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Towards an Anthropology of Collaboration in Eastern Europe

Comments on Rafael

Steven Sampson

Vincente Rafael's discussion of collaboration, rhetoric and rumor in the Philippines can aptly be applied to the postrevolutionary situation in Eastern Europe. The euphoria of the 1989 revolutions in these countries masks some more enigmatic facts. In particular, we tend to overlook the fact that these regimes reproduced themselves for over 4 decades. Moreover, the mechanisms behind this reproduction were not simply force or violence, but more sophisticated.

In short, the East European regimes were regimes of collaboration.

Our understanding of collaboration has been limited by its politicized context. Collaborators are by definition traitors, people who cooperate with occupying powers or dictatorial regimes. Collaborators are losers in a political struggle, whose evaluation and mythologization is always the work of the winners. Hence, the sacrifice and courage of the resistance fighter is contrasted with the opportunism and immorality of the collaborator. Our histories of "the resistance" are glorious. Revolutionaries write their memoires. Collaborators keep silent. There is a "Museum of the Resistance" in even the smallest European village. There are no museums of collaboration.

Nevertheless, collaboration seems to characterize society's relations with even the most brutal occupying powers or repressive regimes. The collaboration may take the form of local elites being coopted by the occupiers. Or it may be more widespread, as when an entire society tries to live a "normal life" under wartime conditions, or under conditions of repression as existed in Eastern Europe up until 1989. Those who resisted, be they resistors in wartime, or East Europe's dissidents, remained the exception.

Our explanations for collaboration seem to fall into two types. One explanation focuses on the psychological weakness on the part of the collaborator. The weakness may be either an overt opportunism or naive ignorance ("Had I only known", is a typical defense of the collaborator on

If one judges from the statements of collaborators, however, they [were] neither ruthless nor naive. Many considered themselves to be [ge]ne patriots. Norway's Quisling was one of these. The Filipino elite another instance. There is a heroic, martyr-like aspect to many collaborators. Some of them demonstrated courage in collaborating despite the [resistan]ce of resistors in their communities, villages, and countries. [Mo]reover, some well known collaborators later judged as psychologi[cally u]nbalanced seem to have been upstanding citizens before they col[labora]ted. Quisling was Defense Minister in the 1930's. By the time of his [execut]ion in 1945 he was viewed as politically unrealistic, messianic, and [menta]lly unbalanced. It is convenient to classify collaborators in these [ways] because it turns a social, collective process into a psychopathology. [A] second explanation for collaboration avoids the psychological mo[tives o]f collaborators. Collaboration is here seen as a normal process of the [exerci]ze of power and relations of power. Collaboration in this sense is [viewe]d as simply one course of action in a society under pressure. [Collab]orators "had no choice". Subject to the pressures or threats of dicta[torial] regimes or occupying powers, those who collaborate are guiltless, [mere] objects of history. Collaboration is here made equivalent with [survi]val".

[Th]is latter explanation is convenient in the political restructurings [that] take place after a war or revolution. Collaboration is the rule, not [the exc]eption, during wartime. Of course, most collaborators never go on [tribal be]cause it would wreak havoc in society at large. The stigma of col[laborat]ion tends to be limited to collaborating elites. These individuals go [on tria]l, and are accused of opportunism, treason or meglomania. They re[ceive] ike Norway's Quisling or the author and Nazi sympathizer Knud [Hamsu]n, a public trial resulting in execution or punishment. The under[lings] and minor collaborators - the small Quislings - go free. They [reinst]ate the image of their being victims, of having had no choice, or of [having] been overly naive. Whereas collaborating elites are punished, the [masses] are viewed as innocent. They "had no choice" but to collaborate. [The] problem with these two kinds of explanations for collaboration is [that it] akes the subject out of history. The collaborator is viewed as a psy[cholog]ical deviant or as an innocent victim. This is understandable in [view o]f the kinds of pressures societies undergo during dictatorship, [revolut]ion or occupation. Collaboration represents a kind of individual [compr]omise, and compromise is "polluting". Putting collaborators on trial [and foc]using on them as individuals helps society to absolve itself. By

memorializing collaborators as individuals, society forgets its general complicity.

Let us try to separate collaboration as a process from the statements and justifications of collaborators. Let us instead view collaboration as one possible type of relation between regime and society.

Doing this, we might distinguish a continuum, with resistance on one end, and collaboration and support on the other.

Hence, we might have four different types of relations between the oc- cupying/dictatorial regime and society:

1. Collective forms of resistance: revolution, revolt, guerilla warfare, de- monstrations, banditry, etc.

2. Individual acts of resistance: sabotage, refusing to cooperate or make expressions of support, lying, cheating, swindling, arson, gossip, slander, character assassination, what Scott (1987) has called "everyday forms of resistance".

3. Passive acceptance. Leading a "normal life" as if the abnormal circum- stances did not exist.

4. Collaboration, aiding and abetting a dictatorial regime or occupying power.

The line between the various forms of power relations is fluid. It depends on circumstances of a social and political nature, and on the psychological disposition of the population. Hence, those who passively accept a regime may suddenly turn into revolutionaries, while those who revolt against it may under certain circumstances become collaborators. Yugoslavia's par- tisans, despite their heroic mythology in fighting against the Germans, also collaborated with the German army in their struggle against fellow allies, the Yugoslav Royalists.

Like other types of collective action, collaboration involves not just ac- tions but their justifications. Revolutionaries' justifications - their ideolo- gies - are usually taken seriously by nonrevolutionaries and by those who analyze collective action generally. Collaborators' justifications, however, are usually dismissed as sheer rationalization or opportunism. Yet these ideologies pervade collaborative activities and tend to make life bearable for collaborators. For example, Rafael shows that Filipino elite collabora- tion was based on their view of trying to help the masses by acting as a

tween them and the Japanese. In the same way an East
riter who consented to having his work censored by the
t still see himself as a spokesman suffering a punishment in
eve a higher, patriotic, good ("Better a real writer than a party

pology of collaboration would then try to explore the relation
e actions and ideologies in their social and historical context.
hropology would try to account for why collaboration oc-
mass scale in some places and why there was resistance in
vay had a Quisling, but also Quislings. Denmark during the
ciety dominated by passive, resigned acceptance, which some
tantamount to collaboration (see Deak's [1990] assertion and
by the Danish Royal Historian Kaarsted). Yugoslavia had a
ne in Croatia, and a courageous resistance movement in other
country. Poland under the Nazis had no Quisling, but under
ists had collaborators who were as ruthless.
rn Europe the issue of collaboration takes on special signifi-
Europeans are seeking to explain (and explain away) four
communist rule. Yet much of this rule was based on a complic-
regime and members of society, party bureaucrats, workers,
and intellectuals. Communist rule entailed collaboration on a

oria over the revolutions has prevented us from asking more
tions, in particular, "How did these mechanisms of collabo-
e?" The revolutions have taken place in such a way that the
ing collaborators remain not only unjudged publicly, but
occupy the same positions. For the first time, collaborators are
tory as they see it. Moreover, they are confusing our cate-
g themselves heroes, victims and resistors. This is especially
nia, where the line between repression and collaboration was
re extent that collaboration, dissidence, and resistance all
ach other, and where dissidents are now being called collabo-

standing of the communist period in Eastern Europe entails
ding of collaboration. To understand postcommunist politics
and otherwise - also entails an understanding of how the
d ideologies of collaboration can change.
ontext, let us examine aspects of collaboration in Eastern

Collaboration in Eastern Europe

Rafael has outlined how collaboration in the Philippines took place when local elites cooperated and spoke for the Japanese occupiers. Communist Eastern Europe is also largely a result of Soviet occupation, which in some places simply replaced German occupation. The Soviets tended to bring in exiled communists who had spent the war years in Moscow, or to pro-mote local communists, who took orders from Soviet commissars. In some East European countries the communist party was so small that party leaders were often viewed as a foreign element. Indeed many of the par-ties had leaderships dominated by members of ethnic minorities, whether they be Jews and Ukrainians in Poland, Jews, Bulgarians and Hungarians in Romania, etc.

The first decade of communist rule in Eastern Europe was also a pe-riod of widespread repression using the aid of an occupying army. The regimes established secret police systems which neutralized or repressed opposition. In such a situation it became natural for some people and groups to choose the option of collaboration. In the early 1950's the collab-oration manifested itself as privileges and power given to party activists and bureaucrats. While a good deal of these individuals were true believ-ers, the vast majority saw entrance into the apparat as an opportunity for personal careers and social advancement.

In the late 60's and 70's, as regimes sought to legitimate themselves on a basis other than simple repression, there arose a second kind of collabo-ration. Known in Soviet Studies as the "social contract" or "social com-pact", this consisted of a kind of grudging cooperation between undemo-cratic regimes and passive society: the "contract" consisted of society giv-ing up its right to assert political demands in return for a degree of social and economic security, the right not to work too hard, to pilfer from the state, and to cultivate a private sphere of materialism and consumerism (Sampson 1987a). The social contract was best expressed by Janos Kadar in 1962 in his famous remark "He who is not against us is with us". To the extent that society acceded to the contract it collaborated in its own repres-sion.

Anyone who questioned the contract - who tried to take back the political sphere, who took their work seriously, or who called attention to the hypocrisy of the public sphere - was considered a dissident, and even a social deviant by society. Such deviants tended to be repressed by the regime, but just as often they were also isolated by society itself.

ere existed in Eastern Europe a third kind of collaboration, regime on the one hand, and intellectuals and other cultural ther. Such intellectuals, perhaps like the Filipino elites under upation, may have received privileges. But they also saw patriots who could use their influence to help less fortunate any such intellectuals tried to pursue their careers in spite of , retreating into esoteric jobs such as medieval history, theo- s or safer occupations such as children's theatre. The line borating and surviving as an intellectual was a fine one, to s incisively depicted by the Polish writer Czeslaw Milosz in nd).

tion in Eastern Europe varied from one regime to another. gime demanded the least collaboration. Poland and post-1956 wed for the expansion of individual and social activities to lly anything which did not directly or publicly challenge the macy of the regime.

vakia and the GDR tolerated less public contestation of the re. Here the only safety valve was a retreat into privatism: house, the West German television station or rock music 2). Passive acceptance and passive resistance was wide- e societies, but so was alienation and frustration.

omania, Bulgaria and Albania represent regimes which de- active collaboration from society: bureaucrats had to carry itical directives, the social contract was more of a "deal" by the regime, and cultural elites had to praise the regime

oid getting in trouble with it (Sampson 1986a). These socie- aded by collaboration.

o accident that the participants in the revolutions here (and ne in Albania) contain a large proportion of those normally laborators. Havel and Mazowiecki have dossiers as dissi- liffer dramatically from that of Romania's Iliescu or Bulga- v, both high party functionaries. These countries seem to ably in the degree to which servants of the former regimes er at the local level.

ion in Eastern Europe did not simply vary from one society also occurred within a larger social and historical context ed varied social responses: resistance by some, passive ac- thers, "social contract" by large sections of society, and op- ideological collaboration by intellectuals.

Part of this context was in the safety valves which characterized the sophisticated way in which power was exercized in Eastern Europe over the last two decades. The Eastern Europe of the 1970's and 1980's was not the same totalitarian style society of the late 40's to 50's. The societies had developed, and the regimes tolerated, various safety valves in their pursuit of legitimacy. The social contract and a less pressing form of col- laboration was part of this safety valve. The second economy was another (Sampson 1987b, 1988). The much discussed lack of work ethic - especially work in the public sector - also contributed. There evolved a "second so- ciety" consisting of informal channels, alternative or parallel social con- sciousness in which different social categories operated, i.e., "us" and "them" (Hankiss 1988; Sampson 1986b; Skilling 1989; Wedel 1986). Rumors and oral communication supplemented the censored, written communications of the regime (Lukasiewicz 1988; Sampson 1984b). Much analysis of East European societies in the 1970's and 1980's noticed this new kind of power relation between regimes and masses (cf. the work of the Hungarian sociologist Hankiss).

The Czech writer Simecka (1982) called this situation one of "civilized violence", in which populations "adapt". Polish sociologists spoke of "covert repression" in terms similar to Marcuse's "repressive tolerance" (Marody 1988). In general, regimes appeared to be legitimate by having the society's collaboration but without social support or legitimacy. The social contract, a legitimacy without democracy, could explain why Eastern Europe was relatively passive for so many decades (Sampson 1984a, 1986a, 1987a, 1988).

The existence of pervasive collaboration led to the evolution of alterna- tive value systems in which a separation of private belief and public action was deemed normal (Sampson 1986b). Milosz (1952) called this phenomenon ketman, a Persian word connoting the ability and even the desire not to reveal one's true intentions to those in power. Ketman is a property of collaboration, since our evaluation of collaboration is based as much on actions as on declarations of support for an occupying power or criminal regime. Yet if, as Milosz states, East European societies were societies of ketman, then these declarations have no meaning.

Indeed, Rafael's discussion of collaboration in the Philippines points in the same direction: the elites who made statements supporting the Japanese made them in a code which made them meaningless; i.e., they used English which made them invalid. In Eastern Europe the collabora- tors' support for the regime, its leaders, and policies were also made in a different language, the language of Marxist dogma, of personality cult, of

struggle, of adoration for all things Soviet. Such language was as
ign" as the English spoken by the Filipine elite.
et collaboration is never a permanent condition. It is, rather, a condi-
which occurs when society is in a state of repression or occupation.
n the relationship between regime and society changes, collaboration
collaborators become objects of social discourse. In the post-occupa-
or in Eastern Europe the post-revolutionary) stage, there takes place
cussion of how much collaboration was too much, of who "was
d" to collaborate and who was "opportunist". At times this discus-
is carried out by former collaborators themselves. Such is the case in
inia.

...laboration and Rewriting History in Romania

inia was known as that East European country which suffered the
comprehensive forms of repression: unlike Poland or Hungary,
inia had no social safety valves in cultural life; nor did it have an elite
allowed for a private sphere. Unlike the GDR or Czechoslovakia,
inia had no safety valve in the economy either. The country was, in
politically repressed, culturally suppressed, and economically poor.
eadership demanded continuous expressions of active loyalty, while
cret police saw to it that dissidents were kept isolated and protests
lly suppressed. Throughout the 1980's Romania distinguished itself
other East European states by its political passivity and lack of
st (Sampson 1984a, 1986a).
rough the Ceausescu period, one safety valve was kept open for
nian society. This was the rhetoric of nationalism, national indepen-
, and eventually Romanian ethnic chauvinism and etatism. Whereas
East European countries had experienced anti-Sovietism and anti-
an feeling as manifestations of *dissidence*, anti-Sovietism and anti-
an feelings were cultivated by Ceausescu himself; they were the pil-
f the Romanian Communist Party's legitimacy and help explain why
escu was relatively popular from the end of the 1960's through the
70's. The acceptance of nationalist rhetoric by most of Romanian so-
meant that those who protested Ceausescu's rule could easily be
ied as "subversive", being in the pay of the KGB or of Hungarian ir-
ists.
e policy of Romanian nationalism and its link with the Ceausescu
e, meant a very unique situation for collaborators. Party bureau-

crats, intellectuals, and society at large could express their hatred or
disgust with Ceausescu as leader, while supporting his nationalist stand.
Moreover, the same individuals who profited by their syncophant atti-
tude toward the regime, the "syncophantocracy", could invoke fear of
Ceausescu's revenge and the repression of the secret police to justify their
actions was survival. More important, the legacy of *ketman* in Romania,
what in Romanian terms is something inherited from a "Balkan
mentality" or Turkish domination, means that all outward signs of
behavior can be dismissed as mere acts of "survival".

This is in line with Orthodox religious views, which place greater
stress on behavioral expressions of faith rather than doctrinal, ideological
commitment. In short, much of Romanian politics was simply theatre.
Those who wrote poems praising Ceausescu, who supported the regime,
did not consider themselves collaborators. Rather, they were *actors*. As ac-
tors they had no need to justify their role. They were simply surviving.

The lack of protest in Romania led to academic discussions and con-
demnations of Romanians' "Balkan legacy" and the degree to which
people sought individual solutions instead of social solidarity (cf. Samp-
son 1984a). Other Romanians insisted that no protest was possible, and
therefore looked with amazement at the handful of dissidents in the
country. A common saying, "the head that bows low does not get cut off
by the sabre," justified passivity and *ketman* as a practical strategy. The
1989 revolutionary rhetoric was initially articulated in terms of Romania
showing to the rest of the world that they indeed had courage. Never-
theless, most Romanians experienced the revolution in the same way as
did those outside the country...by sitting in front of their television sets.

What happened when the revolution of 1989 came? Most striking was
the degree to which several of the regime's highest officials regarded
themselves as guiltless. During the days after the revolt, several of
Ceausescu's highest officials volunteered their services to the revolution-
ary government at the TV station. They were astounded when they were
refused.

Romania's current president, Ion Iliescu, while falling out of favor
with Ceausescu in 1972, nevertheless retained his seat on the Central
Committee until 1984. Iliescu never made a public statement against
Ceausescu nor any of his policies. He, like prime minster Petre Roman, in-
sists that they had no other choice. Yet Iliescu's hagiographers now call
him a "dissident" since 1972. Other high ranking officials in the regime
now maintain that they had plotted to replace Ceausescu for many years,
and were simply preempted by the popular revolt of December 1989

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