

Collaboration in comparative perspective

Stathis N. Kalyvas*

Department of Political Science, Yale University, New Haven, CT USA

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The concept of collaboration is simultaneously contested and multifaceted. Its current political and scholarly use has been largely determined by the events of the Second World War. The term has acquired a pejorative and/or polemical connotation signifying primarily the collaboration of native political forces with the Axis occupiers during the Second World War. In its most polemical dimension, the term has become synonymous with treason and the adoption of a Fascist or Nazi ideological position.

Yet, from a conceptual perspective, this practice is highly restrictive. To begin with, it is hard to come up with a serious theoretical reason for excluding from the concept practices of collaboration with non-Axis forces, e.g. of German or Japanese elites with the Allied occupation forces following the Axis defeat in 1945. In fact, collaboration as a practice is 'as old as war and the occupation of foreign territory'.¹

The concept of 'indirect rule' so essential for understanding colonisation also requires the use of collaboration. To go even further, it is possible to observe that collaboration is an essential feature of both empire and also state-building processes. In spite of this conceptual minefield, convention forces us to use the term in a way compatible with current practices. Even within this restricted conceptual domain, however, collaboration can be analysed across several dimensions.

One dimension refers to the political and legal modalities of collaboration. Did it follow a formal treaty or not? Where those who signed this treaty representative and legitimate political actors?² A second dimension refers to the (non-mutually exclusive) policy areas in which collaboration was practised: was it political, military, or economic.³ A third distinguishes between the primarily political dimension of collaboration and its cultural and social underpinnings. Collaboration by political versus ethnic organisations is a related issue. A fourth dimension entails the study of underlying motivations and distinguishes by forced collaboration (or cooperation), survival-driven collaboration (or *attentisme*), and collaboration that is chosen given acceptable alternatives.⁴ This last category is further distinguished from 'collaborationism' used exclusively for a collaboration based on ideological identification as opposed to state collaboration based on the *raison d'Etat*.⁵ Additionally, it is also possible to disaggregate motivations and dynamics among elites and ordinary citizens. A key issue is understanding whether collaboration is superimposed on pre-existing political cleavages and whether it creates

*Email: stathis.kalyvas@yale.edu

new ones (again, not a mutually exclusive dichotomy). Last, researchers must be able to disaggregate the occupation's demand for collaboration from the societal supply of collaboration: obviously the two eventually converge, but they also vary across contexts.

The complexity and multidimensionality of the phenomenon of collaboration signals both the promise of a research agenda geared toward its comparative study as well as the limits of this collection of articles, which constitute a subset of papers that were presented in a conference on 'Wartime Collaboration in Nazi-occupied Europe 1939–1945,' organised in Florence, at the European University Institute, in October 2005. The initiative was taken by Professor Arfon Rees, and the conference was coordinated by Olga Baranova. Its objective was to bring together papers covering different national experiences as a basis for future comparative research which remains scarce.⁶ Indeed, the comparative study of the European and Asian experiences of collaboration is also scarce. These two literatures do not communicate and it is often cinema, rather than historiography, that uncovers the underlying commonalities, from Louis Malle's *Lacombe Lucien* to Ang Lee's *Lust, Caution*.

The articles that follow point to the richness of the topic and the potential for fruitful comparisons. Olga Baranova relies on several new sources to explore collaboration with German forces in Belarus. She shows how practices of collaboration were closely connected with prewar Soviet policies, describes the Nazi recruitment of Belarusian exiles and, most importantly, turns to the mass level to explore the behaviour of the civilian population which found itself trapped between pro-German collaboration and pro-Soviet resistance. The elements that emerge are the mix of motivations covering everything from survival to hardcore political preferences. As the outcome of the war became clear, however, the population began to move toward the resistance which led to a savage, and counterproductive, policy of reprisals by the occupation authorities. Stathis Kalyvas turns to the Greek case and shows that both collaboration and resistance cannot be understood without taking into account the civil war that raged in the country during the occupation. The focus on military collaboration is enhanced by a regional quantitative analysis showing the 'endogenous' nature of collaborationist recruitment in 1944: the factors that best predict which villages collaborated with the Germans include the extent of previous leftist violence along with the local presence of the German troops. Local military factors, in this particular case, appear to trump purely political considerations in shaping the choice to collaborate. Olga Kucherenko follows a similarly local approach, by focusing on one town, Odessa, which was occupied by Romanian troops. Echoing Baranova's and Kalyvas' analysis, she finds that prewar factors coupled with local dynamics best account for the type and extent of collaboration, which was characterised by a broad mix of motives.

Moving from Eastern and South-eastern Europe to the West, Fabian Lemmes covers both political and economic collaboration in France. He finds that, although ideologically motivated collaboration was rare, most firms cooperated with the occupation authorities out of expediency. Even within this framework, however, he uncovers a multiplicity of motives and practices behind this activity. His Western parenthesis is followed by the contribution of Milan Ristović, who examines the ideology crafted by Serbian collaborationists which was based on a retreat in the past: the myth of a return to traditional rural and patriarchal life was supposed to be a response to Serbia's crushing defeat. Whether this ideology had any popular appeal, however, is a different issue. Last, Carla Tonini turns to one of the harshest occupation regimes, that of Poland, where the German demand for collaboration was absent. This feature, combined with a long experience of resistance against foreign rule, helped shape the Polish response to the German occupation.

These papers highlight the methodological possibilities that inhere in the study of collaboration. Many dimensions vary across the landscape of collaboration, including but not limited to the type of defeat; the legal administrative frameworks; the type of political actors who took the initiative of collaboration; the intentions and policies of the occupation authorities vis-à-vis the occupied countries. At the same time, these papers also point to some commonalities: the fluidity of collaboration; the mix of motivations ranging from survival and pragmatism to outright ideological preferences; the connection of collaboration with the prewar national politics of the occupied countries, but also the potential that collaboration and resistance had for reshaping past allegiances. It is clear that collaboration (like resistance) as a political option cannot be understood in isolation from the *longue durée* of politics, as the occupation often proved to be a new episode in an ongoing political struggle; at the same time, these papers also suggest that collaboration as an individual choice at the mass level was often shaped endogenously by the war itself. Finally, most of these papers show the relevance of a local perspective for making sense of processes and dynamics that are either lost or misinterpreted at higher levels of aggregation.

Notes

1. Hirschfeld, 'Collaboration', 1.
2. Paxton, 'La collaboration d'Etat', 351–2.
3. Estes, *A European Anabasis*.
4. Durand, *Le nouvel ordre*, 10; Röhr, 'Okkupation und Kollaboration', 62–3.
5. Hoffmann, 'Collaborationism'.
6. For example, Davies, *Dangerous Liaisons*; Bennett, *Under the Shadow of the Swastika*.

Notes on contributor

Stathis N. Kalyvas is Arnold Wolfers Professor of Political Science at Yale, where he also directs the Program on Order, Conflict, and Violence. He is the author of, among others, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge, 2006).

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