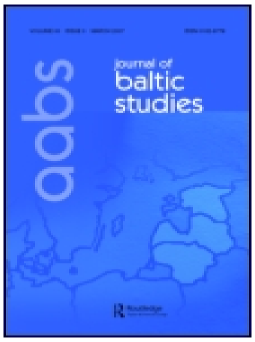

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Karsten Brüggenmann

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Foreign Rule and Collaboration in the Baltic Countries, 1860-1920. New Directions in Research

Guest Editor's Preface

Karsten Brüggemann, Tartu Ülikool Narva Kolledž, Estonia/ Nordost-Institut, Lüneburg, Germany

Foreign rule has been a reality in the Baltic lands for centuries. If we leave aside for a second the proud Grand Duchy of Lithuania during the Middle Ages, then Danes, (Baltic) Germans, Swedes, Poles and Russians have been the masters in this region. A history under foreign rule -- this, at least, is the common perception of Baltic history if one takes for granted the point of view of the three nations that inhabit this region and from which today's national states received their respective names. Yet this perspective is bound to our epoch, and would have sounded quite alien to, say, a Baltic German landlord some hundred years ago. The latter would have referred to the fact that his ancestors came to the eastern shores of the Baltic Sea centuries ago, claiming these shores as his homeland, too. Why should he be called a foreigner to these lands? Our common understanding of "foreign" rule therefore appears to be dependent upon another powerful political and moral concept in twentieth-century history -- the right of every nation to self-determination and, by extension, the dominant discourse of nationality (see the new critical contribution by Koller 2005).

The conception of foreign rule essentially requires a "Self," most often in the form of a weaker group that is dominated and/or governed by an "Other," stronger entity. Foreign rule may be the result of capitulation, conquest, expansion, annexation or occupation. It may last for centuries and can in exceptional cases even change from "foreign" rule to "our" rule. Alternatively, it may last only a few weeks. Its character can be total or partial, colonial or military. Since the very concept of "foreignness" has experienced many changes throughout history, we may confine our topic to the national perceptions of "foreign" rule that were increasingly apparent in the Baltic region from the second half of the nineteenth century, and which derived from the so-called "national awakening" amongst the Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians. In these cases "foreign" can therefore be understood as meaning German or Russian, although it is sometimes quite difficult to differentiate these national perceptions from those of social foreignness -- e.g. of the culturally and socially foreign landlord (in Estonian, not incidentally, the word for "master" (*saks*) derives from the common word for "German" (*sakslane*)), or the nationally and politically foreign Bolshevik who could nevertheless be close in social terms.

How people under foreign rule perceive an externally-imposed order, and how they behave within it in order to survive, very much depends upon the quality and duration of the rule in question. In this regard, the concept of "collaboration" (with all of the connotations, especially moral, that this implies) appears to be traditionally connected with the period of the Second World War (Benz 1996; Dieckmann et al. 2003; Gilliatt 2000; Hirschfeld 1984; Röhr 1994). An international conference held at the Lüneburg-based *Nordost-Institut* in November 2003 tried to widen the scope of this debated concept (Krzoska 2003; Tauber 2006). However, during this meeting only Darius Staliūnas tried to apply the concept to the nineteenth century, presenting a paper concerning Russia's "offers of collaboration" in the northwestern provinces of the Tsarist Empire (Staliūnas 2006). Christoph Dieckman has even gone so far as to claim that the term is already "burned out" (Dieckmann 2006). Nevertheless, the participants agreed that a careful *Historisierung* of the concept could help us in getting to grips with its actual use, and thus prove valuable in terms of further research. To this end, one useful approach might be to view an individual's cooperation with foreign administrative structures not in collectively interpreted terms of loyalty and treason, but rather in terms of a person's strategy for coping with foreign domination. In this way, one may discern various considerations of material gain, idealism or simply opportunistic behavior that can be used to classify an individual's activities. According to Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, however, "collaboration" is not possible without a certain level of self-consciousness of a given (national) group (Liulevicius 2006). A particular group identity is certainly needed in order to define the loyalty that a "collaborator" ostentatiously ignores. In the national context, a "patriot" who is prepared to give his or her life for "our" cause assumes the positive role in the popular imagination, while the "collaborator" becomes a despised "traitor." No doubt, every master narrative needs the "traitor" as the "Other" in order to generate cohesive historical myths (see also Donskis 2006).

Although none of the papers presented in this special issue were given at the aforementioned conference, at least three of them still bear the traces of these debates. Of the contributions here, only Brüggemann's paper contains no mention of "collaboration," perhaps because in 2003 he was not yet a member of the *Nordost-Institut* team. The colleagues assembled here presented the first drafts of these papers during the nineteenth

Conference on Baltic Studies that was held in Toronto in June 2004 under the title "Dynamics of Integration and Identity: the Baltics in Europe and the World." It was actually Professor Jüri Kivimäe, the head of program, who first suggested that the entire panel "'Foreign rule' in Russia's *Ostseeprovinzen* before and during the First World War: Problems of Perception and Legitimacy" might be published in JBS as fully elaborated articles. Unfortunately, other obligations have meant that the authors are not able on this occasion to present the results of thorough and detailed research. All the articles herein thus preserve something of their originally intended workshop character. This, incidentally, is the reason why we chose to add the subtitle "new directions in history," so as to make it clear right from the start what is to be expected from our contributions. It should be noted, however, that the texts have benefited considerably from critiques and suggestions provided by anonymous reviewers as part of the overall JBS editorial process.

In this respect, moreover, I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Ralph Tuchtenhagen, who kindly responded to the suggestion that he add his oral comments from the Toronto panel in written form. His contribution is all the more valuable in that it seeks to compare and to systematize four articles that are mainly confined to one period in one country (the common burden of specialization), and therefore provides the reader with a terminological framework for further research.

The first article examines the various possible ways of perceiving foreign domination in the Russian province of *Estliandia* during the period of Estonian "national awakening." Konrad Maier chooses for analysis three prominent figures of the Estonian cultural renaissance during the final third of the nineteenth century who, for their personal behavior, drew completely different conclusions from the political realities of their homeland. Not one of them actually wanted to end Russia's hold over this province, but all of them reacted strongly against German domination. Although Johann Woldemar Jannsen represented the more Germanophile trend within the national movement, he certainly encouraged his co-nationals to emancipate themselves in cultural matters. In the first instance, Carl Robert Jakobson and Ado Grenzstein stand for the two sides of the Russian coin: the first advocated political emancipation from Baltic German tutelage with the help of the tsarist administration, while the second appealed emotionally for a merger with the Slavic nation out of a disappointment with the national achievements of his own people. Maier's text reflects the difficulty in making appropriate use of the term "collaboration." It views this term as valid, but calls for further biographical research in order to adequately interpret the activities of the chosen figures in the context of their own time.

Detlef Henning, in his article, changes the perspective on "collaboration" and "treason." He does not confine his analysis to the period of "national awakening," focusing instead upon prominent figures in Latvian history that are perceived in the popular imagination as "traitors" to national loyalty. Henning discusses the evolution of this stereotype, which was encoded in Latvian national culture at an early stage through the character of Kangars in the national epos *Lāčplēsis* (The Bearslayer). He draws our attention to the fact that although the content of accusation remains the same, the imagined "enemy" has changed throughout the course of history. This can be proven already during the First World War, when the Russian state (previously perceived as a reactionary force following the punitive expeditions of 1905-06) once again became the focus of Latvian loyalty against the common German enemy. Henning therefore demonstrates convincingly that there is no long-term discursive consistency to be found when looking at the negative stereotypes applied to individuals who are excluded from the concept of national "Self." A thorough analysis of such stereotyping in Latvian cultural history (including, incidentally, the Soviet period) still remains to be written.

Joachim Tauber's contribution deals with the members of the *Taryba*, Lithuania's "stubborn collaborators" under German occupation in the First World War. This period witnessed an extreme form of "foreign rule," which highlighted a clear need (and possible use) for collaboration. In sharp contrast to the Estonian Carl Robert Jakobson half a century earlier, who saw the Tsars as the only possible source of support for the political emancipation of his kinsmen, Lithuanian politicians after 1916 turned to the Germans in an attempt to gain the national autonomy which had been denied to them by St. Petersburg. In his intriguing article Tauber makes two things clear about the concept of "collaboration": first, the term is perceived completely differently when the weaker party suddenly assumes superiority; second, successful collaboration can definitively erase "the moral stigma [that is] usually reserved for history's losers," and which is attached to the likes of Pétain, Quisling, Vlasov or other prominent examples from the Second World War. In the case of the Lithuanian *Taryba*, Tauber stresses that the members of this body managed to remain at least partially independent, in that they never supported German intentions without also seeking some advantage for Lithuania (or at least for themselves). In this particular case, however, the German side was split into numerous fractions, thereby presenting the Lithuanians with alternative ways of reacting to German demands. This shows that even military occupation, undoubtedly the most severe form of foreign rule, can be far less strict than it proved to be during the Second World War.

Finally, we are introduced to the "semantic wars" which, according to Karsten Brüggemann, accompanied the Estonian War of Independence. The author argues that the "national" solution for Estonia prevailed over its Bolshevik rival largely because the bourgeois side was able to present its vision of the country's future within the framework of what Estonians had come to accept as their "own" form of rule. The Bolsheviks, for their part, followed the social concept of "own" rule and introduced tactics of class war that downplayed national loyalty and were therefore not acceptable for the majority. Yet even the "national" alternative was not that popular at the time when the Provisional Government took over power from German authorities in November 1918. For the new government to be recognized by Estonians as "our" authority would require social revolutionary decisions to solve the agrarian question and the military victory over the Germans in June 1919. By this stage, however, the Bolshevik alternative in the form of the stillborn "Estonian Worker's Commune" had already been buried by its Moscow masters, who were preparing for peace with the Estonian bourgeoisie. These events show that even in times of victorious revolutionary ideologies, idealism cannot in itself offer any guarantee of eventual success (while also proving once again that the losers of history seldom form the object of serious research). Finally, this article demonstrates that a certain order can be perceived as socially "foreign," even when its protagonists are actually "ours."

The phenomenon of cooperation with foreign rulers that may, in a broader sense, be termed "collaboration" is one of the possible behavioral strategies for an oppressed people under foreign rule. Nevertheless, the criteria according to which some people are called "collaborators" and others "patriots" are far from clear-cut. Just imagine Jannsen being a member of the Communist Party in the 1950s, or Jakobson applying for support from the Soviet bureaucracy and being keen on Soviet culture. The perception of such figures nowadays would definitely have been quite critical. Our moral criteria also appear to be dependent on the quality of perception of a specific form of foreign rule in a given society. The very issue of "collaboration" during Soviet times in the *Sovetskaia Pribaltika* still awaits analytical research, but this question concerns people who are still among us. Of course, not every Soviet Balt deserves the label of "collaborator," maybe not even every Party member. The question from the corresponding Lithuanian debate -- "one can hardly be a collaborator for a hundred years, can one?" -- deserves our attention, because it may be highly dubious to argue that a collaborator is still a collaborator in cases where the foreign order has already lasted for several generations and looks set to endure for the immediate future (Wittig-Marcinkeviciute 2004, 9). The applicability of the concept of "collaboration" during times of prolonged foreign rule may therefore be seriously criticized. Once again, however, each individual case should be carefully checked. Is everyone to be accused who under circumstances of foreign oppression swims with the tide, or does one perhaps have to restrict the verdict of "collaboration" to acceptance and/or use of violence against one's "own" group?

In this case, however, the abilities and power of historians are restricted. If we agree with Paul Ricœur, then the historian's task clearly differs from that of the judge: he/she should seek only to understand history, without judging or excusing anyone (Ricœur 2000, 744). It is therefore not our job to decide whether Niedra was a "traitor," a "collaborator" or a "patriot." Our job is to investigate why he did what he did and why he went the way that he chose. Nevertheless, we do also have to try to explain why Niedra's activities in a specific historic and societal context were/are understood as "treason." In historiography we deal mostly with *post factum* interpretations of events that are employed as part of a specific narrative. In fact, as Tuchtenhagen points out in his commentary, virtually every kind of act can be stigmatized by one group as "collaboration" when it comes to the interests of another "class," "people," or "nation." In this sense, one could perhaps speak of collaboration as just another "imagined" phenomenon in history.

To crack the codes of the Baltic nations' master narratives is indeed a fascinating topic for further research. The promising investigation of the "places of memory" in Estonian history (Tamm 2003)[1] may be one of the directions that can open up a completely new chapter in historiography for the Baltic countries. New research, sometimes conducted far away from the Baltic states (see Brüggemann's overview), may also be fruitful here. Yet, it should be added that apart from affirmative statements on rewriting Baltic history as a history of multicultural societies with a pluricultural past (Rosenberg 2005, 164-5), still nothing more substantial has been undertaken by the established history writing elites.

May this collection of papers show at least some of the possible directions that new research in Baltic history might follow. One possible suggestion might be to commission a series of biographies that cover, for instance, those generations for which life under conditions of foreign rule witnessed a breathtaking rise up the social ladder from being children of serfs to part of a national elite. Contrary to the actual perception, even in Baltic history we can discover not only the personal tragedies of the numerous people that went through the concentration camps of the twentieth century, not only stories of "heroic" and consequently violent "resistance" and despised "treason," but also simple success stories of people who used the opportunities of history within the framework of small national societies. This could open up an interesting perspective of continuities, of *longue durée*, that is clearly underrepresented in historic research about Baltic history. However, this concentration on biographies could tell us more about personal choices as well, and about the changing conditions of "collaboration" or "resistance" under foreign rule and national independence.

Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Andreas Lawaty, the Director of the *Nordost-Institut* who chaired our panel in Toronto and passed the honor of being JBS guest editor over to me. Many thanks go also to David J. Smith who has been a patient editor and was polite enough not to laugh about the silly German way of saying things in English.

KARSTEN BRÜGGEMANN
Hamburg

Note

1. In Estonia, the literary journal "*Vikerkaar*" (*Rainbow*) in 2003 published a special issue (No 10-11) dedicated to the "*lieux de mémoire*" in Estonian history (see the introduction by Tamm), where younger scholars debated some of the clichés in national historiography like the "ancient war of independence" (Anti Selart), the "war of Mahtra" (Kersti Lust), the national movement (Kristi Kukk), and the battle at Võnnu/Cēsis (Karsten Brüggemann), accompanied with texts written by Peter Burke, Jüri Kivimäe, Jean-Pierre Minaudier, and an interview with the late Reinhart Koselleck.

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