

# Memorial Space and Gender. Analysis of Latvian Contemporary Commemorative Places

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# Theoretical background

- Collective memory (Halbwachs)
  - Decisive importance in remembering or forgetting that past are “social frameworks,” as opposed to individuals. Memories always are reconstructed because of public pressure and dominant values and identities
  - «Collective memory is particularly susceptible to politicised forms of remembering» (Assmann 2006, 7).
- Cultural memory (Confino, J. & A. Assmann)
  - The central role in cultural memory is performed by symbolic carriers of memories (not living people and their communication). Memorials are symbolic media and collective and symbolic constructs that function on the basis of social communications and are revitalised in terms of individuals learning about them and including them in their memories (Assmann 2016, 19)
- Feminist scholarship on collective memory (Hirsh & Smith, Jacobs, Massey, McDowell)
  - «Gender is an inescapable dimension of different power relations, and cultural memory is always about the distribution of and contested claims to power. What a culture remembers and what it chooses to forget are intricately bound up with issues of power and hegemony, and thus with gender” (Hirsh & Smith 2002, 6)



# Theoretical and methodological background

- Memorial landscapes (Dwyer & Alderman 2008)
  - Memorial landscape as text
  - Memorial landscape as arena
  - Memorial landscape as performance
- The research involved content and semiotic analysis of memorial places as text.

# Periodization of establishment of memorial places

- 1) Russian Empire
- 2) World War I and the replacement of regimes
- 3) Republic of Latvia





# Periodization of establishment of memorial places

- 4) Period of occupations and totalitarianism
- 5) the period of the Latvian Awakening and the restoration of the Latvian state



# Monuments dedicated to people of importance in Latvian history and culture

- Equally important are monuments dedicated to people of importance in Latvian history and culture. There are few monuments to women.
- Of the 46 monuments that are found in Rīga, just 5%, feature women



Anna Kern (1800–1879)



Anna Wermann (1750–1827)



Cäcilie Armitstead (1854–1940)



- Monuments to truly important women are found elsewhere in Latvia, though they, too, are few in number:

- monuments to the poet Aspazija in Jūrmala,
- writer Anna Brigadere in Tērvete,
- the pop singer Nora Bumbiere in Jelgava,
- poet Mirdza Ķempe in Liepāja.



# Recent developments

**“Rīgā būs piemineklis Aspazijai, sola Mārtiņš Staķis”**

“8. martā jeb Starptautiskajā sieviešu dienā notikusi diskusija par iniciatīvu Rīgā uzstādīt pieminekli Latvijas rakstniecei, sabiedriskajai darbiniecei un politiķei Elzai Rozenbergai jeb Aspazijai.

Rīgas mērs uzsvēra, ka "šādam piemineklim bija jābūt jau sen" un Rīgā trūkst pieminekļu "drosmīgajām Latvijas sievietēm, ar kurām varam lepoties"

"Par Aspazijas nelokāmo stāju viņa tika daudz vajāta un daudz cietusi, taču vienmēr palikusi nelokāma, un manās acīs viņa ir viena no drosmīgākajām Latvijas sievietēm," sacīja Staķis, uzsverot, ka "ir nepareizi, ka līdz šim Latvijas galvaspilsētā nav pieminekļa šai izcilajai personai"."

(Satori, 2021)





# Content and semiotic analysis

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The most monuments do not have open gender marks.

- A woman as symbol is seen in two (2.19%) and woman/women together with man/men is seen in 8 (8.79%), man/men is seen in 23 (25.27%) of 91 monuments in Latvia that are dedicated to the Liberation War
- Of the 394 monuments and plaques dedicated to the victims of the Second World War and the victims of Nazism erected in military cemeteries and town squares during the Soviet period, women were used as symbols in 17 (4.31%) monuments, women and men 10 (2.54%) monuments and men / men in 58 (14.72%) monuments



- There are no gender marks in the memorials dedicated to the victims of the Holocaust, which were established after the restoration of Latvia's independence.
- Nor do most of the monuments to the victims of Stalinist repression. Some monuments use images of mourning women and families. The image of a man, on the other hand, is rarely used.







Women appear in memorials, as the Victims of, the Spirit of, the Contemplation of, the Apotheosis of—but hardly ever as real women from lived history, with first and last names.



- The absence of sculptures honouring real women reinforces the false view that women have not made notable achievements nor contributed major advancements to society.
- The Latvian memorial landscape as a text represents the narratives of heroism and sacrifice in the collective memory. Women are not participants in events, actors, but fulfill their duty, exercising their grief.
- There has never been a significant discussion of gender balance and gender equality in the memorial landscape as an arena.

# Conclusions



- Latvia's memorial landscape is dominated by memorial places that contain no open gender marks
- Memorial places in Latvia tend to be dominated by monuments to the war and to the resistance movement, which embody masculine identity in collective memory
- Images of women are used little in Latvia's memorial culture in quantitative terms
- The collective memory that is embodied in memorial culture has no gender balance; it is distinctly masculine, and it overshadows in collective memory and cultural memory the roles of women in history and culture, as well as their suffering during World War I and the liberation battles and in terms of the crimes that were committed here by the totalitarian regimes
- The memorial design demonstrates that space itself continues to serve as an expression of cultural memory, as the ground upon which struggles over gender are played out

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Thank you