

## Western Anthropologists in Eastern Europe Continued

*Jan Kubik sends us another view on the question of political Legitimacy in Eastern Europe.*

I welcome Michael Sozan's call for a "fruitful scholarly debate" on the question of political legitimacy in Eastern Europe. Such a debate is urgently needed among cultural anthropologists who still have not contributed to this subject. I present here only some rudiments of my position on political legitimacy in Eastern Europe focusing on the role of cultural anthropology ( especially symbolic analysis ) in the study of this problem. My views will be more systematically presented in a forthcoming manuscript entitled: *The Role of Symbols in the Legitimization of Power. Poland: 1970-1981.*

The problem of legitimacy of power in the Soviet Block has not received satisfactory treatment. Theoretical frameworks have usually been derived from political science and political sociology. Even the most successful studies, such as Rigby's and Feher's (1982), suffer from the lack of a systematic analysis of symbolic dimensions of political life, although such an analysis is central to an adequate understanding of political legitimacy. On the other hand, studies of public rituals in the communist countries (see Lane 1981) have not addressed the issue of political legitimacy.

The cultural and symbolic dimensions of legitimization processes in communist states have been rarely discussed or comprehended, even in the works employing the category of political culture. The political culture approach suffers from two fundamental deficiencies. First, it relies on a model of political culture derived from the analysis of Western democracies and is therefore unable to account for many features of political life in both "imperfectly westernized" regions such as Latin America or Southern Italy and diametrically different polities of the communist world. Second, all too often the researchers employ standard questionnaire and survey techniques that can hardly yield an adequate picture of people's attitudes and values if people are reluctant to reveal their true views. This is the problem of reticent cultures observed in Italy and Mexico, and considerably more pronounced in countries ruled by communist regimes (for a discussion of reticent culture see Almond and Verba, 1980).

What does anthropological (symbolic) analysis have to do with legitimacy? Legitimacy is sometimes defined as an attribute of an order that is simply complied with, whatever the subject's

reasons for compliance (defined in such a way legitimacy and authority carry the same meaning). However legitimacy is usually defined as an attribute of an order that is complied with for a very special reason: subjects' belief in the order's correctness. This belief can be rendered in a more objective way as congruence of an image of authority projected by those in power and an ideal of the perfect authority held (though not always clearly articulated) by the people. Such an ideal, in turn, finds expression in all, most, or some key values of a given group and is conveyed by the dominant symbols of its culture. This symbolic domain of a given group (its cultural heritage) should be reconstructed independently from a rendition of the ideology of the rulers. The comparison of both models should reveal a degree of legitimacy achieved by the regime (political system, social order, etc.).

Legitimacy in large societies is a complex phenomenon. First, it must be distinguished from claims of legitimacy. Legitimacy is an empirically determinable state (or dimension) of a social system; legitimacy claims belong to this system's normative superstructure. To use Sozan's example, Leninist *claims* to legitimacy do not vary in Eastern European countries, but the *actual* legitimacy of these regimes varies considerably. Second, political legitimacy fluctuates over time and social space. It increases or decreases over time (for example, it increased in Poland in 1970, after Gierek took power from Gomulka) and is stronger or weaker in relation to different groups (party apparatchiks "legitimize" a communist regime more readily than, say, individual peasants).

The methods of symbolic analysis, developed by modern anthropology must be used to interpret the relationship between the political and symbolic dimensions of public life in Eastern Europe. I believe that anthropology can and should grasp, conceptualize, interpret, and explain this particular drabness and absurdity of life under communism that has usually eluded anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists, et al, though it has been amply conveyed by such fiction writers as Milosz, Kundera, Zinoviev, Skvorecky. This specificity of existence under communism (different in each country) comes partially from the nature of public discourse (e.g. through censorship, omnipresent propaganda, manipulation of cultural heritage diluted in half-truths and half-lies, and stupefying "correctness" of the official dogma), i.e., from certain characteristics of the symbolic superstructure. Cultural (symbolic) anthropology seems to be particularly well equipped to deal with such a phenomenon.

I suggest two forms of analysis; both of them yield interesting results in my Polish research. I have examined the system of values of Polish society, using the results of systematic studies conducted by Polish sociologists since 1957 -- a unique situation in Eastern Europe comparable only to this of Yugoslavia (Denitch 1976). I am also analyzing symbolic actions of the State, the Church, and the opposition to reconstruct various symbolic strategies used in the continuous struggle for domination over peoples' minds and hearts and, therefore, also for political legitimacy.

Cultural anthropology can considerably enrich existing analyses of propagandistic techniques, especially on the local level. Moreover, anthropology has developed sufficient methodological and the theoretical apparatus to study "unofficial", interstitial aspects of political life, whose systemic character in the communist world has never been well understood, although some western anthropologists working in Poland were bewildered by the all-encompassing nature of this phenomenon (see Pine and Bogdanowicz 1982; Hann 1985; Bell 1984; Sampson 1985-86). My personal and professional experience, as Pole and anthropologist, leads me to conclude that patron-client relationships, second economy, informal sector and related phenomena, which pervade all sectors of social life in Poland, make the system run. A growing number of Polish sociologists have also reached the same conclusion. As long as people create and transmit national symbols and values through informal structures, and as long as these structures dominate political and economic life, their study must be incorporated in any serious account of political legitimacy in Poland and, I believe, in other countries of Eastern Europe. We need to develop a language that will allow us to deal with the question of political legitimacy in Eastern Europe in a more realistic way than does Sozan. His contention that "We know very well that village governments and higher levels of government are legitimate in Eastern Europe" is preposterous. Neither do all of "us" know that nor are these various levels of Eastern European government legitimate in any established sense of this word (Yugoslavia seems to be a separate case). Communist governments put forward various claims to legitimacy (not only Leninist; there is, for example, a growing tendency to use nationalistic justifications of power in many Eastern European states). These claims are internalized and accepted, or rejected, by the citizens. A delicate balance of claims, identifications, and rejections changes over time and social space. But so rarely are communist regimes identified with and unconditionally approved as "correct" by the people, that it is false to call these regimes legitimate without further qualification. They

achieve a certain degree of legitimacy in certain periods, but it is still an open question when, where, and how.

The scope of this presentation allowed me merely to signal certain issues I regard important in any discussion of political legitimacy in Eastern Europe; I hope that in a future discussion I will have an opportunity to treat some of the points raised here in a more exhaustive manner.

## References Cited

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