

**INTELLECTUAL OCCUPATION AND COLLABORATIONISM
IN THE CULTURAL LIFE OF ESTONIA: REFLECTED
IN THE EPISTOLARY COMMUNICATION BETWEEN
TUUDUR VETTIK AND ROLAND LAASMÄE**

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Abstract. This article analyses the concepts and phenomena of collaborationism and conformism in Estonia during the Soviet annexation. The focus is on cultural personalities and events connected to choir music and the Song Celebration Movement in 1940–1985. An important source for studying this subject is the correspondence between two creative figures: Tuudur Vettik and Roland Laasmäe. This period in the Estonian Song Celebration history was marked by an ideological pressure from the Communist Party, and creative figures – poets, composers, choirmasters and bodies organising the Song Celebrations – largely depended on the attitude of party leaders and on cooperation with them to ensure their stable and calm day-to-day existence. Rebels could expect a whole range of repressions: imprisonment, deportation to Siberia, or local persecution and boycott. The article briefly delves into the history of the concept of *collaborationism* by describing its various nuances and periods; manifestations of the phenomenon are analysed in other fields beside the music. Comparison is made with the history of other West European states (incl. former socialist countries), and the experiences of the Baltic states during the period in question are also analysed.

Keywords: collaborationism, conformism, annexation, repressions, deportation, imprisonment, creative intelligentsia, formalism, intellectual fight for freedom, national culture, Estonia, Soviet Union

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1. Introduction

This article analyses a complicated and delicate issue which researchers often prefer to bypass. It is the evaluation of Soviet cultural figures – those who were to ensure the continuity of national culture – on the collaborationism axis. We will also try to define the concept of *conformism*.

The President of the Republic of Estonia Toomas Hendrik Ilves has stated that collaborationism has been as little examined in Estonia as occupation has been in Russia. If we wish to avoid falling into the same trap of selective treatment of history that we see to the East of us, we must make an honest and thorough examination of Estonian history up to August 1991 (Ilves 2007).

The introduction to the article defines the concept of collaborationism and analyses its historical definitions in Europe, mainly in the context of WWII; the main body concentrates on describing the manifestations of collaborationism and conformism during the periods of military occupations (the Soviet as well as the Nazi occupation) and Soviet annexation in Estonia, referring to a reality where ways and means had to be found to carry on national culture and the nation itself in the conditions of consecutive occupations and the Soviet annexation. This constitutes the dialectic characteristic of the period. Since the researcher's task is "to analyse and understand this period, the how's and why's of its functioning, and not so much to condemn it" (Annuk 2003:31), with the help of all the available sources, it is imperative that we make a clear distinction between the terms collaborationism and conformism.

The same phenomenon took place in the annexed Soviet Socialist Republics as well as in the 'friendly' European socialist states which were also controlled by the Soviet Union. The Soviet Cultural Colonialism has been studied in depth on the example of Romania by Andrada Fătu-Tutoveanu (Fătu-Tutoveanu 2012:77). Her hypotheses and conclusions can be generalised to include the other former socialist states.

We will also look more deeply into the phenomenon of covert resistance while the occupation regime tried to employ cultural as well as scientific activities in the service of its ideology (Karjahärm 2006). Communist Party (CP) was only partly successful in this. Not all planned activities went according to the 'cultural brainwash'. Creative figures employed clever ways to convey a wordless (Kannike 2006:212) but rebellious message between the lines.

Before we concentrate on the conformism/collaboration 'ratio' of Estonian creative figures we will briefly touch on the concept of collaborationism and its historical dynamics.

What is collaboration and what forms did it take during the 20th century? Collaboration has become an emotive word coloured by negative connotations. Yet, has the deeper content of this concept been just as negative in its initial phase or has it acquired this specific connotation and become a condemnable phenomenon through its connections to certain historical events and the associated personalities?

Various definitions have been provided for the concept of collaborationism, yet it has mostly been linked to cooperation with enemy ranks (e.g. 'collaborator (traitor)'). The term *collaborate* dates from 1871, and is a back-formation from collaborator (1802), the French *collaborateur*, as used during the Napoleonic Wars for smugglers trading with England and assisting in the escape of monarchists (Hoffmann, Collaboration).

Stanley Hoffmann subdivided collaboration onto *involuntary* (reluctant recognition of necessity) and *voluntary* (an attempt of exploiting necessity). According to him, collaborationism can be subdivided onto *servile* and *ideological*, the former is a deliberate service to an enemy, whereas the latter is a deliberate advocacy of co-operation with the foreign force which is seen as a champion of some desirable domestic transformations. In contrast, Bertram Gordon used the terms ‘collaborator’ and ‘collaborationist’ for non-ideological and ideological collaborations, respectively. Legally, it may be considered a form of treason. Collaborationism may be associated with criminal deeds in the service of the occupying power, which may include complicity with the occupying power in murder, persecutions, pillage, and economic exploitation or participation in a puppet government (Hoffmann, Collaboration).

John Armstrong (1968:396) captures the idea of collaborationism the most precisely: “cooperation between elements of the population of a defeated state and the representatives of the victorious power”.

The Argentine analyst Eduardo R. Saguier extends the definition of collaborationism to despotic regimes from Egyptians pharaohs, Roman emperors, medieval popes, absolute monarchs and 19th century dictators to modern totalitarianism (fascism, Nazism, Stalinism). Yet he admits that not all collaborationist regimes were the same. There are very different types of collaborationism: starting with collaborationism obtained through torture, venal or economic collaborationism, institutional and ideological collaborationism, as to achieve the maximum degree with state collaborationism, grade given during the last world wars by states menaced by conquest or invasion – Vichy France, Horthy’s Hungary, Quisling’s Norway (Saguier 2003).

The reality is that collaboration, as an idea, is an ever-present theme in world history (Davies, 2004:1). The 13th-14th century Chinese elite collaborated with Mongol invaders (Davies 2004:1), the 15th century Bosnian rulers collaborated with their Turkish governors (Malcolm 1996:21), the 17th century Serb forces collaborated with the ‘hated’ Habsburgs against the Ottoman Empire (Glenny 1992:4).

We can say that the negative connotation and content of the concept are highlighted most dramatically in the context of WWII.

Cooperation with Hitler and institutions under his lead left a mark which is used as a guideline by historians when giving their assessment in relation to the concept. The issue has been researched and thoroughly analysed by Peter Davies, who also introduced the economic perspective of collaborationism: “we must remember that collaboration – especially in the economic sphere – was always a two-way relationship. Hitler wanted it, and benefited from it, but some local collaborators also came out of it well, at least until they were punished for their lack of scruples after 1945” (Davies 2004:148).

The most remarkable example in the context of WWII must be the Norwegian politician Vidkun Quisling (1887–1945), a senior officer in the Norwegian Army and former Minister of Defence, who served the Nazis as Prime Minister and collaborated with them during World War II. He established his name as a

synonym for ‘traitor’, someone who collaborates with the invaders of his country, especially by serving in a puppet government. Traitors and collaborators have been called puppets or lackeys as well as quislings (Tangenes 2006).

Many surveys are underway on collaboration, collaborators and collaborationist governments around the world. Stanley Hoffmann has studied collaborationism in France during World War II. He mentioned that “there is no satisfactory treatment of the most delicate of all the problems raised by the fall and divisions of France: collaboration with the German occupants” (Hoffmann 1968). That was known as the Vichy regime. He added that “The subject is infernally complicated. Vichy, the pluralistic dictatorship, is complex enough. However, it is easier to distinguish phases, clans, ideas, and issues within the maze of Petain’s regime than in the story of French collaborationism”.

The Vichy government, itself heavily engaged in collaboration, arrested around 2000 individuals on charges of passing information to the Germans (Kitson 2005).

There was an active collaboration movement in the Netherlands (Hirschfeld and Wilmot 1992). Small but active Greek national-socialist parties, such as the Greek National Socialist Party, or openly anti-Semitic organizations, such as the National Union of Greece, helped German authorities fight the Resistance and identify and deport Greek Jews. High-profile collaborators included Dutch actor Johannes Heesters or English radio-personality Lord Haw-Haw.

Jeffrey W. Jones has published a remarkable study on collaborationism as a phenomenon in the Soviet Union – in the occupied Russia in 1943–1948. It was particularly during the difficult war years and immediately afterwards that the Russian nation experienced a fate similar to other occupied nations. Jones states that historians of the Soviet Union, with access to a broad range of sources, also began to examine the issue of collaboration (Jones 2005:747). This article reproduces a comprehensive list of studies on collaborationism in various European states (Jones 2005:747).

The concept of collaboration has always existed and continues to exist. In 1990s there were reports of collaboration between Albanians and Serbs. In 1999 the political situation in Russia was described to exhibit “unprecedented collaboration between (Russian Communist) leaders and openly fascist parties such as Russian National Unity” (Davies 2004:4).

Nor can collaboration and its aftershocks stay out of the headlines in the 21st century. Thus, the decision made in 2002 to release one of Hitler’s key agents in France Maurice Papon from prison on medical grounds caused a storm of protests. *It demonstrated that the issue of collaboration was still very much alive* (Davies 2004:47).

2. Studies of collaborationism and conformism in Estonia and the Baltic states

After the Soviet occupation, the issue of collaborationism has been studied on the basis of material concerning the annexed Baltic states (Kõll 2003), as well as the other so-called Soviet Socialist Republics who had not joined Soviet Russia

voluntarily but had been occupied. It is easier to analyse this from an outsider's perspective, which makes the contribution of Rein Taagepera and Andres Kasekamp, two Estonian researchers who grew up abroad, that much more valuable.

Kasekamp self-assuredly concludes that "most Estonians believed the German occupation to be a lesser evil than the preceding Soviet occupation" (Kasekamp 2003:92).

Rein Taagepera analyses the attitudes of the young Estonian intelligentsia in the 1950s and 1960s, stating that they were increasingly accepting Marxism as an inevitable and suitable medium for personal and national development. The policy of working within the Soviet legal framework was called the 'Lithuanian path' and was characterised by sympathy for friendly cooperation with Russians. This, however, changed after the events in Czechoslovakia. Discussions on the questions of collaborationism in the West reached a pinnacle in 1969–1970 and the phenomenon was getting viewed in an increasingly negative light (Taagepera 1978:99)

We must, however, stress that information on the subject is still sketchy. Not much information was available on the subject for decades. Archives were closed, materials on these issues suppressed. Aadu Must has pointed out that the sources of Estonian history are peculiar in that most of them are located outside the country, in the archives of states that used to govern us; furthermore, this is not only a quantitative but also a qualitative problem. All too often the materials reflecting the political context and actual objectives of the events can only be found in central archives of former occupying countries, while the written materials on the same events in Estonian archives tend to be of a more mundane level, although hints at the actions of the people carrying out the decisions can also be found (Aadu Must. *Estica in foreign archives: lecture course in the University of Tartu*, 2008; reference is based on lecture notes by the author). This is also true for the issue treated in this article.

The meaning of and difference between occupation and annexation are still a bit hazy for the Estonian public. The issue of collaborationism in the context of Estonian history has also never been dissected honestly and factually. When the distinguished Estonian historian Enn Tarvel raised the issue, he found himself basing his analysis more on the work of our southern neighbours, the Latvians. The problem is usually approached in a primitive way, on a purely black and white scale, as a choice between collaborationism and resistance. Real life in fact offers a wide variety of choices and nuances. Based on the work of his Latvian colleague, the history professor Antonijs Zunda, Tarvel counts the following forms of collaborationism: neutral, total, conditional, tactical. Conditional collaborationism means that the collaborationist does not identify his objectives with those of the occupant (Tarvel 2005:7). If we try to assess the cultural figures active from the 1940s to the 1980s on the axis of collaborationism categories defined by Zunda, their biographies afford traits that can be qualified as conditional or tactical collaborationism but could also prove political conformism to the regime and socialist ideology.

Conditions under the occupations of the last century were quite similar in Estonia and Latvia, and the compilation published in Latvia in 2004 could serve us quite well, all the more as it also refers in passing to problems in Estonia (Kangeris 2004:98). It actually turns out that Latvian historians have also only dared to analyse collaborationism during the German occupation, not in the context of the lengthy Soviet annexation.

Heinrihs Strods explained that collaborationism can be assessed only against the historical background of the country – how the tyranny of diverse regimes interlace, how the local peoples were mocked and exploited for practical purposes by the ferocious regimes of the two neighbouring countries, but also the sympathies and antipathies deriving from the ethnic origin which also could have triggered the murderous destruction of so many people (Strods 2004:82).

Andrievs Ezergailis seconds this with a statement that as many forms as the occupation takes, the assessment of collaborationism should be just as complex. It is very important not to base the assessment solely on what we know today, at the point of development that history has reached later, but that the conditions of the era in question and the information available to the decision-makers of the time are also taken into account. He sees no point in describing or assessing the Baltic collaborationism from the perspective of what we know of the history of France or Denmark. In addition to this, Andrievs Ezergailis emphasises, we should know that the history did not always afford a choice between the very bad and the very good, but sometimes also between the bad and the very bad. The analysis ends with a conclusion that it is clear that nothing is clear yet and that the problem requires research and deep concentration (Ezergailis 2004:120).

We must not forget that the central power in Moscow tended to hide its intentions from the local people until the very last moment; plans were only revealed to the people during their implementation. This cannot, however, be said of the locals, the so-called partners, who were included in the early stages – politics were implemented on the spot through their words and actions. A clear example of this is the puppet government set up by Moscow in 1940 to govern the ESSR and made up of illustrious representatives of the Estonian intelligentsia.

Anton Weiss-Wendt stresses that the majority of the population of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania hailed the Nazi dictatorship which overcame the Soviet regime in the summer of 1941 as a victory, not a defeat. The Baltic peoples were ready to reconsider the very idea of collaboration (Weiss-Wendt 2009:323).

A continuous cause for debate has been the participation and responsibility of the local population in compiling a list of persons marked for forced deportation and in carrying out this operation. Did involvement in deportations make them supporters of the regime and automatically turn them into enemies in the eyes of the people, or should we take more note of the wider context of the situation? The issue is also painfully present in analysing the cases of agent recruitment (Rahi-Tamm and Kahar, Andres 2009:429–460, Weiner and Rahi-Tamm 2012:5–45).

An example of this is the debate in 1992 on whether the former members of the Communist Party had the right to participate in the highest political echelons of the

restored Republic of Estonia or in leading offices of the public service. The issue was regulated specifically in the Constitution Implementation Act Sections 6 and 7 (cf. *Põhiseaduse tulek...*/The Coming of the Constitution 2002:101 and 334; *Eesti Vabariigi Põhiseadus*/Constitution of the Republic of Estonia: 29). Enn Sarv has written about it with painful honesty and clarity, claiming that it is important to distinguish collaborators from the former members of the CP: “The problem of former Communists is completely separate from the problem of collaborators. Collaborators form only a small part of CP members”. Yet, as the example of Estonia shows, many former collaborators participated in the fight for independence at the end of the 1980s. Many CP members were actively involved in restoring Estonia’s independence through their activities in the National Front (Sarv 1997:266).

3. Intellectual violence

Collaboration of intellectuals at leading positions has been interpreted in various ways. Attempts have been made to justify this or to condemn it as conforming to the regime, demoralising immorality, or moral relativism (Karjahärm, Sirk 2007:761).

What complicates the assessment even further is that cooperation with foreign authorities should be evaluated not in the conditions of a short-term military occupation but a long-term annexation. This gives the problem new dimensions – a way had to be found to ensure the survival of the nation and its culture with the least losses and conformity. The problems of expediency and possibility thus add to problems of an abstract justice.

Karsten Brüggemann has expressed his opinion on the same subject in a discussion group organised by Hiljar Tammela and Olev Liivik (Tammela, Liivik 2010), saying that the arguments and reasons behind every individual decision should be assessed separately so as not to get stuck on one-sided perspectives that divide people into *victims* and *sufferers*. ‘*Strategies of conforming to the system should not be viewed as ‘opportunism’ or as ‘collaborationism’ but as individual decisions’* Brüggemann says with conviction.

The following analysis treats the issue of conformism mainly on the example of choirmasters and choir composers active in 1940–1980.

What opportunities were available to creative figures in the Soviet reality? This is a subject that excites many creative figures but which is often spoken of in half whispers because collaborationism has only been treated cursorily when describing the fate of choirmasters and composers. Facts in themselves do not speak; their meaning depends on the interpretation (Annuk 2003:19).

Should such activities be understood and forgiven, or condemned? It is difficult to determine when people became turncoats and changed their ideology because of fear or downright terror, and when it was prompted by simple personal ambition.

The materials studied for this analysis (Database of Tuudur Vettik and Roland Laasmäe) allowed the author to concur with Olaf Mertelsmann that it was time to

give up the black-and-white view of history and to admit that “on the one hand we had resistance, yet on the other hand there was also collaborationism. Most people functioned mainly in a so-called gray zone, either during the German or the Soviet regime, between pragmatic cooperation and passive resistance/repulsion” (Mertelsmann 2004).

What is the relation between collaborationism and adaptation during the period under view and how should we interpret this complex subject on the example of Estonian creative figures?

Estonia’s annexation took place with merciless consistency and no exceptions were made in the field of culture. Karjahärm and Luts see simplicity in the Bolshevik logic – anything that did not serve the objectives of annexation had to be destroyed. Stalinism demanded unconditional obedience and the conquered nations were to collaborate totally. Those who deviated from the set norms were to be repressed. This plan inexorably brought along the total subjugation of the Estonian cultural elite, which was turned into an obedient tool of the regime (Karjahärm, Luts 2005:150–152).

Jaani Laas has described how the Soviet Union central authorities hurriedly set out to reorganise Estonia’s economy and culture according to the Bolshevik models after Estonia’s occupation in 1940, using for this purpose Estonians who had received ideological Communist education and sent over from Russia, as well as local Communists/collaborators (Laas 2010:7); this description is also very fitting to describe the short-termed but eager actions of Ksenja Aisenstadt – a Party member through and through – in the Conservatory from November 1940 until January 1941. CPSU disapproved of “parts of Estonia’s past bourgeois culture which made it necessary to mercilessly throw these in the ‘dustbin of history’” (Viies 2003:42). A similar motif is found in Johannes (Ivan) Käbin’s speech at the 1950 March Plenum: by discarding the paramount Party principle – vigilance – agencies had been taken over by a cadre contaminated with anti-Soviet element in 1940.

It is also clear that the Soviet criteria for deciding the value of a person on the basis of the uniform that they had worn in WWII, be it voluntarily or against their will, are only to be taken seriously on one level – if they characterise anyone at all, it’s only the evaluators and the appliers of the criteria themselves. The deeper objective of these evaluations was to weaken the oppressed by sowing internal discord among them. The policy of driving a wedge between the creative figures of the Estonian nation (just as was done with other nations in other parts of the empire) was at times crowned with remarkable success. The very same problem of categorising people according to uniforms worn voluntarily or by force is still strong in the Estonian society in 2012.

The objective of the Soviet authorities was not only the military occupation of the Baltic states but also their annexation to the Soviet system. The ideological attack was all-encompassing and took place under many diverse banners: everything that differed from the governing ideology fell under attack and was branded capitalism or *bourgeois nationalism*, or *formalism*, *cosmopolitanism*, etc. The

Communist Party controlled all aspects of life in the Soviet Union. During the reign of Stalin, singing praises to the great leader became a public duty; after his death, when the leaders of the Communist Party were engaged in an internal battle for power from which no one managed to emerge as the sole leader, Lenin was hastily adopted as the object of adoration, because the cult of a great leader was an integral part of Communist ideology (Kasekamp 2011:180). During the so-called *Khrushchev Thaw*, it was deemed best for the rise of the new leader to sacrifice the *has-been* Stalin, making him responsible for all the past crimes of the Soviet authorities. This set the stage for creating the illusion that the Communist Party and the Soviet Union had passed through a *purgatory* – all bad things were declared to have remained in the past, even though the same regime stayed on, albeit in a somewhat altered form.

History is mostly understood through personal experience. The generation born in Estonia after we regained our independence jokes about the *Soviet times* and points to many comical traits in the behaviour, speech and somewhat ritualised behaviour of the people who subscribed to the Soviet ideology. It is a fact that two or three generations of Estonians grew up in conditions where the daily existence and success depended on one's ability to give out the impression that they were ready to swear blind to the outright lies and half-truths generated by the official ideology (Soosaar 2007:41).

When speaking about the social structure that invaded Estonia in spring 1940 and took root here for forty five years in autumn 1944, Enn Soosaar states curtly that the Soviet power was built on the everyday truth that “on all steps of the hierarchy ladder, from members of the CPSU to common white and blue collar workers, people thrust out their chests and spoke nonsense about the fall of the rotting capitalism, the victories of mature socialism, the bright future of the imminent Communism” (Soosaar 2007:41). It was like some sort of absurd ritual in which all social strata participated without hesitation: “Members of the Academy and Artists Laureates, journalists and university lecturers, constructors and brick layers, agronomists and tractor drivers, all the people who wished to remain or become upwardly mobile” (Soosaar 2007:41).

This was a unique theocratic state where open atheism was not possible and any dissidents were to be destroyed. In order to stay alive, official religion had to be respected at least seemingly.

The direct and immediate repressions in the Soviet cultural life were complemented by prominent mental violence which was present in all fields of culture – from folk culture to fine arts.

4. Formalism – political and institutional background of persecution

The Soviet leadership viewed culture as an instrument that could legitimise the totalitarian regime. Culture served as an important tool for ideology and propaganda, an inherent component of Communist Party work (Karjahärm 2006:175).

Fulcher notes that culture as a whole, and music in particular, has always been an instrument of ‘symbolic power’ in different countries, not only in the Soviet Union and the socialist countries under its influence. It has served regimes during revolutions, wars, post-war development periods in France, Germany, etc. (Fulcher 2005).

In order to understand the functioning of the mechanism of violence of the totalitarian Soviet Union – which victimised the whole Estonian intelligentsia – we need to know the background of these events and follow the political logic of the time.

All the most important decisions of various fields of life in Soviet Socialist Republics were shaped in the centre of the Soviet power – Moscow. It would therefore be fitting to look at the cultural background which had taken shape there.

The Soviet Union launched a forceful attack against composers in February 1948. On 10 February 1948, the Central Committee of the Soviet Union Communist (Bolshevist) Party (C(b)PSU) adopted a decision *On the Opera ‘Great Friendship’ by Vano Muradeli*. The decision condemns the *formalist trend* in Soviet music. The oeuvre of such legends of Russian music as Dmitri Shostakovich, Sergei Prokofiev, Nikolai Myaskovsky (1881–1950) received a devastating assessment, and Vissarion Shebalin, Aram Khachaturian and Gavril Popov were also heavily criticised. Muradeli’s opera was accused of bland music and lack of expressiveness, disorder and disharmony, use of dissonances and sound combinations that were unpleasant to the ear. There were no memorable melodies or arias, odd segments and scenes with melodic pretensions were cut short by disharmonious noise that seemed totally incongruous to the normal human hearing and had a depressive effect on the listener. The opera was also criticised for not using folk melodies.

When composer Vano Muradeli realised that Stalin completely hated his opera and might destroy him, he reacted in a way which seemed totally incomprehensible at first but which turned out to be a sly move in the Soviet context: he eagerly launched into self-accusations and by presenting himself as a sufferer managed a no lesser feat than to turn the decision *On the Opera ‘Great Friendship’ by Vano Muradeli* in his own favour. He set out on a tireless tour of industrial and manufacturing plants and collective farms, and inspired a powerful wave of repentance which became all the rage along with the unmasking of formalists after the condemnation of his opera. Muradeli stood up in front of work collectives and explained that he was a formalist and a cosmopolitan, but that the Party had luckily shown him the right direction. Shostakovich describes it colourfully in his memoirs: “Everyone was happy. The workers saw a real live formalist; they had something to talk about to friends and neighbours. Muradeli made good money and fulfilled the self-criticism quota of the composers’ union. [...] It was Muradeli and no one else who gave the impulse to start the wide-based destruction of Soviet music”, Shostakovich concluded (Shostakovich and Volkov 2002:145).

The Central Committee of C(b)PSU decreed that music, just like literature earlier, had to be in the style of socialist realism – socialist in content and ethnic in form – and must favour odes to Stalin and the Communist Party, but also permitting praise to the victorious war, construction of a socialist society, collective farming, Soviet internationalism and taming of nature by the Soviet man. The favourite genres included mass, choir and folk songs as well as operas and short symphonic works with a preordained content.

Like all campaigns initiated in Moscow, this quickly spread to the annexed territories. By the beginning of March, formalist inclinations were *discovered* in the oeuvre of several Estonian composers. Many Estonian composers were heavily reprimanded by the Central Committee of the Estonian Communist (Bolshevik) Party (EC(b)P CC), starting from Heino Eller whose earlier works turned out to be formalist in their entirety. Formalism was identified in the work of Eduard Oja, the song *Surematus* (Immortality) by Tuudur Vettik, Violin Sonata by Johannes Bleive, works of Hugo Lepnurm and Alfred Karindi. Somewhat surprisingly, the criticism even hit Lydia Auster, freshly back from Russia. A resolutely negative assessment was given to popular and jazz music creators, who were seen to grovel before Western decadent bourgeois music (The decision ... Muradeli 1948). The 13th All-Estonian Song Celebration in 1950 was also to be a mass event with *ethnic form and socialist content*.

As far as composers were concerned, it was the Estonian Soviet Composers' Union who had assumed the role of the ideological watchdog. It had been founded by a Resolution of the ESSR Council of Ministers on 3 January 1941; the official founding meeting took place in Leningrad in May 1944, the founding conference only in June 1946 (*Eesti NSV Kultuuriasutuste...*/Historic encyclopaedia of cultural agencies 1986:18; see also Kreegipuu 2005:40). The Union primarily united composers who had been active in the Soviet rear, and these also held senior positions in the organisation. Although composers who had stayed in Estonia during the German occupation were accepted as members, they had minimal opportunities to participate in decision-making.

By 1949, the Composers' Union of the Estonian SSR had shaped into an organisation that mainly worked towards carrying out a forceful Soviet control over composers. The minutes of the board meetings reveal how the speeches of many leading cultural figures echo a panicky wish to show obedience to the new regime and a naive effort to apply every hint or guideline sent from Moscow even more diligently than might actually have been intended in the first place (Oja 1999:10). Enn Oja's description conveys the general atmosphere and inclinations that were prevalent among the leaders of musical circles of the time. The requirement that the lyrics of songs and musical shows correspond to the Communist Party political ideology, the requisite compulsory repertoire for amateur and professional theatres, compulsory politicisation of curricula in musical education institutions, analysis of every beat in the oeuvre of composers in the hope of finding formalist nuances, KGB style interrogations carried out by the board of the Composers' Union, expulsion from the Union of *suspect* composers – all this ruled

the cultural field of this period. Most of such documents have been signed by Harri Kõrvits, the Acting President of the Estonian Soviet Composers' Union. He was also the leading interrogator and accuser of his colleagues, as the minutes reveal.

David Vseviiov has remarked perceptively that the Soviet system was *satanically devious and cleverly irregular*. He adds a curious commentary of his own: "An artist whose oeuvre consisted only of portraits of Lenin could be deported to Siberia, while an artist who had never painted Lenin might be left in peace. In order to understand the functioning of the Soviet period, we must compile a complex bundled diagram" (Vseviiov 2009:186). Vseviiov might be mystifying the history of the period to a certain extent with this claim. The history later showed that although there were similar exceptions, the mechanism of repressions was not quite as irregular as that.

One motif for repression certainly was the ability of a person to influence or even lead others. If a so-called *Lenin-painter* had that, they were dangerous to the Soviet authorities and could well find themselves among the deportees.

According to official canons, cultural life had to be under absolute ideological control. Any deviation from the official Soviet guidelines had to be caught in a series of seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Elvi Alekand, the long-time Head of the Cultural Department of the City of Tartu Council of People's Deputies (CPD) Executive Committee, has described in great detail the actual conditions in Tartu in which Laasmäe and his colleagues had to work, and the bureaucratic rules and rituals that they had to fulfil (Randjärv 2012:214–226.).

If we only concentrate on the Song Celebration Movement, we can find the same trend clearly illustrated in the programmes. The most extreme example of Communist Party control is the repertoire of the 13th All-Estonian Song Celebration in 1950 with its dominant motif of *great achievements* of Stalin. The three opening songs of the Celebration were *Kantaat Stalinist* (Cantata on Stalin) by Alexandr Alexandrov, *Laul Stalinile* (Song to Stalin) by Gustav Ernesaks and cantata *Rahva võim* (People's Power) by Eugen Kapp. They were all conducted by Gustav Ernesaks. Since the 1955 Song Celebration, the songs *Lenini sõnadest* (The Words of Lenin) and *Suurest Leninist* (The Great Lenin) returned to the repertoire next to songs praising the great homeland (Estonian Song Celebrations). Estonian songs made up a mere 17% of the programme.

Ideological control was not limited to the programme of the Song Celebrations. As Elvi Alekand remembers, all choirs had to coordinate the programmes of all their concerts in the relevant state agencies. For concerts in Estonia, the seal of the Cultural Department of the City of Tartu CPD Executive Committee sufficed, while the programmes of concerts held further afield had to be coordinated in the Propaganda and Agitation Department of the ECP Tartu City Committee. Party organisations checked the concert programmes and demanded that the so-called Lenin-songs be performed. We can also read in the archives of the Composers' Union how the permitted and banned repertoire was determined and what efforts were made to organise the commissioning of new choir songs from composers and

writers in line with the demands of Moscow.¹ Alekand claims that although the control system was theoretically absolute, it nevertheless tended to crack in real life. By then, even the Party apparatus included people who viewed Communist propaganda as nothing more than a veneer and who found a way to use the flimsiness of commands to act according to their own conscience. Public opposition, however, was out of the question as it would have led to immediate harsh reprisals.

Printing music sheets, concert programmes, invitations and posters was a huge problem. During the Soviet era, print runs could be determined only by a written permit of the competent agencies and this often led to all sorts of problems which have now been largely forgotten. A long bureaucratic road to Calvary had to be walked before something could get printed in the 1960s and 1970s. The commissions had to first be included in the printing plans of the publishing and printing houses (Randjärv 2012:102). This came at a price of a complicated procedure requiring numerous signatures, which sometimes left customers behind schedule. In any case, all changes in the programme had to be again coordinated with the Cultural Department of the Executive Committee and the Party Committee; for example, printing of a new songbook warranted a permission from the Ministry of Culture (Randjärv 2012:109).

Any publication required the permission of the Soviet censor, the so-called *glavlit*².

In 1967, on the anniversary year of the October Revolution, it was laconically announced that the printing houses were overburdened with printing honorary diplomas – after all, Soviet citizens needed recognition for their work (Randjärv 2012:102).

The materials of the Estonian Theatre and Music Museum virtual database³, used for this analysis – letters of explanation by the officials of district committees to the Ministry of Culture, and minutes of Ministry meetings – provide a colourful insight into the situation of the 1970s in particular, with cultural collectives being encouraged to emphasise their ideological-political attitude. After all, the desired attitude did not really exist. From ministry officials to mid-level officials to leaders of collectives, everyone was forced to comply with the *Potyomkin-style* game in an attempt to preserve their national culture in this Soviet madhouse.

After the annexation of Estonia by the Soviet Union in autumn 1944, the country fell into insecurity, as illustrated with so many examples by historian Evald Laasi in his book on resistance movement of 1944–1949: “1941 June deportations had cut into the soul of the nation, mass repressions had done their

¹ Lists of allowed and banned songs. ERA. R-1958-1-13 (1947); ERA. R-1958-1-17 (1948); ERA. R-1205-2-383 (1948); ERA. R-1958-1-35 (1949); ERA. R-1958-1-36 (1949); ERA. R-1958-1-70 (1953).

² Glavlit, officially Division of Literature and Publishing, was the agency that decided on the permission for publication of performed or published texts, organized their pre- and post-censorship, etc.

³ <http://vetik.tmm.ee> ja <http://laasmae.tmm.ee> compiled by Laine Randjärv.

job. Illusions, if anyone had had any, shattered under the rolling wheels of trains to Siberia. Occupation authorities mercilessly arrested and sent tens of thousands of people to prison camps. The Forest Brethren did not have too many choices in the end – they could either continue their guerrilla war or go to a prison camp in Siberia”. Laasi believes that the extent of the Forest Brethren movement was largely a direct reaction to the Soviet policy (Laasi 1992:8).

Yet the attitude of the Estonian creative intelligentsia was not as clear-cut as it seems in retrospect. The Soviet propaganda machine at first cleverly managed to deceive the intelligentsia and feed them positive illusions. Estonian writers believed the honeyed talk of the occupation forces with particular naive keenness. A *people's government* was formed according to the plan confirmed in Moscow and included three celebrated literati: the Prime Minister was the Cross of Liberty decorated Johannes Vares-Barbarus who had fought on the Narva front in the War of Independence; the seat of the Minister of Education was given to the great expert on European culture, highly educated Johannes Semper, while Nigol Andresen became the Minister of Foreign Affairs. A total of ten writers were *elected* to the Riigikogu, formed under the instructions of Moscow. After Estonia was annexed to the Soviet Union, *proletarian author* Johannes Lauristin was set up as the leader of the executive in August 1940 (Karjahärm 2006:142). In June 1940, well-known authors Nigol Andresen, Johannes Vares-Barbarus, Johannes Semper, Mihkel Jürna, Aira Kaal, Aadu Hint, Debora Vaarandi, Karl Taev and many others joined the Communist Party. A whole set of Estonian writers, even those who did not yet belong to the CP, were promoted to leading positions, and cultural circles were promised that they would retain their power over directing culture. But the most luring bait for everyone was probably the sizable increase in salary for artists, writers and other creative figures (Karjahärm 2006:142–145).

Believers in illusions could be found in other areas as well. One of these was the Director of the State Central Archives, the distinguished Estonian historian Oskar Liiv who also believed that the Soviet regime had opened up new opportunities for Estonian archives and did not even notice that the growth in the size of archives and the consequent increase in employment and money were the result of evildoings – the *new opportunities* had opened up due to the need to collect the archives of institutions, incl. cultural associations, closed by the Soviet authorities (Miller 1994:54–57).

Creative figures were fairly quick to identify after 1940 which button should be pushed when talking to the representatives of the new regime, and rapidly acquired the rudiments of the Soviet rhetoric. There were no other options for creative figures to *survive* in the professional sense.

Ideological categorisation of cultural figures had still not yet been clearly defined and people sincerely hoped to be able to continue with traditions from the independence era in the actual work. Everything changed just a few months later. As the events came to show, intellectuals were not allowed to bask long in their intellectual superiority. Fight against formalism was organised first and foremost to eliminate this kind of resistance. When the intellectuals could not be beaten any

other way, the battlefield was turned into a primitive form so that only strength and not intellectual or creative superiority would have the advantage.

After the problems with the opera *Great Friendship* by Vano Muradeli, large-scale restructuring started in the Estonian music as well. Thus, many respected composers fell under criticism and condemnation at the plenary meeting of the ESSR Composers' Union on 3 October 1948.

It is important to mention that at the 5th Congress of the EC(b)P CC in December 1948, *accusations in nationalism became a daily event* (Raid 1995:45), leading to full frontal attack against the national intelligentsia and ending with a ruthless attack against them at the March Plenum of the EC(b)P CC in 1950. The general attitude of the era favoured this. At the end of the 1940s, Estonia began to undergo a violent collectivisation of private property. In response to the foundation of collective farms, Forest Brethren launched a fight against the perpetrators of violence. This leads to a simple and logical conclusion: Forest Brethren movement was essentially the public, armed expression of the national resistance, *exploding to its last high point in 1948–1950 as a reaction to the implementation of the Stalinist agricultural policy* (Raid 1995:51).

In 1948, the biggest problem for the EC(b)P constituted in the armed resistance movement against the Soviet regime – the Forest Brethren. It is in this context that Tuudur Vettik's fairly innocuous and musically primitive *Metsavendade laul* (The Forest Brethren's Song) got targeted. No Soviet functionary was able to understand how the author of the symbol of anti-Soviet movement could live and work freely in a territory annexed by the Soviet Union. The logic of the totalitarian country was simple and clear – tens of thousands had been shot for infinitely more trivial reasons. Some kind of public explanation and repentance was the least that could be accepted in the Soviet Union of the time.

In March 1949, immediately before the mass deportation, fight against the composers who valued earlier traditions intensified. At the 13 March 1949 plenary meeting of the Composers' Union, which discussed the situation of musical theory and criticism in the Estonian SSR, Vettik and many other musical figures received a lambasting for their creative as well as publishing activities.

The Executive Secretary of the Board of the Estonian Soviet Composers' Union Harri Kõrvits, who presented the principal report⁴, did not hold back his emotions, accusing creative figures in the most aggressive terms of formalism, disobedience and insubordination as well as of lack of loyalty to the Soviet ideology and the Communist Party, for not appreciating the *correct works* of their *wise* colleagues, etc. Kõrvits strongly condemned the activities of Heino Eller and his Tartu group, particularly the musicologist Karl Leichter: "Our musicologists and composers whose joint activities allowed the stinky yeast of formalism to begin to ferment in the bourgeois Republic of Estonia (in Tartu in a particularly salient way), have not yet attempted to evaluate this disease, which still affects the

⁴ General meeting of the ES Composers' Union on the situation of musical science and criticism in the ESSR. 13 March 1949. ERA. R-1958-1-26.

only composer among them who has remained in Tartu – Johan Bleive –, with sufficiently serious and ideological criticism and self-critique. [...] traces lead us to the circle which used to count Eller, Leichter, Tubin, Roots and others among its members”. Kõrvits also demanded that the anthology *Kakskümmend aastat eesti muusikat* (Twenty years of Estonian music), compiled by Leichter in 1938, be re-evaluated (*Muusikateaduse ja -kriitika olukorrast.../Situation of musicology and music criticism in the Estonian SSR*)⁵ This was of course consequently done. The criticism resulted in Leichter being demoted from the position of the Head of the Chair of Musicology of Tallinn State Conservatory and he later worked as a road worker, locksmith and librarian. The creative figures who were expelled from the Composers’ Union were also entered on the black list of the Soviet authorities (or the other way round – those who were on the black list were also expelled from the Composers’ Union).

At the same meeting, Kõrvits repented having praised Vettik too enthusiastically on his birthday a year before and was extremely penitent. The text of the report is very characteristic of the spirit of the era, as shown by a quote from the speech by Kõrvits: “I would mention first my writings on the occasion of the 50th birthday of Tuudur Vettik; the approbatory style fit for a celebratory speech and the principal tone which is hardly suitable for a Bolshevist as well as the general wording makes it one of the worst examples of birthday articles. My mistake is even greater because I gave a positive evaluation in advance, without being familiar with the work – I gather 10th, 11th and 12th All-Estonian Song Celebrations under one fundamental denominator in Vettik’s *Diktsiooni õpikul* (Diction textbook) and silently ignore the content analysis of Vettik’s oeuvre, especially during the bourgeois period”.⁶

Tuudur Vettik was arrested on 18 February 1950 and labelled *class enemy, bourgeois nationalist, etc.*

At the end of April 1950, a joint meeting of EC(b)P cells of the ESSR Department of Arts, ES Writers’ Union, ES Artists’ Association, ES Composers’ Union and TS Conservatory took place; the main issue was: *How could we let a class enemy work so long without punishment?* The answer came readily. “Since the introduction of the Soviet regime, individual leading officials of many Estonian SSR Party organisations have carried out an incorrect policy in choosing, posting and educating the cadre” (*Tugevdada võitlust .../One should intensify our fight... 1950:4–5*). Ksenja Aisenstadt who drew the attention of the meeting to these deficiencies stated that “as early as 1940/41 the bourgeois-nationalist clique led by Päts and Vettik was free to persecute the active supporters of the Soviet authority with impunity” (*Tugevdada võitlust.../One should intensify our fight 1950:4*). Ksenja Aisenstadt was the Acting Director of the Tallinn State Conservatory from November 1940 until January 1941. The best way to characterise her is to say that her party zeal was so great that in addition to eliminating the

⁵ For more information on Tartu school, see Humal. Heino Eller ja Tartu koolkond.

⁶ ERA. R-1958-1-26.

church music and organ class in the Tallinn State Conservatory she had apparently considered having the organs demolished and sent to scrap metal (cf. Kõlar 2010).

Professor Lippus points out that Vettik, Päts and Karindi were very different as musicologists, just like their lives and activities had previously evolved in different circles (Lippus 2008:192). She claims that their only link is in fact the 1947 Song Celebration, after which they figure as an unseparable whole in the speeches of the EC(b)P CC 8th Plenum in March 1950 (Lippus 2008:192, Verbatim records ... 1999).

The author of this article finds their common ground to be actually much larger, although large entities are sometimes difficult to spot. All three were involved in the Song Celebration movement, although each in a somewhat different way. Support for one another and sharing of common ideas can be found in publication of school songbooks, organising Song Celebrations (which is a large and complex job), as well as in defending one another in creative issues during ideological political fights at meetings of the ESSR Composers' Union, for example.

5. Political polarisation of cultural figures

The political polarisation of Estonian cultural figures has been treated fairly widely in literature. Sirje Olesk writes in her collection of articles *Tõdede vankuval müüiril* (On a rickety wall of truths) about the setting up and introduction of the new literary paradigm at the 2nd Congress of Writers of the Estonian SSR in November 1946 and the following period of transition of 1947–1949 that “frontiers develop within literature and the future bourgeois nationalists – i.e. peoples with prior literary experience – are put in relief, in opposition of particularly orthodox *homini novi* [...] who hanker for a position on the Parnassus, i.e. inside the institution, and start to clear it of the former occupants to make room for themselves” (Olesk 2002:68).

A mechanical and often coincidental principle has been used as one criterion for categorising cultural figures: those who had lived in Estonia during the German occupation were bad or at least suspect, while those who had fought in the Soviet army or stayed in the Soviet rear, were good. Another observation rings largely true: the people who had stayed on the Soviet side (providing that they had not been arrested there) were preliminarily given a sizable advance limit of trust which they had to work hard to maintain – and not everyone succeeded in this. Those who had fought on the *wrong side* were repressed, while those who had stayed in Estonia and remained neutral naturally had to work even harder to gain the trust of the authorities. Yet it is important to see things from a deeper perspective – the larger strategic objective of the Soviet ideology (not only in Estonia but also elsewhere) was to drive a wedge within the national intelligentsia, to fragmentise it. This is the age-old principle of empires – *divide et impera* – divide and conquer. This was the key to minimising any possible resistance to foreign authorities. Tuudur Vettik, Riho Päts and Alfred Karindi, celebrated

figures of Estonian choir movement actively took part in the musical life of Estonia during the German occupation, while many cultural personalities who later rose to leading positions in the Estonian SSR had participated in Estonian SSR National Cultural Ensembles in Yaroslavl.⁷

According to Avo Hirvesoo, 95 musicians were mobilised in the Soviet army or simply deported to Russia in 1941; 65 of them later returned to Estonia and most “were able to continue in their vocation, some in leading positions (V. Alumäe, E. Kapp)”. Hirvesoo proposes that the cultural personalities united under Estonian National Cultural Ensembles, formed in Yaroslavl at the objectives of propaganda in 1942, were saved from active military service and repressions just in case they could be used in possible future international negotiations (Hirvesoo 1996:13). Toomas Karjahärm has assigned the Yaroslavl cultural ensembles perhaps a more accurate significance of *political tools*, assuring that after the end of the war these ideologically hardened employees were to become the obedient introducers of Moscow politics back home (Karjahärm, Sirk 2007:193–194).

Moscow was intentionally trying to drive a wedge inside the Estonian intelligentsia, hoping to create a conflict between those who had spent the war in the Soviet rear and those who had remained in Estonia or had fled abroad. This policy was successful. Helene Mugasto-Johani, inspector of ESSR National Cultural Ensembles in 1942–43, describes with complete sincerity the political educational *manipulation* that was carried out among the members of the cultural ensembles. There were, for example, systematic study circles where reports were heard and discussions ranged from the Great October Revolution to ethnic issues and principles of Marxism; Party history was taught in study groups for the Communist youth. The creative members of the cultural field were to constitute an ideological weapon that would *shoot* at the German-occupied Estonia with artistic ammunition.

Vettik had spent the war years in Estonia, on the territory occupied by the German Fascists, in terms of the Soviet rhetoric. This was to be condemned. Gustav Ernesaks, on the other hand, had been active in the Soviet rear – whether voluntarily or by force, was of no importance. The authorities approved.

By analysing these voluntary acts or random historical coincidences, we can see that the polarisation of creative figures during or in the aftermath of WWII events was influenced by the fate they met in 1942–44. Both sides applied themselves to creative work, attempting to support themselves and their families. And yet those who participated in the National Cultural Ensembles in the late 1940s

⁷ ESSR National Cultural Ensembles were officially formed on 16 December 1941 by a directive of the USSR Committee of Arts and were officially opened on 22 March 1942 in cinema Gigant in Yaroslavl. The decision by the Soviet government to unite the cultural figures of occupied Estonia into cultural ensembles during the war was announced at the end of 1941 in the USSR Committee of Arts. The meeting to that effect counted the participation of the ESSR leader of government Johannes Vares-Barbarus and many very important figures in the development of the planned ensembles and the Estonian cultural life – Paul Pinna, Ants Lauter, Nigol Andresen, Eugen Kapp and Vladimir Alumäe (Cf. Pajuste 2011:219). Other participants in the ENCEs included Gustav Ernesaks, Jüri Variste, Harri Kõrvits, Edgar Arro, etc.

usually rose to leading positions in the Soviet Estonian society, while others were treated with distrust and persecution by the Bolshevik regime. Vettik and Ernesaks, both illustrious creators and distinguished personalities in choir culture who have gone down in Estonian history, were different, says Urve Lippus (Lippus 2008:193). Vettik was devoted to promoting choir culture, educating choirmasters. This could have been seen as a neutral activity. Ernesaks worked actively in the Estonian SSR Composers' Union, which had become an important tool of the Soviet authorities in controlling the creative musical intelligentsia and determining their ideological inclinations. As far as Moscow was concerned, he was undeniably a more positive figure than Vettik.

Although many creative figures who had been *on the wrong side* were not directly repressed, they received their punishment indirectly. They were not arrested or deported, but after having been made redundant on ideological grounds they lost the possibility to work in their field. Hugo Lepnurm,⁸ who had served in the Soviet army during the war, was forced to leave teaching because of his religious beliefs and was stripped of his membership in the Composers' Union. The same happened to Karl Leichter, Enn Võrk, Aurora Semper, Peeter Laja, Artur Uritamm and Johan Tamverk, who were erased from the list of the Composers' Union in 1950 on ideological grounds.⁹ The reasons given included: *bourgeois cosmopolitan and nationalist opinions and activities that are in conflict with the values and duties of a Soviet creative union* [Leichter, Semper]; *continuous creative and social passivity and activities not corresponding to the directions and duties of the Soviet Composers' Union* [Lepnurm]; *activities as an inspector of the Tallinn Conservatoire during the Fascist occupation, when he began an extensive symphonic piece dedicated to 'the people deported and repressed by the red terror'* [Tamverk]; *continuous creative and social passivity* [Laja, Uritamm].¹⁰

In 1951 this list was extended with the name of Nikolai Goldschmidt¹¹ who had been a loyal supporter of the Soviet regime but was now erased *in connection with his arrest by the USSR authorities*.¹² The board of the Composers' Union was getting more skilful in their duties as ideological overseers and executors. One of the most drastic examples is the interrogation protocol of Enn Võrk, conducted by Eugen Kapp, Harri Kõrvits and Edgar Arro on 14 December 1950 under the

⁸ Hugo Lepnurm (1914–1999), composer, organist and teacher. Since 1936, teacher of organ and solfeggio, later theoretical musical subjects and music history in the Tallinn Conservatoire. He spent 1941–1944 in a Soviet Army work battalion in Udmurtia, then in ESSR National Cultural Ensembles in Yaroslavl. In 1945 he became a professor of the Conservatoire. In 1950–1958 he was forced to give up teaching because of his religious activities. During this period he worked as a concert and church organist and composer, as well as the Head of the Ecclesiastical Music Department of the Estonian Lutheran Church Consistory.

⁹ Correspondence in the issue of erasing members of the Composers' Union. 12 July 1950 – 24 June 1952. ERA. R-1958-1-43. L 1-4.

¹⁰ ERA. R-1958-1-43. L 1-11.

¹¹ Minutes of the meeting of the board of the ESSR Composers' Union. 12 July 1950 – 24 June 1952. ERA. R-1958-1-38. L 45-51.

¹² ERA. R-1958-1-38. L 45-51.

auspices of the Estonian Soviet Composers' Union.¹³ The three composers who ranked among the leaders of the CU had together actively participated in the Estonian National Cultural Ensembles in Yaroslavl.

We cannot find direct facts describing the stark opposition between the two important figures, the former leader of the Song Celebration Movement Tuudur Vettik, and Gustav Ernesaks. Although Ernesaks has written a number of books, his decisions and motifs have remained largely unexplained. Ernesaks was certainly an Estonian patriot. This is evident in his oeuvre. In 1938, after the failure of the national anthem competition, Ernesaks was one of the few composers from whom President Konstantin Päts expected the new Estonian anthem for the 25th anniversary of the Republic in 1943. But the opportunities and decisions of the two great men were different. The forced disappearance of one leader gave the other the chance to rise. We can find irony and hints to the effect in letters by Vettik; we can also draw conclusions by reading and analysing the minutes of the Estonian Soviet Composers' Union, particularly the materials on preparations for the 1950 Song Celebration¹⁴. The fate was kind to Ernesaks in the creative sense. The so-called Kaama Choir¹⁵ founded during the first years of the WWII in the Soviet rear on the territory of the Udmurt ASSR later developed into the ESSR State Academic Male Choir (*Eesti NSV Riiklik Akadeemiline Meeskoor – RAM*) and since the 1991 the Estonian National Male Choir (*Eesti Rahvusmeeskoor – RAM*)¹⁶, an asset which made the charismatic Ernesaks famous in Estonia as well as abroad and secured his leadership role in the Song Celebration Movement after 1948.¹⁷

By contrast, the glory of Tuudur Vettik, a legendary choirmaster during the independence period, faded in a Siberian prison camp, and only his great will-power helped him rise back to the ranks of creators at the end of the 1950s, when he also wrote songs that attested to a surprising obedience to the regime.

¹³ ERA. R-1958-1-38. L 22-28.

¹⁴ Minutes, protocols and speeches of meetings, sittings, plenums of the Composers' Union of the Estonian SSR. 18.02.–28.11.1948. ERA. R-1958-1-17. L 35–48; 49–92; 175.

¹⁵ *Kaama kraavihallide meeskoor* (Male choir of the Kama ditch-diggers) founded at the initiative of Gustav Ernesaks and Jüri Variste in Kambarka, Udmurt ASSR, at the river Kama, which held its first rehearsal on 28 September 1941 in a earth cabin. Ernesaks was mobilised to the Red Army work battalion located in Kambarka from 10 August 1941 to 14 April 1942. It was a hard life, similar to prison, but made more bearable by singing. After a troupe of Estonian cultural figures had been formed in Yaroslavl in 1942 to offer entertainment to the front and the rear – Estonian National Cultural Ensembles (ENCE) – Gustav Ernesaks was invited to join by a government cable. Together with Harri Kõrvits and Jüri Variste he founded the male and mixed choirs of the ENCE (cf. Ernesaks 2008:87–88).

¹⁶ Gustav Ernesaks: “I do not think for a moment that the Kaama male choir in their trench grey uniform would not have been founded without me. Others would probably have done that. The only doubtful thing is whether my thoughts would have so stubbornly turned to the founding of the National Male Choir later on” (see Ernesaks 1983:17–18).

¹⁷ Composers' Union of the Estonian SSR general meeting on 30 June 1948 on the repertoire of the 13th All-Estonian Song Festival. ERA. R-1958-1-17. L 94-101.

The author will now attempt to find a wider social meaning of Vettik's activities, his repression and consecutive removal from the head of the Song Celebration Movement, with parallels to others with the same fate.

We can begin by saying that despite their different fates, Vettik and Ernesaks were not opposites in principle. Their opinions, objectives and views of life were largely similar.

We can only ask: what would have happened if Vettik had not been sent to a prison camp in Siberia, if he had continued his work with his choir and also directed the Song Celebration Movement and the programme policy according to his conscience? We are unavoidably left with a suspicion whether Vettik's uncompromising personality would have let him direct the Song Celebration Movement and avoid public confrontation in the conditions of the Soviet regime. Would he have been capable of knocking on doors of bureaucrats, fighting with the Department of Arts in Moscow, crossing the line between the permissible and the banned (with Party members obviously given freer range than those who had spent the German occupation period in Estonia)? Would he have been able to maintain his great privilege of continuing to organise great national cultural events – Song Celebrations – in Estonia, in the conditions of a totalitarian state? After all, it was not a simple organisation of concerts but a series of constant and tiresome discussions with the central authorities in Moscow and the ideological bodies that represented it locally, as well as with local musical leaders, as can be read from the Song Celebration Leading Committee minutes. It is also true that sometimes the discussion was solved not by a creative discussion but by a direct command. And even in such cases, for the sake of survival, one had to know how to retreat. Preparation of Song Celebrations was a multi-layered and extremely complicated political and psychological process where the particular context of the time and conditions demanded particular methods and particular people.

Did the ideas of a *bourgeois nationalist* who had spent time in Siberia not deserve attention during the Soviet era? After 1968, when Tuudur Vettik was finally rehabilitated, many leading positions of the Song Celebration movement were already occupied by other people. Or were there sensitive additional factors which were not discussed publicly during Vettik's lifetime? It would be careless not to mention Vettik's difficult personality which led to communication problems that also caused him to be sidelined from many decision-making opportunities in music.

One thing affects others, and Vettik's bitterness and surly manner, possibly also a sense of inferiority caused by the repressions, might have held him back in normal collegial communication.

In reality, any final judgements are forced because people and the logic behind their behaviour cannot be viewed separately from their time. This leads us back to the question: where does conformism end and collaborationism start, or *vice versa*?

6. Development of national culture and/or collaborationism

Concerning the relationship of Estonian creative figures and collaborationism, we can say that many Estonian artists and scientists had chosen the path of *conditional collaborationism*. Heinrich Mark, exile Prime Minister of the Republic of Estonia in the functions of the President, has provided the following description of the position of the Rector of the University of Tartu Hans Kruus, a well-known historian. Kruus had told him: “As a historian, my assessment of the situation tells me that Estonia will remain under Russian rule for a longer time; we have the choice to 1) fight back and let the Estonian nation be wiped out, or 2) hide our fists in our pockets and play along. I have decided to choose the second path” (Mark 1996:33–34). This description allows us to claim that Hans Kruus had chosen the road of *conditional collaborationism*. Public confrontation with the preservation of the nation and its culture was probably impossible at the time.

This has been expressively described by the Hungarian writer Sándor Márai: “with Bolsheviks taking control of the society totally, permanently and underhandedly, it became impossible to take up arms against the regime that was under the protection of [Soviet] Russian tanks and machine guns on the territory of the country. What was considered every person’s right in the West, was seen as a conspiracy in the East – in the Communist interpretation – and it took you to the gallows” (Márai 2006:253–255).

As we have already said, the subject of collaborationism is sensitive and extremely delicate and no individual under observation should be judged without studying the databases and archival material in depth. It is, alas, often neglected. Historians have thoroughly analysed the events during occupation and annexation as well as the related factology in Estonia. Until now, however, our historians have not analysed the events from the human perspective or have done so insufficiently. *‘It is high time to focus on the question why,’* said David Vseviov in response to a poll organised by Hiljar Tammela and Olev Liivik (Tammela, Liivik 2010:129–135). Why did someone accept a position or lodge a complaint against their colleagues? It is even more difficult to differentiate between conformism and collaborationism.

Research revealed signs of conformism in an atmosphere of ideological pressure. We cannot look past the fact that Vettik has written the songs *Oktoobri-tähistel* (October Symbols) (1947) and *Laul Stalinist* (Song of Stalin) (1948) for mixed choirs and *Nõukogude Arme*e (Soviet Army) (1949) for male choirs. We might ask *why* if only the life of Vettik and that of most of his colleagues had not already provided an answer: the most likely reason was the wish to conform to the Soviet ideology. In a certain sense, the sole fact of living during annexation could be considered collaborationism.

If we look at the Party-obedient songs written by Estonian composers for the Song Celebrations in 1947–1990¹⁸, we come up with an intriguing result. We may

¹⁸ Music sheets of All-Estonian Song Festivals 1947–1990. See digital archive of the Estonian National Library <<http://digar.nlib.ee/digar/esileht>>.

ask – were there any active Soviet Estonian choir composers who created no *correct* songs at all?

In December 1947, for example, the Director of the Department of Arts of the ESSR Johannes Semper sent a letter¹⁹ to many lyricists demanding that the following themes be reflected in the cantata under creation for the 13th All-Estonian Song Celebration: ten Soviet years of the Estonian nation; our eternal unity with the whole socialist state; building up of socialism and communism; the leading role of the Communist Party; glory to comrade Stalin. The same topic continues on 15 May 1948. Johannes Semper, now on behalf of the board of the ESSR Writers' Union, writes a letter²⁰ to the Department of Arts recommending that certain writers be contacted to commission choir songs about Stalin, Soviet children's songs and other songs with Soviet content in addition to Song Celebration songs. This is how Johannes Semper, Mart Raud, Paul Viiding, Debora Vaarandi, Juhan Schmuul (Smuul), August Sang, Kersti Merilaas, Ralf Parve, Erni Hiir, Minni Nurme, Felix Kotta and Paul Rummo came to receive a letter²¹ from the new Director of the Department of Arts Kaarel Ird. Simultaneously, a fierce discussion continued in the Composers' Union²² where the Song Celebration Leading Committee was planning the *correct* repertoire from the musical side and was hoping for a good cooperation with writers.

The composers were mainly discussing who had the right to submit their songs to the Song Celebration – would younger composers also get their foot in the door or are songs chosen according to their suitability to the Song Celebration? “Every song is not going to the Song Celebration”, Vettik said at the meeting.²³ Andersen's speech, where he emphasised what Ernesaks had already said in the same meeting, is particularly characteristic of the Soviet mentality at the time as well as later: “I think that one of our biggest failures is the lack of songs about comrade Stalin – not lack but paucity. Bolsheviks, Soviet people cannot be satisfied with what has been achieved. If we have only one song about Stalin, this shows our poverty, and if we only have lyrics for three songs about Stalin, this shows our poverty”.²⁴ Guidelines like these and in even stronger wording were directed at cultural circles – lyricists and composers – by the ideological apparatus of the EC(b)P. People had the choice of surviving and continuing their work by conforming and showing obedience to the Party, while also creating unique works that have become classics of our choir music, or losing the possibility to create at all.

¹⁹ Correspondence on commissioning song lyrics and melodies with writers and composers; minutes of meetings of choir song competition jury. 22 December 2002. ERA. R-1205-1-383. L 1.

²⁰ Correspondence on commissioning song lyrics and melodies. 22 December 1947. ERA. R-1205-1-383. L 13.

²¹ ERA. R-1205-1-383. L 14.

²² Minutes of the meeting with composers and poets invited by the lead committee of the 13th All-Estonian Song Festival. 1 October 1948. ERA. R-1958-1-17. L 49-92.

²³ General meeting of the CU of the Estonian SSR. 30 June 1948. ERA. R-1958-1-17. L 48.

²⁴ ERA. R-1958-1-17. L 49-92.

It is particularly intriguing that the songbooks of the 1950 All-Estonian Song Celebration were already being prepared in 1947–49 under the leadership of Tuudur Vettik. Initially the programme included four songs by him: *Mingem merda möõtemaie* (Let's Sail the Sea), *Laul Stalinist* (Song of Stalin), *Mina aga tantsin* (I Just Dance), *Rõkatame rõõmulaulu* (Let's Sing the Song of Happiness), six by Riho Päts: *Ühte laulu tahaks laulda* (I'd like to Sing a Song), *Lepalind* (The Redstart), *Eideratas* (Spinning Wheel), *Kevad* (Spring), *Laul mesilasest* (Song of the Bee), *Rummutants* (Roms Dance), one from Alfred Karindi: *Kevade laul* (Spring Song) and one from Hugo Lepnurm: *Minu vellel hää elo* (Happy Life of My Brother) (*Eesti XIII üldlaulupeo segakoori laulud 1947–1948*, *Eesti XIII üldlaulupeo meeskoori laulud 1948*, *Eesti XIII üldlaulupeo lastekoori 1948*; *Eesti XIII üldlaulupeo naiskoori laulud 1948*/ Estonian Song Celebrations).

Understandably, after the *persona non grata* people were arrested or demoted in March 1950, their works could no longer be performed at the upcoming Song Celebration. The programme had to be filled with *ideologically correct* songs and with this in mind Harri Kõrvits personally edited the 6th songbook, filling it with songs by Russian authors praising the great leader. Some songs from Estonian composers like himself, Lüdīg and Vedro were also added. Songbook with the substitute songs was prepared for printing in just a couple of days – it was sent to typesetting on 20 April and to print on 22 April 1950. Time was of the essence: choirs only had a few months to prepare the songs. While the songbooks by Vettik in 1947 as well as 1950 were titled *Songs for the Estonian 12th or 13th Song Celebration*, the 6th book by Kõrvits no longer included the word *Estonia* in the title. Since 1955, it was clear from the first stages of the preparation process that the songbooks were meant for *Soviet Estonian* Song Celebrations.

The analysis shows practically all choir music composers of the era conforming to the situation and the social demands.

People could be broadly divided into three groups according to their active creative period as well as their fate. The first group consists of composers who fell into disfavour in 1950s: Hugo Lepnurm, Alfred Karindi, Riho Päts, Tuudur Vettik. Their oeuvre was at a forced creative hiatus during the All-Estonian Song Celebrations of 1950 and 1955; after their return from prison they made attempts at rehabilitating themselves. Lepnurm no longer sent ideological songs to Song Celebrations.

The second group of composers (starting with Lydia Auster) was formed by composers who generally did well during the Stalin, the Khrushchev as well as the Brezhnev era. The table shows that the creative apogee of Harri Kõrvits probably ended with Stalin's death.

The third group is made up of the newer generation of composers who mainly opened their Lenin-song coffers at the 1975 Song Celebration.

Assessing the existing material in a black and white principle – who wrote or did not write *Lenin-songs* –, the ideological CP approval could be stamped on practically every composer who lived during the period of 1947–1980 or was still active a decade later. But this would be an arbitrary conclusion. In actual fact we

have to study the exact context where each individual song was created, and also the message between the lines of text as well as music. Many authors seem to harbour particular love for songs about nature, work, or life on collective farms. This could have been a lifesaver that allowed to fulfil the quota of ideologically correct repertoire demanded by the Party and thus to escape repressions. Figure 1 illustrates the percentage of Estonian patriotic songs and ideologically biased songs in the oeuvre of Estonian composers throughout the years of Soviet annexation.

An analysis of the 1990 All-Estonian Song Celebration repertoire shows that a year before the Republic of Estonia regained its independence, musicians were already thinking more freely and had become independent in their decisions – ideologically decreed works were no longer performed at the Song Celebration.

The source-critical approach makes us realise how highly we must appreciate the work of all the people who guaranteed the survival of our national culture. These were times when a way to survive had to be found instead of simply weighing the good and the bad solutions. We must understand the efforts of creative figures to secure *modus vivendi* through supremely difficult relations with foreign powers during the long decades of Soviet annexation. Ways had to be found to preserve the nation and its culture.

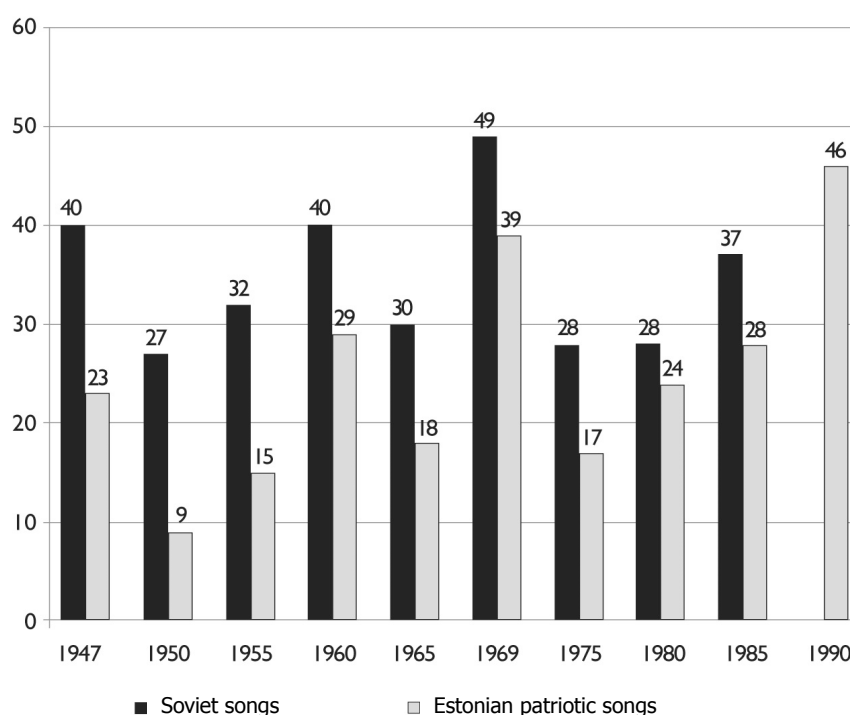


Figure 1. Comparison of the number of Soviet and Estonian patriotic songs written by Estonian composers and performed at All-Estonian Song Celebrations during the years of Soviet annexation 1947–1990.

However, people with a completely different frame of mind were also active at the period – people who were not at all concerned with preserving national culture but only their own lives and well-being. There are sadly other similar cases to be found in our cultural history, with creative figures setting out to *destroy* their colleagues in order to save their own skin. When introducing the analysis of the conflict under study, it is very difficult to decide if we can speak about collaborationism or conformism with the regime, or if this is a weird mix typical of the repressive Soviet era. After all, we still need to find an answer to the question whether Estonian-born deporters were merciless executioners who sent innocent people away in convoys, or little more than victims themselves in the iron grip of a satanic system?

People changed their views and values like chameleons. At the end of the 1940s, the testimony of Ado Velmet²⁵, the head conductor of the 1950 Song Celebration, helped to concoct political accusations against Tuudur Vettik in Soviet security bodies. The crown of thorns of a victim of repressions by German occupation forces had become a desirable ornament and protective shield to Velmet in the conditions of the Soviet regime. The Soviet apparatus found an eager servant and lackey in Harri Kõrvits, the long-time Executive Secretary of the Composers' Union and later chairman of the board; Kõrvits spared no effort in making up brutal accusations against his colleagues' creative work and everyday lives. The actual content of these accusations was undeservedly unjust and served Kõrvits' personal goal to be saved, as he also carried a mark of shame in the eyes of the Soviet regime – he had worked as a parish clerk.²⁶

Dmitri Shostakovich says the following about his contemporary composers in his book *Testimony*: “Composers were brought together and they started to betray each other. It was a sorry picture that I would rather not remember. [...] Composers were happy to devour one another. Nobody wanted to end up on the list. [...] And comrades composers did everything to escape the list and have their companions added to it. They were true criminals whose philosophy was: you die today, I will live one more day” (Shostakovich and Volkov 2002:144-145).

Let us make a small detour to film for comparison. We all know and love the classic movie *Vallatud kurvid*, based on the musical *Hermese kannul* written in 1946 by Leo Normet and Boris Kõrver. Rehearsals had already started in Estonia theatre when it was banned for ‘content unsuitable for Soviet people’. A decade later the libretto of the same musical was turned into the script for the film *Vallatud kurvid* and circulated in the Estonian SSR film institutions for an eternity. Officials did not like the film and Tallinnfilm Art Council finally rejected it once and for all on 29 December 1958. The justification was simple: not Soviet in style. Soon, however, papers arrived from *Goskino* in Moscow, generously permitting Tallinnfilm to start shooting *Vallatud kurvid* (Frisky curves). This example proves that there was no shortage in Tallinn of officials who were loyal to Moscow and

²⁵ Protocol of Ado Velmet's interrogation. 23 November 1950. ERAF. 130-1-6456. L 251-252.

²⁶ Harri Kõrvits had worked as a parish clerk in Koeru and Tallinn. ETMM, M 145.

that the myth ‘*we would have done it in Estonia but Moscow banned it*’ was not always true (Laasik 2012).

One of the odd aspects of collaborationism was public repentance. However, not every show of repentance was linked to collaborationism. Even creative figures who pleaded guilty of formalism were not necessarily collaborationists because that would have presumed a purposeful and knowing cooperation with the governing regime. Like Karjahärm says, self-criticism with a smattering of penance was carried out in various ways – through ‘self-flagellation’ at a meeting of the creative association or Party cell organisation. The *guilty* had to publish their guilt in the national media (Karjahärm 2006:142). The *times demanded* that. We may ask whether Vettik and Päts, with their open letters in the 1948 October number of cultural and political newspaper *Sirp ja Vasar*, were just *innocent penitents* or did their activities exhibit signs of collaborationism? It is difficult to give a clear-cut judgment. If we take into account the fact that even Vettik had Party-obedient songs in the programme of the 1947 Song Celebration and that he was earnestly taking part in creating works with a similar content during the preparatory meetings for the 1950 All-Estonian Song Celebration in the Composers’ Union, we cannot categorically deny it. Since we can already find a special column for penitents in 1949 issues of magazine *Looming*, the behaviour of Vettik and Päts was not at all out of the ordinary. In the February issue of the magazine, for example, it is the turn of Mait Metsanurk and Hugo Raudsepp to castigate themselves, with Peet Vallak being slightly more modest (Karjahärm 2006:142).

7. Summary

The main conclusion of the paper is that musical culture, just like cultural sphere as a whole, was inexorably linked to the politics of the time.

This article redefines some black-and-white common notions about Soviet reality and the intellectuals who had to live under these conditions. In the European tradition, open collaboration with occupants has always been condemned.

The problem of the Estonian common notion and radical nationalism is that they cannot tell the difference between a relatively short-term armed occupation and a long-term annexation that stemmed from it. A logical question emerged during the research: how can we judge intellectuals who, by the stealthy methods and means of the Soviet regime, or simply under threat, were made to incriminate one another? Blackmail, fear of falling out of favour, or luring with a cushy job were all used for manipulation. Tuudur Vettik has said that all protocols accusing him had been falsified, deliberately distorted to incriminate the accused. It is only logical to guess that the same may also apply to other interrogated persons. However, there were intellectuals who with supreme diligence showed loyalty to the Soviet power. It is not the task of this paper to pinpoint them. The author believes that today, when the near past is still very near, it would be painful and

problematic to bluntly spotlight all details, situations and the actions and decisions of people, as this judges the past without explaining the role of creative intellectuals in the complicated socio-political processes of the previous century. But it is eventually unavoidable and will take place at some point.

Relations with foreign authorities become more complicated when occupation turns into annexation and the foreign power stays for decades. In this situation the national intelligentsia must find its own *modus vivendi*, the optimal ways to sustain the nation and its culture.

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