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The Baltic States

Cultural opposition: Controversies of the Concept

Several problems arise when discussing the historiography of cultural opposition in the Baltic States. First, and most importantly, Baltic academics and historians have not offered any clear scientific definition of what constitutes cultural opposition. As a result, we are left to consider what the concept of cultural opposition *does not mean*. In our view, this unclear definition is the product of various factors. As the three Baltic states each fought for and won state independence, historians from these nations have dedicated most of their attention to discussions of the armed resistance, the operation of Soviet repressive structures and the repression of peaceful civilians. The selection of these themes as research topics can be explained by the fact that such subjects were off limits during the Soviet period, and academics were to conduct academic research according to the prevailing ideological and political parameters. In addition, in the post-Soviet scholarly environment, the positions of various social groups and individuals were described in a simplistic way, with the help of three schematic categories: collaborators who expressed active support for the Soviet regime; the freedom fighters, who are usually identified with the armed resistance movement; and conformists, who have received limited attention thus far. Research agendas were also heavily influenced by the Cold War totalitarian paradigm that postulated that Soviet-type political regimes in Eastern Europe were all monolithic and totalitarian, and there were only minor and insignificant differences between them. Moreover, the totalitarian framework contributed to the blurring of differences between the Stalinist and post-Stalinist periods. In sum, “cultural opposition” in works by Baltic historians was first of all understood as unarmed opposition, i.e., non-violent resistance to the Soviet regime’s political, ideological and cultural pressure.

Historiography

Emigre historians from the Baltic States before 1990 dedicated most of their attention to the analysis of the Soviet political regime, and the government’s socio-economic, cultural, educational, and cadre policies.¹ In other words,

1 Stanley, *Lithuania under the Soviets*; Karklins, *Ethnic Relations in the USSR*.

they analyzed the process of the Sovietization of societies and discussed how respective societies reacted to this process.² In the second half of the 1980s, influential works about the anti-Soviet partisan war emerged, while³ attempts were made to discuss “intellectual culture” in the Soviet period, to search for a “critique” of the “official culture” and expressions of intellectual autonomy,⁴ and to analyze the works of artists and writers from the post-Stalinist period.⁵ Such studies attempted to explain the factors that affected the position of different social groups, especially the intelligentsia with regard to the Soviet regime. Such works were not usually written by historians, and only published sources were used to support their arguments and conclusions. In contrast, émigré authors merely stated that once the armed resistance had ended, other non-violent forms of resistance emerged in the Soviet Baltic republics. They paid particular attention to the activities of religious groups—primarily the Catholic Church and individual members of the clergy—and to the movement for believers’ rights.⁶

Romualdas Misiūnas from Lithuania and Rein Taagepera from Estonia are two emigre scholars who presented one of the most comprehensive accounts of cultural policy during the Soviet period in the Baltic states. (Their monograph was first published in 1983, and a revised edition came out in 1993).⁷ It is not without reason that reviewers considered the monograph by Misiūnas and Taagepera to be a thorough, academically grounded and “hitherto unsurpassed analysis of the Soviet regime in the Baltic States.”⁸ Misiūnas and Taagepera discussed the formation of Soviet political-economic structures, the evolution of Sovietization, and the scale of the armed resistance and repression. Nevertheless, probably the most fascinating and valuable of the authors’ contributions were related to Soviet cultural policy and to social and cultural responses to such policies. According to Misiūnas and Taagepera, de-Stalinization in 1954–68 created conditions that were conducive to the self-expression of the cultural elite in the three republics. The literature and

2 Shtromas, “Official Soviet Ideology and the Lithuanian People,” 57–73.

3 In Lithuanian historiography, see: Girnius, *Partizanų kovos Lietuvoje*. The book was re-released in Lithuania in 1990.

4 The Lithuanian émigré Vytautas Kavolis described intellectual culture as follows: “Intellectual cultures are traditions of unceasing concern with ideas of universal human significance. Intellectuals are individuals who participate intensely in these traditions. [...] A restricted mode of thought that does not transcend the limits of a particular field of specialization [...] does not belong to intellectual culture...” According to the scholar, the “intellectual ... not only judges that which exists but also develops alternatives (political, scientific, or artistic) to that which in his surroundings is thought to be ‘reality’.” Kavolis, “On the Deformations of Intellectual Culture,” 34–35. This definition of intellectual culture corresponds with conceptions of cultural opposition discussed earlier in this chapter.

5 Grinius, “Literature and the Arts in Captive Lithuania,” 197–214.

6 Vardys, “The Role of Churches,” 151–64.

7 Misiūnas and Taagepera, *The Baltic States*.

8 Kasekamp, *A History of the Baltic States*, X.

art of the time rejected the obdurate elements characteristic of the socialist realist canon, instead featuring more experimentation and a search for creative inspiration and innovation in the nation's historic past, and in its cultural traditions. It is no wonder that scholars have described this period as the "re-emergence of national cultures."⁹ According to this narrative, the social and cultural activist groups that emerged in the context of de-Stalinization played a very important role in the formation of the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian national movements during Gorbachev's perestroika.

The restoration of independence in the early 1990s witnessed the release of the first works by historians that focused primarily on the themes of armed resistance and Soviet mass repressions.¹⁰ Research in the field became even more popular in the Baltic states—practically simultaneously—in 1998, with the establishment of historical commissions that became responsible for examining crimes committed by the Nazis and Soviets.¹¹ (Major document compilations were also published that reflected the activities of Soviet repressive institutions).¹² Even though the research projects supported by international historians' commissions were primarily aimed at analyzing Soviet repressions and the anti-Soviet partisan war, gradually works started to appear that discussed non-violent forms of resistance as well.¹³ Later on, studies and monographs were written that analyzed various movements and groups of the intelligentsia that advocated religious rights. This theme had a greater appeal to Lithuanian historians, primarily due to the significance of the Chronicle of the Catholic Church in the Lithuanian samizdat movement, but academics from the other Baltic states also engaged with the topic.¹⁴ New research results, in contrast to the publications of émigré authors, were based on the rich archival material that became accessible to researchers after the archives of the KGB and the Communist Party were opened.

9 Misiūnas and Taagepera, *The Baltic States*, 131–203.

10 Truska, *Lietuva 1938–1953*, 125–76; Strods, *Latvijas nacionālo partizānu karš*. In 1999, a joint paper by three Baltic historians was released which was mostly dedicated to the partisan war: Anušauskas, *The Anti-Soviet Resistance in the Baltic States*.

11 The International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania, see <https://www.komisija.lt/en/tyrimai/>; Estonian International Commission for Investigation of Crimes Against Humanity, see <http://www.historycommission.ee/>; The Commission of the Historians of Latvia, see <https://www.president.lv/en/activities/commissions-and-councils/commission-of-historians>. Accessed October 7, 2018. All these commissions were established by state presidential decree.

12 Tininis, *Komunistinio režimo nusikaltimai Lietuvoje 1944–1953*.

13 See, for instance, research conducted by Latvian historians: Bleiere, "Resistance of Farmers to the Soviet Policies in Latvia (1945–1953)"; and Rimšāns, "Manifestations of Youth Resistance against the Communist Regime in the Latvian SSR (1965–1985)."

14 Streikus, *Sovietu valdžios antibažnytinė politika Lietuvoje (1944–1990)*. See also works by Latvian and Estonian historians: Altnurme, "Padomju okupācijas režīms Baltijā 1944–1959"; and Zikmane, "Relations between the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia and the State (1944–1959)."

At the beginning of the 2000s, Baltic historians started producing substantial publications dedicated to the Soviet period which discussed the political, economic and socio-cultural aspects of the past. They analyzed not only the partisan war, but also various forms of un-armed resistance. Such narratives did not only discuss the political dissident movement (the activities of the so-called Helsinki groups), or movements for religious rights, but also various forms of “civil opposition” (also called “passive”), such as the folk movement, various non-conformist youth movements (the hippies), and illegal rock festivals.¹⁵ Incidentally, these studies did not discuss problems such as the politicization of “civil opposition,” or explain what determined the regime’s approach and policies; for instance, why was a relatively tolerant approach towards the folk movement replaced by a more repressive one? At around the same time, several comparative historical syntheses of the Baltic states were published. It needs to be noted that in such works, the Soviet period only comprised one part of an often fragmented historical account. This explains why such studies contained practically no new insights on, or assessments of non-violent forms of resistance (cultural opposition).¹⁶

New archival data that had previously been inaccessible for academics, the emergence of new research trends, such as cultural memory studies, and the application of new methodological approaches (for example, social network analysis) all contributed to the further development of research on the Soviet past in the Baltic countries. One could identify certain research topics that historians gave special attention to. Latvian historians have studied in the detail the phenomenon of “national communism” in the 1950s, interpreting it as an attempt to gain a degree of autonomy from Moscow by the way in which the Latvian leadership adopted political and economic decisions and furthered the development of national culture.¹⁷ Incidentally, these attempts were repressed by Moscow, which significantly shaped the subsequent political and national-cultural development of Latvia. There were studies which discussed more than just the cultural policy of the Soviet regime and the attempts of various government institutions to control creative processes (such as censorship). Such works also analyzed the aspirations of intellectuals to preserve creative autonomy, resist political pressure and/or challenge the established ideological canon.¹⁸ Researchers have also become increasingly interested in non-conformist artists and their experimentation with various art

15 Arvydas, *Lietuva 1940–1990*, 516–33; Bleiere, et al., *Latvija navstrechu 100-letiju strany*. The first history of Latvia in the twentieth century was written by the same authors, and was published in 2005.

16 Kasekamp, *A History of the Baltic States*; Plakans, *A Concise History of the Baltic States*.

17 Bleiere, “Latvijas Komunistiskās partijas etniskais sastāvs un nacionālkomunisma problēma 1944–1965.” In Lithuanian historiography: Grybkauskas, *Sovietinė nomenklatūra ir pramonė Lietuvoje 1965–1985*, 111–38; Sirutavičius, “National Bolshevism or National Communism.”

18 Švedas, *Matricos nelaisvėje*; Ivanauskas, *Įrėmintą tapatybę*; Satkauskytė, *Tarp estetikos ir politikos*.

forms that aimed at highlighting the importance of national traditions.¹⁹ These trends became more pronounced in the 1960s–1980s, although they were expressed to different degrees in the Baltic states.

Studies in cultural memory have recently gained popularity in Baltic academic circles. The notions of cultural and communicative memory, advocated by Jan and Aleida Assmann, has allowed scholars to examine Soviet and post-Soviet commemorative practices more closely. The first such studies appeared in the beginning of the 2000s, and attempted to identify similarities and differences in post-Soviet societies in the Baltic states.²⁰ It is generally acknowledged that the memory of communism—especially post-war repressions and deportations—is one of the key elements in post-Soviet identity building processes in Baltic societies. Moreover, the experience of Soviet occupation is usually used as a “filter through which meaning is attributed to the entire twentieth century in a sense transforming other, less dramatic periods into commentaries on the occupation experience.”²¹ The “traumatic memories” of national minority groups in Baltic societies are also researched extensively in an attempt to explain the interaction of cultural/historical memory between the titular nations (Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians) and the national minorities. Scholars analyze how perceptions of the Soviet period changed in post-Soviet memory culture in the context of changing memory regimes and memory politics.²²

Another theoretical paradigm which has significantly shaped research on cultural opposition is social network analysis. In seeking to explain the emergence of social movements in the Baltic republics during the period of *perestroika*, scholars have studied networks of various informal cultural and professional circles, and other social groups.²³ The object of research thus shifted away from politicized forms of opposition, such as advocates of the rights of the Catholic Church or illegal (*samizdat*) publishers, to various ethnic and cultural movements that were tolerated by the government, such as youth sub-culture, informal intellectual-artist communities, or heritage protection groups. Researchers claimed that such movements in the late Soviet period paved the way for social mobilization, which culminated in the emergence of independence movements in the three Baltic States.

19 Naripea, *Estonian Cinescopes*; Matulytė, “Fotografijos raiškos ir sklaidos Lietuvoje sovietizavimas.”

20 Mikhelev and Kalnačs, *We Have Something in Common*.

21 Joesalu and Koresaar, “Continuity or Discontinuity.”

22 Davoliutė and Balkelis, *Maps of Memory*; Pettai, “Debating Baltic memory regimes.”

23 Ramonaitė and Kavaliauskaitė, *Sąjūdžio ištakų beiškant*; Ramonaitė, *Nematoma sovietmečio visuomenė*.

What Do Baltic Collections Say About Cultural Opposition?

The more than 70 collections from the Baltics that are described in the COURAGE project evince the persecution of cultural figures by the Soviet authorities, and contain material collected by Soviet institutions of power about writers, artists and university lecturers. They also hold documents on the activities of creative unions, art, and science institutions, and private collections about figures who were important in cultural life at the time, and whose activities and cultural expressions were censored and restricted in some way. The collections show that in the Baltic states cultural opposition varied both in terms of form and content. Manifestations of cultural opposition ranged from the ambition of literary figures, cinematographers and artists to introduce prohibited authors, themes and art forms into cultural life and education, through the activities of the early anti-Soviet dissidents, their independently published works, to human rights or religious rights groups, and the armed anti-Soviet resistance.

The collections from the Baltic States are testimony to the large number of cultural figures – writers, poets, artists, cinematographers and scientists, who experienced repression, imprisonment or deportation (see the Knuts Skujenieks²⁴, Kazys Boruta²⁵, Antanas Miškinis²⁶, Bronislava Martuževa²⁷, Kurts Fridrihsons collections²⁸), or restriction of their professional activity (see the Rimantas Vėbra,²⁹ Rimantas Jasas³⁰ and other collections). One could identify active female participants of cultural opposition who were not only visible in the public life of the time, but were also involved in cultural activities, maintaining broad-scale correspondence with prominent figures in the fields of art and science, and urging them to embrace bolder, more original themes. Such cultural figures include Aldona Liobytė³¹ (1915–85), Vanda Zaborskaitė,³² and

24 COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Knuts Skujenieks collection”, by Daina Bleiere, 2018. Accessed: September 20, 2018. (forthcoming)

25 COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Kazys Boruta Collection”, by Vldas Sirutavičius, 2018. Accessed: September 20, 2018.

26 COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Antanas Miškinis collection”, by Saulius Grybkauskas, 2018. Accessed: September 20, 2018. (forthcoming)

27 COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Bronislava Martuževa collection”, by Daina Bleiere, 2018. Accessed: September 20, 2018. (forthcoming)

28 COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Kurts Fridrihsons”, by Daina Bleiere, 2016. Accessed: September 20, 2018.

29 COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Rimantas Vėbra collection”, by Darius Staliunas, 2018. Accessed: September 20, 2018. (forthcoming)

30 COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Rimantas Jasas collection”, by Saulius Grybkauskas, 2017. Accessed: September 20, 2018.

31 COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Aldona Liobytė collection”, by Saulius Grybkauskas, 2018. Accessed: September 20, 2018. (forthcoming)

32 COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Vanda Zaborskaitė collection”, by Saulius Grybkauskas, 2018. Accessed: September 20, 2018. (forthcoming)

Meilė Lukšienė³³ in Lithuania and the Sirje Kiin Private Archive³⁴ in Estonia. In Lithuania, these women were part of a close-knit oppositionist network which included core members of the Vilnius University Literature Department. Due to their activities, Vanda Zaborskaitė and Meilė Lukšienė were forced to abandon their positions at Vilnius University, while Aldona Liobytė lost her managerial position at the Literary Fiction Publishing House. Despite such measures, they continued with their oppositional activities and constantly attracted the attention, and provoked the criticism of ideologues. For instance, in 1973 the official publication *Komunistas* (The communist) published a critical article about the journal of Lithuanian philosophers, *Problemos* (Problems). It generally attacked philosophers and their works in the country, but also condemned Meilė Lukšienė's publications, in particular.³⁵

The Estonian journalist Siirje Kiin who actively participated in public life, and helped prepare the so-called appeal of 40 intellectuals to the government in 1980 tended to operate from behind the scenes. (She did not actually sign the petition.) However, similarly to Aldona Liobytė, through her actions she created an atmosphere and an infrastructure which established connections among the cultural community. Without these links, any activity would have been difficult. Another important figure in the creation of cultural networks in the Baltic states was Irena Pliuraitė-Andrejeviene who was active participant in the ethnographic folk movement in Lithuania. She served as an important link between Dr Viktoras Kutorga, the founder of the ideology of humanistic socialism and a former member of the anti-Nazi underground, and Vytenis Andriukaitis, one of the leaders of the Kaunas Ethnographic Club (see the Strazdelis Underground University collection).³⁶ Thanks to Pliuraitė, the acquaintance of these two men ultimately developed into the establishment of the underground humanistic Strazdelis University. Pliuraitė herself, much like Sirje Kiin in Estonia, helped to create connections, and prepare and translate documents from Russian.

Cultural opposition can be approached not only from the perspective of the intentions of individual activists and the range of activities they were involved in, but also from the perspective of the regime itself. The themes of repression and persecution are clearly represented in the party archives and in the collections the KGB and institutions of censorship of the time left behind (see the Lithuanian Communist Party Central Committee collections,³⁷ Antanas

33 COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Meilutė Lukšienė collection", by Saulius Grybkauskas, 2018. Accessed: September 20, 2018. (forthcoming)

34 COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Sirje Kiin Private Archive", by Mari-Leen Tammela, 2017. Accessed: September 20, 2018.

35 Gaidys, et al., "Leidiniui 'Problemos' – penkeri metai," 74.

36 COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Strazdelis Underground University", by Saulius Grybkauskas, 2018. Accessed: September 20, 2018. (forthcoming)

37 COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Lithuanian Communist Party Central Committee Collection (1953–1962)", by Vladas Sirutavičius, 2018. Accessed: September 20, 2018.

Sniečkus, various documents of Lithuanian KGB departments;³⁸ Second Directorate of the Soviet Lithuanian KGB;³⁹ Glavlit (Lithuania),⁴⁰ files of political prisoners 1940–1986; completed investigative files of the Soviet Estonian KGB; collection of documents of the Central Committee of the Latvian Communist Party;⁴¹ Veljo Tormis' manuscript collection at the Estonian Theatre and Music Museum).⁴² However, there were cases when critical voices, due to certain subtleties in expression, managed to avoid censorship. The article in *Komunistas* – well known in historiography but never thoroughly researched – which criticized *Problemos*, is case in point. In this article, the polemic is between the ideologue G. Zimanas on the one side, and the philosophers B. Genzelis and R. Ozolas who were also the editors of *Problemos* on the other (see the Romualdas Ozolas and Lithuanian Philosophers' Opposition collections).⁴³ Even though the article was viewed as an attack, it could also be considered an intellectual critique which accurately identified the sophisticated arguments of the authors of *Problemos* that diverged from official interpretations of Marxism. However, from the perspective of academic ethics, the critique went beyond the boundaries of a "fair" intellectual dispute, by leveraging ideological force and thus limiting any potential for discussion. In this case, the Zimanas group took the position of ideological establishment, and demonstrated to the academic community that that which defines the key concepts of national and social policy also defines the most important theoretical categories.

The condemnation of the philosophers under the direction of Zimanas highlights the significance of the theoretical component that is often missing from analyses of cultural opposition. For example, criticisms of the book by A. Ramonaitė, J. Kavaliauskaitė and others, who attempted to reveal the origins of *Sąjūdis* (the National Front) and the restoration of Lithuania's independence⁴⁴ (see the Invisible Society in Soviet-era Lithuania collection)⁴⁵ through

38 COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Antanas Sniečkus collection", by Darius Staliunas, 2017. Accessed: September 20, 2018.

39 COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Second Directorate of the Soviet Lithuanian KGB", by Saulius Grybkauskas, 2018. Accessed: September 20, 2018. (forthcoming)

40 COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Glavlit (Lithuania) collection", by Vilius Ivanauskas, 2018. Accessed: September 20, 2018.

41 COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Uncompleted investigative files of the Soviet Estonian KGB", by Darius Staliunas, 2018. Accessed: September 20, 2018. (forthcoming); COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Completed investigative files of the Soviet Estonian KGB", by Mari-Leen Tammela and Triin Tark, 2018. Accessed: September 20, 2018. (forthcoming)

42 COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Veljo Tormis' manuscript collection at the Estonian Theatre and Music Museum", by Mari-Leen Tammela and Triin Tark, 2018. Accessed: September 20, 2018. (forthcoming)

43 COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Romualdas Ozolas and Lithuanian Philosophers' Opposition", by Saulius Grybkauskas, 2018. Accessed: September 20, 2018. (forthcoming)

44 Ramonaitė and Kavaliauskaitė, *Sąjūdžio ištakų paieška*; Ramonaitė, *Nematoma sovietmečio visuomenė*.

45 COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Invisible Society of Soviet-era Lithuania", by Darius Staliunas, 2017. Accessed: September 20, 2018.

an analysis of networks of social scientists, highlighted that a discussion on how these networks actually functioned was missing from the narrative. The debate about *Problemos* shows that a certain degree interaction between representatives of the regime and its critiques was possible within the confines of cultural/intellectual networks, and that sophisticated theoretical views could also be expressed.

Even though there was an armed anti-Soviet resistance in all the Baltic republics after World War II, it was in Lithuania where the struggle was the most intense. Armed opposition in Lithuania was accompanied by intense anti-Soviet counter-propaganda, that manifested itself in the publication of newspapers, booklets, and artistic postcards (see the Lithuanian Partisans' Collection in the Lithuanian Special Archives).⁴⁶ Cultural resistance was also represented in poetry, especially in works by the partisan poet Bronius Krivickas (see the Bronius Krivickas collection).⁴⁷

Another important aspect of cultural opposition—not only in Lithuania and the other Baltic republics but in the whole USSR as well—was religious opposition. It was directly related to religious dissidence and the demand for political rights for believers. The Latvian Paulis Klavinš and Estonian Karl Laantee, for example, advocated such rights from beyond the borders of the USSR (see the Action of Light⁴⁸ and Karl Laantee personal archive⁴⁹ at the University of Tartu Library collections). Religious opposition in Lithuania was multifaceted, which is clearly reflected in the project's collections: it ranged from a firm intransigence with the Soviet system, dissident activity and an underground press, such as the Chronicle of the Catholic Church (see the Catholic Press in the Soviet Lithuania collection),⁵⁰ to attempts at finding a common ground or means of co-existence with the regime, as demonstrated by the activities of Vaclovas Aliulis (see the Vaclovas Aliulis collection)⁵¹ and the monk, Father Stanislovas (see the Father Stanislovas collection).⁵²

In neighboring Estonia, it was youth movements and civil rights opposition in the cities rather than religious groups that dominated cultural opposi-

46 COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Lithuanian Partisans' Collection in Lithuanian Special Archives", by Saulius Grybkauskas, 2018. Accessed: September 20, 2018.

47 COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Bronius Krivickas collection", by Saulius Grybkauskas, 2017. Accessed: September 20, 2018.

48 COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Action of Light Collection", by Daina Bleiere, 2017. Accessed: September 20, 2018.

49 COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Karl Laantee personal archive at the University of Tartu Library", by Darius Staliunas, 2017. Accessed: September 20, 2018.

50 COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Catholic Press in the Soviet Lithuania", by Saulius Grybkauskas, 2018. Accessed: September 20, 2018. (forthcoming)

51 COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Vaclovas Aliulis", by Saulius Grybkauskas, 2018. Accessed: September 20, 2018. (forthcoming)

52 COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Father Stanislovas collection", by Saulius Grybkauskas, 2018. Accessed: September 20, 2018. (forthcoming)

tion. Noor Tartu (see the Young Tartu collection),⁵³ the Estonian Students' Building Brigade archive at the National Archives of Estonia, and the Circle of History Students collections demonstrate that students took an interest in their historical heritage and the organization of conferences for young scientists (involving also their colleagues from Lithuania; see the Students Science Society of Vilnius University collection).⁵⁴ Moreover, even initiatives of communist youth organizations, such as the Komsomol, could create space for cultural opposition. Construction brigades, for example, that were gradually transformed, could inadvertently turn young people's enthusiasm towards non-Soviet purposes.

The cleansing of the national communist leadership in Latvia in 1959 left a significant mark on the history of the country. It resulted in a narrower dialogue between the party leadership and society, which undoubtedly impacted on the trajectory of cultural opposition. This is evident from the collection of documents of the Central Committee of the Latvian Communist Party. Latvia was the Baltic republic which suffered the most from the rapid Soviet industrialization that had a damaging impact on the region's social, economic and ecological situation. Therefore, in Latvia initiatives of cultural opposition were concentrated on preserving local traditions and the natural environment. Sometimes these activities seem confined to local areas like the museums in Madona which attempt to preserve the pre-Soviet historical legacy and cultural distinctiveness of the region (see Madona Local History and Art Museum).⁵⁵ Other intellectual initiatives were very targeted and sought concrete tasks to preserve nature and culture. For example, in March 1958, a group of 55 well-known scientists, writers and public figures signed a petition against plans to build a hydroelectric power plant (HPP) on the Daugava (the Pļaviņas HES). The plans envisaged the flooding of one of the most beautiful parts of the river's glacial valley, including many natural and historical monuments. The Elza Rudenaja, First River Daugava Festivity in 1979 collection reveals efforts of the opposition to draw the attention of society towards the issue of the Daugava river in the late 1970s. Such local or limited initiatives eventually turned into large scale mass protests; the protest campaign against the construction of the Daugavpils HPP in 1986–87 (see collection).⁵⁶ It was the first issue in Latvia that involved the wider public, and became the first step on the path to the restoration of national independence. The environmental movement also played a crucial role in mass mobilization in Lithuania and

53 COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Young-Tartu collection", by Mari-Leen Tammela and Triin Tark, 2018. Accessed: September 20, 2018. (forthcoming)

54 COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Students Science Society of Vilnius University", by Saulius Grybkauskas, 2018. Accessed: September 20, 2018. (forthcoming)

55 COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Madona Museum of Local History and Art", by Daina Bleiere, 2018. Accessed: September 20, 2018. (forthcoming)

56 COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Protest campaign against construction of the Daugavpils HPP in 1986–1987", by Daina Bleiere, 2018. Accessed: September 20, 2018.

Estonia. For example, Estonian journalist Juhan Aare initiated a letter campaign against the planned phosphorite mines in Northern Estonia in February 1987 (see Juhan Aare collection).⁵⁷ The campaign turned out to be successful and expanded from sending letters to organizing mass protests. It became known as the Phosphorite War, and was a starting point of revolutionary transformations in Estonia in the late 1980s.

Although the collections in the Baltic republics are focused solely on the region, the material they contain also contribute to our understanding of cultural opposition in the neighboring countries, especially in Soviet Russia and Poland. The Sergei Soldatov personal archive collection, for example, tells the story of one of the most active dissidents in Estonia. A lecturer at the Polytechnic Institute in Tallinn, Soldatov had graduated from the Leningrad Technical Institute and maintained close ties with the Soviet Union's democratic movement, in which he was one of the most active members. The Helsinki Group also maintained close ties with all dissidents in the USSR (see the Viktoras Petkus collection),⁵⁸ while the Chronicle of the Catholic Church in Lithuania was the longest running samizdat publication in the USSR (1972–89). In terms of its format, it was comparable to the underground publication “Khronika tekushchykh sobytii” that was distributed in Russia, reporting news about Russian life, and the persecution of the democratic movement.

Chronology: Linear Interpretations and the History of Cultural Opposition

Narratives of the development and dynamics of anti-Soviet and non-Soviet opposition, often follow a similar pattern: they first discuss the emergence of underground circles and their activities, and then analyze open expressions of anti-Soviet sentiments, such as protests.⁵⁹ Such linear histories match the narrative of *Lūžis prie Baltijos* (Breakthrough by the Baltic Sea),⁶⁰ which represents the totalitarian approach in Soviet studies. However, as COURAGE demonstrates, events did not necessarily unfold in this direction. While open protests and manifestations of anti-Soviet sentiments often grew out of clandestine networks, it was more often the case that the opposite was true. The de-Stalinization process that took place during the Khrushchev period encouraged illusions of liberalization, and prompted more intense opposition activities from the creative intelligentsia and the youth, especially students. Lukšienė, Zaborskaitė and others were dismissed from their positions at Vil-

57 COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Juhan Aare collection”, by Triin Tark, 2017. Accessed: September 20, 2018.

58 COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Viktoras Petkus Collection”, by Vladas Sirutavičius, 2017. Accessed: September 20, 2018.

59 For example, Tamoliūnienė, *Laisvės proveržiai sovietiniame Kaune*.

60 For more about the descriptions “Kovojianti Lietuva” and “Lūžis prie Baltijos,” see: Grybkauskas, *Sovietinė nomenklatūra ir Pramonės plėtra Lietuvoje 1965–1985 metais*; Ivanauskas, *Lietuviškoji nomenklatūra biurokratinėje sistemoje*.

nus University for their anti-Soviet activities. Ideological rhetoric forced both party activists and the security organs to find explanations for why young people got involved in anti-Soviet activities; it was usually considered to be the result of weak or ineffective ideological indoctrination. Over time, participants in cultural opposition networks understood this attitude themselves and became more cautious. Those who became victims of repression as a result of their involvement in oppositional activities would often revert to more subtle forms of action, as did Vanda Zaborskaitė, Meilė Lukšienė and Aldona Liobytė.

However, somewhat paradoxically, in the first half of the 1970 and at the very beginning of the stagnation period, these more subtle forms of cultural opposition were not expressed. It could be said that at this time, many of the figures featured in the collections became in some way associated with one another. The dismissal of Jonas Jurašas from his position as the Kaunas Drama Theatre director due to his refusal to obey censors and remake his play in accordance with the demands of cultural administrators (see the Jonas Jurašas collection),⁶¹ and the banishment of Modris Tennison, the founder of one of the first pantomime troupes in the USSR, from the Kaunas Musical Theatre (see the Modris Tennison's Pantomime Team collection)⁶² illustrate the tension and conflict between the Soviet regime and the representatives of cultural opposition at the time. The prominent intellectual and former Soviet political prisoner Juozas Keliuotis (1902–1983) gathered around him cultural people who were unhappy with the Soviet regime, attracting them with his firm, uncompromising position and intellectual erudition. In 1972 he finally cracked, having been surrounded by a dense network of secret informers. We can get a sense of just how important an obstacle Keliuotis was to the Soviet regime not only from Soviet Lithuanian KGB documents, but also from the USSR KGB report to the Central Committee of the CPSU about his retraction from anti-Soviet activities. The success of Soviet security institutions to finally crack one of the pre-war Lithuanian intellectual authorities, Keliuotis, was overshadowed by the protests following the events in Kaunas that same year and the subsequent distribution of anti-Soviet leaflets (see the Romas Kalanta collection).⁶³

Unlike in Lithuania or Latvia, the collections from Estonia demonstrate that the most intensive expressions of cultural opposition took place from the late-1970s to the early-1980s. Therefore, it was no accident that when Gorbachev implemented his reforms in the USSR in the mid-1980s, Estonia was

61 COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Jonas Jurašas collection", by Darius Staliunas, 2018. Accessed: September 20, 2018. (forthcoming)

62 COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Modris Tenisons' Pantomime Team collection", by Darius Staliunas, 2018. Accessed: September 20, 2018. (forthcoming)

63 COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Romas Kalanta collection", by Saulius Grybkauskas, 2018. Accessed: September 20, 2018. (forthcoming)

the first of the Baltic republics where major political and social transformations started to take place.

Between Cultural Opposition and Dissidence: The Opinion of Ex-Oppositionists and Experts

When attempting to summarize the various definitions of cultural opposition given by experts during the course of this project, one may notice a relative, yet essential difference between the notions of “cultural opposition” and “dissidence.” The contrast between these concepts is an important one, as it allows us to bring the project’s findings in line with discussions about society during the Soviet years that are taking place in historiography. Defining, substantiating, and most importantly discerning the activities of cultural opposition is a complex, albeit important undertaking, as it opens new avenues of research on the Soviet system. A comparative assessment of definitions of “dissidence” and “cultural opposition” reveals that these two forms of critical engagement with Soviet rule differed in terms of the content of the activities they refer to and the aims of the individuals and groups that were involved in them. Dissidents addressed mostly political questions, while the participants in cultural opposition movements were more engaged with cultural questions. The historian Arūnas Streikus has outlined this difference accurately, doubting in an interview whether Catholic independent publishing (*samizdat*) could actually be considered as cultural opposition. While cultural opposition challenged the cultural values promoted by the government, and did not openly seek to abolish the Soviet order, the dissident movement, which would most definitely include Catholic underground publishing, should without a doubt be considered as political opponents of the regime (see the Catholic Press in Soviet Lithuania collection).⁶⁴

Political dissidence and cultural opposition are different by nature. Dissidence was a direct result of the loss of independent statehood and the subsequent struggle to regain it, seeking to exploit both international political developments and the opportunities within society itself (see Vytautas Skuodis,⁶⁵ *Periodical Auseklis* collections).⁶⁶ The origins of cultural opposition lay within a symbiotic relationship with the regime: the disappointment and the conflict that were provoked by limitations on the freedom of one’s professional or creative activity. Naturally, political dissidence and cultural opposition overlapped and often supplemented one another. This was accurately noted by

64 COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Catholic Press in the Soviet Lithuania”, by Saulius Grybkauskas, 2018. Accessed: September 20, 2018. (forthcoming)

65 COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Vytautas Skuodis Collection”, by Saulius Grybkauskas, 2018. Accessed: September 20, 2018.

66 COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Periodical Auseklis Collection”, by Daina Bleiere, 2017. Accessed: September 20, 2018.

Andriukaitis who stated that dissidents acted on the currents of resistance and the cultural opposition that surrounded them, even though cultural opposition did not openly confront the system itself (see Strazdelis Underground University collection). When discussing the bond between dissidents and cultural opposition, it is important to note that even if cultural activists were aware of the difference between their activities and those of the dissidents, they were still the main consumers of dissident literature. They read what dissidents wrote and published in samizdat literature, and were involved in its distribution (see, for example, Manuscript magazines at the Estonian Cultural History Archives).⁶⁷

There are numerous observations testifying to the carefully considered line between dissidents and the cultural opposition that the cultural activists did not wish to overstep, understanding that they would be able to do much more by remaining with the framework of legality. Film director Jonas Jurašas and the historian Vytautas Umbrasas could be considered examples of this. Their disagreement with the system arose not only from the sense that there was a limit to one's professional or creative life but also from a certain need for moral and intellectual development. Soviet censorship restricted and oppressed any attempts at self-improvement, social engagement or horizontal communication links, and thus provoked the dissatisfaction of cultural activists, and prompted a search for ways to overcome these restraints. As a type of resistance, cultural opposition was a very effective form of expressing disagreement with the government that allowed people to creatively search for opportunities for cooperation and self-expression while avoiding any direct conflicts with the regime.

The activities of philosophers illustrate the various considerations and ideas about cultural opposition. The school where philosopher E. Meškauskas taught was not anti-Soviet in its stance, it was merely concerned with a deeper understanding of the origins of Marxist philosophy. However, as has been mentioned previously, due to criticisms articulated by Genrikas Zimanas—the most important Soviet Lithuanian ideologue of the time—and his followers, the philosophers that were under attack even discussed the possibility of publishing samizdat. The school ultimately rejected this idea and searched for legal forms of cultural opposition instead. In this context, much like in the case of Jurašas, there was a certain boundary that the philosophers were reluctant to cross. It is likely that this decision had to do with their understanding and knowledge of the Soviet system, and the belief that more could be achieved by operating legally within the cultural field.

67 COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Manuscript magazines at the Estonian Cultural History Archives", by Mari-Leen Tammela and Triin Tark, 2017. Accessed: September 20, 2018.

Problems and best practices

Perhaps the most complicated field in the legacy of cultural opposition in the Baltic States is the visual arts. There are only a few works that are kept at the Lithuanian National Art Gallery that demonstrate aspects of national opposition in art and sculpture (see the Lithuanian National Art Gallery Collection).⁶⁸ The relative and situational nature of opposition is highlighted by the activities and works of Vincas Kisarauskas (see the Vincas Kisarauskas collection)⁶⁹ and his wife Saulė Kisarauskienė (see the Saulė Aleškevičiūtė-Kisarauskienė collection).⁷⁰ These were two of the most famous graphic artists in Lithuania, but they were also administrators, who followed political orders from Moscow, and found hints of formalism and other “unsuitable” forms of expression in their own work. In Estonia, Indrek Hirv’s art⁷¹ and Heldur Viires’ private collections⁷² more openly expressed oppositionist views, and the authors of the works in the collections also experienced repression themselves. Nonetheless, the collections were, and remain inaccessible. The Hirv art collection was assembled from gifts to the owner and to his parents, whereas the Viires collection evolved unintentionally. For this reason, the impact of these collections on society is limited. In contrast, the Paul Kondas painting collection and Kurts Fridrihsons collection present good examples of joint state private initiatives to preserve and display the legacy of opposition in visual arts. While the paintings of Estonian amateur artist Paul Kondas and the Latvian Kurts Fridrihsons were not accessible to a wider audience during Soviet times, Rein Joost, the former director of the Museum of Viljandi (Estonia) and writer Gundega Repše (Latvia), initiated the transfer (acquisition or donation) of works from private collections to state museums, thereby making them available to society.

Concluding Remarks

It could be argued that not enough attention is being given today to the preservation of the legacy of cultural opposition and to the understanding of its social significance in the Baltic states. This partly has to do with the politics of memory in these countries, which accentuates the importance of Soviet re-

68 COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Lithuanian National Art Gallery”, by Saulius Grybkauskas, 2018. Accessed: September 20, 2018. (forthcoming)

69 COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Vincas Kisarauskas Collection”, by Vilius Ivanauskas, 2018. Accessed: September 20, 2018.

70 COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Saulė Aleškevičiūtė-Kisarauskienė”, by Vilius Ivanauskas, 2018. Accessed: September 20, 2018.

71 COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Indrek Hirv’s art collection”, by Külli Kuusik, 2018. Accessed: September 20, 2018.

72 COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Heldur Viires’ private collection,” by Liisi Hint and Triin Tark, 2018. Accessed: September 20, 2018. (forthcoming)

pressions, such as the murders and deportations conducted by USSR security organs; the armed partisan struggle against Soviet rule; and the anti-Soviet dissident movement. For this reason, the cultural opposition that subsisted in a grey zone, and engaged in negotiations with the regime over interpretations of cultural heritage, language and history, is less visible in public life today, and the documentation of its activities has practically been left to private initiatives. In Lithuania, for example, state archives and museums are more concerned with documents with the status of special collections. Such documents include the files of the Lithuanian Communist Party, Soviet state security and the Ministry of Internal Affairs. At the same time, the Lithuanian Special Archives was entrusted by the state to actively search for, and archive sources in relation to the anti-Soviet armed resistance. Other state archives in the country administer and store documents that already belong to their collections, and do not conduct searches for new documents. This is the main reason why ensuring the survival of collections of cultural opposition and granting access to researchers and the public remains the concern of private individuals—former representatives of cultural opposition and their heirs. The description of these collections during the course of the COURAGE project revealed that personal archives contain large volumes of interesting material, although they often remain uncatalogued. A case in point is the cooperation between the society of history students at Vilnius University and Noor (Young) Tartu, the association of young historians at Estonia’s Tartu University (see the Young-Tartu⁷³ and Students Science Society of Vilnius University collections).⁷⁴ The historical topics that were discussed and the social and personal links between the students had drawn the attention of not just academic administrators at the time, but also of Soviet state security. During the project, the COURAGE researcher was given letters and other interesting material on the basis of which a new collection was created in the Manuscripts Department of the Lithuanian Institute of History. This example demonstrates the importance of cooperation between archives, museums and researchers in the preservation of the legacy of cultural opposition.

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73 COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Young-Tartu collection”, by Mari-Leen Tammela and Triin Tark, 2018. Accessed: September 20, 2018. (forthcoming)

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