Governing the dead

Sovereignty and the politics of dead bodies

Edited by FINN STEPPUTAT

Governing the dead

HUMAN REMAINS AND VIOLENCE

Human remains and violence aims to question the social legacy of mass violence by studying how different societies have coped with the dead bodies resulting from war, genocide and state-sponsored brutality. However, rather paradoxically, given the large volume of work devoted to the body on the one hand, and to mass violence on the other, the question of the body in the context of mass violence remains a largely unexplored area and even an academic blind spot. Interdisciplinary in nature, *Human remains and violence* intends to show how various social and cultural treatments of the dead body simultaneously challenge common representations, legal practices and morality. This series aims to provide proper intellectual and theoretical tools for a better understanding of mass violence's aftermaths in today's societies.

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Contents

Figures

Tables

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Series editors' foreword

The birth of a series is an editorial, intellectual and human adventure.

We took the initiative of creating the 'Human Remains and Violence' series following our encounters with researchers working in genocide and Holocaust studies, as well as those in the field of forensic science, having in common with them an interest in the twentieth century's legacy of extreme violence. We share their astonishment at the lack of attention paid to the fate of the dead bodies and human remains within these unique contexts, given that this fate reveals political, ethical, religious, social and legal issues, an understanding of which is fundamental to these societies' survival.

Governing the Dead is the second volume in this series, suitably capturing the scope and vigour of these research aims and ambitions. It is the result of a workshop organised in December 2010 by Finn Stepputat at the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS) in Copenhagen, which brought together political scientists, philosophers, social anthropologists and historians to address the issue of the governance of dead bodies. The event's dynamic success means that it is quite right and proper for *Governing the Dead* to find its place within the 'Human Remains and Violence' collection.

The Copenhagen workshop was indeed one of the first intellectual points of contact for us, followed by several others, first in Paris in 2011 and 2012, and then in Manchester in 2013 and 2014.

Each of these meetings contributed to conceptually strengthening our research and establishing an academic community on an international level that continues to grow.

From an intellectual perspective, there is no doubt that the contribution made by *Governing the Dead* to understanding the salient biopolitics at play in the governance and handling of bodies, both within democratic regimes and in extreme contexts, is an essential one. In studies on extreme violence it will no longer be possible to eschew an examination of the actors, the rationale behind the actions and the ideologies that shaped the practices applied in the handling of dead bodies.

And on a human level, the truly interdisciplinary character and spirit of integrity, openness and intellectual rigour that presided over the workshop in Copenhagen are also qualities that we wish to instil in our collection. We are therefore more than happy to include Finn Stepputat's *Governing the Dead*, convinced that there could be no better ambassador for both our research enquiries and approach.

Acknowledgements

Intro

1

Introduction

Finn Stepputat

Sovereignty and dead bodies

When my wife suddenly died some years ago, our home was soon flooded with paramedics and police officers, including a photographer and a social worker-cum-police officer. I asked the criminal investigator who interviewed me about the circumstances of the death if they could postpone taking my wife's body to the hospital morgue. A few hours would allow us to say goodbye to her and to try to realise that she was no longer alive. I guess I was inspired by an experience from my youth when I spent time at the wake of an older woman who died in the refugee settlement where I did fieldwork at the time. At the age of thirty-one I had never seen a dead body *live* before, and the mellow ambience among the family and friends surrounding the dead body made a lasting impression. In the case of my wife, the criminal investigator told me that my request was a very unusual one and that the body would have to be removed since it was, in principle, a criminal case. He nevertheless allowed me twenty minutes alone with my wife before they all left the house, taking her body away in the ambulance.

This event seemed to confirm an influential idea which holds that modern Western society is 'denying', 'silencing' or even 'ignoring' death, for example, by removing dead bodies from the gaze of the living, with the exception of the gazes of a few professionals in charge of containing the dead bodies in designated sites and forms.[1] Yet, even

in Western societies dead bodies are constantly breaking through the surfaces of containment, not least through media coverage of violent conflict, everyday crime, disasters and prominent deaths. Examples are legion: the elaborate and emotional *lit-de-parade* of North Korea's Kim Jong-Il; the slain body of Moamar Ghaddafi in a cold store by the market in Misrata before he was returned to his tribe; the debated disposal of Osama Bin Laden's corpse in open sea; the mutilated bodies of victims of state terror in Syria, often filmed and circulated in trophy videos; the sometimes equally mutilated victims of drug cartels, paramilitaries and petty criminals in Latin America; the dead bodies of unidentified flood victims piling up outside the overfilled morgues in the Philippines … this is to mention just some of the images that have circulated in international media in recent years, testifying to the power and spectral qualities of dead bodies.

The event of my wife's death and its aftermath made me realise the force with which the state is articulated at the transition from life to death, a realisation that related to my previous academic engagement with ethnographies of state and sovereignty. States tend to establish a range of laws, institutions and practices to take control of the transition from life to death, including the whereabouts of dead bodies. In many cases state apparatuses have limited reach, so either families are left to deal with their dead on their own, or they have to negotiate regulation with other forms of authority. But even though state entities, at will or by default, delegate specific responsibilities and faculties to private, social and religious entities, they usually claim the ultimate authority to define and govern the dead within their jurisdiction through legislation and institutionalised procedures.

Pertaining to issues such as civil registers, public health, criminal law, il-/legitimate violence, property, inheritance and citizenship, the legislation and procedures around dead bodies are clearly related to the sovereignty of the state. Nevertheless, the relationship between dead bodies and sovereignty becomes a lot richer as a ground for political analysis if we denaturalise the concept of sovereignty and go beyond its legal definition as (only) a formal attribute of an internationally recognised territorial state (Hansen and Stepputat 2005). Focusing on *de facto* rather than *de jure* sovereignty, the authors in this volume understand sovereignty as an effect of practices that are fundamentally related to the body and to issues of life and death.

In this prism, the death of a person represents an occasion for the performance of sovereignty, not only for territorial states but also

for a range of sub-, trans- and supra-national entities that seek to claim or produce autonomous domains of power: religious communities, nations (not always coinciding with states), village and ethnic communities, drug cartels and gangs, insurgents, vigilantes, private security companies, international peace missions and others who manage dead bodies in ways that overlap or conflict with legally institutionalised state practices. Thus, in general terms, the aim of this volume is to explore how the management of dead bodies is related to the constitution, territorialisation and membership of political and moral communities that enframe lives in various parts of the world.

Unlike a previous wave of interest in the history of death[2] which during the 1980s focused on societal attitudes towards death and the effects of death in terms of interpersonal relations, the past decade or two have seen a developing interest in dead bodies and human remains as objects of political analysis. How death and dead bodies are dealt with is far from a homogenous, uncontested field of social practice, as the literature of the 1980s could lead us to believe (Lomnitz 2005). As Lomnitz argues, death relates to deep issues of power. Thus a political study of death will have to take into account contradictions between friends and enemies, citizens and their others, or the 'particular and species-general points of view' (Lomnitz 2005: 17).

This volume looks at sovereignty as a particular form of power and politics, hopefully showing that the fate of bodies in the transition from life to death can provide a key to understanding fundamental ways in which sovereignty is claimed and performed. The contributions analyse (post-)conflict as well as non-conflict contexts, which too often are studied in isolation from one another. Focusing on contemporary issues rather than the equally important historical dimensions, they all grapple with the questions of who governs the dead bodies, how, why and with what effects. With a broad set of analytical approaches and geographical contexts, the chapters analyse how dead bodies are placed and dealt with in spaces between competing, overlapping and nested sovereign orders, under normal as well as exceptional conditions.

The chapters

In the following chapter (Chapter 2) I give an overview of the theoretical approaches that the chapter authors draw upon to explore

the terrain where dead bodies and sovereign practice intersect. Here I look at contributions that draw on psychoanalysis ('the fear of death'), critical theory ('between bio- and necropolitics'), the structuralist-functionalist anthropology of burial rituals ('rites of separation and the sacralisation of authority') and recent ideas of agency and materiality ('dead agency'). Despite their differences, the various approaches point towards an excess of meaning and affect relating to dead bodies and human remains, something that evokes the mystical, the sacred, the liminal and the transgressive, which, in the end, escapes explanation.

The following nine chapters are organised in two parts. The first, 'Containment and negotiation' takes us from the – often incomplete – efforts of states to contain and separate out dead bodies in particular sites to the ways in which such efforts of containment are negotiated and contested in struggles between different entities that claim the dead bodies. The second part, 'Transgression', gives four examples of how entities that claim sovereignty – including the state itself – produce effects of sovereignty by challenging and transgressing the laws regarding the legitimate use of violence and how dead bodies should be treated with dignity.

Part I. Whereas the cemetery looms large as the site where modern (biopolitical) states have sought to contain dead bodies and separate them effectively from the living, this part opens with a counter-image to the (double) containment of dead bodies in the soil of the cemetery. Benedikte Møller Kristensen writes about ideas and practices of 'open-air burials' among the Duha in Mongolia that involve the opposite of containment, namely the dispersal of the dead body as it is left to be eaten by animals in the wilderness; a sort of nomadic territorialisation as it were. Framed by the rise and fall of Soviet state regulation of dead bodies, this chapter analyses how the Duha have perceived and dealt with the state's claims on their dead bodies and the implied nationalisation of a landscape that was animated and managed through the Duha's open-air burials. Families have had to navigate between the moral claims of the state, the shamans and the (agentive) corpses in a post-Soviet context where the Duha see their lives as increasingly marginalised and unprotected, as evidenced by the rising number of unnatural deaths.

Christophe Robert explores the notion of 'dead zones' as zones in which the cemetery is losing its character of a container that separates the dead from the living. In Saigon 'dead zones' denote marginal, poor and polluted urban areas with partly abandoned and formerly peri-urban cemeteries. The image of the leaking cemeteries

as well as of leaking corpses – notably of soldiers and subjects of the slain 'old regime' – is deeply connected to the perception of disorder, amorality and pollution. State authorities, blamed for the neglect and abandonment of the cemeteries and the dead, plan to solve the problem by eradicating the cemeteries and thereby the images of the past that the graves and cemeteries help keep alive. The chapter looks into how these processes are interpreted and shows how the 'debt to the dead' turns cemeteries into sites of mobilisation challenging the sovereign authorities.

The next three chapters all look into situations in which the association between dead bodies and the notion of national soil is manifest and where dead bodies become a centre of negotiation and contestation between different, partially sovereign entities within the nation-state. Lars Ove Trans follows the repatriation of the corpse of a dead Mexican migrant worker from his home in the USA to his community of origin in the state of Oaxaca. As a recent phenomenon, the federal Mexican state supports the repatriation of corpses for burial in Mexican soil, once more showing how burial may be taken as the 'ultimate test of belonging' (Geshiere 2005). However, migrants have multiple sites of belonging and often uphold partial membership of several political communities. Therefore the repatriation of the migrant corpse is negotiated with the authorities of various political communities – including the nation, local and transnational communities, states and federal states – which make claims to decide on the whereabouts of the corpse.

The chapters by Myrttinen and Fontein both deal with the theme of exhumations in the formation of independent nation-states. Whereas Lomnitz (2005) authoritatively asserts that nations are founded on dead bodies and human remains, these two chapters show the contested and negotiated process of selection of the particular remains that underpin the foundational myth of the nation. Henri Myrttinen looks at the place of the dead in narratives and commemorations of the struggle for the independence of East Timor. He notes that some dead bodies – in particular those of dead fighters of the war of independence – are more important than others, and that the hierarchy of dead bodies mirrors the political hierarchy of the independent state. However, marginalised ex-combatants, significantly organised in martial and cultural arts groups that occasionally recur to threats of violence to enhance their influence, challenge this hierarchy and the monopoly of the state in managing the dead. They do so by engaging in unauthorised exhumations and collecting

remains of dead fighters in order to claim a more prominent place for themselves in the current political order.

Joost Fontein analyses the exhumation of a mass grave with dead bodies in varied degrees of decomposition in the northern part of contemporary Zimbabwe. Mugabe's party, ZANU-FP, seeks to categorise the remains as victims and testimony of the cruelty of the colonial regime, but along the way the exhumation becomes a site of political contestation as the human remains are not easily incorporated into the state-authorised narrative of their history. This, he argues, relates to the indeterminacy of the human remains, which demand yet defy their categorisation into particular types of 'dead'. The ruling party seeks to govern these dead and capitalise on the uncertainty and ambiguous meanings they produce, including the allusion to the transgressive powers of ZANU-FP. But in the end the party gives up on controlling the dead and opts for the recontainment of the human remains and sealing off of the mass grave.

Part II presents various cases in which necro-political aspects of sovereignty take precedence over the bio-political in practices that work through dead bodies, notably by transgressing the limits set out in state law. As Antonius Robben shows, representatives can, in the name of the state, establish a state of emergency that allows the transgression of laws that regulate the life and death of subject-citizens. X-raying the necro-political military regime in Argentina in the late 1970s, he describes how the state tried to produce its 'cultural sovereignty' by imposing a particular cultural project on the political community. Robben shows how the regime used abductions and torture to produce bodies that were neither dead nor alive. He suggests that practices were not only informed by necro-political logics but also by bio-political logics of re-forming and resocialising subjects under torture that could serve to prove the feasibility of establishing cultural sovereignty. Those who became disappeared-dead were denied proper burial and reincorporation as dead or martyrs in society; but as recent history shows, these restless dead have kept influencing the politics of the living.

Regnar Kristensen also gives an example of how state representatives themselves transgress laws and norms regarding dead bodies. Kristensen follows the dead body of Mexican drug lord Beltrán Leyva from the site of the killing to the site of Leyva's burial in order to analyse the relationship between state and corpse, state and Church, and Church and soul. On the way, state officials engage in acts of transgression by humiliating and ridiculing the corpse, a show of excess that also characterises the protection of the corpse on its journey, a

protection worthy of a head of state. Linking up with Fontein's focus on the materiality of dead bodies and human remains and discussing the common interpretations emerging in the press coverage of the events, Kristensen relates these excesses to certain ideas in popular Catholicism regarding the spirit of dead bodies, a restless, terrorising force that is ready to attack people.

Richard Kernaghan takes as his point of departure the ways in which the Maoist Shining Path movement exploited the 'transgressive potential' of human remains by leaving dead bodies to decompose on the road, using them as a crude 'political pedagogy' in their attempt to craft new political subjectivities and introduce a new law in the Peruvian Huallaga valley. While the corpses-as-things are long gone, the images and meanings of corpses on the road linger in the post-war era when Kernaghan, through his method of ethnographic writing, seeks to understand how that past time of 'foul weather' coexists alongside the more steady weather situation of the present. In particular he is interested in how these images of past and present inform ideas of property relations and the social relations embedded therein.

Ninna Nyberg Sørensen adds an explicit gender perspective to the analysis of sovereignty and dead bodies as she explores the phenomenon of 'femicide' or 'feminicide' in the context of post-war Guatemala. Describing the development of the killing of women and the sites and state in which their dead bodies were found, the analysis generates an interpretation of feminicide as linked to the increasing influence of parallel, 'corporate' powers and their formation and territorialisation of moral/political communities or fraternities. In this interpretation, the mutilated dead bodies are central to the spectral qualities of violence and hence to the governance effect of violence. Sørensen furthermore emphasises the complicity of the patriarchal state and the ways in which feminicide and the impunity associated with this practice produce notions of public and domestic space and in particular the place of women in these spaces.

In the postscript, John Borneman polemically turns the volume's question – how the living are governing the dead – on its head, asking why we believe that we are in a position to govern the dead. We seek to govern the dead through ritual, but we are often not very successful. Borneman uses the case of communist leaders and the Marxist ideology that sought to govern the dead away from the present. As Marx wrote, 'the tradition of the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living', which is why we should 'let the dead bury their dead', as he famously quoted from the Bible.

But the communist leaders were unable to govern the dead. Rather they placed themselves inside the nightmare of the dead generations by disappearing the dead imperial family, mummifying the body of Lenin and cremating and officially deeming as ungrievable – even in the private sphere – the millions who suffered death because of the regime. Borneman argues that the dead produce effects in terms of displaced aggressions, repetition compulsion, the compulsive moving around of dead bodies and even the belief that the dead can, and indeed should, be governed.

Notes

1   See for example Ariès 1981; Becker 1973; and Illich 1976.
2   Ariès 1981 and Le Goff 1984 are prominent examples.

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2

Governing the dead? Theoretical approaches

Finn Stepputat

Following a trend of emerging interest in carnal fetishism[1] and the politics of dead bodies (Verdery 1999), this volume focuses on the particular relationship between sovereignty on the one hand and (dead) bodies and human remains on the other, arguing that this analysis can help us understand fundamental ways in which sovereignty is claimed and performed. We see sovereignty as an effect of practices that are fundamentally related to the body and to issues of life and death, and pertaining to the state as well as other political and moral communities.

This chapter sets out the theoretical terrain that the authors of the volume navigate in their analyses, a terrain where dead bodies and sovereign practice intersect. More specifically it looks at four different approaches, including psychoanalysis ('fear of death'), critical theory ('between bio- and necropolitics'), the anthropology of rituals ('sacralisation of authority') and lastly more recent ideas of materiality and alterity ('dead agency').

Fear of death

The point seems rather banal and commonsensical: the encounter with a dead body articulates our fear of death by reminding us that we are all going to die, that our social world can always be shattered by the death of somebody close or important to us, including for

example presidents of totalitarian regimes, as the volume *Death of the Father* describes so well (Borneman 2004). In all political and moral communities, however, practices, discourses and institutions have developed that prescribe and guide how dead bodies should be taken care of, thus mitigating the fear of death and defending society against the ravages of death and the potential meaninglessness of life. By fulfilling these functions, the practices help forge the authority of the institutions that take responsibility for the transition from life to death.

While not explaining how sovereignty comes into the picture, this is, in a very simple form, the point that a range of theories from Hobbes to psychoanalysis make regarding the linkage between power and the fear of death. Hobbes himself makes an explicit connection between sovereignty and the fear of (pain and) death. Noting that human beings are naturally repulsed by pain and death – which slows down the 'vital motions' around the heart – he suggests that it is the fear of pain and death that 'entices the subjects to yield certain freedoms and power to a sovereign being, through a social covenant in return for civil peace'.[2]

We find a much more detailed elaboration of the relationship between power and the fear of death in Hertz's seminal 1907 essay on death and reburial in Borneo. Hertz pointed out that the corpse is 'an object of horror and dread', not only because of the process of decomposition but also because 'when a man dies, society loses in him much more than a unit; it is stricken in the very principle of its life, in the faith it has in itself' (1960: 37, 78). It seems as if the moment of crisis caused by the death belies society's investment in terms of ritual consecration of its members and hence the transcendental and sacred quality of society. In Hertz's study these sentiments are expressed through the fear of spiritual contagion. Due to this fear, the possessions and closest relatives of the dead are subject to taboo and set apart during the 'wet state' of the dead body. In this Durkheimian interpretation, the degree of emotion and ritualisation around the dead body reflects society's investment. Thus, some corpses, such as those of strangers, do not inspire any emotion or ritualisation at all (1960: 76).

In psychoanalysis the fear – or 'terror' – of death is taken as an indisputable, universal fact:[3] nobody is immune to the all-consuming fear of death, a fear that influences all other fears (Becker 1973). Death, in other words, is the mother of all fears. In order to live with this fear, we tend to repress the feeling of fear by different means, ensuring that it emerges only in particular ruptures and chocks

such as those provoked by the encounter with dead bodies. Looking into this encounter and borrowing Bataille's concept of 'the abject', Kristeva (1982) characterises the corpse as the paradigmatic form of the abject, understood as something nauseating and repulsing that causes us to turn away, and from which we seek to distance ourselves: 'The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object' (1982: 4). The abject is radically excluded as an object of loathing, but since it is also part of our own life, as in the case of human waste or death, the abject collapses the distinction between subject and object. It invades or even expels the subject, doing away with the fundamental boundaries that mark subjectivity. Drawing upon Mary Douglas, Kristeva sustains that it is 'not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules' (1982: 4). Against biological explanations of the repulsion that dead bodies produce, Kristeva holds that the abject and abjection are 'primers of culture' that draw us 'toward the place where meaning collapses', a place beyond discourse. The abject does not *signify* death: 'No, as in true theatre … refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live' (1982: 2). In Kernaghan's interpretation (2009; this volume), the Peruvian Shining Path movement used these powers of abjection as a kind of 'political pedagogy' aimed at opening up and changing political subjectivities when leaving corpses to rot on the roads.

Bataille (1991) gives the fear of death and the abject powers of the dead body a key role in his conceptualisation of sovereignty. He shares Hertz's image of the dead body as an object of horror and dread. Thus, the dead body partakes of 'a whole sticky horror' that cannot be assimilated into 'the order of things' (1991: 215–16). But for Bataille, analysing modern, secularised society, the horror is not related to the fear of *spiritual* contagion as in Hertz's case, but rather to the fear of contagious *violence*. Obsessed as he is with 'the fine line between repulsion and desire' (Posel and Gupta 2009), Bataille notes that the violence of death constitutes 'a supernatural peril which can be "caught" from the dead body' and that the 'desire to kill may take hold of us' (Bataille 2006: 46–7). Therefore the dead body is subjected to taboo. Within the community, but less so when the dead body belongs to a stranger, the 'taboo which lays hold on the others at the sight of a corpse is the distance that they put between themselves and violence' (2006: 44).

For Bataille (1991) the constant containment or repression of the fear of death and the sentiments that death produces characterises the profane domain of everyday life. This includes in particular the taboo against killing, while its transgression characterises the sacred domain of sovereignty, what Mbembe (2003) calls the domain of death. In Bataille's interpretation, sovereignty is intrinsically embedded in the body and in life as a biological force, expressed either in the will to take life or in the willingness to disregard one's body and one's own life. Like other manifestations of sovereignty, the display of will, sacrifice and disregard of death appears both frightening and awe-inspiring as it thematises the almost sacred character of life itself. Thus, the emaciated body of the hunger striker (Aretxaga 2001) or the blood of the jihadist martyr (Devji 2005) remains a powerful weapon in what we may call 'necropolitics' (Mbembe 2003), a concept to which we will return in the next section.

In a certain sense, Bataille points to the fear of death and the attempts of authorities to ameliorate and control the powers of abjection of dead bodies as constitutive elements in relation to political communities. Unlike many other attempts at identifying the defining traits of sovereignty, Bataille understands sovereignty as an effect of practice rather than seeing a sovereign will as the source of sovereignty. He may easily be criticised for the unmistakably vitalist tenor of his fascination with the decision, excess and (disregard of) death, and his corresponding critique of the dull, bureaucratised and fainthearted everyday life under modern capitalism. Nevertheless, his focus on the body at the centre of sovereignty has inspired various later elaborations of the concept of sovereignty, as we will see below.

Dead bodies between bio- and necropolitics

Given the theoretical links established above between sovereignty and dead bodies, it would be no surprise if shifts in the ways authorities claim to govern dead bodies coincide with shifts in the ways in which sovereignty is claimed. In this regard, and focusing on Western modernities, it is instructive to look at the correspondence between the shifts that took place from the late eighteenth century onwards, when the modern cemetery was generalised as a concept for disposal of dead bodies and the general relationship to death changed, as Ariès (1981) and others have documented vividly. Regarding sovereignty, an influential narrative holds that modern forms of power,

the power of life, in this period began to displace the power of death, understood as the right of the sovereign to kill and to let persons sentenced to death live. The power of death is associated with classical accounts of sovereignty and manifested for example in medieval spectacles of executions as described by Foucault (1977). In Dean's words, sovereignty

> is the most ancient of powers, the most mysterious, the darkest, the most allied with the sacred, the mythical, the divine and the demonic. It is the power of powers. Its symbols are blood, the sword and the executioner. Its mechanisms are the ceremonials of public execution and rituals of torture, with their motifs of confrontation, revenge, terror and what Foucault called 'atrocity'. (Dean 2004: 18)

Against this, modern forms of power rely on the development and refinement of the power over life, as manifested in improved public health systems, decreasing mortality rates, elaborate regimes of discipline and new forms of subjectivity. With the bourgeois revolutions and the emergence of the nation form, the locus of sovereignty changed from the sovereign to the people or the nation, whereas the right of the sovereign to take life became increasingly limited by the assumption that the life of every citizen had a value. In the modern state, lives could be taken or sacrificed only in the name of the future of the people, the nation, society or the species (Borneman 2004).

In fact, the sovereignty of the modern state was theorised – famously by Hobbes – against versions of the state of nature, in particular characterised by the proximity to death (and exaggerated sex-drive) (Lomnitz 2005: 36). This general idea of a movement 'away from death' (Fabian 1973: 55) has been also evident in anthropological studies of death. As Fabian noted in the 1970s, anthropologists since the late nineteenth century had had very little to say about death in modern society; they did not study death in the singular but tended to forward a parochial vision of death-related behaviours, customs or 'folklores' of death in different cultures, thus 'relegating reactions to death to "the others", or at least the other that has survived in us' in archaic forms (1973: 53). In a similar, critical fashion, other scholars have depicted death in modern Western society as being pushed back, marginalised, suppressed, silenced or even denied.[4] Turning Hobbes' vision of 'the State of Warre' on its head, the critics have sometimes tended to romanticise the relation to death in pre-modern societies as in the case of Ariès' (1981) notion of 'tamed death'.

Foucault also wrote, at the end of the 1970s, about the 'gradual disqualification of death' that had taken place since the late

eighteenth century. Then death was a spectacular ceremony manifesting the transition from one power to another, from 'the sovereign of this world' to 'the sovereign of the next world'. Now, in contrast, death has become 'something to be hidden away' (2003: 247). The reason is the shift from the power of death (or of 'sovereignty') to the 'power of life'. The shift coincided with the emergence of clinical medicine and bio-medicine, which permitted the constitution of life and death as biological processes (Rose 1999). Thus, in Foucault's words (2003: 247–8), bio-power, the power of life, emerged 'beneath' the power to take life:

> Now that power is decreasingly the power of the right to take life, and increasingly the right to intervene to make live … death becomes, insofar as it is the end of life, the term, the limit, or the end of power too. Death is outside the power relationship. In the right of sovereignty, death was the moment of the most obvious and most spectacular manifestation of the absolute power of the sovereign; death now becomes, in contrast, the moment when the individual escapes all power, falls back on himself and retreats, so to speak, into his own privacy. Power no longer recognizes death. Power literally ignores death. (Foucault 2003: 248)

This analysis gives material for at least three reflections. Firstly, since the late eighteenth century dead bodies have increasingly become objects of biopolitics, with profound implications for how the dead have been governed in and beyond the Western hemisphere. Developments in biomedical science were articulated in states' progressive introduction of the 'concept of the cemetery' and prohibitions against 'intra-mural burial', as the Spanish king wrote in a decree in 1789.[5] Authorities justified the new measures with reference to public health and the danger of disease and infection stemming from decomposing and uncontained dead bodies buried in and around overcrowded churches, and during the nineteenth century medical doctors were involved in campaigns for the construction of extramural cemeteries.[6] However, many people in nineteenth-century Latin America violently opposed the separation of the dead and the living, which they saw as an abandonment of the dead, who, in very practical terms, were left alone in distant cemeteries without the protection and ceremonial attention they had received when buried in and next to the churches. As Wilson (2004) shows in the case of nineteenth-century provincial Peru, the new regulations contributed to producing and sanitising a bourgeois notion of public space by banning and displacing the lively indigenous burial processions from the cities with reference to the risks they represented for public health.

The birth of clinical and bio-medicine was also the precondition for other developments in the governance of dead bodies. One was the systematic registration and standardisation of causes of death that developed with the death certificate during the nineteenth century (Trostle 2005), generating information that fed into the production of knowledge and policies of public health. Another development was the emergence of forensic medicine, which – with great disparities – became part and parcel of the state procedures surrounding dead bodies, with particular importance for the enforcement of state criminal law. In regard to (necro-political aspects of) sovereignty, forensic medicine and the associated state laws and procedures are essential to upholding the state's claim to a monopoly of legitimate force and the elimination of killing with impunity.

Thus, on this background it is not entirely true that death is the limit of modern (bio-)power. The dead are subjected to public health considerations at least until they reach the 'dry state' after a number of years,[7] and as an Italian friend who wanted to keep a little of his mother's ashes had to realise, states can be very firm in holding on to the human remains. In Italy it is illegal to remove ashes from the sealed urn, and the cemetery attendant doing it risked his job. Whereas there is no rationality involved in forming the subjectivity of the dead as such, we may see the way in which the dead are governed as a disciplining – or a stabilisation as Fontein argues in this volume – of the leaking, putrefying bodies.[8]

Furthermore, reading the justification for the new nineteenth-century regulations, it is obvious that the public health rationality was linked to considerations of the human dignity of the dead, including their individuality, as Ariès (1981) also shows. Whereas many states left questions of the soul to religious institutions, they tended towards establishing a direct relationship to every dead citizen within the territory by taking responsibility for the disposal of the body, irrespective of the religious creed of the citizen. Unlike older forms of sovereignty, which were primarily legal and symbolic reigns, the modern state tended to establish comprehensive, effective and totalising forms of detailed government of populations and territories (Burchell *et al.* 1991).

A second reflection relates to the temporal relation implied in the quotation from Foucault given above between a time of 'sovereignty' understood as the ancient power of death, and a posterior time of the power of life, of biopolitics. Even though Foucault reserves the notion of sovereignty for pre- or early-modern forms of power, he is interested in how the seemingly contradictory powers of life and

death are related in modern societies where 'thanato-politics' – or necropolitics – continues to mark dynamics of political communities (Foucault 1978). Thus, modern techniques of government made possible much more exhaustive, ambitious and effective forms of sovereignty, culminating in systematic exterminations of population in modern states as well as their colonies. This was particularly evident in the twentieth-century totalitarian states that were characterised by both a highly developed politics of disciplining and improving the body and the species, and an unprecedented will to exterminate populations in order to defend, protect and purify the political community – nation, society or people – often defined in racial or ethnic terms (Foucault 2003). Thus, central concepts of the power of death such as blood, fatherland and nation were reinscribed in bio-political discourses of hygiene, eugenics, etc. (Dean 2004). The bodies of those who died in these systematic exterminations were not disposed of with the dignity that supposedly applied to citizens of modern states. The exception that they were subjected to while alive was extended into death, including highly industrialised methods of disposal.

In an attempt to develop a modern idea of sovereignty that incorporated Foucault's insights into modern forms of power, Agamben (1998) suggested that biopolitics was the original form of sovereignty and that political communities are constituted on the possibility of reducing fully human members to purely biological beings, stripped of dignity and desymbolised as 'bare life' that can be killed with impunity. Less interested in the sequence of bio- and necropolitics, Agamben focuses on cases of indistinction between bare, natural and moral, political life, between exclusion and inclusion, between law and nature, which characterise situations in which legal or ethical exceptions are becoming the norm such as camps for indeterminate detention. As expressed by Dean (2004: 22), '[w]e do not need to look for a historical point of connection between the powers of life and death because [together] they are constitutive of the sacred character of political community'. Rather, Dean suggests, we should 'delineate the co-ordinates of this philosophical twilight zone' of indistinction.

Thus, whereas we in general may see the overlap, interrelation and even indistinction between bio-power and necro-power as lying at the heart of modern sovereignty, Das and Poole (2004) argue that this relationship is particularly visible at the margins of the state. In a highly disconcerting analysis of the borderland between Mexico and the USA, Magaña (2011) gives an example of this. She shows how

the Mexican state, being unable to protect and nurture the life of its citizens as they seek to cross the border into the USA, puts great effort into rescuing and repatriating the bodies of those who die in the attempt to leave Mexico, a point Trans also makes in this volume. Fontein (this volume) shows how an exhumation in Zimbabwe generates uncertainty because of the competing interpretations regarding the identity of the decomposed dead bodies: If they were killed by the colonial regime they would legitimate the ruling party as protecting and nurturing postcolonial life. If they were killed by the ruling party itself, the capacity and will of the party to use violence against its own population would not, from the party's point of view, be a totally unwelcome subtext produced by the exhumation.

The overlap or indistinction of bio- and necropolitics is also evident at the margins of life where biomedical regimes of power have brought new subjects into being, such as the brain-dead organ donor or 'fetal subjects', who are subjected to decisions of life and death by health professionals, administrators, prospective parents, relatives and others (Kaufman and Morgan 2005). Again, the dead bodies provide an entry point for the analysis, for example by posing the question of whether the foetuses are given a proper funeral or just disposed of unceremoniously in a dumpster (Melhuus 2005).

Finally, Foucault's analysis of death as the limit of modern power gives material for a third reflection: Death constitutes such a limit to the extent that the state has been secularised. In these cases, the rationality of the state excludes the idea of an afterworld – and hence the political nature of the passage from life to death – which otherwise has been an important element for the construction of hegemony and social order. In Latin America, for example, ideas of an afterworld and in particular of purgatory were crucial for Spanish colonisation, when the brute, law-making force of the conquest was replaced by law-enforcing political governance, including the insertion of the Catholic Church between life and death to help people to 'die well'.[9] This ensured a certain power over life in the form of confessions and other pastoral techniques of government (Lomnitz 2005). But as the postcolonial states were consolidated towards the end of the nineteenth century, they often took over only the management of the dead bodies (and the recording of birth and death), whereas the fate of the soul and relations to an afterworld were left to the religious communities to manage (see R. Kristensen, this volume).

As an extreme example of secularisation, the Soviet Union in the early years aimed at introducing cremation as an atheist funeral

while suppressing any commemoration of the millions of dead from wars and persecution (Borneman, this volume; B. M. Kristensen, this volume). Nevertheless, even the Soviet Union could not just leave the dead to themselves but had to move significant dead bodies such as those of the imperial family around, as Borneman describes in his contribution. And with twentieth-century nationalism, secularised states engaged in different sorts of death cults in which dead bodies of citizens who had given their lives for the nation were celebrated and commemorated extensively. In this sense, the sovereignty of the nation seems to rest on the remains of its dead, as Lomnitz (2005) and Taussig (1997) have shown in the cases of Mexico and Venezuela. Thus, whereas sovereignty no longer relies (only) on the power of death, dead bodies have an important role to play in the enchantment of politics and the sacralisation of authority, which is the theme of the next section.

Rites of separation and the sacralisation of authority

Since the emergence of the discipline, scholars of anthropology have analysed extensively the rituals associated with death, partly for the sake of analysing the key elements of culture that supposedly surface in mortuary ritual, and partly for the sake of developing more general theories of ritual, culture, society and power. This section will look at ways in which anthropologists and others have interpreted the ritualisation of death as linked to power and sovereignty. Common to these interpretations is the idea that the qualities of the dead body – the process of its immanent decay and its ambiguous being both subject and object, pure and impure, sacred and profane – endow the ritual with its symbolic power and political efficacy. Described in terms such as 'alchemy' (Bloch 1982), 'sacralisation' (Kaufman and Morgan 2005), 'transgression' (Taussig 2006) and 'catharsis' (Kristeva 1982), the ritualisation may be interpreted as being productive of a gift of the authority in terms of fertility and reproduction of the polity.

Like Borneman in this volume, we may characterise the ritual performance at the threshold between life and death as a 'rite of separation', a ritual that separates the living and the dead and transforms persons into non-persons, ancestors, spirits or just corpses.[10] But the ritual also entails a reordering of social relations, such as positions in the family and in society, personal and kinship alliances, hierarchies, etc. Therefore the context of the ritual is characterised by

provisionality, indeterminacy and danger (Kaufman and Morgan 2005). The rituals are 'moments of social drama' (Jewsiewicki and White 2005: 6) that bring not only interpersonal relations into the public domain, but also relations between the deceased and the political/moral community in question, for example in terms of rank, status and membership. As Hertz noted, '[t]he emotion aroused by death varies extremely in intensity according to the social status of the deceased, and may even in certain cases be lacking. At the death of a chief, or a man of high standing a true panic sweeps over the group. On the contrary, the death of a stranger, a slave or a child will go almost unnoticed; it will arouse no emotion, occasion no ritual' (Hertz 1960: 76).

Capturing the sense of indeterminacy and danger, Hertz's classical account of rituals of death and reburial depicts death as a process of parallel transformation of the dead body, the mourners and society. In the vein of his teacher, Durkheim, Hertz interpreted mortuary rites as a socially constructed orchestration of emotions and beliefs that worked to manage the dangers posed by the death of a member of society. Between the physical death and the much later reburial the person was disaggregated from the collectivity, and the social roles and capacities invested in the person were reallocated to others. Hertz saw the reburial of the remains – now in a considerably more 'dry' state – as a celebration of the incorporation of the soul of the deceased into the community of the dead, which coincides with the end of the relatives' mourning. More importantly, he read the reburial as a celebration of the regenerated society that survived the death of a member – which he saw as 'tantamount to sacrilege' (1960: 77) – and the threats posed by a potentially malevolent and socially uncontrolled spirit. Thus, Hertz offered a redemptive, functionalist approach to grief and pain: in the end, life triumphs over death and harmony reigns (Taussig 2001: 307).

Hertz invoked death as a passage between social orders to emphasise the similarities between mortuary rites, rites of initiation and marriages (Bloch and Parry 1982). This was soon picked up by van Gennep (1909) in his famous analysis of *rites de passage* and later by Turner (1967) in his elaboration of 'liminality' as the transformative and potentially dangerous phase of being 'betwixt and between' social orders, literally at the threshold (*limen*): the dead person has been excluded from the order of the living but not yet included in the order of the dead. Turner showed how key elements of society – its rules and hierarchy – were put into play and negated in the liminal phase, which he considered an 'anti-structure'. This negation gave the ritual

its transformative symbolic power but was also related to the dangers associated with decomposing dead bodies, their homeless, spiritual and ghostly manifestations, and the mourners, as Hertz noted.

From a structural-functionalist point of view, these rituals are not only about separating the dead from the living. Like other rites of passage, mortuary rites (re-)order and separate categories of fundamental significance for the symbolic order. In Douglas's terminology (1966: 41), they are 'rituals of separation' in the sense that they hold the total structure of 'keystones, boundaries, margins and internal lines' in relation. They deal with what blurs the boundaries – and hence what is seen as impure, polluting and defiling – by separating, demarcating and punishing transgressions. It is worth noting here that Douglas also inspired Kristeva in her thinking about the abject as a transgressive state, a 'non-respect' of structure and prohibitions, which is dealt with by means of ritualised purification, a restorative 'catharsis' either in the form of religious rituals or through art (Kristeva and Lotringer 1999: 18, 25).[11]

Building on the insights of Hertz and others, Bloch and Parry (1982) analyse mortuary rituals as linked not only to the problem of *symbolic* order in the face of death and decay but in particular to the problem of *political* order. They see these rituals as privileged occasions for negating the finality of the social order and confirming the existing authority as stable and legitimate. Focusing on the coinciding symbolisms of death and fertility/regeneration in many mortuary rites, they show how the idea of an eternal, unchanging political order (of traditional authority) symbolically claims victory over the challenges posed by contingent, arbitrary and discontinuous individual death.

The trick played out in the rituals consists in the juxtaposition of negative and positive elements: The rituals elaborate the negative aspects of death – primarily the decay, putrescence and pollution that underscores the finality of life – as something to get rid of to make way for the regeneration of the ideal order (1982: 27). These aspects are pre-eminently, but not always, associated with women, who have been given the ritual role of 'soaking up' the pollution caused by decaying flesh, by weeping, mourning or preparing the dead body, a burden that otherwise have been shouldered by, for example, untouchables or low-grade priests (1982: 25). Overall, the ritual represents the purification of the soul/spirit and the 'alchemy' that transforms death into fertility as a 'gift' of the authorities (1982: 41), which, as Kaufman and Morgan note, in the same movement 'sacralizes authority' (2005).

Thus, in the vein of Hertz, Bloch and Parry see the celebration of the soul's incorporation into the collectivity of the dead as a celebration of society, the continuity and fertility of which is nurtured by this pool of ancestors.[12] Correspondingly, a 'good death' is a death that permits this kind of victory over biology and unpredictability, whereas a 'bad death' is one that does not permit control of bodily decay and the regeneration of fertility, for example in the case of a missing body (Bloch and Parry 1982: 15–17). This latter situation makes it impossible for society to recuperate its life-essence.

We may not find the regenerative, fertile aspect in any strong form in the funerary systems of Western societies. As Bloch (1982: 229–30) notes, this is because the creativity and continuity of legitimate power is 'attributed to God and/or to capital' and affirmed elsewhere. Nevertheless, in the modern states of the West immense efforts are invested in the retrieval of (nationalised) dead bodies, be they Danish explorers who died in Greenland's ice, tourist tsunami victims in Thailand or American soldiers missing in action in wars overseas. In the words of American soldiers, the retrieval of dead bodies is 'no less than a sacred duty' (Samet 2005: 624), which, of course, may not be universal.

Commonly, the structural-functionalist approaches described above have been criticised for being ahistoric and for their tendency to impose system and order on an unruly reality. In Turner's version of the *rite de passage*, for example, he has been accused of sanitising what can be an inherently untidy experience and ridding it of disturbing, transgressive elements (Taussig 2006). In this regard Taussig is obsessed with the place of transgression and its relationship to taboo and the sacred. Here he follows Foucault (1998), who, wondering what becomes of the sacred and of profanation when God is dead, suggests that transgression points to the sacred in a secularised society. Taussig sees the human body as a 'privileged theatre of sacred activity' (2006: 170). The decaying body is an important site of (religious) reflection with a unique transgressive and sacred potential, not being a symbol but a vehicle of transgression: 'Pride of place should be given first to the cadaver and then to menstrual blood, compared with which polluting and hence sacred power, other components and features of the body … are usually quite inferior in terms of sacred, transgressive potential' (2006: 162). In a later analysis, he interprets the unceremonial disposal of a chopped-up dead body in a river in Colombia as an example of a transgression that is also sanctifying (Taussig 2012: 513). Depriving persons of proper disposal – the most basic sign of being human according

to Bataille and many others – strikes at the heart of what we consider as human, what separates us from the non-human, including the inhuman. 'Yet, the inhuman is every bit as religious, every bit as sacred, as the pious rites that help move the corpse from its frightening negative state to that of hallowed ground.' In this way, we may understand the disposal of a chopped up body in the river as 'an arc of sanctification' (2012).

Whereas the classical anthropological insights suggest how authorities make use of the opportunity of every death to (re-)produce political community and sacralise its authority, Verdery (1999) analyses how rituals are orchestrated around the bodies of renowned dead persons to legitimise the authorities and reorient and give new meaning to political communities in moments of crisis. Looking at post-socialist states in the 1990s, she notes how restless and symbolically charged dead bodies 'enchanted' or 'animated' transitional politics as the remains were (re-)buried in public spectacles, pointing to and correcting wrongdoings of the previous regime, such as denying people a proper burial.

Verdery (1999: 27–33) attributes the symbolic efficacy of dead bodies to (1) 'the aura of sanctity the corpse is presumed to bear' due to the tendency of religious institutions to monopolise death and burial, (2) their 'self-referentiality', which allows people to identify with the dead persons in terms of victimhood and suffering and (3) the materiality and 'thereness' of the corpse. The latter property is what makes abstractions – such as patriotism and civil society – concrete and tangible, and the concreteness that nevertheless transcends time also helps make the past immediately present and mark particular sites, territories and boundaries with specific meanings. This kind of symbolic work is particularly relevant in relation to nations and other political communities that base claims to sovereignty in ideas of kinship and ancestor worship. As both Fontein and Myrttinen show in this volume, this is not a straightforward mechanism but rather a strongly contested process where different factions struggle over which dead bodies should represent the nation and how they legitimise different factions.

The latter observation furthermore underlines one of Verdery's main points, namely that dead bodies are polysemic political symbols that allow for an excess of meaning which is hard for authorities and elites to control. This is, however, also the point that allows recent approaches to the analysis of the political lives of human remains to critique Verdery. Whereas she regards dead bodies as political vehicles that are used by political agents, the approach presented in the

following section suggests that we have to think of their materiality as having effects, or even as endowing the remains with something that could be interpreted as material agency.

Dead agency

The title of this volume, *Governing the Dead*, plays on the (Foucauldian) notion of liberal governance as the conduct of the free will of citizens. The title is of course somewhat contradictory since dead bodies in a modernist ontology do not have agency. As Verdery (1999) notes, 'corpses don't talk much'. This stands in contrast to much of the ethnographic literature in which the dead are often depicted as extremely powerful and talkative beings. As much as people assume that the community of the dead nourishes the community of the living (Bloch and Parry 1982), they also experience the dead as haunting the living and placing onerous demands on them in terms of respect, expenses and attention. Following these accounts, the dead can be a scary, capricious and even hateful crowd, an 'awfully envious lot' (Taussig 2001: 307).

However, with the segregation, silencing and medicalisation of death in Western societies, the dead, in the shape of spirits, ghosts and ancestors, seem to have lost much of their power over the living.[13] The dead in modern societies are assumed to let their will be known only indirectly, through the written will they leave behind, a will that they wrote while still alive and governed through social norms and sovereign laws. When people are dead, norms and laws dictate how and where the bodies can be disposed of and remembered. As several chapters in this volume analyse, the dead bodies can also fall into the hands of people who transgress these norms and laws, who violate and mutilate the dead bodies, abandon them unburied to mark new territories or inscribe messages of sovereign power on them. Or the dead bodies can be exhumed and reburied and made symbolically and politically 'efficacious', as Verdery (1999) argues. But in all these cases, the dead bodies are usually depicted as being without agency, while the living are acting upon the dead bodies as matter that can be interpreted and given meaning; they are not governed in Foucault's sense of the 'conduct of conduct', however.

Against this image, recent approaches – including several of the chapters in this volume (Fontein, B. M. Kristensen, Kernaghan, and R. Kristensen) – attribute to dead bodies something that comes close to agency, not only because of the subjectivity in terms of their

biographies as (formerly) living and known persons but also because of the mere materiality of the bodies. These approaches are related to theoretical debates that question Cartesian binaries (subject/object, mind/body, meaning/matter, person/thing, culture/biology), and in particular the privileging of subject–mind–meaning over object–body–matter. In the social and human sciences this tendency leads to a representational and semiotic bias, meaning that, in this case, analysts tend to read the (living and dead) body as a text rather than including a complementary perspective of the body as an experiential 'being-in-the-world' (Csordas 1994).

In this phenomenological vein, the Bones Collective (Fontein and Harries 2009) and Fontein (this volume) engage critically with Verdery's analysis of the politics of dead bodies in which the living talk on behalf of the silent human remains. They argue that human remains 'speak to us but not eloquently enough', that the remains provoke an 'uncontrolled empathy' as well as 'efforts to control it, or to speak, care or respond to the dead' (Fontein and Harries 2009: 7). Hence, dead bodies and human remains are not only symbolising aspects of social and political life and acting as a blank canvas for the inscription of political agendas. It is not politics that gives meaning to bones, they argue; rather it is the bones that animate social and political processes such as mourning, othering, marginalisation and subversion. Thus, the very materiality of the human remains deserves analysis as a phenomenon in itself, a phenomenon that has the power to animate politics and produce affect.

Inspired by the recent turn in anthropology towards the materiality of things and substances, Fontein and his colleagues attribute the disturbing, animating, constraining and enabling power of human remains not simply to the ambiguity of dead bodies as uneasy subject/objects or persons/things, but as flowing, transforming materials that are recognisably human, thus demanding stabilisation into definable 'objects' and perhaps identifiable 'subjects' (Filippucci *et al.* 2012). Yet human remains defy these contested processes by their excessive alterity or indeterminacy: the 'torque of materiality', in Fontein's case, of the leaky, fleshy and stinky remains exhumed from a mine shaft in Zimbabwe.[14] This 'torque of materiality' suggests that human remains are more metonymic than metaphorical, that they signal 'presence' more readily than meaning, and that therefore processes to turn human remains into metaphors, such as 'the dead', are often contingent and contested (Filippucci *et al.* 2012).

Here we may see a parallel between this approach and Posel and Gupta (2009), who interpret the ritualisation and careful preparation

for disposal of the dead body as attempts to stabilise the boundaries and (re-)establish the dignity and human-ness of the dead body, and thereby reproduce the threatened distinction between humans and animals. Whereas Posel and Gupta (with Nussbaum 2004) focus on the human/animal distinction, Fontein and colleagues focus on the human/thing distinction. Using Latour's (1999) 'post-humanist' approach,[15] we could interpret the post-mortem human intervention as an attempt to stabilise and 'purify' the category of the human against the thingy-ness, the material indeterminacy and the excessive potentiality of dead bodies and human remains.

We may also relate this discussion back to Bataille's and Foucault's understanding of sovereignty as a form of power that is being performed on the body and therefore relies on the resistance and the resilience of the mere lifeforce of the body. Even in death, however, when the lifeforce of the body has been subjected, the bodily substances resist in their materialities. Dead bodies do not go away that easily, a fact that represents very real and practical problems for those responsible for mass violence. As the Nazis realised, even cremation is a meticulous time- and energy-consuming method of disposal that in no way could keep up with the daily toll of dead bodies in the extermination camps; this, as van Pelt (2002) has convincingly documented, was the background for the development of new types of ovens and slackened regulations for cremation in Nazi Germany. And after attempts at hiding the dead and mutilated bodies in mineshafts as in Zimbabwe or removing, transporting and reburying them elsewhere as in the case of ex-Yugoslavia, they may still show up and *qua* the 'torque of materiality' (and DNA-tests) threaten to overturn political agendas and foundational narratives and challenge the power of those who are responsible.

In his psychoanalytical register, Borneman (this volume) also in a way attributes agency to the dead, which has implications for how dead bodies are related to politics and sovereignty. Polemically he asks how the living have become convinced that the dead are governable. How come they believe they are governing the dead, that it is not the other way around? The living seek to govern the dead through rituals. Following Lévi-Strauss, these can be rituals of mourning that transport the present into the past promising closure by placing the dead irrevocably in a separate time–space as ancestors; or rites of commemoration that transport the past into the present by recreating 'the sacred and beneficial atmosphere of mythical times' in which the living can mirror their ancestors and their deeds (Lévi-Strauss 1966: 314).

Nevertheless, as Borneman's and several other chapters in this volume show, the living are often not very successful in their attempts to govern the dead. Borneman argues that the dead, like the Lacanian real, produce affect. This may be seen as having effects in terms of displaced aggressions, repetition compulsion, the compulsive moving around of dead bodies and even the belief that the dead can, and indeed should, be governed. Borneman uses the case of communist leaders and the Marxist ideology, which, in stark contrast to fascist ideologies and leaders' obsession with death and the dead, sought to govern the dead away from the present. As Marx wrote in the introduction to *Capital*, 'the tradition of the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living', which is why we should 'let the dead bury their dead', as he famously quoted from the Bible (Matt. 8:22).[16] But the communist leaders were unable to govern the dead. Rather they placed themselves inside the nightmare of the dead generations by disappearing the dead imperial family, mummifying the body of Lenin and cremating and officially deeming as ungrievable – even in the private sphere – the millions who suffered death because of the regime.

Conclusion

As the foregoing theoretical approaches suggest, each in its own way, we are dealing with deep layers of the constitution and change of political and moral communities, with phenomena that eschew simple rationalisations and explanations. Whether we take psychoanalysis, phenomenology, critical theory or even (to some extent) structural functionalism as our theoretical frame of reference, they all point to an excess of meaning and affect, something that evokes the mystical, the sacred, the liminal and the transgressive, which, in the end, escapes control as well as explanation. In this perspective it seems as if states and other sovereign bodies can be associated with practices of controlling and appropriating for themselves the excessive 'powers of death' or, alternatively, preventing contenders from appropriating these powers by disappearing, annihilating or otherwise preventing the proper disposal of dead bodies.

Whereas some of the theoretical approaches set out in this chapter are ahistorical, there is no doubt that relations between sovereignty and dead bodies have to be understood in their historical contexts. Thus, we may end by asking why the interest in dead bodies/human remains and their relation to politics has

been growing over the last decade. One factor could be the current denaturalisation of state sovereignty that accompanies privatisation, deregulation, globalisation and the challenges posed by sub- and trans-national political entities. Not only are many states unable to control mortality and uphold the monopoly of violence, but they are also unable to effectively stabilise, contain and hold on to the dead bodies, as de Boeck (2007) and Magaña (2011) have shown in the cases of Kinshasa and Mexico, and as both Robert and R. Kristensen document in this volume. These are among the phenomena that suggest that the powers of death, to the degree that states were ever able to control them, are in the process of being disassociated from the state and being appropriated by other political and moral communities. On the basis of the material and arguments brought out in this volume, the fate of dead bodies and human remains seems to be a very appropriate field to study in order to trace how claims and performances of sovereignty are developing in the contemporary world.

Notes

1   Understood as beliefs in the sacred nature of human bodies (Bernault 2006: 371).
2   Quoted in Barbour and Pavlich 2010: 3.
3   This is disputed by Ariès (1981), who historicises the terror of death, linking it to eighteenth-century changes in the domestic sphere where death became less random, less mystical and less familiar than before. Death became a self-conscious terror instead of the tame death that characterised death in medieval European society (see also Borneman 2004).
4   See for example Ariès 1981; Becker 1973; Freud 1959. For an overview, see Seale 1998.
5   Real Cedula, 27 March 1789. Archivo General de Centro America A.1.2.4, Leg. 2246, Exp.16218.
6   See for example Pinfold 1997.
7   In Guatemala, for example, relatives can have dead bodies exhumed after six years and bring home the bones if they so wish.
8   You may of course argue that bio-power is not governing the dead but rather governs the living subjects by constraining and conditioning their access to corpses.
9   The First Provincial Council of Mexico 1555, quoted in Lomnitz 2005: 83.
10 Rites of separation were first described by van Gennep (1909), who saw them as a type of rites of passage that were 'pre-liminal', characterised by exclusion and symbolic death.

11 'The various means of *purifying* the abject [the various catharses] make up the history of religions, and end up with that catharsis par excellence called art' (Kristeva 1982: 17).

12 However, unlike Hertz, who sees society as an agent that orchestrates emotions, Bloch and Parry perceive society as being produced through ritual.

13 Seale (1998: 52) explains this in terms of the separation of the old and dying, who are socially dead before death.

14 Pinney 2005, in Fontein, this volume.

15 Holbraad (2011) distinguishes between humanist (for example Gell and Miller) and post-humanist approaches to materiality.

16 From *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*.

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Part I: Containment and negotiation

3

The proper funeral: death, landscape and power among the Duha Tuvinians of northern Mongolia

Benedikte Møller Kristensen

The traditional funeral practice of the Duha reindeer nomads of northern Mongolia consists in placing corpses on the open ground in the wild forest (*xer*) to be eaten by wild animals. Under socialism, the Mongolian government issued a ban on open-air (*il tavah*) funerals and imposed compulsory burial of the dead in cemeteries (Delaplace 2006). This ban was a part of the Mongolian People's Republic's 'dead-body politics' (Verdery 1999) aimed at nationalising local subjects through the centralisation of burials. Moreover, it was a branch of its 'biopolitics' (Foucault 1982) as the state sought to govern the health of the population through their corpses. However, these policies were never fully acknowledged by the Duha, who regard burial beneath the ground as an inherently dirty, dangerous and thus improper activity, whereas open-air funerals are seen as the proper and clean way of treating the deceased. Burial may capture the souls (*sünc*) of the deceased underground and transform them into malevolent devils (*chötgör*[1]) thus polluting the land and its inhabitants. In their effort to avoid such pollution the Duha often, and during the last years increasingly so, conduct open-air funerals; especially in the case of deceased shamans and 'ordinary' people suffering a 'non-ordinary' death as a result of violence, drinking or magic. This chapter thus aims to explore the Duha concepts of proper and improper burial, including how their 'return' to open-air funerals may be conceived as an effort to (re)gain control over local bodies, lives and lands.

The Duha are a Tuvinian minority group of reindeer herders and hunters, amounting to only around 400 people, living in the forested and mountainous regions of northern Mongolia bordering Russia. They practise a kind of local shamanism, where they regard certain sacred amulets (*eren*) in the household and natural entities in the landscape as animated by the life and deeds of past kin. Such artefacts and entities continually mould the lives of the living kin. An amulet may for example bear the imprints of past and present kin members' amoral deeds, such as murder, theft or magic, which may spread misfortune among the living kin. The sacred artefacts of the Duha are thus, as Caroline Humphrey (2002) has proposed regarding the possessions of the Mongolians, 'expressive and transformative of persons-in-society' (2002: 83), since the relationship with possessions is 'constituted as a matter of character or personality, as an ethical rather than a legal relation' (2002: 65). The burial sites of the Duha materialise the ethics of the deceased subject, his kin and the state. For example, if the deceased died because of the transgression of traditional rules (*yos*) for proper conduct, such as heavy drinking or fighting, or if the bereaved treated the corpse improperly,[2] the burial place may turn into one that is devilish (*chötgörtei)* and polluted (*bohirdoh*), materialising the past amoral deed. Drawing on Robert Hertz (1960), death among the Duha may be seen not as 'a mere destruction but a transition' (1960: 48), where 'death is consummated only when decomposition had ended: only then does the deceased cease to belong to this world' (1960: 47). Among the Duha the advent of death marks the potentially pollutive and dangerous separation of the soul from the body, where the proper departure of the soul depends on the 'fast' and 'clean' decomposition of the corpse. The open-air funeral is thus regarded as the morally proper and clean way of treating the deceased.

Following the collapse of socialism in Mongolia the Duha have increasingly returned to their traditional open-air funerals. The question is, how can we interpret this 'return'? It may be seen as a part of the so-called revival of shamanism in the region, which has been interpreted as a 'way of making misfortunes meaningful' (Buyandelgeriyn 2007: 142), or a 'socio-psychological' way of dealing with 'identity crisis' by 'reconstructing ethnic identity' through shamanism (Shimamura 2004: 197–8). Following this lead the increase of open-air funerals could be seen as a local version of the 'dead-body politics' discussed by Verdery (1999), making the Duha corpses 'political symbols' engaged in the reordering of their 'entire meaningful world' (1999: 35). The Duha corpses seem to work partly as 'political

symbols' as neighbouring people recognise the Duha funeral places as exclusively Duha territory. However, the return to open-air funerals cannot be seen as a 'reordering of meaningful worlds' as such, since they serve to control rather than understand the potentially danger-ous and unstable powers of corpses. Drawing on Pedersen (2011), the Duha turn toward shamanism may be viewed not so much as a projection of the political into the religious sphere, but rather as 'an ontology of transition' actualising the labile and uncertain character of post-socialist northern Mongolian society (2011: 35). As a result of the severe changes the former socialist state and the contempor-ary Mongolian state enforced and continue to enforce upon the Duha traditional way of life, many Duha feel they have lost control over their own bodies, lives and lands, a control they seek to regain through their increased use of shamanic rituals and open-air funerals.

A socialist, moral and hygienic burial

Before the revolution in 1921 the open-air funeral seems to have been practised widely[3] by the Duha and Tuvan, as well as the Mongolians, which has been documented by early travellers in the region and ethnographers (Haslund-Christensen 1945; Kenin-Lopsan 1978; Pozdneyev 1971: 95). After the revolution the Mongolians started to replace their traditional open-air funeral with European burials in cemeteries. The revolutionary hero Sühbator was one of the first Mongolians to be buried in the Altan Ölgii cemetery in Ulaanbataar, which later became a resting place for numerous other socialist her-oes and representatives of the Communist Party (Michel 2002: 1). In 1955 the Mongolian government issued a decree imposing com-pulsory burial of the dead in cemeteries and banning the traditional open-air funerals of the Duha and Mongolians (Delaplace 2006: 47). The reason behind this decree was, according to Delaplace, both to eliminate a tradition that was considered 'backward' and 'dirty' and 'to involve the dead in a socialist building project', where the graves of the dead were concentrated in cemeteries near the cities (Delaplace 2006: 47).

Although the Duha saw the decree as a violation of their sha-manic tradition it was not implemented by the state to fight reli-gious rituals and belief. Rather it was part of the socialist 'struggle against the feudals' (Baabar 1999: 293) and their 'amoral' and 'dis-respectful' ways of treating the lower classes. The state perceived the open-air funerals as a feudal means of suppressing the masses: the

feudal Lamas were granted a 'respectful' burial beneath the ground, whereas lay people were merely thrown away in the open as just so much rubbish (Delaplace 2008). According to Delaplace (2008) and Billé (2010) this is reflected in the state's propaganda material, where the 'open-air funeral was described as a lack of rites and an unregulated (*jurmamgüi*) abandonment of bodies' (Billé 2010: 157). The regulation thus aimed first and foremost to foster a dignified memory of the dead, whereas giving corpses away to dogs and birds was said 'not to encourage one to respect one's relatives' and could 'provoke disdainful dispositions of them' (Delaplace 2008: 55–62). Moreover, the law seems to have served the socialist agenda of 'resignifying local spaces and bodies' by saturating them with the 'specific political values' (Verdery 1999: 39–40) of the socialist state. The socialist aspiration of the decree can be underlined by the fact that just a year before the new burial decree was implemented, the revolutionary hero Sühbator was removed from the Altan Ölgii cemetery to the newly built mausoleum in the central square of Ulaanbataar in 1954.[4] Finally the decree seems to have served the bio-political aim of preventing the potential contagious effects of placing corpses in the wild. Health, hygiene and the fight against contagious diseases was an important part of the Mongolian People's Republic's policy throughout its history (Brown *et al.* 1976).[5] However, the open-air funerals of the Duha seem not to have posed any actual contagious risk, as traditionally they must take place far away from human settlement and the corpses are usually eaten by wild predators – and thus quickly disposed of.

Between 1954 and 1956 the Duha, who had formerly lived as stateless forest dwellers in the taiga areas of Russian Tuva and northern Mongolia, gained Mongolian citizenship. With their new legal status followed dramatic changes in their traditional livelihood; their reindeer were collectivised and only a limited number of people remained in the taiga to look after the reindeer, while most other Duha were relocated in the fishing *negdel* (collective) in the nearby village of Tsagaan Nuur (see Farkas 1992). According to some of my informants the Duha living in Tsagaan Nuur were forced to abandon their traditional funeral practice, as conducting an illegal open-air burial was punishable by a huge fine. They reported that: 'Nobody in the village disobeyed the law, as they were afraid to be fined.' However, the Duha in the taiga continued to grant the deceased open-air funerals, since 'nobody in the taiga cared about the law, as nobody would check it'. Yet, one of my informants told me that the various burial practices in the village and the taiga simply derived from practical concerns, since 'in Tsagaan Nuur [the village] we had the cemetery,

so people buried their deceased. In the taiga there was no cemetery, so we did, as we have always done: we left them in the open.'

The state's project was thus only partly adopted by the Duha, and many of those who were forced to adopt it feared that their deeds had given rise to malevolent *chötgörs* haunting the burial places. However, an older Duha man who had lived most of his adult life in the city of Darhan, told me: 'I am not a religious man. I do not believe in *Chötgör*. When I walk over a graveyard my eyes do not see anything and my ears do not hear anything [referring to spirits].' Yet, all other Duha of my acquaintance never voiced doubts about the presence of *chötgör*.

The reason why the new burial practices were never fully embraced by the Duha may be connected to the tension between the socialist and local concepts of cleanness and morality. The Duha told me that they preferred to grant their deceased an open-air funeral, because it is 'the clean way' in contrast to the 'dirty' burial beneath the ground. This is illustrated in the following:

> We have this tradition [open-air funeral] from the ancient times. We leave the body in the open, so dogs and birds can rapidly consume the body completely. If you visit the site seven days later, nothing is left. We do this to keep things clean. They are left in the open to ensure that their souls can leave and rise into the air. If they do, they come back and take care of their children and future kin [i.e. as reincarnations].

Interestingly both the socialist state and the Duha perceived corpses as subjects and used concepts of cleanness and dirtiness to define their different perceptions of what constitutes the morally proper and improper treatment of corpses. The socialist state defined open-air funerals as amoral, because corpses were treated not as human subjects, but as mere waste, and as dirty since an unburied corpse was considered a health risk. The Duha perceived burial underground as hindering the proper departure of the deceased soul and as a dirty practice potentially polluting the land of the living. Ironically, the state-enforced burials seem to have boosted the shamanic tradition: The burials produced numerous places haunted by *chötgörs*, which led to an increased need for shamanic rituals in order to appease these malevolent beings.

Polluted by socialism

The integration of the Duha as citizens in the Mongolian state in 1956 marked a transition from their traditional life as hunters in the taiga,

with limited knowledge of and access to the surrounding nation-states,[6] to an integration as workers in the *modern* socialist state. On the one hand, this legal acknowledgement changed their traditional livelihood as nomads and hunters fighting for everyday survival in the taiga, turning them into workers in the socialist state with *free* access to various consumption and consumer goods, medical supplies and education. On the other hand, it implied a transition from a life structured around the flexible rules of their shamanic tradition to the more fixed laws of the Mongolian People's Republic, where their shamanic beliefs and rituals and other so called feudal practices – such as the open-air funeral – were prohibited (see Farkas 1992).

As in other parts of Mongolia, the Duha remember socialism generally as a time of 'prosperity, stability and security' (Pedersen 2011: 48), as it marked a jump from a life of severe poverty and insecurity[7] to a life with the material surplus and social security of the socialist state. However, citizenship also forced the Duha to adopt a new way of life, where modern/socialist ideologies, laws, practices and consumer goods were introduced and mixed in new ways. This slowly but consistently polluted and transformed the spirits, bodies and land of the Duha. For example, an elderly Duha explained that their blood and bodies became polluted during socialism, because: 'we were taught to eat a new Mongolian diet [based on flour, rice and livestock meat] in the *negdel*, which polluted our formerly clean and medical blood'.

The introduction of compulsory burials is also said to have polluted and transformed the Duha land and its spirits, as one middle-aged male informant explained:

> During communism many *lus* [water and earth spirits] were transformed into *chötgör*. You see, we were told to bury the dead, they burned our *eren* [amulets], and they dug holes in the ground to search for stones and so the *luc* were transformed into *chötgör. Chötgör* are ferocious, they may steal your soul.

And the shaman Gompo elaborated:

> Today the *gazriin luc* [spirits of the earth] are ferocious, because people have polluted their homeland. Therefore *lus* are harming people. In the old days our homeland was clean, but today it is polluted. According to our traditions a dead man should not be buried in the ground. 'The natural law' [*jam*] is to place him on the open ground.

The Duha concept of *jam* refers to a set of rules attached to the land of *Oron Hangai*[8] (literally the forested land), but referring both to

the concrete visible landscape and beings (humans and animals) and its invisible inhabitants (spirits). The *jam* consists of some kind of fluid hierarchical order of living beings (spirits, humans and animals), where spirits are generally in a superior position, humans in a middle position and animals in an inferior position. Moreover each kind of being has its own 'way of being' (*asjigtai*) – its characteristic livelihood, character and corporeal characteristics – which humans must not interfere with. To live according to the rules is to place oneself in the right position in the hierarchy of living beings and avoid mixing one's own 'way of being' with that of others. For example, a bear is only in the character of prey if it is situated in a physically lower position than the hunter, whereas if it is placed in a higher position, e.g. sitting in a tree, it is forbidden to hunt it down. Moreover, it is forbidden to shoot it during hibernation, though it may be positioned underneath the ground physically lower than the hunter, because it would interfere with its 'way of being'. Humans, animals and spirits each have their own distinct way of being, but humans are also divided into different *beings* each with their rules according to their ties to a or several *eren(s)*.

In contrast to the spirits of the neighbouring Darhad people, who according to Pedersen (2011: 51) 'were unable to move within the "frozen" (immutable and changeless) infrastructure of everyday *negdel* life', the spirits of the Duha seem to have cracked the ice of the *negdel* life already during socialism. For example I was told several stories of how Duha and other locals during socialism had turned mad from encountering the *chötgörs* of the burial places outside of Tsagaan Nuur. For example an older Darhad told me how her two sons had turned mad – a state in which they were still held – because they had herded sheep close to a burial place, where they were startled by a sudden encounter with a *chötgör*. They lost their souls and became captured in a limbo of madness.

The Duha in the taiga also continued to grant their deceased ones open-air funerals during socialism. Inspired by Caroline Humphrey (2004), I propose that the Duha in the taiga managed to carry on the illegal practice of open-air funerals through establishing a kind of 'localised form of sovereignty' (2004: 420) 'nested' within the 'higher sovereignty' of the Mongolian state. Humphrey discusses how it was possible for the mafia in Buriyatia to establish a 'localised sovereignty', in the form of an illegal *marshrut* system of local taxi-drivers, which was 'nested' within the Russian state. According to Humphrey this was achieved because a great deal of what the *marshrut* system did ensured people's freedom of movement in the city and thus the

function of the city was 'not provided for in the law' and hence was '"invisible" to it' (2004: 423). In our case, the 'nesting' of the 'local sovereignty' of the taiga seems to have arisen from state officials' fear of the invisible 'powers' of the shamans and spirits inhabiting the taiga, which seems to have limited their enforcement of the law in the taiga. Obviously officials' fear of spirits was not provided for in the law, as from the socialist state's point of view spirits were simply superstition. However, drawing on Taussig (1999) and Højer (2009), the officials' fear of spirits may have been brought about as a result of the socialist state's strategic effort to eradicate the so called superstition, which ironically brought superstition to life precisely because the efforts put into destroying it revealed it as 'something which was important and powerful enough to necessitate destruction' (Højer 2009: 579). The fear of the Duha shamans and spirits was evident in many of the stories I overheard in the taiga. People told me that even though officials knew of people who were secretly performing open-air funerals and shamanic rituals in the taiga they 'never did anything to prevent the open-air funerals' and 'they seldom imprisoned the shamans'. However, in the cases where shamans were arrested they were always, according to the stories, 'treated well', because 'the police feared them'.

Nested within the forest of dangers

Even today many Khalkha Mongolians and neighbouring Darhad people are afraid to travel into the taiga and wild forests (*xer*), which is the traditional homeland of the Duha, because they fear the Duha shamans and the invisible *spirits*[9] that inhabit the area. I overheard numerous stories of how outsiders suffered various misfortunes initiated by their improper engagement with the *spirits* of the taiga. One such story was recounted by a Duha who had formerly worked as a border guard:

> Our border patrols [referring to patrols of a non-Duha ethnicity] are struck by bad things [*muu yum*], because they don't know how to deal with *lus savdags* [water and earth spirits] and how to make offerings. But people from the taiga [Duha] know how to worship *lus savdags* and behave well. If they pollute nature, they can clean it up again by themselves.

This former guard told how he once went on border patrol with a young Khalkha Mongolian border guard. On the patrol they shot a

moose close to Agi mountain. The moose was not killed – though it was hit with the bullet right in the heart – but escaped to the gorge on the northern side of the mountain, an area known by the Duha to be guarded by a tiny childlike master spirit (*eze*) named Avlin. The Mongolian border guard followed it to the gorge, a place that according to the Duha it is forbidden to approach. His transgression of this rule resulted in various misfortunes in his life:

> That year the house of my friend [the young Khalkha Mongolian border guard] burned and this autumn his young wife passed away. Such a hardship has arisen. Also the son of our commander at the border post shot himself ten years ago. It happened because of our commander's misbehaviour, by not following the rules [*yos*]. It happened because he did not worship the upper *tenger* [the heavens], *lus* and *Oron Hangai*.[10] Such things happen because these people don't know the places of *lus savdags*, *chötgörs*, *eren* and sacrificial places and the mountains with *ezens*.

The 'localised sovereignty' of the taiga does not refer to a fixed geographical space nor to a fixed set of rules. It revolves around the fluid and labile space of *Oron Hangai*, consisting of its multitude of 'local sovereignties' materialised in the places and objects embodied by spirits, which have 'the capacity to determine conduct within the territory of a polity without external legal constraint' (Humphrey 2004: 418). To travel safely in the land of *Oron Hangai* one must continually try to sense the hidden rules of its places and beings. This entails a complex knowledge of the signs in nature indicating the presence of certain spirits and an intricate familiarity with the nature of various spirits and places. Moreover, the land of *Oron Hangai* is characterised by its 'lack of boundaries' (see Pedersen 2009) and its intermix of 'neutral places' (not inhabited by spirits) and 'powerful places' (inhabited by spirits). These places are continually in the making, as human deeds and lives give rise to new places of *power* and thus new rules to be followed. The enrolment in the sovereignty of the Mongolian People's Republic forced some Duhas – as we have seen – to violate their traditional rules and adhere to the legislation of the state, which gave rise to numerous places that are haunted by *chötgör*.

The contemporary turn toward the open-air funeral may be seen as a kind of 'dead-body politics' (Verdery 1999) of the 'localised sovereignty' of *Oron Hangai*. Yet, this 'dead-body politics' is an attempt to elicit the labile powers of the sovereignty of *Oron Hangai*, an idea that contrasts with the meaning that Verdery gives to dead-body politics as an ordering of meaningful worlds – a sovereignty that is

recognised by Mongols and neighbouring people who fear to trans-
gress the 'powerful places' of the Duha, as reflected in the following
story told by a young man of the neighbouring Darhad:

> I went to the taiga last week to cut down wood and after a long day I took
> a rest under a tree. When I woke up I could not find my axe, and I went
> to search for it. It was very strange, because I was all alone in the taiga.
> But, then I passed this place, where I saw a human skull, and I knew it
> was a Tsaatan [Mongolian name for the Duha] funeral place. So I realised
> that this man had taken my axe. I should not have cut down woods in his
> vicinity. Only Tsaatans can approach such a place.

The agency of the corpse

According to the Duha humans have three souls: the soul of bones, the
soul of blood and the soul of the mind and heart (*canaa-cetgel*). The
first two are respectively tied to the bones and blood and disappear
with the decomposition of the corpse, while the third moves freely
around in the body. It may escape during dreams or in an instant of
sudden fright – and following death it is finally detached from the
body. The deceased may linger in his corpse or possession if he is not
aware of his own death or if he does not want to give himself up to
dying. The souls of the deceased are among the Duha, as among the
Tuvans in general (Lindquist 2007), said to stay around the house-
hold and closest family for the first seven days after the advent of
death, unwilling and unable to leave. Only after the seventh day is the
soul capable of leaving this world, which it must ideally leave between
the seventh and forty-ninth day after death. In order to ensure this
departure it is of the utmost importance that the living kin follow the
rules for a proper funeral. These rules are not fixed but differ from
family to family; however most people seemed to agree on the fol-
lowing rules: the deceased must be undressed and wrapped from top
to toe in white cotton cloth; the corpse must be placed on the sunny
slope of a mountain, at a far distance from human settlement; the
oldest relative must give a farewell speech to the deceased, persuad-
ing it to leave this world; sometimes belongings will be burned and a
shaman or Buddhist Lama may conduct a ritual in order to guide the
soul of the deceased to its proper resting place. The living kin under-
take these practices in order to ensure the proper departure of the
soul to – in the case of a lay person – some kind of afterworld or – in
the case of a shaman – its embodiment in a certain spirit vessel/amu-
let (*eren*) or a sacrificial tree (*tahih shutdeg mod*).

The soul of a lay person should ideally leave this world and travel to the heavens (*tenger*) and/or the land of *Erlegin*, which is said to be a forested world like this world, but characterised by darkness and 'only lit up by the rays [*tuja*] of dead people's souls'. Some people told me that the land of *Erlegin* is a kind of transitory place, where the souls of the dead wait to be reincarnated in the foetuses of future kin; others said that it is the eternal resting place of the dead. The soul of shamans is, however, bound to stay in this world. As one older female inform-ant put it, 'they do not have the right to die and live in peace'. Three or four years after the advent of death the soul of a shaman will take up abode in her *eren*, shamanic dress and sacrificial tree, from where they empower and disempower their living kin. I perceive the sha-manic paraphernalia of the Duha as 'agents' (Gell 1998), since they are the material form through which the powers of deceased shamans are passed on to present kin groups. The corpses and bones are also poten-tial 'agents' materialising the moral rules and ethics of the Duha. If corpses have not been decomposed and in particular if the bones have not been cracked within the first seven days of the advent of death, the souls may linger in the bones and transform them into the 'agents' of devilish things (*chötgörtei yum*). Such devilish things arise from the improper embodiment of human souls in their material remains, pol-luting and transforming the souls of the deceased ones, their corpses/ bones and their resting places into devilish beings, entities and places. The often violent agency of corpses thus seems to be the materialisa-tion of the broken rules and ethics of 'the local sovereignty' of *Oron Hangai*, which continue to haunt the living.

According to the Duha the agency of the corpse normally ceases to exist when its flesh has been completely consumed and its bones fully broken by predators, which might also be the reason why people – according to one older shaman – in the old days used to smash the bones of the corpse during the open-air funeral. Still the deceased may retain its agency, though its material remains have disappeared, if it manages to stay within another object, such as a natural entity or an artefact. Yet, when the soul realises that its former body has gone it is likely to depart for the afterworld. This may explain why the Duha show great relief when they realise that a deceased was consumed fast, as one middle-aged Duha woman told me: 'My father's younger sibling left Ulaan Huu's grandfather at the entry way to Darkan. At first one crow came and left. Then five crows came and then another four crows and after that one eagle. We had left him there and went away and when we came back everything had disappeared. It was a very good sign.'

The subjectivity and agency of the object of the corpse thus rests in its materiality, where the corpse is considered a potential subject until a predator has recognised it as food and starts eating it.[11] Recalling Hertz (1960), the proper departure of the soul is thus dependent upon the fast and complete decomposition of the corpse.

In the case of the death of a shaman her ritual paraphernalia should be hung at a sacrificial tree, ensuring that the soul of the shaman will find her way back to her belongings and stay in this world, lingering in them. Sooner or later the material form of an *eren* as concrete amulet will decay and disappear, but the agency of the deceased shaman will remain, since it is also embodied in a sacrificial tree and the whole area around the tree. The very material permanence of places ensures the continued agency of shamans, since their powers are encapsulated not only in the sacrificial trees, which may die and decay, but also in the very place surrounding such trees. The *eren* of the Duha are both kinds of 'living memories' and sorts of 'living sovereignties'. The history of each kin group is materialised and remembered through their *erens* and sacrificial places, where each embodies a specific part of history, whereas their entirety materialises the totality of the group's history. The *erens* and sacrificial places of kin groups also embody certain sets of rules to be followed by their kin and spread illness and death among those who do not adhere to these rules.

However, socialism led to the pollution of numerous places and beings, which continues to leave its mark on contemporary lives. For example, a place in the taiga called Morlig is said to be inhabited by especially malevolent *chötgörs* originating in the souls of an entire camp of Buriad herders (men, women and children) who were executed as counter-revolutionaries by Russian Soviet soldiers in the 1940s.

Lawless lives in the forest of laws

The collapse of socialism marked the end of the state law on funerals, but also the end of social security, which the Mongolian People's Republic had provided for its citizens. As one informant explained, 'before the state at least cared about us, today it does not care' and 'because of the hunting laws, we are forced to live illegally'. In 1990, the fishing *negdel* in Tsagaan Nuur closed, leaving its former workers

unemployed. With limited chances of gaining new employment many Duhas decided to return to their traditional lives as reindeer nomads and hunters in the taiga (Farkas 1992: 17). Today the main subsistence of the Duha is hunting, which thanks to strict contemporary regulations is illegal. Yet, though the border guards in principle are tasked to enforce the hunting legislation in the taiga, and though the border guards often visit the taiga, no Duha has to my knowledge been fined for illegal hunting in the last ten years, though hunting is happening on a regular basis.

Today the Duha perceive the transgression of their traditional rules during socialism, and in the present, as one of the reasons behind the contemporary escalation of violent deaths among them. A matter of great concern for my informants was a series of unnatural deaths in a group of relatives, which were all simultaneously attributed to the decline of social security in the Mongolian state, the rise of alcohol abuse and crime and the transgression of traditional rules. The first deaths were two young Duhas, who had been killed in the village of Tsagaan Nuur apparently by a gang of drunken people; a third Duha was robbed and killed in a gold mine. The local police refused to investigate these crimes, because, according to one of my informants, 'they were just Tsaatans'. The fourth death was a middle-aged man, who, according to my informants, died as a result of the medical malpractice of a local doctor, as my informants explained: 'Nobody cares about us. In our region we only have drunk doctors.'

Though there was a shared consensus that these deaths were linked to wider social problems in the region, such as alcohol abuse, crime and the lack of proper medical care, many relatives of the deceased thought that the *real* reason behind these deaths was somehow linked to the transgression of the rules connected to the *eren* of their kin. Some thought that these unnatural deaths were all connected to a visiting shaman's improper offering gift, of raw mutton, to an *eren* in the family. A gift offering deemed improper in this family, particularly raw meat, is against the rules of their *eren* and among the Duha in general, since it has a history in the former state's introduction of a new *pollutive* diet. Moreover, this shaman was considered ignorant because she had left her homeland of the taiga to live and work as a shaman in Ulaanbataar and become part of the so-called market shamans certified by the state.[12] Later the family tried to appease their *eren* by offering it the appropriate 'white food' and by having a ritual performed for it by a local kindred shaman.

Some thought that these deaths were initiated by other new *erens* kept in the households of the deceased, as they all recently had *erens* made by the same shaman. Others thought that all the deceased had been infected by a *chötgör* roaming at a former burial site. Yet others proclaimed that the deaths had been caused by an *eren* inherited by a female shaman of this kin, as the rule of this *eren* was that it had to be inherited by a male. Finally, one non-kin member confided to me that she thought the deceased themselves, except one of them who 'was indeed a good man', were to blame, as they were 'always fighting and drinking'.

During my stay in the camp, no consensus on the reason behind these deaths was reached, but various steps were taken to avoid future deaths: some families removed their *erens* from their household and placed them in the wild forest (*xer*) and the elder sisters of the female shaman tried to convince her to grant her *eren* to a male member of the lineage. Also, the most recent deceased was given an open-air funeral, though it had been very difficult, as he had died in the village. From there they had carried his corpse for two days on horseback to a distant mountain in the taiga. But as they explained: 'We had to do it this way, because Baatar [an older Duha] told us, that he should have a Tuvinian funeral. A funeral according to the rules, so we thought it was proper to do it this way.' However, the first three men were not granted open-air funerals, but simply buried in the village for practical reasons.

The families' 'lack of knowledge' about how spirits were engaged in the series of deaths can – drawing on Højer (2009: 578) – be viewed as 'knowledge of lack', as most of them agreed that the deaths somehow derived from the kin's transgression of traditional rules for proper conduct with the spirits, whose content was however unknown. The family's efforts to circumvent future deaths by giving up their *eren*, offering them 'white food' and granting the last of the deceased an open-air funeral can be seen as attempts to prevent further misfortune. Confronted with their own 'knowledge of lack' of the spiritual causes behind these deaths the acts of giving up *erens* seem to be some kind of a *gamble* with 'unknown spiritual powers', where the only certain thing is that it *will* cause a reaction, which might – if lucky – turn out to be fortunate.

The Duha feel both abandoned and obstructed in their very livelihood by the post-socialist state and simultaneously haunted by the *powers* of the former state. Their lands and bodies have been polluted and their basic subsistence as hunters is deemed illegal by the state, leaving them in a marginalised and unprotected position,

where they are forced to lead an illegal – in the eyes of the post-socialist state – life in order to survive. The contemporary turn towards the open-air funeral – and the shamanic tradition in general – among the Duha may be seen as an effort to elicit the *powers* of their spirits and (re)gain agency in their own lives and lands. By turning toward the rules of *Oron Hangai* rather than the laws of the Mongolian state they seem to evoke 'a localised form of sovereignty' that is 'nested' within 'the higher sovereignty' of the Mongolian state 'but nevertheless retain a domain within which control over life and death is operational' (Humphrey 2004: 420). This 'localised form of sovereignty' differs substantially from Humphrey's case, as the 'localised sovereignty' of the Duha encompasses the realm of both humans and spirits. I suggest that in their effort to (re) gain agency in their lives, the Duha engage in a gamble with the 'localised sovereignty' of *Oron Hangai* in general and the *eren* in particular. These powers continually set out the rules to be followed, granting merit to those who conform to the right rule and punishing those who do not.

   Among the Duha the rules of the sovereignty of *Oron Hangai* as well as the Mongolian state have become blurred. Thus, the law of the state seems to have obtained the labile nature of the rules of *Oron Hangai*, since nobody is quite sure of its composition and whether and how it may be enforced. Although hunting is seldom penalised, the fear of being caught is reflected in various practices, such as the cutting up of meat outside the camp. Such practices are developed to hide illegal activities, and the associated shamanic actions serve to evoke the protection of the spirits. Today, the Duha turn to their shamanic tradition in order to elicit the powers of the spirits and avoid the characteristic misfortunes of the post-socialist era, such as murder, alcoholism, poverty, imprisonment or fines. In conclusion we may perceive the open-air funeral as a political gamble with dead bodies engaged to elicit local powers and navigate between sovereignties.

Notes

1 In this chapter I use Mongolian terms to elaborate on relevant local terminology. The language of the Duha was originally Tuvan, but since only elders speak Tuvan today and most others only speak Mongolian I have chosen to use Mongolian terms. However, I have retained the Tuvan term *eren* in my translation of Duha spirit vessel/amulet, rather than the Mongolian term *ongod*, as the Duha usually engage the Tuvan term *eren*.

2   An example of such improper treatment of a corpse was the death of a middle-aged Duha, who was wrapped in silk cloth instead of cotton cloth, which delayed the decomposition of the corpse. An instance which frightened his kin, who feared that his soul had not been able to leave this world, as they had heard – through a passing sheep-herder – that his corpse still lay fully wrapped and untouched by predators four month after his open-air funeral. Another example of improper treatment is the state-enforced burial beneath the ground.

3   However, among the Mongols the open-air funeral seems to have existed among other mortuary customs. As documented by Crubézy *et al.* (2006), four different burial customs were already practised before the time of Genghis Khan: 'bodies could be buried, cremated, left exposed to wild beasts or in trees, whereas exposure could be followed by the collection of bones and their subsequent burial'.

4   In 2005 the mausoleum was dismantled and the remains of Sühbator were cremated and his ashes placed back in the Altan Ölgii cemetery.

5   Before the revolution the health system was confined to traditional Buddhist doctors and shamans, whereas in 1923 the new state started to develop the health sector according to Soviet/European standards with the assistance of Soviet/Russian medical professionals (Baabar 1999; Brown *et al.* 1976).

6   One older Duha explained: 'When I was a boy, I did not know about Russia or Mongolia. I only knew that I was a boy of the taiga.' Still, the surrounding states seemed to have been very present in the lives of the Duha, as the Mongolian government attempted to force them out of Mongolia and back to Tuva several times in the years between 1920 and 1950 (Wheeler 2000: 41–2).

7   The insecurity of being caught between the wider Soviet Union and Russia, where the Mongols repeatedly drove them out of their traditional pastures in Mongolia and back to their southern pastures in Tuva in the Soviet Union. Moreover, they feared brutal collectivisation and enforced military service in the Second World War, which many tried to escape in the 1940s. In this period several Duha families fled from Tuva to Mongolia, where they stayed illegally until they gained citizenship in the mid-1950s (Wheeler 2000: 41–4).

8   The concept of *Oron Hangai* refers both to the concrete, visible, local landscape and to its invisible spirits.

9   Such spirits include: *chötgörs* haunting places of bad (*muu*) deaths; the master spirits (*eze*) guarding specific places; the water and earth spirits (*lus*) connected to the waters and earth; and the *erens* left at the sacrificial trees (*tahih shutdeg modnuud*) of the Duha.

10   Literally the forested land, a concept referring both to the local landscape and its spirits.

11   It is only a potential subject, as the soul may have left to attach itself to some other object and may have properly left for the afterworld, leaving the corpse desubjected as an object.

12   Today many local Duha perceive shamans from the city as market shamans, whom they do not consider as 'true' shamans, but as 'fake'

shamans primarily interested in making money from their rituals. In Ulaanbataar many shamans are taught to shamanise in the so-called shamanic schools, where they also take shamanic exams and receive certificates confirming them as 'true' shamans. However, many Duha perceive this schooling as both 'fake' and also inherently dangerous, as they are not taught the 'true' rules of shamanism, but 'fake' ones, which may pollute, rather than heal people.

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4

Dead zone: pollution, contamination and the neglected dead in post-war Saigon

Christophe Robert

Thresholds and water margins: Binh Hung Hoa cemeteries

The entrance gates of the Binh Hung Hoa cemeteries are falling apart. The faded, mouldy yellow paint peels off. Some of the gates date back from the time of the American War. One of them displays a date, 1964, the year President Johnson decided to escalate the war in Vietnam. These are the largest cemeteries in Saigon/Ho Chi Minh City, located in one of the poorest areas in the city. The cemeteries are full and overflowing: Buddhist graves and Christian graves; graves of Vietnamese and ethnic Chinese; graves of poor people; graves of soldiers of the old regime, who died in vain for the defunct Republic of Vietnam, which disappeared when Saigon was liberated in April 1975 (or fell, according to American terminology).

Many dead rest here, but their spirits are restless and disturbed these days. People say that the Binh Hung Hoa cemeteries are the oldest in the city. On late nineteenth-century French colonial maps these graveyard sites were recorded on the far northwestern margins of the new colonial city of Saigon then under construction. At the end of colonial rule in Vietnam in the mid-1950s, the city had moved closer to the cemeteries that now lay on the other side of the airport. These days the graveyards are full and in complete disarray. No one is quite sure of the actual number, but they are said to hold several thousand graves. Many more graves have been swallowed up by encroaching slums and new streets and neighbourhoods, a

Figure 4.1 Refuse on the side of the road through Binh Hung Hoa cemeteries.

process that has accelerated since the American War. On the northern side, near the crematorium, fields of bright green vines blanket the cemeteries. The presence of tombs can only be divined by large ripples in the folds of green. Names and photographs of the dead on the tombstones peer from under the vines.

Abandoned tombs haven fallen over. Some graves have been removed and are filled with weeds. Others have been renovated, and refurbished with enamelled green or blue tiles. The area is insalubrious. The streams that cross these marshy lands erode gravesites. Local inhabitants complain of the run-off from the cemeteries. Dead bodies are leaching bodily fluids in the waterways. There is no running water in these poor neighbourhoods, and people draw water from wells they dug themselves. They complain of government inaction, of the lack of social services and help to deal with unsanitary conditions and an emerging health crisis. Newspaper articles report high rates of cancer in the area. Here, in addition to economic hardship and the lack of educational and job opportunities, living in a poor area is marked by high incidence of disease and widespread anxiety about health hazards from adjoining cemeteries and factories.

In 2008, the People's Committee of Ho Chi Minh City decided to remove these cemeteries, and turn the area into an urban park. And since then? The removal of the cemeteries stalled, and turned into a

story of official incompetence and callousness that became big news in Saigon in 2009 and 2010 until the government reined in the press on this specific issue. Rumours continue to circulate about the future of the area. In summer 2011 construction began for a luxury gated community and golf course on a large, adjacent marshy plot that belongs to the Airport Authority.

The cemeteries are located in swamp lands next to Tan Son Nhat airport, which became the largest American air base during the Vietnam War. The marsh is bright green. The almost unnatural hues of tall grasses seem oddly out of place. The swamp is surrounded by tight rows of narrow houses, carpentry workshops and street-seller stalls. The marshy landscape looks tentative, in movement. The land is flat, but the eye cannot see very far; the horizon is short. It is one area of the city where you find huge trees, dark untrimmed wild canopies. Scrawny ponies graze along the canals and cattle waddle in graveyard ponds. The narrow streets are packed with dirty traffic and dust. The air stings with exhaust fumes from motorbikes and trucks carrying construction materials. Houses are being demolished on the edges of the marsh. Landfill has been brought in to create stone, gravel and concrete platforms sunk into the mud on which roads and new houses will be built. The whole thing feels tentative, crowded, unstable.

The cemeteries are large, uneven rectangles covering several square kilometres, filled with tight rows of graves in barren sandy soil. But the resting places of the dead have been encircled. Adjoining streets have filled up with new houses and apartment buildings. Along the marshy eastern edge of the cemeteries the golf course and luxury resort under construction next to the airport fuel renewed pressure to remove and relocate derelict graveyards, and the inhabitants of this poor neighbourhood. Beyond the cemeteries a few isolated graves are still found among warehouses. There is a sense of violation here: locals say that many abandoned graves were moved surreptitiously, dug up or simply covered over.

I first heard of this place inadvertently from a Vietnamese woman I will call Lam, during a conversation about her mother's death. Lam is a busy, forty-year-old banking manager. Her face tenses up and she nervously scratches at her left cheek with a fingernail as she describes an anxious episode that occurred in these cemeteries. 'I went out there to meet a supplier. At the time I was in charge of marketing. We needed to have quality advertising signage made. I made an appointment with this factory manager, to meet him at the factory site. I took a taxi one rainy evening to go meet him and

check on the quality of the work.' She gets agitated as she recalls the story: 'The taxi stopped. It was completely dark. I was scared. I asked the young taxi driver, "Where are we?" We were lost. He said, "This is the address, sister. It's here." I could not see anything in the rain and the darkness.' She calls the factory manager, and waits in the taxi. He finally comes out to meet her. 'I get out of the car, and I almost fainted. We're surrounded by graves. I could see the tombstones everywhere in the darkness.' She asks the factory manager, 'What is this place?' The factory manager tells her that his company rented this space cheaply, 'Because it was right next to the cemeteries.' Lam's face is distorted by the memory of this terrifying moment. Her mother had recently passed away. She was grieving.

Lam's unexpected encounter with graves and the dead momentarily terrify her. A year later, she still recalled this episode with great anxiety and sadness. 'I'll never forget that moment. I was so scared. It was so sad. I kept thinking about the fate of the people who were buried there, and about my mother.' Lam was working, her mind focused on projects and checklists. And then something scary and seemingly impossible unexpectedly came into view, and jolted her.

Grieving and mourning are painful, patient attempts to let go of the departed. When Lam stepped out of the taxi into the rain and the darkness the departed returned with unexpected violence. What is it exactly that returned then? In Vietnamese notions of death, the dead are not kept at bay.[1] Spirits of the dead are present in funerary altars found in all Vietnamese households, however modest. The spirit world is nearby, not remote, and ordered by means of funerary rituals and daily offerings to the spirits of deceased ancestors on the family altar at home.[2] Spirits live among people, or rather the living inhabit a realm made up largely of the tactile and soothing presence of deceased ancestors, and occasionally the less benevolent presence of errant ghost souls.

But at that terrifying moment, Lam's brutal encounter with abandoned graves and disorder raised the spectre of chaos, of violation of the ordered relationship between the world of the living and that of the dead. Georges Bataille long ago reflected on the fear of violation and contamination resulting from encounters with corpses, and humans' efforts to institute rituals to domesticate the pollution from encounters with dead bodies (Bataille 1962: 46–7; 1991: 79–81). In Lam's case, something brutally came into view. But it was more than a difficult or unexpected encounter with death. It was an utter jumbling of categories and mix-up of expectations concerning death.

I reflect here on one specific instance of this jumbling of ritual, social and political categories. On the surface this looks like a case of reclaiming fallow, marshy land for urban redevelopment and road building. The removal of cemeteries from city centres or urban areas is not a new or unexpected phenomenon. In nineteenth-century Paris or London, for instance, dozens of *intra-muros* cemeteries were removed and converted to parks (Thorsheim 2011). Similarly, in the last few decades governments in Hong Kong, China and Singapore have been promoting cremation and the removal of cemeteries from city centres (Teather 2001). But in this case, as evidenced by Lam's unexpected encounter with abject death, in addition to simply neutral 'urban development' we are dealing with lingering anxieties stemming from ethical violations surrounding the treatment of corpses and the deceased.

The southern threshold of this area is a marsh crossed by a stinking, polluted stream called Black Water Creek. Its dark, slow waters meander through the flat landscape. The terrain is being prepared for development. Some of it has been developed and built up already. But it is still a puzzle of land plots under construction. It is being bulldozed, drained, filled out with sand and landfill, flattened and tamped down. In spite of the large red billboards from the district's People's Committee asking people not to litter, wild and illegal dumping is rampant. The marsh is uninhabited, but not abandoned. You detect human presence by the trash that is dumped everywhere and that sinks slowly into the black mud. It is land in transition. Most of it has not been claimed by anyone yet. Hence, as is often the case in Vietnam, it is used for dumping.

This zone is about death, pollution, refuse and purification. The impulses to purify come from below, from locals' calls for better social and health services, for an end to the contaminated run-off through the graveyards. Impulses to purify, clean up and evacuate also come from above, more brutally and visibly, through demolition and construction in attempts to civilise, pacify and reorder these complex, irregular social and natural environments. On the north bank of Black Water Creek a squat, white building hosts a newly built government memorial to the war dead. These dead are safe, properly named, recognised and honoured during state commemorative ceremonies. In autumn 2011 a newly built middle school opened, not far from the war memorial. Development proceeds piecemeal, plot by plot, with large areas of marshland, wild grasses and reeds in between.

Dead zones: anxieties over matter out of place

Water animates this landscape. In Vietnam as elsewhere, marshes are drained to build houses and channel water flows for agriculture. But run-off and pollution, and deep movements of water below the surface, evoke other forces. The swampy ground is alive and forces people to take notice. It brings about erosion and erasure, forces that push things to the surface. The dead resurface as well – both symbolically and in real terms, when erosion shifts the soil around tombs and collapses graves, when water gnaws at the sandy loam and digs gullies through the cemeteries. In these gullies, people say they imagine the veins of the dead, and the fluid movement of the corpses now liquefied, now alive in new abject and polluting forms.[3]

The land is alive with forces through the movement of water. There is no real way of knowing where water comes from and where it flows to. It erodes and seeps through sand and sediments. Here, in the marshy, sandy soils on the margins of the Mekong Delta, the annual seasonal cycle of the rainy and dry seasons drives time – water or its absence is the key element. Abundant, regular rains and drained lands turned into rice fields and orchards have created the wealth of the Mekong Delta. But in these threshold lands and water margins where the city expands on the outskirts of dense urban cores, run-off and interactions of land and water in marshlands create unstable and shifting landscapes. These are domains of real estate speculation, wild zones of power[4] where people dump garbage and build without permits, where state officials clear the land and residents for massive profits – indeterminate zones where, in earlier times, cemeteries were built on the far margins of the city.

These cemetery spaces are disorderly. Death spills over into the realm of the living. 'I'll never forget that moment', says a terrified and sorrowful Lam. The dead suddenly peered out from their graves, unannounced, when she stepped out of the taxi. The boundaries of the cemeteries are soft; their margins creep outward. Entrance gates have no fences and no locks. They mark a threshold, not the edge of a border. These thresholds are open and welcoming, since the world of the dead is not remote from that of the living. In rural areas, in less populated zones, graves are built according to geomantic prin-ciples in propitious locations, next to houses, in rice fields, in hills, both inside and in the margins of inhabited territory, so that ben-evolent ancestors can feel they rest peacefully near and among their descendants.[5]

Here in the city, according to local officials and their attempts to rezone neighbourhoods, there is no longer enough room to bury the dead. The dead are crowded in their decrepit spaces: graveyards are full. People reclaim every small space on the cemeteries' margins. Street sellers set up portable awnings and flat tables along the dusty roadsides and paths that cross the graveyards. They push abandoned tombstones out of the way to display their wares: plastic wallets, helmets or sunglasses.

Middle-class urbanites object to the presence of street sellers and 'uncivilised' (*khong van minh*) selling among places of repose of the dead. The poverty in neighbourhoods around the cemeteries displays itself in recognisable ways, as with itinerant hawkers waiting for the occasional client. This is a familiar scene, replicated day and night everywhere in Vietnam. But the ways in which these street vendors operate near cemeteries cause disquiet and repulsion among the *nouveau-riche* bourgeoisie. Graveyards are not supposed to be places where people ply their trades. And yet a bit of careful observation of daily life in these neighbourhoods reveals a different picture: the graveyards are zones of intense social activity, and most of it has little to do with death or burial. The Binh Hung Hoa cemeteries are zones of passage. They form large 'open' plots in an otherwise incredibly dense urban fabric. Their lesser density, the massive tree canopies, the streams that crisscross them, their location next to large marshlands and industrial zones surrounding the airport render them anomalous. Locals use muddy trails as shortcuts: motorbike and foot traffic is incessant in the cemeteries. People visit relatives' graves by motorbike, and ask street sellers and passersby for directions into the maze of tombs.

The educated middle classes deplore the lack of civilised behaviour – the lack of civility – of the poor. Why do discourses about poverty collide with those about death, moralised and displaced into the realm of culture and civilised behaviour? In marginal areas where occupancy is less dense, where land rights are not clearly established, and in transitional zones between city and countryside, neat binary demarcations and roles waver. This has to do in part with difficulties in local administration and management of city services. These are ambiguous zones, where the unclear attribution of tasks and the lack of accountability of the city government give rise to the types of environments we encountered around the cemeteries. Discourses on the 'uncivilised' behaviours of the poor should perhaps be reconceptualised as symptoms of dispossession and mismanagement. In public areas where ownership is not private, there are few efforts at

maintenance. It is in part because no money can be made directly or visibly in these processes, where tasks and responsibilities cannot easily be parcelled out for immediate or significant profit.

These cemeteries fall into zones of unclear sovereignty ruled by customary arrangements. They are run by local crews of graveyard workers who pay off local officials for a free run of the facilities and services. Decay is visible: the graveyards are patches of sandy soil with dried-up clumps of weeds, strewn with litter, garbage bags, construction materials, piles of ashes and half-burned trash. I ask Lam, who lives nearby, why the area is littered with refuse. She replies matter-of-factly, 'Because it's a poor area.' The idea is that the poor live in their garbage. But the reality is more complex, more subtle: the poor live among garbage because the city and government services that handle waste removal do not operate there. Why not? Because this is a poor neighbourhood, says Lam. The logic is neatly circular, yet inescapable as far as most Vietnamese are concerned.

Because of the disquiet caused by cemeteries, these zones are further left to abandonment. They are on the other side of the threshold. The neat boundaries between civilised and uncivilised behaviour that are hallmarks of middle-class speech and attitudes toward the poor crumble. Cemeteries are places where the presence of garbage adds another layer of discomfort and disquiet to facts of death. Death here is linked directly with garbage, refuse, pollution and contamination.[6]

'Dead zone' (*khu vuc chet*), says Lam. 'The area is really "complicated" [*phuc tap*]. A lot of poor people live there. They have no jobs, no income, no place to live. So they do small jobs: they dig graves, they build tombstones, they help clean and restore the graves. It's very expensive: they charge high prices for these services. But if the relatives of the deceased don't agree with the price, these people – you know, many are from "black society" [criminal groups] – they will destroy the grave.'

She adds that she reads about this in newspapers, in addition to her daily conversations in the neighbourhood. She continues on the same themes, prodded on by growing anxiety: 'This area at night is very "complicated" [*phuc tap*] because it's not lit. It's very dark at night. People enter the cemeteries to play cards and gamble, to smoke [heroin], and when they're high they simply lie on the graves and fall asleep there. Prostitutes go into the area as well. Very "complicated" area!' She pauses briefly, and rounds up her description by focusing on the forlorn lives of youths in the area: 'The ponds gather rain water. People fish there. The children in the area have no

community centres or parks. They have nowhere to meet and play. It's a very poor area. So in the evenings children and youth go to the cemeteries to play. They play in the tombs.'

Here, the combination of poverty, destitution, death and criminality gives rises to an imaginary landscape superimposed on the actual topography. The sense of violation, the presence of the dead and ghosts that roam the poorly lit cemeteries at night is relayed by popular, imaginative constructs of outcasts and a criminal *Lumpenproletariat*. The living who occupy and inhabit these cemeteries violate the peaceful rest of the dead. Their callous handling of the deceased – of people unrelated to them – when combined with the real pressures of destitution creates powerfully negative images of violation. Yet violation of taboos surrounding death is displaced into the realm of criminality and lack of accountability, more than simply violation *per se*. Vietnamese are used to the presence of the dead, but as a properly domesticated presence, channelled by respect for the deceased inscribed in daily ritual practices of ancestor worship. Here the callousness of the poor and destitute who live among the tombs shocks middle-class sensibilities. What is perhaps most shocking, as in the cases Lam describes, is the spectre of abandonment of the dead and the abject callousness of the living toward the anonymous dead.

Identifying the dead: names and images of the deceased

In the far northern reaches of the cemeteries, along dusty roadsides, vines blanket graves in layers of bright green. Vines are reminders of oblivion, slowly advancing waves of forgetting and abandonment. The graves are not all subjected to this in the same way: in some plots, graves are better kept and locked in metal cages to protect them from desecration.

Regardless of their current state, all graves display names of the dead, and the briefest of biographies summed up simply by dates of birth and death. Photographs of the face of the deceased enamelled or engraved on some headstones embody the words and give depth and substance to absent biographies. The images of the dead give a sense of presence and militate silently against forgetting. The effect is uncanny, since this mirrors the display of the photographs of the dead found on family altars in all Vietnamese homes. The city of the dead mirrors that of the living.

Similarly, in ceremonies in Buddhist temples during the seventh lunar month, Buddhist monks and nuns read long lists of names of people who have died in previous years and whose names relatives want read publicly for merit-making. Reading the names of the dead is a long ceremony. The gathered worshippers pray for the souls of those who are named and whose ashes rest in urns on long rows of shelves in carefully tended funerary halls. Here, as opposed to the cemeteries, Buddhist pagodas concentrate the power of dead souls in their demarcated enclosures. They domesticate and sublimate it in ritual.

I ask Lam and other people who have placed their parents' urns in Buddhist temples why they did so. Echoing what others said, Lam replies: 'I travel a lot for work. I worry that I may miss important dates in the ritual calendar.' She means that monks' prayers and the supernaturally potent milieu of the Buddhist temple provide ritual protection to her mother's remains, even if she is absent. Her recently widowed father joins in the conversation and adds, 'I worry about the neglect and abandonment of these cemeteries. Such terrible places.' Here again, the question concerns the demands of remembering the dead, as opposed simply to the threat of oblivion and anxieties of decay and abandonment. During the Buddhist name-reading ceremonies worshippers line up in long rows in a packed hall, all wearing the light grey robes of the lay follower, a moment of gathering and display of society to itself, as Durkheim would have it.

Image: faces of the deceased on tombstones

In cemeteries newer tombstones display a photograph of the deceased. The face of the deceased is represented by a photograph taken close to the time of death, for instance as an elderly person for those who died in old age.

For North Vietnamese Army soldiers and National Liberation Front guerrillas a name and the national crest of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam peer outward from the grave. In military cemeteries in southern Vietnam, the process of naming and display is often abbreviated: many of the dead were only known through nicknames or first names, their dates of birth unknown. In some cases, they are identified only as 'woman', 'man' or 'anonymous' – piercing reminders of the chaos of war, although provincial governments since the 1990s have invested heavily in the refurbishing and upkeep of military cemeteries. In some cases, a photograph is displayed on

a military grave, invariably showing the face of a very young man or woman next to the date of his or her 'sacrifice' (*hy sinh*). The concept of sacrifice anchors this display of anonymous or abbreviated biographies. In Vietnamese military and war martyrs' cemeteries, individual identity of the dead is always already subsumed in the national discourse of sacrifice, a sacrifice of blood for the eternal life of the nation.

This poses a problem for the dead of the 'old regime' (*che do cu*). I put this term in quotation marks because most older southern Vietnamese loathe this phrase, which disdainfully implies that their dead were on the losing side of history. The display of images of the dead from the 'old regime' and its soldiers cannot be officially recognised. They may be honoured privately, but not recognised as such, in the public sphere or in cemeteries. As soldiers of the defunct Republic of Vietnam (1955–75, with Saigon as the capital) they are the ignominious dead, the ghost soldiers who cannot be named, and whose memory cannot be honoured publicly. Official narratives of the victorious Communist Party skirt the death and continuous, if spectral, presence of these soldiers. It is rendered as absence, subsumed under narratives of a heroic People's War, of the People-as-One[7] rising to fight foreign aggression. Graves of soldiers of the US-backed Republic of Vietnam are forgotten, ignored, their memory privatised and held to be the responsibility of families of the deceased soldiers, provided they keep quiet about their memories of violent death. The neglect and abandonment of graves in southern Vietnamese cemeteries is often linked to the presence of these unclaimed dead: many families of dead soldiers of the 'old regime' fled repression and 're-education' in the 1970s and 1980s. They left as 'boat people' (*vuot bien*), leaving behind graves that are now at the centre of contention over the presence of large numbers of unclaimed tombs in Saigon's cemeteries.

The face of the deceased on a headstone locates a tomb in relation to several places and sites, and symbolically in several directions at once and along different axes. These images materialise the deceased who peer out from their graves, inhabiting them. But they also call and make a demand on the living, on relatives, descendants and passersby. The dead interpellate the living. Unlike in Western European or American cemeteries, Vietnamese graves do not display epitaphs recalling career, familial belonging or important biographical facts (writer, artist, etc.) that contextualise the life of the deceased. Here the dead are located by means of a name, birthplace, a date (and, sometimes, a time) and place of death, accompanied by

a photographic portrait reproduced on enamelled ceramic. Neutral formulas, such as 'peaceful rest' sometimes figure above or underneath the name. These words and symbols identify the deceased primarily as belonging to a family and a religion, by means of two series of Buddhist and Christian symbols: the swastika, Buddhist symbol of the wheel of the law (*Dharma*) and karmic laws of birth, death, reincarnation and rebirth (*samsara*), as well as the lotus flower, Buddhist symbol of purity; and wheat garlands and the cross for Catholics.

Practices vary and photographs are not uniformly affixed to headstones, though most recent graves include a medallion portrait of the deceased. One effect is that the dead are preserved as alive, by means of a portrait that becomes an image of them in death. This is not a death mask, an image of the corpse, but rather an image from when they were alive.[8] Descendants choose photographs of the dead carefully. These portraits are not exuberant. Smiles are thin and subtle. The face, photographed head-on, fills the oval medallion or rectangular frame: a biography condensed in the portrait and the image of a face. This type of portraiture and the effect of repetition from grave to grave helps identify (with) the dead by recognising them as ancestors – an endless indebtedness by means of which living descendants can recognise themselves as such and locate themselves in kinship and social terms in relation to the deceased. This recognition is an ethical demand (Hegel 1977: 270; Levinas 2000: 82, 105; Mbembe 2003: 14). Here the demand of the other, displayed and conveyed by a photographic image of the face, is the demand of the deceased, dead and yet still alive and able to place demands on others from the realm of death. It is in part a demand for immortality, a wish. But it is also a debt that must be enforced and that the dead enforce on their descendants. To refuse that debt, by improperly paying respects to the dead, by not tending to the graves and the needs of the dead would run the risk of having the deceased turn into ghosts and malevolent spirits.

When graves are abandoned or untended, when cemeteries become dumping grounds overgrown with vines and weeds as a result of administrative neglect, these demands fail. This is not an ethical breach *per se* in the case of families who left or disappeared in the wake of war and the chaos of emigration. People bemoan the fact that graves were abandoned, but do not blame directly those who left as refugees: it is considered part of the violent aftermath and harsh sorrow of war, a sorrow that is best left unvoiced. But it is an ethical failure, and people see it as such, when authorities and

Figure 4.2 The face of the dead, peering out from an abandoned grave.

local officials neglect their duties of caregiving and keeping the dead properly sheltered when cemeteries are not properly managed. Then these fractured memories and threats of abandonment and oblivion index the violent return of something heavily repressed but active within the recent history of Vietnam.

Naming the dead

Naming the dead, the display of names and photographs of the deceased, establishes claims over the land and inscribes it with social norms and an ethical mark. In the name of the deceased and the ancestors, families disavow death – not the unavoidable facticity of death *per se*, but the decaying presence of the corpse. In the wake of funeral rituals, by means of names and photographs etched into headstones, the corpse is transformed into an ancestor, a principle of ideally unending filiation and descent (Hertz 1960: 77–9; Watson 1982). Oblivion, symbolised vividly by the growth of vines and vegetation over the tombs, is the return of something threatening, best forgotten, the materiality of decomposition – something that rituals,

funerals and naming claims over a small rectangle of earth for the corpse below do their best to occult. In the abandonment and oblivion of these cemeteries images of decay resurface. These images of decomposition sneak in and seep into consciousness. The threat in this something that resurfaces stems from the ways it imposes itself. One cannot evade and forget it, or easily put it out of mind (Bataille 1991: 80; Siegel 1983: 9).

Ideally, cemeteries provide a mirror image – cities of the dead mirroring those of the living. The mirror image here, however distorted, is threatening and uncanny. These places become 'dead zones' because they don't seem to stand up to ethical norms of proper behaviour toward corpses of the dead (Posel and Gupta 2009: 301). Here something reasserts itself, something that is best kept at bay, tentatively but successfully in funeral rituals and ancestor worship. The neat demarcation between the worlds of the living and the dead is not a principle in Vietnam: quite the opposite. These two 'worlds' are best understood as the contact zone between the visible world of social relations and the invisible but efficacious world of spirits and the dead (Lévi-Strauss 1992: 246).

The process of naming is extensive. Its deep ritual and familial ramifications extend to political and administrative realms. The problem in part is that administrative failure is almost complete: failure to name, register, count and administer, and govern the dead, who are not cared for properly. The problem of governing the dead mirrors that of governing the living. Official calls for law and order, for cleanliness and public hygiene when the government is eager to blame the criminality of these areas, are undermined by the brute facts of poverty and official neglect in rapidly urbanising contexts.

Dead zone: contamination and symbolic pollution

The territory occupied by these cemeteries is an actual place, wedged between Saigon's airport and industrial zones, and surrounded by marshlands and dense residential areas. But this geographical territory also maps (or is mapped on to) and masks another reality. The territory is both real and imaginary. Through the intervention of an 'outside', of something else that terrifies and escapes language, it becomes imaginary, the territory of fears and anxieties, including social anxieties about 'social evils' because of the poverty and chaos in the area.

'Dead zone' for Vietnamese here means derelict and vague spaces, on the outside, in areas under construction and in thresholds where the city is expanding: liminal areas, unmarked, unclear, unregistered, out of direct municipal and state control, unclean spaces where all sorts of crimes are imagined to take place. These are also spaces of the imagination, anxious spaces where criminality and threatening perpetrators are imagined to reside and roam.[9]

As opposed to the notion of cemeteries as resting places after a long and eventful life, this 'dead zone' threatens and undermines the very image of 'good death' and peaceful eternity (Bloch and Parry 1982: 15; Kwon 2006: 12–16). Other images and other thoughts come to mind anxiously. As we saw with Lam and her father, one witnesses and, on the basis of media representations, one imagines crime, gambling and prostitution taking place in these graveyards – forms of excessive social behaviours and transgressive exchange that shock, because they have no place here. They destabilise the fragile scaffolding of ritual exchange with the dead in this place of repose. Yet the point is that this place is active: the territory is crowded, this is a place of labour peopled by workers who are imagined to be loud and coarse, drink too much, use drugs, have sex with prostitutes, etc.

Contamination (imaginary, symbolic or real) disturbs the 'good death' of people buried here. Something that should have remained out of sight comes to the fore and becomes visible. Contamination, juxtaposition and mixing create anxiety, and perhaps terrify in some cases. Pollution is no longer a figure of speech. Anxiety about the return of the dead, of death that returns, including in the figure of ghosts, is not figurative in this case, but the real event of the reappearance of decay and abjection, the anxious contiguity of threatening figures of prostitutes and junkies roaming at night with polluted run-off from the graves into waterways and water tables in the area. Pollution in this dead zone seeps in and becomes unbearably real and anxiety-producing when its source is identified as 'death itself' (which is an impossible thought, supposedly, but not here). The ritual scaffolding and apotropaic justifications of funerary rites are compromised.

The symbolic pollution of death rooted in decomposition of the corpse is domesticated in ritual (Siegel 1983; Watson 1982). The idea of cemeteries as resting places, too, aims to domesticate this threat: it delineates proper spaces for death, territories supposed to be marked off and domesticated. In these 'dead zones', on the other hand, something escapes. There is run-off. Bodily fluids from corpses ooze and seep into the ground, polluting drinking sources of the living. Hygiene is threatened, and 'social hygiene' problems begin to fester and seep

into view as well, especially when relayed by mass media. There is something unclean and transgressive in this area, and this something 'unclean' extends to sources of lawlessness imagined to be located in poverty – in lack of education, poverty and criminality associated with 'social ills' and people living outside the confines of the law.

This brings into view more complex demands of organisation and less easily located questions connected to governing spaces of death. The problems of governing these large, complex spaces seem intractable: indeed, the 'solution' of the People's Committee of Ho Chi Minh City, which sits in a distant, imposing colonial building in the city centre, has been to decide to raze and relocate the Binh Hung Hoa cemeteries, in effect to eliminate them. This answers demands of a past that will not sit still with more of the same aggressive policies which pretend that the violent wartime past simply no longer exists. Oblivion here is clearly an attempt to forget in order not to face the complexities of that past and the moral claims that some Vietnamese may be able to make in its name.

The city government wants to remove graves and raze these cemeteries because they are a chaotic mess, symbols of disorder, pollution and contamination. But the underlying causes for the apparent chaos in these fallow zones of decay and half-abandoned cemeteries can be traced to precise causes, namely war itself. In order to avoid confrontations over this past that will not sit still, the authorities, instead of addressing it politically, decide to continue to skirt it and pretend it simply never happened. There is something peculiar to this temporality and the political discourses about the past displayed in this removal of cemeteries. As in Hong Kong or Singapore, places where pressure on land for building and infrastructure is intense, the removal of cemeteries is framed first and foremost as a necessary aspect of economic development and growth (Kong and Yeoh 2003; Teather 1999, 2001).

Pressures on land in the city core led workshop and textile factory owners to establish themselves in these poor, outlying districts where real estate and rents are cheap. The personal ties and arrangements that helped create these industrial zones now undermine official attempts at registration and control. Over time, the murky processes by which lands were purchased and leased out make it nearly impossible to clearly ascertain who controls which lands and on what terms. Parts of the cemetery lands themselves have been leased out to state-owned factories, and graveyards have shrunk over time.

Today the city government – with its fragmented jurisdictions and unclear lines of authority – tries *ad hoc* to re-establish control

over these areas and over processes by which public and private lands are apportioned, sold and leased. This reveals anew a strange temporality, in which the past figures as a great chaotic 'before' (*ngay xua*) – which may be further cut off and classified as 'before liberation' (before the end of the war on 30 April 1975) or 'before market economy reforms' (late 1980s), etc. But in the meantime, 'development', 'modernisation' and economic growth have also meant the establishment of entirely new land laws and regimes of property rights, as well as a rapid and massive expansion of private property and speculation on real estate in Vietnam. Cadres from Ho Chi Minh City's People's Committee and district-level municipal agencies placed themselves in a position to apportion real estate projects and enrich themselves in the process. Urban planning and questions of sovereignty have been undermined by government officials in city- and district-level People's Committees, the Planning and Investment Office and the City Architect Office of the municipal government acting as 'intermediaries' in large real estate transactions.

This goes hand in hand with a sort of folk 'common sense' in which the city is classified into good and bad zones and, accordingly, neighbourhoods and populations themselves as either 'good' or 'bad' – popularised by the phrases 'bad people' (*nguoi xau*) to refer to criminals and 'complicated areas' (*phuc tap*) for neighbourhoods with supposedly intractable social problems. In other words, a moralistic middle-class map of urban zones and society arose over time, based on anxieties about criminality and on blaming the poor for their poverty and lack of access to education and social services. This moralisation extends to discourses on cleanliness and contamination in poor urban areas and graveyard zones. On the other hand, the term 'dead zone' is also used by people who live in these areas to point out that they have been abandoned by callous authorities and left behind without any support. In the wake of scandals after journalists unearthed the problem of cancer caused by industrial pollution and water contamination in Binh Hung Hoa graveyards, the official solution has been large-scale removal of cemeteries and people from these 'problematic' areas.

Zones of neglect and abjection

The municipal government of Saigon/Ho Chi Minh City has tried without much conviction or success to close down the textile and plastics factories that dump waste directly into the marshes around

Binh Hung Hoa cemeteries. Factory owners and managers bribe local cadres in order to stay in business and continue to pollute. The government has also tried to regulate illegal dumping of trash and close down illegal garbage dumps that sprouted in the marshes (People's Committee of Ho Chi Minh City 2008). Levels of water contamination have also been tested. But with pressure from the municipal government not to admit to large-scale and widespread contamination problems, tests came back negative and inconclusive (Government of Vietnam, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment 2008). Local residents have a ready answer: tests results were manipulated and the problems hushed up. To them, it is yet again the same pattern of exploitation and abuse of the poor. For residents corruption is the root cause of the widespread pollution and contamination, the abuse of locals and neglect of the cemeteries. Lam notes plaintively, 'The whole society is corrupt. This is what you have to do in order to make a living and survive.' Lam's father, a former journalist, is more direct: 'This entire society is rotten', he says.

Care for the dead in cemeteries and the management of death as a question of public administration have become a scandal because the problem is broader than simply families paying for the care of their dead. Cemeteries are managed by local administrations, yet personal networks of patronage undermine management and strategic planning. For local residents, the abandonment and neglect of these cemeteries are symptoms of the government's neglect for the people. Local officials base their governing practices on fees and profit. For Lam, 'If they cannot make money from something personally, it will never happen.' There is no visible way to profit from the care and maintenance of cemeteries. 'You see, this is why we have these problems. They don't care about the poor people who live here', she adds.

The 'solution' of the municipal authorities to deal with pollution, overcrowding and abandoned graves is to remove the cemeteries. This apparent solution only displaces problems temporarily, by tearing out the local social fabric and carving out new zones for land development and speculation. This 'solution' is also an attempt to erase and forget the past. The problems in these 'dead zones' stem from at least one generation of neglect and official incompetence and impunity, since the end of the war in 1975.

Cities are rezoned by excluding and removing the poor. This is in spite of the fact that workers, the poor and people engaged in the informal economy have got by and built these neighbourhoods from

scratch without official help and support in areas where the government provided none of the basic environmental and social services: no drinking water, no sewers, patchy electrical power and bad schools. More recent discourses about 'modernising' urban infrastructure are intimately linked with speculation on land, and land deals financed by domestic and foreign capital. The poor and the neighbourhoods they have built become impediments (Davis 2004: 15–16). And so are the dead. Both need to be removed and pushed further out into marginal lands on urban peripheries.

As we have seen, for Hegel the ethical nature of the family is revealed in the act of burial and of caring for the dead (1977: 270–2). In Vietnam these are also essential principles, relayed by ancestor worship and Buddhist rituals of care for souls of the deceased, including those of the anonymous and abandoned dead. But, as we saw here, because of contrary forces of poverty, mobility of the poor and the abjection of pollution and contamination, the poor are placed outside of the social. The difficulties these neighbourhoods experience in terms of livelihoods and lack of support from the government have rendered them 'complicated', as the local colloquial idiom has it – and this is now held against residents of these poor districts. The cemeteries are indeed 'dead zones' and 'complicated' areas where the world of the dead and the living intermingle in problematic ways. The informal economies of the *Lumpenproletariat* in these neighbourhoods interact with and feed on addiction, gambling and prostitution. This mostly stems from the inability of the government to regulate the burial of the dead and maintain cemeteries, and provide adequate social services, education and ultimately jobs to local residents.

In the context of the impossibility of concerted popular political action – in the absence of political structures and mechanisms for the accountability of elected officials, and without a vigorous and independent press with investigative journalism – moral claims based on weak ethical principles of shaming are one of the few avenues for comment if not contestation about the unfolding environmental problems and social struggles in these dead zones.

Notes

1 In 'The Living and the Dead' (ch. 23 of *Tristes Tropiques*), C. Lévi-Strauss discusses the range of attitudes toward the dead across human societies, which are always rooted in respect. He opposes two ends of a spectrum,

with many intermediary attitudes across different cultures: from a 'contract with the dead', where if properly engaged ritually the dead return only at propitious intervals, to societies where the living put constant demands on the dead and 'press them into service' (Lévi-Strauss 1992: 233). He notes that in all societies 'a form of sharing cannot be avoided' between the living and the deceased (233).

2 For Hegel in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (paragraphs 452 and 453) the ethical nature of the family is revealed in the act of burial and of caring for the dead (1977: 270–2). I work through this insight by focusing on violations of what Hegel analyses as fundamental ethical norms revealed in the care for the dead.

3 In 'Miasma', Taussig (2004) reflects on the interactions between marshes, mud, decay and death. He builds on Bataille's discussion of the fear of corpses and decomposition in ch. 3 of *The Accursed Share* (Bataille 1991). My discussion builds on both of these theoretical approaches to death, decay and violation.

4 I borrow the expression from Buck-Morss's discussion of 'wild zones of state violence' in the first chapter of her *Dreamworld and Catastrophe* (2000: 21).

5 In *After the Massacre* anthropologist H. Kwon discusses the centrality of the notion of 'house' (*nhà*) to Vietnamese moral classifications of death and to two interrelated form of dwelling: 'the tomb is a house for the dead that shelters the body and demonstrates the deceased's social identity' (Kwon 2006: 13).

6 In these passages, I am elaborating on the notions of pollution and dangers of death as discussed by Mary Douglas, especially in ch. 1 of *Purity and Danger* (1966).

7 C. Lefort articulated the concept of the People-as-One (*le Peuple-Un*) as an essential component of twentieth-century totalitarian thought, in both Nazism and Stalinism. See ch. 8, 'The Logic of Totalitarianism', and ch. 9, 'The Image of the Body in Totalitarianism', in his 1986 book.

8 For a contrasting view of the role of photographs in funerary practices, and analyses of Javanese understandings of corpses and fears of contagious death, see Siegel 1983. My own interpretation of practices surrounding images and names of the dead in Vietnam is heavily indebted to Siegel's ongoing ethnographic analyses of death, naming and uncanny encounters (Siegel 1969, 2006, 2011).

9 The theme of living in graveyards recurs in Vietnamese literature, to stress the abjection of extreme poverty and destitution. For a contemporary example in the form of a short story first published in Hanoi in 1995, see Nguyen Manh Tuan 2003.

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5

Travelling corpses: negotiating sovereign claims in Oaxacan post-mortem repatriation

Lars Ove Trans

This chapter explores the process of death and repatriation of a Mexican migrant, Jacinto, from his home in Los Angeles to his native village of San Pedro Yalehua, a Zapotec Indian community located in the Sierra Juárez mountain range in the southern state of Oaxaca.[1] In this process, Jacinto's close relatives suddenly find themselves in a situation where they have to navigate the claims of various different authorities representing states (local and federal) as well as local, national and transnational communities who each seek to govern not only the whereabouts of the corpse but also the meaning of notions such as belonging, membership and obligation.

In the case of Jacinto, the number of authorities involved had multiplied as in 1976, at the age of twenty-five, he decided to leave his home town of San Pedro Yalehua in search of more promising economic opportunities north of the US–Mexico border, thereby following in the footsteps of many of his fellow villagers and Oaxacans more generally. During the years in the United States, Jacinto had together with his wife, Norma, who also came from Yalehua, saved up enough money to buy a two-storey house in Oaxaca City, where they had for a long time dreamed of returning to live. However, at fifty-one, Jacinto had been diagnosed with diabetes and, despite the warnings of the doctors, continued to enjoy alcohol in large amounts. Four years later, his kidneys failed as a result of the diabetes and alcohol consumption, and he had to undergo dialysis treatment twice a week while on a strict diet. Because of Jacinto's

need for regular dialysis treatment, their dream of retiring in Oaxaca was complicated. On 15 April 2011, any hope of ever returning to live in Oaxaca disappeared as Jacinto suffered from a stroke and fell to the floor in the bathroom of their apartment in Los Angeles.

Jacinto was quickly brought to a hospital, where he was placed in the intensive care unit and put on a respirator. During the following days, Norma and many other relatives made daily visits to see him and pray for his recovery. About a week later, the doctor told the family that it was unlikely that Jacinto would recover because his brain had suffered from a lack of oxygen caused by the stroke. As he explained to Norma, there was no point in keeping Jacinto alive on the respirator at this time, and once it was turned off his heart would eventually fail. Although some of the relatives found it difficult to accept this message, and were convinced that Jacinto had made signs to them by moving his eyes during their visits, Norma reluctantly began to reconcile herself to the doctor's verdict. However, she asked the doctor if it would be possible to wait a few days before shutting down the respirator so she would have time to organise the transportation of the body back to Mexico, a request to which the doctor was sympathetic.

Later that day, Norma began, together with her sister-in-law, Rosa, to investigate what they should do to have Jacinto's body transported back to their native village in Oaxaca. Their first stop was at the Mexican consulate, where a consular staff member explained the services provided by the consulate to help with the repatriation of a dead migrant. Among these services, as the staff member told the relatives, the consulate offers financial assistance that, depending on Norma's economic situation, would most likely be in the range of USD300 to USD500. To qualify for this support, Norma would have to use a special programme set up by the consulate together with a handful of funeral companies that provide only the most basic funeral services and transportation of the corpse to an international airport in Mexico. On the other hand, the programme guaranteed that the total cost of these services would not exceed USD1,763 – less the financial support obtained from the consulate. Norma then contacted one of the funeral companies from the consulate's list and agreed to have them take care of the preparation of the body, necessary paperwork and transportation. The following day, on 26 April, the family returned to the hospital where Norma gave the staff permission to turn off Jacinto's respirator. Four hours later Jacinto's heart beat for the last time and he drew his final breath.

The situation confronted by Jacinto's relatives is not unique but something that many migrants and their families ultimately need

to deal with. For instance, as migrants grow old, they often eventually face the choice of selecting a burial site, specifically whether to be buried in their place of origin or in their new place of residence. In the case of Mexican migration and in particular Oaxacan migration, which began in significant numbers in the late 1970s and then accelerated during the 1980s, an increasing number of migrants have today reached old age, and they are therefore likely to encounter decisions related to death and burial. However, seen in relation to the vast body of literature dealing with the movement of Mexican migrants to and from the United States, the subject of repatriation of dead migrants in the US–Mexican context has so far received slight academic attention. Two notable exceptions are Lestage (2008), which details the increase in repatriations and attributes it to the involvement of the Mexican government and the emergence of a repatriation industry, and Félix (2011), which similarly discusses the institutionalisation of the practice of repatriation along with how the desire for a posthumous return and burial is popularly expressed in the diasporic imagination. Nevertheless, the numbers of posthumous repatriations are significant with an estimated annual average of 8,000–9,000 cadavers in recent years (Lestage 2008: 210).[2]

Not only do the high rates of post-mortem repatriations in themselves merit attention, the contention of this chapter is that the subject also provides a unique prism for studying the politics of identity, membership and obligation in relation to political communities. Taking my cue from Foucault's description of the body as 'the inscribed surface of events' (1977b: 148), my aim here is to examine the engravings that the different authorities involved in the repatriation attempt to carve onto the dead migrant body. According to Foucault, these inscriptions result from the fact that 'the body is … directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it, they invest it, mark it, [and] train it' (1977a: 25). An important effect of the inscriptions, which take place through the powers of discourse, is 'to individuate, to invent subjects, which are attached, so to speak, to bodies' (Lash 1984: 14). However, whereas Foucault's concern is primarily with the living body, the idea here is that much the same argument applies to the dead body, although the objective of these power relations might ultimately be aimed at living bodies.

Thus, similarly to the living body, the corpse is also a site upon which the state and other actors can wield their influence and seek to construct meaning. In this sense, as Posel and Gupta (2009: 299) argue, the corpse has a dualistic life as a material object, a decaying body,

and as 'a signifier of wider political, cultural, ideological and theological endeavours'. Accordingly, the corpse can serve as a 'vehicle' for furthering political projects, as a marker of inclusion or exclusion in the political sphere and with the intention to invent subjects, living and dead (e.g. Anderson 1983; Lomnitz 2005; Verdery 1999). By following the corpse of Jacinto on its journey from Los Angeles to its final resting place in Oaxaca and documenting the practices, discourses and negotiations surrounding his transportation – and Mexican post-mortem repatriations more generally – I intend to illustrate how various authorities seek to exert their sovereignty by inscribing their claims on the deceased migrant body.

A death in the migrant community

For most immigrant groups who struggle in the lower echelons of the US economy death can be a serious economic challenge. The funeral expenses usually involve the costs of a coffin, burial plot, funeral home and mass, as well as expenditures related to housing and feeding family and guests (see Moore 1970). In the case that the body is being sent back to the place of origin, the costs will increase manifold. Historically, in order to meet the financial burdens associated with a death, immigrants with shared backgrounds have often formed burial societies where all members support one another in cases of death. These associations, which have been documented in many parts of the world, are among the earliest ethnic voluntary associations in the United States (Soyer 1997). Besides the immediate economic costs, the death of an individual is also, as Lomnitz points out, 'a crisis for his or her immediate social group, a time in which legacies and debts are revealed and communitarian ideals are enacted' (2005: 58). The enactment and confirmation of such communitarian ideals would seem to be even more important among immigrants, who often find themselves in an unfamiliar and antagonistic new setting with limited access to resources.

In the case of Jacinto, his death left Norma and their closest family in disarray regarding financial matters and all the formalities they needed to deal with. However, relatives, friends and *paisanos* (fellow migrant villagers) quickly responded to offer both emotional and economic support. At eight o'clock in the evening on the day that Jacinto was declared dead, about forty-five relatives and fellow villagers showed up in the apartment of Jacinto and Norma for the first of nine consecutive evenings of rosaries (*novenario*) – a sequence of

prayers – for the deceased. Normally, the *novenario* would begin on the day of the burial, but since the interment would be postponed a considerable time because of the transportation, it was decided that the saying of the rosary should begin that evening. Two days after the last rosary, the family held a wake (*velorio*) in the mortuary of the funeral company attended by almost 150 relatives and *paisanos*. During the ceremony, a priest celebrated mass and the migrant community wind orchestra played a number of funeral marches, as is customary at wakes in Yalehua. The event concluded with the relatives who would be unable to travel back to Oaxaca for the burial taking turns to pass by the open casket to say their final goodbyes to Jacinto.

Not only do the rosaries and the wake provide a ritualised scheme for mourning the loss of a relative, friend and member of the community; this is also a period where a large number of the fellow migrant villagers show their solidarity by giving aid to the family of the deceased. As Hertz (2004: 197) pointed out, 'with the occurrence of death a dismal period begins for the living during which special duties are imposed on them'. In addition to the monetary donations, this aid also takes the form of donations in kind, for example by bringing food and drinks to be served to the attendants at the rosaries or simply by helping out with all the practical preparations in the apartment.

Most of the community members gave their monetary donations to Jacinto's family at the wake by dropping money-filled envelopes into a box placed in front of the casket. In total, Norma received about USD2,400 in voluntary, individual donations and an additional USD100 from the wind orchestra. In addition, the Yalehua migrant organisation in Los Angeles, which has close to 300 members, donated USD600, an agreed standard amount given in case of accidents or the death of someone who originates from the village. Such collections are common among migrants from the same Oaxacan village communities, and the total amount collected can vary from USD1,000 to in some cases USD8,000–10,000, depending on the size of the village community, the reputation of the deceased within the community and whether he or she cooperated with the migrant organisation.

Generally, these acts of reciprocity, which among indigenous Oaxacans commonly go by the name of *guelaguetza*, or *gozona* in Zapotec, serve to reinforce the importance of the village community and create strong bonds of solidarity and goodwill. From a Durkheimian perspective, one can argue that rituals such as rosaries and wakes for the dead serve to strengthen ties between the living

community members by providing occasions for a 'renewal of common values, a reaffirmation of communal conceptions and a strengthening of social bonds' and solidarity (Metcalf and Huntington 1991: 50; see also Hertz 2004). Thus, adherence to the proper mortuary rituals not only serves to mark the separation of the living from the dead and to provide the deceased with a proper destiny in the afterlife (see Robben 2004) but also as a confirmation and demarcation of the social collective among the living – for instance, by demonstrating who is considered to be a member of the migrant community and who is considered to be outside of it.

The Mexican state's programme for repatriation of human remains

Although the community plays an important role in helping the family in the event of a death, the Mexican federal state has since 2004 also offered consistent support to the relatives to help them repatriate a body to Mexico. In fact, Lestage (2008) argues that a major factor behind the general increase in the number of bodies being repatriated has to do with the involvement of the Mexican federal state (2008: 213; see also Félix 2011). However, after an initial increase in the families receiving financial assistance through the consulates from 1,831 cases in 2004 to 2,755 in 2005 (Lestage 2008: 214), this number has since levelled off. Thus, over a three-year period from 2009 to 2011, the Secretariat of Exterior Relations (*Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores*, SRE) helped to pay for the repatriation of 9,297 bodies of Mexicans who had died abroad with a budget of USD13,015,800. That is, more than 3,000 bodies annually, with an average of USD1,400 paid by the Mexican consulates per transfer of human remains.[3] In the case of the repatriations that do not receive financial assistance from the SRE, the expenses of returning them are typically covered by relatives and the community, but also sometimes by the Church or private insurance companies.

One notable effect of the intervention of the SRE in the repatriation of human cadavers to Mexico is that prices have fallen significantly over the last decade. As the director for protection for the United States at the SRE explained to me in an interview, the SRE has made agreements with a number of funeral homes in order to ensure that they have a basic service package available at a reduced price for the repatriation of Mexican migrants. Thus, whereas the

shipment of human remains to Mexico would typically cost between USD5,000 and USD8,000, the SRE has managed to reduce the price to USD2,000–3,000. The agreement, on the other hand, supplies the companies involved with a steady flow of customers referred to them by the Mexican consular offices. The basic package negotiated with the funeral companies includes the issuance of a death certificate, embalming of the body, a very basic coffin made from wooden boards, a simple wake ceremony held at the funeral home and the transportation of the body to an international airport in Mexico. Thus, there are certain limitations to the programme, as Jacinto's relatives would come to experience.

The SRE has not only played an active role in lowering the price. They also in many cases support repatriation based on the needs of the closest relatives. As the SRE director pointed out: 'If people do not have the amount of money, we can pay 1,000 dollars, 2,000 dollars … the contribution can be as high as 100 percent or as little as 10 percent … it depends on every case, on the economic situation [of the family].' In the case of Jacinto, in the meeting with the consular staff member Norma explained that she had not been working for two years because she had been taking care of her husband during his illness, and that their only income had been the disability benefits that Jacinto had received during this period. The staff member then asked Norma to sign a declaration of truth and provide identification that Jacinto came from Mexico. Norma had brought all Jacinto's documents, among them his US passport, to which the woman replied: 'Don't show me that he was a US citizen, or otherwise we will not help you. Just show me his draft card [*cartilla militar*] and his birth certificate.' In the end, Norma received USD1,200, which she was told is the maximum amount provided by the consulate in Los Angeles, because of her financial situation and the fact that they did not have any children who would be able to help with the costs of the repatriation and funeral.

Although most countries seek to provide consular services to their emigrants, particularly in cases of personal crisis, the extent and scope of the services provided by Mexico to its diaspora is unique (e.g. Laglagaron 2010). When asked about the reasons behind the Mexican government's provision of these types of services to Mexican emigrants, the SRE director put it in this way:

> We have a responsibility to our nationals who are overseas. Because they are in a very distressed situation [to begin with]. I mean, they leave with no food, no money. They go out to seek for a better opportunity and we recognise that, and we recognise the contribution that they make in

their hometowns. So, the government of Mexico takes this very seriously, and provides for assistance to their nationals in distress when they are abroad.

In this view, the services provided by the SRE reflect a sense of moral obligation arising from the fact that the Mexican state was unable to provide the migrants with a livelihood to begin with, as well as recognition of the economic contribution that they make to their places of origin once they have left. Similarly, a consul from the Mexican consulate in Los Angeles pointed to the financial contributions made by migrants to their families in Mexico in order to explain why the Mexican state provides this type of service to its emigrants:

> Because they come over to work very hard, but a great part of their income is sent to Mexico, to their families to live, for them to go to school, to buy clothes, food, to build a home and all of that. So a great part of that money goes into Mexico and when they [the families] get the money and buy things, then they pay tax [IVA]. So, in one way or the other, they [the migrants] pay tax in Mexico. Maybe it is not [through] the salary but because of the goods that they [their relatives] buy.

As pointed out by the consul, even though the migrants only indirectly pay taxes in Mexico – in the form of value-added tax (IVA) – the large amount in remittances sent by Mexican migrants nevertheless entitles them to demand certain services from the Mexican government. The quotations from the SRE director and the consul also reflect a general change in the perception of migrants since the 1990s by the Mexican state, where migrants no longer constitute a surplus or a danger but instead are celebrated as the new heroes of development (Martínez-Saldaña 2003). This change in representation has been accompanied by a gradual extension of rights to migrants and various outreach programmes aimed at strengthening the affective ties and loyalty of Mexicans abroad to their *patria* and to ensure the continued involvement of migrants in their communities of origin.

Moreover, the direct intervention of the Mexican state in an intimate aspect of migrant existence makes the state concretely visible in the eyes of the migrants and comes to signify the ubiquity and translocality of the state (see Tenekoon 1988). In this way, the employment of state programmes can be a way to legitimate its rule and establish political authority, even if the presence and attention of the Mexican state outside of its territory can seem to be somewhat in contrast to its absence and neglect within, particularly in the case of indigenous communities.

The body and the nation

Although there may be an important, implicit financial motive behind the various programmes created by the Mexican state to protect and connect with Mexican nationals residing abroad, the programme for repatriation of human remains primarily sends a strong message of belonging. Thus, an important function of the intervention of the Mexican state in the lives (and deaths) of migrants is not only to promote material effects in their place of origin but also to create symbolical effects and in the process reinforce the emigrants' sense of enduring membership. The Mexican consul in Los Angeles reinforced this aspect when I asked him why Mexican migrants wanted to go back to Mexico to be buried:

> In many ways our people are here, you know, to work and to provide a better life for their families and all that, but they always request when they die to go back. It is a belief. It is a love for the country. It is a love they have for the place of birth. It is something natural. It doesn't matter if they get the US citizenship … They may be the best and most loving people of the US, but they never forget that they are Mexicans, and their dreams are to go back in one way or the other.

The relation between national identity and death, underscored by the consul, has been explored by Anderson (2006: 13), who points out that with the ebbing of religious modes of thought, the idea of nation provided a 'secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning'. The meaning provided by the idea of nation to fatality is, as Anderson argues, captured in the public ceremonial reverence accorded to cenotaphs and tombs of Unknown Soldiers (2006: 9), which serves to reinforce the idea of heroic death and produce national heroes who gave their lives for the greater national good (Posel and Gupta 2009: 304). However, it is not only fatality that is given meaning in a national frame of reference; the idea of nation similarly acquires its significance in a symbiotic relationship through the people who have given up their lives for the *patria*. In this sense, the place of death and the corpse in particular is, as Posel and Gupta (2009: 301) note, 'a pre-eminent site for the identification of symbolic boundaries between a nation and its other'. In the case of the Mexican state's programme to repatriate human remains, one can therefore argue that the deaths of the Mexican 'migrant heroes' are incorporated into a certain political (national) narrative where their final allegiance to the nation is demonstrated by the choice of burial site.

The importance of death and the corpse as a site for identification of symbolic, national boundaries arises as it not only reinforces the idea of Mexico as a nation but also stresses the importance of Mexico in the lives of the migrants. In this sense, it serves as an ideal site for the cultivation of a diasporic consciousness among the migrant population in which, following the words of the consul, 'they never forget that they are Mexicans and their dreams are to go back in one way or the other'. The message conveyed is that their identity and final loyalty remain unchanged even as the migrants integrate and assimilate themselves into US society – a view also reflected in the changes made to the Mexican Constitution to allow Mexican expatriates to retain their Mexican citizenship even as they gain a new citizenship in their country of residence. In practice, however, such sentiments and ideas about national belonging are not necessarily stable or eternal. They have to be continually constructed – or, sometimes, enforced administratively through practices such as ignoring the fact that the deceased had also become a US citizen, as in the case of Jacinto. In this context, it is also worth noting, as Lestage points out, that with a population of 9 to 10 million Mexicans living in the United States and an annual mortality rate of almost 6 out of every 1,000 Mexicans in the year 2000, it means that only one in every five or six Mexicans who die in the United States are transported back to Mexico (Lestage 2008: 211). Nevertheless, burial in the 'homeland' is a strong symbol of belonging that feeds into the attempts of the Mexican state to nurture relations and encourage the involvement of expatriates in their place of origin. Thus, it is not only life processes that politics are projected into with the intention to shape processes of subjectivation and promote certain moral forms of existence, as Foucault's concept of biopower denotes (Lemke 2011: 42). In the case of the Mexican state's programme for the repatriation of human remains the same argument can be made with processes of death.

As Jacinto had never mentioned anything about where he wanted to be buried, Norma took it for granted that his wish was to be buried in the village where he was born. Furthermore, since music had been a central part of Jacinto's life, and because he had received his musical formation in the village, Norma thought that it was fitting that the village wind orchestra could in this way pay their final respects to him. Thus, similarly to the consul, Norma emphasises the special attachment to the place of birth as the primary motivation for selecting the site of burial. Compared to Norma, however, the consul puts this attachment explicitly in terms of the Mexican

nation-state, and, in his interpretation, the place of birth comes to metonymically signify the nation-state.

Bureaucratic dead ends – from LA to Oaxaca

The transnational process not only extends the period between death and burial, a period that is in itself often associated with uncertainty and danger (e.g. Kaufman and Morgan 2005), but also multiplies the number of encounters with authorities who must be dealt with, where things in principle can go wrong. Although the Mexican programme for the repatriation of human remains seeks to simplify the process of repatriating a cadaver by offering a full service package, it nevertheless only pays for the transportation to an international airport in Mexico. If the relatives are unable to find the resources to pay for the remaining transportation, it is therefore necessary to contact institutions and agencies inside Mexico to obtain support, such as the Oaxacan Institute for Migrant Affairs (*Instituto Oaxaqueño de Atención al Migrante*, IOAM) if the dead body is destined for Oaxaca.

In the case of Jacinto, the funeral company in Los Angeles had assured the relatives that they would make the necessary calls to obtain the financial assistance needed to pay a funeral company in Mexico City to pick up the casket at the airport and drive it to the village. However, when Jacinto's relatives showed up at the funeral company on the day before the wake with the clothes that Jacinto's body should be dressed in an employee told them that he had been unable to find any agencies that could help them with paying the remaining transportation and they would therefore have to pay another USD500. The relatives acted with surprise and disbelief to this news. Rosa then took matters into her own hands and borrowed a phone to call the IOAM in Oaxaca, where she was put through to the head of the Department of Legal Assistance. He told Rosa that the IOAM would help if they could visit their office on Monday and bring a document from the village authorities in Yalehua stating that Jacinto was born in the village and the age at which he had migrated from the village. After the phone call, the employee congratulated Rosa for having been able to arrange the final part of the transportation. However, Rosa was unimpressed and complained to the employee that he had tried to charge them the additional amount.

On Saturday 7 May, the day after the wake, Norma travelled from Los Angeles to Oaxaca City together with Jacinto's sister,

Zulma, and a brother to help arrange the remaining transportation of the body and to take part in the funeral in the village. Early on Monday morning, they met with two other close relatives, Laura and Reynaldo, who live in Oaxaca City, and went to the IOAM office. Rosa had after her conversation with the IOAM called Laura and instructed her to obtain the document from the village authorities. Laura, who incidentally happened to be staying in the village at the time, asked the authorities to prepare the document and then journeyed back to Oaxaca City on the once-a-day public bus, a six-hour bus-ride through winding mountain roads. With the document in their hands, the small group thought it would be a straightforward matter to obtain help from IOAM, as Zulma later recounted in an interview:

> When we came to the Institute, we thought it was just a matter of giving them the document, and that they would then reply, 'Yes, everything is fine. We will arrange things with the funeral company from here.' Instead, they were giving us a thousand excuses, 'This is not the right document. We need another document stamped and signed by the village authority, and without it we can't do anything.' Gosh, we were looking at each other in amazement, because we were already there [in Oaxaca City] and we had already bought the return tickets [to Los Angeles]. What are we going to do if the body does not arrive? What is going to happen then? They are already waiting for him in the village! Then, Reynaldo intervened and told them that it was a very long way to go all the way back to the village to get another document. Time was running out, we soon had to bury the body because it had now been several days that it had been like that [in transit].

The additional document requested by the IOAM was a statement by the municipal authorities declaring that Jacinto was a person of limited financial means. However, as Zulma pointed out, there was urgency not only because they had bought their return tickets, but also because many villagers were already busy preparing the food to be served to all the attendees at the rosaries and wakes. The small group was therefore getting desperate because if they had to go back to the village to get the second document it would set the process back by at least two days. For that reason, the group decided to wait in the IOAM to see if they could talk to someone in charge who could grant them an exception from the normal requirements. Nothing happened, however, and they were waiting for hours until Norma accidentally had a chance to talk to the secretary of the director of IOAM. During their conversation, Norma, who knew the director was away on a visit to California, told the secretary that her sister-in-

law, Rosa, and her family were personal acquaintances of the director and that Rosa had already talked to him, although this was not the case. The secretary acted with surprise and asked, 'Do they know the director? OK, let me talk to the vice-director.' When the vice-director came, he asked, 'Who talked to the director?' Norma responded that her sister-in-law had talked to him, to which he replied, 'Why didn't you say that from the beginning? If you wait a moment we will arrange everything, don't worry.' Thus, the strategic use of a white lie by Norma to circumvent the bureaucratic procedures demonstrates, as Gupta argues, that a practical knowledge of the hierarchical nature of state institutions can be used to further one's own ends (1995: 384). Indeed, as Zulma explained in her account of the events, 'You see. In this way they got moving, because otherwise they would have made it difficult for us.' It also illustrates that, as Nuijten (2004: 226) notes, although the Mexican state apparatus 'propagates the idea that it operates in a modern, technocratic, professional manner', based on uniform procedures and standardised, administrative techniques, this image coexists alongside another seemingly contradictory image of the state: the belief in 'the right connection', where power relations determine the final outcome.

With all the formalities in order, the IOAM arranged with a funeral company to pick up the casket at Mexico City airport. From there the hearse drove to Oaxaca, where Reynaldo joined the chauffeur to help guide him the remaining way up to the village. A few minutes before midnight, on Tuesday 10 May, Jacinto's body finally arrived in his native village of Yalehua and the church bells were tolled in a particular way that announced his arrival. Many villagers soon came to help the relatives carry the casket to the house of Jacinto's parents, where it was placed on a large table in the porch in front of the house. The porch quickly filled up with family and villagers who came to pay their respects and the casket was opened so they could all see Jacinto's body. The rosary was then recited and, following that, a small group of family members remained to watch over the body during the night.

The corpse and the village of origin

Although the process of repatriation of a migrant corpse in itself can pose a great number of challenges and obstacles, in the event that the deceased originated from an indigenous village community in Oaxaca and the relatives intend to have the cadaver buried in the

village cemetery, they might face yet another set of challenges. Thus, before a dead migrant can be buried in the village of origin permission is required from the village authorities. In some indigenous Oaxacan communities this permission is dependent upon whether the migrant has been cooperating with the migrant hometown association by paying a fixed monthly or annual membership fee. Usually, this is imposed on the migrant to make up for the *tequios* (collective community work for the maintenance and construction of village infrastructure) that they have missed while being away. The village migrant association typically maintains a list of migrants who have cooperated with the association, which is sent back to the village authorities so that they can keep track of who remains in good standing. In the event that a migrant who has failed to cooperate with the migrant association returns to the village of origin, he or she faces possible sanctions ranging from mockery to fines and sometimes imprisonment by the village authorities (Cohen 2000; VanWey *et al.* 2005).

The village of origin not only in many instances puts certain economic obligations on the migrants. Some villages have also extended the local system of governance, known as *usos y costumbres*, to include migrants (Kearney and Besserer 2004; Trans 2009). This system consists of a hierarchy of village offices (*cargos*), which are rotated annually among members of the community, and all male citizens are expected to serve in various municipal *cargos* in their lifetime without pay (Wolf 1957). The village communities governed by *usos y costumbres* have a large degree of autonomy, and it is for example up to the village assembly to decide who should fulfil which *cargos* as well as to determine the sanctions for not complying with these demands. However, when the authorities assign *cargos* to migrants they place on them a tremendous burden, as they may have to leave jobs and families behind in the United States in order to return to their village of origin to fulfil their duties. If a migrant is unable or unwilling to assume the task of the *cargo*, he risks being met with severe sanctions. For instance, in a village neighbouring Yalehua, a very strict enforcement of the rules follows when migrants fail to comply with *cargo* duties, as the village president explained in an interview:

> The sanction is that they lose the right to return and they lose their properties according to the rules. If they do not return the second time they are nominated, then no more [*pues ya no*]. Then they lose the right to live here. For example, if they have a house, if they have properties, then they do not have the right to sell them. That is what they lose. However, those who return, who show respect, they continue to be citizens [*ciudadanos*] with all their rights. That is the way it is here.

In this village, the right of the migrant to return is also extended to the corpse. That is, as the president asserts, the deceased migrant is only allowed to be buried in the village if he cooperated with the migrant organisation while away and fulfilled the *cargos* that were given to him:

> If they did not cooperate, they know that they will not be allowed to enter. Because he [the dead] is going to waste the time of the community police officers [*topiles*] to dig the grave, to waste the time of the orchestra, the authorities and the church.

There are, however, great differences among the villages in the region in the degree to which they require migrants to cooperate with the hometown association and participate in the *cargo* system. For instance, in another nearby village, which also nominates migrants for *cargos*, the authorities are less strict about enforcing the rules in the event that the relatives of a deceased migrant wish to have the corpse buried in the village cemetery even though the deceased did not comply with the *cargos* he was nominated for while away. Thus, as Pedro, a migrant from this village, explained about the practices of his hometown:

> There have been cases where people are not in good standing, where if it is the dead or the family, they [the village authorities] give them a hard time and say: 'No, you can't bury this person here.' So then, they have to go through kind of like a little legal process where they have to go and get permission and, you know, go back to the city and they make them go back and forth, and then they finally do let them get buried there. I don't think that there has ever been an instance where they sent the body back … Once the body is in the village, they eventually let them bury their dead. But they do give them a hard time if they didn't pitch in and they didn't contribute. So, when it comes to that situation, if they [the family] know that the deceased or they themselves haven't contributed, then they don't want to go through the hardship of arguing with the authorities when they are already suffering their loss. So, then they just prefer to leave the person in the city, whether it is here in LA, in Mexico City or in Oaxaca City.

In this way the village authorities can, through the corpse, seek to shape an understanding of what is expected of a migrant villager during his or her absence. As Pedro added: 'There is a little scare-tactic in it also. It is not as bad as it looks but they use it as a way to manipulate you, you know, to contribute more.' Although this village compared to the former seems to offer a bit more lenience, in one case, however, when a migrant villager who for long periods

had failed to cooperate died in Los Angeles, the former village president refused to have the village church bell rung, as it is customary, thereby symbolically excluding the deceased migrant from the community. Thus, in the case of both villages, one can argue that it is not only the banished life, *homo sacer*, as Agamben (1998) writes, that acts as the included outside upon which the community constitutes itself and its moral order. As the above cases illustrate, this argument can equally be extended to the deceased migrant who posthumously risks being excluded from the community.

In the case of Jacinto, throughout his years in Los Angeles he was a member of the migrant organisation and paid his dues, while also being a member of the village wind orchestra, therefore remaining in good standing with the authorities in the organisation as well as in the village. Moreover, as the president of Yalehua explained in an interview, the village authorities were aware of the fact that most of the migrants also face hardships in their new places of settlement, and they therefore sought to avoid putting as many burdens on them as some of the neighbouring villages. Therefore, when Rosa phoned the village authorities to inform them of Jacinto's death, she did not have any difficulty obtaining permission to have Jacinto's corpse buried in the small village cemetery.

Before the burial of Jacinto's corpse could proceed, however, the mourning rituals continued for another day with two more rosaries, this time accompanied by the village wind orchestra. For the second night of wake, a small group of relatives stayed with the body and helped one another to place the belongings of Jacinto that should accompany him in the casket as well as a small bag of food for him to take on his final journey to the other side. Early on Thursday morning, 12 May, the day of the burial, a group of male family members had gone to the cemetery to dig out the grave. Before they commenced on their arduous task they had poured mezcal on the surrounding graves of relatives, as an offering, and on the site of Jacinto's grave to ask permission from a final claim-making sovereign entity, namely mother earth, to make the grave and receive Jacinto's body.

In the afternoon, relatives from Oaxaca City and friends of Jacinto from some of the neighbouring villages came to pay their final respects and take part in the mass held in the village church. After the mass, all the attendants went in a procession led by the orchestra playing funeral marches, followed by the casket carried by a group of men, while fireworks (*cuetes*) were ignited to signal that the body was now going to the cemetery. When they had covered about 100 metres along the small road leading up to the cemetery,

the casket suddenly began shaking from side to side. As Zulma later recounted the event:

> He [Jacinto] did not do this when he left the house, he was calm, but when he left for the cemetery the coffin turned as if it wanted to go [down the road] to the house of his sister instead. It was so heavy that the guys [carrying it] screamed when the casket turned. The poor guys looked as if they were drunk.

A young man, however, came to the rescue by getting down under the casket and helped to lift it with his back. With his help, the men managed to carry the coffin the remaining distance to the ceme-tery, although they were struggling and suffering. While a number of circumstances such as the weight of the casket, the bumpy dirt road and even alcohol might also possibly account for the zig-zag movements, several villagers explained to me that this phenomenon, which in Zapotec is known as *chbegade*, happens when the dead dies with things pending, if it was not the right time to die, or the deceased is refusing to leave his family and his pueblo. Finally, at the cemetery, while one of the village elders made a short prayer and the orchestra was playing, Jacinto's casket was lowered into the grave. As Zulma added on her return to Los Angeles: 'Now, at last, he is resting in peace, because, poor him, he was sent from one place to the next without the body arriving, but finally he made it.'

Concluding remarks

With the death of Jacinto a process begins where a number of differ-ent authorities representing diverse political communities each seeks to exert their influence and govern the handling of the corpse as well as its spiritual afterlife, whether carried out through laws, regula-tions, policies, rituals or social norms. For Jacinto, having migrated to the United States from his native village in Oaxaca, the process of death extended across a national boundary, which together with his indigenous background multiplied the number of authorities involved in managing his death.

A central contention of the chapter is that the involved author-ities in the process of making sovereign claims over Jacinto's dead body concomitantly seek to shape meanings related to member-ship, belonging and obligation. The meanings that these author-ities, metaphorically speaking, try to inscribe on Jacinto's body, and the migrant body more generally, are sometimes overlapping and

complementary, as for example displayed by both the Mexican state and the local village encouraging the migrant's continued membership of the community, along with the sending of remittances. In other cases, however, the claims may be conflicting, as, for instance, when village authorities oblige migrants to return to perform *cargo* duties in order to maintain their membership, and sometimes even decide posthumously to exclude a migrant from the community for failure to meet these obligations while alive.

Although the existence of multiple and, sometimes, overlapping authorities increase the number of demands and potential obstacles that the relatives of the dead have to deal with, it nevertheless also allows room for negotiation and manoeuvring between them. In addition even if the corpse may seem like a privileged site for authorities to inscribe their various sovereign claims – as a subject that cannot resist or speak back – the cadaver does not always lend itself easily to such engravings. For instance, in the case of Jacinto, his soul – as it was perceived by his close relatives and many fellow villagers – continued to make claims on the body after his death in order to avoid being put into its final resting ground.

Accordingly, not all authorities succeed equally well in making their sovereign claims. In the case of the Mexican state's programme for the repatriation of human remains, although the numbers are significant it is, as Lestage notes, less than 20 per cent of the Mexicans who die in the United States whose remains are transported back to Mexico. Thus, not all migrants necessarily share the identities and meaning of belonging promoted by the Mexican government. In some of these cases, mundane reasons such as the economic costs, ignorance of the repatriation programme or simply the location of close relatives – particularly the children – guide the choice of burial site. In other cases, however, the efforts of the Mexican state to promote sentiments of belonging and inclusion among the migrants are perceived to stand in contrast with the failure of the state to provide them with a livelihood to begin with. As a result, some migrants out of resentment towards the conditions that they had to endure before their migration make a deliberate decision not to return to their place of origin, whether alive or dead.

Notes

1 In order to respect the privacy of my informants, the names of people and the village appearing in the ethnography have been changed.

2 This number does not include the repatriation of human remains in urns.
3 The numbers are based on personal communication with the SRE, 27 January 2012. The year 2011 covers the period from January to October. Interestingly, the number of certificates issued for embalming (form 160), which is required for the shipment of a cadaver internationally, have gone down over the period from 9,049 in 2009 to 8,395 in 2010 and to 6,625 in 2011 (January to October).

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6

Claiming the dead, defining the nation: contested narratives of the independence struggle in post-conflict Timor-Leste[1]

Henri Myrttinen

Introduction

Timor-Leste's struggle for independence (1975–99) cost the lives of more than 108,000 people, the majority of them unarmed civilians. Throughout the period of the Indonesian occupation, a small armed resistance movement, the Falintil (*Forças Armadas de Libertação Nacional de Timor-Leste*) fought militarily against the occupation forces, supported by a civilian resistance network.

With independence, a new national narrative has emerged in which the 'valorisation' of the resistance takes a central place and is anchored in the constitution. Among the living, this has meant the payment of pensions and compensation to veterans, public recognition, medals, public holidays and ceremonies. For the dead heroes of the Falintil, national monuments have been erected and a central heroes' cemetery built. The official narratives stress heroism, sacrifice and above all unity, a term that resonates strongly in a society where various fault lines came violently to the fore in 2006 in a crisis that shook the foundations of the new nation-state.

The supposedly unifying narrative of the nation struggling as one for independence, of which the claim of the nation over the remains of the dead heroes is one manifestation, is however not uncontested. The chapter will focus on three aspects of this socially, culturally and politically complex debate. Following a brief historical outline, it will look at (1) the role of the dead in narratives of the state, (2) the role

of narratives of continued struggle and (3) competing efforts of state and non-state actors to collect the remains of the fallen and demand recognition. While none of the groups questions neither the narrative of the struggle nor the state *per se*, they see them as imperfect and demand revisions, in part with the help of the spirits and bodies of the dead.

Politics of the dead and the independence of Timor-Leste

The village-level conflict resolution workshop had been running for well over an hour, consisting mainly of the mandatory long-winded official speeches by dignitaries, when the villager raised his question to the East Timorese workshop facilitators with a note of worried urgency in his voice: 'Sir, since you come from Dili [the capital city of Timor-Leste] and are more educated than we are, can you please tell us – is it true that Nicolau Lobato is still in the mountains and that he will return to save us in this situation?'[2]

The question jolted me, as Nicolau Lobato, the first prime minister and later president of Timor-Leste and the guerrilla commander who was being referred to, had at the time (in early 2007) been dead for close to thirty years. The whereabouts of his remains are however unknown, and the East Timorese government has repeatedly demanded that Indonesia release relevant information (Murdoch 2009).

Though I was aware that the spirits of the dead are more present in the lives of the living in Timor-Leste than my Northern European experience allowed, this was the first time that I was confronted with the complex politics of the dead and their implications for defining the newly independent nation. The question posed gained additional poignancy from the fact that the small village in question lay in the foothills of Mount Matebian, which was not only one of the major battlegrounds during the initial years of the independence struggle but is also – as the meaning of its name ('All Souls') in Tetum indicates – the spiritual home of the souls of the East Timorese deceased.

Over the years I would encounter this belief in the return of Nicolau Lobato and other 'un-dead' figures, especially from the early years of the independence struggle time and again.[3] Kammen (2009: 400–5) for example notes the adherence of one of the spiritual leaders of Colimau 2000, a ritual/martial arts group, to this

belief. On New Year's Day 2005, several members of the group had announced the reappearances of Lobato and of another dead, legendary independence fighter, Vicente 'Sahe' dos Reis, in the Central Manatuto District, leading to public unrest and their subsequent arrest (UNMISET 2005).

The dead and their spirits play a central role in Timor-Leste cosmologies, with some regional differences between various ethnolinguistic groups (see for example Hicks 2004; Therik 2004; Traube 1986). Invariably, however, in all of the various cultural groups, the dead remain present in the lives of the living as spirits.[4] As such, they demand attention and compensation and can have either a malevolent or benevolent role in the lives of the living. Improperly buried dead and/or those who have not been properly ritually compensated remain restless and potentially dangerous, causing loss of livestock, illness or death among the living (Sakti 2012; Schlicher and Tschanz 2011). This spiritual dimension has in the past not always been fully recognised in dealing with the dead of the long independence struggle, especially in international transitional justice efforts.[5]

The independence struggle began after the Carnation Revolution in Portugal in 1974, when the territory which had been Portuguese Timor for around four centuries was thrust into a series of cataclysmic events. The brief period of rapid decolonisation led to a brief but bitter civil war in 1975, followed by the proclamation of independence. This proclamation was made under the shadow of a looming Indonesian invasion, and nine days later the morning calm over the capital city Dili was shattered by the growl of Indonesian air force planes dropping paratroopers into the city.

The invading forces met with the stiff resistance of the Falintil. Supported by a network of civilian supporters, the guerrillas were able to continue their armed struggle, albeit to a very limited scale, until a political solution was found in the form of a United Nations-organised referendum on independence in 1999. When the referendum results heavily in favour of independence were announced, pro-Indonesian militias and Indonesian security forces went on one last rampage, killing upwards of 1,500 civilians. The international outcry over the violence led to the deployment of an international peacekeeping force and the establishment of a temporary UN administration, the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET). After two and a half years under UN tutelage, Timor-Leste regained its independence on 20 May 2002.

According to the estimates of the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation of Timor-Leste (*Comissão de Acolhimento,*

Verdade e Reconciliacão de Timor-Leste – CAVR), the conflict between 1975 and 1999 had cost the lives of upwards of 108,000 people, the majority of them unarmed civilians (CAVR 2005).

The complex politics of remembrance has led to competing readings of the nation and the struggle. Whereas others have done an excellent job exploring complexities between national, NGO and personal-level narratives (Harris-Rimmer 2010; Kent 2011; Sakti 2012) I will focus on alternative narratives of the nation and the independence struggle as articulated through the dead by the state, non-state actors and individuals. The three processes I will focus on are the ways in which the nation is narrated by the state by valorising certain dead; how the dead are summoned as part of narratives contesting the end of the struggle; and how exhuming the dead is used as a contestation of state narratives.

The nation and the dead

As noted in the introduction above, the link between nationalism, the nation, the dead and their sacrifice is often a very intimate one, especially if the independence and sovereignty of the nation was achieved and/or defended through violent struggle.[6] As outlined by Anderson (1991), Hobsbawm (1990) and others, the concept of the Westphalian nation-state has been adopted globally as a blueprint, especially following the post-Second World War wave of decolonisation in Africa, Asia and Oceania as well as the post-cold war break-up of Czechoslovakia, the USSR and Yugoslavia. Although some elements of the languages of stateness, as Hansen and Stepputat (2001) name it, are easily recognisable in all nation-states (e.g. national symbols such as flags, coats of arms, anthems; the rituals of protocol; presence of a state bureaucracy), the local variants of the languages and their understandings, as it were, may differ greatly. These are in part contingent upon the local historical, social, economic and cultural contexts. Although, for example, mourning and honouring those who fought and died for the nation plays a central role in reaffirming the nation-state both in Timor-Leste and my native Finland, the meaning given to the dead is different. While in Finland the dead live on either as the abstract dead of monuments and historical narratives or in personal memories and fading photographs, in Timor-Leste they can additionally be active agents affecting the everyday lives of the living through their presence as spirits.

Governing the dead thus also needs to be seen in the context of the local understandings of statehood. Verdery (1999) points to the

symbolic power of memorials and reburials, to show how these can be used to legitimise or delegitimise certain narratives, political structures and processes, and how the 'aura of sanctity' of the dead can be used to sacralise the otherwise mundane (or even 'dirty') world of politics. Similar processes are undoubtedly at play in Timor-Leste as well, as I will discuss below. However, the local understanding of the dead as, in a sense, 'un-dead', means that they are not merely symbols but also agents in their own right. Here, Fontein's (2006) examination of spirits and war veterans in Zimbabwe, despite the very different political, historical and social settings, bears in many ways on Timor-Leste. In addition to being mobilised on a symbolic level, the spirits of the dead can be actors in their own right and be invoked to legitimise either state authority or resistance to it. Also, in Timor-Leste as in Zimbabwe, summoning these spirits allows the living to connect their struggles to seemingly nobler struggles of the past.

Valorising the dead, narrating the nation

> I wish to greet the relatives, widows, orphans of our dear brothers and comrades in arms killed during the struggle for independence, our Heroes. We all shared a dream: to achieve the independence of our country. They shed their blood, sacrificed their lives so that today, we could live the independence we all yearned for. We will never forget your husbands, brothers and fathers. (Brigadier-General Taur Matan Ruak, Commander of the F-FDTL: farewell speech, 6 October 2011)

Like the leaders of other postcolonial nations that fought for their independence, the political leadership of Timor-Leste has been heavily dominated by figures who played key roles in the struggle. The Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste makes explicit reference to the resistance and its martyrs, both in the preamble and in Article 11, calling for the 'valorisation' of those who participated in the independence struggle, including 'rendering of tribute to the national heroes' (Leach 2002; RDTL 2002).

In practice, this 'rendering of tribute to the national heroes' has taken various forms for the living and for the dead. For the living, the main forms of recognition have been medals, official commemorations and pensions as well as in 2011 a special uniform. The process has, however, been highly politicised and fraught with controversy (Fundasaun Mahein 2011; International Crisis Group 2011; Roll 2011). Several commissions have looked into the veterans' issue and currently there are around 200,000 people claiming

veteran status, an unlikely number given the fact that the nation has a population of around 1 million, more than half of them too young to have participated in the struggle. Powerful lobby organisations of the veterans have blocked legislation in parliament that would have led to compensation being paid to victims of political violence during the occupation or to their kin before the veterans' demands have been met.

While the living heroes of the struggle have, in part, been compensated, the valorisation of the dead has taken on other forms. A central 'heroes' cemetery' has been established at Metinaro, a few kilometres east of the main army base of the country. This 'heroes' cemetery' is to become the centralised final resting place of dead Falintil, whose remains have been brought there from across the country (for a discussion of official memorials in Timor-Leste, see for example Leach 2008).

The proximity of the cemetery to the main army base is no coincidence, for the new armed forces (F-FDTL – *Falintil-Forças de Defesa de Timor-Leste*) explicitly draw their legitimacy from the narrative of the struggle, including the deaths of the martyrs (Rees 2004). It is not only in their name that the new armed forces see themselves as the mantle-bearers of the guerrilla force. Political slogans from the struggle are taken up by the F-FDTL and the lines between Falintil and F-FDTL are often deliberately blurred (International Crisis Group 2011).

The 'martyrs of the fatherland' (*mártires da Patria*)[7] or martyrs of the national liberation (*mártires da libertação nacional*) are also regularly evoked in official speeches and commemorations by the civilian leadership. Although the Constitution explicitly mentions the various arms of the resistance movement (i.e. the armed struggle, the clandestine civilian front and the 'diplomatic front' in exile), it is above all the members of the armed struggle – living and dead – who are at the centre of the narrative. Prominent living and dead figures of the armed struggle and their kin have been the first to receive government support, while financial and political recognition of members of the unarmed resistance movement or civilian victims has not gone much beyond lip service.

Though non-combatant deaths formed the vast majority of casualties during the independence struggle, their memorialisation has received less official attention than that of the members of the Falintil force. Of the civilian dead, the ones who receive the most attention in the official calendar are the more than 200 killed in the Santa Cruz cemetery massacre on 12 November 1991. As they were

mostly young members of the civilian clandestine front, the anniversary of the massacre is commemorated as 'Youth Day' in the country and candles are lit not only for those killed in the massacre but for the conflict dead in general. On occasion, government figures have made public appeals to the Indonesian government to make information available on the whereabouts specifically of the Santa Cruz dead, but these calls have not been pursued very forcefully (Suara Timor Loro Sa'e 2010). Further official memorials have been built at the sites of other massacres, such as the church in Suai and in the village of Kraras (Kent 2011; Leach 2008).

Remembering the civilian dead has also, however, been problematic for post-independence East Timorese governments. As the UN and civil society organisations, among others, have repeatedly pointed out, the Indonesian government has not lived up to its own national or international obligations to persecute those allegedly responsible for serious crimes, war crimes and crimes against humanity during the occupation. In the interests of maintaining good neighbourly relations with Indonesia, successive Timor-Leste governments have not only stopped short of demanding justice but have at times actively undermined efforts to bring perpetrators to justice.[8] The memory of the civilian dead implicitly raises questions of how and why they died, questions that are troublesome to the 'forgive and forget' *realpolitik* of the living.

Demands by East Timorese and international civil society organisations for a change of policy have been met with increasing irritation by the government of Xanana Gusmão. While in office, the former president, José Ramos-Horta, also repeatedly expressed his dissatisfaction that the United Nations Serious Crimes Investigation Team (SCIT) continued to be active in the country (author's interviews, Dili 2011; Ottendörfer 2011). In spite of occasional calls, the Timor-Leste authorities have also not actively pressed the Indonesian side to be more forthcoming with information on the whereabouts of the remains of the missing dead and forcibly disappeared (author's interviews, Dili 2010; Magalhães 2011; UN Human Rights Council 2011).

Ottendörfer (2011) points to another possible reason for a reluctance to deal with the civilian dead, and that is the fear of being made accountable for one's own killings. Among the most sensitive topics in the country are the brief 1975 civil war and killings within Falintil during purges, as well as other killings of East Timorese by the guerrilla force. While the bitter civil war was discussed publicly in the CAVR process, internal purges and killings have not been

broached (CAVR 2009). Internal splits in the guerrilla movement also led to the creation of organisations of disaffected ex-combatants, such as the CPD-RDTL (*Comité Popular pela Defesa – República Democrática do Timor-Leste* – Popular Committee for Defence – Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste) and *Sagrada Familia*, to whom I shall return later.[9]

The valorisation of the resistance struggle has *de facto* meant a glorification of the living and the dead Falintil fighters (especially those close to the current national leadership) at the expense of all other sections of society – the civilian resistance, those who remained neutral, those purged for being deemed ideologically unreliable, those who collaborated with the Indonesian occupation or supported integration, the victims of the violence and their kin as well as those who fled into exile. Though this preferential treatment of the dead Falintil over other sections of society is not spelled out directly, and as such would contradict the official mantra of national unity (*Timor Ida Deit* – There is only one Timor), it is occasionally unofficially admitted (Ottendörfer 2011).[10] It is those who fought, prominently, gun in hand, for an independent Timor-Leste who are valorised, be they living or dead (Roll 2011).

The central place given to the 'martyrs' in the state narrative serves multiple purposes. As Klaus Schreiner (2002: 203) notes for the case of Indonesia, 'hero worship as a means of politics is rooted in the fields of historical consciousness, religious practices and political legitimisation … Hero worship is a means to create and to maintain national cohesion.' In Timor-Leste, the state narratives valorise the dead fighters and select civilian victims (especially of the 1991 Santa Cruz massacre) but draw the line when dealing with the civilian dead becomes politically inexpedient. The sacrifice of the martyrs is seen as the foundation upon which the nation was built and in whose memory central state institutions, above all the armed forces, legitimise themselves. While remembering the sacrifices of the past, however, the state narrative is a forward-looking one: the struggle is now over; it is time to build a unified, developed state. Not all, however, agree.

Summoning the dead, continuing the struggle

'Be careful. It is not necessary to do anything about them, we must love them, it is not necessary for us to be angry with them, because often people dream of Jesus who will also return to save the world, even

though they do not know when Jesus will reappear. Therefore, if in this group they dream that Vicente Reis will reappear, then it is because they only want the best for this country. Therefore it is not necessary to be angry with them,' warned [President] Ramos-Horta.[11] (*Jornal Nacional Semanário*, 27 October 2007)

The interplay between the dead, their spirits and the East Timorese body politic is a complex one, which needs to be seen in the cultural context of the region. In Timor-Leste, as in many neighbouring societies, there is a strong tradition of venerating ancestral spirits, who can play a benevolent or malevolent role in the lives of the living. The delineation between dead and living is thus not as categorical as in Western thought, and the dead are seen to have a very real degree of agency from beyond the grave. Hierarchies also exist among the dead with some ancestral spirits being more powerful than others, a potency that the living may tap into.

Aside from looming large in the historical narratives of liberation and the official commemoration politics, the fallen heroes of the resistance, both against the Portuguese colonisers and the Indonesian occupation, are both politically and spiritually 'potent dead', to borrow a phrase from Chambert-Loir and Reid (2002). The potent dead are ancestors, the veneration of whom confers power and potency to the living, either in an abstract sense (e.g. political legitimatisation by conjuring up the memory of the deceased) or a very 'real' sense of passing on mystical powers to the living.

A well-publicised example of this was the daring escape of renegade Major Alfredo Reinado, leader of a group of armed mutineers, which also took place in 2007. When surrounded by the Australian Special Air Service (SAS) troops close to Same who were seeking to arrest him, he summoned the spirit of Dom Boaventura, leader of the 1912 Manufahi uprising against the Portuguese colonial power. With the aid of the spirit, Reinado gained invisibility and escaped past the SAS (Agence France-Presse 2007; Nygaard-Christensen 2011: 220–1). Various other groups, such as the martial arts groups (MAGs) and ritual arts groups (RAGs) that have mushroomed in the country but also allegedly the *Sagrada Familia*, regularly use ancestral worship in rituals to give them supernatural strengths and skills (Myrttinen 2010; Scambary *et al.* 2006).

The powerful spirits of Dom Boaventura, Nicolau Lobato, Vicente 'Sahe' dos Reis and other prominent, dead fighters of the initial years of the independence struggle share an aura of purity unsullied by what is often seen as the 'dirty' politics of the post-conflict years.[12] By summoning their spirits, a link can be established between the

struggles of today and past, seemingly purer and nobler anti-colonial struggles, thus adding to the legitimacy of the contemporary cause. Similar dynamics can also be seen in Fontein's (2006) narratives from Zimbabwe, and in Southeast Asia as in southern Africa the spirits can not only legitimise (or delegitimise) what is occurring today; summoning the spirits and memory of the dead also brings the inherent obligation to remain pure and true to the cause. In all three cases, however, the intervention of the spirits can also be of a very practical nature, ensuring escape from near-death situations or occasionally even victory.

Returning to the opening scene of this chapter and the agitated expectation of a return of resistance heroes from the realm of the dead, another form of the agency of the deceased becomes visible. Beyond merely interacting with the present spirits of the heroes, there are also messianic expectations of their reappearance to save the nation in times of need and usher in a radical, new transformation of the social order.[13] The question raised by the villager for example was made in the midst of the most severe political crisis of the newly independent nation. Messianic saviour figures are not uncommon in the country or in the greater Southeast Asian and Melanesian regions which Timor-Leste straddles (see for example Kammen 2009; Traube 2007). Timor-Leste's former colonial power Portugal and occupying power Indonesia also have long political histories of messianism, with Sebastianism in the former and legends of *ratu adil* in the latter. Messianic beliefs in which figures presumed dead or lost in the mists of time return bring with them, as is also the case when summoning un-dead spirits, an understanding of time that is radically different from mainstream Western conceptualisations. The past is present in the now, not only in the form of vestiges and memories; rather, the boundary between a past and present time has been lifted. The messianic moment itself not only ushers in a new era, but can further lift the boundaries between past, present and future, marking the end of time.

The summoning of the anti-colonial hero Dom Boaventura or the messianic wait for a return of fallen independence fighters has potential political dimensions. The sub-text implicit in both is one of *a luta continua* – that the struggle is not over, that the promised 'real' independence has not yet been achieved and that the spirits of dead resistance fighters are needed to help in the struggle, to help fulfil this promise. The past, present and expectations of the future flow together. The notion of the struggle not being over was articulated time and again in my interviews with members of martial and ritual

arts groups and veterans' organisations, and this notion was inter-twined with deep-felt disappointment with the post-independence settlement from which they had not received what they felt was their due (Myrttinen 2011a, 2011b; Traube 2007).[14] These sentiments are further strengthened by the silent but heavy shadow of obligation seemingly cast upon the living by the fallen resistance heroes and victims of the occupation to make their sacrifices worthwhile.

The feelings of frustration with the unfulfilled promises of the post-conflict settlement and of continued struggle also flow into the various disaffected MAGs and RAGs (such as the above-mentioned Colimau 2000) and veterans' organisations such as the CPD-RDTL and *Sagrada Familia*. Though in part very different in their respect-ive outlooks, forms of organisation and age of membership, these groups all share a strong sense of disaffection, demands for 'real independence', for recognition, and have an ambivalent relation-ship with the political elites of the country (Myrttinen 2010, 2011a; Scambary *et al.* 2006; Shoesmith 2011). Among these groups, the *Sagrada Familia*, however, has most focused on the dead.

Collecting the dead, demanding recognition

> In our culture it is obligatory for us to honour the dead and to remain in contact with them. If this is not possible, it will have concrete ramifica-tions on the lives of the living. In order for us to be able to live, we must bury our dead properly. (Januario de Jesus of the victims' organisation, 12 November (quoted in Schlicher and Tschanz 2011: 112))

The East Timorese state, as discussed above, has an ambivalent attitude towards the dead – on the one hand 'valorising' the dead and celebrating the fallen independence fighters at Metinaro, but on the other refraining from pushing the former occupying power Indonesia to be more forthcoming with information on the remains of the fallen and disappeared. The state also has a very limited cap-acity in terms of exhuming and identifying remains. While some NGOs have carried out searches and exhumations of remains (Schlicher and Tschanz 2011), it is a veterans' organisation, the *Sagrada Familia*, which has been the most active.

The *Sagrada Familia* was founded around its charismatic leader Cornelio 'L-7' Gama (alias *Eli Foho Rai Bo'ot*) towards the end of the independence struggle. Following disputes between L-7 and the Falintil leadership in the Aileu cantonment area, the group split off (Fundasaun Mahein 2011: 7). The group grew in size in

the post-independence years, drawing especially upon those ex-combatants who felt sidelined by the official veterans' compensation programmes. It has taken on a semi-religious character, mixing animism and Catholicism under the spiritual leadership of L-7, though it also has business interests. The movement is also partially congruent with the *União Nacional Democrática de Resistência Timorense* (UNDERTIM) party, for whom Mr Gama sat in the National Parliament from 2007 to 2012. The party has made veterans' issues one of its main concerns (Shoesmith 2011: 72).

The *Sagrada Familia* and UNDERTIM have repeatedly called for more government attention to be paid to the living and dead heroes of the struggle (Timornewsline 2010). Out of a sense of frustration at a perceived lack of interest by the government, *Sagrada Familia* has begun collecting the remains of fallen Falintil on its own, which is illegal under Timorese law. Over 400 sets of remains are now held in temporary storage in the eastern village of Laga, their future uncertain. L-7 has demanded that the government compensate him financially for the efforts and pay due respect to the fallen by giving them an appropriate burial in the central heroes' cemetery in Metinaro, but this had allegedly been blocked.[15] The possibility of an alternate heroes' cemetery in the eastern part of the country has been raised as well and the *Sagrada Familia* plans on continuing its efforts. A possible compromise solution is to inter the remains within ossuaries which the state is currently constructing in all district capitals, thus, in a sense, leading to a public–private partnership of sorts (author's interviews, 2011–12). As a faction which split from the mainstream Falintil, the *Sagrada Familia* has maintained an ambivalent stance vis-à-vis the state and its institutions, and its exhumation and reburial efforts can be seen as a challenge to the state on numerous levels.

In addition to the symbolic political meaning ascribed to reburials by Verdery (1999) in which the reburiers stand to benefit directly, the dead themselves can also be seen as benefiting, a benefit that then also reflects well upon the reburiers. As Klaus Schreiner (2002: 193) notes for Indonesia, 'reburials aim at strengthening the ritual position of the deceased by transferring his or her remains to a site of higher and more appropriate dignity'. While the collecting of the remains of fallen comrades by *Sagrada Familia* can be seen in part as an understandable humanitarian gesture and as part of fulfilling cultural and spiritual duties, it is thus not without its political agenda. On the one hand, it is an indictment of the state, which is seen as not

doing enough for the dead. On the other hand, it is also a concrete attempt to physically gain control over a key part of the narrative of the struggle and thereby the nation, especially if plans for an alternate memorial or memorials go ahead.

For the veterans' organisations such as *Sagrada Familia*, a dignified reburial of the fallen Falintil at a centralised location is also part of their demands for more societal recognition for their contribution to the nation. The issue of recognition and compensation has become constitutive of the identity of the various disaffected groups and their members (Myrttinen 2011b). Attempts by political parties such as Fretilin or UNDERTIM to use reburials as platforms for highlighting their particular role in the independence struggle also go in this direction. What would require more research, though, is in how far groups such as *Sagrada Familia* seek to harness the spiritual power of the dead in addition to seeking control over the narrative of the dead.

Other disaffected organisations such as the CPD-RDTL or RAGs have been less extravagant in their claims on the dead but demand that the government both press Indonesia for more information on the missing dead and pay suitable respect to the dead comrades (author's interviews, Dili 2010). The issue of collecting the remains of the dead has also been politicised in the sphere of party politics. Presidential candidate Taur Matan Ruak took up the topic as part of his 2012 electoral campaign (TVTL 2011), while the opposition Fretilin party has sought to link reburials of the remains of those who died in combat to its role in the independence movement (*Diario Nacional* 2011b).

While the various groups – be they MAGs, RAGs, veterans' organisations or political parties – present a challenge to the state narrative and the manner in which the dead are memorialised, it is important to note that none of the groups challenge the legitimacy of the notion of the state or the national narrative *per se*. It is rather that they challenge their current forms, which they see as insufficient.

The attention given to the fallen Falintil is, in a sense, a replication in the realm of the dead of what is happening among the living. In both cases, powerful veterans' organisations dominate the debate, be it over the reburial of remains or over compensations to the living. Seeing their contribution to the struggle as legitimising their claims, these organisations have been successful at prioritising the remains of the fallen Falintil over those of civilian victims and the demands of veterans over those of survivors of violence.

Discussion

> It is a Mambai [ethnolinguistic group in central Timor-Leste] common-
> place that the nation was won through suffering and sacrifice; it was 'pur-
> chased', the saying goes, 'not with silver or gold, but with the blood of the
> people' (*ba los nor os-butin nor os-meran fe al, mas nor povu ni laran*).
> (Traube 2007: 10)

The official narrative of Timor-Leste, as enshrined in the Constitution, reifies the role of the independence struggle as being constitutive of the nation. Although the narrative makes note of the contributions of the civilian clandestine front, the so-called 'diplomatic front' and the Catholic Church, in practice it has been the fighting men – and to a far lesser degree, women – who have been most valorised.[16] The sacrifices of the martyrs, which the official narratives exhort the people to remember, legitimise the state, its independence and its institutions. The narrative of joint national sacrifice and ultimate victory in gaining independence are meant to create and preserve national unity – *Timor Ida Deit*.

This official narrative of the struggle and the nation, manifested in monuments, pension payments, memorial days and speeches, is, however, not uncontested. In fact, ironically, the supposedly unity-building narrative leads to increased disunity. Many of the young state's citizens and well-organised pressure groups consider the struggle as not being over and 'real' independence as not having been achieved. As outlined above, these narratives of the continued struggle can find an outlet in messianic expectations of the return-ing (un)dead. The potency of the heroic dead can also be harnessed directly for the continuing struggle against current political elites and foreign interference, as was the case for Major Alfredo Reinado when he summoned the spirit of Dom Boaventura, and is the case on a smaller but more quotidian scale with the MAGs and RAGs.

The end of the struggle and the 'realness' of independence is questioned not only through the dead, however, but also through the state's politics of recognition. As I have argued elsewhere (Myrttinen 2011b), for the disaffected groups, and for example Traube (2007), who has argued for the community she researched in central Timor-Leste, the national narrative that the blood, sacrifice and deaths redeemed the nation is not questioned. Rather, what the various groups demand is recognition and compensation for their par-ticular role in the struggle. Sacrifices were made, and now dues are demanded. For the dead, this has on the one hand meant calls for the compensation of their descendants and on the other the proper

reburial of the remains. As discussed above, the reburial serves both a political and spiritual function. Politically, it bestows the reburied dignity and recognition, while spiritually the proper reburial of the body places the restless spirit at ease, lest they cause mayhem in the lives of the living. For now, however, the spirits and remains of the dead continue to be restless, playing their part in numerous ways in the ongoing debates over defining the nation.

Notes

1 I am heavily indebted to Victoria Kumala Sakti of the Languages of Emotion cluster, Free University Berlin, for her invaluable insights and comments without which this chapter would not have been possible. The chapter is based on the author's fieldwork and interviews conducted during numerous visits to in Timor-Leste between 1999 and 2012.
2 'The situation' (*situasaun*) was a common euphemism for the political and military crisis that gripped Timor-Leste from April/May 2006 until April 2008.
3 It should be noted here that the semantic categories of 'alive' and 'dead' are not as strictly delineated in the Timor-Leste context as in the Western context.
4 While Timor-Leste is predominantly Catholic, local Catholicism is heavily imbued with animist traditions and ancestral worship.
5 These efforts have included the work CAVR and the joint Indonesian–East Timorese Commission of Truth and Friendship, an Indonesian '*ad hoc*' tribunal, investigations by the UN Serious Crimes Unit, individual court cases against perpetrators of serious crimes during the occupation as well as local-level reconciliation proceedings (see for example Harris-Rimmer 2010; Kent 2011). With the exception of local-level proceedings and, to an extent, the work of the CAVR, the procedures remained very much within the limits of Western-style formal justice with little room for local belief systems.
6 In interviews, some veterans would contrast East Timorese independence and nationhood with that of other neighbouring nations, for example in the South Pacific, who, as they disdainfully put it, 'were handed independence on a gold plate', i.e. were decolonised in a peaceful manner. The fact that Timor-Leste had fought and suffered for its independence thus made it 'worthier' in a sense.
7 This is also the name of one of the main avenues in Dili.
8 The most blatant case of this was the arrest of Maternus Bere in 2009, suspected of having played a key role in the Suai massacre ten years previously. Mr Bere was arrested by East Timorese and UN police in Suai after crossing from Indonesian West Timor on family business. After being transferred to prison in Dili, President Ramos-Horta and Prime Minister Xanana Gusmão intervened, allegedly at the behest of the Indonesian

foreign minister. Mr Bere was then transferred to the Indonesian embassy, which got him out of the country.

9 A leading member of *Sagrada Familia*, whom I interviewed in Dili in August 2012, called the prospect of raising questions over civilian deaths caused by the resistance 'dangerous … very dangerous' for society.

10 The slogan, which came into use after the outbreak of the severe political and military crisis of 2006, relates only to Timor-Leste, however. There are no aspirations on either side of the border to unify Timor-Leste and Indonesian West Timor.

11 Author's translation.

12 Although the official narrative of the independence struggle tends to stress this 'purity', the reality was more complex, with bitter internal feuding in which Nicolau Lobato was also centrally involved. See Walsh 2012.

13 The cult of personality surrounding Major Alfredo Reinado during the crisis years also took on messianic dimensions. He was, somewhat paradoxically, expected to save the nation from the crisis that he had done much to bring about in the first place (Myrttinen 2008; Nygaard-Christensen 2011).

14 The notion that the struggle is not over was apparent also in the threat by CPD-RDTL and *Sagrada Familia* to take action against a demobilisation ceremony for F-FDTL and Falintil members in August 2011 (although the Falintil had actually been demobilised a decade earlier). As Cornelio 'L-7' Gama of the *Sagrada Familia* stated: 'We [are] totally against this demobilisation program, because it is not the time to demobilise veterans or FALINTIL' (*Diario Nacional* 2011a).

15 Given the widespread importance of maintaining contact with ancestral spirits in Timor-Leste society through grave sites, it remains far from clear whether family and kin members are as enthusiastic as the state or *Sagrada Familia* about having the remains of loved ones transferred to centralised resting places, which tend to be far beyond the geographical horizon of most Timor-Leste citizens, especially in rural areas.

16 While the predominance of male narratives in Timor-Leste seemingly confirms Cynthia Enloe's (2000: 44) observation that 'nationalism typically has sprung from masculinised memory, masculinised humiliation and masculinised hope', it should not be forgotten that East Timorese women's organisations have very consciously and with partial success brought women's narratives into the public debate (Cristalis and Scott 2005; Harris-Rimmer 2010).

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7

Remaking the dead, uncertainty and the torque of human materials in northern Zimbabwe

Joost Fontein

Introduction

In Zimbabwe the politics of heritage, memory and commemoration has been the subject of considerable academic and public debate for a long time. In March 2011, however, this took a decidedly macabre twist when reports, accompanied with graphic photographs and video footage, emerged of massive war veteran-led exhumations taking place at the disused Monkey William mine at Bembera Village in Chibondo in Mount Darwin (northern Zimbabwe), where the remains of hundreds, if not thousands of people apparently killed by the Smith regime during the liberation war of the 1970s, had been (re)'discovered'. These events attracted enormous media attention and an unprecedented furore of angry responses from different political parties, civil society organisations, human rights groups and public commentators within Zimbabwe. The criticisms that these grisly exhumations provoked offer key insight into the topography of Zimbabwe's complex 'politics of the dead', and the difficult questions that can arise about who has sovereignty over human remains. But apart from the grotesque displays of human remains involved, and the crude politicking taking place around them by the war veteran group, the Fallen Heroes Trust (FHT), which is closely linked to the ruling party, ZANU-PF (Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front), and which used the exhumations to reinforce its anti-colonialist rhetoric of 'patriotic history' (Ranger 2004; Tendi

2010), perhaps the most striking aspect of these events was the way in which the forms and qualities of the human materials themselves animated the heated debates that ensued.

Many objections stressed the 'unscientific', 'chaotic' and 'destructive' nature of the exhumations. They were decidedly 'unforensic', and led by war veterans and spirit mediums who stressed 'African' ways of dealing with the dead, as they paraded villagers, reporters and TV crews through the mine, and past tangled piles of indistinct human remains materials laid out on plastic sheets, to illustrate the horrors inflicted by Rhodesians. But the nature of the materials themselves caused many to question the true identity of the people whose remains were re-emerging from the abandoned mine. Did they really date from the late 1970s? If so, why were some of the remains still apparently fleshy, leaky and stinking? Might they include more recent human remains – from the *gukurahundi* massacres of the 1980s; or ZANLA (Zimbabwe National Liberation Army) purges of ZIPRA (Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army) comrades around independence; or from more recent political violence against MDC (Movement for Democratic Change) supporters since 1999;[1] or even the missing bodies of military purges at the Chiadzwa diamond fields in 2008/9?

In this chapter I explore how these questions about the identity of the dead, the manner of their deaths and who has sovereignty over them – i.e. by whom and how they should be exhumed and reburied – were provoked by the excessive potentialities of the properties of the human substances being exhumed; by their profoundly evocative and affective, yet unstable, uncertain and ultimately indeterminate materialities. It focuses on how the mass of stinking, intermingling, leaky, half-decaying bodies and bodily substances being disinterred and separated – being remade imperfectly and contingently into particular kinds of 'political bodies/subjects' – both demand and enable, and yet ultimately defy the very reconstitution of the dead and past lives, and the complex politics of commemoration in which they are entangled.

It is likely that some in ZANU-PF saw the political usefulness of the uncertainties provoked by the excessive potentiality of the human materials being exhumed from the Mount Darwin mines. They could both celebrate their 'liberation heroes' and reinforce the anti-colonialist rhetoric through which they have very effectively polarised Zimbabwean politics and marginalised opposition political parties, NGOs and human rights organisations in the last decade and, at the same time, demonstrate and remind Zimbabweans of

their own capacities for violence. In this way the exhumations can be understood as part and parcel of ZANU-PF's performative stylistics of power. Yet ultimately the uncontained uncertainties about the identities of the dead, and the manner of their deaths, in part provoked by the indeterminate nature of the human materials, were unsustainable. By August 2011 the exhumations had been stopped, the mines sealed and exhumed remains reburied at the site, and the issue largely disappeared from the new agenda, as the government became increasingly concerned that the matter had got 'out of hand', and sought to physically and discursively contain the issue and any political ramifications that may ensue.

If the huge resurgence of scholarly interest in the politics of death and 'the dead' over the last decade, in Africa (Lee and Vaughan 2008) and elsewhere (Verdery 1999), has increasingly recognised that beyond both biopolitics and necropolitics (Mbembe 2003) the transforming materialities of bodies and lives matter (see Jindra and Noret 2011; Krmpotich, Fontein and Harries 2010; Posel and Gupta 2009), then the Mount Darwin exhumations and the responses they provoked illustrate how human remains can exemplify the excessive potentialities of stuff – what Chris Pinney has called 'the torque of materiality' – and how the 'alterity of an enfleshed world' defies any easy reading and therefore makes possible the very politics of uncertainty and (un)becoming in which they are entwined (Pinney 2005: 270).

Context: the politics of the dead in Zimbabwe

As the complex entanglement of the politics of the past, and of the dead, with that of its material remains, performative practices and monumentalised forms (funerals, state commemoration, monuments, ruins, artefacts, graves, bodies, bones and so on) have received renewed scholarly attention in recent years, the significance of human corporeality, or 'carnal fetishism' as Bernault (2010) calls it, has increasingly come into focus (Jindra and Noret 2011; Krmpotich, Fontein and Harries 2010; Lee and Vaughan 2008; Mbembe 2003; Posel and Gupta 2009). In Zimbabwe, where the politics of heritage, memory and commemoration has been the subject of much academic and public debate for some time, this emergent conjunction of meaning and matter has followed a broadly similar trajectory. After independence in 1980, the historiography and commemoration of the liberation struggle became the subject of

profound (and continuing) contestation. Since 2000, this politicisation of the historiography of the liberation struggle has intensified through the emergence of what Ranger (2004) has called 'patriotic history'. ZANU-PF has increasingly arrogated exclusively to itself the liberation credentials and 'languages of suffering' through which it has polarised political debates, and effectively marginalised the various factions of the opposition MDC, with which it was forced to share power in Zimbabwe's hugely problematic 'unity government' from 2009, until its recent 'landslide' win in the elections of July 2013 enabled it to once again become the sole ruling party.

While this 'patriotic history' has manifest itself in many guises, a central dynamic has circulated around what Muchemwa calls ZANU-PF's 'necropolitan imagination' and 'an aesthetics of heroism' (2010). This is apparent both through the ever heightening contestations surrounding the highly partisan ZANU-PF-dominated selection of National Heroes (Fontein 2009a; Kriger 1995; Werbner 1998), but also by a host of new state-driven oral history and heritage projects focusing on the legacy of the struggle; in particular the enthusiastic adoption of the SADC-wide, UNESCO-sponsored 'liberation heritage' project by National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ), through which this parastatal has become increasingly involved in state commemoration and has carried out excavations, exhumations and reburials at former guerrilla camps in Mozambique, Zambia and other former frontline states.

Elsewhere (Fontein 2009a) I have argued that this 'liberation heritage' project not only matched ZANU-PF's rhetoric of 'patriotic history' with NMMZ's need for state funding. It was also a response to long-standing demands from the war veterans, spirit mediums and relatives of the war dead, and even the unsettled, troubling spirits of the dead themselves, for the return of human remains buried in anonymous, shallow and sometimes mass graves across Zimbabwe's rural areas, and in former guerrilla camps in neighbouring countries. Indeed in the last decade there has been a proliferation of such demands, reflecting both the changing salience of human corporeality across the region and beyond, and a complexity of diverse local interests and agendas that do not always perfectly match the political imperatives and rhetoric of 'patriotic history' espoused by ZANU-PF's ideologues; from war veterans and families haunted by the unsettled spirits of their dead, to spirit mediums concerned about the failure of the rains, ancestral anger and the state of the nation as a whole, to land settlers seeking to re-establish 'autochthony' on resettled ancestral lands (Fontein 2011).

In many cases exhumations have already been taking place, often without official permission, or beyond the supervision of trained archaeologists from NMMZ or forensic scientists. In January 2008, for example, long before the dramatic events at Chibondo exploded into the public arena in March 2011, the FHT and a related war veteran-led group *Taurai Zvehondo* [lit. 'Talk about the war'] were already involved in identifying mass graves in Mount Darwin, and were 'awaiting assistance from the Government which should lead the exhumation process'.[2] There are also many cases of unidentified human remains resurfacing from *unknown* graves and abandoned mineshafts dating back to the 1970s. Numerous newspaper reports over recent years attest to this fairly common occurrence, which long predates the recent (re)discovery of the human remains in the mineshafts at Chibondo.[3] In a sense, such activities and discoveries have obliged government institutions to act, and in this context NMMZ's adoption of its 'liberation heritage' portfolio in the late 1990s can, in part, be understood as a response to the demands of relatives and living comrades, and even the resurfacing bones and unsettled spirits themselves (Fontein 2009a). Certainly NMMZ's 'liberation heritage' activities have often appeared reactive to events already taking place, as indeed was the case with the Chibondo exhumations that I discuss below.

The issue of the return of the war dead has animated highly politicised debates about state commemoration in Zimbabwe since independence (Daneel 1995; Kriger 1995; Werbner 1998). Although some limited official reburials were carried out in the 1980s and 1990s (see Daneel 1995; Kriger 1995), demands for such events intensified as Zimbabwe's political and economic situation worsened dramatically after the end of the 1990s. In 2001 Ambuya VaZarira, an influential spirit medium in Masvingo district, explained how war veterans frequently 'come to me here, telling me that … their fellow comrades who died in Mozambique are continuously giving them problems, harassing them, saying that they should be collected from Mozambique … so the *masvikiro* [spirit mediums] … agreed that we … will see how they can collect these dead from Mozambique'.[4] These comments echoed common concerns shared by many war veterans and families haunted by the spirits of the unsettled war dead, yearning to return to the soil of their ancestors to become ancestors themselves, so that they in turn can look after their living descendants.

Such concerns reflect the importance of 'bringing home' rituals, held a year or more after death and a funeral, to return the spirits of the deceased home from a liminal period in 'the bush' to

become benevolent ancestors – *kugadzira* in Shona or *umbuyiso* in siNdebele – which is well known across Zimbabwe. Failure to perform these rites leaves the deceased unsettled and incomplete in their transformation into ancestors. Where the location of graves is unknown or where proper funeral rites have not taken place the deceased can become dangerous and frightening spirits known as *ngozi* [Shona and Ndebele], who haunt the people responsible for their deaths, but also their living relatives and friends (Bourdillon 1987: 233–5; Werbner 1991: 151–6, 188–90). These unhappy spirits also haunt the 'nation' as a whole, as indeed spirit mediums told war veteran leader Andrew Ndlovu in 2001.[5] Spirit mediums often complain that droughts, economic crises, and even the AIDS pandemic, are all the result of these unhappy spirits demanding to be returned home. Their troubling presence equally intertwines with the politics of regionalism, 'traditional authority' and factional disputes between rival war veteran groups.

However, Zimbabwe's social and political milieu is also haunted by the victims of *postcolonial* violence. This primarily takes two forms. Firstly, and most recently, the escalating political violence by ZANU-PF against opposition MDC supporters and civil society activists since 2000, and particularly during the 2008 elections (see for example Masunungure 2009; Solidarity Peace Trust 2008a), has manifested its own 'politics of the dead' in the form of tortured, dismembered bodies, disappearances, disrupted funerals, avenging spirits and alternative MDC registers of 'heroes', which I have discussed in greater detail elsewhere (2010). Secondly, perhaps even more contentious than the tortured bodies of political violence in the last decade, there have been the unsettled spirits and resurfacing bones of the *gukurahundi* massacres in Matabeleland and the Midlands in the 1980s, when an estimated 20,000 civilians were killed by the notorious fifth brigade during a reign of terror directed by the ruling ZANU-PF against its minority rival ZAPU, under the guise of rooting out ZAPU 'dissidents' (Alexander *et al.* 2000; Eppel 2001, 2004, 2009; Ranger 1999; Werbner 1991). This lasted from 1982 until 1987, when ZAPU was 'swallowed' into the unity pact with ZANU-PF, and remains a massive scar on Zimbabwe's postcolonial milieu and a hugely sensitive topic. Community efforts to commemorate, rehabilitate, exhume and rebury *gukurahundi* victims in order to resolve deep legacies of violence among the living and the dead were long obstructed by ZANU-PF.

The profound and deepening salience of the unresolved legacies of the *gukurahundi* terror are reflected by the rapidly growing

number of calls in recent years for the issue to be addressed. Yet the legacies of the *gukurahundi* continue to fester, perhaps more so than ever.[6] Although some *gukurahundi* sites are known, many families and communities in Matabeleland continue to complain that their lives are deeply impaired and haunted by the unsettled spirits of the *gukurahundi* dead and the unresolved violence of the 1980s (Eppel 2001; Werbner 1991), and, as with the mass graves of the liberation struggle, *gukurahundi* bones and graves are still being discovered.[7]

Clearly then, the politics of the dead in Zimbabwe long predates the grisly events at Chibondo that burst into the public arena in March 2011. It is deeply animated both by the bones of past massacres resurfacing from shallow mass graves around the country and across international borders, and by the tortured bodies of recent political violence. Moreover this politics of the dead is deeply animated by the spirits of the dead themselves, as deeply frightening *ngozi* spirits, whose presence is intimately intertwined with the 'affective presence' and 'emotive materiality' of bones, bodies and human substances (Fontein 2010). These are linked through the simultaneously symbolic and material processes whereby people, living and dead, are properly constituted, and the proper ritual and material processes through which people are made safely dead. In this respect the resurfacing bones of people killed in the war or during the 1980s, the leaky, tortured bodies and disrupted funerals of people killed much more recently and the frightening presence of the unsettled dead as *ngozi* spirits, all reveal the transgression of normal and normalising processes whereby people (living and dead) are constituted, and the living transformed into benevolent ancestors, and sometimes avenging spirits. And it is in this context that exhumations and reburials are often understood, across very different registers of meaning and practice (e.g. Crossland 2009; Eppel 2001; Renshaw 2010), as forms of healing or commemoration – a way to make people safely dead, or in other words, to 'feed' (Rowlands 1999: 144), 'atone for' or 'finish the work of' the dead (Kuchler 1999: 55).

Yet even where there is general agreement about the socially cathartic potential of exhumations, these are processes that can be unusually problematic (see Renshaw 2010) and enormously contested, as was illustrated by the Chibondo events, which I turn to below. This is particularly the case where the identity of the dead and the manner of their deaths are uncertain. In the exhumations of mass graves at Chimoio, Nyadzonia, Freedom camp and other former guerrilla camps in Zambia and Mozambique, the political identity of the dead and the manner of their deaths were hardly in dispute, even

if old and new rivalries and tensions inevitably sometimes emerged between different actors involved. The Chibondo exhumations were very different in this respect. There the ambivalent materialities of the human remains being disinterred, and shown widely in television and newspaper reports, provoked profound uncertainties and controversy about the identity of the dead and the manner of their deaths, and this meant that tensions between different ways of reconstituting the past and remaking the dead came to fore.

The Chibondo exhumations

Almost as soon as the discovery and exhumations of human remains at Chibondo were announced in March 2011, they became mired in controversies that reflected the politics of the dead I have been describing. Like state commemoration in the 1980s and 1990s, initial concerns circulated around the highly politicised and partisan nature of the exhumations. The enormous attention the exhumations received from the state-controlled, ZANU-PF-aligned print and broadcast media fed claims that this was an exercise in ZANU-PF propaganda, in the face of waning popularity, worsening internal factionalism and possible forthcoming elections.[8] As ZANU-PF politicians publicly visited the site, many such criticisms focused on the deeply disturbing images and video clips of disassembled, decaying bodies, bones and undefined human remains being crudely disinterred and chaotically laid out on plastic sheets, broadcast several times a day, like ZANU-PF election jingles, on televisions across the country.

Yet even as such critiques of ZANU-PF's 'gross politicisation' of the exhumations were appearing in independent newspapers and websites, the ZANU-PF-aligned media was describing in detail, and extolling the virtues of, the war veteran- and spirit medium-led tours being conducted at the site for people, including school children, bussed to Chibondo from all over the country. Claims were made in April that they were receiving 'between 1,500 and 3,000 visitors a day',[9] and recent fieldwork in Masvingo suggests that ZANU-PF officials across Zimbabwe's different regions were mobilising high-profile visits to Chibondo for local chiefs, war veterans, spirit mediums and other 'traditional' rural leaders. It is also clear that such visits were carefully choreographed, and that 'the war veterans … wanted journalists to interview people they had selected themselves so that they wouldn't "give out the wrong information"'.[10] Journalists visiting the

site reported that 'Zanu PF slogans and songs were the order of the day' and that 'school children, teachers and villagers were forced to go underground and view the bodies so that they would appreciate the extent of the brutalities of the Rhodesian Army'.

Many commentators recognised that the politicisation of these human remains by ZANU-PF fitted a long-established pattern of using a narrow and exclusivist legacy of the liberation struggle to buttress its own legitimacy. This includes undermining that of opposition parties, including 'old' (and 'new') ZAPU, the fractious factions of the MDC with whom it was then sharing a 'unity government', and, more recently, a host of emergent Ndebele pressure groups such as the Mwthazi Liberation Front (MLF), a radical group agitating for secession for Matabeleland. It is not surprising therefore that the crude politicking at Chibondo provoked the anger of those linked to ZAPU and ZIPRA, who have long felt that their contributions to the liberation of Zimbabwe have been deliberately ignored.

The spectacle of the Chibondo exhumations also quickly provoked wider sensibilities about the unresolved legacies of the *gukurahundi*, and very soon ZAPU and other Matabeleland-based pressure groups were calling for other mass graves from the *gukurahundi* period to be similarly excavated and their human remains exhumed and 'given a decent burial'.

Apart from the still unresolved *gukurahundi* legacies, the Chibondo exhumations also raised questions about the fate of much more recent victims of postcolonial violence. The political commentator John Makumbe asked, rhetorically, 'when will the group that is doing this work visit Domboshava to exhume the bodies of several soldiers that that were "buried" there by night only a few years ago?'.[11] Similarly in a press statement on 24 March, the largest MDC party (MDC T) stated that:

The MDC … welcomes the exhumation, identification and proper documentation of any Zimbabwean whose fate was determined by the liberation struggle – a national project in which we all took part. For the exercise that is above party and sectional selfishness, a national budget administered by the relevant state institutions, led by the Ministry of Home Affairs, is imperative to cover the necessary costs of tracking down the genealogy and family trees of the victims through forensic science, carbon dating and indisputable DNA sampling. Such a process would reveal death details and murder methods. Zimbabweans have endured violence since colonialism and yearn for the day when the truth about the liberation war, Gukurahundi, Operation Murambatsvina, the 2008 atrocities –among others – is brought onto the surface for informed debate and reflection. Without such a concerted, nationally sensitive process,

national healing and reconciliation shall be impossible. The MDC calls on ZANU PF to stop what it is doing and leave it to the nation to work out an appropriate way forward, beyond amateur propaganda antics and political carelessness.[12]

This statement illustrates how quickly concerns were raised about the *manner* of the exhumations themselves. These kinds of critiques focused on the crude, unsophisticated way in which the exhumations appeared to be handled, and the absence of any trained 'archaeologists, pathologists or other specialists' supervising the events.[13] The widely circulated images of war veteran exhumers in overalls and gum boots pilling up unsorted human remains on plastic sheets caused huge consternation about the lack of forensic expertise at the site.

In their defence FHT emphasised their use of spirit mediums and diviners to enable them to identify the dead and return their remains to their families. For them this was not a new practice.[14] Given the long salience of the haunting, unsettled dead that I have discussed, it is not surprising that FHT spokesmen placed a great deal of emphasis upon the resolution of suffering for communities and families and especially the dead themselves, which their exhumations at Chibondo offered. Official reports emphasised the evidence of Rhodesian atrocities that was being unearthed with the human remains, including accounts of people being buried alive, the use of acid to destroy corpses and live grenades being found amidst the mangled human materials.[15] Such accounts linked evidence of Rhodesian atrocities being revealed to the resolution offered by 'traditional' 'African' approaches to the identification of the dead that were being applied, which some argued meant that forensic approaches would not be necessary. Saviour Kasukuwere, ZANU-PF 'minister for black empowerment', stated 'Forensic tests and DNA analysis of the remains won't be carried out … Instead, traditional African religious figures will perform rites to invoke spirits that will identify the dead.' 'Spirits of the dead had long "possessed" villagers and children in the district', he added; they have 'refused to lie still. They want the world to see what Smith did to our people. These spirits will show the way it's to be done.'[16]

Nevertheless, the crude and decidedly unforensic nature of the exhumations did raise wider disquiet about 'disrespecting the dead'. Such concerns fed into a high court application made in Bulawayo at the beginning of April 2011 by lawyers acting for ZIPRA veterans to 'stop the government from going ahead with its controversial programme of exhuming mass graves'.[17] The high court order was successful and by

7 April Justice Nicholas Mathonsi had 'granted an interdict sought by the Zimbabwe People's Liberation Army (ZIPRA) war heroes who are demanding that any exhumations in Mt Darwin … should be carried out in a government-led "legal process"'.[18]

Despite the claims of people involved with the FHT exhumations, about there being no need for forensic expertise, it seems that others in ZANU-PF and government did quickly recognise the need to legitimise the exhumations by bringing in professional archaeologists from NMMZ. If early on NMMZ had denied any involvement, on 27 March (before the high court's decision), ZANU-PF's co-minister of home affairs, Kembo Mohadi, announced that 'the government was taking over the exhumations from the Fallen Heroes Trust'.[19] Media politicking around the site continued however, but by May it was clear that no new exhumations were taking place at Chibondo, and as security around the site was increased, efforts were now focused on what to do with the 848 sets of remains that had already been disinterred.

By this stage NMMZ was already involved in efforts to rebury the remains in a new, memorialised grave at the site. On 13 August *The Herald* reported that the 'reburial of over 700 former liberation fighters that were buried at the disused mine shafts at Chibondo' had begun. Minister Kasukuwere said he hoped the area 'would become a national shrine' and that 'the process should remind Zimbabweans of the cruelty of the Ian Smith regime', and noted, 'over 24,000 people [had] visited the site since the exhumations started'.[20]

In many ways, then, the highly visible but crudely performed politics of the dead taking place at Chibondo mirrored and exacerbated the long-existing tensions of commemoration in Zimbabwe: the narrow celebration of ZANU-PF heroes, the marginalisation of other nationalist contributions, and the belated efforts to legitimise the operations through NMMZ's liberation heritage portfolio, as well as of course ZANU-PF's continuing reticence about confronting its terrible *gukurahundi* legacy, or dealing with the dead of other periods of postcolonial violence in which it is implicated. Importantly, however, these kinds of criticisms did not really question the need for the exhumations *per se*, nor initially the identity of the remains being exhumed. But this would change.

Too 'fresh', 'intact', fleshy, leaky and stinky?

As ZANU-PF's publicity machine went into overdrive, using the exhumations to inflate its anti-colonialist rhetoric, controversies

surrounding the events quickly took on a much more sensitive dimension, which turned on the nature of the human materials themselves. Amid the proliferation of TV and press coverage, serious questions were raised about the true age and identity of the remains, and the cause of their deaths. Many reports suggested that the distorted bodies and disassembled remains, being chaotically disinterred, laid out on plastic and broadcast on television, were simply too 'intact', leaky, fleshy and too smelly to date back over thirty years to the liberation struggle. *The Standard* reported that suspicions were 'aroused' after 'journalists … were shocked to see bodies that were still intact'. 'One of the bodies still had visible hair, while others had their clothes intact', the report continued, and another 'had fluids dripping from it', and a 'strong stench still permeates the 15-metre-deep mine shaft'.[21] An unidentified pathologist claimed that 'there was no way there could still be a stench … three decades after the bodies were allegedly dumped … ordinarily by this time there should only be bone-remains', and numerous other news reports too carried articles citing pathologists claiming that the visual evidence of the Chibondo remains suggested they included 'fresh bodies'.[22]

It was not just the human remains that provoked this profound uncertainty but also the objects and artefacts associated with them: particularly the clothes, shoes and uniforms that were found entangled with the remains. Even Ambuya VaZarira and her son Peter Manyuki (who were bussed there from Masvingo by ZANU-PF officials) were shocked that 'some of these bodies were still wearing their clothes'. 'Is it possible that bodies would still be wearing clothes after 30 years?', Peter asked me rhetorically (Fieldnotes, 13 December 2011). Some reports even suggested that cell phones, coins and (recent) plastic ID cards had been found among the remains, and in Bulawayo I heard rumours that Mafela Trust officials visiting the mine found Zimbabwe National Army ID tags among the remains (Fieldnotes, 6 December 2011). Of course the FHT dismissed as 'mischievous' and 'sad indeed' such claims that the bodies were 'too fresh' to date to the liberation struggle.[23] But interestingly they too pointed to the clothes, uniforms and other artefacts found in the mine to support their argument that these were victims of Rhodesian atrocities. In particular, a great emphasis was placed on the 'Super-pro' canvas shoes found among the remains, which were very commonly worn by guerrilla fighters during the struggle. For people on both sides of the controversies that the exhumations provoked, the artefacts around them seemed sometimes to offer more stability of meaning than the remains themselves.

For her part, Shari Eppel of the Solidarity Peace Trust was very careful to point out that what may appear like 'fresh', still decomposing flesh may actually be 'mummified' remains dating back to the 1970s. This is an effect that is, apparently, not uncommon in mass graves, where many bodies have been densely buried on top of one another. Nevertheless she also acknowledged that 'it is not impossible that these graves contained victims from the 1980s'.[24] But her main argument emphasised that the uncertainty surrounding the material qualities of the remains could be resolved and determined only by professional forensic anthropologists.

These uncertainties about the age and identity of the Chibondo dead and the manner of their deaths raised highly emotive concerns about whether these Chibondo remains themselves might include not only victims of Rhodesian violence, but also victims of more recent ZANU-PF violence. Were these ZANU-PF heroes or victims? Peter Manyuki, who was bussed to Chibondo to witness the exhumation, expressed a common opinion when he said that 'probably there are bodies from the liberation struggle there, but maybe also bodies from other periods of violence, like from the *gukurahundi*, and maybe the elections of recent years, and even from Chaidzwa … there are many periods in Zimbabwe's recent past when parents lost their children and don't know where they are buried' (Fieldnotes, 13 December 2011).

Very quickly all the different constituencies of Zimbabwe's 'politics of the dead' began suggesting that the Chibondo remains included 'their dead', including the MDC parties, ZAPU and ZIPRA veterans, Mafela Trust and the radical new Ndebele groups such as the MLF. Indeed the MLF were first to suggest that the Chibondo remains included *gukurahundi* victims, stressing that 'thousands mysteriously "disappeared" in Harare, Chitungwisa and other parts of Mashonaland at the hands of the tribalistic Zimbabwe regime', and adding that 'the "discovery" of the said skeletons could as well provide a clue as to the fate of the said ethnic Ndebele people and ex-ZIPRA force troops who disappeared during the same period'.[25] Soon ZAPU, ex-ZIPRA veterans and others followed suit.[26] The then prime minster and MDC president, Morgan Tsvangirai, 'slammed' the exhumations, and MDC deputy spokesman Chihwayi claimed 'these bodies look fresh; ZANU-PF should come clean on the issue of these exhumations … those remains are of MDC who were killed by ZANU-PF [since] 2000 and especially during the run-off elections of 2008'.[27] Amid all these suggestions about who the remains might include, some even suggested that the Mount Darwin mines

contained very recent victims of the army's violent take-over of the Chiadzwa diamond fields in late 2008 and early 2009, when it is alleged hundreds of illegal diamond miners and traders were machine-gunned from helicopters.[28]

No longer just deeply 'disrespectful to the dead', the exhumations were now criticised as being a deliberate attempt to destroy or 'cover up' crucial evidence of violence and murder. Certainly people questioned whether Chibondo was a 'war grave' or a 'crime scene', and for many using divination and spirit possession was no longer an acceptable means of identifying and settling the dead, but a deliberate obfuscation of the 'truth' about the dead; a way as Eppel put it of 'silencing the bones'.[29] In response the FHT complained that Tsvangirai's criticism of the exhumations was not 'in defence of African culture' and that he was 'talking cheap politics'.[30] Nevertheless the uncertain nature of the human materials being exhumed had changed the focus of the controversies, from the crude politicisation and 'disrespectful' nature of FHT practices, to much more sensitive questions about the 'true' identity of the Chibondo remains, and the 'real' purpose of the decidedly 'unforensic' exhumations. Having initially argued that similar exhumations should take place at other mass graves around the country, ZIPRA veterans, the MDC and other critics quickly changed their focus towards the prevention of any exhumations without proper forensic expertise.

Clearly the exhumations at Chibondo had indeed raised far 'more questions than answers',[31] and perhaps this offers the best explanation for why, after initially supporting the war veteran efforts with enormous media coverage and aplomb, ZANU-PF ministers in the 'unity government' quickly moved in to 'take over' and then to rapidly close them down. It also explains why, as the controversies deepened, the FHT became increasingly concerned to 'choreograph' visits to and reporting at the site, and why once the government and NMMZ had taken over, security at the site was intensified and public visits stopped. It also explains why the question of professional, forensic involvement came to dominate the debates that ensued, even though both those involved with FHT at Chibondo and those who were opposed to them espoused the potentially cathartic, 'healing' nature of exhumations and reburials. Suddenly questions about *how* human remains are remade into dead (political) subjects, how the dead are made present and how the past is reconstituted – how the cause and manner of these deaths was to become known – became of central concern. And these sensitive and difficult questions turned, ultimately, on the indeterminate nature of the materials, substances,

things – human and non-human – being reconstituted into par-
ticular kinds of subjects and objects. These are questions that were
raised, in part, by the indeterminate yet demanding and excessive
potentiality of human materials themselves.

The torque of materiality and the excessive potentiality of human remains

Elsewhere I have begun to examine Zimbabwe's politics of the dead
(Fontein 2009a, 2010, 2011) through analytical lenses emergent
from recent theoretical debates about materiality (Miller 2005),
affect (Navaro-Yashin 2009), the 'agency of objects' (Gell 1998;
Latour 1999; Leach 2007) and the 'imbrication of the semiotic and
the material' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 337); what Domańska has
called a 'return to things' (2006). What bones do in Zimbabwe is *not*
confined to questions about contested representations of the past, or
the 'symbolic efficacy' of bodies (Verdery 1999), but also relates their
'emotive materiality' as human substances, and their 'affective pres-
ence' as dead persons who continue to make demands upon society.
So bones and indeed bodies in Zimbabwe have an ambivalent agency
as uneasy subject/objects, both as extensions of the dead themselves
(Gell 1998), as restless and demanding spirit subjects/persons, but
also as unconscious 'objects'/'things' (Latour 1999) that retort to and
provoke responses from the living. The two are often intertwined,
so that the emotive materiality of human corporeality is often finely
entangled with the affective presence of the dead as spirits demand-
ing recognition, atonement, 'feeding' (Rowlands 1999) and proper
'ritual', symbolic and material transformation into ancestors.[32]

The significance of the simultaneously material and symbolic
transformations and transferences involved in funeral processes
exemplifies the importance of Ingold's critique of 'materiality' and
'object agency', in favour of thorough investigation into the prop-
erties, flows and transformations of materials (2007: 1–2). This is
pertinent to understanding how the political efficacy of recently tor-
tured bodies relates to that of older resurfacing bones in Zimbabwe,
by suggesting that what matters is not necessarily objects like bones,
'the body', 'graves' or indeed the soil, but rather the properties and
flows of materials between them. It illustrates how ritual and mater-
ial transformations (and transgressions thereof) of fleshy, leaky
bodies into dry bones, and people into ancestors, through the mer-
ging of bodily substances into soil – how the living become (safely)

dead – can animate the politics of the burial and belonging in Zimbabwe (Fontein 2011). It also shows how violence against living people (which interferes with bodily boundaries and the material 'containment' and constitution of persons) is finely related to disruptions of funerals, the dumping of corpses and the subsequent resurfacing and return of their remains and avenging spirits, illustrating how Zimbabwe's politics of the dead involves not only contested commemorations of people killed in the past, but also continuing violence against the living (Fontein 2010).

The determination to focus on materials and substances also reverts attention back to how materials become, or are stabilised (or for Latour are 'purified') into 'objects' and indeed 'subjects', physically but also conceptually, historically and politically. How do bones – or fragments of bone sifted from the merged substances of decayed bodies, sand and soil – become recognised, 'articulated' (Hallam 2010), or (re)constituted as uneasy human/things or ambivalent subject/objects, through archaeological excavation, forensic exhumation or indeed divination? And how, in turn, are these processes turned into commemorative rituals or funerals, not only responding to the demands of the (reconstituted) dead, but actually 'remaking' them? Ingold's focus on materials (2007), and 'things' (2009) commands us to consider how exhumations are, in part, about remaking or reconstituting 'the dead' as particular kinds of 'objects' or 'political subjects', 'afforded' or enabled by the materials excavated from mass graves, an issue that others have explored in greater depth (Crossland 2009; Filippucci *et al.* 2012; Hallam 2010; Renshaw 2010). Thus, Filippucci *et al.* (2012: 199) have described 'unearthing' human remains as:

> [A] transformative and relational process of becoming, involving soil, hands, towels and brushes, and bones … through which the flow of human materials with other substances is arrested and channelled, so that human remains are temporarily stabilized into recognizable objects and the work of cultural elaboration can begin. … it is a process of becoming by which traces of past lives are reconstituted and come to assert an ambivalent quality of felt presence, which has the capacity to unsettle the here and now, with an indeterminate alterity.

Importantly this emphasis on becoming or 'remaking of the dead' points to the 'otherness of human remains' (Renshaw 2010: 460); how 'things, materials and stuff are always both more and less than the objects and subjects that they constitute, substantive qualities that are in excess of, yet imbricated in their own becomings and unbecomings' (Filippucci *et al.* 2012: 11; Fontein 2011: 718). Pinney

calls this the 'alterity (or torque) of materiality that can never be assimilated to a disembodied "linguistic-philosophical closure"' (2005: 270). If scholars of 'materiality' have often stressed the 'dialectics of objectification' (Miller 2005: 38), then for Pinney 'the dialectic of "subjects making objects making subjects" … is not smooth but instead rife with disjunctures and fractures' (Filippucci *et al.* 2012: 204) exactly because stuff, substances and things always maintain an excessive potentiality to exceed their constitution, 'stabilisation' or 'purification' into recognisable objects or identifiable subjects. Pinney's insistence upon the 'enfleshed alterity' of the material world means that processes of becoming, stabilisation or (re)constitution are fraught, incomplete, uncertain and ultimately indeterminate. It is this indeterminacy that can make them so contested.

This 'indeterminate alterity' of things or 'torque of materiality' indicates that the uncertainty that surrounds how and what human remains do in Zimbabwe's politics of the dead pre-exists or is immanent to questions about the ambivalent agency of bones and bodies as uneasy subject/objects. Furthermore it raises important questions about what, then, is specific or unique about human substances that sets them apart from other kinds of things or materials. Filippucci *et al.* (2012) suggest that the distinction between metaphor and metonym might be useful here: 'if initially human remains appear poignant because they seem more obviously "human" than other material objects and artifacts, then at second glance this poignancy does not easily or clearly make them more communicative as metaphors or objectifications of human beings or past lives lived' (Filippucci *et al.* 2012: 211; see also Renshaw 2010). Rather human remains often 'signal presence more than meaning' and these 'excessive metonymic qualities defy, perhaps much more than other things, efforts to turn them into meaningful metaphors'. 'As a result', they continue: 'they can be subject to huge and often highly specialised efforts and dramatic over determinations into particular types of subjects/objects, such as ancestors, victims, heroes or specimens – processes that are often unusually problematic, politicized and contested' (Filippucci *et al.* 2012: 211).

This reveals *how* the controversies surrounding the Chibondo exhumations were provoked by the excessive potentialities of the human substances being exhumed – by their profoundly evocative and affective yet unstable, uncertain and ultimately indeterminate materialities. It also explains why the objects and artefacts – the clothes, uniforms, shoes, coins, grenades and so on – found with the tangled mass of stinking human substances took on such importance

for the different sides of the debates that ensued: because they offered more stability of meaning (see Renshaw 2010). Furthermore it explains why many of the debates turned on the *manner* of the exhumations, particularly between demands for 'proper' forensic expertise and FHT's emphasis on 'African' ways of dealing with the dead, even as everyone agreed that exhumations and reburials can be cathartic, and offer resolution and 'healing'.

Indeed this 'torque of materiality' and the 'excessive metonymic qualities' of human remains suggest that neither of these approaches is necessarily very good at 'remaking the dead', in the absence of extensive contextual work by which human substances can be meaningfully reconstituted as specific kinds of political subjects, and even particular named individuals (whether through oral history, DNA analysis, the archaeology of material context or performances of social relatedness by which divination and spirit possession achieve moral authority). Ultimately, then, the excessive potentiality of human materials makes the 'remaking of the dead', however approached, a profoundly uncertain and indeterminate process, and it is this quality that often leads to highly 'specialized efforts and dramatic over determinations', which, as the Chibondo exhumations exemplified, can be 'unusually problematic, politicized and contested'.

The politics of uncertainty

This argument about the 'indeterminate alterity' and 'excessive potentiality' of human remains provides explanation for the fierce controversies that surrounded the Chibondo exhumations. One issue remains to be explored, however. Although the uncertainties about the identity of Chibondo dead provoked by the indeterminacy of the human remains animated the most effective critiques of ZANU-PF efforts to 'remake the dead' into their liberation heroes, there is also a sense that these profound uncertainties may have had (at least for a short time) some recognised political utility.

If politics is often assumed to turn upon the (contested) work of determination, and the elimination of doubt, then recent work in political anthropology suggests that uncertainty can also be part of a performative stylistics of power. 'Uncertainty' has become something of a new 'buzz word' in anthropology of late; it is, if you like, the new 'ambiguity'. Analytical uses of the term have been diverse (see Buyandelgeriyn 2008), but my usage here is very specific. Can

we relate the uncertainties and indeterminacies of stuff and material substance to the productive duplicities and uncertainties that often surround rumours, gossip and political satire, which, as Mbembe has so effectively illustrated (2001), are often part and parcel of the 'stylistics of power' in African postcolonies?

For Mbembe, the satirical cartoons that attempt to ridicule and thus debase the vulgar excesses of the political elite in Cameroon are 'an integral part of the stylistics of power' (2001: 115), which do not check the power of the 'elite' so much as reinforce their omnipotent presence. Mbembe's argument points the way towards 'recontextualising' rumour 'as a quasi-material substance, as a hinge between the world of concepts and the world of bodily experience' (Weate 2003: 40). In a sense Mbembe does for political anthropology what recent theorising about 'materiality' has done for studies of material culture – exploring the 'mutual imbrication of the semiotic and the material' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:37).

Rumours, then, like cartoons – and I would argue like bones, bodies and human substances – not only carry or reveal a complexity of meanings; they can have duplicitous political affects. In the same way, we could suggest that the controversies which surrounded the Chibondo exhumations, and challenged ZANU-PF's crude efforts to 'remake' the dead into its own 'liberation heroes', actually also served its interests in another way: by reminding people everywhere of its profound capacity for violence. The significance of this point was recognised by some MDC critics at the time who 'accused its rival of trying to plant fear in the population that those who don't vote for it will end up dead'.[33]

If political authority must always depend upon a combination of legitimacy and sovereignty, then perhaps the 'gross politicking' that surrounded the Chibondo exhumations was not just about reinforcing ZANU-PF's anti-colonialist ideology and legitimacy, but was also a performative exercise in demonstrating (again) that 'the ultimate expression of sovereignty resides … in the power … to exercise control over mortality'; what Mbembe calls 'necropolitics' (2003: 11–12). This argument gains strength if we bear in the mind the increasingly troubled politics of the unity government (2009–13), and particularly the debates already emergent in 2011 about the timing and conduct of future elections. It also provides explanation for the cruder, grotesque dimensions of the politicking taking place at Chibondo – the school visits into the mine and people bussed in from rural areas around the country, broadcast like election jingles on national television.

Similarly in this perspective the *ad hoc*, chaotic and decidedly unforensic conduct of the exhumations may have been less about deploying 'African' methods of identifying the dead, or about destroying evidence of ZANU-PF atrocities, than about performative and demonstrative stylistics of power and sovereignty. This view was expressed by some commentators at the time. For example, in responding to reports that the FHT had 'forced school children, teachers and villagers from the surrounding area to view the decomposing remains so that they could "appreciate how evil whites are"', the MDC deputy spokesman Chihwayi suggested 'those villagers know that many of those remains are of MDC activists but they are too scared to say it … that's why ZANU-PF is now instilling fear by showing them those remains. This shows that we are again not going to have free and fair elections.'[34]

Perhaps, then, ZANU-PF's interests in the FHT exhumations at Chibondo may have lain not only in reinforcing its message of 'patriotic history'. Importantly, this argument does not rely on the existence of any Machiavellian political intentions to provoke rumours and uncertainty; such political affects can operate regardless of any design. Yet ZANU-PF, or at least some among its turbulent ranks, may have recognised the political purchase of the indeterminate nature of human remains – the torque of human materialities – which makes them difficult to read, identify and recognise, and indeed defies such determination even as their emotive and affective qualities demand or insist upon it. It is likely that some in ZANU-PF saw the political usefulness of such uncertainties because it allowed them to have it both ways – to celebrate their 'liberation heroes' and reinforce their anti-colonialist rhetoric, and at the same time, demonstrate and remind Zimbabweans of their own capacities for violence. Furthermore this kind of politics of uncertainty does have some historical purchase in Zimbabwe, and fits an emerging pattern that circulates around the political efficacy of rumours (see Fontein 2009b). This dimension of ZANU-PF politics may be less about controlling narratives of the past than about channelling the indeterminacies of meaning and matter to suit its political purposes.

Yet there is, in the final count, a limit to this argument. If the uncertainties of rumours and material remains are sometimes the site of the reinforcement of a particular mechanism or performance of 'state power', and if rumours that seek to subvert or 'reveal the truth' behind official representations can duplicitously reify the omnipotent presence they seek to undermine, then surely this can work both ways. There always remains the possibility that the

politics of uncertainty provoked by rumours, and at Chibondo by the indeterminate alterity of human remains, can subvert the other, 'productive aspect of power'. This aspect appeals to moral and historical legitimacy, and resonates with people's aspirations to good governance, a functioning state and, in this case, the need to rebury the unsettled dead of the liberation struggle. In 2011, ultimately the uncontained uncertainties about the identities of the dead and the manner of their deaths were not sustainable or easily containable. By August the exhumations had been stopped, the exhumed remains had been reburied and the mineshaft was apparently sealed, amid proclamations that a new national shrine was to be built at the site. The issue disappeared from the news. Perhaps the possibility that some of the remains from the mineshaft at Chibondo might be victims of ZANU-PF's postcolonial atrocities were just too threatening to the legitimacy of its 'patriotic history' project, outweighing any benefits that might have accrued from the grotesque displays of the ability to 'exercise control over mortality' (Mbembe 2003: 11–12). Perhaps, as several people in Harare and Bulawayo suggested, people in the higher echelons of ZANU-PF became concerned that matters at Chibondo had 'got out of hand'. Perhaps, at its simplest, biopolitics outweighed necropolitics. Or as Shari Eppel put it, 'they shut down those exhumations in Mt Darwin … because their dead scare them' (Fieldnotes, December 2011). In the end, the uncertainties provoked by the torque of human materiality exceeded or overwhelmed its own political utility.

Conclusion

In 2004 Judith Butler wrote that 'the question that preoccupies me in the light of recent global violence is: Who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives? And finally, what makes for a grievable life?' (Butler 2004: 20). In Zimbabwe these are familiar questions which demand answers that stretch beyond conventional analyses of how postcolonial commemoration is necessarily inflected with the politics of recognition, 'visibility' (Casper and Moore 2009) and the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. Events at Chibondo illustrate how what Pinney calls the 'alterity of an enfleshed world' (2005: 270) is fundamentally imbricated in the 'disjunctures and fractures' of all human becomings (and unbecomings), in which the politics of commemoration (of 'what makes for a grievable life') are but one dimension. The grisly exhumations at Chibondo in 2011 illustrate how the

excessive potentiality of human substances demands yet defies any easy 'reading', 'metaphorisation' or stabilisation, and therefore animates, affords and makes possible the kind of politics of commemoration that Butler refers to. It was, after all, the fleshy, leaky, stinking, maybe still decomposing or otherwise mummified qualities of the many remains being disinterred and reassembled from the Mount Darwin mine that provoked much of the intense debate and criticism the exhumations became enveloped in. Questions about the performative stylistics of power, the politics of uncertainty and contestations over different techniques of determination – of remaking the dead – turn in part on these indeterminate material properties and transformations. And it is the excessive qualities of this human stuff, demanding yet defying easy determination or stabilisation into meaning, which both enabled and exceeded ZANU-PF politicking around the dead, and the multiple, diverse responses that were provoked by it.

Notes

1 ZANLA was the military wing of ZANU during the liberation war, and ZIPRA the military wing of the older but smaller rival nationalist party, ZAPU. Despite various attempts to combine their efforts, during the war these rivalries sometimes led to fighting between different guerrilla groups, both in Zimbabwe and in guerrilla camps in Mozambique, Zambia and elsewhere.

2 'Mt Darwin's killing fields', *Sunday Mail*, 13 January 2008; 'Efforts to locate 2nd Chimurenga mass graves continuing', *ZBC News*, 12 January 2008.

3 A potent example came in January 2008, when, after particularly heavy rains, farmers in Mount Darwin, northern Zimbabwe, reported human bones re-emerging from the soil as they ploughed their fields ('Mt Darwin's killing fields', *Sunday Mail*, 13 January 2008).

4 Interview, Ambuya VaZarira and VaMoyondizvo, 16 August 2001.

5 '56 war vets reburied', *Daily News*, 25 October 2001; 'Mysterious deaths rock Kanyemba', *Sunday Mail*, 3 June 2008.

6 If, as one human rights activist recently explained, during the 1990s many people who directly experienced the terrors of the 1980s were too frightened to 'break the silence' and acquiesced (reluctantly) to government obstruction of any kind of commemoration – so much so, even, that ZANU-PF became 'complacent' – then in the last decade a new generation of 'angry young Ndebele men' has become increasingly vocal (Fieldnotes, 6 December 2011).

7 'We want to know where our loved ones are buried', Letters, *Daily News*, 3 September 2001; 'Give us money not treatment: Gukurahundi survivors', www.radiovop.com, 23 May 2011; 'Mass graves from Gukurahundi era

located in Matabeleland', *SW Radio Africa*, 19 October 2005; 'Evidence of "dirty war" lies far below', *Zimbabwe Independent*, 29 September 2000; 'Film reveals horror details of Ndebele massacre', *Nation (Kenya)*, 11 November 2007; 'Tracking down a massacre', *BBC News*, 7 May 2008.

8   According to *The Standard*, ZANU-PF was 'whipping up people's emotions ahead of an election it dearly wishes to force through this year' ('Sunday Comment: Unearth truth on human remains', *The Standard*, 26 March 2011). These elections eventually came in July 2013, which ZANU-PF won decisively, amid much controversy and allegations of rigging.

9   See '848 fighters exhumed from Chibondo mineshaft to date', in 'Remember: Chibondo liberation war mass grave exhumations', *The Patriot*, 30 April 2011 [Supplement].

10   See 'Row over fresh Mt Darwin human remains', *The Standard*, 20 March 2011.

11   'Skeletons to the rescue', www.thezimbabwemail.com, 23 March 2011.

12   'MDC calls for care, sensitivity in exhumations', www.swradioafrica.com, 24 March 2011.

13   See 'No respect', www.cathybuckle.com, 26 March 2011; 'Sunday Comment: Unearth truth on human remains', *The Standard*, 26 March 2011.

14   Cox (2005, also Shoko 2006) has discussed the 2004 discovery of 19 mass graves and abandoned mines containing an estimated 5,000 people killed by Rhodesian forces during the 1970s.

15   See for example 'The untold story of Chibondo', in 'Remember: Chibondo liberation war mass grave exhumations', *The Patriot*, 30 April 2011 [Supplement].

16   'Zimbabwe mass grave becomes political propaganda', Associated Press, 31 March 2011.

17   'ZIPRA veterans challenge chaotic exhumations', www.radiovop.com, 3 April 2011.

18   'Judge halts Mt Darwin exhumations', www.newzimbabwe.com, 7 April 2011.

19   See 'Amnesty: Zim mass grave bodies must be exhumed by experts', Amnesty International Press release, 6 April 2011.

20   'Zimbabwe: Chibondo reburials in progress', *The Herald*, 13 August 2011.

21   'Row over fresh Mt Darwin human remains', *The Standard*, 20 March 2011.

22   'Mt Darwin mass graves contain fresh bodies: Pathologist', www.zimdiaspora.com, 27 March 2011; 'Chibondo mass grave cover-up', *Zimbabwe Legal Affairs*, 4 April 2011.

23   See 'The pain of a historic village', p. 3, in 'Remember: Chibondo liberation war mass grave exhumations', *The Patriot*, 30 April 2011 [Supplement].

24   Solidarity Peace Trust, 'Hard road to reform', 13 April 2011, p. 48.

25   'ZAPU, MDC demand Gukurahundi exhumations', www.newzimbabwe.com, 19 March 2011; 'Discovered 280 remains not of victims of Rhodesian war: MLF', www.zimdiaspora.com, 19 March 2011.

26 'ZIPRA veterans challenge exhumations', www.radiovop.com, 3 April 2011; 'Sunday Comment: Unearth truth on human remains', *The Standard*, 26 March 2011.

27 'Hundred of bodies removed from Zimbabwe mass grave', www.ipsnews.net, 25 March 2011.

28 'Mass graves raise more questions than answers', www.swradio.com, 23 March 2011.

29 Solidarity Peace Trust. Update no. 2, March 2011, 'The silencing of the bones', www.solidaritypeacetrust.org/1015/spt-zimbabwe-update-no-2.

30 See 'Their bones shall rise', in 'Remember: Chibondo liberation war mass grave exhumations', *The Patriot*, 30 April 2011 [Supplement].

31 www.swradio.com, 23 March 2011.

32 So, for example, the material qualities of corpses at the inherently dangerous, liminal moment of funerals, such as the 'tears' of a corpse or its mouth dropping open, can be 'read' as indicating the frightening temperament of the dead person being buried (Fontein 2010: 437–8).

33 See 'Hundreds of bodies removed from Zimbabwe Mass grave', www.ipsnews.net/, 25 March 2011.

34 See 'Mt Darwin mass graves contain fresh bodies: Pathologist', www.zimdiaspora.com, 27 March 2011.

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Part II: Transgression

8

Governing the disappeared-living and the disappeared-dead: the violent pursuit of cultural sovereignty during authoritarian rule in Argentina

Antonius C. G. M. Robben

Graciela Beatriz Daleo was abducted on 18 October 1977, at the age of twenty-eight. She had been active in the *Juventud Peronista* since 1966, a Peronist youth organisation whose incessant street demonstrations during the early 1970s had been instrumental in the return of the exiled former president Juan Domingo Perón to Argentina. The Peronist Montoneros, the Marxist People's Revolutionary Army or ERP (*Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo*) and a host of other guerrilla organisations had equally contributed to Perón's political rebirth through armed operations against the reigning military dictatorship of Lieutenant-General Lanusse. Free elections were held in March 1973, and Perón became president of Argentina in July 1973. Soon, a violent factionalism developed between left-wing and right-wing Peronists about the administrative control of national, provincial and local governments, while the ERP continued to attack the armed forces and dreamt of a Cuban Revolution on Argentine soil. The left-wing Montoneros resumed their political violence by late 1973, in part as a response to right-wing death squads. Perón died in July 1974. His widow María Estela Martínez de Perón assumed his place in a worsening political and economic climate. The ERP and Montoneros were persecuted relentlessly, especially after the military coup of March 1976 (Robben 2005: 134–42).

Graciela Daleo had joined the Montoneros in 1975. She organised logistic support by providing weapons, safe houses, money and documents, and went into hiding when the military took charge of

the country. On the morning of 18 October 1977, she was at the Acoyte subway station in Buenos Aires, and about to board the train when a man crossed in front of her and said: 'Federal Police, you have to accompany me.' She threw herself on the platform, began to scream and tried to bring the cyanide capsule she had taken from her shirt pocket to her mouth when three men belonging to a naval task group launched themselves at her. The cyanide capsule fell from her hand, and she was unable to reach the other capsules hidden in her bra and handbag. They beat her, and grabbed her by the wrists to be handcuffed. 'I'm called Graciela Daleo!', she screamed, 'They're abducting me. They're going to kill me! Call my father at 592780!' The men choked her and shouted: 'It's for drugs, she's a drug dealer', and dragged her up the stairs of the subway station. They hooded her, threw her into a beige Ford Falcon passenger car and took her to the clandestine detention centre at the Navy Mechanics' School or ESMA (Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada). Three witnesses to the abduction called her father anonymously later that day (Anguita and Caparrós 1998: 345–46; Daleo and Castillo 1982: 1–5).

At the ESMA, Graciela Daleo was tortured and interrogated for hours by Navy Lieutenant Pernías about her friends, contacts and political militancy, and finally subjected to multiple mock executions while kneeling on the grass outside the detention centre. She was penned up for months in a tiny cubicle and eventually forced to do typing work as part of a rehabilitation programme. After more than fifteen months in captivity, she spent February and March of 1979 in Bolivia as a test of her ideological recovery. She was told that her relatives and fellow captives at the ESMA would suffer the consequences if she tried something foolish, and was obliged to report periodically to the embassy's naval attaché. Upon her return to Buenos Aires, the disappeared Graciela Daleo was allowed to visit her parents, accompanied by naval personnel. On 20 April 1979, she was send into exile to Venezuela. She was considered unsuitable for Argentine society but still fit to live abroad. She returned to Argentina in May 1984 (Camara Nacional 1987 2: 327–30; El Diario del Juicio 1985 22: 422–5; interviews with Graciela Daleo on 4 and 24 October 1990).

Daleo's multiple political transformations from street protester and guerrilla insurgent to torture victim, disappeared, forced labourer, exilee and free citizen reveal the authoritarian state's necro- and biopolitical hold over its citizens. If state sovereignty is defined as the power to rule about life or death in exceptional situations, as Agamben (1998: 8) and Foucault (1998: 135) have argued, then this

dominion was manifested in Argentina during the 1976–83 dictatorship. Anthropology has demonstrated how everyday acts and local practices at society's fringes shape the state and its multiple imaginations (e.g. Biehl 2005; Das 2007; Das and Poole 2004; Hansen and Stepputat 2001; Skidmore 2004), while studies about state terror have analysed the state's repressive, regulatory and disciplinary influences on people's agency (e.g. Aretxaga 2003; Sluka 2005). This boundless 'ability to kill, punish, and discipline with impunity' (Hansen and Stepputat 2006: 295) was exercised by the Argentine authoritarian regime to enforce cultural sovereignty through a devastating assault on Argentine society. The term cultural sovereignty refers to the state's power to regulate society's cultural practices, and ultimately to impose a particular cultural project on its citizens. The violent conflict between the Argentine revolutionaries and the military was therefore not just about political power but was a cultural war about the vested authority to determine the cultural confines and social conditions of the Argentine people. Graciela Daleo's predicament illustrates this contest. Rather than being assassinated together with thousands of other disappeared citizens, she was forced into a rehabilitation programme to dispel her revolutionary ideas and instil notions of order, hierarchy, discipline and morality.

Based on in-depth interviews with key actors during the dictatorship and the analysis of newspapers, secret army documents and official reports, this chapter examines the governing of the disappeared-living and the disappeared-dead in Argentina between 1976 and 1983 by an authoritarian regime which was convinced that the nation's cultural tradition was besieged by a guerrilla insurgency and a revolutionary ideology, thus challenging its political and cultural sovereignty with arms and ideas. According to the military, the Argentine state was endangered by infiltration and armed violence supported by foreign communist regimes, while the nation's Western, Christian heritage was being corroded by revolutionary beliefs that did away with the nuclear family and paternal authority as bourgeois, private property as the exploitation of the proletariat, religion as an alienating ideology and the divine social hierarchy as maintaining an unjust social inequality. The Argentine dictatorship was determined to cleanse the national body and spirit of such forces and ideas, described as cancers and viruses. Tens of thousands of people were disappeared through state terrorism, at least 10,000 of them were assassinated, others were forced into exile, while only an estimated 100 captives passed through a few rehabilitation programmes.

The chapter's main argument is that necropower and biopower were under military rule no longer the baleful and benign faces of a sovereign state, exercised with due process and regard for people's common welfare, but became intertwined in an authoritarian governmentality that comprised a 'complex form of power, which has as its target [the] population' (censorship, intelligence gathering, disappearance), 'a whole series of specific governmental apparatuses' (media surveillance, tasks forces, secret detention centres, rehabilitation programmes), and the 'governmentalisation of the state' (state terrorism) to guarantee the survival of Argentina's cultural sovereignty (Foucault 1991: 102–3). This unbounded state power organised forced disappearances to assess citizens suspected of endangering the Argentine state and the nation's Christian culture. The disappeared were kept in a condition of social indefinition as living-dead whose ideological transformation and social conduct under captivity were monitored to determine their fate. This undefined status continued for the assassinated captives when the military junta lost power in 1983: the disappeared changed from being alive yet missing into dead yet unaccounted for. The democratic government tried to purge the fallen regime's necropolitical control from Argentine society through a truth commission, criminal trials, exhumations and the rule of law but was held hostage by the military's refusal to resolve the liminal condition of the living-dead; even thirty years later when nearly a thousand perpetrators were convicted or indicted for human rights violations.

Cultural war and the process of national reorganisation

The Argentine armed forces did not stage a coup d'état in March 1976 to fight the insurgency more effectively, because they had already acquired extensive powers in October 1975 and the guerrilla organisations had incurred significant losses by late December 1975. The military installed a dictatorship to give the military junta a free hand to reconstruct Argentine society and restore 'the essential values that serve as the foundation to the comprehensive rule of the State' (Record of Basic Objectives, cited in Verbitsky 1988: 145). This ambitious programme was called the Process of National Reorganisation. The name harked back to the National Organisation of 1852–62 that began with the ouster of the nationalist dictator Juan Manuel de Rosas in 1852 and ended with the formation of

the state in the classic sense of the term as a sovereign power and a national territory with an organic whole of institutions. A National Constitution was written, the Republic formed, Congress instated and a national education system developed. In addition, Argentina's national territory was enlarged in the 1870s, when the Patagonian pampas were occupied through a genocidal military campaign against the indigenous population. This expansion made the economy take flight with the export of salted beef, hides, wool and wheat. The three Argentine presidents – Mitre, Sarmiento and Roca – most responsible for the territorial conquest, political stability, economic prosperity and state sovereignty were all retired generals. The 1976 military junta believed they were following in their footsteps: Videla, Massera and Agosti were convinced that they could repeat the feats of their illustrious predecessors. They were determined to wipe out the revolutionary insurgency, and restore the nation's cultural sovereignty by banning foreign ideologies and forbidding subversive cultural expressions and practices.

Cultural sovereignty was to be achieved through a cultural war against the so-called subversion. 'We understand by subversion the attempt to alter our essential values inspired by our historical tradition and Christian conception of the world and of man. This man who inherited from God his freedom and dignity as a person as his most precious good' (Lieutenant-General Videla, cited in *La Nación*, 14 December 1976). Or, in the words of General Leopoldo Galtieri: 'The subversive war … is the clash of two civilisations, ours and the Marxist, to determine which one will be dominant and thus inspire or direct the future organisation of the world. More concretely, it is about discovering which scale of values will serve as the foundation of such organisation' (*Somos*, 11 April 1980). General Díaz Bessone had already declared in 1976 that 'the coexistence of two value systems within one national society is impossible. This is why we combat the subversion that wants to impose another value system: a system without God, without religion; a system that builds walls to drown freedom; a system without private property' (*La Nación*, 24 November 1976).

The Argentine military classified certain citizens as subversives unfit to live in Argentina for not embodying Argentine culture and traditional values, and therefore subject to annihilation. The words of junta leader Lieutenant-General Videla are revealing: 'I want to point out that the Argentine citizenry is not the victim of repression. The repression is against a minority which we do not consider Argentine' (*La Nación*, 18 December 1977). Non-Argentine

Argentines were thus placed beyond the constitutional provisions of the state of siege and beyond international war conventions by turning them into outlawed, exterminable subversives rather than irregular combatants. The Argentine citizenry did not escape the military's strategic classification, either. The 1975 battle plan subdivided them into friendly forces, neutral forces and proper forces that each required different forms of psychological warfare (CGE 1975). Nobody was beyond suspicion, and life could not be taken for granted because the boundaries with death were permeable political constructions. As the cultural war progressed, some forces were reclassified as hostile to the Argentine state, such as labour unions, progressive parishes, neighbourhood associations and cultural centres. Norberto Liwsky suffered this fate for being involved with a community housing estate that vied for legal recognition. An officer told him that he knew that Liwsky was not involved with the insurgency but that he was going to be tortured for not understanding that 'there was no room for any opposition to the Process of National Reorganization' (CONADEP 1986: 22).

Guerrillas, revolutionaries and activists were threatened with annihilation. Many targeted Argentines, like Graciela Daleo, coped by living in illegality while continuing with the armed resistance, whereas others refrained from politics entirely and chose an internal exile in the countryside. At least 10,000 Argentines did not fit in with the military's grand design for Argentina, as was documented by the CONADEP truth commission and forensic investigations. They were forced to undergo a terrifying passage between life and death through torture and disappearance to end up on the wrong side of the verdict.

The violent confrontation between the Argentine military and a revolutionary segment of Argentine society was a dispute about cultural sovereignty between enemies that adhered to two fundamentally different cultural projects. The revolutionaries believed in the naturalness of social equality, the blessings of Marxism and the historical inevitability of a class struggle ending in the proletariat's victory and a world without exploitation and alienation. The military believed in the existence of a divine natural order with an intrinsic social hierarchy. They emphasised Argentina's traditional Christian culture that respected private property, paternal authority and the nuclear family (Robben 2005: 172–80). Lieutenant-General Videla explained that the conflict between armed forces and revolutionaries was therefore not purely military but cultural: 'The fight against subversion is not only a military problem: it is a worldwide phenomenon

which has a political, economic, social, cultural, psychological and also a military dimension' (*La Nación*, 8 September 1976).

The Argentine military often spoke of society as a social body, and employed etiological terms to describe the ills and cures of the diseased Argentina. The guerrilla organisations were for General Díaz Bessone 'strange bodies' that had to be extirpated, 'however hard the surgery may be' (*La Nación*, 23 October 1976). The state of siege of 1974 and the mandate given in 1975 by the democratic government to annihilate the subversion had provided the military with the scalpel to heal the nation once and for all, according to General Galtieri: 'We all wish to be cured with medicines, but if the Nation's authorities so desire, the Armed Forces will operate, and in that case, let nobody have any doubt that all evil will be extirpated; and to extirpate all evil, all cells will have to be extirpated, even those about which we are in doubt' (*La Nación*, 5 December 1979). The word 'cell' bridged metaphor and object because guerrilla combatants were organised in cell-like structures. The military employed organograms to unravel these social networks through the torture of captives, and then root out the combatants systematically throughout the country.

Conquering bodies and minds

Blindfolded, humiliated, disoriented, stripped naked and already beaten during the abduction and transportation to the clandestine detention centre, captives were immediately subjected to torture. The overt rationalisation was to obtain information about imminent threats, such as assassination attempts and bombs in crowded places, but there is not one known case of such urgency. In fact, most captives were extensively abused before even one question was asked. Coercive interrogation was believed to reveal the captive's social relations, and served to identify new human targets, secret meeting places and safe houses, despite the unreliability of information extracted through pain infliction. The military, however, were convinced that such information helped destroy the contaminating subversion, dyad by dyad.

Elaine Scarry (1985: 61) has drawn an analogy between war and torture by arguing: 'Whereas the object of war is to kill people, torture usually mimes the killing of people by inflicting pain, the sensory equivalent of death, substituting prolonged mock execution for execution.' Torture was extended into the selves and minds of

the captives to break their fighting spirit and erase subversive ideas because, according to General Alcides López Aufranc (1975: 644), the political violence in Argentina 'concerns an infection of the minds, a gangrene that runs the risk of killing the free, democratic and plural Argentine social body if it is not attacked decisively and energetically'. Lieutenant-Colonel Minicucci concluded in 1977: 'The population is essential in this war. Because they want to capture man in body and mind. The struggle of ideas is therefore fundamental in this war' (*La Nación*, 29 October 1977). The military's dual use of bio- and necropower is manifested in the daily practices of state repression. They tried to influence the minds of the Argentine people through a strict control over school and university curricula; the censorship of books, films and music; the fostering of religious faith – especially Roman Catholicism – and the inculcation of patriotism and respect for authority. Torture was reserved for the most subversive minds, namely those of abducted guerrilla insurgents and political activists. Interrogators explored captives as if they were surveyors, mapping life histories, political beliefs and thoughts about family life. Body and mind were dominated through torture with the objective to desocialise and traumatise the victims so that their political agency was crippled and their trust in fellow human beings for ever damaged.

The simulation of death in torture demonstrated the authoritarian state's omnipotence through a theatrical display of the power to assassinate captives at will and make their bodies disappear through a network of clandestine detention centres. These centres were called black holes (*chupaderos*) into which captives vanished to never emerge again unharmed. Life was held in abeyance because of the ambiguous status of the disappeared as missing yet alive. The disappeared were in fact structurally and socially dead when they arrived at the clandestine detention centres, and might develop compulsive thoughts about death and even about being dead. The ex-disappeared Norberto Liwsky has remarked: 'I began to feel that I was living alongside death. When I wasn't being tortured I had hallucinations about death – sometimes when I was awake, at other times while sleeping … I desperately tried to summon up a thought in order to convince myself I wasn't dead. That I wasn't mad. At the same time, I wished with all my heart that they would kill me as soon as possible' (CONADEP 1986: 23). One disappeared survivor observed how captives feared death in liminality: 'that particular death which is dying without disappearing, or disappearing without dying. A death in which the person dying had no part whatever: like

dying without a struggle, as though dying being already dead, or like never dying at all' (CONADEP 1986: 167). This fear of death was the fear of falling for ever in the social interstices as neither dead nor alive, as neither mourned nor mournable.

The military dimension of the cultural war was principally focused on intelligence. The strategy was to dismantle the cellular guerrilla networks, their outlawed front organisations, and a heterogeneous array of militant labour unions, progressive parishes and radical student associations. Aside from the mass arrest of striking workers, the most common tactical procedure was abduction. Lieutenant-General Videla stated that the counterinsurgency 'Implied attacking en masse, with everything, throughout the entire terrain, taking them from their hide-outs' (Seoane and Muleiro 2001: 52). A targeted location would be sealed off with regular uniformed troops, and then a task group of military and policemen dressed as civilians carried out the raid. A brief but rough interrogation was conducted upon capture, and then the hooded captive was taken to one of over 650 clandestine places of detention.

Most clandestine detention centres were small, with one or two rooms or a cellar at a police station, and functioned mainly between 1976 and 1978. There were also half a dozen large centres with dozens of cells and several sizeable enclosed spaces that functioned into the early 1980s. Captives were registered upon arrival on a detention card with their name, age, gender and degree of danger, the area of detention and the security force in charge. This administration served a repressive infrastructure that implemented the national reorganisation through secret guidelines and operating procedures. Clandestine detention centres served to achieve the cultural sovereignty of a revitalised Argentina through the triage of so-called subversives.

Passage through the clandestine detention centres proceeded by way of consecutive transformations of body and mind, at which death might appear at every threshold. Captives in small detention centres traversed these stages within the same confined space but large centres like the Navy Mechanics School accorded a proper place to each social phase. Different places signified different phase-specific relations to death, and implied other captor–captive interactions. In this sense, the large clandestine detention centres were a microcosm of the desired New Republic. Although magnified by the absolutist dependency relations between captors and captives, these centres represented the quintessence of a society structured along strictly authoritarian and hierarchical relations. They were manifestations

of the natural hierarchy, where some were on a higher rung than others, with disappeared subversives at the very bottom and military officers at the top.

The Navy Mechanics' School or ESMA in Buenos Aires was one of Argentina's largest clandestine torture and detention centres through which an estimated 4,000 inmates passed during the dictatorship. Located in the three-storey Naval Officers' Mess, it operated between March 1976 and November 1983, and can be regarded as the most elaborate of all centres, with torture rooms, cabins and cubicles for shackled, hooded captives, a maternity ward for pregnant captives, an infirmary, a television room, an office for forging documents, a documentation centre for captives forced to do office work, a photo lab, a recording room, a storage room for booty, living quarters of naval officers and a war room where organograms were kept up to date, raids were planned and the final fate of the disappeared was decided (Robben 2005: 250–3). The various routes of captives through this complex universe expressed different relations to their captors, their degree of recovery and their final destination; yet they all began in the basement's torture cells.

The predicament of the disappeared-living

The ESMA Basement (*el Sótano*) housed the interrogation and torture rooms. Here, the ground rules between torturers and tortured were set by changing the subject–subject relation into a subject–object relation of absolute dependency. The captive transformed from being a person with a complex social status into a nonperson identified by a number and completely isolated from society: naked, hooded, immobilised, hungry and often terrified. The blindfold or hood made the disoriented captive unable to anticipate the captor's actions. The subjugated captive became the captor's extension, responding to his every command, but was at the same time his negation by being entirely deprived of agency. One policeman boasted of having his private captive on a leash, making him walk on all fours and bark like a dog (Andersen 1993: 209). This condition simultaneously dehumanised and acculturated the captive. It maintained the difference between victor and defeated, between self and other, but also enforced the torturer's self and his terms of social engagement onto the captive.

Some persons died accidentally from torture. One man was so severely beaten at the clandestine detention centre La Escuelita in

Tucumán Province that he urinated blood. Antonio Cruz, also captive, testified that he mentioned this to the captors but they dismissed it: 'Before the torturers went off that night, they left him tied to a pillar in the open air with strict orders not to feed him and to give him only water to drink. He died hanging there in the early hours of the morning … the interrogators were told what had happened, and they regretted having been unable to obtain any precise information' (CONADEP 1986: 37). In fact, the captors regarded this death as a defeat, according to the ex-disappeared Juan Gasparini (1988: 149): 'One had to endure the suffering before an enemy who didn't give death away. The victory was to earn one's death.' Such death wrested power from the repressive state and affirmed the deceased's agency in the eyes of the remaining captives.

Graciela Daleo's failed suicide attempt, described above, demonstrates how the Argentine military tried to rule over the lives and deaths of their targets. Task groups carried antidotes and substances that provoked intense vomiting in case a cyanide capsule had been swallowed. They rushed the captive to the hospital to empty his or her stomach, and then proceeded to the secret detention centre for torture. Often emotionally deeply shaken by their narrow survival, the captive was told that he or she owed their life to the military because the Montonero commanders had ordered their combatants to choose death upon capture. The disappeared's death was not defined by accident or volition but by an administrative procedure that calculated the value of his or her life.

Captives who survived the first stage of torture were assessed by senior officers. There are no reliable estimates available, but thousands of Argentines were abducted, tortured and released again. Elena Alfaro was told by General Suárez Mason: 'You are being released; in fact, you shouldn't have been abducted, but you know that sometimes things slip out of our hands, especially with the [task group] gangs' (*El Diario del Juicio* 1985 14: 319). Still, she remained under surveillance and could have been abducted again if the military saw reason to do so. Furthermore, her abduction had most likely had the desired effect. The experience of torture would make her mistrustful of others and shy away from any revolutionary activity that would undermine the state's cultural sovereignty. Decades after her release from the ESMA, Liliana Gardella still feels spiritually assassinated: 'I have lost my naturalness and spontaneity, and therefore also my identity. And this is so because a [life] project is missing' (Actis *et al.* 2001: 65). Munú Actis concurs: 'I also felt at the ESMA that they were killing me. What I used to be died … I felt

dead. One never recovers entirely from that condition' (Actis *et al.* 2001: 66). Hannah Arendt (1975: 474–7) has argued that authoritarian states thrive on terror and loneliness. People feel isolated by the internalisation of fear, and experience the loss of self as a social death by being deprived of social contacts.

ESMA captives considered unfit for release were moved from the Basement to the Hood (*la Capucha*), where they were held in windowless cabins (*camarotes*) or smaller cubicles (*cuchas*) of 2.0 × 0.7 × 0.7 metres into which hooded captives were shoved. Captives who responded favourably to the ESMA regime might be considered recoverable for Argentine society. Recoverable captives were treated better than those deemed nonrecoverable, who were assassinated sooner or later. One prominent Montonero member spent two years in a cubicle before receiving a lethal injection (Actis *et al.* 2001: 58; Martí, Milia and Solarz 1995: 52).

Rear-Admiral Horacio Mayorga explained to me how the decision to assassinate a captive was made. 'The death of any guerrilla was always decided by at least five persons. But one thing yes, five persons who like you and me, sitting like this, said, "That one can't go on living"' (interview with Rear-Admiral Horacio Mayorga, 3 October 1990). The verdict entered the ESMA's necropolitical administration through one capital letter on the detention card: 'L' or Liberty (*Libertad*) meant that the captive had been recuperated and would be freed. 'T' or Transfer (*Traslado*) indicated a death sentence (*El Diario del Juicio* 1985 24: 457). The Argentine military used the term 'Transfer' as a euphemism for death. It was the same term used in Argentine cemeteries to indicate the transfer of human remains from one grave or one cemetery to another. No date of death was added to the inscription, as if the condemned captive had already been killed administratively and the actual assassination was a matter of routine.

Condemned captives were taken to the Little Hood (*la Capuchita*) in the ESMA's attic. Fifteen to twenty cubicles were available for captives before they were taken down to the Basement for a death flight. The captives were given a sedative to make them drowsy, were loaded on a truck, driven to the airport and put on board an aircraft bound for the South Atlantic Ocean. Rear-Admiral Mayorga described the final procedure as follows: 'they injected them and threw them in the sea. They didn't … He didn't even know that he was going to die, I can assure you' (interview with Rear-Admiral Horacio Mayorga, 3 October 1990). Proof of this procedure was provided in 2005 when forensic anthropologists exhumed twelve individuals at General

Lavalle cemetery and discovered, by examining the skeletal lesions, that they had fallen onto a water surface from a great height before washing ashore (EAAF 2006: 18).

Recoverable ESMA captives were enrolled in a rehabilitation programme. This programme resembled the thought-reform programmes of communist China, which Lifton described as an alternation between assault and leniency, and the demand of confession and re-education. 'The physical and emotional assaults bring about the symbolic death; leniency and the developing confession are the bridge between death and rebirth; the re-education process, along with the final confession, create the rebirth experience' (Lifton 1961: 66). The ESMA rehabilitation programme pursued a similar structure of social death and rebirth, implemented through brutality and forbearance, but the specific steps were quite different from the Chinese practice. The emphasis rested on the social habitus of the captives, on changing their social identity, group attachments and sense of social order as well as an embrace of Western and Christian values.

The ESMA rehabilitation process consisted of four phases. The first phase was directed at the old self. Disappearance and torture accomplished a social death, briefly described above. The second phase served to assess the transitional self. The captive's conduct revealed the effects of the dismantling process. Some became apathetic, others collaborated and still others resisted any attempt to destroy their social identity. The condition of being disappeared suspended captives between life and death, and their behaviour and thoughts determined whether they would be saved or assassinated. At this stage, decisions were taken about the person's life. Recoverable persons were resubjectified by converting the subject–object into a subject–subject relation between captor and captive, albeit under strict conditions and without reverting to the old self. Without shackles and blindfolds, the captives were taken to the Hood, put in a cell, and ordered to carry out small tasks such as sweeping floors or distributing meals.

The third phase accomplished a social rebirth through the slow reconstruction of a new self in harmony with the reorganised Argentine society. Dignity was restored by addressing captives by their personal names, and by providing privileges such as bathroom facilities, cigarettes and better food. Birthdays would be celebrated and captives might go out on a picnic or play a game of soccer with their captors. New tasks were assigned that were in accordance with their old professional identities. Meanwhile, supervising officers held lengthy conversations with the captives and observed them closely.

Graciela Daleo felt like crying when a close fellow captive was bru-
tally tortured but she succeeded in containing herself until she was
in her cell, because 'crying was a sign of weakness or that one had
not recuperated' (*El Diario del Juicio* 1985 22: 424). She observes that
they wanted her to abandon the feelings of social solidarity nurtured
during her decades as a revolutionary, and become an individualist.
She was told repeatedly: 'it's an individual process here, you have
nothing to do with the rest, everything has to do with you' (*El Diario
del Juicio* 1985 22: 429).

The rehabilitation programme pursued a resocialisation that
involved accepting the conditions set in the detention centre.
Captives were given psychological tests to assess their progress, and
were encouraged to write a self-critique. Whereas before they were
punished for using reflexive forms, such as 'I think' and 'I believe',
they were now asked to reflect on their lives. Miriam Lewin's life
story was so liked by her captors that they gave her the good news:
'You're reborn, kid. What you wrote fell really well, so we have
decided to save your life' (*El Diario del Juicio* 1985 21: 413). A suc-
cessful spiritual rebirth meant that the disappeared denounced his or
her Marxist beliefs and had acquired Western and Christian values.
The release of recovered captives was a proof to the military that
the cultural war had been won because if even confirmed believers
in the revolution could be resocialised, then they were living proof
that Argentine society as a whole had been remade. The Process of
National Reorganisation had been successful, in their eyes, and the
Argentine military who had had the ungrateful task of curing the
sick social body through more than 10,000 assassinations had acted
in a Christian spirit of forgiveness, mercy and magnanimity by free-
ing some of their former enemies.

The rehabilitation programme's final phase was the slow reincor-
poration into society. The disappeared reappeared through a phone
call to relatives, an outing to a bar or a short family visit accompanied
by one or two officers. Eventually, the person would be released but
remained under surveillance and had to call or visit the clandestine
detention centre periodically for assessment talks. The ESMA rehabili-
tation programme contained these four phases most clearly, but the
first three were common in other clandestine detention centres.

The return of the disappeared-dead

The assassination of abducted captives was carried out by task
forces who possessed jurisdiction over the 117 areas that organised

the nation-wide repression. Each area had one or more clandestine detention centres that formed part of a secret web of repressive institutions (Robben 2005: 193–7). The armed forces, police, courts, hospitals, morgues, cemeteries and airports were to a greater or lesser extent all involved in the necropolitical shadow state. The disappeared were cremated, buried in mass and anonymous graves or dumped at sea. Forensic anthropologists have documented around 10,000 assassinated disappeared persons, but the human rights movement insists that 30,000 disappeared were murdered. The Argentine armed forces tried to erase every trace of their remains, but failed to do so.

Uruguayan authorities found mutilated bodies along its shores within weeks of the military coup of March 1976 (Dandan 2011). The Argentine police recovered bloated corpses from the Paraná river, and brought them to a local cemetery 'blindfolded, gagged and with their hands tied behind their backs with wire' (CONADEP 1986: 228). These remains were most often buried anonymously, even when a positive identification had been made. Occasionally, the relatives were notified. Elsa Sánchez de Oesterheld's husband and four daughters were abducted in 1976 and 1977 by the Argentine Army. They all disappeared, except her eighteen-year-old daughter Beatriz. Her body 'was the only one I recovered because a police commissioner did not have the courage to bury her anonymously' (interview with Elsa Sánchez de Oesterheld, 15 April 1991).

Thus, the disappeared-dead came to govern the dictatorial state, to paraphrase John Borneman (this volume), as they kept turning up and as searching relatives kept demanding attention to their plight. Human rights organisations, and in particular the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, reminded the Argentine people and the state authorities of the existence of disappeared citizens through habeas corpus petitions and public protests. All levels of state were obliged to respond to the pleas for information but they only seldom came through: the judiciary, the armed forces, the police, local, provincial and national authorities, state hospitals, morgues, military bases, Argentine embassies and so on. In addition, searching mothers told their heartrending stories abroad, and solidarity movements sprang up in Europe and the United States.

The first cracks in the shadow state developed after the June 1982 defeat of Argentine troops by a British expeditionary force during the Falkland/Malvinas War. Government employees tipped off relatives about the whereabouts of anonymous burial places, and a few judges felt more at liberty to order exhumations. The first exhumation of a mass grave took place in October 1982. Around 400 unidentified

skeletons were found at the Grand Bourg cemetery (Cohen Salama 1992: 60). The December 1983 turn to democracy, and investigations into the whereabouts of the disappeared by a truth commission, made room for many more exhumations.

The military's grand design for a reorganised Argentina had been eroded by the very disappearances that were intended to accomplish the desired cultural sovereignty. Key military commanders were sentenced between 1984 and 1986 but growing unrest within the armed forces, and the determination of President Raúl Alfonsín and his successor Carlos Saúl Menem to reconcile the nation, resulted in an amnesty for indicted troops and former guerrillas in 1986 and 1987, and the pardoning of convicted officers, junta members and guerrilla commanders in 1989 and 1990.

Ongoing exhumations, and the creation of memorials, monuments and memory sites during the 1990s, unveiled the hidden infrastructure of the necropolitical shadow state. The disappeared, who had been assassinated and concealed to cleanse the nation of so-called subversive elements, were reincorporated into Argentine society through ceremonial reburials as honourable deceased citizens whose ideals for a more just Argentina were praised publicly. Meanwhile, the clamour for the resentencing of perpetrators became louder and louder.

Declarations by Army Commander Martín Balza that the dictatorship had designed a standard operating procedure to separate guerrillas from their children, and hand them to childless military couples, led in June 1998 to the arrest of the pardoned dictator Lieutenant-General Jorge Rafael Videla on kidnapping charges. The incarceration of many other high-ranking officers encouraged human rights lawyers, judges and members of Congress to seek the derogation of the amnesty laws and presidential pardons. These initiatives were accelerated when President Kirchner took office in 2003. The Supreme Court overthrew the amnesty laws in 2005 and the presidential pardons in 2007. By August 2011, 198 persons had been convicted of human rights violations, and 1,061 had been indicted or were on trial (CELS 2011; Robben 2010).

Conclusion

The Argentine military embarked between 1976 and 1983 on a cultural war against their own people, determined to secure the country's cultural sovereignty. Biopower was defined in cultural

terms, and required necropower to constitute an authoritarian governmentality. Whereas the territorial sovereignty of the Argentine postcolonial state had been achieved in the late nineteenth century through the aggressive conquest of land and the extermination of the indigenous inhabitants, the dictatorial regime sought to create cultural sovereignty through state terrorism, crimes against humanity and an authoritarian control over Argentine society. Cultural sovereignty became extended into the bodies and minds of the enemies of the state through disappearance, torture and either rehabilitation or assassination. Just as the political sovereignty of rulers is ultimately vested in the power to decide about life and death through the constitutional right to punish offenders and make war against foreign powers, so the Argentine military felt legitimated to define the boundaries and conditions of Argentine society and culture. Argentines considered unfit for the coveted Christian nation were disappeared so that they could not be reincorporated into society as dead citizens or remembered as martyrs for what the military regarded as subversive causes.

The military soon realised that their grandiose plans were frustrated by the disappeared-living and disappeared-dead who had been banned from society. Relatives demanded information about their fate, and resisted attempts to silence them through denial, intimidation and the disappearance of human rights leaders. The defiant weekly protest of searching mothers, right in front of the presidential palace at the Plaza de Mayo, showed that the authoritarian regime had been unable to stamp out the culture of street mobilisations that had characterised Argentine politics since the rise of Perón in 1945 and had forced the military to allow his return to the presidency in 1973. Increasing street protests and strikes by workers in 1981 and early 1982 added to the social unrest. The worsening economic crisis, rising political expectations about a peaceful transition to democracy, and national and international human rights protests moved the junta to invade the Falkland/Malvinas Islands to detract from the domestic troubles. The military defeat in the South Atlantic accelerated the fall of the dictatorship and resulted in free elections by October 1983. Little remained of the regime's cultural sovereignty as the democratic government reversed the restrictions on political freedom and cultural expression to create an open society.

The sovereign democratic state was, however, unable to disentangle itself from authoritarian necropolitics because the social indefinition of the disappeared continued to weigh on Argentina.

The disappeared could not be incorporated into society as deceased members and the searching relatives could not occupy their place as bereaved citizens. This existential anguish made former Montonero Ernesto Jauretche wish a similar fate upon Emilio Massera, the one-time junta member and master-mind of the ESMA secret detention centre, who died a convicted man in November 2010. Jauretche (2010) wrote in his scathing obituary:

> That he will never return from his decaying remains, that he will never be able to reproduce himself; that if God exists, he will not give him shelter not even in a latrine of heaven, and that neither the devil nor the third hell will accept him. That there will not even be for him the promised biblical resurrection.

Radical evil does not deserve the spiritual rest denied so cruelly to others, Jauretche seems to suggest, because death is not there for human beings to own or dispossess.

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9

Dangerous corpses in Mexico's drug war

Regnar Kristensen

On 16 December 2009, 400 heavily armed soldiers from the Mexican marine forces entered an enclosed residential zone in the city of Cuernavaca to arrest the drug baron Beltrán Leyva, leader of the Mexican drug cartel of the same name. He was classified as the most violent drug cartel leader on the planet by the American Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), and as an extremely dangerous enemy of the fatherland by the Mexican president, Felipe Calderón. For several hours, the marines were engaged in heavy shooting with the end result that Beltrán Leyva was killed, along with three of his hit men and one marine. The Mexican press generally considered this incident a success story of the Mexican government's harder law-enforcement measures in the current war on organised crime. My approach to this incident, however, is not to analyse the hyper-complex discourse on state, law enforcement and organised crime in Mexico. Rather, I will take this story as a departure point for exploring the governance of dead bodies, which starts where it ends for most scholars of political science and criminology. As the contributions to this volume show, the corpse is not always the end of the story. On the contrary, as we shall see, a corpse still holds the power to stir up more death.

The overall argument is that the brutal treatment of corpses transgresses the spheres of national security politics and the simple spread of terror. Corpses are instead seen as a social force that enchants politics and socialises religion. They make the past present

and foresee possible futures. Drawing on popular Catholic practices I stumbled over in my fieldwork among criminal gangs in Mexico City,[1] I take the liberty in this chapter of speculating on the possible social and cosmological complications of the violations of Beltrán Leyva's corpse in the Mexican drug war. The analysis takes it departure from the way in which Beltrán Leyva's corpse was dealt with and draws on theories of the sovereign's use of excessive force (Hansen and Stepputat 2005), the enchantment of politics (Verdery 1999) and the social lives of bones (Krmpotich *et al.* 2010). The conclusion is that a violent death in popular Catholicism may prevent the soul from leaving the dead body for purgatory, and that this provides the ground from which 'bone-trapped', restless spirits can terrorise the living.

The story of Beltrán Leyva's corpse

In the days after the killing of Beltrán Leyva, images of his corpse were broadcast in the Mexican and world media. The blood-covered corpse was shown with bullet holes and a disfigured arm. It was, moreover, stripped naked and covered with pesos and dollar bills soaked in his blood. On his stomach, somebody had placed several religious amulets and a paper slip with a number three on it, perhaps as a reminder of the custom in the Los Zetas drug cartel of naming members with a number. This cartel was, at that time, collaborating with that of Beltrán Leyva. The obscene photos of the disfigured, ridiculed corpse had not, however, received many comments in the media before the next instance of bloodshed occurred one week later, to which I shall return after following the corpse of Beltrán Leyva to his grave.

The burial of Beltrán Leyva's corpse was deferred for four days since there were a number of formalities to be undergone before it could be taken to the cemetery. Conspiracy pervades Mexico, and rumour had it that the corpse did not really belong to him. It was hence important for the Mexican government to prove that they had shot the right person. Beltrán Leyva's dead body therefore first had to be transferred to the forensic laboratory (SEMEFO) in Morelos in order for its DNA to be compared with a sample from his brother, who had served time in gaol, and confirm that the corpse was indeed Leyva's. The transfer of his corpse from the place of killing to the forensic laboratory was followed meticulously in most newspapers, from which I quote *El Reforma*:

Elements of the marines started to mobilise inside and outside the residence before the removal of the corpse of Beltrán Leyva. The presence of elements from the marine force increased in the zone, in addition to the arrival shortly before of armed vehicles from the Mexican Army, which had to protect the area.[2]

To my initial surprise, it apparently required many heavily armed soldiers to transfer the corpse to the forensic laboratory. Equally surprising was the subsequent armed protection of the corpse at the forensic laboratory, which was also followed closely by all national newspapers. Quoting from *El Universal*:

The installations of SEMAFO were converted into an invincible fortress guarded by armoured cars, soldiers, tanks and artillery to avoid any incidents. Nobody was allowed to enter until the day after, when the sister of the deceased drug cartel leader and a friend of hers arrived and identified themselves at the entrance to SEMAFO. Immediately, the soldiers took positions of protection and sent a signal of alert to the police and soldiers surrounding the installation.[3]

My question here is why were the newspapers so eagerly describing the tense, secret and apparently very dangerous atmosphere around the forensic laboratory, which was converted into 'an invincible fortress'? The corpse subsequently had to be transferred to Culiacán, Beltrán Leyva's hometown in the state of Sinaloa. The media was again thrilled by this transfer. One newspaper stated that the corpse had been transferred from the Federal District to Culiacán (approximately 1,000 kilometres) in a large car followed by two military vehicles.[4] Another, that a commercial aircraft had been hired to transfer it.[5] The funeral itself was apparently also a major security challenge for the military. Quoting again from *El Reforma*:

Five army vehicles yesterday protected the convoy of ten cars which transferred the body of Beltrán Leyva to the graveyard of Jardines de Humaya, where he was buried in the presence of family and friends, mostly women and children. More than 150 soldiers blocked the main roads to the cemetery in a strong and vigilant operation. Women and children were astonished and terrorised at being checked by the soldiers, who stood outside the graveyard for sixteen hours to avoid any possible attack. Additionally, some soldiers were dressed in civilian clothes to oversee the cemetery from the inside.[6]

One might think this was the last we would hear of the corpse of Beltrán Leyva and yet, one month later, a brief notice in the national newspaper, *El Universal*,[7] was soon reposted on various Internet pages such as Twitter and Latin News. It concerned an unpleasant

incident of a decapitated head found on top of Beltrán Leyva's grave, apparently belonging to the corpse of a local resident who had been murdered and beheaded days before. Curiously enough some of the commentaries stated that the decapitated head might have been used in a satanic rite.[8] This disfigured head was merely one more contribution to the gloomy Mexican statistic of a beheading a day among the fighting cartels in Mexico's drug war. In this case, the unfortunate person's head once again drew media attention to the disfigured corpse of Beltrán Leyva.

The story of the marine's corpse

Two days after Beltrán Leyva's funeral, the marine who had been shot during the campaign was buried in the presence of both family and military personnel in his home state of Tabasco. Prominent soldiers and family accompanied his body on the last stretch of an official burial ceremony. The soldier's coffin was wrapped in the Mexican flag and followed to the grave while a band played the national anthem in the presence of the Secretary of the Marines.[9] And yet the soldiers and Secretary of the Marines had barely parted with their dead colleague when the deceased's family was brutally gunned down on their way home. The dead marine's mother, brother, sister and aunt were all killed in a hail of bullets from the hitmen of the Los Zetas drug cartel. This bloodshed was interpreted by the media as revenge for the publication of the obscene photos of Beltrán Leyva's corpse. To quote one journalist: 'This rage is in response to the barbaric treatment of the corpse of Beltrán Leyva who, despite being a criminal, has the right to some dignity.'[10] The discussions in the media following the killing and counter-killings soon took on a political agenda. Whereas left-wing politicians and journalists attacked the barbarism of both the cartels and the government and depicted it as a clear sign of the government's loss of control and inability to protect its own citizens, the government's version was rather to downplay the importance of the photos, if not to attempt to apologise for their grotesque nature, saying it was a bad joke on the part of the forensic staff.[11] Yet, at the same time, it claimed that the barbarically violent murders of the dead soldier's family were the irrational behaviour of criminal groups that were being squeezed into a corner in the current war on crime.

By now, it should be clear that the desecration of Beltrán Leyva's corpse had had violent consequences. The desecration of his corpse

was clearly overstepping some moral boundary. Without doubt, many Mexicans fear the escalating rate of killings and disfiguration of corpses. Many of them welcomed this incident as an opportunity to criticise the government and the cartels for engaging in ever more 'uncivil warfare', in which violence does not follow normal codes of honour. Regardless of the side of the political spectrum, the violence against Beltrán Leyva's corpse and the deceased marine soldier's family was hence described as barbaric, uncivilised behaviour. In both cases, cultural and international practices of the proper conduct of 'war' were transgressed. However, although it could be seen as simple terror on the part of the Los Zetas drug cartel, there was no need for the forces of law and order to take those same means into their hands, even though they were perhaps not displeased with the effects of the published pictures. They showed a wider audience that the state can also transgress the normal boundaries of 'war' conduct to maintain the image of a sovereign state's far-reaching power. In this case, the excess of one seems to have triggered the excess of the other, indicating that we are currently witnessing a special economy of violence in Mexico analogous to economies of terror seen elsewhere (e.g. in Colombia; see Taussig 1987). The treatment of corpses is here vital for the excess to trigger further terror.

Sovereign bodies and the will to violence

Scholars have drawn attention to the fact that so-called 'wars' on internal enemies (e.g. criminals or terrorists) within nation-states take on characteristics which are different from those of traditional 'wars' between nations. They question, in particular, the notion of *sovereign* bodies by suggesting a shift in ground of our understanding of sovereignty from issues of territory and external recognition by states to issues of internal constitutions of sovereign power within states through the exercise of violence over bodies and populations (Hansen and Stepputat 2005: 2). Drawing on Foucault and Bataille, Hansen and Stepputat suggest that the heart of sovereignty can be found in the use of irrational, excessive and arbitrary power. Surplus power and excess is, for them, the very mark of sovereignty (2005: 11). It is not, however, an all-consuming power. On the contrary, as they also argue, '[S]overeignty is the tension between the will to arbitrary violence and the existence of bodies that can be killed but also resist sovereign power' (2005: 13).

In Beltrán Leyva's case, it was not only the state that had the will to excessive violence. The drug cartel also had this will, and, as such, the case is an example of how an organised criminal group acts as an informal sovereign power that has become a law unto itself and, at the same time, the perennial outside, an unruly and original source of sovereign life that is a necessary condition for any claim to defend a social order. As Hansen and Stepputat argue: '[I]n such situations the state is not the natural and self-evident centre and origin of sovereignty, but one among several sovereign bodies that tries to assert itself upon the bodies of asylum seekers, "terrorist", or mere criminals' (2005: 36). However, if the irrational, uncivil violence is the force of the *living* sovereign powers (in this case both the cartels and the Mexican state), what of the apparent puzzle of the force of the *dead* corpse? I am here referring to the rather strange presence of so many soldiers in the last journeys of the corpse of Beltrán Leyva from his death to the cemetery in Culiacán five days later. The most violent cartel leader on the planet, to paraphrase the DEA, seemed – peculiarly enough – to be more dangerous dead than alive. In the newspapers, the presence of soldiers was explained by the desire to 'protect' and 'avoid incidents' or 'attacks'. It is hard to believe, however, that the relatives or neighbours considered the presence of armed forces as protective; after all, it was soldiers that killed Beltrán Leyva. If anything, it was the corpse of the dead marine, or at least his family, that needed this protection. The fact that many might also have been tempted to take revenge on Beltrán Leyva's relatives for the violence he committed cannot be ruled out, yet the military presence still seems exaggerated, and, as seen with the deceased soldier, vengeance does not need the presence of the original corpse for it to be delivered.

It can also be argued that the state's interest in protecting the dead bodies is because they wished to influence the recognition of the dead person, in this case converting the dead soldier into a national hero and the dead drugs baron into a national tragedy. And yet, if the military presence was merely symbolic, it was counterproductive to allow so many soldiers to walk the 'evil' guy to his grave, making his funeral reminiscent of a state funeral. As Katherine Verdery has convincingly argued in *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies* (1999), there may be more enchanted approaches towards corpses than the sovereign's image strategies. She suggests here a different take on the politics of corpses by focusing on how the reburials of revolutionary leaders, artists and more humble folk have *enchanted* the political life of Eastern Europe and played a fundamental part in revising the past and reorienting the present following the fall of the Soviet

Union. Her take on these complex symbolic processes is grounded in cultural anthropology, giving the negotiation of meaning precedence over explanatory models.

> 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 the dead-body politics as part of a larger process whereby fundamental changes are occurring in conceptions of time itself. (Verdery 1999: 26)

By 'changes in the conception of time', Verdery is referring to the ability of dead bodies to transcend time, making past human beings immediately present. It should be clarified that Verdery analyses reburials of corpses. Beltrán Leyva was not reburied but merely buried. Not much time passed between his death and his burial. Still, I find Verdery's take on corpses as reference points for a cultural enchantment of politics to be rewarding when exploring the immediate afterlife of Beltrán Leyva's corpse. No matter what side we see it from, the burial of his corpse was part of a wider cultural context in which both the state and the cartel's reactions could be viewed and criticised for overstepping the proper cultural treatment of corpses, evidencing a lack of respect for both dead and living but also creating an enchanted environment of suspense as evidenced in the newspaper descriptions of the mystery and dangers surrounding Beltrán Leyva's last journey from Cuernavaca to the graveyard in Sinaloa. They expected something ugly to happen but did not know from where it would come, nor what form it would take. This suspense, underscored by the head subsequently found on his grave, is evidently embedded in cultural practices that look forwards as much as backwards, where time flows easily between past, present and future. The point of drawing on Verdery is that her view on political corpses underscores this ability to transgress the past and make it present, which in this case is a scary thought but also an 'enchanted' way of interpreting dead-body politics in Mexico. As Verdery cogently points out, dead bodies as a symbol have the great advantage of not talking much on their own, even though they did once (1999: 29), which makes them altogether unusually protean and concrete symbols (1999: 52). As she states:

> They [corpses] 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. (Verdery 1999: 27; emphasis in the original)

Hence, on the one hand we have these concrete, potent symbols that are moved around in the national geography, contributing to the political landscape of excessive violence. On the other, they make the past present and foreshadow the future in so far as they send a strong message to the public of what might happen. The word 'enchanted' captures here the ambivalent sensation of awe, thrill and being spellbound, and furthermore connects the dead bodies to the national history of violence, which could transgress to the present. The construction of the Mexican state has been narrated as an extremely violent one (Brandes 2006; Lomnitz 2005) with several beheadings and disfigurations of founding state heroes, Miguel Hidalgo, Santa Anna and Pancho Villa being just three of the most famous. The founding father of Mexican independence, Miguel Hidalgo, was publicly decapitated in 1811. The revolutionary hero Pancho Villa's skull was stolen from his grave in 1926 and the 'on and off' President Santa Anna lost his leg in a battle in 1838 and buried it in a graveyard in Mexico City, only to have it excavated and torn to pieces by an angry mob years later. If the cultural practices of corpses contain, as Verdery argues, the ability to transgress time, making past present, the treatment of these famous Mexican corpses becomes a frighteningly potent symbol. Seen as such, no wonder the brutal treatment of corpses generates such strong sensations among many Mexicans. Yet if the disfigured corpses are seen as violated 'lives' capable of transgressing time, would it also be possible to imagine that they have a more material life to them? Are they just particularly potent symbols, as Verdery argues, or is there some 'force' related to the materiality of these corpses? If this is the case, would it raise another more supernatural reason for the Mexican state and the soldiers to watch over the corpse of Beltrán Leyva? What if the forensic staff did desecrate his corpse for a joke and later made the military afraid of the cosmological consequences of their act? Or, to put it differently, what if the symbolic 'force' of his corpse, which shows his and his rivals' 'will to kill and be killed', was closely interlinked with the material life of the dead corpse?

The substance of dead bodies

To approach this line of investigation of the corpse's social life, I draw on some of the arguments discussed in the special issue on the material life of bones in the *Journal of Material Culture* (14(4), 2010). Some of the authors in the network are colloquially known

as the 'Bones Collective'. They ground their investigations and the-oretical approaches in distinguishing bones as things, and bones as substance. Quoting them:

> In starting from this approach, we are not rendering bones as other-than-human, but rather focus attention on the very properties, processes and techniques through which bones and bone are constantly negotiated as person or things, subjects or objects, meaning or matter … The approach we advocate here is a reading of bones (and indeed bodies) not prede-fined as corpse or as symbol but as parts of other people that are sensed through our faculties. (Krmpotich *et al.* 2010: 372)

Hence the question is not 'what do people do with bones?', as in Verdery's more symbolic approach, but rather 'what do bones do to people?'. In this approach, the scholars focus on the desire to find the individual subject in the bones. With the naming of the corpses comes an increased subjectivity and an increased human-ness which counteract those aspects of mortuary practices that are often designed to distance the living and the dead, to transform the dead into another social space and set of social relations (Krmpotich *et al.* 2010: 379), in particular if the person suffered what Hertz long ago identified as a 'bad death' (1960), as in the case of both the sol-dier and Beltrán Leyva. Fontein and Harries have proposed that the humanising efforts might be a form of compensation for a 'bad death' (2009: 8). This compensation links otherwise qualitatively different worlds since the bones somehow connect past life (and violent death) with present violent afterlife. This opens up the possibility of inquir-ies into the religious experiences of the people in question. In the following, I will move the analysis into the field of religion, aware that popular Catholicism is a major player among both soldiers and criminals. It should be remembered that the obscene photos of the corpse showed religious amulets belonging to Beltrán Leyva placed on his mutilated body by the soldiers. Photos released after his death also showed figurines of the Virgin of Guadalupe and San Juan de Los Lagos standing on a shelf in his flat. My own research into criminal gangs in Mexico City that were associated with Beltrán Leyva also clearly demonstrated a strong religious devotion to popular Catholic saints and virgins among so-called criminals (Kristensen 2011).

   Drawing on Fontein and Harries, the question is 'what do bones do to people' when they die violently? Popular Catholic beliefs in Mexico at times stress the fact that the souls of those dying 'badly' have a hard time leaving their earthly relatives. This was the case among the criminals I studied in Mexico City. They told me about

how the lost souls of relatives or friends were troubling them or the people living physically close to the deceased (the graveyard, or where he or she had died). I was told that the souls of deceased relatives seek them out where they used to live (their home, place of death, former workplace, etc.). One family had severe problems with a son/brother/father who was killed by bodyguards when stealing to buy toys for Magic Day for his children. His soul was wandering restlessly, causing accidents (stove set on fire, things falling down scaring the children, etc.). Gang members also told me how one of them was violently attacked by a restless soul at Jubilete, a historical place on their pilgrimage from Mexico City to San Juan de Los Largos, where Catholics were killed by the Mexican Army in the Cristero War of 1926–9.

These attacks were explained by the deceased soul's incapacity to leave earth for a temporal purification in purgatory before the final judgement. In contrast to the souls of a 'good death' (Malvido 2005: 20–7), the souls of a 'bad death' stayed close to their bodily remains on earth and terrorised their living relatives and people passing close to their remains. The point I make here is not to explore further the public prayer sessions and rituals which families and pilgrims have ventured into to ensure that the deceased souls find peace and stop bothering them. I do not know what the family did to secure Beltrán Leyva's soul's peace of mind, if anything. The point is rather to speculate analytically as to whether the violent death of Beltrán Leyva and the disfiguration of his corpse could also have influenced how people view the afterlife of his soul. Before continuing with this analysis, I have to clarify that the idea of purgatory as a physical place is not part of the Roman Catholic Church's doctrine; however, gang members (and others) often believe that it is a place, as the noun grammatically indicates. This adds a spatial dimension to the purification process in purgatory, which becomes crucial to the 'lives' of the 'bone-trapped' souls who cannot leave earth because of their 'bad death'.

Extending the line of analysis of Fontein and Harries, I suggest Beltrán Leyva's disfigured bones not only 'do something to people' (trigger awe and violence) but also 'do something to his soul'. So far, we have seen that the soldiers followed the corpse closely for fear of new outbreaks of violence, and yet, given the popular Catholic beliefs in the roads afterlife can take, I cannot help speculating whether the disfigured bones might also contain a danger beyond this, in so far as they might oblige his soul to stay longer in the vicinity of his physical remains. On the one hand, the popular Roman Catholic belief

has it that his death allows his soul to detach from his body and start a purification process in purgatory. Even for mortal sinners, there is a chance for salvation of their soul in purgatory, especially if the people left behind render sufficient worship to God and pray for them. For Roman Catholics it might, however, take a good deal of prayer before a soul is sufficiently purified; at least, there is no reason to believe that many Catholics in Mexico would not suspect this to be the case for this notorious violent drug baron. On the other, according to the popular belief mentioned earlier, his violent death and unfinished errands could prevent his soul from leaving earth, and this becomes a major cosmological problem if purgatory is somewhere other than earth. The result is a kind of long-term incomplete detachment of the soul from the dead body – which leaves the soul stranded in a long liminal period (see Turner 1967).

If we take popular Catholicism into consideration, Beltrán Leyva's last trip to the graveyard and beyond could thus also be seen as a stranded purification process whereby his soul is trapped near his dead body, leaving it restless to terrorise people, a scary thought when one considers his 'will to kill'. If we follow this line of speculative analysis a little further it brings us to the graveyards, since they are the physical place where living humans are closest to the 'bone-trapped', posthumous souls. What do these bones in the graveyards, then, do to people? How do living people approach and work with dead corpses?

The 'force' of forgotten bones

Work with dead bodies in Mexico is divided mainly between the Mexican state-owned cemeteries (there are also private cemeteries) and the dominant Catholic Church (there are also a number of other churches, e.g. Pentecostal, Methodist, Mormons, etc.). The Roman Catholic Church helps the souls in purgatory (by praying for them) and the state takes care of the dead bodies in the graveyards (by providing and maintaining the public burial grounds). There is no uniform Mexican approach to corpses, though, given that the secular Mexican state has been opposed to the Roman Catholic Church in Mexico *per se* ever since they were separated by President Benito Juarez in the middle of the nineteenth century. Still, the working division between state and Church has ensured that the two main players have had a fairly peaceful coexistence with regard to the 'governance of the dead', which stands in stark contrast to their disputes

concerning 'the governance of the living' (e.g. abortion, divorce, etc.). The state does not interfere with how the Roman Catholic Church takes care of deceased souls at the time of death. Likewise the Roman Catholic Church does not interfere in the administration and caretaking of the bodies in the cemeteries, with the exception of the few church crypts that are open to new corpses. This does not mean that the one institution has no interest in the other's domain. As we saw in the above case of the dead soldier, there may be a mixture of national and religious symbols when burying a person.

Of the more than twenty cemeteries I visited in Mexico, it was not the presence of the living in the graveyards that caught my attention. Rather it was the oblivion of the dead bodies that came to my mind. Many graves were in a state of bad disrepair and, on some occasions, I would stumble over the bones of corpses because the graves had fallen apart and attracted dogs and other 'bone robbers'. The tradition of going to the cemetery seems less strong than the impression the vast literature concerning the practices of the Days of the Dead in Mexico might suggest (see Brandes 2006 for a similar point). This does not mean that the spirits of the deceased are forgotten; it just points to the fact that, in the popular Catholic faith, it is not necessary to visit relatives' material remains to retain a spiritual contact with the deceased and, I would like to add here, if they have had a good death (detachment). The famous celebration of the Days of the Dead on 1 and 2 November in Mexico consists, among other things, of setting up a family altar with photos of the deceased inside people's home, a popular tradition that is separate from the cemeteries. Those who venture into the cemeteries on these two nights every year (and many do), and who do not merely go to observe the others (which many also do), very likely go to visit their deceased relatives, as the tradition has it. The same tradition, however, also clearly tells that it is the souls of the dead that come back for a visit on the days named All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day rather than the bones, which are in the graveyard all year round. Indeed, for 363 days of the year, the souls are not believed to be together with their earthly bones, according to this tradition. So even in the best-known case of going to the cemetery in Mexico, these are the 'souls" days rather than the 'bones" days.

The increasing use of cremation also illuminates this oblivion of the corpses. The Roman Catholic Church has traditionally discouraged people from using cremation, arguing that the body is a holy object through which the sacrament is received and, furthermore, that cremation constitutes a denial of the Christian belief in

the resurrection of the body. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, cremation was hence viewed as pagan among Catholics, whereas the secular Mexican State had no problem with this practice. The Roman Catholic Church has, however, relaxed its policy towards dead bodies, and, in 1997, the Vatican granted an indult to allow for the celebration of the funeral liturgy, including mass, in the presence of the cremated remains, although this is still not preferred in most dioceses in Mexico. In spite of the clear differences between the state and the Catholic Church's 'governance of the dead' in Mexico, they therefore both seem to allow the corpses to slide into oblivion.

This oblivion of the corpses, however, results in a particular magical practice with bones. During my fieldwork in 2009–8, on several occasions I observed people looking for lonely, forgotten and unhappy corpses in the cemeteries. The idea was to take a lonely corpse home and seduce it to make it work for them (spying or killing). They had to persuade the dead body to do so by treating it well, smoking with it, serving it drinks and food and performing certain rituals. If no name was available on the tombstone, they would also name it. The dead body could refuse the invitation and would thus subsequently be returned to his or her grave. It was important that the dead person was very lonely (a badly kept grave) and that all the bones of the dead body could be collected to be sure that the spirit had all the bodily functions necessary to follow their orders (could hear, use its arms and legs, etc.), otherwise it would be of no use to send spying or killing. A 'fresh' corpse was considered to hold more power but was often not 'lonely' enough, making the seduction efforts harder. This may sound exotic and far removed from popular Catholic practices in Mexico, and so it is in many regards. The people participating in this moral economy explained the practice as drawing on aspects of Cuban *Palo Monte* (see Lydia Cabrera 1975) also known as *Congo* in Mexico City. There is some obvious African-Christian syncretism at stake (e.g. the use of Christian images in rituals) in this dealing with posthumous spirits. Still more significant for this analysis of the cosmological implications of what bones do to people and souls is the fact that those who 'kidnapped' the corpses from the cemeteries were the same people who went on long pilgrimages to Catholic shrines. They were devout Catholics, carrying a heavy cross while reciting popular prayers for their lost friends and relatives in purgatory. They feared attacks from restless souls, which they connected with the 'bad' deaths of the Cristero War or with people shot while stealing. The souls transgressed the

past and became present when attacking the pilgrims, and the same transgression in time happened when the lonely bones were taken home from the cemetery to work for them. Whether dead souls or forgotten bones, they had the potential for a scary 'social life' in the present. In all cases, the cosmological order allowed for constellations with supernatural forces deriving from posthumous 'lives' that intervene violently in a present situation.

Concluding remarks

Throughout this chapter I have argued that dead bodies are not death matter. On the contrary, corpses transgress natural and supernatural spheres and make the past present in possible futures. This makes the bodies that suffered a 'bad death' in Mexico scary to follow and yet 'good to think with'. But why connect the current excess of violence and the oblivion of some corpses at cemeteries with the necropolitics of Mexico today? After all, there is a significant time difference between a still warm, disfigured corpse and the forgotten bones 'kidnapped' from the cemetery. How can they possibly be part of the same problem? The journey of Beltrán Leyva's corpse does not necessarily demonstrate that there is a social 'life' to his corpse going in that direction. Indeed, the journalists' thrill at how the soldiers dealt with his corpse did not refer to any supernatural force. Yet I suspect this says more about the journalists' disregard for popular Catholicism than about the awe felt among the soldiers and the cartel members involved. Considering the soldiers' reaction and the ethnographic findings of popular Catholicism in gangs associated with this cartel, I have taken the liberty to extend the journalists' speculations and draw attention to what might also be at stake in this renowned case. I suggest that, as a result of Beltrán Leyva's violent death, his corpse is likely to be suspected in Mexico's violent underground economy of confining a restless terrorising force capable of attacking people. If this force can furthermore be used against others, there might be another good reason for a little extra safeguarding of his corpse. Understanding the influence of popular religion gives us here another dimension to all the relevant and, for the author, also significant non-religious reasons discussed at the beginning of the chapter. Vengeance and the strategic spread of terror are certainly also at stake, as well as the 'will to kill', which is at the heart of the force of the sovereigns fighting each other in the drug war. Yet it is when these different

dimensions of the dead corpses are analysed together that we find another more profound reason why the Mexican military and the Beltrán Leyva and Los Zetas cartels were so preoccupied with this particular corpse.[12]

Notes

1   From 2002 to 2005 the author worked as an international expert on drug and crime related issues at United Nations Regional Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC) in Mexico City. In 2008 he returned to Mexico City to conduct a full year of ethnographic fieldwork on criminal gangs' religious practices, which resulted in his PhD dissertation in anthropology in 2011. In 2013 he resumed fieldwork in Mexico City, this time to conduct a family study on conflicts and religious practices.
2   *El Reforma*, 17 December 2009 (author's translation).
3   *El Universal*, 19 December 2009 (author's translation).
4   *El Reforma*, 19 December 2009.
5   ElUniversal.com, 20 December 2009.
6   *El Reforma*, 21 December 2009 (author's translation).
7   *El Universal*, 19 January 2010 (author's translation).
8   Spise.com, 17 January 2010.
9   *El Reforma*, 22 December 2009.
10 *El Universal*, 22 December 2009 (author's translation).
11 SDPnoticias, 19 December 2009.
12 In October 2012, two months after I had written this chapter, Mexican marines killed another major drug baron, Heriberto Lazcano Lazcano, nicknamed Z-40. His corpse was stolen from the funeral home before he was buried. It appears here that Beltrán Leyva's corpse is not the only 'dangerous corpse' in the Mexican drug war.

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10

Time as weather: corpse-work in the prehistory of political boundaries

Richard Kernaghan

Insurgent law, an afterlife

'These things are the mirror', said the Shining Path leader, who in Wilson's accounts always stayed unnamed. 'They are the mirror so the people and masses will know not to commit such errors.'

That, Wilson told me, was the answer one *guerrillero* gave to his question of why the Party left dead bodies in public places to rot … always with a sign tossed nearby announcing the crime of which the victim had in life been accused. The mistakes the anonymous leader alluded to were any defiance of Party rules. Those same rules were what they would impress upon all who gazed at the physical remains of the condemned.

Wilson described this political pedagogy as a matter of fact, his voice steady and calm as we sat at a table adjacent to the kitchen of his home. There he shared stories of his former days as a river canoe operator ferrying people and cargoes of raw cocaine across the Huallaga river. Like all boat operators of those times, now over twenty years ago, Wilson was 'organised' into the Shining Path (*Sendero Luminoso*),[1] which is to say the Party kept him under watch and continually on call. At any moment he and his boat might be commandeered and sent on 'commissions'. Wilson recalled working all night to pass people back and forth when the guerrillas staged armed stoppages on the Marginal Highway. He recalled too the disastrous 1989 attack on the Madre Mía army fort, when he transported

combatants towards the scene of the battle and then back to the other side with so many dead and wounded in tow. Wilson said the toll on the Party from that single fight – in losses of seasoned fighters and damage to morale – became a turning point in the war. Or so one veteran guerrilla combatant later confided to him. The soldiers, secure in their underground bunkers, 'won' without firing a shot, as various groups of *senderistas* converged upon the fort from different locales. Confused about who was who in the dark of night the guerrillas opened fire on each another into the early morning hours, until they had decimated their own ranks. This was the moment of historical revelation that Wilson foregrounded so as to explain how the storm of people's war had hurtled off course.

In our conversations on Huallaga history Wilson echoed many things I had heard about Shining Path rule during the heights of its power. He said that to reside in rural villages, which were recast as People's Committees as early as 1982, was to live subjected to the demands of a Maoist-inspired armed struggle. There, it was forbidden to espouse other political doctrines or to do anything that might betray the revolution. Mobility in and out of areas of insurgent control was severely curtailed. One could not enter or leave without permission. Power ostensibly belonged to 'the people', yet Wilson insisted that local Party delegates exercised a vertical, despotic control.

Attracted by an ascendant cocaine boom, the insurgency's political infrastructure and influence spread quickly throughout the countryside of the Upper Huallaga valley. Within a few years all farm land upon which the cocaine trade depended came under Party dominion. Anyone who wished to grow coca had to express support for the insurgency and its armed struggle.[2]

The Shining Path governed through spectacular punishments meted out for transgressions of Party rules. Through a ritualised practice of revolutionary justice called 'People's Trials' (*juicios populares*), the Party regularly sentenced to death those deemed political or social enemies. Rural communities under *Sendero* control served as prime locations for staging the *juicios* where residents were expected to participate in the executions to show their loyalty and subjection. People's Trials were a technique for forming a revolutionary public: both in the sense of creating a political community and transforming the people who would populate it. The trial's public-generating effects did not end with the execution. Afterwards the lifeless remains of the killed would be dumped along a road – generally the Marginal Highway – to send a message to any and all who

encountered them. The Shining Path not only distinguished between advocates and detractors of its revolution but called on everyone to think carefully in choosing sides.[3]

In these pages I weigh the following question: to what extent have the effects of Shining Path techniques for crafting an insurgent social contract lingered long after the movement's demise? Human corpses served the ends of drawing insurgent territory and forging new law. Once upon a recent time what is now the region's political *pre*-history had profound impacts upon relations between people and property. I say *prehistory* because, for Huallaga communities, that era falls on the distant 'other side' of the new legal situation founded through the Peruvian state's military defeat of the Shining Path – an imposition engendering its own silences and forms of oblivion through different tactics where corpses too played a role.[4] The historical proximity of that former era is striking, however, less for what is publicly said about it than for how that other time crops up in ordinary, seemingly unrelated, affairs.[5] In the countryside it is especially around concerns about theft where the disquieting past of Maoist armed struggle insists, though often through signals and gestures that evade direct commentary. There, whether hovering obliquely in knowing glances, elliptical references or the occasional inside joke, murmurs of Shining Path justice resonate, becoming palpable in the rhythms and flows of rural life.

This chapter unfolds around a series of encounters with a long-time resident of the Upper Huallaga valley whom I call 'Wilson'. A trip to see him at a farm provides the narrative thread linking our conversations. My account of that trip also creates opportunities to point out vital markers through which a defeated insurgent legal order can be read from the valley's ever transforming landscape. Those markers appear as material signs – a refurbished road-top; the visual display of rural place-names; and a harsh warning scrawled at a river's edge – all of which indirectly convey an earlier era when dead bodies were common sights. Here my approach to writing is deliberately ethnographic so as to better trace the shared atmospheric, sensorial qualities of this historical place at a specific moment – the year 2010 – in the aftermath of insurgent law. I dwell on what is at once fleeting and tangible in a mundane present of the Upper Huallaga valley in order to ask how the absent corpses of Shining Path lawmaking circulate still and sometimes come to the fore – if now only *as image*. The way those dead bodies circulate, I argue, accentuates the climatic attributes of political time – attributes that must first be sensed before their importance may be grasped. For if the primary

purpose of political community is to safeguard relations between subjects, time becomes 'weather' precisely when the possibility of property itself is placed in doubt.

Questions

The blunt touch of *Sendero* law-making often raised the question of why? Why so violent? Why so uncompromising? Why did they impose such a rigid political programme?[6] The movement's extreme secrecy, together with the terrors precipitated by its tactics, tended to dissuade the posing of such questions to Shining Path members directly. Nevertheless, in rural areas of the Upper Huallaga valley, where the Party had an active political presence for over two decades – a far longer period than almost anywhere else in Peru – there were opportunities to ask. Those who lived or worked in rural communities often had intermittent contact with guerrilla leaders and on occasion would speak to them, if not entirely without fear then with a certain degree of frankness, about Party methods. It was from such moments of shared sociality that Wilson drew in order to explain to me the Shining Path's motives and justifications. Wilson identified his sources only indirectly as *el hombre* (the man) or simply *un mando* (a leader) as if to emphasise the prudent distance that one maintained even now by speaking in less than explicit terms.

'Why', he once asked, 'do you kill like that … I mean, if it leaves people traumatised …' But before Wilson could finish the *Sendero* leader interjected: 'Like it or not people must understand that everything needs to change.' Words alone, he claimed, would not engender the deep social transformations the Party sought … only actions. And if they did not show what the Party was willing to do, the new society they hoped to create would be no different from the corrupt, bourgeois state against which they waged people's war.

In the brute presentation of dead bodies multiple kinds of demonstration seemed to be in play. Human remains signalled the Party's determination. They established its laws. They drew the boundaries of political community and defined, if only by negative example, the type of revolutionary subject they sought to craft.

Wilson distilled it down for me to one vital point: 'That's what the mirror was for, so that people would look at themselves through it.'

From then on when we spoke about the routinised rituals of Shining Path justice I would return to the idea that the corpses of

Sendero's victims could somehow possess reflective powers. The notion of a mirror seemed to overflow with significance but without erasing a certain stubborn ambiguity. Through the display of the executed the Party clearly communicated its unequivocal disposition to kill. Less evident was how those lifeless bodies could serve as a catalyst for interrogating the personal behaviour and political allegiances of those who subsequently encountered them. I wondered in what precise sense coming upon a corpse could approximate seeing one's own reflection. For if gazing into a reflective surface refers one back to oneself, that reference is only possible if the image in the mirror is sufficiently similar to conceal its basic otherness – an otherness hovering in places both real and unreal.[7] How could looking upon the dead body of someone else produce a comparable likeness? And how might the production of such likeness have public-generating effects?

The Shining Path may have intended the act of looking at human corpses to alter subjectivities, but as a self-proclaimed revolutionary movement its broader goal was to modify collective attachments by announcing and reinforcing political boundaries. Bodily remains could be used to accomplish that, perhaps, since encounters with corpses focus attention on borders of the most basic and experientially immanent kind. They focus attention onto the lines separating one bodily self from another, and one human biological life from death.[8]

A mirror in its own way establishes borders too by showing doubles of physical things. Moreover, as a motif for the slain corpse the mirror brings together two aspects of the human dead: the fleshy, decaying thing and the image of the deceased. In death, as Robert Hertz observed long ago, thing and image may at first resemble each other, yet over time they increasingly diverge. And in cases of 'bad death' the image may linger on as a disquieting presence once the corpse is no more. In that regard, whenever the remains of the executed are displayed the figure of the mirror could underscore how thing and image collaborate to deliver a grim warning, with the image extending that warning over time.

The idea of misfortunate events is what threats project into the mind. Upon the imagination the Shining Path strived to impress its rules. But the presentation of corpses served no less to highlight those places where one could be taken to stand accused before a People's Trial. In that sense slain bodies acquired a topographical dimension as they intensely charged certain locales with an atmosphere of unbearable threat.

Two weathers

On the river and along the main road encounters with corpses occurred with great frequency during the 1980s and early 1990s, so much so that they actively shaped not only the legal topography but the political climate of those years. Because such encounters seldom happen any more, considerable stress should be placed on the growing chronological distance between that violent period and the ethnographic present of the Huallaga today. A nuanced grasp of how the corpse-work effects of the past quietly persist in everyday experience requires weighing that ever increasing span in dateable time.

Differences between political eras of then and now are most strikingly expressed by the transformations said to have occurred through the shift away from the inclement political conditions that prevailed not so long ago. In local accounts that former era is spoken of as having had an extreme volatility. People speak as if time itself acquired the mutability of a fierce, dreadful storm … redolent of how Thomas Hobbes once defined political states of nature. For Hobbes foul weather described the hostile predisposition of all against all that he claimed necessarily prevailed in the absence of a single domineering political order.[9] And indeed, a climatic language would seem to lend itself to describing the fluid and turbulent circumstances of the Huallaga's past, a past engendered through the commingling of various forms of violence: not only a Mao-inspired 'people's war' or the Peruvian Army's counter-insurgent response, but intermittent police drug busts and raids on coca farms as well as cocaine traders' own conflicts among themselves. Perhaps there is little new in what I am saying here. Michael Taussig in his ethnographic diary of paramilitary violence in Colombia has emphasised the crucial place atmosphere occupies not only in the creation of war machines but in any rigorous attempt to portray them ethnographically.[10]

Yet what if the apparent affinity of a meteorological language for depicting circumstances of extreme social unrest expressed something crucial about the political nature of time itself? That, at least, is what Michel Serres seems to propose in treating Hobbes' allusion to weather as much more than metaphor. Weather, Serres suggests, is the elemental turbulence from which all more structured (human) temporalities emerge. It is a *meteoric* or 'basic time, close to chaos … made up of jolts', which antecedes more redundant, clock-like temporalities.[11] In that sense 'basic time' or *time as weather* is primordial, and yet, as he explains, it never ceases to be but for ever hovers close

by: 'always there … at my side or bombarding me with unexpected jostles … we together are, we and the world, immersed in it'.[12]

The notion of a primal temporality predating the present while running simultaneously alongside it suggests an intriguing framework for weighing how the political prehistory of the Huallaga continues to insist today. As a prior chaos that haunts and ever threatens to return, Serres' concept of meteoric time offers one way of asking how the corpses once fundamental to border-creating activity might linger on *in absentia* though in a manner adjacent to the lived present. Moreover, it offers a way of gauging the differences between historical eras that takes a lateral (as opposed to backwards) glance at the past as it insists in the currents of ongoing social life.

Conceiving of time in a meteorological register also translates well to an ethnographic method of writing – a writing that not only trains attention on the sensorial details of current circumstances but does so with a conviction that what has passed will continually insinuate itself into the contemporary moment. Here such a mode of writing could attempt to grasp the palpitations of the Huallaga's violent past through what jostles and jolts present day experience. This is to say: within the atmospheres of sensations and affects that give social encounters their singular texture, it could search for the precipitations of a basic time – understood as a political prehistory – that would make possible the sideways apprehension of antecedent events.

Thus, two very different kinds of 'weather' but reaching one through the other. Up front: the acute pressing of sensations unfolding. On an adjacent flank: primordial churning. Ethnography, however, as a recording activity must begin by jumping into the movements of a lived present … on a red Honda, let's say, and the three of us spirited from town to country along a road become amazingly smooth. There Charapa, ever at the helm, accelerates … until we are racing down the pristine jet asphalt.

This two-lane highway looks and feels brand new though it was first built in the late 1960s. A road-building consortium recently finished a year-long stint of construction in which it dug out the worn, broken surface and rebuilt it again. Where before there weren't even shoulders, neat v-shaped, cement ditches now frame it on either side. Sharp yellow and white lines guide traffic by day while by night red reflectors grab the glare of headlights to trace forward a ghostly ribbon of lanes. The roadside has transformed, too, populated with signs where once there were almost none. Bright yellow diamonds with black lettering advise of upcoming curves. White on green

rectangles announce remote hamlets and turn-offs onto formerly obscure rural trails.

The ordinariness of these details cloaks something remarkable. For many years one could pick up the lay of the land only gradually and with great effort, that is, by actually travelling to areas off the highway or, less directly, through the versions that cycled by hushed word of mouth, versions that often warned against travelling at all. Many villages were hidden from the highway and one learned of them haphazardly and often without knowing exactly where they were. One would hear of them and know strangers were not welcome. But now an instant diagram unfolds, place-name by place-name, for anyone who takes the road. The signs give away freely what before was secret and say 'you can go there' regardless of who you are.

On *this* side of the river the fateful air that hovered over many Huallaga villages has waned, except perhaps in the memories of those still deeply marked by earlier times. On the *other* side roads are not paved and there are few signs.

As we cut along the highway a light mist falls. The waves of tiny droplets feel cool on my face and coat everything: our clutching hands and clothes, all surfaces growing wet to the touch. 'Just like Lima', Tina says, turning her head back towards me. And instinctively we look up at the sky, overcast with grey billowing clouds, for a sense of what is to come. 'Will it rain?' I ask. But Tina shakes her head and insists that no, not a chance. It is the confident voice of one who knows. But as we move on and minutes pass, the mist only thickens. Clouds darken. Tina leans towards Charapa, her voice now sounding concern: 'It might rain.' He nods but says nothing as he presses us forward into the wet air.

This was once the road where the Shining Path left corpses so often that to travel along it entailed confronting the dead. There was no way to avoid them. Using the road meant being exposed to a repeating presentation of putrefying remains. Their display became an idiom of violence – a visual language that crafted anticipations of immediate futures and of one's own place within them.[13] However, today there is nothing on or about the road that signals former histories of violence, much less the specific work that human corpses once performed. Today road travel traces horizons of expectation that promise possibilities far less intense and threatening.

But back when the Shining Path placed bodies across the highway they did so as a challenge to the political order and orientation of the Peruvian state. After all, the road was a government-built

and subsidised public work: a line of gravelled earth and occasional asphalt that was embedded into the Huallaga landscape to bring some places into communication while bypassing others.

In those days encounters with rotting corpses were not only a commonplace of everyday experience, they directed thought onto the existential limits of one's own human life. They indicated something utterly basic about the self. Of all the kinds of demonstrations in which dead bodies could take part, perhaps this one was the most elemental. Indeed, as Julia Kristeva has eloquently noted, 'corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live'.[14] That thrusting – for Kristeva, the visceral repulsions elicited by decomposing human waste – is a force that draws strict boundaries between life and death. Successfully kept at a remove the corpse becomes an object marking that border. There, as object, it would also be image. For image, as Blanchot once remarked, is what enables one to sustain a distance from things.[15] Image in this sense would be a corollary and even an ally of the thrusting force of bodily repulsions. Because as long as human remains are only image they can do no more than gesture across the distance manifested by the image itself.

The base materiality of putrefying things, however, presses at the borders of human life and threatens to overrun them. If that happens, Kristeva says, what was object for the subject becomes abject: an invasive presence that can no longer be held at bay. If that happens, she says, 'It is no longer I who expel, "I" is expelled.'[16] In other words, putrefaction enables corpses to 'act' though not as subjects with agency, but as the abject that disturbs the relational borders upon which subjectivity presumably depends. Of course, this is not to exclude the possibility that death may be simply a transition or to ignore that with the loss of life many other kinds of non-human life spring into action. Strictly speaking, what transitions or springs is rarely if ever treated as a mere continuation of the life that was.

Precisely because corpses indicate and place visceral accents upon boundaries to the human, they can be turned into tools for challenging or reasserting political order. Such is one interpretation of what happened in the Huallaga: that the Shining Path used the abjective powers of corpses to unsettle subjectivities but in hopes of enacting transformations at the level of political attachments. Then again if the ultimate goal was to sever affective ties to the Peruvian state and rebind those affects into a new, emergent political collectivity, the corpse had to do more than simply reiterate threats of death. It had to inscribe those deaths within a legal-moral order. Turning the corpse toward those ends required over-coding it with a message,

which is why the Shining Path routinely left paper signs on or beside the bodies. Those signs, professing Party authorship but always placing blame for the killing on the victim, expressed an intent to redirect the powers of the corpse. Harnessing those powers meant investing the person slain with responsibility for the killing event. It meant locating the originating cause of death in the victim's own transgressions. In this way slain corpses could take on a strange self-referentiality with regard to who and what had killed them.

Shifting terrains

At the village of Pueblo Nuevo, Charapa barely slows as he hangs a right onto a well-packed dirt road. Suddenly we are being bounced around and Tina complains, demanding he knock it off. Charapa just laughs, and if anything accelerates more down the straight 200-yard stretch until the Huallaga comes into view. A murky green-grey expanse rippling under ashen skies. We have left the mist and the immediate threat of showers behind. Charapa brakes to a halt. Tina and I hop off at the top of the bank, as he coasts the bike down to one of two long, wooden canoes waiting at water's edge. This is Puerto La Roca. Here we cross for Venenillo.

Here dirt road meets river under a thick mat of clouds. Volvo trucks come to carry crates of bananas off to the highway and across the Andes. Farmers and farm hands arrive as they move back and forth from one side to the other. Beyond that little more than a name marks this place. Puerto La Roca is but one of many points of passage linking left bank with right. It is one of many sites where river, trails and dirt roads come together. Here small movements and rhythms within moments of waiting create a sense of utter still-ness, a stillness where the world of things sometimes takes on an extra charge. Within such moments a silence redoubles and there is a sense of air thickening, which might well be the shared, unspoken knowledge that illicit life-ways linger near. Or it might well be noth-ing at all.

Tina and I wait our turn, taking small steps down the bank as a boat operator and his teenage assistant help Charapa lift the motor-bike up and into a canoe painted deep cobalt blue with thick bands of red and white. Once both wheels have been securely planted on the floor of the craft, Charapa sits atop his bike again, leaning for-ward slightly, gripping the handlebars, looking proud. On a wooden plank behind him Tina finds a seat and motions for me to come on.

Figure 10.1 Crossing over to the left bank.

This is Puerto La Roca in 2010: two lean-to shelters on a pale allu-vium bank that descends abruptly into the water. On the other side there are no major towns, no regular police and little institutional presence of the state, only tiny hamlets anchoring constellations of scattered farms. Here and there the Peruvian Army operates small counter-insurgency outposts.

Little over a decade ago the left bank was still the 'red' side of the Huallaga river and that made crossing not only politically signifi-cant, but affectively charged. Crossing the river entailed going over to an other world with its own regime of rules, with its own highly tensed fields of force. This river, the most prominent topographic feature of the valley, became a political boundary unmarked yet felt, a threshold which gave onto another legal order. To inquire how that happened is to ask about the means through which moral-political forces fuse with natural historical landscapes to project an atmos-phere … in this case, an atmosphere of threat that imposes lines and shapes movements.

What once made Puerto La Roca a remarkable point was its geographic location on the right bank roughly across the water from a series of sparsely populated villages collectively known as the *Bolsón Cuchara*. Throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s the Cuchara basin was a Shining Path stronghold, and as such it became

a regular target of incursions by the Peruvian military and police. But unlike the army, which slaughtered en masse to provoke a generalised flight of all who lived on the left bank, the Shining Path practised a far more selective violence within its territorial zones. The Party killed just enough to control the contours of its civilian 'bases of support'.

And yet over the last fifteen years there has been a widespread if uneven contraction of Shining Path influence. So much so that Tina and Wilson tell me there is now only one place, Magdalena, also on the left back and 30 kilometres north of the Cuchara basin. There, insurgents still control who comes and goes, and Tina and Wilson are able to tell me this because in Magdalena they have a farm. Today, however, we are headed to Venenillo, the entrance for the Cuchara, and where an army fort transforms the terrain as it guards against the unlikely return of the Shining Path.

A resonance in time

The boatman ferries us up river for a good ten minutes before bringing the canoe alongside the shore. Tina and I step out onto the bank. As she waits there for Charapa I walk several yards to set the bags down on drier ground. I then turn around to take a few snapshots: of the boatman and his helper heaving the motorbike onto shore, but also of the lone remaining passenger – a man in an orange jersey and dark jeans, who sits perched on the boat's edge, casually flipping the pages of a newspaper.

While I have this man in my frame, Charapa rides by and up the bank. Tina follows behind on foot towards a dirt trail that disappears from view into a grassy thicket. After handing the boatman a ten-sol note I pick up our bags and tread quickly in pursuit.

Upon reaching the top of the bank I see Charapa and Tina paused before the high grasses. But as I start down the trail something curious catches my eye. Ahead, a compact group of fruit crates are standing alongside the narrow path, six columns in all, and each one stacked five crates high.

In that there was nothing strange at all. What grabbed my attention was an odd inscription scrawled across one of the crates. *No Robar* (don't steal), followed underneath by three individual letters: an uppercase 'G' (or possibly a 'C') and then a 'C' and another 'C', and below that the words *Te Violo* (I rape you).

Figure 10.2 The crates.

Charapa and Tina had passed right by them, seeing only empty crates … even though the 'message' appeared at eye level … counting … one, two, three, four crates up from the ground of the stack placed closest to the trail.

I lingered there a moment, just long enough to document my discovery and then I started towards my friends again, faster now to make up for lost time, leaving the columns standing there above the shore to look out towards the water. For to that extent the writing addressed solely those who approached from the bank, the crates were turned to 'face' the river … As if in anticipation of canoes that would pull up to shore and tempt someone to haul them swiftly away.

Perhaps this inscription was nothing at all. For me, though, it resounded within a larger political history and referenced a long-

time practice of posting menacing statements along routes and crossroads. What mattered here, I suspected, was not only the explicit content of the words but the temporal resonance or echo they set in motion. What they invoked was not merely a general commandment against stealing. They seemed to allude to a well-known maxim that the Shining Path had frequently laid on the dead bodies of its victims so as to convert them into criminal types and thereby serve notice to all who came upon them:

'This is how thieves die …' '*Así mueren los rateros …*'

With messages like this, Maoist insurgents transformed corpses into a means of rural governance.

Though the warning on the crates indirectly referenced a regional genre of political threat, there was no corpse nearby. Nor did the warning explicitly appropriate that threat, speaking in the name of the insurgency, let's say. Instead it acted upon that genre through a crude artistry of sorts. Into a well-worn logical relation of cause and effect it injected an unexpected twist: theft no longer traced a straight line to death but to a humiliating and explicitly gendered bodily violation, one that left the thief alive but also marked and transformed.

The message was coarse. However, its playful transposition of a common refrain not only alluded to times when another political-legal order was still massively present. By upsetting a generic expectation it produced a darkly comical effect.

For it amused Tina to no end, when we were on the bike and in movement again heading towards Venenillo. I told her what had held me up. The words surprised her and she immediately told Charapa, who turned his head enough to beam us a grin. So! Tina said, '*No Robar … Te violo, ah!*' and later she would tell her husband Wilson all about it.

The words on the crates were humorous for Tina, for Charapa, and possibly for others who would walk that way. But I could not help thinking they became a joking matter only in the absence of *Sendero* law, that is, to the extent those words offered testimony to the radical waning of its force: a decisive turn of events that had an enormous impact on current conditions in the countryside. For there was a direct relation between the Shining Path's current weakness and the ability of the government to wage a continual campaign of coca eradication against Huallaga farmers. For the first time the police were no longer afraid of *Sendero*. And evidence of the police's new-found boldness could be seen in their freedom of

movement: that there was no place, no place except for Magdalena perhaps, where they wouldn't escort work crews to tear up fields of coca. And there was evidence of a more superficial sort, too, though not for that any less revealing, in the freedom the police now felt it had to actually make fun of the insurgency, through the whimsical alteration of the inscriptions *Sendero* painted on visible surfaces to reaffirm its presence.

On and along the main highway the Party's slogans, its acronym and its hammer and sickle symbol appeared from time to time. But its painted messages no longer packed the intensely frightful charge they once did. With the Shining Path's military capacity largely destroyed, the territorial coverage of its law had dissipated almost completely. The inscription on the crates, therefore, spoke, if obliquely, to the fading of *Sendero* power, and on more than one register: for the withdrawal of that law was now causing common theft and robbery to return to the forefront of everyday anxieties afflicting Huallaga farmers.

Escarmiento

We reached the farm half an hour after crossing the river thanks to Charapa, who deftly manoeuvred us up muddy trails and over small streams, the largest of which came last. It was there that we had no choice but to traverse on foot, with Charapa insisting on pushing the bike alone against the current through the rocky muck that lay beneath. Up the other bank a path led us through an intimate forest of cacao and fruit trees until we reached a small clearing. To the far left of what was a dirt patio, Charapa's wood-slat cabin came into view, and through the doorway we could see Tina's husband Wilson at the table sharpening a machete, oblivious to our approach. As we walked towards him Wilson looked up, welcomed us with a smirk and then met us at the door, machete hanging loosely at his side.

Forget pleasantries, Tina's first question was 'The chickens?'

Wilson deadpanned, 'They're not here.'

For a split second alarm flashed over Tina's expression, spreading to her shoulders on its way down her arms … only to dissipate as soon as a wry smile on Wilson's face made her realise he was pulling her leg.

Visibly reassured, Tina turned to me and explained: the eighteen chickens they brought to the farm a month ago had dwindled already to twelve. What they didn't know for sure was what had happened.

This much they assumed: while the six chickens might have been plucked from the air by birds of prey, most likely they had been stolen by human hands. Such was the beginning of a refrain I would hear throughout the rest of the trip about the petty thefts and even armed robberies to which they and other farmers were continually exposed. These days having property stolen was *the* concern.

The most recent incident at the farm involved the disappearance of a large plastic tub filled to the brim with harvested cacao: a batch of white fleshy seeds Wilson had removed from their pods and left outside the cabin when he returned to town. Thefts of cacao seemed all the more cruel because the crop was supposed to be their future. Only a year before, coca was mainly what Charapa and Tina grew here, that is until in the month of May, when a police-escorted eradication crew arrived and razed their coca plants to the ground. From all sides the same worry pressed down upon area farmers: how to hold on to the fruits of their labour? Later that day Tina would confide that the previous month a close friend of Charapa's had been gunned down by two men for several kilos of raw cocaine.

I could not help but wonder if any of this would have occurred in a *Sendero* zone (if any were truly left). And I wondered to what extent such threat gathered here because the guerrillas stayed far away. For the explicit reference I had seen on the crates to theft and rape made for an odd coupling: odd and compelling. It brought to mind something Wilson had explained to me one morning, four years before, regarding the curious legal situation that prevailed at their other farm – the one in the zone of Magdalena. I remember we were sitting at a table in his home when he began to speak of *Sendero*. I remember how he carefully prefaced his comments with the insistence that everything has a good side as well as a bad.

'Out there on the highway', he said, 'there are robberies and rapes.' But in Magdalena, there is none of that. 'It's different.' Over there, other rules are in force. 'One cannot just enter.'

One can't just walk in, Wilson said, and there was no need to explain. *Sendero* law meant boundaries to free circulation, but also a space imagined as sheltered from 'common' robbery and at least one form of sexual violence. That is to say, through my recollections of our conversation four years before, the connection between *Sendero* and the words on the crates today resounded all the more.

Tina and I set down our bags on the long table inside, as Charapa parked the red Honda across the room along a clothes-line sagging with old work shirts and trousers. He then headed out to inspect the cacao groves, leaving Tina to take charge of the kitchen. Turning

to stoke the fire, Tina asked her husband to sit down and talk with me while she prepared breakfast. 'Tell him about your story', she said, and that was enough for Wilson to settle into something much broader: a long, hour and a half talk about the history of the region, beginning decades before the highway was built, when the valley was a refuge, he said, for dissidents of the political left. He told of the era of absentee landlords and the times of agrarian reform and the process of land titling that began with the construction of the road – a process still in its infancy when *Sendero* appeared in the early 1980s. Wilson had much to say about the Shining Path but it is the point about property that bears directly upon what I have been exploring here.

Wilson recalled that when the Shining Path arrived to organise villages on the left bank of the river, Party leaders announced that any land deeds issued by the government were no longer valid. They promised, however, once their revolution had triumphed there would be plenty of land to go around. Until then, *Sendero* would decide who could stay and harvest, and how much. In essence, the Party claimed the underlying title of all arable land and thereby forced all farmers into a relationship of subjection. Access to land depended on maintaining a (good) relationship with local Party leaders.

Four years earlier Wilson had stressed to me that the Shining Path should not be viewed as an utterly negative movement. Today at Charapa's farm he could find no redeeming virtues and spoke only of *Sendero*'s many flaws. His perspective had hardened, ever since Party leaders in Magdalena had banned him from entering the area again. He could no longer go with Tina to their farm. And so exiled from that property, Wilson divided his time between Charapa's farm in Venenillo, where he tended the chickens and pigs, and the house he shared with Tina in the town of Aucayacu.

Stung by this most recent of harms at Shining Path hands, Wilson was now thoroughly dismissive of everything the insurgency had ever been. Nonetheless, he liked to talk about the conversations he had shared with Party leaders – about their ways and the reasons why their revolution had failed. This time, though, when our discussion turned once more to the practice of displaying dead bodies, Wilson claimed, 'That was for teaching a lesson.' The exact term he used was '*escarmiento*', which spoke not merely to pedagogical intent but to a specific act: an exacting punishment or correction that served to warn of a danger.

Escarmiento described making an example of someone but in a manner that assaulted the senses, offended sensibilities and, in so

doing, gave visceral definition to a fault or error. But to the extent that both *escarmiento* and *espejo* (mirror) presupposed an experiential encounter that demands contemplation, the conceptual distance between them was not far. Yet *escarmiento* was also etymologically related to *escarnio* – a tenacious form of taunting with the intent to affront and humiliate[17] – which was precisely the gist of what I had earlier seen written near the river bank.

Like the corpse-work of *Sendero* justice, the letters and phrases written on the crates presented a reflective proposition though without any material guarantee. Whoever stood before them would receive a command as well as a threat calling on the viewer to 'see yourself' placed in a dreadful condition. No corpse accompanied the inscription. Nonetheless, the history of a former political use of dead bodies hovered nearby to create a murmur-like effect. That murmur pointed to a force seemingly past but lingering as a co-presence from another time. And so by alluding in part to that other work the inscription elicited a laugh in the absence of the corpse, which was enough to imagine that the coupling of theft and rape could return precisely in the withdrawal of *Sendero* law, perhaps even to mock its fall.[18]

Yet maybe that murmur of co-presence happened less through a generic resemblance than through the notable differences that distinguished these statements of threat. That much occurred to me when I later looked over the photograph, scanning for what else the crates' message might convey for local matters of law and property. Here was a composite figure formed by three lines of text that acquired a humble poignancy when viewed within the current rural concerns about theft.

On the middle line between the inscription's proposition appeared three letters. Were these letters initials claiming the crates as someone's own? Assuming they marked a personal identity, then the 'author' did not speak in the name of a collective – much less of an insurgent movement. As such, the warning was at once limited in range and weak in force. Tina and Charapa, who travelled that way several times a week, had no idea who the author might be. And without such knowledge the message took on a levity that ran counter to the seriousness of its threat.

The potential intensity of this speech act, thus, owed much to the author's identity. A lot depended as well on the disposition of those who actually saw and read the inscription. What gestured to *Sendero* justice was the harshness of the proposition combined with *its public expression*, even though the exact wording diverged from admonishments often accompanying bodies of Shining Path

Figure 10.3 The warning.

victims. That *public* aspect seemed pivotal and was largely why I did not read from the message any reference to the state security forces. For while regionally the Peruvian Police and Armed Forces had a far greater reputation for sexual violence than the Shining Path, they did not brazenly admit it, much less frame such acts as public statements of law.[19]

TE VIOLO (*I rape you*) spoke to the violent intimacy of a 'private' justice. Following the impersonal commandment NO ROBAR (*Don't steal*) it was filled with the personality of a conjugated act, located in some present future encounter between unknown and still undetermined subjects … This third line delivered the threat but as if in waiting and still in store.

The full proposition said: you violate these objects, which as my material property are the extension of 'me', I violate your person in its most contracted state, namely, in your body, and of that body, the most 'private' of parts. The proposition expressed a simple exchange, bringing into rough equivalence two forms of personal property, but here there was no attempt to 'make a people'.

No robar, te violo directed 'sight' towards oneself not as physically dead but as violated in life. Shifting the promised outcome from a lethal to a sexual violence was, therefore, a strategic displacement that in these specific circumstances made the message crudely

witty – as opposed to merely nonsensical. However, a more revealing difference from the *Sendero* maxims of old was how this proposition implicitly traced an imaginary barrier beyond which all propriety could threaten to fall apart. For the statement *no robar, te violo* conjured an image of unconstrained right where '*I*' could do anything to '*You*', but in a manner that if taken to extremes would unsettle the very distinction between the two. Much as Hobbes described the state of nature where lines demarcating *mine* from *thine* fall away.

Right without limits suggests an endless spiral of uninvited appropriations: a raucous state of affairs seemingly outside law, where relations of hospitality and extended sympathy no longer obtain. Real or unreal, such a situation invokes a Hobbesian fantasy of all against all where time itself becomes a weather most foul. Real or unreal or precisely because somewhere in between, 'time as weather' names a circumstance where titles to property (understood as durable, enduring possession) become neither secure nor presently possible. While a fictional condition, it is a fiction with sufficient force to captivate imaginations and haunt social relations.

'Time as weather' haunts because property itself presupposes temporality, or rather a particular manner in which duration comes to be fused with things. As David Hume once observed, property is engendered through time. Though he was also careful to add that time is 'not any thing real in the objects, but is the offspring of our sentiments' – which is to say how our sentiments are directed towards objects.[20] Stabilising possession, Hume speculated, was the critical step not only in creating property but more broadly in making possible the relations of hospitality upon which collective existence depends. In other words, not only property but peaceful cohabitation required injecting duration into the possession of things.

An echo of Hume's theory of property can be heard in Michel Serres' depictions of meteoric time: 'Our relationships, social bonds, would be airy as clouds were they only contracts between subjects … [T]he object … stabilises our relationships, it slows down the time of our revolutions.'[21] Objects, for Serres, are what allow social bonds to become substantial enough to withstand the tumultuous vicissitudes of life and of the world. But, if that turbulence is, as he insists, a mode of temporality – and Serres says it is the most primary and free-flowing of all – then objects would play an vital role in how social groups segment, divide and apportion time. Objects would enable contracting subjects to corral and partition the unruly flows of 'basic time', while pushing most of the turbulence *out*, as it were, to the margins of collective life.

Out in the margins basic time would still persist to hover before and beside the segmented temporalities or steady durations that make property possible. 'Out there' basic time would become a noise disturbing enduring possession and the social bonds that enduring possession objectifies. It would be that all against all fictitious state of affairs where furious winds or floods could at any time sweep through and carry everything away.

'You' steal. 'I' rape. Time goes meteoric … property vanishes.

And, of course, this is fiction. Or perhaps an ur-mode of social time is something quite real that only becomes tangible and thus available for reflection by embracing the powers of the imagination. Did not Hobbes and Hume say as much, each in his own way? Hume's remarks about time and property seem worth pursuing, because instability of possession is often considered a prevailing character-istic of both war and illicit economies. Certainly the Peruvian state drives home that point every time its agents rip up coca fields or set rustic drug labs aflame. Those remarks also bring to mind something I heard in the Huallaga valley when I first began going there in the mid-1990s. People had this to say then about the early era of coca/cocaine prosperity. I refer to the late 1970s, when the drug trade first animated the regional economy. Back then making money, lots of it, was suddenly no longer difficult. And that made an impression on local farmers, who were seeped in the wisdom and common sense that simply getting by invariably demanded back-breaking labour. The burgeoning drug economy sparked migration from all corners and walks of life. Among those who arrived, from Lima some say, was a clever, ruthless criminal class – professional con artists, petty thieves and violent thugs – keen to use their skills to cash in on the new-found wealth. For the boom was a time of easy money: easy to make, frustratingly hard to hold on to. Make a fortune today. Have it stolen at gunpoint tomorrow.

The boom was a period of spiralling transgressions, but often of a tragic sort, even for the professional criminal set. For they, like most people, did not anticipate the sudden rise of the Shining Path, which was a criminal racket of a wholly other order – much like the state, you could say – but with the winds of revolution infusing its actions with a sort of legitimate title. At the forefront of its Maoist political programme was 'cleansing' the Huallaga valley of all man-ner of human folk deemed scandalous and crooked: corrupt politi-cians, abusive landlords, adulterers, rapists, drug addicts, *travesties*, thieves. The Shining Path sought to discipline the social life of the boom while using the cocaine economy to raise funds for its armed

struggle. So serious and effective was the programme of '*limpieza social*' that in some Huallaga towns it was said not even a pickpocket could be found for years to come.

Crucial to the communicative work of *Sendero* law-making was the use of dead bodies, freshly killed and displayed on paths and roadways in order to send a shudder into all who found them. This is to say, they operated first and foremost at the level of affect: by delivering a blow to the sentiments in order to turn them in a different direction.

Now jump two and three decades forward. That former corpse-work is part of the political prehistory that in the Huallaga presses at the edges of the lived present. Even when people do not speak of those earlier times directly, traces of how dead bodies were once politically displayed resonate in the movements and soft noise of ordinary life, sending ripples into humble encounters and prosaic non-events. Those ripples unsettle, but sometimes barely enough to notice … such as when a threat appears scribbled on a stack of crates overlooking the river.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1 The Communist Party of Peru – Shining Path (*El Partido Comunista del Perú – Sendero Luminoso*). In 1980 *Sendero Luminoso* initiated an armed insurrection that spread in the coming years across Peru. Though defeated militarily by 1994, factionalised remnants of the insurgency would continue to have an active presence in the eastern coca-growing regions of the Upper Huallaga and of the Apurimac/Ene river for many years to come.

2 Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación 2004: 109.

3 Meanwhile, in the towns bordering those rural areas that came under direct Party influence, enforcement of *Sendero* laws often took the form of unceremonious hit-and-run killings. Executioners rarely failed to leave a scrawled placard behind to take credit for the death-giving act to announce the rule that had been transgressed.

4 See Kernaghan 2009: 188–212.

5 As a trans-historical force that 'exists', as Nietzsche suggested (1994), 'at all times or could possibly re-occur', political prehistory can be considered here a mode of temporality that belongs to the foundational violence of a prior legal order but which secretly inheres in the everyday life of the present.

6 A significant scholarly literature has attempted, if not to answer these specific questions, then to provide abundant historical and ethnographic contexts to understand the distinctiveness of the Shining Path as a Latin American insurgency and the social dimensions of Peru's internal conflict. See especially: Burt 2007; Degregori 1989, 1990; González 2011; Heilman 2010; Poole and Rénique 1992; Portocarrero 2012; Starn 1995; Stern 1998; Taylor 2006; Theidon 2012.

7 Fittingly, Foucault (1986: 24) described the mirror as combining utopic and heterotopic dimensions: unreal to the extent that one sees oneself in a placeless place, real in that its reflective surface belongs to an actual object: 'From the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there.'

8 Kristeva 1982: 3.

9 Hobbes 1996: 88–9.

10 Taussig 2003b: 11–12.

11 Serres 1999: 100.

12 Serres 1999: 100.

13 See Kernaghan 2009.

14 Kristeva 1982.

15 Blanchot 1989: 254.

16 Kristeva 1982: 3–4.

17 Coromines and Pascual 1980.

18 And no doubt one should be attentive here to the at times intimate proximity that violence has to humour, a point Taussig (2003a) foregrounds in a brilliant essay on the 'language' of mutilated corpses and the vertiginous forces dead bodies may bring into play.

19 But see Theidon 2012.

20 Hume 1978: 509.

21 Serres 1999: 87.

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11

Governing through the mutilated female body: corpse, bodypolitics and contestation in contemporary Guatemala[1]

Ninna Nyberg Sørensen

Introduction

This chapter examines the brutal killing of women in post-war Guatemala, the interpretations that these murders engender and the place of the dead bodies in the country's contestations over sovereignty. It grows out of having lived and worked (with other issues) in the country 2005–9 and by being horror-struck by Guatemala's ever present perverse blend of beauty and terror: The breath-taking range of landscapes, architectural wealth and colourful clothing displayed against a nagging background of genocide and unresolved problems of poverty, abuse and generalised violence. Like other newcomers to the country, I was struck by homicide rates resembling the most violent years of the armed conflict, by rising incidents involving the killing of women and girls, and by the shocking brutality with which the killings often were carried out. Today violence and horror continue to haunt Guatemala as does a generalised climate of fear and impunity. Despite the tireless peace-work of thousands of Guatemalans and considerable sums pumped in by international donors, the violence that ravaged the country during the thirty-six-year-long armed conflict (1960–96) is not over. Why is it that the years following the peace accords may turn out to be the most violent in Guatemala's recent history? What explains that the atrocities 'pile up like pages in a book', that 'everything goes unpunished'[2] and that state authorities

seems unable or unwilling to stop the killings? And what explains the gendered forms the 'eternal tyranny'[3] in Guatemala take?

During Guatemala's armed conflict state sponsored campaigns of terror and mass killings left a death toll of approximately 200,000 and an additional 40,000 forced disappearances. Some 440 villages were razed to the ground and over a million refugees were displaced (Sanford 2003; Schirmer 1998). Peace agreements were signed in 1996. These agreements were meant to trigger democratisation and to end extreme violence and killings. However, while political violence decreased, social and criminal violence rose to the extent that Guatemala today is among the most violent countries in the world.[4] Homicide rates are higher than during the most violent civil war years and rates are rising. So are violent killings of women. Teenagers, college students, housewives and *maquila* workers have disappeared and later been found naked, disembowelled, sexually mutilated, strangled, beheaded and dumped like garbage in abandoned lots. Sometimes insults are carved into their flesh. The extreme level of violence, in turn, is fed by a weak or overwhelmed judicial system, inadequate institutional structures and a general lack of state capacity or will to manage these multiple, complex and interconnected challenges. A law condemning femicide was passed in 2008, but the killings continued after the introduction of the law. All the while Guatemalans keep talking of their nation as a 'wounded body' and of failed attempts to reconcile the country's extreme social and ethnic inequalities as 'a finger in the wound' (Nelson 1999), I argue that the politics involved in the interpretation of contemporary violence, in particular the incomprehensibly cruel violence directed towards women and girls, must be understood in relation to a patriarchal ideology that governs through gendered violence.

Various national NGOs and commissions have put the issue of violent killings of women on the agenda and begun to search for explanations as to why, and why with such brutality, as well as what can be done to prevent these killings in the future. This is important and relevant work to which I will be referring throughout the chapter. What concerns me here, however, are not so much the killings in themselves as how societies like Guatemala are governed through the violated and mutilated female body.

Throughout the chapter I use the Guatemalan culture of silence (Wilkinson 2002) and its extension to the silencing of feminicide as a metaphor for Guatemala's failure to confront the disaster of everyday violence. I do not take my point of departure in the atrocities

carried out during the prolonged armed conflict. I write about the present. The forms of governance developed prior to and during the civil war, as well as the struggle to commemorate the victims and reinstall dignity in the survivors through exhumations of mass graves and legal persecution of the perpetrators, are important historical contexts, while small arms proliferation, organised criminal networks, drug trafficking, human trafficking and the infiltration of the state by parallel, clandestine structures are highly significant contemporary contextual factors. For this reason, the analysis here relies on the significance and gendered meanings of mutilated female bodies in the present process of state formation in Guatemala, on the role they play in the making and territorialisation of political communities and on how struggles and contestations over sovereignty and state formation are represented in particular inscriptions on female bodies.

The chapter is divided into five sections. In the first I introduce the terms and definitions utilised in debates over violence towards and mass killings of women. In the second I present the state of affairs in Guatemala through numbers and statistics. I then turn to descriptions of the brutality with which the murders are committed and the body(parts) displayed. In the fourth section the killing of Guatemalan women is placed in historical context, including the legacy of the armed conflict. The fifth section discusses what Nelson (1999) has termed 'the splattered body politics' in processes of state formation in Guatemala.

Gendering the corpse: homicide, femicide and feminicide

Sexual violence against women is known in almost all corners of the world, but systematic violent killings of women seem to be concentrated in specific areas. The border town of Ciudad Juarez in northern Mexico is perhaps the best-known case, but other areas in the world also show high incidence of violent killings of women (Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA 2009). The systematic and violent killing of women is generally termed 'femicide', when distinguishing the victim of the homicide as female, or 'feminicide', when stressing that these women are killed because of their sex, and that not only the male perpetrators but also the state and its judicial structures are responsible for the insecurity of female citizens and the impunity following acts of violence against them.

The concept of femicide is attributed to Diane Russell, who initially defined femicide as 'the killing of women because they are women'. She later sharpened the definition to 'the murder of women by men motivated by hatred, contempt, pleasure, or a sense of ownership over women' (1990: 34). In order to recognise that girls and female babies are also among the victims, 'women' was replaced by 'females', resulting in a definition of femicide as 'the killing of females by males because they are females' (Russell and Harmes 2001). In Russell's view, femicide is on the extreme end of a continuum of misogynist or anti-female terror that includes a wide variety of verbal and physical abuse. Whenever these forms of terrorism result in death, they become femicides (Russell 2008).

The case of Mexico's Ciudad Juárez, where close to 500 murders of women took place between 1993 and 2009, led Marcela Lagarde (2006) to introduce the term 'feminicide' to emphasise government impunity and negligence in investigating the murder of women.[5] Other distinctive marks related to feminicide are initial reactions of denial, particularly at the local level, lack of proper investigation and the lack of willingness to detain and bring to justice those responsible for the murders and discriminatory and disrespectful attitudes towards family members of the victims, if not outright blaming of the victims themselves (European Parliament 2006).

Along these lines Rita Laura Segato has refined and developed the concept. She defines feminicide as the assassination of a generic woman, just because she is a woman and belongs to this type of human beings, much in the same way as genocide is a generic and lethal aggression directed towards all those belonging to a certain ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious or ideological group. Both crimes are directed towards a category, not a specific subject. Feminicides are *not* ordinary crimes, sexually motivated gender crimes or crimes related to domestic violence, as often asserted by law enforcers, authorities or some activists. Like other forms of violence, feminicide has an expressive dimension. According to Segato, however, the prevalence of the expressive dimension of the violence also makes feminicides 'crimes of corporation'. The corporative dimension is important to Segato's definition, as 'corporation' is understood to entail the group or network that administers the resources, rights and duties of a parallel state (Segato 2005).[6]

In Guatemala, women have been among murder victims for a long time. However, the violence that was previously directed at the internal subversive enemy has been displaced to other sectors of society, including women. The working definitions of femicide and

feminicide have facilitated an understanding of how the murder of Guatemalan women is tied to racism, paternalism and corruption and how the levels of impunity are connected to the corrupt hidden powers in the country. A law against femicide was approved by Congress in April 2008. The law was the result of lengthy negotiations between representatives of civil society and the state and entails preventive measures, definitions of crimes and mechanisms of punishment, meant to guarantee women the right to a life free from physical, psychological, sexual or moral violence. Perpetrators of femicide can be punished with twenty-five to fifty years' imprisonment.

Most women's and human rights organisations view the law as a positive gain, some find it regrettable that the term adopted is femicide, not feminicide, while a few find the law extremely problematic and yet another sign of the inferior status of women in society.[7] How come, they ask, that Guatemala needs a law against femicide when it is already against the law to kill any human being? And how can a law that limits the penalty for femicide to fifty years be considered a victory, if the penalty for assassination (§162 penal law) can be a life sentence or even death? A few organisations even point to the danger of augmenting the number of violent killings of women as a result of the law. Non-deathly violence against women can be punished with five to twelve years in prison. Will Guatemala see more violent killings of women if released perpetrators of violence look for vengeance upon leaving prison? The most severe critiques point to the fact that Guatemala does not lack laws or penal codes but rather compliance with them.[8] And as for the knowledge of the law, a survey carried out by the Center for Women's Research, Training and Support (CICAM) among justice operators, health workers and civil society in September 2008 found that not one (of 220) respondents could come up with correct answers as to what the law is all about.

'Femicide' and 'feminicide' have entered the vocabulary of Guatemalan women's and human rights organisations and progressive feminist parliamentarians. Outside these circles, the violent killings of women are often silenced. During and right after the violent conflict Guatemalans – for very good reasons – were struck by what Wilkinson (2002) has termed a culture of silence. I prefer to call this culture of silence a conversational art form of selective forgetting or collective amnesia since violence as such no longer is silenced. Guatemalans, of all social strata, talk a lot and at length about it. Lunch conversations often revolve around the issue of who has been mugged when and where, where the most violent killings have taken place over the last twenty-four hours, whether or not *los narcos*, the

police or the government are involved, how the government is doing absolute nothing about it, and how corruption and impunity have become so widespread that nobody is left with any expectations that anyone will actually do something about it. Strangely enough – and even if the newspapers spread out on the lunch tables will have their fair share of press photos showing half-naked female corpses found and photographed the previous day – state responsibility towards violent killings of women and mutilated female bodies are seldom part of the daily 'blame-it-all-on-the-state-game'. Why is this? Even if rape and sexual violence are silenced in most societies, why is it that the violent killings of women are not included in everyday conversations on generalised violence but relegated to the realms of justice or feminist NGOs? Paraphrasing Uribe (2004) one may speculate that the fear of contagion in feminicised spaces – of being 'rapable', 'mutilable' and 'body partable' – has become so extreme that any type of exchange is dangerous. It may even be argued that fear of contagion becomes more important in situations of contested sovereignty, i.e. when the state no longer has monopoly on violence, or when state discourse of feminicide rests on a blame-the-victim strategy that relies on a gendering of the public sphere.

Quantifying the corpses: homicide and feminicide rates in Guatemala

Although political violence in Guatemala has decreased with the peace accords, human rights defenders, union leaders, environmentalists, corruption fighters, judges and indigenous community leaders continue to carry out their work under threats and at risk of getting killed. It is not uncommon that police investigations conclude that the killing of a trade union leader turned out to be a crime of passion, committed by an ex-partner or *la otra mujer*, hereby resisting the idea that the violence represents a political problem. But violence has also become generalised. Ordinary citizens, especially those who cannot afford private cars and secure housing and who work odd hours far away from home, risk getting robbed and killed on public busses or on the streets. The rich and the middle classes may be targeted in their cars on in public places such as restaurants or super markets. Generalised crime and violence affects everyone. As statistics are poor and contradictory, a 'war of interpretation' revolves around the story told by governing elites versus the one told by human and civil rights activists critical of the

Table 11.1 Homicide rates per 100,000 inhabitants and by sex of victim. Central America

Country	Count	Rate	Male %	Female %	Year
Belize	130	41.7	92.5	7.5	2010
Costa Rica	527	11.3	88.2	11.8	2008
El Salvador	4,085	66.0	87.4	12.6	2008
Guatemala	5,960	41.4	88.9	11.1	2009
Honduras	6,239	82.1	93.1	6.9	2009
Nicaragua	766	13.2	92.1	7.9	2008
Panama	759	21.6	91.3	8.7	2009
Mexico	20,585	18.1	89.8	10.2	2008

Source: UNODC 2011.

government's interpretation of the violence, the corpses it produces and their political significance (Wright 2011: 719).

Different government bodies and NGOs present contradictory numbers. Underreporting results from the existence of barriers to reporting, not from a lack of will on the part of the victims and their families. Apart from the obstacles presented by a misogynous regime, lack of confidence in an effective response from state institutions, fear of additional violence, concerns regarding stigmatisation and the prospect of loss of economic support, have been pointed out as an explanation for contradictory reports (Musalo *et al.* 2010: 175). Most agree that even the statistics that report higher numbers suffer from severe underreporting. The figures presented are those frequently referred to by national and international observers. They generally exclude persons who die later of their wounds in hospitals.

Underreported or not, the figures in Table 11.1 clearly show that on a national basis there is a higher risk of getting killed in Honduras and El Salvador than in Guatemala. Women are slightly more at risk in El Salvador and Costa Rica, but both homi- and feminicide rates in Guatemala are above those of Mexico, which have made international headlines. Disaggregated data from Guatemala (Table 11.2) additionally show that certain areas of the country, in particular the departments of Guatemala City, Escuintla, Izabal, Santa Rosa, Petén, Zacapa, Chiquimula and Jalapa, present homicide statistics above the national average and the average of the neighbouring countries. Departmental statistics do not differentiate between male and female murder victims. The Presidential Secretariat of Women (SEPREM) only keeps records of reported (not all committed) feminicide. The human rights organisation *Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo*

Table 11.2 Homicide rates in Guatemalan departments, 2009

Department	Population	Homicides	Homicide rate	Reported femicide	Violent deaths of women, 9 months, 2010
Alta Verapaz	1,078,942	160	14.82	2	5
Baja Verapaz	264,019	72	27.27	0	9
Chimaltenango	595,769	110	18.46	0	7
Chiquimula	362,826	223	61.46	4	4
El Progreso	155,596	87	55.91	0	–
Escuintla	685,830	516	75.24	0	17
Guatemala	3,103,685	2,644	85.19	29	175
Huehuetenango	1,114,389	189	16.96	4	4
Izabal	403,256	291	72.16	3	16
Jalapa	309,908	187	60.34	2	3
Juitiapa	428,462	220	51.35	2	0
Petén	613,693	420	68.44	4	13
Quetzaltenango	771,674	162	20.99	4	5
Quiché	921,390	76	8.25	7	1
Retalhuleu	297,385	83	27.96	1	2
Sacatepéquez	310,037	73	23.54	0	13
San Marcos	995,742	236	23.70	5	19
Santa Rosa	340,381	239	70.21	8	3
Sololá	424,068	52	12.26	1	2
Suchitepéquez	504,267	196	19.04	8	13
Totonicapán	461,838	18	3.4	4	5
Zacapa	218,510	144	65.90	2	8
TOTAL	14,361,666	6,398	44.55	95	332

Sources: population statistics, Instituto Nacional de Estadística; homicides, Policia Nacional Civil (PNC); homicide rate calculated by author; reported femicide, SEPREM 2010; violent death of women, GAM 2010.

(GAM) provides statistics of violent deaths of women based on newspaper monitoring. Even if severely underreported, the figures provided by SEPREM and GAM suggest an interesting connection: The departments with the highest homicide rates are predominantly ladino;[9] the predominantly indigenous departments (e.g. El Quiché, Suchitepéquez and Totonicapán) have considerably lower homicide rates, but women also remain targets of gendered violence in indigenous communities.

Table 11.3 Violent deaths in Guatemala, 2001–2012[a]

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Total	3,230	3,630	4,236	4,507	5,338	5,885	5,781	6,292	6,498	5,960	5,681	5,174
Men	2,927	3,313	3,849	4,010	4,820	5,282	5,191	5,605	5,778	5,265	5,050	4,614
Women	303	317	387	497	518	608	590	687	720	695	631	560
% women	9.3	8.7	9.1	11.0	9.7	10.3	10.2	10.9	11.1	11.7	11.1	10.8

Note: [a] Homicide and femicide rates reported by PNC are slightly lower than rates recorded by local and regional human rights organisations. I use PNC figures as they allow for comparison over an eleven-year period. Source: homicide rates according to the Guatemalan National Civilian Police (PNC). See http://centralamericanpolitics.blogspot.com/2012/02/femicide-in-guatemala-2001-2011.html.

The homicide and feminicide figures provided in Table 11.3 show that murder rates have risen between 2001 and 2009 and fallen slightly over the last two years of this period. The number of femicides doubled in the period 2001–7 and has remained around 11 per cent of the total murder rate ever since.

The numbers reveal the magnitude and rise in murders during the 2000s. They confirm what UN special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial Executions, Philip Alston, concluded after his visit to Guatemala in 2006: 'Guatemala is a good place to commit a murder, because you almost certainly get away with it.' They tell little, however, about the extreme cruelty, total lack of respect for life and the human body and the at times ritualistic form of performing the killings and staging the corpses.

Mutilating the female body in acts and discourse

Only three weeks into 2013 the government tallied 33 feminicides. Six women and girls were killed in one day alone. Two of the girls were strangled to death in a street in the capital Guatemala City wearing their pyjamas.[10]

Gender-based violence is manifesting itself all over Latin America, but most alarmingly in Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. Torture and bodily mutilation are often perpetrated as 'semantic operations permeated with enormous metaphorical force that dehumanises the victims and their bodies', as Uribe writes in the case of violence in Colombia (Uribe 2004). In Guatemala, where on average two women are killed each day, the killings are committed with extreme brutality, including sexual violence, torture and mutilations, before the bodies are left or dumped in public places. The injured bodies and shattered body parts provide insights into what Achille Mbembe (2003) has defined as necropolitics and Melissa Wright (2011) has shown to unfold through the gendering of space, violence and subjectivity.

Manuela Sachaz was a babysitter, newly arrived from the countryside to Guatemala City to take care of a ten-month-old baby. Returning from work her employers found Manuela in their apartment in a pool of blood. The baby son was propped up in a high chair, his breakfast before him. Both had been decapitated, Manuela further raped and mutilated, her breasts and lips had been cut off, her legs slashed. The crime remains unsolved.[11] The body of sixteen-year-old María Isabel Franco, raped, stabbed and strangled, was

completely coiled with barbed wire, when she was found in 2001. She died of an axe blow to her head. Nancy Peralta, a thirty-year-old accountancy student kidnapped in 2002, died from forty-eight stab wounds and a broken neck. Her killers had tried to cut off her head. The crimes remain unsolved.[12] Other victims killed over the previous years include Astrid Marilú Villagrán Estrada, whose body appeared in three different parts of the city (head, extremities and torso); Lesley Eugenia del Valle, killed in front of her children by several punches; Lourdez Johana Villalta Pineda, assassinated with a bullet in her head, also in front of her children; Yiar Arqueta López, choked by ski-masked men; and Yelsmi Lilibeth Lara Miranda, who was beheaded. As a warning, the head was later sent to another woman, the ears to a local store owner in Zona 11 of Guatemala City. María Ester Soto Ruíz was found strangled and decapitated within a vehicle. Cindy Marlene Hernández was violated, tortured and strangled. The crimes remain unsolved.[13]

More recent atrocities include the 2008 rape and murder of three-year-old Sofía Juarez: her body remained missing for two days. The dismembered bodies of six women found scattered throughout Guatemala City in March 2009: one of the murdered women, Ingrid Cruz, was videotaped as her body was being mutilated. Her murderers uploaded the video to YouTube, from where it was later removed because of its content. The Suruy daughters, Heidi, Diana and Wendy, aged seven, eight and twelve, were killed with extreme brutality on their way to school in a smaller village of San Lucas Sacatepéquez, their throats cut and their school uniforms messed up. Their killers turned out to be intimately related to the murdered girls. At the time of writing no final verdict has been given.[14] Another little girl, only three years old, was raped and killed by three men hoping to rise in the ranks of their gang. Her father found her dead, naked and beaten after searching for her for hours. Two of her killers were later stoned to death by the community and then set on fire. Afraid of revenge, the girl's family had to flee the community. The crime remains unsolved.

Three 2010 cases, committed on the same day (21 September), share a similar and widespread characteristic. All cases were preceded by death threats that were reported to the police. In none of the cases did the police taken any protective measures: Veronica Ofelinda Jiménez, a thirty-three-year-old street fruit-juice vendor, was killed by several shots early in the morning. Her killers left a note saying 'this is what happens to informers and dirty bitches'. Her husband suspected a fellow street vendor to be behind the

earlier death threat. At 10.30 a.m. Rosa Bernabé Bautista, a poor forty-five-year-old woman, was killed by seven bullets to the head when she left a social organisation distributing food aid to the poor. In Señora Bautista's case, a member of the infamous Mara 18 was behind the earlier death threats. Finally, sixteen-year old Sonia Karina Estrada López was shot two corners away from her school. Her family was told that fifteen days prior to the murder she had been assaulted by a gang member, who threatened to kill her because she refused to give him her cell phone.[15]

A few studies have examined the profile of the perpetrators. Although based on rather small available samples, these studies indicate that many perpetrators are known, most often intimately, to the victims. Around a quarter of the perpetrators may be partners (husbands, boyfriends and ex-partners), another 11 per cent fathers of the victims, 5 per cent other family members, and 36 per cent neighbours or male acquaintances (Svendsen 2007). In such cases, the violation and/or killing of women and girls are often explained by authorities as caused by 'affect', 'love problems' or jealousy; too much alcohol, too little personal dignity and over-exaggerated machismo. Other studies point to the involvement of 'narco-cults' or killings related to the drug wars permeating the region (Bunker *et al.* 2010). In these cases the killings are not explained as 'crimes of passion' but rather as carefully planned, staged and executed in struggles over territorial control. As in regular war, violence against women serves a highly symbolic purpose in the war on drug trafficking: it creates cohesion within armed groups, reaffirms masculinity and is a form of attacking 'the enemy's morale' (Toledo 2011).

The BBC documentary *Killer's Paradise*, based on several of the cases mentioned above, was broadcast worldwide in May 2006.[16] What shocked the world most was the matter-of-fact and trophy-like explanations given by the young male assassins interviewed. In the words of one of them, 'It is the fashion in Guatemala to kill women.' 'Many of them we killed for fun, it felt good seeing the blood flow.' 'Others with whom I had had relations, I killed because I feared they would leave me. One of the worst I cut up in pieces with a machete, it involved a lot of violence.' When asked why, he answered: 'I partly did it because I had to, because of the hatred I felt towards them, their life, their mind, their heart. I did it because it excited me, the blood; it attracted me to see the blood flow on the floor, to me that was something beautiful.'

The documentary also takes issue with the way state officials deal with the victims. In the case of the victim Claudina Velasquex Paiz,

a young law student, the police report mentioned that she had a belly ring and was wearing sandals, meant to indicate that she was a gang member or a prostitute and that killing her did not therefore deserve investigation. Former president Oscar Berger also linked the killing of women to their involvement in youth gangs and organised crime. By doing so he resisted the idea that Guatemalan feminicide represented a political problem while simultaneously insinuating that the victims were not worthy of too much attention, that they must have been criminals in the first place, and that their death therefore could be seen as a form of public cleansing by 'the removal of troublesome women restor[ing] the moral and political balance of society' (Wright 2011: 713).

Local media portrayal generally relies on blood, gore, nudity and torture. When not involving minor children, accompanying newspaper photos often bear resemblance to pornography, and headlines and reporting often indicate some sort of victim responsibility for the killings, either because they wore improper dress or makeup or simply for being in public places without proper escort, without permission. The reporting of female corpses found in the streets, in the rivers or in the garbage dumps is often relegated to short paragraphs of the inside pages of the national newspapers. They are considered insignificant. And to the justice system impunity is the order of the day. Less than 10 per cent of the murders of women are investigated. In addition to severe underreporting, around 98 per cent of the reported killings are never solved.[17]

Governing through necropolitics and narcopolitics

In a recent article, Melissa Wright (2011) compares Mexican discourses on femicide to discourses on drug violence in Ciudad Juarez and argues that the politics over meaning in both cases must be understood in relation to gendered violence and its use as a tool for securing the state. By gendering Mbembe's concept of necropolitics, she highlights how the politics of gender and the politics of death go hand in hand: Official state discourses on the violent killings of women have maintained that these women have been out of their proper place (the domestic sphere), have been contaminated by their activities in the public sphere and ultimately constituted a contamination risk for their families, communities and nation. Hereby state discourse has positioned the young murdered women in the political order, as a 'pillar of the necropolitics demonstrating that the publicness of the

victims, as evidenced by the corpses' location in public places and the mutilation of their raped bodies', disrupting the social order and political peace of northern Mexico (Wright 2011: 715).

The discourse on drug violence, on the other hand, while reflecting the same blame-the-victim strategy, has represented violence as aimed at targets within the drug industry rather than innocent civilians. Drug violence is seen as the outcome of disputes internal to the drug trade, in response to competition over markets, resources, alliances and political protection. It is perpetrated by men who are more 'business-like' than typical homicidal maniacs, with logical mindsets reminiscent of rational-choice actors (Wright 2011: 719). In sum, official state discourse has portrayed femicide and drug killings around a binary femininity–masculinity rationality, spatially organised around women's proper domestic activities and men's violent business on the streets.

From another vantage point, Posel and Gupta (2009) suggest that the place of death and the corpse – which at the same time may repulse and lure, disgust and fascinate – is a pre-eminent site for the identification of symbolic boundaries between a nation and its other or between the sovereign and the governed. They foreground what they call 'the dualistic life of the corpse': on the one hand the corpse is a material object, while on the other hand it is a signifier of wider political, economic, cultural, ideological and theological endeavours. Whereas sovereign practice establishes who is disposable and who is not, the power to dehumanise the disposable lies in the power to reduce bodies to undignified trunks of flesh (Posel and Gupta 2009). This conceptual set-up provides a powerful means of exploring corpses, bodypolitics and contestation in contemporary Guatemala.

In Guatemala violence against women is habitually explained as a contemporary effect of conquest and colonial ills; of civil war; or lately of violent competition between drug cartels and gangs for control over narcotics, territory and trafficking routes. Much in the same way as the civil war left the Mayan culture broken, mutilated and atomised – a culture in pieces, a wounded body politic (Nelson 1999: 131) – the practices of destruction inherent in the present moment are leaving their deadly mark on Guatemalan society. But what is it that makes the mutilated female body such an effective form of governing, what is the effect of the mark and what does it tell us about sovereignty and state formation in Guatemala?

The Guatemalan civil war was marked by pervasive state-sponsored violence including physical, psychological and sexual torture, disappearances and massacres of entire communities. The

Guatemalan Army used an extremely effective campaign of terror that consisted in killing not only guerrillas, but also their potential or perceived supporters within the civil population, and 'by doing so in such an arbitrary and vicious fashion that people in the region came to feel an intense and overwhelming fear, not merely of supporting the guerrillas, but of doing anything that might suggest they sympathised with the guerrillas' cause – such as denouncing the army's methods or giving voice to their own fear' (Wilkinson 2002: 351). During incursion, sexual violence was used as a tool of warfare. Soldiers would often rape any lone woman they stumbled across, murder them afterwards and dump the body (Manz 2004). Women suffered 99 per cent of reported sexual attacks (CGRS 2006).

Many of those who took part in the counter-insurgency campaigns were trained in sadistic methods of utterly destroying the enemy. During the most violent years of the armed conflict soldiers often cut open the wombs of pregnant women and hung the foetuses up in trees or smashed them against rocks. In addition, thousands of indigenous women were the victims of mutilations and sexual violence. Upon the signing of the peace accords, many former members of the security forces joined the police or were hired by private security companies. Corrupt police officers and private security forces are thus well equipped to commit attacks on women by use of former counter-insurgency tactics. In 2006 the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights stated that the lack of prosecutions of atrocities committed by high-level officials had 'encouraged the current crime wave sweeping Guatemala' (CGRS 2006). The demobilisation of former members of the security forces without any programme for their reinsertion into society along with the fact that an estimated 2 million firearms are in the hands of the civilian population, may be factors that play a role in the wave of brutal murders of women.[18] However, another important factor is the explosive cocktail in which soaring crime rates, drug trafficking and the proliferation of narco-violence and *maras* (youth gangs) combine with a *machista* male-dominated society, domestic violence and a patriarchal state.

The fact that sexual violence was used as a weapon of domination and social power over the female body during the war (CALDH 2005), and that contemporary femi[ni]cides have much in common with the methods applied against women during the armed conflict (Svendsen 2007), easily lead to the conclusion that feminicide is a legacy of the armed conflict and hence a question of continuity in terms of deeply rooted misogyny and a dominant

patriarchal ideology expressed in family values politically sanctioned by the state. However, we may also interpret today's feminicide as pertaining to a different context in which the attempts of the state to relegate feminicide to domestic violence, crimes of passion or youth gang feuds can be read as a sign of contested sovereignty. As Sagato observes in the emblematic case of Ciudad Juárez, there is 'a direct relation between capital and death, between accumulation and unregulated concentration and the sacrifice of poor, dark-skinned mestiza women, swallowed up by the cracks in which monetary economy, symbolic economy, control of resources and power of death articulate' (Segato 2005: 265–6). I suggest that in Guatemala, as in Ciudad Juarez, the mutilated female body has become central to the making and territorialisation of overlapping, partially sovereign bodies – or political communities – at the local, regional or national level.

The extreme impunity surrounding the killing and mutilation of women as well as the smokescreens put out by authorities and others involved in shaping public opinion in Guatemala indicate that drug cartels (including the Zetas and their Guatemalan counterparts involving former elite soldiers, the Kaibiles), law enforcement officials and economic and political elites are somehow involved in feminicide. Impunity and the involvement of state as well as parallel corporate powers should warn us against accepting often heard individualised explanation for the killings as grounded in sexual or emotional motives. According to Segato's investigations in Ciudad Juarez, violent killings of women are not the work of deviant individuals, the mentally ill or other social anomalies. Often the perpetrators act collectively. They share the same gender imaginary, speak the same language and thus understand one another perfectly. The violation is directed towards the annihilation of the victim's will with the purpose of denying her control over her body, and is as such an allegorical example of a sovereign practice, in this case the pointing to the sovereignty of the perpetrator.

But sovereign power is never only physical. Without the psychological and moral subordination of 'the other', the only power left is the power of death, which according to Segato can never be sovereign. A war leading to total extermination cannot constitute a victory. The victory lies in the power to colonise, to exhibit the dead corpses to those destined to stay alive. And if sovereignty and control only can be performed in front of a living community, feminicide has more in common with the idea of colonisation than that of extermination. Therefore, feminicide is not about an utilitarian

end – the extermination of women – but must be understood in its expressive (and, I would add, performative) dimension. Like any other act of violence, feminicide is a discursive gesture with a particular signature, and violence read as a text will lead us not only to the perpetrator, but to the perpetrator as author, as an author with a message (Segato 2005).

Some crimes, Segato continues, are not only communicated vertically between perpetrator and victim (e.g. through a punitive fist meant to contain, reduce and install discipline and censorship in, the victim). They are also communicated horizontally. Horizontal (and spectacular) communication is directed towards the surrounding community and is often expressing an attempt at seeking permission to enter into this community. Seen from this perspective, the violated and mutilated female body can be read as a sacrifice or as an initiation ritual: in competition with other men, the perpetrator shows that he deserves to become a member of the virile brotherhood because of his aggressiveness and power of death. As masculinity is a status conditioned on being earned, it needs regular (re)confirmation throughout life (Segato 2005). It is in the tension between Segato's two coordinates – a vertical axis constructing the victim and a horizontal axis conditioned by the status earned by paying tribute to a brotherhood or criminal organisation – that the more fundamental and societal aspects of feminicide can be found. Thus, it may be reductionist to interpret the killing and mutilation of female bodies as crimes based in hatred to women if those dominating the scene are not the victims but rather men who are bonding in a patriarchal regime of a Mafioso order.

In the Guatemalan case, struggles over sovereignty simultaneously lead to alliances and contestation between the state and criminal state and non-state actors. Alliances are formed when organised criminal networks infiltrate the state apparatus and (some) state representatives join forces with criminal networks (illegal groups and clandestine security organisations) to further their politics or to enrich themselves. Competition takes place in the instances in which (some) state authorities attempt to keep or regain control over territories and bodies. The simultaneous enactment of alliance-making and competition testify to a divided state apparatus. Meanwhile, local drug cartels lose territory to Mexican business competitors who find the Guatemalan levels of impunity and state fragility an attractive business environment for their operations. Returning to the Central American homicide and femicide rates of Tables 11.1–11.3 it may even be argued that different rates

pertain to different realities. Violence associated with the drug war and organised crime – including state corruption – appears to have specific effects for women. Mutilating the female body creates cohesion within armed groups, reaffirms distorted forms of masculinity, becomes a form of attacking 'the enemy's' morale and establishes sovereignty over territories. It even restores the traditional *machista* spatial order of a male public space (*la calle*) by relegating women to the domestic sphere (*la casa*).

Conclusion

In October 2011, President Otto Pérez Molina, a retired general, presented his plan to reduce violence against women and improve the investigation of feminicide in Guatemala. During the same meeting, his vice-presidential candidate, Roxana Baldeti, promised to provide more resources for and institutionalise the Presidential Secretariat for Women (SEPREM) and the Coordinator for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Violence against Women (CONAPREVI).[19] In November 2012, the Molina government introduced several new measures to address violence against women, including a special tribunal to process feminicide, while simultaneously, however, disbanding the national coordination body CONAPREVI, thus limiting the participation of NGOs in the process. Given that Pérez Molina was elected on strong *mano dura* (hard-handed) principles, including a remilitarisation of policing and governance, one could ask whether institutionalised policies would lead to a decrease in perpetrations of feminicide and whether state practices of impunity could end?

Sceptics would maintain that post-war Guatemala has become a dehumanised social space, similar to what Lowe (2008) with reference to the US–Mexican border has called a gendered necrospace of complex and pervasively gendered violence. In this social space both the state and the illicit drug cartels have (and use) the capacity to dictate who matters and who is dispensable. Claiming ultimate authority to govern the dead – either by perpetrating feminicide or by tacitly embracing 'the new judicial category of life devoid of value' by maintaining extremely high rates of impunity (Agamben 1998) – remains in contest. On the one hand the penetration of organised transnational drug cartels means that several regions of Guatemala have become *de facto* governed by criminal networks that both hold entire communities in thrall to their extreme violence and fuel the culture of silence by their dehumanising practices of decapitation

and the cutting off of gendered body parts such as breasts and lips. By using feminicide and other violent killings as messages to de(a)monstrate their potency (Bunker and Sullivan 2010), the cartels carefully craft the myth of being vigilantes standing up to competitors and a corrupt state. On the other hand the 'insufficient efforts to conduct thorough investigation, the absence of protection measures for witnesses, victims and victims' families, and the lack of information and data regarding cases, causes of violence and profiles of the victims' (CEDAW 2006) suggest state responsibility.

Given the extensive technical and financial support the Guatemalan justice system has received over the past sixteen years, the question is, as noted by Special Rapporteur Philip Alston, 'less what should be done than whether Guatemala has the will to do so' (Alston 2007). The fact that the state for decades failed to properly investigate and prosecute the pattern of feminicide in Guatemala cannot and should not be explained by reference to incompetence or shortages in human, financial and technical resources as is often the case in UN reports (see e.g. Musalo *et al.* 2010). A far more critical question regards the function of feminicide in society.

Guatemalan women face systematic gender-based violence so prevalent that they have broken new legal frontiers to establish gendered violence as grounds for asylum in the United States (Bateson 2010). The most salient impact of this development is that while state-crafting through what we conventionally understand as political violence has decreased, other forms of violence have entered the art of governing. That some of this violence has invaded the domestic sphere should not lead us to think that it is less political; that some of it resembles the past should not lead us to look for explanations only in the armed conflict. Rather, as underscored by Angelina Godoy (2006), the perverse blend of violence and repressive authority goes hand in hand to maintain class power and masculinist control through the enactment of *mano dura* policies.

Notes

1 This chapter was written in 2010, revised in early 2013, and does therefore not reflect recent positive changes introduced by Attorney General Claudia Paz y Paz, including the effects of the joint task force for crimes against women established in 2012.
2 Paraphrasing Daniel Hernández-Salazar's text from the 2000 exhibition 'Memoria de un angel' (The Memory of an Angel).

3 I borrow this phrase from North American photographer Jean-Marie Simon (2010).

4 For recent reports on the Central American/Guatemalan crime and violence levels, see: Dudley 2010; Finlay 2010; International Crisis Group 2011. For reports on feminicide in Guatemala, see: Carcedo 2010; CCPDH 2006; Heinrich Böll Stiftung 2009, Musalo *et al* 2010; Sanford 2007, 2008; Shepard-Durini 2008; Svendsen 2007.

5 The hitherto highest murder rate was reported for 2010, when 304 women were killed.

6 This dimension is firmly established in and around Ciudad Juarez and with tentacles in the provincial capitals of Mexico.

7 During August 2010 I interviewed the following Guatemalan NGOs and government offices on the issue of femicide: Fundación Sobrevivientes, Instituto de Estudios Comparados de Ciencias Penales (IECCPG), The Human Rights Ombudsman Institution (PDH), Fundación de Antropología Forence (FAFG), La oficina Nacional de la Mujer (ONAM), Centro para la Acción Legal en Derechos Humanos (CALDH), Secretaria Precidencial de la Mujer (SEPREM), Coordinadora Nacional para la Prevención de la Violencia (CONAPREVI), and Red NO a la violencia. I thank representatives for their time and valuable contributions, and I thank programme assistant María Sofía Villatoro, the Guatemala office for Danish Development Assistance to Central America, for helping me set up the interviews. Because of constant threats against activists I do not name my informants.

8 A lively debate containing the many different views (and the usual suspects) can be seen in the internet comments following *El Periodico*'s coverage of the law, e.g. www.elperiodico.com.gt/es/20080410/pais/52254/.

9 'Ladino' is the category used in Guatemala for 'mestizos', people of mixed descent.

10 Anastacia Moloney, 'Guatemala's feminicides show no signs of letting up', 22 January 2013, www.trust.org/item/?map=guatemalas-feminicides-show-no-signs-of-letting-up.

11 *The Sunday Times*, 28 August 2005.

12 For more information on these cases, see Sanford 2007.

13 For more information on these cases, see Svendsen 2007.

14 Various news clips, *La Prensa Libre* and *Nuestro Diario*, 2008 and 2009.

15 These three cases were covered in *Nuestro Diario*, 22 September 2010, pp. 4–5.

16 *Killer's Paradise* explores the high murder rate of women that has persisted unsolved in Guatemala since the end of the Guatemalan Civil War. The film is a co-production of the National Film Board of Canada and the BBC and was directed by acclaimed Toronto-based journalist and filmmaker Giselle Portenier. Clips and trailers can be found at www.videosurf.com/killer's-paradise-79593.

17 Interview with CICIG representative.

18 See One World Net, 'Guatemala: murders of women recall counter-insurgency techniques', http://archive.oneworld.net/article/view/113856.

19 See PrensaLibre.com, 'Pérez Molina promete una fuerza de tarea contra el femicidio', 21 October 2011, www.prensalibre.com/decision_libre_-_actualidad/Elecciones_Guatemala-pp-organizaciones_de_mujeres-otto_perez_molina-partido_patriota_0_576542472.html.

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Outro

12

Abandonment and victory in relations with dead bodies

John Borneman

Katherine Verdery was the first to make some systematic obser-
vations about the accelerated movement of dead bodies in East-
Central Europe following the collapse of the Soviet Empire. She
noted that, in this period of political transformation, the corpses of
political leaders and cultural heroes accrued certain powers leading
to a struggle over appropriating those powers, and to the exhum-
ation and displacement of their bodies (Verdery 1999). Here I wish
to consider the modes of appropriation of the power of corpses
and offer an explanation for their widespread movement in post-
socialist states. This movement, I will argue, is a manic reaction to
the death of political regimes and to the sense of abandonment that
accompanies this end. Although people may understand this reac-
tion as asserting sovereignty over the dead, it in fact demonstrates
the inverse: that the dead govern the living. How and why is it that
humans deny being governed by the dead and instead claim victory
over their losses? What is the connection between the experience of
regime end and the attempts to declare victory through the exhum-
ation and reburial of corpses?

I

The death of other humans is an omnipresent threat and experience
in all cultural landscapes, and after the death, landscapes are marked

socially by the absence of the person to whom one was attached. Anthropologists have documented the various ways in which all societies try to deal with this absence by inventing peculiar rites and institutions to turn absence into a presence of sorts and a 'good death'. The specifically human characteristics of relations to the dead entail both the individual process of mourning and collective funerary rites.

Neither individual grief in mourning nor funerary rites are specific to humans, however. Dogs grieve for their dead owners, sometimes to the point of refusing to live after their deaths, often refusing to make new attachments – a reaction roughly corresponding to our notion of melancholia. Lions are known to smell and lick the dead bodies of members of their own species before eating them. Dolphins appear listless and lose appetite after the death of a member of their pod. Elephants have been observed to cover the dead with leaves and branches, to get highly agitated upon seeing the bones of members of their species and also to revisit the bones of dead relatives. Chimpanzees show complex emotions towards a dead partner, although they seem to no longer care once the corpse begins decomposing. Given the increasingly complex understandings of other species, our notion of human distinctiveness as defined by individual grief and collective rites of separation is insufficient. One must also add that, in contrast to other species, there is tremendous variation within the human species in relating to the dead. The ethnographic record documents endless diversity in modes of proper and improper separation that are sensitive to place and time.

II

Among humans, we can speak of two radical orientations toward grief and toward funerary rites. As to grief, we have the Freudian distinction between mourning and melancholia, the former being a grieving process of letting go of the lost object, the latter as a grief that refuses to acknowledge the loss and hence holds on to the lost object. As to funerary rites, we can distinguish between eviscerating traces of the dead and preserving them for eternity. These two orientations can, as an initial heuristic, be roughly mapped onto the difference between beliefs in reincarnation or the transmigration of souls and the belief that death is a more absolute end.

Mourning	Melancholia
eviscerating the dead	preserving the dead
belief in reincarnation	belief in an absolute end

In short, there is an elective affinity between mourning, eviscerating the dead and belief in reincarnation, on the one hand, and an elective affinity between melancholia, preserving the dead and belief in an absolute end, on the other. Each of these distinctions breaks down in any attempt to use them as the basis for a typology of types of societies. Cremation and preservation, for example, are often practised simultaneously in many societies. But as radical orientations and affinities, they are nonetheless a useful point of departure.

Before moving to particular cases drawn from my own ethnographic work, let me begin with an unfashionable comparison of culture regions, and acknowledge the rough historical difference between the West and East that corresponds to the extremes of preservation versus cremation of the dead. We might isolate the crucial difference in funerary practices in the symbolism of embalming the body before putting it underground and burning it on a pyre above ground. Burning above ground, it is interesting to note, although regularly practised in Western countries as the burning of effigies, that is, burning substitutes for some disliked figure, is highly regulated if not illegal when practised in the open air.[1] There is something disturbing in the West, then, about the visualisation of the evisceration of the dead, the fear of contamination through this process, and hence there is a need for control of its public display and acknowledgment. Something like the public secret of prostitution and homosexuality, until recently: accepted as private acts so long as one need not recognise them in front of others.

In England, for example, the Cremation Act 1902 allowed burial authorities to establish crematoria, but the act was amended in 1932 to ban open-air pyres, a practice which in turn was legalised in 2010 if, the court stated, it took place within a structure of some sort. Denmark shares with England a similar legal and popular evolution of the practice; they both now have one of the highest rates of cremation within Europe (73 per cent). In 1892, the practice in Denmark was officially legalised. More recently, however, the framing has been changing. In 2009 as a justification in preparation for the UN Climate Change conference, the Danish association of crematoria

revealed that fifteen of its thirty-one crematoria proposed recycling waste heat from its ovens into district-heating systems, and that all of its crematoria already profitably recycled scrap-metal parts salvaged from the dead – specifically knee or hip replacements. (Artists, importantly, are barred from using such scrap metal.)[2]

We see here, then, in England and Denmark, some concern with the afterlife, but the concern is framed as the continued utility of dead bodies during and after cremation. This is certainly not to be equated with the strong notion of rebirth contained in the Hindu or Buddhist notion that life continues after cremation through reincarnation. Reincarnation is not merely life after death, as in the Christian or Muslim belief in a rematerialisation of some version of the person in heaven; rather each individual is reborn into another living being – if and until some select few reach nirvana, a state variously imagined as free of suffering and of the desires that produce individual cravings and aversions.

Nirvana is, again, quite unlike the Christian imagination of individual beings reconstituted in heaven or hell, in sites of pleasure and goodness or punishment and evil. Desire does not go away but is either fulfilled or one is punished for it. The belief in reincarnation itself should theoretically be more comforting after a loss. Maintaining that the dead will be reborn, even, perhaps, as younger, healthier people, or in a higher and better status than in previous lives, makes it less wrenching to display the deceased above ground and to let the corporal remains disappear publicly. This is not to neglect that Hindu or Buddhist cremation is part of a series of rites of separation, which ultimately also entail quite emotionally wrenching acts, such as sifting through the remains for bone shards and cracking the skull after the burning, and also often purifying the survivors who had been contaminated by the dead in a ritual.

Hindu and Buddhist funerary rites in fact work through the grieving process to effect the type of separation from the loved object that Freud analysed as mourning, a more radical letting go of the loss than is common in Christian rites. Because the dead person has a future and that future is dependent largely on the accumulated karma of the dead as well as on the performance of the proper rituals by the living, an extreme melancholic attachment to what is lost appears less compelling. A clear East/West mapping of culture area is confounded, of course, by the fact that some Christian sects and New Age groups in the West also believe in reincarnation, as do many Native Americans, for example, the Inuits and other indigenous peoples.

The point here is that the absence of a strong doctrine of reincarnation in the Semitic monotheistic religions, and thus in the West generally, confronts the individual and groups there with their own stark and difficult-to-accept view of the absolute end of life. Those societies that insist on the dead being dead have a more difficult time with loss, and therefore try, in a melancholic gesture that subverts their ideology of finality, to preserve the dead, most frequently putting their earthly bodies underground. We often talk of 'burying the dead', but putting them underground should be taken as a metaphor of finality rather than a literal overcoming, putting away or putting behind. The crucial point theoretically is that burial underground expresses a desire to preserve or arrest the natural temporal process of decay, but also not to be witness to it. We might investigate the elaborate symbolic forms of modes of preservation in different cultures, and whether these correspond to a melancholic attachment to loss, or in the extreme, to an occlusion of the loss by claiming the ability to govern it.

III

Why humans in the East and West grieve the dead is not, I suspect, because they are gone, but, on the contrary, because they won't go away. As intersubjective beings, humans do not think their existence alone but experience it in a continuous series of attachments to and separations from others. We carry around within us images of these others, who become internal objects, images in our heads, and remain so even after their deaths or disappearances. The dead remain as memories that appear in dreams and daydreams, and they often appear as the result of projections in uncanny experiences of déjà vu. The fact that the dead are still present confounds the sense of chronological time and social order in any cultural system, but it is especially troublesome in those societies that interpret mortality as the susceptibility to a final death, an exit from the world of the living once and for all. The possibility of life after death and the signs of this afterlife are ubiquitous in both the East and the West, and often take the form of imaginative representations of quasi-humans in liminal states – vampires, zombies, ghosts and monsters, which, although having forms specific to cultural and historical worlds, can nonetheless be interpreted generally as attempts to make sense of and contain the afterlife, this most unknowable of things.

Whatever the imaginations of death, the decay of the body confronts all human groups with an empirical and inescapable reality, a phenomenon Maurice Bloch intensively explored in Madagascar (Bloch 1971). The process of decay makes dying and dead bodies a particularly appealing site for projection, that is, for religious thought: the attribution of forces and causes to beings wholly outside ourselves. How does one reconcile death with the slow disintegration of the body, with the rot and stink that suddenly appears internal to the body? And how does one deal with the fact that the present decomposition of a dead person is a sign of our own futures? Such contradictions bring forth ambivalent emotions, especially guilt feelings for having been unable to stop the death or arrest the decay, or worse, for having wished for the death at some point, in others words, for having failed the dead or even caused the death.

Such emotions are appropriately called affects, intense feelings that are difficult to bring into language, to euphemise or symbolise, and hence to control. The impossibility of bringing our losses fully into language points to a gap in the symbolic order, something for which there are no words that nonetheless has structuring effects, such as the reappearance of the dead in our dreams and visions as if they were still alive. This eruption of the loss that cannot be symbolised is what Slavoj Žižek (1989: 162) takes as the Lacanian Real – 'the hard core resisting symbolisation [that nonetheless] produces a series of structural effects (displacements, repetitions, and so on)'. Affect might, in other words, be the symptom of the Real, the only manifestation that the Real exists. That is, the reappearance of the dead despite their absence asserts itself over the living, comes unbidden and reveals itself in displaced aggressions and repetition compulsions. Thoughts of the governability of not only the emotions but also of corpses themselves, then, can be understood as attempts to contain affect and reverse an asymmetry in power – to insist that one can indeed control the dead even after it is they who have abandoned us. This insistence is summarised in Žižek's (157) pithy statement, 'In the phallus, loss as such attains a positive existence.'

The refusal to let the dead be dead and to accept our abandonment also has an affinity with the desire to remain young forever, that is, with the denial of mortality and the ageing process generally. Here, again, we might note an old East/West difference: age is valorised in the East but youth is valorised in the West. In the West today there is an extreme reversal of the usual cross-cultural valences between youth and elderly: the youth want to stay that way forever and the elderly now want to be and act like youth. This prolonged

if not life-long experience of youth, or what we might call a youth-wish, places new demands on the ageing and the dead, positioning them as spectres to be contained or denied. The West today seems permeated by a general paranoia about being watched, surveilled or disciplined by omniscient forces and processes external to the individual, something the collapse of a territorially identifiable enemy (the USSR) and the event of 9/11 have accentuated. Ageing and death circle this youth-state like vultures do their prey. Some of the popularity of the Foucauldian paradigm of discipline can be attributed to this increasingly empowered youth or youth-wish, a prelapsarian state of being located in a paranoid position. Also symptomatic are the well-funded and highly publicised life sciences that continually evoke promises of the extension and reinvigoration of life and feed fantasies of individual omnipotence.

In this spirit of the age, the notion that the dead are internal objects is less appealing to think than the assumption that they are merely external beings that can be embraced or discarded at will. Today expressive culture, especially film and stage drama, routinely stages conversations with the dead as beings largely within ourselves, but art takes liberties with thought that are too dangerous for the popular consciousness – and, unfortunately, for much social science. Popular resistance to the notion of dead as internal objects comes in the form of avoidance of reality-testing and in an obsession with the idea of agency. Acknowledging the dead as internal objects, the alien we have implanted within us, rather than an external reality to be disposed of, would force a level of verification of our perceptions, where we try, to quote Sandor Ferenczi (1926: 318), to 'verify our inner and outer experience by analogies taken from both points of view'. The oscillation between processes of internalisation and externalisation, or introjection and projection, might enable us to modify what notions and images we hold of the dead in our heads as we translate their presence back to ourselves and to others. Without an appreciation of this possibility of modification of the images in our heads, we engage in excessive reification and fetishistic thought by imputing to external others – to the dead, to language, to disciplinary regimes – ideas and imaginations that belong to ourselves alone.

IV

Let us return now to the question of why the dead reappear, and examine some theoretical positions in light of the empirical cases

of the former Soviet Union, a place and people who straddle East and West, and its former satellite East Germany. In the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, Marx famously defined the dead as 'nightmares' that weigh on the brains of the living, consistent with his interest in liberating humans from all past investments in order to accelerate historical change and produce a more perfect world (Marx 1994). Communist leaders in the Russian Revolution interpreted Marx's dictum to mean to liberate the people from the Czarist regime by eviscerating its material remnants – in addition to the physical bodies, the architectural and religious symbolism of its rule – and, six years after seizing power, to hedge their bets, preserving the memory of the Revolution by mummifying Lenin's body and placing it in the centre of the Kremlin. After toppling the Czar in 1918, the new rulers were rumoured to have killed the Romanov family, the Czar and his wife and children, and then to have disposed of their bodies.[3]

The Bolsheviks conjoined the two metaphors that Marx evoked: the Czar as appearing in a nightmare, located inside our heads, and the Czar as an external weight, on top of the brain. As a nightmare, he is internal to the living, a dream that comes unbidden to the unconscious in the night; as a weight on the brain, he is external and can be physically removed. The mummification of Lenin in 1924 can be interpreted along these latter lines, as an attempt to place a material weight on the Revolution, to bind its future to its origin by means of the permanent presence of the dead leader: the Cult of Lenin. In any event, the Bolsheviks chose physical removal for the Czar and tried to erase any material trace of him and his family, and any information about the disposal of their bodies. Perhaps their intent in physically removing one weight (the Czar) and placing another (Lenin) on the brain was indeed to prevent the return of the Czar as a bad dream, that is, to prevent his effects in the unconscious. The point is, they did not reject understanding of the dead as nightmare: a fantasy imagined while asleep and then projected onto the world, which then returns to the psyche as a disturbance or horror. This ambivalence about the presence and use of the dead was in tension with the presentist goal to govern in the name of a single, undivided authority, the Party, that recognised no ambivalence about its past while itself becoming a monstrous death-producing apparatus. Working within the paradigm of total sovereignty over the future of the entire society and the state apparatus, the Party located itself as the phallus, the positive existence of the losses that the Party accumulated and denied. In other words, the Party became an image internal to the person, part of the nightmare.

During the Soviet period, in the space of so many unknowns about the Czar and his family, rumours abounded of sightings. What is significant here is that the masses engaged in collective fantasies of the missing bodies of leaders of the old regime at the same time as the Soviets suppressed the commemoration of the many 'ordinary' dead from the horrific events of early Soviet rule – between 23 and 26 million deaths from the Civil War of 1914–23; another 10 million in the next decade from Stalinist collectivisation, purges and famine; another 26 million deaths from the Great Patriotic War, 1939–45. Lacking a supportive landscape of memory, a public to feed back to the individual the legitimacy of his or her mourning, most people actively collaborated in this suppression to sustain the illusion of the non-existence of the dead. As Katherine Merridale writes, 'Widows or children of purge victims might well be obliged to denounce their disgraced relative, and this not once, but repeatedly in everything they did for the rest of their lives'; they at the same time preserved 'their private memories for years afterwards' in the form of whispered family secrets (Merridale 2001: 75, 66).

The preservation of private memories of the dead in the face of state suppression of private grief was true of all East European socialist regimes. In the early Soviet period the entire state apparatus aimed to replace mystical, religious, emotional burial rites with a 'secular, scientific cremation' (Merridale 2001: 71) and an aseptic 'atheist funeral'. While the state was relatively successful in the replacement of birth and marriage rituals with secular substitutes, the masses stubbornly hung on to their superstitions and elaborate death rituals well into the 1960s. Meanwhile, the state held elaborate yearly ceremonies on the anniversary of Lenin's death of martyrs of the Revolution and rites to commemorate the military heroes of the Great Patriotic War. Merridale concludes, 'commemoration of the war was a near-sacramental act, [and] militarism was not identified with loss, but with triumph' (78).[4]

In retrospect, then, getting rid of the material remains of the former regime did not much liberate the Soviet regime, which took over the more brutal aspects of the Czar's regime and perfected them. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the recovery of those bodies became a new media obsession, often with the suggestion that the unjust death which the Czar and his family had suffered might now take revenge on the living and return the lineage to power. Marx's theory of liberation from the dead should warn us that the stronger the wish for liberation from the dead the more tightly projections of the past may shackle our present.

The Marxian narrative of liberation from the dead is taken up in anthropology by Claude Lévi-Strauss in *Tristes Tropiques*. Although uninterested in the question of either liberation or historical change, his study of ideology and the displacement of truth produced some acute and relevant insights. After reflecting on the nature of religion among Amerindian tribes in Brazil, he reached the conclusion that religion is a 'smokescreen, [which] on the level of religious thought, conceals, embellishes or justifies the actual relationships which prevail among the living' (Lévi-Strauss 1974: 246). His interest in getting rid of the smoke to see the structure eventually led him to a remarkable formulation, in *The Savage Mind*, about the different modes of addressing the dead – of their governability through rites of mourning and rites of commemoration.

Mourning rites, he argues, transport the present into the past. By contrast, commemorative rites 'transport the past into the present. [They] recreate the sacred and beneficent atmosphere of mythical times – a "dream" age … and mirror their protagonists and their high deeds' (Lévi-Strauss 1966: 314). The purpose of commemoration in transporting the past into the present is clearly to secure a seamless repetition of that past (albeit in a transformed state and context); the revisit is a fantasy of unregistered loss and unbroken unity with ancestors in a mythical time. By contrast, mourning, he argues, goes in the opposite direction, seeking to return to the past rather than to bring the past into the present. Mourning rites 'guarantee that men who are no longer among the living will be converted into ancestors'.

The implication is that, whereas commemoration keeps the past alive by incorporating the dead into a myth in the tragic mode, mourning rites – conversion of the dead into ancestors – constitute an efficacious overcoming of the dead's hold on us by taking us back to a past that is acknowledged as separate from our own time. In other words, the dead are an irrevocable loss that, if converted into ancestors in this mourning rite, promise a type of closure. Mourning, therefore, by staging events that place the past in the past, differs from commemorative rites that secure a repetition of the past by bringing it into the future.

In *Political Crime and the Memory of Loss*, I draw attention to this difference between mourning as 'events of accountability' and commemoration as 'rites of repetition', which is homologous to Freud's distinction between mourning and melancholia (Borneman 2011: 3–32). Mourning, as he defined it, is a 'reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place

of one' (Freud 1917: 243), which entails letting go of the lost person, object or event. A proper separation allows for the development of a self worthy of life and new attachments. Melancholia, which grows out of the same loss, is a reaction of self-reproach that keeps the dead alive, entailing a refusal to acknowledge the loss as irrevocable and therefore foreclosing new attachments. While this distinction has proven immensely productive theoretically, there are, as many scholars have maintained, different degrees of letting go and holding on, and therefore a large range of grieving practices partaking of elements of both of these poles.

Subsequent research has questioned the very possibility and desirability of exchanging one loved object for another. Along these lines, Freud's model is interpreted as assuming the health of an ego that is fundamentally narcissistic and intent only on overcoming loss. To be sure, the presence of dead spirits across cultures makes it doubtful that the conversion of the dead into ancestors is ever complete or permanent, but such figures also suggest that mourning work involves a third subject. That is, mourning is not a solipsistic and self-referential act but requires the mediation of another relationship with an imaginative figure. Along these lines, mourning rites could be seen as Sisyphean: stalling devices that attempt to prevent the fairly inevitable return of a mythical past in the future. If mourning rites in fact intend to release us from the past, they most frequently fail to effect this release, although they still may effect a transformation of the loss. Commemorative rites take into account this failure in advance, displacing the struggle from one over whether to commemorate to one over the form commemoration should take, that is, the form in which the past returns and maintains a presence in the present.

It is worth asking what more or less efficacious conversions of the dead into ancestors might look like, and if some forms of revisiting the past are more transformative and more open to futures than others. For one, an effective conversion of the dead into ancestors does not mean that the attachments to the dead and lost objects leave no traces, a point that Freud himself addressed and clarified in later work. In *The Ego and the Id* (1923: 29), for example, Freud explicitly insisted on the permanent traces left by losses, a point Laplanche (1999) has made central to his work on Otherness. Freud conceptualised the healthy ego not merely as an autonomous object free to love but as always 'a precipitate of abandoned object-cathexes'. In short, our losses remain with us as accumulated internal objects, which, in the case of melancholia, lead to an identification with the dead. For the melancholic, the lost person is then 'transformed into

an ego-loss' (Freud 1917: 249), which leads either to a reaction of reproach directed at oneself (depression), or alternatively to mania, assertions of victory over the loss without, however, adequately understanding what it is one has lost.

The question of our relation to the dead, therefore, always turns around the kinds of attachment to lost objects once grieving begins. In mourning that effects a transformation of the loss, the spirit of the dead – the affect of our past attachment – is incorporated into our ego in a way that does not attack it but instead enables a changed understanding of our own temporal existence; the dead in this vision occupy a lost world in which we no longer live and which we have abandoned. The presence of the dead would be remembered as ancestral, prior in time, and not invoked as a living fetish – creating illusions of a determinative presence inherent in the lost objects of our attachment. We would not, then, attribute causality to the dead as spectres outside ourselves, but nonetheless admit their power over us, which arises solely from our necessary internal reckoning with the experience of loss, and the feelings of powerlessness and abandonment that accompany it.

V

Melanie Klein (1948) argues that at moments of significant loss or separation we tend to return to a state of anxiety as a result of fear of the loss of our nurturing, loving, caring, comforting (what she simplifies as 'good') internal objects and the threat of being over-whelmed by our threatening, frustrating, punitive, persecutory (what she simplifies as 'bad') ones. Our fear of persecution by the punitive objects in our head, while at the same time our longing or pining for the nurturing ones, activates in us what she calls the 'depressive position'. This position is a significant achievement in the development of a child, and is possible only when the child comes to affirm the ambivalence of its experience. Acknowledging ambivalence, the child might begin to comprehend objects (persons, things, ideas) in the world no longer as divided into discrete good and bad qualities but as containing within themselves both good and bad.

The balance achieved early on between the two kinds of objects is unstable, and this instability, often marked by a denial of ambivalence, continues to haunt the adult subject. Freud initially explained that as we grow up we internalise images of those to whom we

develop attachments. Klein elaborates how these internalised images constitute a rich inner world of relations, how they are constantly in interaction with the outside world and with one another. One way in which we verify our perceptions is to confront these inner objects with the outside world in order to arrive at a sense of reality, sometimes called 'reality-testing', which provides the basis on which we communicate with others. If the testing goes well enough, we mature and our anxieties do not develop into pathologies, that is, into harmful obsessions and compulsive repetitions. Anxiety about the corpse manifested in the movement of dead bodies is one such repetition.

In moments of the transformation of authoritarian regimes, new orientations must be found in the face of a loss of leaders and delegitimated normative conventions (Borneman 2004a). Klein would argue that the extreme anxieties of this transformation make it likely that we regress to a 'depressive position' in which we fear that our nurturing and comforting inner objects will be overwhelmed by our persecutory ones.

One reaction to this position is indeed depression (a strong version of Freud's melancholia, but where the persecutory objects overwhelm the comforting ones), the other is a manic defence. Such a defence relies on idealisation of the lost object as well as denial of this loss. Transformations from authoritarian regimes entail losses of those sets of authority figures and symbols to which one has been ambivalently attached. Mourning, as opposed to this manic defence, is possible only if one has sufficiently strong nurturing and loving internal objects capable of allaying the fears of loss and abandonment, or of alleviating the guilt for having participated in or even created the loss.

Authoritarian regimes tend to demand forms of complicity in the crimes of their rule. They rely on fear and persecution to secure acquiescence and, through the arbitrariness of their persecutions, cultivate paranoia in the public sphere. At the individual level, evidence for the dominance of threatening objects is the increased prevalence of what clinical psychiatrists call splitting and borderline personalities, characterised by alternating extremes between idealisation and devaluation, and frantic attempts to avoid abandonment. My contention is that the frenzied exhumation and reburials following the collapse of the Soviet and East-Central European regimes represent a collective manic defence: an idealisation of former leaders as well as a refusal to accept that they were in fact gone.

VI

Is the movement of the dead bodies of the Romanov family the unfolding of a manic defence against loss, the first loss being of the Czarist regime, the second of the Soviet? It was a Bolshevik execution squad of ten men that executed Czar Nicholas II, his wife, Alexandra, the couple's five children and four attendants on 17 July 1918, an event that ended Russian imperial rule and presaged an extended period of Soviet state brutality against its own citizens. Subsequent discourse about the event has assumed that the communists murdered the Romanovs, though there has always been some disagreement about the details of their deaths. What remained most unresolved, however, was the status and placement of the missing bodies. What happened to the imperial remains?

The scientific story of these remains begins in 1979, sixty-one years after the event, when a small group of scientists found, secretly, in the Ural mountains, the disintegrating skeletons of nine people, including three children. This finding was kept secret until 1990, however, and only made public as the USSR neared its own disintegration. DNA evidence subsequently seemed to match these remains with Romanov DNA, but many people refused to believe the evidence, most prominently some Romanov descendants, who wanted to reinstate the monarchy, and the Russian Orthodox Church, which had idealised the Czar and later, in the year 2000, even canonised the entire family. Both the Church and the imperial family supported an alternative version of the story, that the Romanov remains had been disposed of elsewhere in the same forest but destroyed beyond recognition – a very discomforting fantasy that combines a wish for annihilation, a persecutory position, with an idealisation of the dead.

From the time of the killings, stories swirled: about moving the boxed evidence of remains to Venice, Italy, hiding the remains inside a wall at the New Martyrs Russian Orthodox Church in Brussels, missing evidence, newly uncovered topaz jewels, scraps of clothing and bone fragments, official denials and previously undisclosed findings, judicial and lay investigations, uncannily specific details such as the movements of trucks and soldiers around mysterious dead bodies near the Ganina Yama mine during the night of their deaths, vehicles getting stuck in mud and dousing bodies with sulphuric acid and gasoline before burning them.

The details of these stories turn around a specific tension: the desire to find a 'final grave', or, alternatively, to suspend the end so as to preserve the lost figure as ideal, which amounts to an idealised

acknowledgment of the loss. Much the same kind of tension can be found in most other cases of such missing bodies when the political body is in a moment of radical transformation: for example, in the insistence in the USA after being driven from Vietnam in 1975 that American bodies, living and dead, were missing and had been left behind, and in the bizarre movement of Eva Perón's remains between Madrid, Milan and Buenos Aires. It is also the story of transformation from socialism told about Hungary by Susan Gal (1991) in 'Bartok's Funeral' and about East-Central Europe by Katherine Verdery (1999) in *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies*. I myself told an ironic version of this story in *Death of the Father*: the movement of the remains of King Frederick II from Baden-Württemberg to rest surrounded by the graves of his thirteen dogs in Sanssouci in Potsdam, near Berlin (Borneman 2004b: 67–8). Verdery claims to explore how dead bodies 'animate' or 'enchant' politics. More precisely, though, her concern is not with how or why dead bodies, specifically, are animated; rather she examines how politics views the materiality of dead bodies as a site for possible enchantment. She asks how the material dead body can be animated and appropriated for more narrowly conceived political ends (e.g. mobilisation, party or national identification, ideological positioning).

The search for meaning through death is the conundrum Walter Benjamin explored when he wrote, 'Death is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell.' The end writes the beginning and the middle of the story to create an interpretative ordering of events of what had happened. Only the end can finally determine meaning and close the story as a signifying totality (cited in Brooks 1984: 23). There is a fear of and struggle over this closure, and hence a motivation to defer the end in an active process of continuous discursive reworking of the stories.

At another level, however, this deferral of meaning in time through the movement of corpses supports my contention that we understand it as a manic defence against loss. In the example of the Russian Czar, the investment in his body – both making it disappear and wishing for its return – is a reaction to the loss of the symbols of an old regime. It expressed the ambivalence about this loss, the love and hate for the old regime. The extreme attempts to hide the family's remains are defences against the feelings of self-reproach and guilt that accompany significant loss, specifically for also having wished this death. This mania is marked, to cite Klein (1948: 351), by 'the desire to control the object, the sadistic gratification of overcoming and humiliating it, of getting the better of it, the triumph over it'. The

attempt to triumph over the lost object, the Czar, his family and his regime, is a reaction to fears of revenge for having been complicit in the murder of the ruling family; the lost object turns into a persecutor and, as was evident in the development of the Soviet regime, the new rulers became possessed by a general paranoia about internal and external enemies.

VII

In this final section, I remain with the Soviet and East-Central European socialist world and focus on the status of the body of Vladimir Ilich Lenin and his icon, and on the Lenin cult outside the Soviet regime. What was the meaning of his icon in one of the former Soviet satellite states, the former GDR (German Democratic Republic)? My own ethnographic research there began in 1982. In 1990 the GDR dissolved and was integrated into West Germany (the FRG or Federal Republic of Germany).

First, as I mentioned, Lenin was mummified after his death in 1924 and put on display in a special crypt in the Kremlin. Throughout the Soviet Empire, icons of Lenin proliferated after his death, consciously supported by the regime, and, after 1945, Soviet bloc allies in Eastern Europe put up public statutes of and named streets after him in all major cities. The mummification was, then, not only about deferring his end but also about commemoration: proliferating images to ensure his continual presence.

Nina Tumarkin, in her excellent book on the subject, argues that the Soviet cult of Lenin was integral to the legitimation of the post-revolutionary regime: 'The cult served the needs of the Soviet state and indeed, as a standardised complex of activities and symbols, was a government and party enterprise concocted for the delectation of the untutored masses.' Yet, she also attributes the cult's success to the 'pull of the irrational in the formation of Soviet political culture … molded by precisely those elements of old Russian culture that Lenin so desperately sought to destroy' (1997: 3). That is, she attributes to ritual the power of being able to tap into the deep cultural roots of Russian mysticism. Lenin, in part through his mummification, was turned into a 'harmless icon' (1997: 87, 90, 105, 127), modelled after the Byzantine practice of the production of icons of saints for identification and distribution, and the creation of 'icon corners' for saints in private homes. The icons, Tumarkin stresses, were not wor-

shipped but served merely as vehicles through which saints (or Jesus or Mary) could keep in contact with this world.

Many Lenin statues were installed in prominent public places in the GDR, though authorities there were never able to create the same depth of identification with Lenin as were Soviet leaders. I want to focus on the most prominent of these, the 18-metre-high Lenin icon that stood at Lenin Platz on Leninallee in East Berlin. Throughout the 1980s I often walked past this statue, and never once did someone comment to me about it. Although overwhelming the square where it stood, the statue was, at least by the time I began fieldwork, pretty much unnoticed. I suspect that for most people it was simply a background visual across from a well-visited park.

After the opening of the Wall in November 1989, those who took charge of dissolving the GDR and the unification process opposed the prominence of this monument to Lenin – proud, towering, revolutionary – on an everyday street in the new centre. There was at the time a general desire by the West Berliners and West Germans, and a large group of East German supporters, to eliminate signs of the Soviet occupation and to return the territorial-political boundaries of the East to their pre-1945 lines. Streets and places were renamed. Even the names of those that celebrated Klara Zetkin, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, German heroes who predated the occupation, sparked contentious debate. The intent was to reverse history in the East generally, to unwind it (called '*die Abwicklung*') and return to the time before the East had become part of the Soviet Empire (Borneman 1991).

The East German playwright Heiner Müller, whose reputation as independent of the regime was never questioned, even after the Wall came down, seemed to capture the spirit of the times in his many interviews. He often uttered aphorisms, and one I particularly liked went: 'Lenin hat gesagt, "Vertrauen ist gut, Kontrolle ist besser." [Lenin said: Trust is good, control is better.] Stalin hat gesagt, "Kontrolle ist gut, Verdrängung ist besser." [Stalin said: Control is good, repression is better.]' And that indeed fitted the *Zeitgeist* in the early 1990s; in order to repress the past, one had to get rid of the symbols that signified it, among which the Lenin icon was one of the most prominent. Hence this Lenin was decapitated and removed. The *Demontage* (disassembly) of the icon is one of the most dramatic images of the end of the socialist era, as the head was separated from the body, and the body slowly suspended from a crane during its removal, hovering over socialist-realist housing blocks.

Four years later, in 1995, an East German who had won a compe-
tition to make a film about *Ostalgie* (nostalgia for the East) contacted
me about narrating parts of the film. East Germans had at the time
little authority to narrate their own history, so it made sense to ask
an American who had done research there and was not really tainted
by the regime to talk about the former East. The director's vignettes
included an automobile race with souped-up Trabbis – the small
state-produced cars with lawnmower-like engines – and a party at
which appeared socialist authorities – such as Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin,
Ulbricht, Gorbachev. The vignette I was involved in was called 'Lenin
came from Warsaw'. It drew on the irony that the man who played
Lenin at these parties was a Pole from Warsaw. I was to explain what
had happened to the Lenin statue. After asking around, the director
determined that it must have been dumped in some remote site in
the forest in Köpenick outside Berlin. Armed with only a three-year-
old photo of a reassembled Lenin lying flat on his back in a forest
behind an unmarked gate, the director, her film crew and I drove to
the Köpenicker forest.

The forest contained several large camping places. We drove into
a few. Everybody we met was suspicious of us, and nobody was will-
ing to give us directions. We wandered around for some time before
finding an unmarked gate next to a sign that said, '*Eintreten verbo-
ten*' (To enter is forbidden). We took that road anyway, eventually
running into a second unmarked gate, with a large boulder blocking
it. Behind the gate was a huge mound of dirt that resembled unexca-
vated Aztec and Mayan temples I'd seen in Mexico and Guatemala.
Under that mound was Lenin, now fully grown over with wild grass,
only two small spots of his granite nose sticking out, reputedly the
result of efforts by another American to uncover the bust.

For the film, I interpreted this burial as a fear of the power of the
icon to mobilise *Ostalgie*, a fear of a melancholic holding on to the
past of which Lenin was a symbol. In Russia at the time there was a
debate about whether to remove the Lenin mummy from Red Square
in Moscow. The new Russian leaders feared that the absence of the
real Lenin (statue) might lead to a legitimation crisis. For the coun-
try's leaders, in Berlin the icon was too powerful to leave around,
in Moscow the mummy was too powerful to bury. More specific-
ally, the fear of Lenin's icon in East Berlin had to do with ongoing
efforts to correct the past in the East, to make people repent and roll
back time. The demand to repent for the past foreclosed a process of
mourning. In a similar way, Germans after the Second World War
faced a demand to repent. Along with submitting to occupation by

four foreign powers, this demand made it difficult to assume responsibility for the crimes of the regime and admit complicity in them while at the same time mourning their own losses. A potential Lenin resurrection in Berlin might have mobilised some people to resist the efforts of the new authorities to wind down and reverse history.

At the time, I did not interpret the popular wave of *Ostalgie* to be nostalgia for a return to the past. Instead, I thought the *Ostalgie* celebrations were mourning rites, attempts to say goodbye to the past, to give it the proper and joyous burial that had been denied these objects of loss in the rush to German unification.

In retrospect, what has happened between the conflict between the three modes of dealing with the past: repression, mourning and melancholia? On the one hand, there is a strong if small group of East Germans who resent and resist this erasing of history, who empowered themselves through the courts (for example, suing officials who fired them because they worked for the Stasi), and reclaimed property they claimed was improperly returned to former owners. They have also pressured museums to change their representations of the GDR period. The attempt to repress the past and roll it back has strengthened their resolve to hold on to it. In this sense, they are in denial of their loss and, if not depressed, themselves engaged in a manic response.

On the other hand, however, a far larger group of East Germans have taken full advantage of the new opportunities that capitalism and West German democracy offer, remodelling their cities and apartments with federal subsidies, travelling abroad to places formerly not allowed, not wanting to be much bothered with the albatross of a socialist past. That reaction means neither denial, repression nor forgetting, however. Even this group has been unable to avoid that past, as it continues to see the dead in films and museum exhibits, and all the political parties seem periodically beset by well-publicised scandals that demand a fuller reckoning with the past leaders.

An increased level of trust in social relations and in the political-economic order generally is a key condition of democratic authority. This trust seems to me characteristic for most residents of Germany today, which suggests that they can relate to the dead without awakening great anxiety. They need not declare governance or victory over them; their bodies are for the moment decomposing without any attempt to reverse the process. This also implies that the attempt to repress the past – to resort to Stalin's dictum, control is good but repression is better – was unnecessary for most Germans. However, some of the smaller groups in the former East Germany who had

initially engaged in *Ostalgie* seemed in fact to have repressed their loss. For them, *Ostalgie* parties, which might have served to acknowledge the loss, had the perverse effect of strengthening the hold on the past. Holding on to the past was also often accompanied by self-reproach, a further attack on and weakening of an ego made vulnerable by the dissolution of East Germany as a political-social order. In the future, such self-reproach makes its members susceptible, in the event they experience another radical transformation of authority, to an assumption of the 'depressive position' and open to another manic reaction to loss. In that case, the dead may again assert control over the living, as internal objects that can eliminate the ambivalence that accompanies loss.

Notes

1　Burning in effigy is also practised in Eastern countries, and the popular associations are similar to those in the West. In India, what is often added to the figure that is burned is a garland of shoes placed around the neck: an ultimate impurity associated with leather (the hide of dead animals, touched and prepared only by untouchables) and with the feet (the mythical site of the origins of untouchables). I thank Kartikeya Saboo for this tip.

2　See Davies and Mates 2006: 162–5; 'Body heat: using corpses for greenery may be a step too far', *The Economist*, 6 August 2009 (www.economist.com.node/14191268, accessed 21 November 2010).

3　Much of this account of the Czar's end is taken from Massie (1996) and Radzinsky (1993).

4　How this loss is addressed in the post-Soviet period is not the subject of this chapter, but an important advance is made by Serguei Oushakine (2009).

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Index

Note: page numbers in *italic* type refer to Figures; those in **bold** type refer to Tables. Page numbers followed by 'n' and another number refer to Notes.