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THE POLITICAL LIVES
OF DEAD BODIES

Reburial and Postsocialist Change

Katherine Verdery

Dead people belong to the live people who claim them most obsessively.
—JAMES ELLROY

CHAPTER ONE

Dead Bodies Animate the Study of Politics

*I*n my introduction I revealed a lively politics around dead bodies during the 1990s in the former Soviet bloc. My task now is to indicate what I plan to make of it. As I already noted, I approach the task mindful of its complexity and unwilling to offer a single explanation of the varied instances I have presented. What I offer, instead, is a broad framework for thinking about material of this kind, one that emphasizes the universes of meaning within which postsocialist politics takes place.

I see politics as a form of concerted activity among social actors, often involving stakes in particular goals. These goals may be contradictory, sometimes only quasi-intentional; they can include making policy, justifying actions taken, claiming authority and disputing the authority claims of others, and creating or manipulating the cultural categories within which all of those activities are pursued. Politics is not restricted to the actions of political leaders but can be engaged in by anyone, although such actors often

seek to present their goals as in some sense *public* ones.[1] That is, some of the work of politics consists of making claims that create an issue as a "public" issue. Political actors pursue their activities in arenas both large and small, public and private; the overlap and interference of the arenas shape what goes on in any one of them. Because human activity nearly always has affective and meaningful dimensions and takes place through complex symbolic processes, I also view politics as a realm of continual struggles over meanings, or signification. Therefore, I stress those aspects in my discussion, and I find dead bodies a particularly good vehicle for doing so.

Politics happens in contexts. Because the context of postsocialist politics is unusually momentous, I preface my discussion with a brief sketch of what I think it is. I start with the assumption that for the last two decades or so, we have been both creating and living through an epochal shift in the global economy. Among its elements is a change in the operation of capitalism, responding to a global recession evident as of the early 1970s. A large literature, beyond my purposes here, has arisen around this transformation. Sometimes called a change to "flexible specialization,"[2] it has produced a massive shift in the tectonic plates of the world economy; one sign of that was the 1989 collapse of Communist Party rule in Eastern Europe, and soon thereafter in the Soviet Union. I have suggested elsewhere how I think that happened, underscoring processes internal to the Soviet system that connected it more fully with international capital flows and, as a result, altered both the form of socialist political economies and their place in global capitalism.[3]

Although I am not alone in seeing the postsocialist transformation in such earthshaking terms, my view is far from universal. Some observers find increasing evidence that as the dust from 1989 settles, persistent continuities with the socialist order are at least as striking as disruptions of it. The centralized economy and socialist property rights, in particular, have proved highly resistant to change. Nevertheless, much of what set socialism most clearly apart from other forms of political economy was wholly compromised after 1989: the Communist Party's relative monopoly over the formal political sphere, the degree of central control over the budget and over economic redistribution, the mechanisms that sustained socialist property as the dominant form, and the illusion of the party-state's omnipotence (brought into question by Poland's Solidarity in 1980 but

smashed altogether in 1989). Even if some of these features continue in postsocialist societies, they no longer index the distinctive cluster of institutions that was "actually existing socialism."

Moreover, the context in which those features operate has changed. The various barriers that socialism had fumblingly erected no longer insulate it from the "outside." Global capitalism exerts its pressure particularly against the institutions by which socialism defined itself as noncapitalist, such as party and state forms, property arrangements, and openness to market forces. Although the results of outside pressure will not necessarily be "transitions to capitalism," the context in which we should assess postsocialism's emerging forms is—far more than before—the international one of global capital flows. When I speak of a shift in the world's "tectonic plates," then, I do not mean that a plate called "socialism" has buckled before one called "capitalism"; I mean, rather, that an alteration in the entire system of plate movements compels us to reconsider the dynamics in any one part of it. For the postsocialist part, those dynamics affect the full gamut of politicoeconomic and sociocultural life.

Where do dead bodies figure in this? I believe they offer us some purchase on the cultural dimension, in the anthropological sense, of postsocialist politics. (By this I do not mean the so-called concept of political culture, as underspecified as it is overused.[4]) They help us to see political transformation as something more than a technical process—of introducing democratic procedures and methods of electioneering, of forming political parties and nongovernmental organizations, and so on. The "something more" includes meanings, feelings, the sacred, ideas of morality, the nonrational— all ingredients of "legitimacy" or "regime consolidation" (that dry phrase), yet far broader than what analyses employing those terms usually provide. Through dead bodies, I hope to show how we might think about politics, both as strategies and maneuvering and also as activity occurring within cultural systems.

Hinted at in my wording is a view similar to Max Weber's: that the pursuit of meaning is at the heart of human activity, and that social analysis aims to understand meanings rather than to explain causes. In his work, Weber described some overarching processes he believed characteristic of modernity, such as rationalization, secularization, and the "disenchantment" of the world. In hands other than his, however, such concepts have

tended to desiccate how politics is treated. I prefer, in examining postso-
cialist politics, to speak instead of its *enchantment*, so as to enliven politics
with a richer sense of what it might consist of.[5]

In speaking of enchantment or enlivening, I have two related things in
mind. The first is an analytic one: I hope to show how we might animate the
study of *politics in general*, energizing it with something more than the
opinion polls, surveys, analyses of "democratization indices," and game-
theoretic formulations that dominate so much of the field of comparative
politics.[6] Where else, I ask, might we look for "politics," in perhaps unex-
pected places that arrest the imagination? The second sense is a descriptive
one, concerning the specific forms that political action is taking in the post-
socialist world. Do we find there the ritual murders, pyramid schemes, and
images of zombies and clandestinely circulating body parts described, for
example, by Jean and John Comaroff in their work on postapartheid South
Africa?[7] Perhaps not, but we do find UFO movements in Armenia, invoca-
tions of the devil as a source of wealth in Transylvania, and radio-based
mass hypnotism in Russia.[8] My two senses of enchantment (the analytic
and the descriptive) are interconnected: we more easily broaden our con-
ception of "the political" in the face of empirical surprises like those.

The analytic and descriptive senses are also, however, importantly dis-
tinct. In trying to animate or enchant the study of politics, I am not saying
that secular socialism dried out a politics that must now be reinfused with
meaning (or even "reborn," as some would have it[9]). To the contrary: com-
munist parties strove continually, as Jowitt has argued, to establish their
sacrality and charisma.[10] Rather, I am protesting that perhaps from too
much rational choice theory, our standard conception of "the political" has
become narrow and flat. Therefore, I propose turning things around:
instead of seeing nationalism, for instance, in the usual way—as a matter
of territorial borders, state-making, "constructionism," or resource com-
petition—I see it as part of kinship, spirits, ancestor worship, and the cir-
culation of cultural treasures. Rather than speak of legitimacy, I speak of
reordering the meaningful universe. I present the politics of corpses as
being less about legitimating new governments (though it can be that, too)
than about cosmologies and practices relating the living and the dead. And
I see the rewriting of history that is obviously central to dead-body politics
as part of a larger process whereby fundamental changes are occurring in

conceptions of time itself. These are the kinds of things I mean when I
speak of analytically enlivening or enchanting politics.*

Investigating the political lives of dead bodies, then, enriches our sense
of the political while providing a window onto its specific forms in the
transformation of socialism. The rest of this book offers some examples
of how such an analysis might proceed. A number of themes contribute to
the enlivened sense of politics that I am advocating, and most of this chap-
ter is devoted to discussing them. Before I continue, however, I believe I
must raise a difficult question, albeit with only tentative answers: Why
dead bodies? What is it about a corpse that seems to invite its use in poli-
tics, especially in moments of major transformation?

WHY DEAD BODIES?

To ask this question exposes one to a flourishing literature on "the body,"
much of it inspired by feminist theory and philosophy,[11] as well as poten-
tially to poststructuralist theories about language and "floating signifiers."
I will not take up the challenge of this literature here but will limit myself
instead to some observations about bodies as symbolic vehicles that I think
illuminate their presence in postsocialist politics.[12]

Bones and corpses, coffins and cremation urns, are material objects.
Most of the time, they are indisputably *there*, as our senses of sight, touch,
and smell can confirm. As such, a body's materiality can be critical to its
symbolic efficacy: unlike notions such as "patriotism" or "civil society,"
for instance, a corpse can be moved around, displayed, and strategically
located in specific places. Bodies have the advantage of concreteness that
nonetheless transcends time, making past immediately present. Their
"thereness" undergirded the founding and continuity of medieval monas-
teries, providing tangible evidence of a monastery's property right to
donated lands.[13] That is, their corporeality makes them important means

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* I alternate among these words and others like "animate" or "enrich,"
rather than resting with the word "enchant," hoping thereby to make my
meaning clearer. One might too easily read "enchant" to imply fairy tales and
magic; although in postsocialism we indeed find some of that, I have in mind
something a bit more down-to-earth.

of *localizing* a claim (something they still do today, as I suggest in chapter 3). They state unequivocally, as Peter Brown notes, *"Hic locus est."*[14] This quality also grounded their value as relics.

The example of relics, however, immediately complicates arguments based on the body's materiality: if one added together all the relics of St. Francis of Assisi, for instance, one would get rather more than the material remains of one dead man. So it is not a relic's actual derivation from a specific body that makes it effective but people's belief in that derivation. In short, the significance of corpses has less to do with their concreteness than with how people think about them. A dead body is meaningful not in itself but through culturally established relations to death and through the way a specific dead person's importance is (variously) construed.[15] Therefore, I turn to the properties of corpses that make them, in Lévi-Strauss's words, "good to think" as symbols.

Bodies—especially those of political leaders—have served in many times and places worldwide as symbols of political order. Literature in both historiography and anthropology is rife with instances of a king's death calling into question the survival of the polity. More generally, political transformation is often symbolized through manipulating bodies (cutting off the head of the king, removing communist leaders from mausoleums). We, too, exhibit this conception, in idioms such as "the body politic."

A body's symbolic effectiveness does not depend on its standing for one particular thing, however, for among the most important properties of bodies, especially dead ones, is their ambiguity, multivocality, or polysemy. Remains are concrete, yet protean; they do not have a single meaning but are open to many different readings. Because corpses suggest the lived lives of complex human beings, they can be evaluated from many angles and assigned perhaps contradictory virtues, vices, and intentions. While alive, these bodies produced complex behaviors subject to much debate that produces further ambiguity. As with all human beings, one's assessment of them depends on one's disposition, the context one places them in (brave or cowardly compared with whom, for instance), the selection one makes from their behaviors in order to outline their "story," and so on. Dead people come with a curriculum vitae or résumé—several possible résumés, depending on which aspect of their life is being consid-
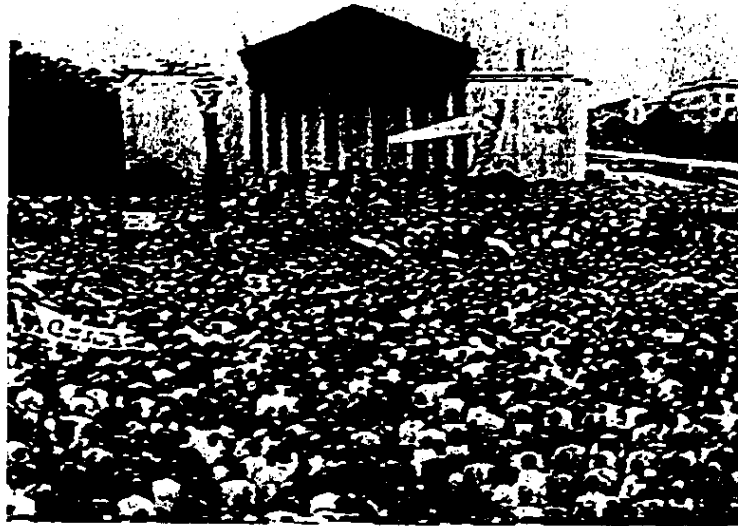
ered. They lend themselves to analogy with *other people's* résumés. That is, they encourage identification with their life story, from several possible vantage points. Their complexity makes it fairly easy to discern different sets of emphasis, extract different stories, and thus rewrite history. Dead bodies have another great advantage as symbols: they don't talk much on their own (though they did once). Words can be put into their mouths—often quite ambiguous words—or their own actual words can be ambiguated by quoting them out of context. It is thus easier to rewrite history with dead people than with other kinds of symbols that are speechless.

Yet because they have a single name and a single body, they present the illusion of having *only one* significance. Fortifying that illusion is their materiality, which implies their having a single meaning that is solidly "grounded," even though in fact they have no such single meaning. Different people can invoke corpses as symbols, thinking those corpses mean the same thing to all present, whereas in fact they may mean different things to each. All that is shared is everyone's *recognition* of this dead person as somehow important. In other words, what gives a dead body symbolic effectiveness in politics is precisely its ambiguity, its capacity to evoke a variety of understandings.[16] Let me give an example.

On June 16, 1989, a quarter of a million Hungarians assembled in downtown Budapest for the reburial of Imre Nagy, Hungary's communist prime minister at the time of the 1956 revolution.[17] For his attempts to reform socialism he had been hanged in 1958, along with four members of his government, and buried with them in unmarked graves, without coffins, facedown. From the Hungarian point of view, this is a pretty ignominious end.[18] Yet now he and those executed with him were reburied, faceup in coffins, with full honors and with tens of thousands in attendance. Anyone watching Hungarian television on that June 16 would have seen a huge, solemn festivity, carefully orchestrated, with many foreign dignitaries as well as three Communist Party leaders standing near the coffins (the Communist Party of Hungary had not yet itself become a corpse). The occasion definitely looked official (in fact it was organized privately), and it rewrote the history—given only one official meaning for forty years— of Nagy's relation to the Hungarian people (see plates 14-15).[19]

Although the media presented a unified image of him, there was no consensus on what Nagy's reburied corpse in fact meant. Susan Gal, analyzing the political rhetoric around the event, finds five distinct clusters of imagery, some of it associated with specific political parties or groups:[20] (1) nationalist images emphasizing national unity around a hero of the nation (nationalist parties soon found these very handy); (2) religious images (which could be combined with the nationalist ones) emphasizing rebirth, reconciliation, and forgiveness, and presenting Nagy as a martyr rather than a hero; (3) various images of him as a communist, as the first reform communist, and as a true man of the people, his reburial symbolizing the triumph of a humane socialist option and the death of a cruel Stalinist one; (4) generational images, presenting him as the symbol of the younger generation whose life chances had been lost with his execution (this group would soon become the Party of Young Democrats); and (5) images associated with the ideas of truth, conscience, and rehabilitation, so that his reburial signified clearing one's name and telling the story of one's persecution—an opportunity to rewrite one's personal history. (That some people presented communist Prime Minister Nagy as an *anti-*communist hero shows just how complex his significances could be.)

Perhaps attendance at Nagy's funeral was so large, then, because he brought together diverse segments of the population, all resonating differently to various aspects of his life. And perhaps so many political formations were able to participate because all could legitimate a claim of some kind through him, even though the claims themselves varied greatly.[21] This, it seems to me, is the mark of a good political symbol: it has legitimating effects not because everyone agrees on its meaning but because it compels interest *despite* (because of?) divergent views of what it means.

Aside from their evident materiality and their surfeit of ambiguity, dead bodies have an additional advantage as symbols: they evoke the awe, uncertainty, and fear associated with "cosmic" concerns, such as the meaning of life and death.[22] For human beings, death is the quintessential cosmic issue, one that brings us all face to face with ultimate questions about what it means to be—and to stop being—human, about where we have come from and where we are going. For this reason, corpses lend themselves particularly well to politics in times of major upheaval, such as the postsocialist

14 AND 15 Scenes from the reburial of Imre Nagy, Budapest, 16 June 1989.

period. The revised status of religious institutions in postsocialist Eastern Europe reinforces that connection, for religions have long specialized in dealing with ultimate questions. Moreover, religions monopolize the practices associated with death, including both formal notions of burial and the "folk superstitions" that all the major faiths so skillfully integrated into their rituals. Except in the socialist period, East Europeans over two millennia have associated death with religious practices. A religious reburial nourishes the dead person both with these religious associations and with the rejection of "atheist" communism. Politics around a reburied corpse thus benefits from the aura of sanctity the corpse is presumed to bear, and from the implicit suggestion that a reburial (re)sacralizes the political order represented by those who carry it out.

Their sacred associations contribute to another quality of dead bodies as symbols: their connection with affect, a significant problem for social analysis. Anthropologists have long asked, Wherein lies the efficacy of symbols? How do they engage emotions?[23] The same question troubles other social sciences as well: Why do some things and not others work emotionally in the political realm? It is asked particularly about symbols used to evoke national identifications; Benedict Anderson, for instance, inquires why national meanings command such deep emotional responses and why people are "ready to die for these inventions."[24] The link of dead bodies to the sacred and the cosmic—to the feelings of awe aroused by contact with death—seems clearly part of their symbolic efficacy.

One might imagine that another affective dimension to corpses is their being not just any old symbol: unlike a tomato can or a dead bird, they were once human beings with lives that are to be valued. They are heavy symbols because people cared about them when they were alive, and identify with them. This explanation works best for contemporary deaths, such as the Yugoslav ones I discuss in chapter 3. Many political corpses, however, were known and loved in life by only a small circle of people; or— like Serbia's Prince Lazar or Romania's bishop Inochentie Micu (whose case I examine in the next chapter)—they lived so long ago that any feelings they arouse can have nothing to do with them as loved individuals. Therefore I find it insufficient to explain their emotional efficacy merely by their having been human beings.

Perhaps more to the point is their ineluctable self-referentiality as

symbols: because all people have bodies, any manipulation of a corpse directly enables one's identification with it through one's own body, thereby tapping into one's reservoirs of feeling. In addition (or as a result), such manipulations may mobilize preexisting affect by evoking one's own personal losses or one's identification with specific aspects of the dead person's biography. This possibility increases wherever national ideologies emphasize ideas about suffering and victimhood, as do nearly all in Eastern Europe.[25] These kinds of emotional effects are likely enhanced when death's "ultimate questions," fear, awe, and personal identifications are experienced in public settings—for example, mass reburials like those of Imre Nagy or the Yugoslav skeletons from World War II.

Finally, I believe the strong affective dimension of dead-body politics also stems from ideas about kinship and proper burial. Kinship notions are powerful organizers of feeling in all human societies; other social forms (such as national ideologies) that harness kinship idioms profit from their power. Ideas about proper burial often tie kinship to cosmic questions concerning order in the universe, as well. I will further elaborate on this suggestion later in this chapter and in chapter 3.

Dead bodies, I have argued, have properties that make them particularly effective political symbols. They are thus excellent means for accumulating something essential to political transformation: symbolic capital.[26] (Given the shortage of investment capital in postsocialist countries and the difficulties of economic reform, perhaps the symbolic variety takes on special significance!) The fall of communist parties devalued much of what had served as political or symbolic capital, opening a wide field for competition in which success depends on finding and accumulating new capital resources. Dead bodies, in short, can be a site of political profit. In saying this, I am partly talking about the process of establishing political legitimacy, but by emphasizing symbolic capital I mean to keep at the forefront of my discussion the symbolic elements of that process.

REORDERING WORLDS OF MEANING

In considering the symbolic properties of corpses, I have returned repeatedly to their "cosmic" dimension.[27] I do so because I believe this emphasis suits what I observed earlier about the significance of the events of 1989:

they mark an epochal shift in the international system, one whose effects pose fundamental challenges to people's hitherto meaningful existence. This is true worldwide, but especially in the former socialist bloc. All human beings act within certain culturally shaped background expectations and understandings, often not conscious, about what "reality" is.[28] One might call these their sense of cosmic order, or their general understanding of their place in the universe.[29] By this I mean, for instance, ideas about where people in general and our people in particular came from; who are the most important kinds of people, and how one should behave with them; what makes conduct moral or immoral; what are the essential attributes of a "person"; what is time, and how does it flow (or not); and so on.

Following current anthropological wisdom, however, I do not see these cosmic conceptions strictly as "ideas," in the cognitive realm alone. Rather, they are inseparable from action in the world—they are beliefs and ideas materialized in action. This is one way (the way I prefer) of defining culture. Unfortunately, nearly all nonanthropologists understand "culture" as cognition, ideas—a meaning I want to avoid.[30] Hence, instead of using "culture," I speak of "worlds of meaning" or simply "worlds" (though *not* in the sense of "lifeworld" that is specific to phenomenology and the recent work of Jürgen Habermas). "World," as I intend it, seeks to capture a combination of "worldview" and associated action-in-the-world, people's sense of a meaningful universe in which they also act. Their ideas and their action constantly influence one another in a dynamic way. In moments of major transformation, people may find that new forms of action are more productive than the ones they are used to, or that older forms make sense in a different way, or that ideals they could only aspire to before are now realizable. Such moments lead to reconfiguring one's world; the process can be individual and collective, and it is often driven by the activities of would-be elites (in competition with one another).

Students of the demise of Soviet-style party-states have tended to pose the problems of postsocialist transformation as creating markets, making private property, and constructing democracy. This frame permits two things: one can absorb the postsocialist examples into a worldwide "transition to democracy," and one can emphasize technical solutions to the difficulties encountered ("shock therapy," writing constitutions, election-management consulting, training people in new ways of bookkeeping,

etc.). I believe the postsocialist change is much bigger. It is a problem of reorganization on a cosmic scale, and it involves the redefinition of virtually everything, including morality, social relations, and basic meanings. It means a reordering of people's entire meaningful worlds.[31]

Although my phrasing may seem exaggerated, without this perspective I doubt that we can grasp the magnitude of what 1989 has meant for those living through it: a rupture in their worlds of meaning, their sense of cosmic order. The end of Party rule was a great shock to people living in the former socialist countries. This was not because everyone had internalized the Communist Party's own cosmology and organization of things: far from it. The history of Party rule throughout the region was a long struggle between what Party leaders wanted and what everyone else was prepared to live with. Practices, expectations, and beliefs quite antithetical to the Party's dictates jostled with those the Party promoted. Nevertheless, daily life proceeded within or against certain constraints, opportunities, and rules of the game that the political system had established, and these formed a set of background expectations framing people's lives.

The events of 1989 disrupted these background expectations in ways that many people in the region found disorienting (even if some of them also found therein new opportunities). They could no longer be sure what to say in what contexts, how to conduct politics with more than one political party, how to make a living in the absence of socialist subsidies and against spiraling inflation, and so on. They found their leisurely sense of time's passage wholly unsuited to the sudden crunch of tasks they had to do. Moreover, their accustomed relations with other people became suddenly tense. Quarrels over property, for example, severed long-amicable bonds between siblings and neighbors; new possibilities for enrichment altered friendships; and increasing numbers of parents saw their plans for security and retirement evaporate as more of their children headed abroad. In these circumstances, people of all kinds could no longer count on their previous grasp of how the world works. Whether consciously or not, they became open to reconsidering (either on their own or with the help of political, cultural, and religious elites) their social relations and their worlds of meaning. This is what I mean when I speak of reordering meaningful worlds. I believe dead-body politics plays a part in that process, and that to examine it will clarify my project of animating the study of politics.

My conceptualization here resonates with Durkheim's, particularly the Durkheim of the *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, which is among other things a treatise on the possibilities for moral regeneration in human societies.[32] The resemblance is not fortuitous. First, Durkheim wrote during a time of great moral ferment in France; his work aimed expressly to comment upon that ferment and contribute to quieting it. His situation then reminds one of the 1990s postsocialist situation. Second (and for that very reason), some scholars consider Durkheim the only major theorist apt for thinking about political and moral renewal.[33] Although I gladly second him in that endeavor, and although some of my proposals in this book (such as the theme of proper burial) hint at a Durkheimian reflex, I part company with him in regard to the *conscience collective*; I look not for *shared* mentalities but for *conflict* among groups over social meanings.

Reordering worlds can consist of almost anything—that's what a "world" means. To reorder worlds of meaning implicates all realms of activity: social relations, political ideas and behavior. worldviews, economic action. Far more domains of life might be included under this rubric than I have time to explore, and dead bodies can serve as loci for struggling over new meanings in any of them. For my purposes in this book, I will emphasize their role in the following areas: struggles to endow authority and politics with sacrality or a "sacred" dimension; contests over what might make the postsocialist order a moral one; competing politicizations of space and time; and reassessments of identities (especially national ones) and social relations. I discuss a fifth possible domain central to postsocialist transformation—property relations—together with the others, for it enters into all of them. Yet another domain that figures centrally in Eastern Europe's transformation but cannot be treated here is the obverse of death, namely [re]birth. The politics of abortion, for instance, has agitated nearly all postsocialist countries, as pro-natalist nationalists strive for demographic renewal of their nations following what they see to be socialism's "murderous" abortion policies.[34]

In each of these domains, dead bodies serve as sites of political conflict related to the process of reordering the meaningful universe. The conflicts involve elites of many kinds and the populations they seek to influence, in

the altered balance of power that characterizes the period since 1989. I will explain what I intend by these rubrics, briefly for the first three and at greater length for the fourth.

Authority, Politics, and the Sacred

The meaningful worlds of human beings generally include sets of values concerning authority—values like the monarch's divinity, orderly bureaucratic procedure, a leader's charisma, full democratic participation, the scientific laws of progress, and so on. Like Weber, we can speak of different ways of acknowledging authority as modes of legitimation, and in considering social change we can ask how one group of legitimating values gives way to another. Unlike Weber, who tended to see the sacred as part of only some modes of authority, I (and many other anthropologists) would hold that authority *always* has a "sacred" component, even if it is reduced merely to holding "as sacred" certain secular values. This was certainly true of socialist regimes, which sought assiduously to sacralize themselves as guardians of secular values, especially the scientific laws of historical progress. Because their language omitted notions of the sacred, however, both outsiders and their own populations tended to view them as lacking a sacred dimension.[35]

Part of reordering meaningful worlds since 1989, then, is to sacralize authority and politics in new ways. A ready means of presenting the postsocialist order as something different from before has been to reinsert expressly sacred values into political discourse. In many cases, this has meant a new relation between religion and the state, along with a renewal of religious faith.[36] Reestablishing faith or relations with a church enables both political parties and individuals to symbolize their anticommunism and their return to precommunist values. This replaces the kind of sacredness that undergirded the authority of communist parties and serves to sacralize politics in new ways. In chapter 2 I describe a conflict that has arisen around the connection of church with politics in Romania (and other Orthodox countries). Among the conflict's many facets are struggles over the sacralization of politics, and reburying a dead body is part of them.

Moral Order

Use of religious idioms may also be part of remaking the world as a *moral* place. Because communist parties proclaimed themselves custodians of a particular moral order, the supersession of communism reopens concepts of political morality, both for politicians and others who want to claim it, and for ordinary citizens concerned with the behavior of those they live among. In the first few years following 1989, the route to new moral orders passed chiefly through stigmatizing the communist one: all who presented themselves either as opposed to communism or as its victims were ipso facto making a moral claim.

Many of these claims led to attempts at assessing blame or accountability and at achieving revenge, compensation, or restitution. Depending on who organizes and executes the process, the moral order implied in pursuing accountability can strengthen a new government, garner international support for a party to a dispute, or restore dignity to individual victims and their families. Society's members may see enforcing accountability as part of moral "purification": the guilty are no longer shielded, the victims can tell of their suffering, and the punishment purifies a public space that the guilty had made impure. Alternatively, the moral outcome may be seen as lying not in purification but in compensation for wrongs acknowledged. Foremost among the means for this was the question of restoring private property ownership, as something *morally essential* to a new anticommunist order. Efforts to establish accountability thus served to draw up a moral balance sheet, to settle accounts, as a condition of making the postsocialist order a moral one. Assessing blame and demanding accountability can occur at many sites, one of them being dead bodies. (In chapter 3, I discuss a particularly stark instance of this, former Yugoslavia, where rival exhumations produced reciprocal charges of genocide and acts of revenge that fueled the breakup of the Yugoslav state.)

Another form of "accounting" that implicates dead bodies involves efforts to determine "historical truth," which many accuse socialism of having suppressed. An example is the reburial of Imre Nagy, mentioned above, which sought to reestablish historical truth about Nagy's place in Hungarian history, as part of creating a new moral universe. His example leads us to an additional means of reordering worlds, namely, giving new values to space and time.

Reconfiguring Space and Time

As scholars ranging from Durkheim to Elias to Leach have argued, what we call space and time are social constructs.[37] All human societies show characteristic ways of conceptualizing and organizing them; any one society may contain multiple ways, perhaps differentiated by activity or social group.[38] When I speak of how space and time can be resignified, I have in mind two distinct possibilities: the more modest one of changing how space and time are marked or punctuated, and the more momentous one of transforming spatiality and temporality themselves. Socialism attempted both, the latter by imposing entirely new rules on the uses of space and creating temporalities that were arrhythmic and apocalyptic instead of the cyclical and linear rhythms they displaced.[39] I will leave that subject to chapter 3 and will briefly discuss changes in temporal and spatial punctuation now.

We might think of both space and time using the metaphor of a geological landscape. Any landscape contains more potential landmarks than are noted by those who pass through it. When I speak of "punctuating" or "marking" space and time, I mean highlighting a specific set of landmarks—using this rock or that hill (or date, or event) as a point of reference, instead of some other rock or hill (or date or event), or some other feature altogether, such as a railway crossing. Influencing the kinds of features selected are such things as one's position relative to them (a rock is a useful landmark only from a certain angle or distance), cultural factors (some groups find trees more meaningful than rocks), local economies (hunter-gatherers will notice items a traveling salesman will miss), and so on. If we put our landscape on "fast forward," the landscape itself transforms, hills and mountains rising up or subsiding while valleys are etched and floras change type. The constantly changing relief presents still other possibilities for establishing landmarks. I think of such spatiotemporal landmarks as aspects of people's meaningful worlds; modifying the landmarks is part of reordering those worlds.

For example, as I observed in the introduction, among the most common ways in which political regimes mark space are by placing particular statues in particular places and by renaming landmarks such as streets, public squares, and buildings. These provide contour to landscapes, socializing them and saturating them with specific political values: they *signify* space in

specific ways. Raising and tearing down statues gives new values to space (resignifies it), just as does renaming streets and buildings. Another form of resignifying space comes from changes in property ownership, which may require adding border stones and other markers to differentiate landscapes that socialism had homogenized. Where the political change includes creating entire nation-states, as in ex-Yugoslavia and parts of the Soviet Union, resignifying space extends further: to marking territories as "ours" and setting firm international borders to distinguish "ours" from "theirs." The location of those borders is part of the politics of space, and dead bodies have been active in it.

As for time, among the usual ways of altering its political values are by creating wholly new calendars, as in the French Revolution (whose first casualties included clocks themselves[40]); by establishing holidays to punctuate time differently; by promoting activities that have new work rhythms or time discipline; and by giving new contours to the "past" through revising genealogies and rewriting history.[41] Since 1989, the last of these has been very prominent in "overcoming" the socialist past and (as some people see it) returning to a "normal" history. I view this historical revision, too, as an aspect of reordering worlds, and one important means of doing it has been to reposition dead bodies.

National Identities and Social Relations

The worlds of meaning that human beings inhabit include characteristic organizations of what we call "identities."[42] In the contemporary United States, people are thought to hold several identities, the most commonly mentioned being class, occupation, race, gender, and ethnic identity; in other times and places, these would have been less salient than kin-based identifications, or rank in a system of feudal estates. Especially prominent in the East European region have been national identifications. Contrary to popular opinion, I and others have argued that socialism did not *suppress* these identifications but *reinforced* them in specific ways.[43] They remain prominent in the postsocialist period, as groups seek to reorganize their interrelations following the demise of their putative identities as "socialist men," now superseded by "anticommunist" as a basic political identification. Sharp conflict around national identities has arisen above all from the dissolution of the Yugoslav and Soviet federations, as new nation-states

take their place. Conflicts to (re)define national identities implicate contests over time and space, for statues and revised histories often celebrate specific sites and dates *as national*.

I find it helpful to assimilate national identities into the larger category of social relations within which I think they belong: kinship. In my view, the identities produced in nation-building processes do not displace those based in kinship but—as any inspection of national rhetorics will confirm—reinforce and are parasitic upon them. National ideologies are saturated with kinship metaphors: fatherland and motherland, sons of the nation and their brothers, mothers of these worthy sons, and occasionally daughters. Many national ideologies present their nations as large, mostly patrilineal kinship (descent) groups that celebrate founders, great politicians, and cultural figures as not just heroes but veritable "progenitors," forefathers—that is, as ancestors. Think of George Washington, "Father of His Country," and Atatürk, "Father Turk." (I say "patrilineal" because, as numerous scholars have observed, nearly all the "ancestors" recognized in national ideologies are male.[44])

Nationalism is thus a kind of ancestor worship, a system of patrilineal kinship, in which national heroes occupy the place of clan elders in defining a nation as a noble lineage. This view is not original with me. It appears in the work of anthropologists Edmund Leach, David Schneider, and Meyer Fortes,[45] and in Benedict Anderson's suggestion that we treat nationalism "as if it belonged with 'kinship' and 'religion,' rather than with 'liberalism' or 'fascism.' "[46] Given this view, the work of contesting national histories and repositioning temporal landmarks implies far more than merely "restoring truth": it challenges the entire national genealogy. This happens quite visibly in reburying a dead body, an act that inserts the dead person differently as an ancestor (more central or more peripheral) within the lineage of honored forebears. My focus on corpses enables me to push this argument even further and to speak of the proper burials of ancestors, which include revering them as cultural treasures.

ANCESTORS AND PROPER BURIAL   Any human community consists not only of those now living in it but also, potentially, of both ancestors and anticipated descendants. In a wry statement by a Montenegrin poet we see part of this nicely: "We Montenegrins are a small population even if you

count our dead." Different human groupings place different emphases on these three segments of possible community—dead, living, and yet-unborn. Imperial China, for example, is renowned for having made ancestors into real actors in the world of the living, while in other societies ancestors are crucial points of reference for the living but inhabit their own world (though they may enter ours on occasion). Pro-natalist nationalist ideologies, by contrast, are preoccupied with *descendants*, connected to ancestors in an endless chain through time.

In many human communities, to set up right relations between living human communities and their ancestors depends critically on proper burial.[47] Because the living not only mourn their dead but also fear them as sources of possible harm, special efforts are made to propitiate them by burying them properly. The literature of anthropology contains many examples of burial practices designed to set relations with dead ancestors on the right path, so that the human community—which includes both dead and living—will be in harmony. Gillian Feeley-Harnik writes of such ancestor practices in Madagascar: "Ancestors are made from remembering them. Remembering creates a difference between the deadliness of corpses and the fruitfulness of ancestors. The ancestors respond by blessing their descendants with fertility and prosperity."[48] Their harmonious coexistence is about more than just getting along: it is part of an entire cosmology, part of maintaining order in the universe.

All human groups have ideas and practices concerning what constitutes a "good death," how dead people should be treated, and what will happen if they are not properly cared for. In what direction should the feet of the corpse be pointed? Who should wash it, and how should it be dressed? Can one say the name of the deceased person or not? How much time should elapse before burial? Is alcohol allowed at the wake? May the body be cremated without killing the person's chances for resurrection? What things must be said at the funeral? What kinds of gifts should be exchanged, and with whom? If one of these things is not done correctly, what will happen? Proper burials have myriad rules and requirements, and these are of great moment, for they affect the relations of both living and dead to the universe that all inhabit. Southern, Central, and Eastern Europe offer many examples of such conceptual worlds.[49] Although specific beliefs and practices vary

widely across the region, for illustrative purposes they display sufficient commonalities to be treated together.

What goes into a proper burial? Kligman, Lampland, and Rév report[50] from contemporary Transylvanian and Hungarian ethnography that villagers there believe the soul of the deceased person watches the funeral, and if it is dissatisfied, it will return and punish the living by creating havoc, often in the form of illness. Was enough money thrown into the coffin? Were the burial clothes fine and comfortable? Was the deceased's favorite pipe put into the casket? If the person died unmarried, was a wedding also performed at his funeral? Various parts of the funeral ritual (the orientation of the body as it leaves the house, the reciprocal asking of forgiveness between living and dead, etc.) aim specifically to prevent a disgruntled soul from coming back. The possibilities for mayhem are much graver if the deceased had no burial at all.

In addition, for months and years after the funeral these villagers offer regular prayers and ritual meals to propitiate the dead and keep them quiet, believing that a well-fed, contented soul will protect its earthly kin.[51] One still finds ritual practices of this kind, for instance, in Transylvania and the former Yugoslavia. Every year a week after Easter, villagers go to the graves of kin in the cemetery, bearing special food cooked for the occasion; they sit on the graves and eat, offering the food to their dead.[52] For these people it is not enough that the dead be properly buried: the living must keep feeding their dead kin so as to ensure the ancestors' blessing and continued goodwill, which are essential to a well-ordered universe.[53]

From research in the Polish/Ukrainian borderland, Oltenia (Romania), and elsewhere we learn that a dead person who does not receive a proper burial has a number of options.[54] He may become a "walking dead man," annoy his family members, try to sleep with his wife, and seek to inflict retribution on those who wronged him. Or he may become a vampire. (These job choices are the preserve chiefly of males; unhappy dead females take on other forms.) One way or another, he makes the lives of his earthly relatives and neighbors unpleasant; they must either give him a proper burial (if he had none) or (if already buried) dig him up and cut off his head or drive a stake through his heart. Concern for the well-being of ancestors and other dead is thus crucial to peaceful living and to an orderly universe; proper burial helps to ensure these.

The idea that properly treated ancestors become protective spirits (or even saints) is found from Russia westward into Hungary, as is fear that a vengeful spirit will torment the living unless suitably placated. Such notions easily acquire deeper religious significance. Tumarkin describes, for instance, the link between the souls of ancestors and saints: in a Russian peasant house, icons often hang opposite the hearth, where the ancestors' souls are thought to reside. Russian Christianity absorbed forms of ances- tor worship, which became an important part of cults of the saints; indeed, Russian peasants have long understood saints to be their adored forefathers who sacrificed themselves for future generations. "To light a candle for the saints," Tumarkin observes, "was to enter into spiritual discourse with the protective spirits of the past."[55]

Ideas about proper burial figure even in present-day dead-body politics. An example is the debates around whether to remove Lenin's mummy from its mausoleum in Moscow's Red Square. Like the corpse of Imre Nagy, Lenin's has been the object of much politicking. Although the idea of removing him and burying him somewhere else[56] is not new, starting in 1989 it was proposed and debated with increasing vigor. (The debate was briefly sidetracked by a report in *Forbes* magazine, also carried on U.S. TV programs such as ABC's *Evening News*, that Lenin was to be sold for hard currency at international auction.[57]) Having initially opposed the idea, Yeltsin later changed his mind, suggesting in 1993 and again in 1997 that Lenin be removed from Red Square for burial.[58] Then came the attacks on the statues of Tsar Nicholas and Peter the Great, fatal in the former instance; both were motivated, as I said, by opposition to Lenin's burial. The Russian Orthodox Church came out on the side of burying Lenin but refrained from stating whether the church would bury him as a "Christian." Meanwhile, the Duma voted to denounce the project for his removal, and the question of who (Yeltsin by presidential decree, the Federal Assembly, or the people by referendum) should make the final decision was tossed around like a hot potato. A poll taken in June 1997 showed clearly who favored burial and who did not: 54 percent supported the idea, and 32 per- cent opposed it; the latter were concentrated among supporters of Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov and some nationalists.[59]

One could say a great deal more on the politics behind Lenin's mummy (as does Vladislav Todorov, in a lengthy and often hilarious discussion[60]).

Market forces also have their effect. The embalmers who own the secret formula for Lenin reportedly took on after-hours work, catering to the fashions of newly wealthy Russians wanting to be embalmed; this moon- lighting gives them another source of income, now that state funds for tending Lenin's mummy have dried up, and subsidizes their continuing to work on him.[61] But also important to determining Lenin's fate are ideas about what makes for a proper burial. Their relevance comes from the decidedly religious underpinnings of the Lenin cult, and from notions about the divine origin of the authority of the tsars (to whom Lenin was often compared).[62]

An embalmed and not-buried Lenin offends Russian Orthodox sensi- bility, according to which *every* dead person should be interred, with very specific rites.[63] For Russians, as for others discussed above, if someone is not buried or is buried improperly (or if *ab*normal people are given a "normal" burial), then bad things will happen.[64] Because an unburied body is a source of things not being quite right in the cosmos, this is in itself sufficient reason to place Lenin firmly in the soil. But the debate is complicated by another set of beliefs, one having to do with saints. In Russian Orthodox doctrine, a dead person is revealed to be a saint not only through miracles but also because the corpse does not putrefy. As is true in many parts of the world,[65] it used to be common Orthodox practice to exhume the dead after a certain time (three, five, or seven years was cus- tomary), wash the bones, and rebury them with a special liturgy. This rit- ual is still performed in some areas, including rural Greece.[66] If upon dig- ging up a Russian corpse one found that it had not decayed, its preserva- tion was a clear sign of sainthood.[67] Even though the incorruptibility of Lenin's corpse is a *human* achievement, he is still touched by these associ- ations: dead people whose bodies have not decayed are holy.[68]

From the religious point of view, then, one can see that Lenin's mummy should be buried, lest bad things happen, and at the same time that it should *not* be buried but be exposed under glass, as befits a saint. In either case, the rationale has not just religious backing but roots in ideas about ongoing relations between the living and their dead. The only group excluded from arguments of this kind is the Communist Party, but it has ingeniously exploited other aspects of popular belief. In the parliamentary debate over what to do with Lenin, one of the communist participants reminded his

audience that in 1941 Russian archaeologists had dug up the body of Tamerlane, about whom it was said that anyone who disturbed his grave would be cursed. Shortly thereafter, the Nazis overran the Soviet Union. The deputy concluded by asking what might happen if they now disturbed Lenin's casket to bury him![69] All these different and contradictory views about reburial are available for use in a political contest that I believe is enriched by including them, to enchant the kind of political analysis we might do on Lenin's corpse.[70]

I should clarify my aims in making these points about "proper burial": I both am and am not making an argument about the continuity of older beliefs and practices. Given that years of official atheism and relentless modernization have eroded many beliefs recorded in earlier ethnographic work, I would be foolish to presume continuity. Nonetheless, as Gail Kligman's wonderful book *The Wedding of the Dead* shows clearly for northern Romania in the 1970s, popular ideas such as those I have described were not erased during the socialist period.[71] Even Moscow intellectuals who think themselves beyond such "superstitions" can feel that there is something uncomfortably out of order about Lenin's unburied corpse.[72] But we should think about these seeming continuities carefully. Some practices that appear to be constant may actually have changed: for example, Andreesco and Bacou describe the modifications that distinguish burial practices in Oltenia (southern Romania) today from those of decades ago.[73] Assuming the trappings of modernity may mean that people no longer *feed* their ancestors, but they may still think it important to *recognize* them.

More important, however, is that some "traditional" practices are in fact reinforced (if not, indeed, invented, in Hobsbawm and Ranger's famous formulation[74]) by their present setting. Andreesco and Bacou indicate that far from suppressing older burial practices, Romanian socialism amplified some of them.[75] One reason might be that because religious burial violated official atheism, to bury one's dead properly was a form of resistance to official religious policy. A similar point emerges from a 1991 article in the *New York Times*, which reported that in Serbia as of the 1970s, practices involving hospitality and feasting in connection with the dead *increased*, as villagers began building entire houses on the graves of their relatives. These often lavish structures, with a coffin in the basement and

regular feasting above, "so the spirit of the deceased has something to eat and drink," had less to do with tradition than with competitive displays among neighbors and against the Party elite.[76]

Thus, by invoking older beliefs and practices, I am not affirming unbroken continuity; the practices may be rejuvenated, attenuated, or simply invoked in discourse. What is most important about them is that those changes or invocations refer to practices that *have a history* (or histories). That history makes available numerous associations derived from earlier, precommunist times, forming a broader cultural system that shapes the possibilities for present political action. Political transformation may give "traditional" ideas new urgency—for example, proper burial and harmonious relations among kin may be especially powerful politically for those living through postsocialist times that have wrought such havoc on social relations among kinsmen, owing to conflicts over property restitution (which implicates kin above all others[77]). Ideas about proper burial, then, even if no longer held in a form identical to ideas from the past, enter into the penumbra of meanings that politicians and others can draw upon, alter, and intensify. These ideas and practices thereby inflect what can be done with dead-body symbolism.[78] The great stability of mortuary practices, mentioned earlier, lends further credence to this claim.

PROPER BURIAL AND CULTURAL TREASURES   I have one final point to make about proper burial. The point is specific to the cases of famous dead, such as Bartók, the heart of Bulgaria's Tsar Boris, and Romanian bishop Inochentie Micu (see chapter 2), who have returned from abroad. And I believe it applies to such cases not just in Eastern Europe but elsewhere as well. Even when ideas about vampires and the undead have gone out of style, one common rule about proper burial still in force is that our *"sons" must be buried on "our" soil*, lest we be plagued by misfortune arising from the soul's continued distress. The notion of repossessing "our" dead is common worldwide, as is evident from customs of warfare that return dead soldiers to their home countries. (Think of the ongoing preoccupation, in U.S. politics, with MIAs from the Korean and Vietnamese wars.) In such cases reburial at home may be presented simply as a matter

of proper rest for the deceased, the idea that it prevents misfortune remaining at best implicit. We see this with a home-bound skeleton of a very different sort, that of the Sioux chief Long Wolf, brought back in September 1997 from London (where he had been "stranded" for 100 years) to his ancestral burial grounds in South Dakota. One of the Sioux who traveled to London to retrieve him observed after the funeral, "It means he's set free. He'll be among his own people. His bones will remain with us. The spirit remains with the bones, and the bones will finally be at rest among his own."[79]

What interests me in cases like this one and similar postsocialist examples is their perhaps unexpected link with national identities, the subject with which I began this section. That link is through the contemporary vogue, worldwide, for the return of cultural property or "heritage," an increasingly important part of building modern national identities. Over recent decades we have grown accustomed to peoples and countries, especially former colonies, petitioning to retrieve items of their cultural heritage or patrimony, often held by former colonial powers. Even Winnie-the-Pooh, Piglet, et al. have entered into the corpus of contested objects.[80] Efforts to define or redefine national identities seem increasingly to involve the notion that the "health" of a people is greatest when it has all its valued things at hand, rather than lying in museums or improper graves elsewhere. Perhaps the cases best known to residents of the United States involve the repatriation of Native American heritage—meaning both sacred objects and ancestral bones. The very word "repatriation" is eloquent: valued objects and remains are returning to the father- or homeland, where they should be.

In her fascinating book *The Return of Cultural Treasures*, Jeanette Greenfield observes that in the nineteenth century, cultural property of many kinds was "centralized," brought from its places of origin into museums in the major colonial centers.[81] We are now witnessing the opposite movement, as more and more museums are forced or volunteer to return their treasures to the places whence these were taken. Not every relic or object that moves is part of this aspect of postcolonialism, and not all bodies and objects are equally worth retrieving. The ones that are, however, are usually the bodies of persons thought to have contributed something

special to their national history or culture. Adapting Greenfield, I would call them "cultural treasures." In many parts of the world it seems to have become very important to bring "our" treasures—whether they are valued objects or physical remains—back home where they "belong." The imagery of possession so often used inclines me to assimilate them to a worldwide concern with property rights—in this case, rights to *cultural* property.

This argument suggests that repatriating dead bodies in the postsocialist period is part of refurbishing (and fighting over) national identities by bringing "our cultural treasures" home for a proper burial—a burial that binds people to their national territories in an orderly universe.[82] These repatriations refurbish national identities by "nationalizing" symbolic capital that had entered global circuits, thus affirming the individuality of East European nation-states too long seen from without as barely distinguishable clones of international Soviet-style communism. Where the repatriates are world-famous, they may bring world respect, countering the arrogance of foreigners inclined to say, for instance, "Who would have thought that Romania, of all places, could produce cultural geniuses like Ionesco, Enescu, Eliade, and Brâncuşi!" This outcome is especially likely where the dead person himself has requested the homecoming (usually in a will), as is true of a number of the repatriated corpses. Perhaps the more respectable image they bring thereby will help their countries to be judged "European" and, thus, worthy of EU membership.

No matter whence the impetus for repatriations—from families of the deceased wanting royalties (as with Bartók; see introduction, note 37), from wills, or from governing parties hoping to consolidate a reputation as guardians of the national heritage—they draw wider notice and enhance the nation's global image. It is as if repatriating these cultural treasures and giving them proper burial localizes part of the symbolic capital they contain, just as postsocialist economies seek to attach themselves to international circuits in ways that will enable them to hold onto some of the profits for themselves. As I suggested at the beginning of this chapter, the corporeality of dead bodies facilitates such localizing claims. Their reburial participates in reordering meaningful worlds that are simultaneously conceptual, political, and economic.

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In 1989, the ordering principles of daily life and the basic rules of the game in Soviet-bloc politics ceased to hold. The result was a high level of political conflict and disagreement as newly forming groups with vulnerable constituencies jockeyed for advantage in new political fields. An always fragile balance of political forces now underwent a profound shift, a shift so momentous that it warranted truly cosmic imagery and raised all manner of culturally deep concerns. What is the order of our world now that the Communist Party has fallen? Whom do we wish to recognize as our ancestors, now that Marx, Lenin, and local communists are out, and what genealogies do we wish to rewrite? How should we position ourselves relative to other people—who, that is, are our kin and trusted associates? How can we reset our moral compass? Who is to blame for what has happened, and how should they be punished?

Trying to resolve questions of this kind is what it means to reorder meaningful worlds. I have emphasized here the following aspects of that process: endowing postsocialist politics with a sense of the sacred, working toward a new moral order, assessing blame and seeking compensation, resignifying spatial and temporal landmarks and international borders, seeking modes of national self-affirmation and of connection with ancestors. Given all this, I think it is not too much to speak of reordering worlds of meaning as what is at stake in reburying the dead.

CONCLUSION

Let me recapitulate the arguments I have been making. My aims in the book as a whole are the descriptive one of presenting some material about the political "lives" of dead bodies in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, and the analytical one of showing how we might think about that material within an enchanted, enlivened sense of politics. I see dead bodies as one of many vehicles through which people in postsocialist societies reconfigure their worlds of meaning in the wake of what I (and, I believe, they) regard as a profoundly disorienting change in their surroundings. The widespread disorientation offered tremendous opportunity to people seeking power, as well; the challenge for them was to form new political arenas, invent new rules of the game, and build new political identifications, all in fierce competition with other would-be elites. None

of these outcomes, however, could simply be imposed. Only an alchemy mixing new political strategies with meanings already available would produce alternative political arrangements. I have suggested that the meanings already available included ideas about kinship, history, proper burial, and national identity; about authority, morality, space, and time. All these are important sites of new meaning-creation, by means of which political opportunists and disoriented citizens alike strive to reorder their meaningful worlds; moreover, dead bodies connect with all of them.

Not every theme I have raised is relevant to every politicized corpse: different themes illuminate different cases, as I try to show in my handling of the cases I discuss in chapters 2 and 3. There is no uniform interpretation of the political lives of dead bodies. My aim in this chapter has been to suggest a variety of ways for thinking about dead-body politics, to offer a loose framework for approaching examples whose details vary. Only sometimes will we clarify the meaning of one or another case through ideas about proper burial, for example, or through looking at the multiple résumés of their lives, as in the case of Nagy. Many things make Nagy's case unique in comparison with other reburials.[83] To understand any given case, one *might* find it helpful to ask what in present and past contexts gives what multiplicity of meanings to the résumé of that particular corpse: *How* does his complex biography make him a good instrument for revising history? What in his manifold activities encourages identification from a variety of people? Answering such questions will often, but not always, elucidate why some dead bodies rather than others become useful political symbols in transitional moments.

Why, you might inquire, do I go to such lengths to interpret dead bodies? Why isn't it sufficient to see them simply as part of legitimating postsocialist polities?[84] What is the payoff of all my talk about "meaningful worlds" and ancestor worship and burial practices, especially given my reluctance to see such practices as having continuity throughout communist rule? I believe I am in part discussing processes of legitimation, attempting to state more precisely what goes into them. But many of the reburials I discuss were initiated not by political leaders eager to establish new legitimacies but by humbler people hoping to rectify their worlds. Moreover, to label an event "legitimating" does not end the inquiry; it invites us to ask *how* that event legitimates *what*, and at whose initiative. In

trying to explain why and how dead bodies work in postsocialist politics, I have presented legitimation as a process that employs symbols; in speaking of dead bodies as unusually ambiguous, protean symbols, I have pointed to the multiple possibilities lodged in a given corpse-qua-symbol that make it unusually effective in politics; and in discussing ancestors and burial rites, I have stressed that these symbols have histories, often deep ones, that further multiply the associations they provide as resources for creating meaning and legitimacy in moments of political contention. Thus my argument throughout this book concerns how we might think of legitimation in less rationalistic and more suitably "cosmic" terms, showing it as rich, complex, and disputatious processes of political meaning-creation—that is, as politics animated.

Is anything in these processes specific to the postsocialist context, distinguishing its many instances from uses of dead bodies elsewhere? I see three ways of answering this question in the affirmative. First, although corpses can be effective political symbols anywhere, they are pressed into the service of political issues specific to a given polity. For postsocialism, this means issues such as property restitution, political pluralization, religious renewal, and national conflicts tied to building nation-states. Such issues are found in other contexts, too, but in most postsocialist ones they occur simultaneously. This is an obvious argument for the specificity of postsocialist dead bodies, but not a strong one. Second, dead bodies—inherently yoking past with present—are especially useful and effective symbols for revising the past. To be sure, political transformation often involves such revision: indeed, communist parties revised pasts extensively. In Eastern Europe, however, rewriting history has been perhaps unusually necessary because of powerful pressures to create political identities based expressly on *rejecting* the immediate past. The pressures came not just from popular revulsion with communism but also from desires to persuade Western audiences to contribute the aid and investment essential to reconstruction. The revisionist histories that corpses and bones embodied were therefore central to *dramatizing* the end of Communist Party rule.

Finally, I believe dead bodies are uncommonly lively in the former socialist bloc because of the vastness of the transformations there that make bodies worth fighting over, annexing, and resignifying. The speci-

ficity of postsocialist corpses lies in the magnitude of the change that has animated them. The *axis mundi* has shifted; whole fields of the past await the plowshare of revisionist pens, as well as the tears of those whose dead lie there insufficiently mourned. A change so momentous and far-reaching requires especially heavy, effective symbols, symbols such as dead bodies. I am suggesting, then, that the specificity of postsocialist dead-body politics, compared with examples from elsewhere, is a matter not of kind but of degree.

The remaining two chapters treat specific cases with the tools I think best suited to them from those I have mentioned. The two chapters are organized very differently: one in the manner of a chronological narrative and the other more like a network of ideas that double back on themselves; the differences in organization are part of the message I hope to convey by the end of the book. In both chapters I strive to bring in the delights of anthropology, too often ignored in the literature on postsocialism: a respect for wide variability on a small scale; close attention to how these particulars intersect with contemporary global processes—how everyday and large-scale forces intersect in particular skeletons in the wake of communism's collapse; and ideas about ancestors, about "proper burial," about the cosmos, morality, and blame, about time and space. and about death and rebirth. I hope the result will demonstrate how we might enchant our sense of the political and enliven our understanding of politics in the postsocialist world.