would make fun of them and that some pupils did not want to sit next to a Jew.<sup>71</sup>

The majority of Jewish children attended schools that were under the supervision of the Jewish community.<sup>72</sup> Sometimes they were attacked by pupils from Latvian schools. Ruvín Fridman remembered that “we would not dare walk in the street with a kippa, we had a cap. We put on a, a, a – every school had its own student cap, you know – the, the, just some gentile kids would pass by and tear down, you know, the, the cap, and calling us ‘you dirty Jew’, and give us a smack, or a kick, or – and chase us.”<sup>73</sup>

65 Percy Gurwitz, *Zähl nicht nur, was bitter war. Eine baltische Chronik von Juden und Deutschen*, Berlin 1991, 20; Kahn, Segments 20-24.

66 NMV, Jāzeps Eiduss, 1789, Interview by Māra Zirņīte and Māra Lazda, 3 February 2000, <http://www.dzivesstasts.lv/lv/free.php?id=20821> (2 November 2020).

67 Department of Special Collections and University Archives, Stanford University Libraries/The Museum of the Occupation of Latvia Audiovisual Archive, Morris Halle, Oral History Interview (excerpt), 04:00-06:00, Interview by Lelde Neimane/Aivars Reinholds/Valters Nollendorfs, 17 April 2012, <http://searchworks.stanford.edu/view/sy421rd1788> (7 January 2021).

68 Gurwitz, *Zähl nicht nur*, 20; Hait, Interview, Segment 12.

69 Karlis Ulmanis and the leader of Agudas Jisroel were on good terms. Stranga, *Kārļa Ulmaņa režīms*.

70 Stranga, *Kārļa Ulmaņa režīms*.

71 USHMM Collection, courtesy of the Jeff and Toby Herr Foundation (USHMMC), Anatolijs Zubovičs, Oral History Interview, 5 January 2007, Accession Number: 2003.456.54, RG Number: RG-50.568.0054 (16 November 2020).

72 Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe*, 251.

73 Fridman, Interview, Segment 29.

Others shared this experience of harassment and attacks, and of being called ‘dirty Jew’ in public.<sup>74</sup> Harry Daniller remembered that when he was ten or eleven years old, Latvian youngsters attacked him and his friends in a park in Riga, and older Jewish boys had to help them.<sup>75</sup> A witness from Liepaja remembered that members of the Pērkonkrusts harassed Jewish men on the streets.<sup>76</sup> Pērkonkrusts supporters also attacked Jewish youth camps<sup>77</sup> and members of the Zionist movement.<sup>78</sup>

Zionists were targeted because they symbolised for Latvian nationalists the idea that Jews were not loyal to the Latvian state, a trope present since the early days of the Republic of Latvia.<sup>79</sup> That perception manifested itself in everyday life situations. For example, Yacob Basner grew up in a Yiddish-speaking household and only learned Latvian at school. When he was five years old, he had to go to hospital and did not understand what the Latvian nurse told him. She got angry and, according to Basner’s mother, shouted in Latvian: “don’t know Latvian - go to Palestine!”<sup>80</sup>

Zionism did indeed gain increasing popularity in Latvia in the interwar period, which was also due to the fact that Jews did not feel accepted by the majority society. Jazeps Eiduss recalled how his cousin turned towards Zionism in the late 1930s and left for Palestine:

“But he later told me that he had wanted to be Latvian with all his heart. He thought in Latvian, he joined the scouts, but at some point he realised that he was treated well, but Latvians would never consider him his own. He would never become a Latvian, and then he turned over, and he became – ‘I am a Jew and I will be a Jewish nationalist’. He says he did the right thing, because there he was recognised as [among] his own. In Latvia he was not [among] his own.”<sup>81</sup>

Zelda-Rivka Hait expressed her feelings towards Zionism similarly. As a student, she was an ardent Zionist, and this was why during her studies she had no non-Jewish friends. She recalled that all she wanted was to finish her education and go to Palestine, and this dream she could not share with non-Jews. About Latvians she said: “I could not find any common language with Latvians, I knew they were antisemitic and there was nothing to talk with them about.”<sup>82</sup> She also referred to the antisemitic Latvian folk songs.<sup>83</sup> Other sources confirm her memory of a folk song that nationalists used to sing with the altered text “throw the Jews into the river” instead of “throw the nets into the river”.<sup>84</sup>

Hait’s feeling of a general and omnipresent antisemitism was shared by other survivors. Some considered it harmless<sup>85</sup> while others viewed it more seriously, as the quotation by Ruvim Fridman cited at the start of this article demonstrates. Non-Jew-

74 JHC, Vitali Voitinsky, Survivor Testimony, 00:13-00:20, Interview by Freda Hodge, 24 March 2016, JHCA-VA4189; VHA, Ernest Jacobs, 45220, Segment 22, Interview by Joanna Buchan, 21 June 1998 (6 January 2021); VHA, Sam Zelikson, 8002, Segment 7, Interview by Leslie Fass, 26 October 1995 (6 January 2021).

75 VHA, Harry Daniller, 19008, Segment 8, Interview by Marcie Goodman, 20 August 1996 (18 December 2019).

76 FVA, G., Interview, Segment 3.

77 VHA, Gilel’ Gordin, 6416, Segment 15, Interview by Irena Motkin, 9 November 1995 (2 February 2020).

78 Oppermann, *More Than a Means*.

79 Nick Baron/Peter Gatrell, *Population Displacement, State-Building, and Social Identity in the Lands of the Former Russian Empire, 1917–23*, in: *Kritika. Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 4 (2003) 1, 51–100, here 83.

80 Basner, Interview, Segment 16.

81 NMV, Eiduss, 1789.

82 Hait, Interview, Segment 23.

83 *Ibid.*

84 Vestermanis, *Der lettische Anteil*, 440–441.

85 Gordon, *Latvians and Jews*; VHA, Frieda Ende, Segment 3-5, 775, Interview by Tina E. Tito, 1 February 1995 (18 February 2020).

ish witnesses also confirmed that “of course ... without the [German] occupation this would never have happened, but in principle, there was antisemitism here”, as Nikolaijs Neilands from Riga remembered.<sup>86</sup>

Antisemitism and prejudices could exist parallelly or together with friendship and trust. Since children went to different schools, ‘mixed’ friendships often developed among neighbours. They were remembered by Jewish and non-Jewish witnesses. David P. grew up in Riga. He recalled that, in general, Latvians were known as antisemites, but he never experienced antisemitism himself, and he played with his Latvian friends every day.<sup>87</sup> Jacob Basner’s two best friends were Latvian boys living next door, they even spoke a little Yiddish.<sup>88</sup> Avram S. from Jekabpils remembered that his Latvian friends came to visit him and eat apple kugel.<sup>89</sup> Frieda Ende’s best friends were twins from a Baltic German family next door.<sup>90</sup> Zofia Zuyeva, from a village in eastern Latvia, was friends with the sons of a Jewish family and their parents were very close. A certain Mr. Rivkin lent her family money so they could buy land, and the families maintained their friendship beyond World War II.<sup>91</sup> Vladislav Gaga, from the small eastern town of Viški, talked about how his parents played cards with their Jewish friends, and about how one Jewish friend taught his mother to play the guitar.<sup>92</sup> Marjans Barščeviskis, from a Polish family in the same village, remembered that after high holidays the Jewish neighbours brought food to share.<sup>93</sup>

Friendship proved not to be an ultimate bulwark against antisemitism: Several witnesses expressed disappointment about Latvian friends who turned their backs on them when the Germans invaded Latvia in 1941.<sup>94</sup> There were, however, also examples of solidarity, especially among people who had been very close to each other. The case of Frieda Ende from Liepāja is an extreme example of the potential of personal affection. After Ende’s father had died, her family experienced financial difficulties and rented a room to a Latvian lodger, a Pērkonkrusts member. Asked whether he did not have a problem living with Jewish people, Ende remembered “no, he thought we were the nicest people”. He used to eat together with them and kiss her mother on the cheek. After the Germans occupied Latvia, this man would save their lives twice.<sup>95</sup>

Ende’s saviour was an exception and rescuing her did not stop him from collaborating in the murder of others. Most Pērkonkrusts members in 1941 did not help Jewish people known to them, as the example of Maly Kohn shows. Kohn attended a teachers’ college before the war. She had Pērkonkrusts members among her colleagues there, and they would always reassure her that “Maly, for us you do not have

86 USHMMC, Nikolaijs Neilands, Oral History Interview, 4 July 2003, Accession Number: 2003.456.2, RG Number: RG-50.568.0002 (28 November 2020).

87 FVA, David P., Holocaust Testimony, Segment 2, 9 November 1986 (7 January 2021).

88 He later explained that the father of the two boys told the Germans which of the apartments in the house were inhabited by Jews and moved into one of them. Basner, Segment 28.

89 FVA, Avraham S., Holocaust Testimony (transcript), Segment 4, 13 November 1992 (18 February 2020).

90 VHA, Ende, Interview, Segment 5.

91 The Rivkin family managed to evacuate before the Germans arrived. They returned after the war and the families remained friends, and Zofia lived with the family when she studied. USHMMC, Zofia Zuyeva, Research Interview, 14 October 2015, Accession Number: 2003.456.76, RG Number: RG-50.568.0074 (22 November 2020).

92 USHMMC, Vladislav Gaga, Research Interview, 15 October 2015, Accession Number: 2003.456.78, RG Number: RG-50.568.0076 (23 November 2020).

93 USHMMC, Marjans Barščeviskis, Oral History Interview, 5 July 2003, Accession Number: 2003.456.4, RG Number: RG-50.568.0004 (23 November 2020).

94 JHC, P., Holocaust Testimony, Segment 1-2; JHC, Zina Edelstein, Survivor Testimony, 09:23, Interview by Phillip Maisel, 25 April 2001, JHCAVA1077 (11 December 2020).

95 VHA, Ende, Interview, Segment 9-10.

to be worried, because we all will look after you”.<sup>96</sup> Under German occupation, a Pērkonkrusts member tried to abduct – and potentially rape – her, but a German officer stopped him. The Latvian later returned to the Kohns’ house, took their jewellery, and abused her parents.<sup>97</sup>

The cases of Kohn and Ende reflect how in some cases the level of affection and interaction was pivotal for the development of relationships between Jews and non-Jews. In a country as multi-ethnic as Latvia, interaction among the groups was inevitable, but close relationships were rare. This is best reflected at the level of intermarriage, which remained very low among all ethnic groups in the country.<sup>98</sup> If it happened, the couple involved was a target of gossip and raised eyebrows.<sup>99</sup> Relations between Jews and non-Jews therefore most often remained on a professional level.

### Economic Interaction and Antisemitism

Mārgers Vestermanis emphasised that economic antisemitism developed among the Latvian bourgeoisie from the end of the nineteenth century, as they perceived the Jews as competitors.<sup>100</sup> Others noted that Jews disproportionately owned many businesses and were therefore targets of antisemitism. Due to the historical situation of being restricted in settlement and profession, Jews were indeed overrepresented in free enterprises and industry.<sup>101</sup> At the same time, however, more than ten per cent were living below the poverty line,<sup>102</sup> and the majority of their businesses were village shops or retail trade. Particularly in the nationalist media, however, Jews were depicted as rich capitalists and exploiters.<sup>103</sup> This image was widespread among the Latvian population. Isaac Z.’s memory shows that the notion of the ‘cunning Jew’ was engrained already in childhood:

“One thing that stands out in my memory is that when I was a child, when my father was working for a while in a Jewish credit cooperative, I was eligible to participate in a summer camp. This was a summer camp with mostly Latvian children and very few Jewish children. And I remember feeling very hurt when some Latvian children were – they asked me ‘where does your father work?’ And I said: ‘he works in a bank’. And then they asked: ‘what kind of bank?’ And I said: ‘in a Jewish bank’. And then a Latvian child said: ‘Oh, then he steals only from Jews’. I remember being very hurt by their assuming and believing that my father was a thief when I knew he was a very honest man”.<sup>104</sup>

96 VHA, Maly Kohn, 36613, Segment 8, Interview by Shauna Sherker, 18 September 1997 (7 January 2021).

97 Ibid., Segment 33-26.

98 Ezergailis, *The Holocaust in Latvia*, 69.

99 Gurwitz, *Zähl nicht nur*, 10; Museum of the Occupation of Latvia, Ēriks Kārklīš, Interview by Lelde Neimane, 23 May 2012, OMF 2300/2593-2596.

100 Vestermanis, *Der lettische Anteil*, 438-439.

101 Katrin Reichelt, *Der Anteil der Letten an der Enteignung der Juden ihres Landes zwischen 1941 und 1943*, in: Christoph Dieckmann (ed.), *Kooperation und Verbrechen. Formen der ‘Kollaboration’ im Östlichen Europa 1939–1945 (= Beiträge Zur Geschichte des Nationalsozialismus, 19)*, Göttingen 2003, 40.

102 Leo Dribins, *Ebreji Latvijā [Jews in Latvia]*, in: Leo Dribins (ed.), *Mazākumtautības Latvijā. Vēsture un Tagadne [Minorities in Latvia. History and Present]*, Riga 2007, 218.

103 Kristiāna Kirša, *Antisemitisma Diskurss Laikrakstā “Latvijas Sargs” (1920–1928) [Antisemitism Discourse in the Newspaper “Latvia’s Guard”]*, in: Ojārs Skudra (ed.), *Latvijas Preses Vēsture. Diskursi un Identitātes [The History of the Latvian Press. Discourses and Identities]*, Riga 2010, 45-60.

104 FVA, Z., Interview, Segment 2.

In the interviews, non-Jewish interviewees did not mention such stereotypes, although many remembered interaction with Jews mainly within the sphere of trade. As in other countries, Jewish peddlers connected the urban centres and the periphery.<sup>105</sup> In some villages, there was just one shop. Many non-Jewish witnesses recalled that in the Jewish shops one could always buy on credit and pay once the salary arrived.<sup>106</sup> Some remembered that Jews and non-Jews worked together in the shoe-making-business,<sup>107</sup> and one Latvian interviewee said that, due to such interaction, his father knew some Yiddish.<sup>108</sup> Irena Saleniece considers the knowledge of Yiddish to be a sign that Latvians valued their Jewish business partners.<sup>109</sup> Multilingualism was common in interwar Latvia, so many of the interviewees spoke various languages at home and with their friends.<sup>110</sup> Zina Edelstein's family owned a small shop in Daugavpils, and she often helped her mother in the store; she learned Russian from the customers.<sup>111</sup> Edelstein did not recall antisemitic incidents in her interview, but children of other shopkeepers did. Isaac Z., whose father had a shop in Livani, told the interviewer that one day they found notes on the steps of their store which said "down with traitors".<sup>112</sup> Leaflets and writings on the walls and windows of Jewish shops are documented in other sources. The members of Pērkonkrusts in particular regularly disseminated these all over the country and called for a boycott of Jewish shops.<sup>113</sup>

Such calls for boycotts were an embodiment of economic antisemitism. They were, however, not mentioned in the interviews. The antisemitism described by witnesses was expressed within economic interactions but not always based on economic considerations. This was discovered by Irena Saleniece. She found frequent mentions of Jewish peddlers visiting villages and staying with local peasants overnight. In one interview, a non-Jewish woman recalled Latvian youngsters blindfolding a Jewish peddler who was sleeping on their oven. When the interviewer asked her whether he became angry with them, the witness said that the boys had just been joking and that she thinks that, in the end, he was just happy to see again.<sup>114</sup>

This example reveals the imbalance in evaluating antisemitism among Jewish and non-Jewish witnesses. The statistics support this: out of 39 interviews with Jewish witnesses, 37 remember antisemitism in one form or another being expressed by Latvians or Germans. In 44 interviews with non-Jews, two rendered the attitude towards Jews as problematic.<sup>115</sup> As implicated above, not all non-Jews were asked about this topic, but the results show that prejudices, hatred, and exclusion remained a problem for those who were targeted. Their perception of interaction paints a different picture than Saleniece's<sup>116</sup> and Boldane's<sup>117</sup>, who claim that non-Jews saw the Jews as part of their communities.

105 This applied to both eastern and western Latvia. Bogojavlenska, *Die jüdische Gesellschaft*, 55-56.

106 USHMMC, Neonila Grigorjeva, Oral History Interview, 22 November 2003, Accession Number: 2003.456.16, RG Number: RG-50.568.0016 (23 November 2020).

107 USHMMC, Anna Garklāva, Oral History Interview, 4 July 2003, Accession Number: 2003.456.1, RG Number: RG-50.568.0001 (23 November 2020).

108 USHMMC, Karlis Aleksandrs Pavlovičs, Oral History Interview, 20 May 2016, Accession Number: 2003.456.72, RG Number: RG-50.568.0072 (24 November 2020).

109 Saleniece, *Latviešu rakstura iezīmes*, 312.

110 Landman, Interview, 04:00-05:00, Viskovatovs, Interview, 03:00-07:00.

111 Edelstein, Interview, 07:00-09:00.

112 Z., Interview, Segment 2.

113 Oppermann, *More Than a Means*.

114 Saleniece, *Latviešu rakstura iezīmes*, 313-314.

115 The interviews were retrieved from the abovementioned collections, but not all are presented in this article.

116 Saleniece, *Latviešu rakstura iezīmes*, 317.

117 Boldāne, *Etnisko Stereotipu Veidošanās*, 88.

An additional phenomenon that was revealed particularly in descriptions of professional interaction was the parallel existence of prejudices against a group and individual affection. Helena Gerasimova came from a Russian-speaking, very poor family. She worked as a nanny for a wealthy Jewish family in Daugavpils. She recalled:

“I went to look after children all summer. The richest families were Jews. Well and then I went to look after those Jewish children. And you know, from that I suffered a lot because the kids saw me on the street walking with those children. And then when I started going to school in autumn, then these kids always made fun of me for being a Jew-nanny. Well, please! Wouldn't that hurt you? But I had a very good mistress, by the way. And I went to her every summer.”<sup>118</sup>

Gerasimova was aware of a general rejection of Jews. She was targeted for ‘fraternising’ with them, as were non-Jewish spouses living in intermarriage. Her sympathy – and potentially financial attraction – nevertheless made her continue working for the family. A similar experience was described by Jazeps Eiduss. His nanny was from a Baltic German family that had lost property and wealth after Latvia gained independence:

“She terribly detested Latvians, terribly. Of course, she did not love Jews either, did not love Latvians. I didn't feel it on myself, she was, of course, very tactful. She didn't say any bad word about us, but when she talked about someone else, one could feel it very well. She simply spoke so scornfully. Just as many Latvian families – like – ‘they are Jews what do you want’ – kind of like that. A Jew remains a Jew ... There was no talk that they [the Jews] in any way should be exterminated or expelled, but arrogantly. But for Latvians – Latvians had taken away her manors, Latvians were [for her] generally peasants”.<sup>119</sup>

Arrogant attitudes towards Latvians were, according to many Jewish witnesses, also quite common among educated Jews. They looked down on them as uneducated peasants with an underdeveloped culture.<sup>120</sup> Ernest Jacobs grew up in a German-speaking household and his parents had many German friends. Jacobs stated that Latvians were xenophobic and that when the Baltic Germans left in 1939, many of the former were very happy.<sup>121</sup> At the same time, a Jewish witness stated that the Baltic Germans “were the worst by the way. Next to the Latvians.”<sup>122</sup> Such contradictory assertions reveal that Jews could hold prejudices against other ethnic groups based on different experiences of exclusion or inclusion.

## Conclusion

Earlier research on the coexistence of Jewish and non-Jewish citizens of Latvia in the interwar period either underestimated the level of antisemitism in the 1920s and 1930s or focussed on the radicalisation of individual groups. Little attention was paid to how antisemitism was conveyed in daily interactions or to how and whether

118 NMV, Helēna Gerasimova, 222, Interview by Baiba Bela, 9 October 1995, <http://www.dzivesstasts.lv/lv/free.php?id=592> (8 January 2021).

119 NMV, Eiduss, 1789.

120 Z., Interview, Segment 4; Kahn, Interview, Segments 4-5.

121 VHA, Jacobs, Interview, Segment 37.

122 VHA, Daniller, Interview, Segment 11.

Jewish citizens experienced exclusion based on stereotypes. Expressions of everyday antisemitism are rarely documented in written sources, and oral history has not been used extensively to confront existing perceptions. By making extensive use of interviews and juxtaposing the testimonies of Jewish and non-Jewish witnesses, this article has examined the topic from a new angle. It has thereby provided a more nuanced picture of how Jewish life in Latvia was affected by antisemitism before World War II.

The analysis has revealed that, while there was no official institutional antisemitism, the structure of Latvian state bodies provided antisemites with the chance to oust Jews from certain positions. Not being represented in the state administration and authorities left Jewish citizens with a sense of not belonging to the Latvian state, which many would also remember decades later. The examination also showed that, although being a very heterogeneous group, Jews were targets of antisemitism all over the country, by offenders from all ethnic groups and on all socio-economic levels. Society in Latvia was ethnically fragmented in general, but Jews were targeted in particular: No other group experienced vandalism and physical attacks based on ethnic belonging.

Non-Jews most often did not consider Latvia's interwar society as particularly antisemitic, but nearly all Jewish interviewees remembered anti-Jewish sentiment or activities. Parallel to group-related prejudices, however, the testimonies revealed cases of individual affection beyond ethnic divisions. The majority of the society, though, did not perceive the Jews as fellow compatriots, albeit often claiming the opposite. Anti-Jewish resentment was omnipresent, not only among radicalising antisemitic students or right-wing politicians. Interviews with 'ordinary' citizens of Latvia, Jewish and non-Jewish, revealed that members of different ethnic groups intermingled more frequently and often closer than scholarly literature has so far acknowledged. Still, antisemitism existed, despite – and not because of a lack of – frequent everyday interaction and entanglement.

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