

A TRANSITION FROM SOCIALISM TO FEUDALISM? THOUGHTS ON THE POSTSOCIALIST STATE

We're going backward! We're not just going back to 1917,
we're going back to feudalism!
(*Russian farmer*)

AMONG the contributions of postmodernism to contemporary thought is a heightened awareness of how objects of knowledge come to be constituted, and of the generative force of images and metaphors in that process. What we can understand of something depends on how we think our way into it in the first place; the questions we pose of it flow in part from the image we have of it and the associations that suggests. If we imagine society as like a clock, a mechanism, we ask different questions from those we ask if it is like an organism, and what we know in consequence differs also. An arresting example is Emily Martin's demonstration that if we imagine conception—in the way medical textbooks do—as a damsel in distress (the egg) being rescued by a knight in shining armor (the sperm), then we miss the crucial detail that the egg, not the sperm, is the active partner in their union.¹

A number of the stories of postsocialism have the knights of Western know-how rushing to rescue the distressed of Eastern Europe.² These stories present socialism—quite contrary to its own evolutionist pretensions—as not the endpoint of human social development but a dead end on the far more progressive road to capitalism, to which they must now be recalled.

An early version of this chapter was delivered in February 1992 as the last in my Lewis Henry Morgan Lectures, University of Rochester. The discussion is based on secondary literature as well as on ethnographic data from field trips in the summers of 1990 and 1991 and the academic year 1993–94. Many persons assisted me in writing it, particularly József Böröcz, Michael Burawoy, Gerald Creed, Elizabeth Dunn, Ashraf Ghani, Jane Guyer, Christopher Hann, Caroline Humphrey, Melvin Kohn, Jane Schneider, and Michel-Rolph Trouillot. My thanks to them all. In addition, I am indebted to personnel of the Humedoara County Court in Deva for facilitating my research there. The fieldwork reported in this chapter was funded by IREX.

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The rescue scenario has two common variants: "shock therapy," and "big bang." The first compares the former socialist bloc with a person suffering from mental illness—that is, socialism drove them crazy, and our job is to restore their sanity. The second implies that (*pace* Fukuyama) history is only now beginning, that prior to 1989 the area was without form and void.³ While the image of "shock therapy" represents Western advisers as doctors, the "big bang" figures them as God.

With images like these guiding our approach to the transition, it would be surprising if we learned very much about what is happening in the former socialist world. I prefer an image that denies the notion of a progress (from sickness toward health, from nothingness to being, from backwardness into development) and purposely mocks the very idea of evolutionary stages. What if we were to think, then, of a transition from socialism not to capitalism but to feudalism? What, if any, evidence can be marshaled for such a view, and to what does it draw our attention, what associations does it mobilize, that other images of postsocialist processes might not? I explore these questions in three sections—privatization, mafia, and emerging state forms—prefaced by a brief discussion of what feudalism might mean.

Feudalism

Among the earliest hints that "feudalism" as an image might not be too farfetched was a remarkable paper published in 1991 by Cambridge University anthropologist Caroline Humphrey, "Icebergs, Barter, and the Mafia in Provincial Russia."⁴ In it, Humphrey described what was happening as of 1990, as republics of the USSR and regions within them declared autonomy from the center; the result was great uncertainty about where government and law actually resided. In consequence, "organizations and enterprises in the regions, run in a personal way almost as 'suzerainties' by local bosses, have strengthened themselves and increased their social functions in order to protect their members. . . . It is not possible to rely on the law, or even to know what it is these days; and at the same time government, which used to regulate flows of goods and allocation of labour . . . has ceased to be universally or even generally obeyed."⁵ Although some might view this as an inevitable part of market reforms, Humphrey saw it as leading to precisely the opposite of a free market, for business in the "suzerainties" was being conducted by quite nonmarket methods: coupons, food cards and "orders," barter, and various forms of influence peddling generally referred to as "mafia."⁶

Western media often mistook these methods for rationing. But the coupons and food cards were not imposed by the Soviet government with an eye to equalizing people's access to scarce basic necessities; rather, it was

regional, local, and even workplace organizations that were giving them out, so as to limit access to particular goods by restricting those goods to persons having coupons. As of 1 December 1990, only people with residence permits could get coupons for certain products; outsiders could not buy those things at all. In the words of a Soviet economist, coupons "divide the market into 'apanage princedoms' and protect resources . . . from 'aliens.'" Organizational and workplaces would procure shipments of goods straight from the factory and distribute them directly—and only—to those of their members who had signed up in advance. This arrangement was effectively binding people to their region of residence or their workplace for the procurement possibilities to be thereby gained.

A corollary of consolidating these suzerainties, however, as Humphrey showed in another paper, was the expulsion of various categories of people—the unemployed, economic migrants, people lacking stable connections with a local boss, vagrants and homeless people, and so forth.⁸ Such people would roam the countryside in hopes of finding work or something to eat. It was partly against them that the local suzerainties were tightening their borders.⁹ This phase of the transition in Russia was leading not to the spread of market forces, then, but (as a Soviet legal specialist put it) to "towns, [administrative divisions], republics fencing themselves off with palisades of rationing in defence against 'migratory demand,'" dividing up the market through increasingly aggressive particularism.¹⁰

These emerging patterns of encystment and transience were a logical outcome of certain features of work organization in socialist firms—which, as Simon Clarke suggests, had a certain affinity with feudalism. "The soviet enterprise is almost as different from the capitalist enterprise as was a feudal estate from a capitalist farm. Like the feudal estate, the socialist enterprise is not simply an economic institution but is the primary unit of soviet society, and the ultimate base of social and political power."¹¹ This unit provided all manner of services and facilities for its labor force (housing, kindergartens, sporting and cultural facilities, clinics, pensions, etc.). The collapse of the party-state reinforced the tendencies to personalism and patronage inherent in such arrangements, making many people dependent on their locality, their workplace, or their boss for access to food, housing, and loans. Belonging to a suzerainty, by either having a regular job or enjoying some other tie to a powerful and successful patron, meant dependence, but as in feudal times it also meant at least minimal security.

The period Humphrey discusses saw not only these forms of localized resource protection but signs of a reversion toward a "natural economy." Marked shortages of money, for example, led to demonetization. In some enterprises and collective farms, bosses were even printing their own money—one thinks of the "money of account" on the feudal manor, which was good there and nowhere else. This might happen at the level of entire

republics, as well, such as Ukraine, where even before full independence a new currency was launched to keep Russian buyers out. Demonetization had other sources also, chief among them the tremendous inflation accompanying price reform. In Romania, for example, during 1991–92 price and wage inflation was so rapid that the mints could not produce enough new money to keep up. And as in Russia, in Bulgaria too a scarcity of money was pressing people backward toward a natural economy, with many cash-poor peasants living almost exclusively off their private plots.¹² Another aspect of demonetization was widespread barter.¹³ Barter is nothing new: under socialism, firms and individuals exchanged goods widely on a nonmonetary basis, even to some degree in international trade. But for a variety of reasons, barter reached epic proportions after the collapse of the Soviet state. Its spread was related to the demise of the bloc's ruble-based trade, the disintegration of each country's centrally controlled distribution system, the virtual absence of commercial banks, and the unenforceability of contracts.¹⁴ People would therefore make their own direct arrangements to procure what they needed, in kind. For example, Russian urbanites would help to harvest potatoes on a collective farm, receiving several sacks of them in exchange.¹⁵

Suzerainties resembling fiefdoms, personalistic ties binding people to the domains of local "lords," demonetized "natural" economies with endemic barter—and added to these, pervasive violence and a localized protection against it, furthering the parallel with feudalism. As with the other features, this last one was at its height in the collapsing Soviet Union, where confusion over who defined and enforced laws led to rampant lawlessness and scorn for central directives. With the progressive weakening and final disintegration of the Soviet Communist Party, each local lord could determine for himself what would go on in his suzerainty; he could even choose either wholehearted acceptance or flat rejection of perestroika's market reforms, for there was no longer an effective central discipline to enforce the reforms.¹⁶ An exasperated Gorbachev finally issued a decree—to little avail—that central decrees must be obeyed. Thus even as collective farms dissolved in one region they might flourish in another, despite reformist orders emanating from Moscow.¹⁷ Local autonomy extended even to managing violence, as bosses maintained order independently of the center's monopoly on coercion. "Protection" against vigilante actions, Humphrey says, was an important job of the local bosses (who, if my experience in Romania is any guide, often perpetrated those actions themselves).¹⁸ A burgeoning literature on Russia's "mafia" confirms the center's loss of control over the means of violence,¹⁹ with a corresponding rise in localized defense.

In a program on public television in late February 1992 about the changes in Russia, a farmer confirmed from the "native's point of view" what I am proposing here when he told the reporter, "We're going backward! We're not just going back to 1917, we're going back to feudalism!"²⁰ How might

this unexpected image illuminate our understanding of the transition from socialism?

It is the nature of metaphors to contain many possible meanings, subject to numerous interpretations. Because feudalism—as both metaphor and social system—signifies many things, I should specify the meaning I wish to emphasize. Leaving aside such features of the feudal order as the lord-vassal relation, coerced labor, and an estate-based organization of power, I center my discussion around Perry Anderson's observation (following Marc Bloch) that "constitutive of the whole feudal mode of production" was the "parcellization of sovereignty." "The functions of the State were disintegrated in a vertical allocation downwards," he says, with sovereignties divided "into particularist zones with overlapping boundaries, . . . and no universal centre of competence."²¹ Similarly Georges Duby: "The hierarchy of powers [was] replaced by a crisscrossing pattern of competing networks of clients."²² "Hence," observes Gianfranco Poggi, "there developed acute problems of coordination, crises of order, and recurrent and apparently anarchic violence."²³ The initial cause of the process was the "barbarian" invasions and its consequence the collapse of an articulating center, epitomized in the sack of Rome.

With the collapse of socialism's party-state we see a disarticulation comparable to the end of the ancient slave-based polity, and, I suggest, a comparable "parcellization of sovereignty," to which Humphrey has called our attention. Perhaps the words of a World Bank economist who visited the Soviet Union in September 1991 make the point: "I expected to find the national government somewhat weakened, but I didn't expect to find no central government at all. I expected to find some sort of republican government, but there wasn't any. There's no government over there whatsoever!"²⁴ The effects of central collapse have been starkest where a preexisting federal authority crumbled and republics declared sovereignty, as in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia (and, differently, Czechoslovakia). In such cases, the center's deconstruction was both sudden and complete, and its effects have included persistent violence and instability. Similar effects—if less visible, and maybe more transient—have accompanied the decomposition of the party-state in other countries of the region also.²⁵ Some areas of the former Soviet empire—Hungary and perhaps the Czech Republic—may partially escape the "feudal" reversion, just as in the ancient world the fall of Rome did not produce feudalism everywhere (not, for example, in its Middle Eastern part). But I think it is illuminating to pursue the feudal metaphor a while, for it has the merit of startling the automatic presumption that what is happening in the former socialist bloc is a transition to markets and capitalism.

To round out my discussion and my metaphor I note one more point from Anderson's analysis of feudalism. No less important than the "parcellization

of sovereignty," he argues, were processes that prevented sovereignty from fragmenting altogether and bringing anarchy, for that would have disrupted the organization of privilege sustaining feudal nobles as a class. "There was thus an inbuilt contradiction within feudalism, between its own rigorous tendency to a decomposition of sovereignty and the absolute exigencies of a final centre of authority in which a practical recomposition could occur"²⁶—that is, contradictory tendencies breaking down the center and shoring it up.²⁷ In pursuing parallels with feudalism, I will be asking what ensues when the overarching party-state collapses and its power is "parcellized," and what processes we can identify that reconstitute a political center—a state of a potentially new kind, compared with the past. Although I recognize that "sovereignty" is more than simply the state, I will focus my discussion by speaking of the latter, and I will call the processes breaking down and shoring up a center "destatizing" and "restatizing" tendencies.²⁸

Investigating the "feudal" aspects of the transition from socialism contributes to what we might call an ethnography of the state. Anthropologists have not examined the state much—they have chiefly invoked it, as a frame for other topics. Theorists from other disciplines (sociology, history, and political science), on the other hand, rarely investigate the state ethnographically, by which I mean at close range from within its daily routines and practices. But with worldwide changes in the nature of state administrations, it is high time for ethnographies of the state, and the former socialist world is an excellent site for them. Such ethnography should treat states not as things but as sets of social processes and relations. Examples of ethnographic approaches to the state can be found in the work of people such as Ann Anagnost on the "socialist imaginary" and the Chinese state, John Borneman on nationness in the two Germanys, Ashraf Ghani on state making in Afghanistan, and Gail Kligman on women and the state in Romania.²⁹ This exploratory chapter augments that literature while suggesting some new approaches to the end of Party rule.

Although one might investigate the parcelization and reconstitution of sovereignty in any number of areas, a central arena for them is privatization. This term generally refers to the legal redefinition of property rights as pertaining to jural individuals, conferring exclusive ownership upon them so as to rationalize the economy (on the assumption that owners will take an active managerial role in "their" firms as socialist managers did not).³⁰ Because such a redefinition decomposes the corporate property managed by the Party apparatus and lower-level collective entities, it very evidently parcelizes sovereignty, for collective property ownership was the foundation of socialism's bureaucratic apparatus and sustained its power.³¹ Beyond this specific link between property forms and the socialist state, states have been understood more broadly as designating and enforcing property-rights structures and setting rules for them so as to maximize rents to the ruler.³²

It therefore makes sense to look at changes in property rights in examining transformations of the state. I speak here of privatization in terms of not only the redistribution of property rights but also what I call the privatization of power, meaning the arrogation of formerly central instruments of rule—especially coercion—by lower-level actors; this parcelizes sovereignty even further.

Privatization

A good working definition of privatization comes from Janusz Lewandowski, Poland's former Minister of Property Transformation, who commented: "Privatization is when someone who doesn't know who the real owner is and doesn't know what it's really worth sells something to someone who doesn't have any money."³³ We might guess from this that "privatization," like "democracy," "civil society," "markets," and other features of postsocialist politics, is partly a symbol. As a symbol, and again like those other symbols, one of its functions has been to generate external and internal support by signifying the end of socialism. After 1989, any government or party that talked convincingly of privatization increased its likely access to aid, credits, and investment, especially from international organizations like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. At least initially (that is, before the 1993–94 elections that returned socialists to power in several countries), "privatization" was also vital to legitimating new governments, for it symbolized revolution and helped to delegitimize the former regime. As Appel has shown for the Czech Republic, privatization's legitimating role was so crucial that it forced compromises potentially injurious to the new government's fiscal capacity, concerns about justice outweighing concerns for revenue.³⁴

Aside from its symbolism, privatization is a multifarious set of processes filling that symbol with meanings. They range from altered laws to changes in pricing policy to a complete resocialization of economic actors. Within five years of the 1989 revolutions, a huge interdisciplinary literature had arisen to monitor these changes.³⁵ I will not engage this literature from a juridical or economic point of view but will instead discuss privatization as an arena of state formation, in which one can look for contradictory destatizing and restatizing processes.

State property has entered into private hands in very different ways in each East European country; in each, it has encountered tremendous obstacles and been the subject of extended, often bitter, political debate.³⁶ The debate gained momentum fast, after 1989, for covert privatization had already been occurring for several years. Polish sociologist Jadwiga Staniszkis

places its beginnings in about 1987 for Poland; David Stark as early as 1984 for Hungary.³⁷ Romanian friends, too, suggested to me that the "transition" was merely furthering processes already apparent two to three years before. Indeed, a major impetus behind perestroika was growing pressure from socialist bureaucrats (*nomenclatura*) to become owners rather than mere managers of state property. Among the main forms these preprivatizations took were incursions by managers of firms into the ownership prerogatives of the state, and expansions of the so-called second economy—those informal activities operating in integral relationship to the formal state-run production system but in its interstices. Both were especially advanced in Hungary, where legalization of the second economy through "subcontracting" became so prevalent in the late 1980s³⁸ as to produce the joke, "What is the quickest way to build socialism? Contract it out." I will offer examples from both privatizations of state firms and expanded second economy, showing for each how "privatization" itself has been produced—and a new state along with it—through a struggle between forces promoting divestiture of state property and other forces promoting the accrual of paternalist and oversight functions in the state.³⁹

For several reasons, such as difficulties in establishing a suitable purchase price for firms and abuses that gave the former elite an edge in acquiring property, privatization rapidly proved a nightmare. Because the socialist economy was not run according to market-based principles of valuation and profitability, it was almost impossible to assess the book value of state firms so as to sell them. Thus any estimate of their value was shot through with politics. Evidence points to a systematic devaluation of state assets, in part through controlled bankruptcies; this enabled would-be manager-owners or foreign buyers to pay far less than the potential value of the holding acquired.⁴⁰ Since most firms found it impossible to do without state subsidies, and since the supply of raw materials was more uncertain than ever because economic ministries no longer guaranteed them, it took no effort at all to bankrupt a firm. Properties might be sold at auctions having only one bidder. In Hungary, Poland, Romania, and doubtless elsewhere, newspapers reported scandals in which a piece of valuable property had been sold at a derisory price, leading to accusations that public assets were being squandered and to calls for state regulation of the process.⁴¹

Beyond this, many former apparatchiks and managers of firms took advantage of uncertainties in the status of property law, thereby gaining possession of properties before their acquisition could be legally regulated. All over the former Soviet bloc, major factories and department stores quickly went from being state property to being joint-stock companies, "owned" collectively by groups of former apparatchiks and managerial or engineering personnel. Likewise, ownership of state farms and parts of some collectives

passed into the hands of those who had managed them before. The bureaucratic positions of these *entrepratchiks* gave them an edge in becoming owner-entrepreneurs.

Privileged and differential access to property came not only from legal ambiguities but also from the extraordinary complexity of the arrangements for privatizing. David Stark's account of how Hungarian firms developed institutional cross-ownership, with managers of several firms acquiring interests in one another's companies, makes it clear that only people with extensive inside information and contacts had the knowledge to participate in such schemes.⁴² Published descriptions of Romania's proposed voucher privatization plan, which gave the public certificates amounting to 30 percent of the value of newly created joint-stock companies while the other 70 percent was held in state management firms, were so complicated as to be impenetrable.⁴³ From correspondence columns in the Romanian press during the early 1990s, it was clear that average citizens suspected they were being hoodwinked by these schemes and that what was presented as a windfall for them would prove yet another swindle, in the time-honored tradition of Romanian political life. In 1995, the government quickened these fears by proposing significant alterations in the voucher program, revaluing the certificates and setting limits on their use.

In each country the groups acquiring control over former state enterprises had slightly different compositions and different intermixtures of foreign capital, but in all, those who benefited the most were the former bureaucratic and managerial apparatus of the party-state. Profiting from their access to administrative positions in state firms, they could create parasitic companies on the side, draining into these the state firm's assets as well as ongoing state subsidies, and could use their political influence to secure monopolies on state orders and preferential access to foreign contracts.⁴⁴ Their privileged relations with foreign firms and management consultants also bring them more intimate knowledge of Western business practices—a kind of symbolic capital that further reinforces their advantage.⁴⁵

Several scholars offer interpretations of these processes. Stark, for example, in a vivid phrasing, speaks of a transformation not from plan to market but from "plan to clan," and he identifies the resulting property forms in Hungary as neither private nor collective but "recombinant" property. He sees the capitalization of preexisting networks as the only possible route to economic transformation, noting that just such networks underlay the economic success of Japan.⁴⁶ Romanian scholar Andrei Cornea writes of the "directocracy" that profits from its dual status as managers and entrepreneurs to siphon off state assets.⁴⁷ According to Cornea, the possibilities for gain put a premium on continued confusion in the system of property rights, reducing incentives for the well-placed to define and closely enforce the

boundaries separating private, collective, and state property. Thus bureaucratic parasitism on state property means stalled privatization, unclear title, uncertainty as to who may exercise property rights, and incomplete, overlapping ownership claims. As I have already noted, Staniszkis speaks of "political capitalism," with its partial disaggregation of central control as homogeneous state ownership gives way to dual ownership of fixed assets, treated sometimes as if they are still state property and at other times as if specific groups had come to own them. She too points to the nonexclusive ownership rights that result, reminiscent of the fuzzy property rights of feudalism.⁴⁸

Although these scholars differ in the end point they anticipate for the processes they describe, each of them reveals powerful interests in favor of retaining a state presence. Such analyses show that even as *entrepratchiks* drain the state's assets, thus debilitating the state and changing both its capacities and its nature, they also support its continuing existence for the resources and subsidies it provides. Because the allocative state of socialism is too valuable to be dispensed with, these groups retard privatization, preserving ambiguity and instability of ownership. By resisting full-scale privatization, then, they also resist the fuller parcelization of sovereignty that would accompany it, preferring a partial concentration at the center.

A number of other forces besides these favor restatization. One is political pressure, stemming both from popular outrage at the speed with which old managers became new elites and from machinations by those among the old elites who did not move fast enough and found themselves left out. Michael Burawoy and János Lukács, as well as Stark, describe how privatization in Hungary led to "bringing the state back in" so as to regulate illegalities in the process of property transfers.⁴⁹ Owing to public outcry against the tremendous profits that Hungary's former elites had amassed so quickly, in January 1990 Hungary's parliament passed the Law for the Defense of State Property that created the State Property Agency; its aim was to prevent further abuses by decelerating privatization and thereby to calm public resentment.

Aside from these responses to public pressure, restatizing tendencies arose from logistical difficulties and the unexpectedly slow pace of privatization. It began to seem that emerging markets were inadequate to solve the problems of decreased production and living standards, endemic corruption, labor unrest, and so on, and that "shock therapy" would so neuter the state as to eliminate vital levers of control over the transition process.⁵⁰ Thus emerged a neostatist position within political debates across the region, arguing that socialism's centralized political economy could be dismantled only by further strengthening the state so it could manage the process of its own dissolution. That is, as David Stark and László Bruszt put it, "The solution to weak and inadequately functioning markets was not more markets but a stronger, more effective, state."⁵¹ This, say some, may even require

expressly *renationalizing* property so as to *denationalize* it. The problem is worst in Hungary, where preprivatization so diffused property rights as to preclude their easy distribution without renationalizing them first.⁵²

In addition to these sources of restatization, the heads of newly privatizing firms and other state employees have themselves also helped to re-create a central authority. For example, a high government official in Bucharest observed to me in June 1991 that his economic program had eliminated central planning, but firms kept coming to him to ask for planning and regulation. Speaking with doctors irate at the government's failure to provide adequate supplies for health, Romania's Minister of Health asked why they did not consider private practice. One replied to him bluntly, "Why should I pay to rent space and to get insurance, material stocks, and all that expensive equipment when the state can do it for me? And besides, where would I get the money?"⁵³ Comparable demands for state intervention came from all quarters but were especially vociferous in the domain of culture. Romania's Minister of Culture described to me how editors of publishing houses had resisted his plan to privatize the publishing business and begged him instead for subsidies. As he put it, "Everyone shouts, 'Down with Communism!' and with their next breath, 'Up with the State!'" Following a visit to New York's Metropolitan Museum, where he learned how the museum raises funds by such gambits as selling earrings like the ones in a famous Rubens painting, this minister proposed that the directors of his own cash-strapped museums do likewise. The reaction: "That is a debasement of art! Museums should not have to become commercial operations; the state should subsidize them!" Archeologists sought state protection against privatization of land, because peasants no longer wanted them digging up old ruins on soil that could produce marketable crops. Literary magazines ran stories with dire predictions that Romanian culture would die unless the state controlled the price of paper, thus subsidizing the publication of books and journals.⁵⁴ In the most dramatic such case, numerous literary magazines appeared in mid-December 1991 with their front page blackened; one headline blared, "Romanian culture at an impasse! Journals of the Writers' Union suspend publication . . . until the government assumes its necessary responsibility to support the national culture."⁵⁵ Everywhere, in asking for subsidies people were reaching out for the familiar allocative state of before, and in so doing they re-created a role for it. Or, looked at from the other side, whatever "the state" is, it does not relinquish domains easily.⁵⁶

Results similar to these in the official, state sector of the economy can also be seen in the growth of "private enterprise" through an expanded second economy. By second economy, I mean all those income-generating activities that workers in socialism carried on outside their formal job—often using equipment or time or even the physical premises of their formal job, in many cases unofficially and sometimes illegally. Workers who drove black-market

taxis in their off hours, construction crews that borrowed tools and supplies from their work site to build houses for themselves and their friends, clerks in stores who held goods under the counter to sell to someone who had given them a gift or bribe or who was a friend or relative, and peasants cultivating the plot of land allotted them by the collective farm—all were engaged in socialism's second economy. It is important to note that these activities were not a suppressed form of entrepreneurship struggling valiantly to survive: their success depended upon their integration with the state sector. Hence, for such entrepreneurs the state's demise would be far from good news.

An example from Romania makes the point. Between 1991 and 1994, the most visible form of this kind of enterprise to my traveler's eye was that the former black-market taxi business had now been transformed into private taxis competing with the state taxi company. As a result, one could, for a change, find a taxi almost whenever one wanted it. Interviewing private taxi drivers taught me a good deal about privatization, most of it irrelevant to my concerns here. One finding, however, pertains directly to the place of the state in a postsocialist economy. Although every cab driver I spoke with in the summers of 1991 and 1992 said he made more money with his cab than with his regular job and could earn even more if he drove the taxi full-time, only one of them had left or would leave his state-sector job to become a fully "private entrepreneur." The same was true two and three years later, except that more had lost their state-sector jobs. Thus nearly all these drivers who had not been forced out of their official jobs were driving the cab outside regular working hours. They preferred to retain a state sector to which they could adhere so as to siphon off resources from it, even at the cost of tremendously lengthening their working day. In some cases, the official job was directly tied to taxi work: an employee of an auto service firm would borrow tools and supplies, in the best tradition of the socialist "second economy," in order to keep his private taxi in good repair. More often, people clung to the state sector job for its anticipated security, benefits, and pensions, which they did not want to or know how to provide on their own. If scattered anecdotes are any indication, the attitudes of these taxi drivers are replicated throughout the Romanian work force. One consequence is that many Romanians have not one occupation but two or three, at least one of which—that in the state sector—serves as a platform for pursuing the others, just as was true in the socialist period.

One could find countless other loci for illustrating privatization's destatizing and restatizing effects.⁵⁷ Sometimes the restatization comes from public demands for the state to regulate the reform process more tightly. Sometimes it comes, rather, from people's pursuit of new opportunities, in which they see an ongoing state presence as useful.⁵⁸ Such instances show how Romanians accustomed to the presence, subsidies, and interventions of so-

cialism's paternalistic state have responded to its seeming disintegration by reconstituting a center to which they can continue to appeal. Although the state's power has been deeply compromised, they have continued to anticipate it in their plans. Any ethnography of the postsocialist state must take account of the ways in which such behavior will reconstitute a form of state power, and must ask how the state being re-created differs from the one supposedly overthrown. I return to this question later.

Mafia

So far I have been concerned primarily with the question of property rights. I turn now to a closely related aspect of privatization: the privatization of power. By looking at how local bosses arrogate central coercion and evade the center's sanctions (often to protect their new entrepreneurial activities),⁵⁹ we discover additional parallels with feudalism's "parcellization of sovereignty." A suitable starting point is the idea of "mafia," central to Humphrey's discussion of "suzerainties" with which I began this chapter. I have presented some ideas relevant to "mafia" in chapter 7 under the label "unruly coalitions," but here I will speak of "mafia," because that is the word people themselves employ.

Talk of mafia has been especially common in the former Soviet Union, with its rash of highly publicized murders during 1992–95, attributed to mafia gangs involved in privatization. Sources have estimated the number of such gangs in Russia as anywhere from 150 to two or three thousand.⁶⁰ But mafia was not confined to Russia. One heard about it all across Eastern Europe—in Hungary, in Bulgaria, in Poland—though not always in reference to precisely the same groups in each place. In Romania during my research between 1991 and 1994, people spoke of mafia often, usually to explain why Romania was not moving swiftly on the anticipated course to a better future. Friends complained that too many of the same old boys were still running things, that connections were still displacing merit and quality as criteria for advancement, that the average citizen could not hope to get space for a small restaurant or a permit for a small shop without connections or bribes well beyond the means of any but the most highly placed. Typesetters, said one friend who had set up his own publishing house, are a real mafia: if you don't pay them off, they won't typeset your books. An acquaintance who is a concert pianist complained that if there were really a market in Romania, she might get a recording contract, but instead the Party-based mafia that controls the record business still goes by connections rather than talent. The level of corruption, people insisted, was infinitely worse than under Ceaușescu, when it was already pretty bad. There was talk of death threats and beatings. "In place of the old Communist Party structures, we

now have rule by the mafia." "The provinces are no longer fully subordinate to the center; the whole system now rests on local mafias, systems of relations not controlled by the center, often making use of their own vigilantes." "We're in a transition from socialism to constitutional mafia." Comments such as these could be quoted from any part of the former socialist bloc.

What is being captured in this image? People typically invoked the expected features—payoffs and bribes, personalistic ties, influence peddling and the corruption of justice, money laundering, and violence. I could give examples of them all, but I will concentrate here on two from Romania: localized violence by bosses usurping the center's former monopoly on force, and a generalized recourse to horizontal and localized networks, in place of the former vertical allegiance to the center.

Romania during the early 1990s was almost as propitious a site as Russia for localized usurpation of violence formerly under state control. Because Ceaușescu was deposed only with the help of factions in the army and Secret Police (*Securitate*), it was impossible to purge these groups from the new order, as happened in countries like East Germany and the Czech Republic. It was equally impossible, however, to incorporate all their members. I believe (but cannot prove) that much of the violence of Romania's first three or four postsocialist years came not from central directives but from self-organizing groups of ex-*Securitate* who had lost out in the power scuffle and hoped to improve their place by preserving a climate of political instability. Members of the *Securitate*, exiled from their former omnipotent position, had every reason to worry about joblessness in a new, "democratic" Romania. They would not need central directives (though they may sometimes have received these) to telephone death threats to active leaders of the political opposition and successful entrepreneurs who are not part of the old-boy network; to beat up demonstrators or political opponents; to smash the windows of newly formed private shops; and so forth.

Securitate members might also be working with local bosses. One story of vigilante violence that I received firsthand seemed clearly a local job, ordered up by local *entrepratchiks*. This spectacular story—unfortunately too long to be recounted here—tells how a collection of county politicians, businessmen, judges, and offspring of former Party bureaucrats drained into their pockets the immense financial assets of the county's former Communist Youth League, along with some hotel and tourist properties. The journalist who uncovered the story soon began to receive telephoned threats, and his girlfriend was savagely beaten in broad daylight on two occasions, once with attempted rape, by men who escaped in a car with brown paper pasted over its license plate. When I last saw him, he was planning to emigrate to France, convinced that he was no longer safe in his city. Comparable stories appeared often in the Romanian media during my research in 1993–94—for example, a TV report of how local police had set upon and beaten a

group of villagers trying to occupy the lands they had formerly owned, which the village mayor and state farm director were now working (see chapter 6).

Such episodes reveal the tenuousness of the center's control over local processes throughout the former socialist bloc, as local bosses build up power by exploiting local networks and informally "privatizing" both the Party's funds and its monopoly on coercion. This has furthered the rampant bureaucratic anarchy resulting from the collapse of a central authority and from "a crisis of obedience and control appearing at all levels of the administrative and economic hierarchy"; the crisis is rooted in the inability of bureaucratic superiors to ensure those beneath them a strategy for survival.⁶¹ In earlier times, socialism's bureaucracy operated through networks of reciprocity, both vertical and horizontal, that were built up over the decades and enabled production to take place despite severe shortages. With the collapse of the party-state, the vertical ties became less valuable, as superiors could no longer guarantee deliveries and investments; subordinates therefore abandoned their vertical loyalties so as to cement local, horizontal relations that might serve them better.⁶² These horizontal ties of reciprocity, sometimes culminating in violence, are what constitute "mafia." Its seeming pervasiveness during the 1990s stems from the removal of the Party's controlling hand, which left the horizontal links unsupervised and uncapped the possibilities for extortion.

Talk of mafia not only aptly renders this privatization of power but also points to useful interpretations, such as Jane and Peter Schneider's account of mafia in Sicily.⁶³ The Schneiders see mafia as part of what they call "broker capitalism," in which petty entrepreneurs having minimal capacity to accumulate capital (compared with the capacity of merchants, industrialists, or financiers) capitalize instead on the only significant resources they command: networks of personal contacts. Mafia flourishes, say the Schneiders, where the center does not effectively administer local-level activities involving production and marketing. Such conditions promote short-term speculative investments rather than long-term productive ones, since one cannot oneself control one's markets, which are often in the hands of foreigners.⁶⁴ These ideas are clearly relevant to the postsocialist situation in Romania, the former Soviet Union, and elsewhere. For the rising class of *entrepreneurs* who aim to acquire state property, their most capitalizable asset to start with was, precisely, their political positions and the personal connections that were so well developed and so vital to managing production in an economy of shortage. Once central control ceased to be effective, local and regional bosses—relying on these ties more than ever—formed mafias in the sense to which we are accustomed. Their situation, shaped by disintegration at the center, indeed parallels that of nineteenth-century Sicilian broker capitalists. Whether these mafias will have only pernicious effects or serve, instead,

to foster capitalism (as Stark suggests, pointing to Japan's mafia-like networks of trust, cross-ownership, and subcontracting) remains to be seen.⁶⁵

Mafia is more, however, than a real phenomenon, a group of people privatizing power along with state assets. It is also an active symbol, one that has spread because it symbolically expresses many of people's difficulties in the transition. That is, we must distinguish between "real mafia" and "conceptual mafia," or mafia-as-symbol. To grasp mafia's symbolic meaning fully, one would need to know more about who is talking about it and under what circumstances, but we might start with the following ideas.

First, mafia-as-symbol implies considerable anxiety about something that is integral to a market economy. Mafia, like markets, rests on a system of invisible horizontal linkages. Indeed, Hann reports that in Hungary, some people equate the market with mafia,⁶⁶ as well as with Gypsies, or (as in Romania) with former criminals, Securitate, and other unsavory characters. Talk of mafia is one way of saying that exchange and enterprise are still suspect, if not in fact condemned, as they were under socialism—that they bring unmerited riches and rely on questionable practices. Talk of mafia, then, may reveal people's ambivalence about the effects of the deepening marketization of their countries.

This is related to a second possible meaning of mafia as symbol: it marks off a space within which certain fundamental distinctions are being reconfigured, such as distinctions between "criminal" and "legal," "exploiter" and "exploited." The socialist regime defined certain kinds of activities as criminal—speculation, use of state property for private gain, and so forth. With the supposed departure from that system come redefinitions as to what is acceptable or prohibited. "Mafia" talk plots the trajectory of this redefinition. Something similar occurs around ideas about exploitation. From a system of production in which the state was clearly the exploiter of labor—and workers were fully conscious of this fact, as I showed in chapter 1—there has emerged a chaotic system in which it is completely unclear who owns what, who is exploiting whom, why there suddenly seems to be not enough money to go around, and why nothing is as it was expected to be in the first flush of postrevolutionary enthusiasm. Mafia is a symbol for what happens when the visible hand of the state is being replaced by the invisible hand of the market. The image suggests that there is still a hand, but it has disappeared into the shadows. (For some people, the earlier situation may seem preferable: as a villager said to anthropologist David Kideckel in the spring of 1990, "It's better to be exploited by the state than by other persons."⁶⁷) Reading the literature on mafia, one suspects that this image even substitutes for the old image of the socialist state itself: just as the party-state was seen as all-powerful, pervasive, and coercive, with violence against the citizen always a possibility, so too is mafia.⁶⁸ In this sense, the image of mafia perhaps gives voice to an anxiety about statelessness, alongside other forms of insecurity.

Similar ideas about mafia as symbol appeared in Russia's *Independent Gazette*, which described the idea of the "invisible hand of the mafia" as something used to scare the Soviet public.⁶⁹ Alternatively, talk of mafia is like talk of witchcraft: a way of attributing difficult social problems to malevolent and unseen forces. And like witchcraft, mafia can become an accusation: with it one points the finger at a certain person or group—the opposing faction in the village leadership, a coalition of business interests competing with one's own—and accuses them of being agents of malevolent forces. The prevalence of mafia as an image during the 1990s suggests how general were the social problems and dislocations, with their accompanying feelings of anxiety. That there are also real mafias, producing the privatization of power from which "local suzerainties" and "parcellized sovereignty" result, merely makes the witchcraft imagery of mafia more compelling.

Emerging State Forms

I have been speaking of the contradictory tendencies that on the one hand erode state power and on the other reconstitute it, and I have suggested that an ethnography of the postsocialist state should document these contradictory processes. The task is more than simply descriptive, however; it should also engage the larger project of understanding better what "the state" actually "is" and what forms "it" takes. Just as the various absolutist states that feudalism incubated differed from the political forms that preceded it, so the various forms of state power being re-created in the former socialist bloc will differ both from those of before and from one another. In other words, to speak (as I have) simply of "restatizing" tendencies is misleading, for the states being reconstituted are not expected to be of the same kind as socialism's party-state. For many people in the region, the hope is precisely to build something else—something more closely resembling a "liberal-democratic" state, for instance.

Comprehensive treatment of the theme of state transformation requires an understanding of the state forms peculiar to socialism. Among those who have approached this problem are Jan Gross, István Rév, and Stark and Bruszt, all of whom emphasize the fundamental weakness of the apparently all-powerful socialist state—that is, its incapacity to accomplish objectives and (in Stark and Bruszt's happy phrasing) to "orchestrate concertation."⁷⁰ To explore state forming after socialism we might also employ a less immediately performative and more cultural approach, emphasizing the different concepts of power and rule that underlie different state forms, or pursuing the particulars of the cultural relationship generally known as "legitimacy." Humphrey illustrates the first of these in her analysis of Russian ideas about power, according to which order is the product of a central personification

of power rather than of the exercise of law, the observation of certain principles, or a robust civil society.⁷¹ I wish to use the second possibility—concepts of legitimacy—so as to show how an ethnographic strategy might proceed in analyzing departures from the socialist state. This requires abandoning the generalizing style I have employed so far and focusing on particulars. In other words, the structure of my discussion replicates what I see as the task of an ethnography of the state: to move between large comparative questions and very localized data.

A common feature of post-1989 political rhetoric is invocation of the "law-governed state." In each country of the region there is a specific expression that has this meaning, best rendered with the German *Rechtsstaat* (*statul de drept* in Romanian, *jogállam* in Hungarian, *pravo gosudarstvenno* in Russian, etc.). The term shows up constantly in political discourse and the press, in the form either of complaints that a law-governed state clearly does not yet exist or of arguments that a given behavior would help to construct one. The idea of the law-governed state, like so many other aspects of the transition, is a political symbol: it sets up a contrast with the form of government under socialism, seen as based in terror, fiat, arbitrariness, and deceit; it also sets up a contrast with the mafiotic forms discussed earlier. Anyone using the image of the law-governed state in political contest, then, wishes to be understood as promoting a departure from those kinds of political processes to postsocialist ones based in accountability to one's constituents and universal acceptance of legal mediation.

Beyond symbolizing an alternative to socialism, the image of the law-governed state indicates a set of practices that might build a new legitimation to distinguish the emerging state from the one of before. It indicates, that is, certain places to examine in order to see new state-forming processes at work. To take this approach is to forsake an image of the state as a reified entity or set of institutions in favor of attending to the practices of government, or power's microphysics. One could look for these practices and techniques of rule not just in the corridors of power but wherever rule is present, legitimacy perceived, subjection accomplished. I will briefly illustrate the possibilities with material on decollectivization, for which chapter 6 provides the background. What can we learn from inspecting the state's procedures and practices around decollectivizing that might clarify whether new forms of legitimation—new cultural relations of state and subjects—are taking shape?

Chapter 6 described a number of the conflicts arising for people in my Transylvanian research community, Aurel Vlaicu, as a consequence of decollectivization. Some people tried to resolve these conflicts by force and others by complaining to the local commissions. Still others had recourse to the law. This is not because they see the law as a neutral arbiter of last resort: my discussions with villagers revealed widespread skepticism about the very

idea of “law.” In the words of a judge I interviewed, there are two Romanian views of law: those who win a case in court say justice was done and the law is impartial, whereas those who lose say justice is corrupt and the judge was bribed. My discussions amply confirmed this judge’s opinion. Most Vlaicu villagers do not believe that the law is neutral and impartial, and this shapes their relation to both law and supposedly law-governed state. Those who lost cases that I followed were convinced from the start that their opponents had bribed the relevant officials, or that because the evident interest of “those in power” was to have them lose the case, the judge would be so instructed.⁷² At the same time, even people who won a case often had trouble enforcing the judgment, owing to resistance by local authorities. These attitudes and experiences suggest that legitimation through the “rule of law” is problematic, and that people view their defense of their rights as something taking place as often *against* the political system as facilitated by it through reliable legal procedures.

For those who pursue their rights in court, what is this experience like? What sorts of dispositions are likely to result from meeting the postsocialist Romanian state in its guise as dispenser of justice? First, going to court involves often costly and time-consuming trips, since cases are not prepared in advance by legal counsel and then brought to trial but are created *in situ*, through repeated court appearances to hear yet another witness, yet another piece of testimony, yet another expert evaluation. This aspect of legal practice discourages many would-be participants at the outset. Second, because cases do not come up in the order posted, parties coming to court on the appointed day may sit for hours awaiting their moment. During this time, people spectate the law: they hear the judge speak over and over about the need for proofs and documentation, argue as to what judicial level has or does not have competence, admonish participants for their posture or their attitude, dismiss or postpone cases because the parties do not have full property title or lack even the preliminary title from the local commissions, throw cases back to the local authorities or to the county commission, advise parties to get a lawyer because they are not competent to defend themselves, and complain frequently about the failure of local officials to comply with court orders to produce documents. Among the things court spectators learn are that the court does not have power to resolve many of the cases brought before it, particularly against local officials’ resistance; that much of the court’s work is carried on in arcane, specialist language to which ordinary people do not have access; that they can be tripped up by numerous procedures and rules; and that the practices of participation in defense of one’s rights eat up large amounts of time and money.

Third, from my attendance at court I saw in the experience of bringing suit subtle forms of domination that participants will come to associate with

their experience of the law. An example is the way their words enter into the court record. Instead of being taken down verbatim by a stenographer, the proceedings enter the record only when the judge periodically dictates a summary to the secretary. This practice leaves no doubt that ordinary citizens’ words have legal effect only if translated (and thus authorized) by state officials. I read postural and behavioral signs as suggesting that many parties to a suit had not come there confident of their rights but, rather, as suppliants. The same attitude appeared in the behavior of those coming to legalize inheritances at the state notary. These orientations to law continue those of the socialist period, when the governors perceived the governed as “children to be corrected and educated” rather than as legal subjects with certain rights.⁷³

It is nonetheless this latter view that underpins not only the concept of the law-governed state but also the actions of all those who bring suit. Even among those who do not, there is evidence of self-conceptions that resist “correction” as people strive to create themselves as effective agents against the state. I detected in some of my village encounters signs of self-conceptions premised on a state having diminished capacities, one far less intrusive than the party-state had been concerning their household activities, their use of their time,⁷⁴ the crops they could plant on their so-called private plots,⁷⁵ and even their sex lives.⁷⁶ With decollectivization, such people have begun to insist on their right to make plans independent of those a state might make for them. As one villager said to me about her land, “Even if I just turn it over to the association, it’s still *my land*, as it wasn’t before. If I don’t like how they’re running the thing, or if I think I’m not getting a big enough share, I can withdraw my land from the association and sell it or give it out in sharecropping.” Others made similarly clear that what was at stake in decollectivization was their sense of themselves not just as owners but as people worthy of respect. Several people protesting to local authorities about allotments they considered unjust told me, “We want them to know they *can’t treat us like this!*” One village friend who had won a lengthy court case against local officials only to give her land over to the village association explained to me why she had sued for her land even though she could not work it: “The important thing is *not to let those people rip me off again!*”

We see, then, encounters that discourage people from perceiving the state as lawful, as well as behavior by which they assert themselves against the state. Both of these indicate that a legitimating cultural relationship through a “law-governed state” is not very robust in parts of rural Romania. Under these circumstances, the fact that privatization—which has its own legitimating effects, independent of the legal encounters that sometimes accompany it—is proceeding so slowly further shapes rural people’s dispositions toward the state as either resigned or defiant. Whether they will be

discouraged and give up defending themselves or will persist, and whether their persistence will result in positive or negative dispositions toward the law, is not yet clear. It would be useful to compare the outcome in Romania, where many structures of the party-state survived the "revolution," with cases in which those structures were more deeply compromised, such as Poland and the Czech Republic. Perhaps in the latter cases quotidian encounters with the law provide a more effective state legitimation than seems to be true for Romanians.

Decollectivization as a vehicle for transforming the state operates not just through practices related to law-based legitimation but through other practices as well, such as the actions of local authorities. Far from being insignificant in reconfiguring state power, local-level management of property restitution has very high stakes for it, inasmuch as the Law on Agricultural Land Resources (Law 18) gave commune authorities and their topographers sufficient independence to foster local autonomy. Their ability to contain and resolve localized conflicts over land and to create some form of order without intervention from the center would impede recentralization of the state and would further local self-government. But if, instead, they become embroiled in infighting and corruption, squandering their independence and enabling or inviting the center to step back in, reconstituted central power will be the result. My evidence shows a tendency for local commissions not to resolve cases on their own but instead to toss them up to the county commission and the courts; both of these were beholden to a national governing coalition (through 1995) whose aims were patently state-expanding and clientelistic. Even the county-level organs lacked adequate means for final resolution of property cases, first of all because no legal suit could be brought without a property title, and local land commissions have been dilatory in producing them. The delay caused President Iliescu to break a parliamentary deadlock concerning agricultural taxation, in the spring of 1994, by proposing that the state resolve the problem, through an executive decree that the preliminary titling papers (*adeverințe*) would automatically become permanent. In other words, delays and disorder in local and county management of property restitution were effectively "bringing the state back in."⁷⁷

At the same time, the political center was itself contributing to these delays, thereby obstructing the decisive implementation of the property law and preventing villagers from becoming full owners. Not only did the government fail to train enough topographers to carry out the measuring but it neither solicited nor accepted offers of trained topographers from elsewhere. Moreover, it postponed for nearly two years a USAID project for satellite mapping, which would have facilitated property restitution: the relevant ministry refused to supply the project with the five to seven key

coordinates essential to starting the work.⁷⁸ That detail suggests a ministry—perhaps even the government as a whole—with minimal interest in resolving ownership questions, which in turn suggests a field of power in which the center faces almost no autonomous propertied individuals capable of articulating an independent interest or exerting certain pressures on the state. This kind of stalling and resistance makes the experience of property restitution a disheartening one for many villagers, as they seek to participate in shaping their futures but find themselves thwarted much of the time. With respect to both legitimation and the field of power constituted around the state, that is a more telling experience than any participation in "free" elections.

I have been suggesting that by examining decollectivization we see something of how state power is being reconfigured in Romania. To what extent is it different from the state power of before? Hints as to the nature of the newly emerging state lie in certain bureaucratic practices that relate to land. For example, decollectivization provided an opportunity to reinstitute the sort of rule-by-records that characterized the Habsburg period in Transylvania; the post-1989 state might have proposed a machinery for re-creating this form of rule, making records a predictable basis for resolving conflicts and then guaranteeing ownership based on them.⁷⁹ So far, however, this does not seem to be the outcome. Instead, the procedures for implementing Law 18 have muddied such records and practices as already existed. An entirely new system of topographic numbers was instituted, for instance, in the absence of legislation to link them to the older set. Thus even a villager with a property title cannot use it effectively in court, for the property numbers on it bear no resemblance to anything else on record.

Together with what I have already said, this suggests that instead of a power institutionalized and exercised through predictable procedures (which many see as the hallmark of liberal-democratic states),⁸⁰ what we see reemerging in mid-1990s Romania are ruling practices similar to those of socialism's predatory "spoiler state," consolidated by preventing other actors from acting effectively.⁸¹ "Government" in this context rests on maintaining an environment of uncertainty, one in which would-be owners can readily doubt legal guarantees to their possession (these are, after all, the same people who lost their supposedly law-guaranteed property after World War II). "Law" in this context becomes not only a space for actively pursuing one's rights but an occasion to experience inefficacy, as cases drag on for months only to be thrown elsewhere, unresolved. "Local self-government" in this context means struggling to assert oneself against powerful local authorities whose failure to resolve problems creates an expanded role for those at the center. During 1994–95, that center moved to consolidate its advantage, as

Romania's ruling coalition dismissed on grounds of corruption more and more local mayors belonging to opposition parties. This would ensure the government's local-level control over the 1996 elections. Accountability therefore began to migrate up the hierarchy rather than down—to superiors, rather than to constituents—reminiscent of accountability under the party-state. Adding to this my earlier examples of practices and requests that reinforced not just a state presence but one resting (like that of socialism) on allocation, it seems that state-forming processes in Romania involve less transformation than reconstitution.

It would be inadvisable, however, to generalize this picture to other countries of the region. Staniszkis, for example, finds that Poland is best understood in terms not of a re-created socialist state but of something akin to the medieval *Ständestaat* (or “estates’ state”).⁵² In this postfeudal, preabsolutist state, the center has lost control over political and economic processes, and the structures of domination are segmented. Constituting the segments, which are of variable origin and function, are collective actors distinguished not by their economic interests (as would be true in a corporatist state) but by group ethos resting on different genealogies and traditions; they work out their mutual interrelations not by a law that is the same for all but rather by ad hoc political agreements. The *Ständestaat* that Staniszkis depicts is a hybrid form, each segment reflecting different organizational principles and different sources of social power. Because no group has a clear social base, parties do not compete for support by claiming to represent specific interests; instead, they offer and promise to realize particular visions of the social order. Prominent among these visions, I suggested in chapter 4, are those that favor nationalist politics. For Poland, at least, Staniszkis foresees a gradual evolution of the *Ständestaat* into a corporatist state, rather than into a liberal-democratic, “law-governed” state of West European type. The prognosis differs for Romania, and probably for other countries of the region as well.

An ethnography of the postsocialist state might proceed in this way, then: looking at privatization as it relates to “statizing” tendencies; noting the points at which one or another actor appeals to the once-paternalist state to intervene; inspecting the terms of those appeals and their acceptance or rejection; examining the legal processes through which citizens may come to experience domination as legitimate or not; investigating actors’ self-conceptions for signs of recoil from a state-saturated subjectivity; and exploring the state-enhancing behavior of local authorities and government ministries. This research procedure would inquire into the implications that state tasks such as regulating property acquisition, enforcing contracts, subsidizing culture and medical care, and so on might have for emergent political and cultural relationships and institutions—elements of potentially new state

forms. It would focus on events in which forms of violence the state is supposed to monopolize are wielded instead by groups—miners, Secret Police, wealthy businessmen—whose very action makes manifest and simultaneously reproduces the state’s incapacity. From these and other practices we may better discern the fields of force emerging in postsocialist contexts and the new forms of domination taking place through them.

Conclusion

This chapter has treated three themes—privatization, mafia, and state—as simultaneously symbols and social processes. Each indicates a set of developments: those pertaining to property rights, to active social networks that employ coercion, and to the transformation of state power. Each also provides symbols and images that enter into postsocialist politics. In similar fashion, my suggestion of a “transition from socialism to feudalism” has entailed both processual analysis and metaphor. As analysis, the chapter has indicated some processes by which sovereignty has been de- and recomposed in Eastern Europe. As metaphor, it participates in a politics of knowledge construction, in which the images that represent and name an object of knowledge crucially shape how that object will be thought. My skepticism about whether the former socialist countries are undergoing a transition to democracy and market economy has led me to propose instead the apparently absurd image of a “transition to feudalism.”

In doing so, I have had two things in mind. The first is to bring a fresh set of associations into play, associations not mobilized by concepts relating to liberal capitalism. From the array of ideas “feudalism” mobilizes I have emphasized the disintegration of socialism’s centralized, paternalist state and its consequences for state re-forming throughout the region. The feudal metaphor also contains a reminder about variation: as the Roman Empire collapsed, feudalism developed in only some of its domains, while in others there arose a variety of prebendal and tributary forms. *Ständestaaten* and absolutist states grew out of some but not all of these. I submit that thinking about feudalism points us in directions at least as fruitful for gaining knowledge of what is happening in the former Soviet bloc as do images of a transition to capitalism, with its big bangs, markets, democracy, shock therapy, and private property. All these highlight not current developments but an expectation, a telos.

This relates to my second purpose in using the metaphor of feudalism. Teleological thinking has plagued the region for decades; perhaps we should abandon it.⁵³ Socialist regimes saw themselves as ushering in the radiant future, the final stage of human happiness. They classified all human history

into a gigantic sequence with themselves at its apex. Precisely because of that teleological orientation, they became vulnerable to the terrible disappointment of their wards. So too with Western leftists: had they not been convinced of socialism's evolutionary teleology, they might have felt less betrayed by the system's shortcomings. Observers who likewise expect from the present transition progress toward a specific end expose themselves to comparable risk. Attending to what is happening rather than looking for what ought to happen might be fairer, humbler, and more prudent.

As is so often the case in Eastern Europe, the most telling summary of my point is a joke.⁸⁴ The Roman emperor is luxuriating in his bath one day. Suddenly three of his councilors rush in, breathless and barely able to speak. "Sire! You must come immediately to the balcony! The slaves are in revolt! Speak to them and calm them down!" The emperor hastily dries himself and puts on his clothes. Emerging onto the balcony, he beholds a sea of placards. They read, "Long live feudalism, the bright future of mankind!"

AFTERWORD

And *Theory*? How are we to proceed without *Theory*? Is it enough to reject the past, is it wise to move forward in this blind fashion, without the Cold Brilliant Light of Theory to guide the way? What have these reformers to offer in the way of Theory? . . . Market incentives? Watered-down Bukharinite stopgap makeshift capitalism? NEPmen! Pygmy children of a gigantic race! . . . Change? Yes, we must change, only show

me the Theory, and I will be at the barricades. . . .

The snake sheds its skin only when a new skin is ready; if he gives up the only membrane he has before he can replace it, naked he will be in the world, prey to the forces of chaos:

without his skin he will be dismantled, lose coherence and die. Have you, my little serpents, a new skin?

Then we dare not, we cannot move ahead.

(*Tony Kushner, Slavs!*)

SO SPOKE Aleksii Antediluvianovich Prelapsarianov, Tony Kushner's imaginary Oldest Living Bolshevik, in his last address to the reformist faction in the Soviet Chamber of Deputies, 1985. Prelapsarianov notwithstanding, however, socialism did shed its skin before a new one was ready, and it did so with no real theory of how to proceed. In this book I have described some early stages in the process of growing a new skin. That process has been guided in a few countries by the "Theory" of shock therapy: other theories—together with outright improvisation—have prevailed elsewhere. The war of theory in Eastern Europe's transformation makes the former Soviet bloc resemble those military battles in which the superpowers fought by proxy, as client-combatants tested out their arsenals (one thinks of the various Arab-Israeli conflicts and Desert Storm). The arsenals being tested on this occasion include not just theoretical blueprints for a new future but theories to account for how the future is unfolding.

This is not the first time that the region has been vexed by inopportune nakedness and ill-fitting theory: the entire Bolshevik experiment can be seen as another such example, in which a theory created for conditions that did not obtain broke down existing structures and produced more chaos than order. Theory is not necessarily the best route to social change. This is

Elizabeth Dunn, Gail Kligman, Gale Stokes, and Brackette Williams improved this section markedly over its initial version; I am in their debt.