

Latvians and the Soviet System in the 1970s and 1980s: Challenges of Adaptation and Collaboration

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Summary. This article examines the current state of research and debate on cooperation with the Soviet regime in Latvia through the application of Stanley Hoffmann's concepts of collaboration and collaborationism. The main objective of this article is to identify the challenges of analysing collaboration in Latvia during the 1970s and 1980s, taking into account the changing social environment, societal adaptation to the Soviet system and shifts in government policy. Whereas *collaborationism* is commonly understood as unquestioning submission to the Soviet system, *collaboration* developed in Latvia as a strategy for preserving national identity under the pressures of Russification.

Keywords: collaboration, collaborationism, Soviet occupation, Latvian statehood.

Latviai ir sovietinė sistema XX a. 8-ajame ir 9-ajame dešimtmėiais: prisitaikymo ir kolaboravimo iššūkiai

Santrauka. Straipsnyje analizuojama dabartinė tyrimų ir diskusijų apie bendradarbiavimą su sovietiniu režimu Latvijoje situacija, pasitelkiant Stanley Hoffmanno pasiūlytas kolaboravimo (angl. *collaboration*) ir kolaboracionizmo (angl. *collaborationism*) sąvokas. Straipsnyje siekta atskleisti iššūkius, susijusius su XX a. 8–9 dešimtmėiais Latvijoje vykusiu kolaboravimu, atsižvelgiant į kintančią socialinę aplinką, visuomenės prisitaikymą prie sovietinės sistemos ir besikeičiančią valdžios politiką. Kolaboracionizmas buvo vertinamas kaip besąlygiškas paklusnumas sovietinei sistemai, tuo tarpu kolaboravimas griežto prievartinės rusifikacijos režimo sąlygomis Latvijoje formavosi kaip nacionalinio identiteto išsaugojimo strategija.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: kolaboravimas, kolaboracionizmas, sovietinė okupacija, Latvijos valstybingumas.

Introduction

There are various perspectives from which the issue of collaboration with Soviet power may be discussed. One – and possibly the most common – approach is to examine how society currently perceives cooperation. In this case, the focus is more on the dynam-

ics of attitudes towards the Soviet system in general than on the issue of collaboration specifically. Another approach is to study the forms and intensity of collaboration during different stages of the Soviet occupation. In practice, however, there is no way to draw a precise distinction between these two approaches or to separate analysis from real public debates and sentiments. Because *occupation* has become a politically charged term associated with treacherous actions and undesirable behaviour, attempts to analyse it in a more academically rigorous manner frequently fail. In addition to its strong presence in public discourse, this highly unfavourable perception also affects historians' efforts to address the issue. The main objective of this article is to identify the challenges of analysing collaboration in Latvia during the 1970s and 1980s, taking into account the changing social environment, societal adaptation to the Soviet system and shifts in government policy. Before doing so, however, it is necessary to examine the background of the Latvian collaboration debate and the main issues it raises.

In Latvian academic studies – particularly in the 1990s and 2000s – the issue of collaboration has been examined predominantly in relation to the period of the Nazi occupation. These studies directly or indirectly addressed Soviet claims that Latvians were, by definition, Nazi sympathisers and collaborators.¹ Because the Soviet occupation destroyed the Latvian state – despite the fact that the majority of Latvians continued to consider themselves citizens of the Republic of Latvia rather than of the Latvian SSR – there was scepticism regarding the applicability of the term “collaborationism” to the actions of individuals during the Nazi occupation. Nevertheless, these studies did include some conceptual discussion.

Any attempts to address the issue of collaboration with the Soviet occupiers prompted a defensive response, both in the academic community and in public discourse. This reluctance to engage with the communist past stemmed from the fact that significant segments of society – particularly political and cultural elites who had actively participated in dismantling the Soviet system – had also been prominent members of the Soviet nomenklatura. The Latvian Popular Front (LPF) was instrumental in Latvia's return to independence. The LPF was a “united, change-oriented ecosystem”, “which included both

¹ See, for example, Kārlis Kangeris, “Izvēles iespējas: ‘Jaunā Eiropa’, padomju republika vai neatkarīga valsts. Valststiesiskie jautājumi un ‘Lielā politika’ kara gados (1941–1945)”, in: *Latvija Otrajā pasaules karā. Starptautiskās konferences materiāli 1999.gada 14.-15.jūnijs*, Rīga, second edition, Rīga: Latvijas vēstures institūts, 2007, pp. 79–94; Antonijs Zunda, “Kolaborācija vācu okupētajā Latvijā: nostādnes vēstures literatūrā”, in: *Okupācijas režīmi Latvijā 1940.-1956. gadā. Latvijas Vēsturnieku komisijas 2001. gada pētījumi*, second edition, Rīga: Latvijas vēstures institūta apgāds, 2007, pp. 141–164; Antonijs Zunda, “Vācijas okupācijas varas politika Latvijā (1941–1945): vērtējums historiogrāfijā”, in: *Latvija nacistiskās Vācijas okupācijas varā, 1941–1945. Starptautiskās konferences referāti, 2003. gada 12.-13. jūnijs*, Rīga, second edition, Rīga: Latvijas vēstures institūta apgāds, 2007, pp. 17–29; Inesis Feldmanis, *Latvija Otrajā pasaules karā (1939–1945): jauns konceptuāls skatījums*, Rīga: LU Akadēmiskais apgāds, 2012; Andrievs Ezerģailis, “Collaboration in German Occupied Latvia: Offered and Rejected”, in: *Latvija nacistiskās Vācijas okupācijas varā*, pp. 119–140; *Occupation, Collaboration, Resistance: History and Perception. Proceedings of an International Conference 27–28 October 2009 in Riga*, Rīga: Latvijas Okupācijas muzeja biedrība (OMB), 2010.

radical nationalists, moderate communists and representatives of other ethnic groups who found the ideals of the Awakening acceptable”.² More than half of the 138 Supreme Council delegates who supported the restoration of Latvia’s state independence on 4 May 1990 were members of the Communist Party. Several of them, such as Anatolijs Gorbunovs, Imants Daudišs and Alfrēds Čepānis, had held senior positions in the party structures. “It is possible that the ability to distance oneself from the occupation period as a criterion for candidate selection was one of the guarantees of the 1990 election’s success”.³ Calls for full-scale lustration were not well received by the public in the 1990s. Defensive stances – such as the notion that almost everyone was an accessory or that everyone was a victim of the Soviet regime – were reinforced by accusations of collaboration with the KGB that were frequently deployed for political gain, particularly during election campaigns.

Collaborationism as a problem in public discourse

Over the past decade, two issues have dominated public debate. One is the publication of a card catalogue of Latvian KGB informers. The need to make the catalogue public was first discussed in the 1990s, but reluctance to identify KGB informers has been reinforced by concerns regarding the incompleteness of the material and the possibility of its manipulation by the KGB. Between 1994 and 2015, the cases of 298 individuals were examined to determine whether they had collaborated with the KGB. In most cases where the only source was information from the catalogue, the courts concluded that there was insufficient evidence to prove an individual’s involvement with the KGB.⁴ Few of the individuals listed in the catalogue have admitted to being KGB informants.⁵

Until 2018, the issue of former KGB agents primarily received media and public attention during Saeima and municipal elections. Historian Jānis Taurēns notes that this attention was situational; there has been relatively little investigative journalism, and the press has not devoted extensive coverage to these issues.⁶ Established in 2015, the KGB Scientific Research Commission significantly advanced the academic study of the topic,

² *Latvijas Republikas dibinātāji un atjaunotāji: Personas un laikmets, compiled by Gatis Krūmiņš*, Rīga: Latvijas Mediji, 2020, p. 114.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

⁴ Juris Stukāns, “Tiesu nolēmumu analīze par sadarbības ar LPSR Valsts drošības komiteju fakta konstatēšanu”, in: K. Jarinovska (scientific ed.), *VDK zinātniskās izpētes komisijas raksti, 1. sējums. Totalitārisma sabiedrības kontrole un represijas*, Rīga: LPSR Valsts drošības komitejas zinātniskās izpētes komisija, Latvijas Universitāte, 2016, pp. 116–144.

⁵ One of the few cases was the confession of physician and politician Georgs Andrejevs in 1994. Georgs Andrejevs, “Tā, tas nu ir pateikts! Atklāta vēstule maniem vēlētājiem, draugiem un 5. Saeimas deputātiem”, *Diena*, 28 May 1994, special issue, pp. 17–19.

⁶ Jānis Taurēns, “LPSR Valsts drošības komitejas ārštata darbinieku, aģentu un informatoru identitātes un tiesas procesi par sadarbības fakta ar VDK konstatēšanu: apspriešana presē un publiskajā telpā”, in: *VDK zinātniskās izpētes komisijas raksti, 4. sējums. Lielais Brālis Tevi vēro: VDK un tās piesegstruktūras*, Rīga: LPSR Valsts drošības komitejas zinātniskās izpētes komisija, Latvijas Universitāte, 2017, p. 124.

but its principal achievement was the public release of KGB agent record cards in 2018.⁷ The publication of the names of informants significantly intensified media coverage and public debate on the issue.

After Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Latvia's public space underwent yet another phase of de-Sovietisation, including the removal of street names and monuments associated with Soviet or Russian domination that had survived the initial de-Sovietisation phase in the 1990s. The most visible outcome of public pressure was the 2022 dismantling of the "Monument to the Liberators of Soviet Latvia and Riga from the German Fascist Invaders" in Uzvaras (Victory) Park in Riga. Since the 1990s, this memorial complex has been a point of conflict. Over time, it developed into Latvia's principal memorial site, where large-scale commemorations of the Soviet Union's victory over Nazi Germany on 9 May were held in the 2000s and 2010s.

Public pressure was directed at a few other monuments as well. Perhaps the most controversial discussions concerned the monument to the writer and Soviet collaborator Andrejs Upītis (1877–1970) in front of the Congress Hall in the capital. There were also calls to close the Andrejs Upītis Memorial Museum in central Riga and the Andrejs Upītis Memorial House in Skrīveri. Although this has been an issue since 1988, the most recent round of debate has been particularly heated. Given Upītis's complex and controversial legacy and his contribution to Latvian literature, discussions surrounding him have been especially contentious. Literary scholar Andris Koroševskis argues that Upītis's support for the Soviet occupation in 1940 was a logical step in his political development, which began at the turn of the 20th century with the aim of "working and living in a socialist country and society".⁸

Upītis's case is central to many Latvian debates on collaboration and is representative of smaller-scale discussions that reflect public interest in cultural collaborationism.⁹ Cultural figures were often held to higher standards than the broader public, given the important role they were seen to play as moral leaders during the Soviet totalitarian period. This perspective assumes that such figures possessed greater agency, in contrast to "ordinary" individuals, who lacked agency and were mere playthings and victims of strong historical forces. Cultural elites were thus considered capable of making informed choices and anticipating the consequences of their actions.

⁷ Available on the Latvian National Archives website: www.kgb.arhivi.lv.

⁸ Arnis Koroševskis, *Lielais noliedzējs: Andrejs Upītis*, Rīga: Dienas Grāmata, 2022, p. 363.

⁹ Ilmārs Šlāpins, "Sirdsapziņas noplēšamais talons", *Rīgas Laiks*, April 2003; Gunita Nagle, "Nepieradināmais Ojārs Vācietis", *Diena*, 11 April 2003; Elita Veidemane, "Lieciet beigām Matisonam mieru!", *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze*, 24 October 2008; Skaidrite Lasmane, Didzis Bērziņš, "Pakļaušanās paradums un pretošanās", in: Vilis Lācis, *Ceļojums uz Norieta pilsētu*, Rīga: Divpadsmīt, 2012, pp. 291–303.

Naturally, debates concerning well-known and revered cultural figures may offer a more nuanced perspective on the political context of their actions and prompt individuals to reflect on how they themselves might have responded in comparable circumstances. One such example is a recent television debate on the role of the poet Ojārs Vācietis in the repression of his secondary school classmate in 1951.¹⁰ However, personalising the problem of collaborationism tends to reduce it to binary oppositions – “traitor” versus “victim”, “bad” individuals versus “good”, and so on – and to narrow it down to questions of personal motives and individual guilt.

Can the 1970s and 1980s be discussed in terms of collaboration and collaborationism?

In general, collaborationism is most often associated with the 1940s and 1950s, when Stalinism was at its peak and the Soviet Union was at its most totalitarian. This was a period when the regime pursued both its open enemies and those suspected of disloyalty with equal brutality. Although cooperation with the Soviet authorities may in some cases have been voluntary, it was often coerced through extortion and threats of death directed at individuals or their loved ones. Collaborators were frequently victims of the totalitarian regime rather than willing traitors, and should therefore be treated with greater empathy, or at least with a degree of understanding. While established typologies and classifications of collaboration and collaborationism can be applied to analyse the attitudes and behaviour of political and cultural elites, scholarship on this period has generated relatively little productive debate.

When discussing the 1970s and 1980s, the situation becomes considerably more complex. The concept of collaboration was originally developed to describe situations involving the cooperation of an occupied country with its occupiers, typically during World War II. In such contexts, the occupation only lasted a few years. As can also be seen in the case of Andrejs Upīts, the views, attitudes and conceptual frameworks of both collaborationists and resistance fighters were often shaped long before the occupation. However, the Soviet occupation of Latvia and the other Baltic States extended over several generations, amounting to roughly half a century. The occupying power represented a totalitarian regime with a highly specific set of views, and younger generations were exposed to – and raised in accordance with – its values and norms. People learned the Soviet way of life, as well as its political and ideological vocabulary, as they adapted to the regime. Engagement with the political system was largely unavoidable, even for ardent opponents. Even in the more liberal post-Stalinist period, the system remained a restrictive political, social and economic structure that offered very limited possibilities for organising one’s life outside

¹⁰ Zane Ozoliņa, “Ojāra Vācieša ziņojums, pēc kura izsūtīja skolas biedru. Vai jaunības izvēle maina dzejnieka daļiņas vērtējumu?”, *LSM.lv*, 5 February 2026.

it. Furthermore, with very few exceptions, citizens were unable to leave the USSR through emigration. Over time, people became accustomed to the Soviet regime, and few believed they would ever live to see a democratic political system or the restoration of Latvia's independence.

In previous publications, I proposed using attitudes towards Latvian statehood as a criterion for analysing the extent to which individuals and social groups engaged in collaboration with Soviet and Nazi authorities (following Hoffmann's distinction between collaboration and collaborationism).¹¹ This criterion is readily applicable to the initial phase of the Soviet occupation in June and July 1940, and can also be applied effectively to subsequent developments under both Soviet and Nazi rule. It is likewise applicable to the second Soviet occupation following World War II, as both the general population and members of the national resistance continued to hope for the restoration of an independent state. In my opinion, the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution in the mid-1950s, which made it clear that no external forces were willing or able to support the restoration of independent statehood, marked a turning point. As a consequence of the Cold War international order, Latvia remained within the Soviet Union. The defeat of the Latvian national communists in 1959 dealt a further blow, demonstrating that aspirations for greater autonomy – even within the Soviet system – were completely unrealistic. In this context, the applicability of the statehood criterion in assessing the political conduct of the general population or of particular individuals may be called into question.

In the late 1980s, the goal of restoring Latvian statehood became increasingly attainable. It is possible to revisit the concepts of collaboration and collaborationism from 31 May 1989, when the LPF called for a public discussion on the restoration of independence. From this point onwards, an individual's attitude towards this objective became a decisive factor in determining their political position in Latvia.¹²

I revised my approach to this issue after conducting research on Latvian elites in the 1970s and 1980s. The notion that Latvia had been an independent state, that it was under occupation, and that the Soviet system had been imposed on Latvians continued to circulate and remained part of the public consciousness. This understanding was shared even by those who voluntarily collaborated with the regime. Individuals who were part of the local nomenklatura during the 1960s and 1970s were born in independent Latvia and were fully aware of how Soviet power had been established in Latvia and how it was perceived,

¹¹ Daina Bleiere, "Par kolaborāciju: definīcijas, klasifikācija, pielietojamība vācu un padomju okupācijas pētniecībā Latvijā", *Latvijas Vēstures Institūta Žurnāls*, 2014, No. 2, pp. 139–167; Daina Bleiere, "Collaboration and Resistance: Definitions, Classification and Their Application in Research on the Nazi and Soviet Occupations in Latvia", in: Valters Nollendorfs, Valter Ščerbinskis (eds.), *The Impossible Resistance: Latvia between Two Totalitarian Regimes (1940–1991)*, Rīga: Zinātne, 2021, pp. 16–46.

¹² Bleiere, "Collaboration and Resistance", pp. 30–31.

even if they were critical of the popular myth of the “good old Ulmanis times”. To some extent, collaborationism was reinforced by Soviet imperial policies of socialist industrialisation, Russification and increased immigration to Latvia from neighbouring republics, which strengthened Latvians’ pessimistic perceptions of their nation’s prospects for survival. Therefore, the issues of statehood and the survival of Latvians as a nation and cultural entity became intertwined. The focus shifted towards the physical and cultural survival of the Latvian nation. Collaboration with the dictatorship came to be seen as a necessity for that survival. It is important to understand the distinction Hoffmann draws in this context between *collaboration* and *collaborationism*. He defines *collaboration* as cooperation between a defeated country and a victorious power: its aim is to preserve or restore the state and it is guided by patriotic considerations.¹³ In the circumstances of Latvia in the 1960s and 1970s, however, collaboration acquired a somewhat different meaning: it was perceived as necessary to ensure the survival of the Latvian nation from the imperial pressures of the Soviet state and system. It was widely believed that, in order to resist Soviet imperialism, “decent” Latvians were needed in positions of political, administrative and cultural leadership.

Hoffmann defines *collaborationism* as voluntary and often enthusiastic cooperation with an adversary for reasons of self-interest or ideology. It is true that collaborationism may be mistaken for collaboration, and that the distinction between the two is often ambiguous. Attitudes within Latvian society towards cooperation with the Soviet authorities underwent significant changes in the 1970s and even more so in the 1980s. According to my research on the Komsomol nomenklatura in Latvia, as well as on local elites in rural districts, only a small proportion of the Latvians whose biographies were examined came from families with overtly pro-Soviet or collaborationist backgrounds (such as Soviet activists of the 1940s, Party members, KGB officers, police officers, members of the destruction battalions, etc.). Improved living conditions, higher income, professional opportunities and vertical mobility were the main factors behind individuals’ decisions to join the Komsomol or pursue a career within the Communist Party. Socialisation within the system had certain intergenerational effects. According to an analysis of the backgrounds of ethnic Latvian Komsomol secretaries in rural and urban areas, few came from families that had engaged in collaboration in 1940–1941 or in the years immediately following World War II. However, their parents had already attained a degree of social or professional standing within the Soviet system as Party members, middle- and lower-level administrators, or similar.¹⁴ The next generation found it psychologically easier to increase

¹³ Stanley Hoffmann, “Collaborationism in France during World War II”, *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (September 1968), pp. 375–395, <<http://www.jstor.org>>.

¹⁴ Daina Bleiere, “Agenten des Wandels? Der Komsomol und seine Funktionäre in der Lettischen SSR in den 1970er Jahren”, *Forschungen zur baltischen Geschichte*, 2024, Vol. 19, pp. 125–152, <https://doi.org/10.30965/9783657797141_006>. URL: <<https://brill.com/display/book/9783657797141/BP000013.xml>>.

their level of engagement with the system because their parents were already involved in it. This suggests that internal resistance to the Soviet regime within Latvian society diminished with each successive generation. At the same time, however, the Soviet system itself was deteriorating. Even the Party nomenklatura began to regard ideological collaborationism as outdated. The ethnic Latvian component of the nomenklatura often appealed to national culture and positioned itself as the custodian of national identity in an attempt to gain legitimacy.

Latvians were comparatively underrepresented in key political posts, such as the Central Committee of the Latvian Communist Party and the apparatus of the Riga City Party Committee, as they constituted less than 40% of the membership of the Communist Party of Latvia in the mid-1980s. Despite their exclusion from many strategically significant positions, Latvians were dominant in certain sectors. This was the result of calculated policy decisions made in Moscow following the defeat of the Latvian national communists in 1959. Latvians were ousted from the Soviet Union's most important sectors, including rail, air and sea transport, and manufacturing, as well as the repressive apparatus. However, they retained and at times even strengthened their position in culture and education, as this sphere was regarded as a privileged domain of titular nationalities in the Soviet republics. Latvians also managed to hold onto power within certain sectors in the capital city of Riga and the major industrial towns, but their standing was the strongest in rural areas. According to my most recent study on the composition of local elites in three rural Latvian districts during the 1980s, Latvians accounted for nearly 90.9% of the local nomenklatura in Talsi district¹⁵ and 88.2% in Cēsis district.¹⁶ In striking contrast, Ludza district had a sizable Russian population in the past, and following World War II, local elites were often supplemented by individuals from neighbouring Russia. In this district, Latvians accounted for only 35.5% of the local elite.¹⁷ However, there were relatively few rural areas similar to Ludza district, most of which were located in the Latgale region. Consequently, districts with a Latvian majority within the nomenklatura played a decisive role in the process of restoring independent statehood.

The scope of action available to Latvian elites was expanded by Brezhnev's attempts to stabilise the local nomenklatura in the 1970s. Previously, the periodic rotation of elites was a key mechanism used by both Stalin and Khrushchev in Latvia and other Soviet republics to combat localism – the formation of close-knit groups inclined to prioritise local interests over those of Moscow. During the 1950s and 1960s, party officials and administrators

¹⁵ Latvian State Archives of the Latvian National Archives (LNA LSA), FPA-4152_US52_GV21–24; US53_GV131–132; US55_GV162, 164–165; US57_GV139–146; US63_GV6–13. 165 personal files of the nomenklatura were analysed.

¹⁶ LNA LSA, FPA-4155_US57_GV138–154; US59_GV160, 211–245, 247–259, 261; US61_GV17–21; US63_GV6. 255 personal files of the nomenklatura were analysed.

¹⁷ LNA LSA, FPA-4136_US61_GV26–43. 152 personal files of the nomenklatura were analysed.

in agriculture and other sectors were regularly transferred between districts within Latvia. In the 1970s and 1980s, however, the stability of local elites increased significantly.¹⁸ The vast majority of local officials during this period were either native to the district or had strong familial or professional ties to it. As a result, local elites became increasingly embedded in local society. This development became the main reason why local authorities in most rural areas did not obstruct the pro-independence movement when it emerged and, in many cases, actively supported it.

In rural areas, a locally born Soviet elite emerged that was able to consolidate itself, provide a degree of stability, and partially balance the influence of groups that were associated with members of the military, repressive and party apparatuses that had come to Latvia during the occupation period and were seen as representing imperial interests. The Latvian-born elite attached considerable importance to the question of national identity, despite the fact that open discussion of it had been prohibited following the defeat of the national communists in 1959. These topics could be discussed publicly with the introduction of the USSR's policies of perestroika and glasnost, which addressed previously suppressed issues such as the events of 1959, Latvia's perceived imperial economic exploitation, changes in ethnic composition, and ethnic tensions. This led to something of an explosion of public consciousness, which also affected processes of self-identification within the Komsomol apparatus and the Communist Party. The National Awakening and the restoration of independence were significantly shaped by this context. Some officials actively engaged in politics, and many expressed support for the restoration of independence and for the LPF.

The idea of collaboration as a means of maintaining national identity rests on the assumption that those engaged in such activity acted with purpose and determination, and this is often how people present their behaviour. However, not everyone was motivated by high ideals; many advanced their careers simply because they were able to adapt to the system or were driven by self-serving, egoistic goals. Collaboration in the name of preserving national identity may therefore also function as a justification for careerism. It is difficult to engage in an entirely honest discussion of where collaboration ends and collaborationism begins, even though many attempts are made to explain, if not excuse, such behaviour, leaving the boundary between the two inherently blurred.

The changes made possible by perestroika were significantly facilitated by individuals who had previously collaborated with the regime but were able to assume responsibility and articulate objectives grounded in national interests (as they understood them at the time). If Jānis Peters, chairman of the Writers' Union, and Džemma Skulme, head of

¹⁸ For more on this trend at the level of provincial Party leadership, mostly in Slavic republics, see: Yoram Gorlizki, Oleg Khlevniuk, *Substate Dictatorship: Networks, Loyalty, and Institutional Change in the Soviet Union* (Yale-Hoover Series on Authoritarian Regimes), New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020.

the Artists' Union, had not supported the LPF in its early stages, its development would have been significantly hampered. In addition, even the more cautious members of the Latvian elite were often compelled to lend support to the Awakening, as they had to take their immediate social and professional environment into account, particularly given their concentration in specific regions and sectors. Whereas social adaptation typically proceeds gradually, in this case it unfolded with the force of an avalanche. Just two years after the first open demonstration on 14 June 1987 – a flower-laying ceremony at the Freedom Monument in Riga organised by the opposition group Helsinki-86 – the LPF issued its 31 May 1989 declaration and formally began discussions on the restoration of Latvia's independence.

Party elites initially attempted to employ containment strategies during those two years, which included ignoring or suppressing the people who were trying to introduce new ideas. Fear of Moscow's reprisals was one factor, but it is also important to note that the elite, particularly the Party nomenklatura, was embedded in the system and needed time to adjust to the new circumstances.¹⁹ Next came syncretism, the incorporation of elements of new ideas into pre-existing frameworks.²⁰ Both phases – containment and syncretism – are evident in Latvia in 1987–1988, when the so-called reform communists constructed a historical narrative of 20th-century Latvia that integrated both Soviet and interwar Latvian perspectives in an effort to reconcile society with the Soviet system. These efforts also included attempts to develop the idea of the republic's economic self-sufficiency. However, when pro-imperial and pro-independence positions emerged as the main political dividing line in 1989, these efforts were abandoned.

The distinction between collaborationists and collaborators, which was not always clear prior to 1987, became more apparent as pro-independence sentiment grew. For instance, Alfrēds Rubiks was relatively popular until 1988, when he was the chairman of the Riga City Executive Committee. However, when he was the leader of the pro-Moscow Communist Party of Latvia from 1990 to 1991, he became extremely unpopular as one of the most committed opponents of independence. The dividing line between supporters and opponents of the restoration of Latvian statehood became more distinct. This increasingly clear distinction played a fundamental role in the political struggle for independence, but it did not eliminate questions of personal responsibility, degrees of collaboration or the consequences of ethical and political choices for individuals.

¹⁹ For example, Anatolijs Gorbunovs admitted in 1997 that his views had changed slowly. He knew what had happened in 1959: "It seemed to me that the Latvians had rushed something back then, so I thought I should try to achieve it somehow more gradually." Karina Pētersone, Ilze Būmane, *Valstsvīrs: Anatolijs Gorbunovs*. Rīga: Zvaigzne ABC, 2020, p. 97.

²⁰ Margaret S. Archer, *Culture and Agency: The Place of Culture in Social Theory*, revised edition, Cambridge, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 192–195.

Conclusion

In the wake of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the release of the KGB informant catalogue, discussions about cooperation with the Soviet regime have intensified over the past decade. However, in-depth analysis of the issue and investigative journalism remain scarce. Although academic studies on collaborationism have contributed to a more nuanced approach to public debate, this has not been sufficient.

Discussions of collaboration tend to focus on the 1940s and 1950s, while the 1970s and 1980s receive far less attention. One reason for this is that political behaviour that can be described as collaboration was relatively widespread, and many individuals who can be classified as collaborators, or even collaborationists, played a significant role in various processes connected to the restoration of national statehood and remained active in politics, public administration and other fields. These factors contribute to the relative reluctance to address this topic directly.

The primary criterion for distinguishing between collaboration and collaborationism is the attitude towards national statehood. This criterion is particularly difficult to apply to the period from the 1960s to the mid-1980s, when allegiance to an independent Latvian state could not serve as a benchmark, as the Cold War international order offered no realistic prospect of the country regaining independence in the foreseeable future. In this context, the issue of cooperation shifted towards questions of allegiance to the Latvian people's survival (their physical existence and the preservation of their language and culture), as well as their role in the republic's governance and economy. When the restoration of independent statehood became a realistic objective in 1989, questions of loyalty to the state again became central.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that collaboration and collaborationism are analytical concepts, and applying them to the behaviour of specific individuals may lead to their use as labels or as a means of expressing disapproval of certain individuals. These categories help to avoid reducing complex phenomena to simple dichotomies such as "compliance" versus "resistance" or "victims" versus "oppressors", and instead enable a more nuanced description and analysis of occupation contexts and attitudes towards the occupying power. Both collaboration and collaborationism are situational and contingent, and do not necessarily reflect a stable or defining characteristic of an individual. In certain contexts, the same individual may be both a collaborationist and a participant in the resistance. This issue therefore requires further research and discussion regarding typology, classification, and the applicability of these concepts.

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This article was written with the financial support of the Latvian Council of Science, project "Navigating the Latvian History of the 20th–21st Century: Social Morphogenesis, Legacy and Challenges" (No VPP-IZM-Vēsture-2023/1-0003).