

What Was Socialism, And What Comes Next?

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*Fate had it that when I found myself at the head of the state it was already clear that all was not well in the country. . . . Everything had to be changed radically. . . . The process of renovating the country and radical changes in the world economy turned out to be far more complicated than could be expected.... However, work of historic significance has been accomplished. The totalitarian system . . . has been eliminated.... We live in a new world.
(Mikhail Gorbachev, resignation speech, 1991)*

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY might fairly be called the Bolshevik century. From the moment of the Soviet Union's emergence after the October Revolution, the presence of this new historical actor on the world stage affected every important event. Its birth changed the fortunes of World War I. The Allied victory in World War II owed much to the prodigious human and material capacities the Soviets were able to mobilize—despite the prior loss of many millions and vast resources from the purges, gulags, collectivization, and man-made famines of the 1930s.¹ So successful was the wartime effort that Stalin was able to bring into the Soviet sphere a number of other countries in Eastern Europe at the war's end. The presence of the Soviet Union in the world shaped not only international but internal politics everywhere, from Western European social-welfare policies to the many Third-World struggles that advanced under Soviet aegis. In the United States, fear of "Communism" and grudging respect for Soviet capabilities spurred violations of civil rights during the McCarthy period, a massive arms buildup, and substantial development from spin-off technology. Who could have foreseen that with Mikhail Gorbachev's resignation speech of 25 December 1991 so mighty an empire would simply vanish? Television cameras lingered on its final image: the small red table at which he had sat. The Soviet Union's meek exit belies not only its tremendous power and influence during the twentieth century but also the positive meaning of socialism² for many who fought to produce and sustain it, both in the Soviet Union itself and in socialist-inspired liberation movements elsewhere. Although the people who created such movements were often few in number, they articulated the dissatisfactions of millions. Inequality, hunger, poverty, and exploitation—to these perennial

features of the human condition socialism offered a response. It promised laboring people dignity and freedom, women equal pay for equal work, and national minorities equal rights in the state. By making these promises, it drew attention to major problems that capitalist liberal democracies had not adequately resolved.

Unfortunately, the execution of socialist programs encountered a number of snags; attempts to rectify them ended by corrupting its objectives, sometimes through monstrous, despicable policies that subjected hundreds of thousands to terror and death. These departures from the ideal led many committed Marxists to abandon their support of the left;³ the expression "real" or "actually existing" socialism came into use, to distinguish its messy reality from its hopes and claims.⁴ In addition to making socialism more difficult to support, real socialism's distasteful features made it harder to study. Criticism and exasperation came more readily than sympathy—and were more readily rewarded with notice. Those who sought to analyze it with an open mind could be dismissed as wild-eyed radicals or apologists of dictatorship. In the United States, one reason for this was the continuing legacy of the Cold War.

The Cold War and the Production of Knowledge

Some might argue that the twentieth century was not the Bolshevik but the American century, in which the United States became a global power, led the struggle of the free world against the Bolshevik menace, and emerged victorious. Although I am partial to neither the oversimplification nor the martial imagery of that account, there is no doubt that the Cold-War relationship between the two superpowers set the defining stamp on the century's second half. More than simply a superpower face-off having broad political repercussions, the Cold War was also a form of knowledge and a cognitive organization of the world.⁵ It laid down the coordinates of a conceptual geography grounded in East vs. West and having implications for the further divide between North and South. Mediating the intersection of these two axes were socialism's appeal for many in the "Third World" and the challenges it posed to the First.

As an organization of thought, the Cold War affected both public perceptions and intellectual life. It shaped the work of the physicists and engineers who engaged in defense research, of the social scientists specializing in Kremlinology, of the novelists and cinematographers who produced spy thrillers. Inevitably, the Cold War as context fundamentally influenced all scholarship on "real socialism," and especially scholarship in the U.S.⁶ Because the material in this book is a product of the Cold War, then, I might speak briefly about what it has meant to study Eastern Europe in that context. Without wishing to be overly autobiographical, I believe this sort of reflection appropriately frames the production of knowledge in which I have been engaged, as seen in the chapters that follow. I emphasize here both the institutional environment and the processes of personal identity formation to which the Cold War was central in my case, leaving aside other aspects of the North American academy or personal choices to which it seems extraneous.

I began preparing to work in Eastern Europe in 1971. In the most general sense, research there at that time was possible only because a Cold War was in progress and had awakened interest in the region, and because that war had abated somewhat into *détente*.⁷ Detente brought with it the rise of funding organizations like the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX), founded in 1968 expressly to mediate scholarly exchanges with the Soviet bloc, and the National Council for Soviet and East European Research (NCSEER, 1978).⁸ Without detente, and without the desperate interest of socialist regimes in increased access to Western technology—the price for which was to let in scholars from the West—our research there would have been impossible. Similarly, between 1973 and 1989 ongoing scholarly access to the region depended on U.S. politicians' view that knowledge about socialist countries was of sufficient strategic importance to warrant federal funding for it.

Within my discipline, anthropology, there was little to incline one to work in Eastern Europe. On the contrary: in 1971, when I began to think about where I would go, Europe was not the place a budding anthropologist would choose. The great books dealt with Oceania, Africa, or Native America—with “primitives.” Few anthropologists had worked in Europe (being “our own” society, it had low prestige), and one rarely found their publications on graduate syllabi. But anthropology has long rewarded an explorer principle: go to uncharted territory. Given that anthropological interest in Europe began relatively late, as of 1971 almost no fieldwork had been done in the eastern part of the continent—precisely because of the Cold War.⁹ Eastern Europe was less known to anthropology than was New Guinea; this meant that any research there, even if not prestigious, would at least be “pioneering.”

To allure of this professional kind one might add the romantic aura, the hint of danger, adventure, and the forbidden, that clung to the Iron Curtain and infused the numerous spy stories about those who penetrated it. To go behind the Iron Curtain would be to enter a heart of darkness different from that of Conrad's Africa or Malinowski's Melanesia, but a darkness nonetheless. That I was not immune to this allure emerges retrospectively from certain features of my early life. For example, I still actively recall the launching of Sputnik in 1957, when I was in the fourth grade. Although I surely did not understand its significance, I got the strong message that it was very important indeed; my recollection of Sputnik is so clear that I remember vividly the space of the classroom in which we were talking about it (just as many people remember exactly where they were when they learned the news of President Kennedy's assassination). Then there was my ill-fated attempt to teach myself Russian when I was twelve (it foundered when I got to declensions, something of which I had never heard). Again, a few years later, out of an infinite array of possible topics for my high school speech contest, the subject I picked was the evils of Soviet Communism.

Finally, there was my reaction to the map of Europe that a fellow graduate student acquired just as I was deliberating where to go for my dissertation research. As we pored over the wonderful place names in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Romania, I found myself becoming very excited. The closer we got to the Black Sea, the more excited I became: I was truly stirred at the prospect of working in a “Communist” country having all those terrific names. Because I had no specific research problem in mind (I just wanted to see what life “behind the Iron Curtain” would be like), nothing dictated my choice of a specific country to work in. I chose Romania from the wholly pragmatic consideration that at that moment, it was the only East European country in which one could do ethnographic fieldwork with relative ease. The reason was major upheavals in the other countries—in Poland in 1968 and 1970, in Czechoslovakia in 1968, in Hungary with its conflict-ridden shift to market mechanisms beginning in 1968—leading them to close themselves off, whereas the Romanian regime had recently chosen a path of greater openness.¹⁰ Those upheavals bespoke a growing crisis in the socialist system, but the crisis was delayed in Romania; hence, that government permitted anthropological fieldwork—and, according to the Fulbright handbooks, even invited it.¹¹

Notwithstanding this invitation, the Cold War placed a number of constraints on North Americans doing research there—on the kinds of topics we might pursue, the ways we thought about them, and our physical movements.¹² Concerning possible research topics, for example, I could not have submitted a proposal dealing with the organization of socialism; hence, my two proposed research projects were a regional analysis of social-status concepts and a study of the distribution of distinctive ethnographic microzones. When neither of those proved feasible for the village I had selected, I did a social history of Romanian-German ethnic relations—having been advised against a study of the local collective farm. Not only were my research topics constrained; so was the attitude I felt I could adopt in my work. I accumulated debts to the people I studied and to the government whose hospitality had permitted me to gather data; outright criticism seemed to be foreclosed. Fortunately, my village respondents' more or less positive assessment of socialism during the early 1970s made it easy to avoid public criticism, as did my own admiration for some of the achievements of the regime up to that point. It was only after the mid 1980s that my attitude became unequivocally negative.

Another constraint—one that greatly affected the anthropology of Eastern Europe—was the privileged place accorded the discipline of political science in creating knowledge about the region, owing to the strategic importance of the socialist world for U.S. politics. In the absence of a preexisting anthropological discourse on Europe more broadly, the hegemony of political science strongly influenced the way the anthropology of Eastern Europe developed. It proved all too easy, in retrospect, to solve the problem of how to find an audience by reacting to the issues posed in political science. This meant adopting much of the conceptual agenda of that powerful interlocutor¹³—nationalism, regime legitimacy, the planning process, development, the nature of power in socialist

systems, and so forth—rather than defining a set of problems more directly informed by the intellectual traditions of anthropology.

A third constraint of research during the Cold War was on movement—a particular problem for anyone not residing in a major city, as anthropologists rarely do. For example, because I had inadvertently entered a military zone on my motorbike soon after I arrived, county authorities were convinced that I was a spy, and the proximity of the village where I lived to an armaments factory only confirmed this suspicion. My movements were closely monitored throughout the period between 1973 and 1989, sometimes to comic proportions (such as when I picked up a police tail during a trip to a hard-currency shop, and my truck-driver chauffeur—hauling a huge crane—sought to shake them off). Whenever a local cop or some politico wanted to score points with those higher up, he might “confirm” my reputation as a spy, noting that I continued to work year after year among people who commuted to the armaments factory. This reputation was so firmly entrenched that it followed me well into the 1990s. Thus the Cold War turned me into a resource that local authorities could use in pursuit of their own advancement, as well as a means to intimidate and seduce Romanian citizens into collaborating with the Secret Police.¹⁴ During 1984–85, the surveillance placed not only on me but also on my respondents finally made it impossible for me to do fieldwork in rural areas at all.¹⁵ In this way, regime repression altered my entire research program, compelling me to abandon ethnographic projects in villages for library research and interviews with urban intellectuals. The result of that work (*National Ideology under Social-ism*¹⁶) had not been in my plans but was, in effect, forced on me by Romania’s response to that moment in the Cold War.

The Cold War affected my research even in this new project, for some of the intellectuals I worked with thought of themselves as dissidents in their relation to the Romanian Communist Party. They were eager to talk with me, thereby attracting to their cause that most crucial of dissident resources: Western notice. The ongoing Cold War had made dissent within socialist countries a weapon in the hands of Western ones; dissidence would spark international protests and signature campaigns or other forms of pressure on socialist regimes. Thus although my topic—national ideology among Romanian intellectuals—turned out to be more sensitive than I had expected, I never lacked for willing respondents. This was true in part because both they and I were not merely “individuals” but points of intersection for the forces engaged in a much larger political struggle: that between “Communism” and “the free world.”

The Cold War and Personal Identity

Those forces not only made me a privileged interlocutor for certain Romanians but in a peculiar way may also have acted even more deeply in my character, constituting my interest in Eastern Europe as in part an intrapsychic one. In

saying this, and in exploring the Cold War’s ramifications in personal identity, I do not mean to claim that other scholars’ motives for studying socialism arose from similar causes but only to probe further for the structuring effects of the Cold War.¹⁷ As I recall my excitement over the map of Eastern Europe, alongside the other early signs of my fascination with Russia, I see an idiosyncratic affinity between the anti-Communism of American society and certain aspects of my character. Through the Cold War, Soviet Communism came to represent the ultimate in Absolute Power and Authority—that was, after all, what totalitarianism meant—something I found at once frightening and captivating.

A moment of epiphany during my fieldwork in the disastrous mid-1980s, when Romania was about the last socialist country anyone would want to be in,¹⁸ led me to wonder at the roots of the fascination. Having spent an exhilarating day with some Romanian friends getting around the endless obstacles the regime placed in everyone’s way, I realized that despite the cold apartments and unavailable food and constant Securitate surveillance, I was having a good time, and it had to do with the satisfaction of defeating Absolute Authority. I realized all of a sudden that the Party’s claims to total power over Romanian society were subverted every day by thoroughgoing anarchy, and somehow I found such an environment very invigorating. At that moment I saw “Communism’s” special appeal for me as partly rooted in a projection: in studying totalitarianism, I had found an ostensibly neutral, scholarly sphere in which to externalize and explore my own internal admonitory voice. Had the Cold War not constructed “Communism” in this way—particularly in my most formative years, the 1950s¹⁹—such that the Soviet Union was Authority Incarnate, I might have found Eastern Europe less interesting. And had the U.S. government not defined this incarnate authority as the main threat to our national security, there might have been fewer material resources for pursuing my choice. For these reasons, I believe, my research into socialism was the direct product of the Cold War.

So, paradoxically, was my relation to Marxist theory, which has exercised much influence on my work. An interest in Marxism did not precede my research in Romania but rather emerged from it. I first went “behind the Iron Curtain” out of curiosity (enlivened by what I have said above) rather than from political or intellectual commitment to Marxist ideals. I wanted to see what life there would be like, not to offer a critique of either their system or ours. When I departed for the field in August 1973, I had read no Marx or Lenin (though my bibliography did include Eric Wolf’s work on peasant exploitation)—further testimony, I would say, to the effects of the Cold War on North American intellectual life. As a result, the form in which I first came really to know Marxism was its institutionalized and propagandizing one, encountered through the Romanian media and my fieldwork.

Witnessing the chasm that separated this Marxism’s expressed goals from the values and intentions of ordinary folk brought home to me how difficult was the task of revolutionary mobilization in the absence of extensive prior consciousness-raising. The point was made succinctly in a conversation one day with two women, members of the

collective farm in the village I was studying. When they launched a contempt-ridden, culture-of-poverty diatribe against the “lazy” Gypsies who hung around the farm, I tried to counter with the social-structural critique of that idea. As I spoke, one of the women turned to the other and said, “*She’s* more of a socialist than *we* are!” Repeated exposure to observations like this, together with Romanians’ determined refusal to be made into “new socialist men” despite their ready acknowledgment that they derived some benefits from the system, served oddly to crystallize for me a new interest in socialism. Upon my return from the field, in 1975, I discovered dependency theory and related neo-Marxist writings, and I entered a department very respectful of Marx’s intellectual heritage.²⁰ Reading and admiring *Capital* was thus the culmination, not the beginning, of my research into “real socialism.” The result was a commitment to the critique of capitalist forms through the critical examination of socialist ones. In my own modest example, then, it might be said that the chickens of the Cold War came home to roost.

The Study of Postsocialism and the Themes of This Book

Although one might think that the collapse of the Soviet system would render nugatory any further interest in it, I am not of that opinion. The Soviet Union may be irretrievably gone, but the electoral victories of renamed Communist Parties in Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, and elsewhere have shown that the Party is far from over. Indeed, exposure to the rigors of primitive capitalism has made a number of people in the region think twice about their rejection of socialism and their embrace of “the market.” The former socialist world is still well worth watching, for several reasons.

This postsocialist moment offers at least three sets of opportunities, all having both scholarly and political significance. First is the opportunity to understand better what is actually happening in the region, if we can set aside the triumphalist assumption that free-market democracies are the inevitable outcome. How, in fact, are East Europeans managing their exit from socialism? Just what does it take to create capitalism and “free” markets? What sorts of human engineering, not to mention violence, chaos, and despair, does that entail? What are the hidden costs of establishing new nation-states? (The answers offered by former Yugoslavia and the Caucasus are disquieting, to say the least.) Do the electoral victories of the re-formed and renamed Communist Parties reflect simply their better organization based in long experience, or genuine public feeling about desirable political ends that they articulate better than others—or perhaps something altogether different, such as people’s wish to be “villagers” rather than reverting to the “peasant” status that postsocialist parties would force on them?²¹ Work on such questions would permit a more nuanced assessment both of our own “Western” trajectory and of the policies that might be appropriate toward

one or another country of the region. To investigate these questions, I argue herein, requires a theoretically grounded understanding of the system that has crumbled and an ethnographic sensitivity to the particulars of what is emerging from its ruins. This does not mean that only anthropologists need apply,²² but it does mean attempting to suspend judgment about the outcome. It also means acknowledging that such phenomena as “privatization,” “markets,” “civil society,” and so on are objects of investigation saturated with ideological significance; we must question rather than mindlessly reinforce them.

A second opportunity, related to the first, is to broaden a critique of Western economic and political forms by seeing them through the eyes of those experiencing their construction. The forced pace of privatization, for example, reveals with special clarity the darker side of capitalism. Far from being mere demagoguery, nationalist objections to the plundering of these countries’ wealth are reactions to visible processes of impoverishment; so too are populist revelations of “corruption.” “Democracy” is being unmasked too, as the export of Western electoral practices makes their failings transparent, arousing shocked commentary—from Poles and East Germans, for instance, at the emphasis on sound bites and candidate packaging to the detriment of debate over principles and ideas. It is possible that as Romanians, Russians, Poles, Latvians, and others live through the effort to create liberal democracies and market economies, they will be driven to a criticism of these forms even more articulate than before, and perhaps to new imaginings of a more viable socialism.

Such new imaginings would be the more fruitful if coupled with the third opportunity of this postsocialist conjuncture: the fuller understanding of what actually existing socialism was. Whether one sees it as a system *sui generis* or as a peculiar and repellent version of capitalism, its features distinguished it from other sociopolitical organizations of human activity. Now that its archives are more open to inspection, we may learn a great deal that we did not know about how it functioned. This would enable thinking differently about how to avoid its mistakes, and that, in turn, would continue the thrust of some of the pre-1989 work on the region. For a number of scholars,²³ part of the impetus for studying socialism was to combat both the stereotypical, propagandizing notions of it so common in the US. media and also the Utopian and idealized images held by Western leftists who had not experienced living in it; both contributed to a larger project of political critique. The goal of further study might be simply the ethnographic one of trying to grasp the variety of human social arrangements. More politically, the goal might be to consider possible futures and signal the problems with some of them; for critics of capitalism, knowledge and critique of the actual forms of socialism was and should remain a foremost priority, part of a persistent quest for viable alternatives to our own way of life. For both these goals, investigating socialism was a useful task. I believe it still is.

This book aims to encourage work on socialism and postsocialism in these directions. It is not primarily a book about Romania (the area of my research), even though much of my material comes from that country, but rather a book indicating how we might think

about what socialism was and what comes after it. Some might argue that Romania is not a “typical” case and therefore is a poor guide for postsocialist studies, but I do not share this opinion. *No* socialist country was “typical”; each had its specificities, and each shared certain features with some but not all other countries of the bloc. To assume that conclusions drawn from one will apply to all would be unwise, but material from any of them can nevertheless raise questions that might prove fruitful elsewhere. That is my purpose here: to point to questions one might ask or approaches one might take in studying the several countries of the former Soviet bloc. To this end, I include chapters on the main themes of the “transition” literature—civil society, marketization, privatization, and nationalism. My treatment of these themes does not much resemble other things being written on them, however; I hope the differences will stimulate thought.

The chapters brought together here consist of essays written between 1988 and 1994. Unifying them is the theoretical model of socialism provided in chapter 1; the later chapters, concerning the “transition,” presuppose this model even as they augment it or examine departures from the system it describes. That is, I see my overall theme as exploring how the operation of socialism influences what comes next. The first and second chapters treat the socialist period, while the remainder either span the divide between pre- and post-1989 or concentrate on developments subsequent to that year.

Chapter 1 is a compressed version of a longer analysis of the socialist system.²⁴ I present socialism as an ideal type, leaving aside for the moment its varied real-world manifestations; in like manner, it is often useful to speak analytically of “capitalism,” for despite differences among countries like Canada, the Netherlands, and Australia, these cases also show important similarities. In offering a single model of socialism, I sought to synthesize work by East European scholars that would help organize our approach to socialist societies by stating the central principles that gave them coherence as a system of family resemblances. Like all ideal-type models, mine describes no actual socialist society perfectly. Moreover, it emphasizes the system’s formal constitution rather more than the forms of resistance it engendered, which were among the most important sources of variation from one country to another (owing in part to differences in the countries’ historical experiences). At best, the model signals certain social processes as fundamental while acknowledging both that these were not the only processes at work and that they were more fundamental to some socialist societies than to others. Parts of subsequent chapters fill out the discussion in chapter 1: these include further treatment of the “spoiler state” and how subjection was produced, of queues as a form of socialist accumulation, and of socialist temporality (chapter 2); socialism’s gender regime (chapter 3); its “social schizophrenia” and the relation of a shortage economy to nationalism (chapter 4); and its property regime (chapter 6).

I believe that a model of this kind retains its heuristic utility even after 1989, for two reasons. First, it provides a framework for thinking further about the nature of socialism, from the new vantage point of its aftermath. Because the workings of a system often appear most clearly with its decomposition, we can expect to learn a great deal about socialism retrospectively. In thinking about these new insights, I find it helpful not to start the inquiry from scratch. Second, a heuristic model serves to indicate problem areas that might be particularly important and interesting in the “transition.” The pervasiveness of intersegmental competition in the Party and state bureaucracies, for example, can be expected to give a special twist to programs of privatization.²⁵ The secondary but highly politicized role of consumption in socialism’s political economy will surely make consumption an especially intriguing topic to follow.²⁶ Changes in the status of property and markets suggest other interesting questions, such as, How is the mix of “personal” and “depersonalized” being (re)configured in once-socialist societies? That is, how can we think about the juxtaposition of privatization in land, say—personalizing a once-collective good—with the kinds of depersonalization characteristic of markets?²⁷ Another locus of significant change is the organization of labor in postsocialist factories, which will provide fascinating evidence about the relationship between workers’ habits under “economics of shortage” and the kinds of behavior intended with the introduction of Western business practices and ideologies.²⁸

In chapter 2 I take up a theme that appeared in chapter 1 and is echoed in chapter 7: the organization of time under socialism. Anthropologists and historians have explored differences in how time is organized and lived across different kinds of social orders. Following this lead, chapter 2 sketches the efforts of the Romanian Communist Party to organize and appropriate time and shows the effects of these policies for how human beings are made into social persons. I include this chapter because I believe that reorganizations of time will prove an especially significant and disconcerting aspect of postsocialism for those who live through its changes, and one likely to be ignored by those who study them. The postsocialist equivalent of E. P. Thompson’s celebrated essay on the imposition of capitalist work rhythms is waiting to be written;²⁹ I hope to provoke someone to write it. The theme of socialist time appears again in chapter 7, as contributing to the millenarian attitudes of Romanian investors in the Caritas pyramid scheme.

Chapters 3 through 5 treat various facets of national identity: how it might relate to the transforming gender regimes of socialism and postsocialism, how the organization of socialism laid the groundwork for increased ethnic conflict after 1989, and how preconstituted nationalist discourses shape the political symbolism that can be used in building “civil society.” For anyone familiar with Eastern Europe, there is no need to justify giving this much space to the theme of national identity, which is fundamental to politics and self-constitution throughout the region; perhaps nonspecialists might simply take my word for it.³⁰ Chapter 4 focuses directly on nationalism, while chapters 3 and 5 add to it two other themes—gender and civil society—significant in their own right.

Chapter 3 asks how gender and national identities intersected in socialism, suggesting that gendered imagery in national myths masculinizes the nation's lineage, feminizes territorial boundaries, and eroticizes national sentiment. In addition, the chapter presents preliminary data indicating that a new form of "patriarchy" has accompanied democratization, making the basic citizen of democracy *male*, as some feminists have suggested is true more generally. Clearly, research into postsocialist democratization must be attentive to gender. The way gender was organized under socialism figures importantly in other aspects of the transition as well; one reason is that the several ways in which gender equality was legislated served to reinforce the significance of gender difference even while ostensibly undermining it. This makes gender, like nationalism, a strengthened vehicle of postsocialist politics. The result, however, has not been—as it has with national identities—political mobilization behind gender-based political movements but rather an assault on feminism by nationalist ideologues, who see the health of the nation as dependent on women's subordinating their bodies and interests to the collective task of national "rebirth."

In chapter 4, I argue (along with others³¹) that postsocialist nationalism is best understood in terms of the workings of socialism, but unlike others I concentrate on its organization of the person, or self, and on the ethnic symbolism of postsocialist anxieties. As with gender, reinforcement of national identities during the socialist period privileges them as foci of organization in postsocialism, for reasons that chapter 4 only begins to indicate. A point this chapter touches upon—the link between nationalists and certain ex-Party apparatchiks—deserves further thought. One argument might be that nationalism is the form of political discourse preferred by all those who want to retain maximum power for the socialist state upon which they had become such adept parasites, and which openness to foreign capital would compromise. In other words, nationalists and ex-Communists share a defense not so much of the *nation* as of the *state*, which they wish to shield from foreign predation.

In chapter 5 I further explore a specific way in which national ideas have influenced post-1989 politics in Romania: through their effects on "civil society." In this chapter I treat civil society as a symbolic construct deployed in political argument, rather than as a "thing" to be "built." Such a procedure is one response to finding that the idea of civil society has proven to be both more complex and more slippery than it might seem.³² I argue that in the Romanian case, the long-term prior development and institutionalization of the idea of "nation" has limited the political efficacy of ideas like "civil society." Although I realize that any analysis of politics must be attentive to more than just the properties of the symbols employed, examining as well the institutional situations and the balance of forces among competing parties, perhaps my discussion will encourage others to be more skeptical about what "civil society" may actually mean when various groups use it in political speech.

Chapter 6 examines a theme mentioned briefly in chapter 4 and more extensively in chapter 8: privatization. The kind of research supporting the chapter, village ethnography, restricts the form of privatization I can analyze to the decollectivization of agriculture. In this chapter I link problems of decollectivization with the way land was treated under socialism. Many of these points will be useful in thinking about decollectivization in other countries of the region, including the Baltic states. I show that although many critics charge the Romanian government with explicitly obstructing the return of land to its former owners, this task is so fraught with complexities that even the best government intentions might run aground on it. In so arguing, however, I do not contend that the Romanian government is in fact eager to see property restitution completed; instead, the maintenance of ambiguous property rights seems crucial to the post-1989 organization of power in that country (and quite possibly elsewhere). The material in this chapter might lead to two things the chapter itself does not attempt: a more vigorous critique of the very notion of property, and the relation of land restitution to ideas about the "nation" as a collective "possessive individual" (an entity that "has" a territory).³³

In chapter 7 I analyze a remarkable occurrence of the early 1990s: the rise and fall of pyramid schemes, epitomized in the spectacular Romanian pyramid known as Caritas. This chapter engages another major theme of postsocialism—the development of markets—and treats it as part of the larger problem of cognitive transformation accompanying the end of the socialist system. In addition, the chapter describes some ways of accumulating both political capital (an aspect of the pluralization of politics) and also other kinds of wealth, and it offers some speculations about the sociopolitical structure of the transition (such as "mafias") that are taken up again in the final chapter. I treat Caritas, then, as a window onto multiple facets of life in postsocialist Romania, among them democracy, markets, privatization, and the accompanying changes in culture.

Finally, chapter 8 uses the metaphor of a transition to feudalism in order to explore the consequences of the party-state's decomposition. In investigating how state power is being altered and reconstituted, this chapter contributes to an emerging anthropology of the state. It revisits the question of privatization—seen now as both a symbolic construct and an arena for state formation—and discusses "mafia" similarly, as both a symbol and an actual process whereby power is privatized. Additionally, the chapter recapitulates from a different angle the point in chapter 5 about the politics of symbols, proposing that the metaphors and symbols we use as *analysts* in thinking about postsocialism may reveal (or suppress) important topics for investigation.

I have used the word "transition" several times and should say a word about my views of it. In my opinion, to assume that we are witnessing a transition from socialism to capitalism, democracy, or market economies is mistaken. I hold with Stark, Burawoy, Bunce, and others who see the decade of the 1990s as a time of *transformation* in the countries that have emerged from socialism; these transformations will produce a variety of forms, some of them perhaps approximating Western capitalist market economies and

many of them not. Stark writes, for example, that the outcome of privatization in Hungary will be not *private* property but *recombinant* property, while Burawoy writes not of the evolution of a new system of industrial production in Russia but of its involution.³⁴ Politics more closely resembling corporatist authoritarian regimes than liberal democracies are a distinct possibility in several countries (Romania, for instance), whereas military dictatorships should not be ruled out for others (perhaps Russia). When I use the word “transition,” then, I put it in quotes so as to mock the naïveté of so much fashionable transitology. Similarly, the title of chapter 8 (“A Transition from Socialism to Feudalism?”) marks my disagreement with the assumptions of that literature.

Taken as a whole, then, this volume constitutes a dissent from the prevailing directions of much transitological writing. It not only employs an understanding of socialism’s workings that is far from widespread in scholarship about the region but also views the central concepts of work on postsocialism with a skeptical eye. This skepticism comes from being not at all sure about what those central concepts—private property, democracy, markets, citizenship and civil society—actually mean. They are symbols in the constitution of our own “Western” identity, and their real content becomes ever more elusive as we inspect how they are supposedly taking shape in the former Soviet bloc. Perhaps this is because the world in which these foundational concepts have defined “the West” is itself changing—something of which socialism’s collapse is a symptom, not a cause. The changes of 1989 did more than disturb Western complacency about the “new world order” and preempt the imagined fraternity of a new European Union: they signaled that a thoroughgoing reorganization of the globe is in course. In that case, we might wonder at the effort to implant perhaps-obsolescent Western forms in “the East.” This is what I mean by the final line in my first chapter: what comes next is anyone’s guess.

NOTES

1. The exact figure for the numbers who died during the 1930s is contested. Robert Conquest gives 14.5 million for deaths resulting from collectivization and the famine in the Ukraine, and 13 million from Stalin’s purges. (His figures are generally thought (to be high.) See Robert Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 306, and *The Great Terror: Stalin’s Purge of the Thirties* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), appendix 1. For a discussion of contrasting opinions on numbers in the gulag, see Edwin Bacon, *The Gulag at War: Stalin’s Forced Labour System in the Light of the Archives* (London: Macmillan, 1994), pp. 1–41.

2. I prefer this term to the word Communism, which none of the Soviet-bloc countries claimed to exemplify. All were governed by Communist Parties but identified themselves as *socialist* republics, on the path to true Communism.

3. For example, the resignations from various Western Communist Parties in the wake of the Soviet invasions of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 (not to mention the people in Eastern Europe who either abandoned Party work or refused to join as a result of these actions).

4. Cf. Rudolph Bahro’s term “actually existing socialism,” in his *The Alternative in Eastern Europe* (London: Verso, 1978).

5. I owe this formulation to Michael Kennedy and David William Cohen, of the University of Michigan’s International Institute, and I thank them for providing me with an opportunity to think about my own work in the context of the Cold War. A related discussion is to be found in Stephen Cohen, *Rethinking the Soviet Experience: Politics and History since 1929* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), chapter 1.

6. For a useful discussion of some properties of American anti-Communism, see M. G. Heale, *American Anticommunism: Combating the Enemy Within, 1830-1970* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

7. As chapter 1 suggests, I understand *détente* as a symptom of the growing systemic crisis in both world capitalism and socialism.

8. Other organizations include the Kennan Institute and East European Program, both of the Woodrow Wilson Center, and the ACLS/SSRC Joint Committees on Eastern Europe and Soviet Studies. All these benefited from at least partial funding through the Congressional Act known as Title VIII, passed in 1984. Most of my own research was supported by IREX.

9. The only ethnographic fieldwork done prior to *détente* was in Serbia, resulting in Eugene Hammel’s *Alternative Social Structures and Ritual Relations in the Balkans* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968) and Joel Halpern’s *A Serbian Village* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958). (The research for sociologist Irwin Sanders’s *Balkan Village* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1949), about Bulgaria, was completed before the Cold War.)

10. Succession anxieties in Yugoslavia, together with some scandals in the late 1960s over anthropologists’ alleged involvement in intelligence, precluded research in that country; the strongly philo-Soviet Bulgarian government was even less receptive.

11. In retrospect, it is possible that the “anthropology” Romania thought it was welcoming was physical anthropology, rather than sociocultural, for the former had a certain importance in Romania, whereas the latter in its North American variant was unknown. As soon as a few U.S. sociocultural anthropologists (Andreas Argyres, myself, John Cole, Steven Sampson, Sam Beck, David Kideckel, Marilyn MacArthur, and Steven Randall, all of whom worked in Romania between 1972 and 1975) began requesting permission to live and work for twelve to eighteen months in rural settlements, the government may have begun to rethink its position; some of us who had worked without extensive surveillance during the 1970s found the climate much more tense by the early 1980s.

12. These constraints did not preclude sound and independent research, however. See the exchange on that question in the Social Science Research Council’s newsletter *Items* for June–September 1994 and March 1995.

13. Not to mention the agenda of the government, as Stephen Cohen (for example) has argued in *Rethinking the Soviet Experience*.

14. Following either 1989 or the emigration of friends prior to that year, I learned of several cases in which people I knew had been urged to collaborate with the police, having been assured that I was a treacherous spy.

15. Surveillance was stepped up in part owing to the regime’s austerity program. During the 1980s, the Romanian government decided to repay the foreign debt ahead of schedule so as to escape the possibilities for foreign leverage that Poland’s debt crisis had made all too apparent.

Squeezing the population to the wall by reducing supplies of fuel and food, the regime hoped to generate enough hard currency to pay off the debt. But under these circumstances, which might lead to rebellion, an American at large was extremely dangerous and had to be closely watched. Adding to this was the suspicion that I was not only a spy but a closet Hungarian (see n. 17).

16. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991.

17. Nor would I say that the matters I discuss here are all there is to say about personal identity in relation to research in Eastern Europe. In my own case, for example, at least as important were problems having to do with my implication in Romanian-Hungarian national conflicts. I became an unwitting party to these because of the ethnic jokes in my first book (*Transylvanian Villagers*), as well as the form of my name, with its Magyar-like first-syllable accent and -y ending. For many years, as a result, Romanians unhappy with one or another aspect of my work have labeled me Hungarian. (My ancestry is French.) It is likely that this imputed identity caused me far more problems than did the climate of the Cold War.

18. That winter was an unusually cold one, with energy shortages in Western Europe that gave the Ceaușescu regime a new idea for securing hard currency with which to pay off their debts: heat was cut back in all apartment buildings, electricity was likewise curtailed, and no one was allowed to drive private automobiles, all the energy savings from these measures being exported to Italy and West Germany for hard currency. Added to the already reduced availability of food (much of it was being exported, giving rise to countless jokes as well as considerable difficulty in procuring a balanced diet), these policies made life in Romania fairly nasty.

19. I believe that the emphasis in constructions of "Communism" shifted between the 1950s and the 1970s-80s, coming to focus more on matters of Communism's failures in the sphere of consumption (long lines in stores, shoddy goods, etc.) rather than on the earlier obsession with "too much state power." In the earlier period, "Communism" was useful in discussing whether the expanded state of the New Deal was too much government. Later, the more pertinent topics came to be the problematic balance between consumption and accumulation—related, I believe, to capitalism's systemic crisis—which socialist economies aptly symbolized.

20. The department of anthropology at Johns Hopkins, where I was fortunate to work beginning in 1977, had been intellectually formed in the early 1970s by Sidney Mintz. Together with Eric Wolf (University of Michigan, then CUNY), he produced the most consistent body of outstanding anthropological work of Marxist inspiration.

21. See Gerald Creed, "The Politics of Agriculture: Sustaining Socialist Sentiment in Rural Bulgaria", forthcoming in *Slavic Review* 54 (1995).

22. See the superb ethnographic work by nonanthropologists such as Joseph Berliner, Michael Burawoy, Maria Csanádi, István Rév, and Michael Urban.

23. I think especially of scholars such as Michael Burawoy, Caroline Humphrey, David Kideckel, Sam Beck, Gail Kligman, John Cole, and Steven Sampson (in addition to myself).

24. See also my "Theorizing Socialism: A Prologue to the 'Transition,'" *American Ethnologist* 18 (1991): 419-39; and chapter 2 of *National Ideology under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceaușescu's Romania* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991).

25. See, for example, Michael Burawoy and Pavel Krotov, "The Soviet Transition from Socialism to Capitalism: Worker Control and Economic Bargaining in the Wood Industry," *American Sociological Review* 57 (1992): 16-38.

26. See Caroline Humphrey, "Creating a Culture of Suspicion: Consumers in Moscow, A Chronicle of Changing Times," in *Worlds Apart*, ed. Daniel Miller (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 43-68.

27. Thanks to Elizabeth Dunn for raising this question, which emerges from the juxtaposition of material such as that in chapters 6 and 7 of this book.

28. Among the works exploring this kind of question are Michael Kennedy and Pauline Gianoplus, "Entrepreneurs and Expertise: A Cultural Encounter in the Making of Post-Communist Capitalism in Poland," *East European Politics and Societies* 8 (1994): 58-94; and Elizabeth Dunn, "Managed Selves: Privatization and the Creation of a New Managerial Class" (typescript, 1993).

29. E. P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," *Past and Present* 38 (1967): 56-97.

30. A further account of the significance of the national idea, for Romania in particular, can be found in my *National Ideology*, chapters 1, 3, and 6.

31. See, for example, Yuri Slezkine, "The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism," *Slavic Review* 53 (1994): 414-52; and Veljko Vujacic and Victor Zaslavsky, "The Causes of Disintegration in the USSR and Yugoslavia," *Telos* 88 (1991): 120-40.

32. For discussion of this point, see C. M. Hann and Elizabeth Dunn, *Political Society and Civil Anthropology* (London: Routledge, 1996).

33. See Louis Dumont, "Religion, Politics, and Society in the Individualistic Universe," *Proceedings of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (1970), pp. 31-41; and Richard Handler, *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988).

34. David Stark, "Recombinant Property in East European Capitalism" a paper presented at the conference on Bureaucratic Capitalism in China and Russia, University of Wisconsin, 1993; and Michael Burawoy, "Industrial Involution: The Russian Road to Capitalism," Havens Lecture I, January 1995. See also Valerie Bunce and Maria Csanádi, "Uncertainty in the Transition: Post-Communism in Hungary," *East European Politics and Societies* 7 (1993): 266-67.

In: Verdery, Katherine. *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996. Introduction.