



Preface

Rupture, End, Death, Closure

Rupture, end, death, closure—different moments in the transformation of regimes. This volume seeks to theorize ruptures in political authority by examining the end of regimes and the mythologization of these ends. Its focus is restricted to a specific subset of regimes that collapsed around the end of World War II (“1945”) and the end of the Cold War (“1989”). For shorthand, we refer to the end of “totalizing” and “patricentric” authority, of an authority that represents itself as the single source and locus of meaning, as the “Death of the Father.”

Accompanied by a web site (<http://cidc.library.cornell.edu/DOF/>), this volume represents and analyzes the end of totalizing, patricentric regimes; the relation of the leaders’ mode of death to this end; and attempts at regime closure following this death. It considers these moments in regime transformation through an analytics of changes in their symbolic forms and affect, which are particularly vital to the processes of democratization of successor regimes. Six anthropologists take up ruptures following the end in four state political forms: Fascist Italy (1943), Nazi Germany (1945), Imperial Japan (1945), and the State Socialist regimes of East Germany (1989), Romania (1989), the Soviet Union (1991), and Yugoslavia (1991). Changes in regime are considered in light of the death of the leader/fathers: Mussolini (1943), Hitler (1945), Hirohito (1989), Honecker (1989), Ceaușescu (1989), Lenin and Stalin (1924 and 1953), and Tito (1991). In all but two cases we begin with a temporal discrepancy between a physical death and a social death. In the case of Italy and Japan, the regime’s death precedes that of its leader; in Germany and Romania, the deaths are coterminous; in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, the death of the leader(s) precedes that of the regime.

How does one know when a regime ends? In a sense, no regime ever really ends, since its traces can be found, or rediscovered and reinvigorated, centuries after its death. An end is not only always disputed but also must be retroactively claimed—and thereafter repeatedly proclaimed, in literature, film, historiography, and commemorative events. The twentieth century was characterized by a proliferation of regime

ends, as dictatorial forms of rule—most often totalizing and patricentric—once eagerly embraced, were then later vigorously and abruptly rejected in Oedipal-like acts of parricide. As we enter a new century, we are witnessing a nearly universal embrace of democratic form, what Churchill called “the worst of all possible systems, the only problem [being] that none of the others is better.” In this context, then, it might be useful to inquire into the kind of transformations out of which democratizing processes are expected to flourish. For this purpose, we have selected extreme cases: the transformations out of some of this century’s most notorious, prototypical totalizing and patricentric regimes. Although we expect our insights to apply to a wide range of regimes in all continents, for the sake of parsimony we have limited our comparisons to the ethnographic examples with which we have developed ethnographic competence as individuals.

Several aporias accompany any attempt to conceptualize regime change. First, although the end is not always coterminous with the death of the leader, a regime rarely ends before the leader dies. Frequently the much sought-after regime closure, a settling of accounts, occurs long after the physical death of the leader. Second, a regime might end without any acknowledgment or recognition of this fact by the participants, perhaps even accompanied by a denial that anything much has changed. Or, alternatively, people might represent themselves as having effected a change in regime when in fact, from any external perspective, that change is difficult to recognize. Hence, self-representation of the end can never be sufficient proof of a change; yet it is an essential condition to take into account in an anthropological inquiry into the end. How do people come to represent themselves as having ended, or departed from, a specific regime of authority? How does this self-representation relate to the death of the leader? What does this self-representation mean for the successor regime?

Our selection of cases for comparison is drawn from two symbolic ruptures—“1945” and “1989”—and from the end of the two macropolitical regime types—“totalitarianisms” of left and right—that were responsible for much of the violence in the twentieth-century Western world. The immediate successor regimes of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany represented themselves as having dramatically changed, as completely repudiating forms of authority that characterized the prior regime, and they adopted democratic forms of government. The successor to Imperial Japan, the third Axis power from World War II (and the one case we take up from outside of Europe), represented itself as both continuous in symbolic form (the emperor system) but also radically changed in its most essential institutional arrangements, which were democratized under American tutelage. What the three successors to former Axis powers had in common was a repudiation of both the death and reproductive cults that had been indispensable to the symbolic forms of the previous regime. In short, at the end they strove for immediate closure. Today this legacy is expressed in the peculiar significance

of the elimination of war-making activities and the death penalty—as a social taboo on killing the other.

The other regimes we consider, the State Socialist type in East-Central Europe, dissolved from 1989 to 1991 in a series of domino effects. For comparative purposes, we have taken up East Germany, Romania, Yugoslavia, and the Soviet Union. The diversity of sociopolitical contexts here, and the short time that has elapsed since the changes, make for difficult comparison. None of these most recent changes (except for East Germany), moreover, have resulted in a total dissolution and repudiation of old structures of authority. Yet each successor regime informs us of a different lesson in the art of ending a regime and in the possibility of closure. Among these variants, the case most difficult to characterize as a rupture, end, or closure, is Yugoslavia. In 1991, there was certainly a rupture. Yugoslavia dissolved into a series of Slavic republics, a change that began with Tito's death in 1979 but also coincided with the collapse of the other socialist regimes in 1989. But the self-representations of what changed varies—as series of ends, new beginnings, regression into a prior fantasized pre-Tito form, or repetition compulsion—depending on the frame used by individuals in the different successor regimes. In short, while much has changed for all of the individuals in the former Yugoslavia, the direction and perceptions of change are not uniform. Only some ends seem to suggest change to a democratic future.

Representing Symbolic Form and Affect

The performance of contemporary political authority includes both subjection to practices, norms, and rules, as well as the exercise of power over forms of subjection. One of our great debts to Foucault is in alerting us to the first part of this equation, to how power is exercised by subjects over themselves through submission to norms of selfhood. But Foucault's effort to move the study of politics away from its obsession with external coercion—"the repressive hypothesis"—has resulted in a relative analytical neglect of conscious attempts to exercise power over forms of subjection. We seek to bring these two aspects of authority together, and to examine how modern authority operates simultaneously on three interconnected levels—domestic, governmental, and transcendent—levels that draw upon both secular and sacred elements.

We also attend to the affective dimensions of political authority, to the efficacy of symbolic forms that are not easily put into textual form, in particular, the ubiquitous use of visual and aural stimuli. Written descriptions of image and sound can approximate visual and aural form, but this translation is partial. Textualization of form is always a re-presentation; it re-cognizes an experience that does not derive its primary efficacy from cognition. The efficacy of many images, especially when combined with sound, is based more on visceral and reactive effects than on rational

understanding of them. Inattention to the efficacy of form, based on the assumption that all experience can be translated into written prose, tends to skew the study of affect toward those aspects that are assimilable to textual strategies. Yet the affective dimension of authority in image and sound, as modern political advertising has successfully demonstrated, may be able to circumvent logical thought or linguistic representation. In short, much as replicating a song melody in social science prose vitiates the melody of its affective force, submitting political imagery to textual operations of understanding (e.g., semiotic or hermeneutic) occludes the primary appeal of the image. That appeal is oriented less to an understanding of its object than to an emotional reaction.

Therefore, this project includes, via a web site, visual and aural components that *complement* the written essays in this volume. They cannot replace the written essays, and therefore they also do not seek to replicate the information provided in these pages. Rather, they seek to maintain the integrity of image and sound so as to comprehend the affective force of authority. By replicating and representing through collage and juxtaposition rather than translating into written discourse, aural and visual experiences elicit reactions to the symbolic forms of authority that better approximate affective force.

History of the Project

The origins of this volume rest with a panel that I organized at the American Anthropological Association (AAA) Meetings in 1995. It was followed by an invited Team Residency of one week in 1996 at the Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Conference Center, and by a second Team Residency of ten days at Bellagio in 1997. The first residency involved work on analysis of individual cases and initial filming for the video; the second enabled us to construct a solid comparative framework for the individual cases and to do filming for a potential video, and made possible the construction of an interactive web site.

The outcome should be viewed as the product of an international dialogue between six anthropologists, a historian, an anthropologist/historian, a composer/media artist, and a digital/electronic archivist. Credit for most of the planning and implementation of the web site goes to Linda Fisher, with initial assistance from Noni Korf Vidal. Moreover, Linda Fisher has been the primary conduit of an international search for aural and visual archival materials. Tone Bringa, Maria Pia Di Bella, Kyung-Koo Han, John S. Schoeberlein, and I were at the initial AAA panel in 1995, as was Nicholas Dirks, who served as discussant. David A. Kideckel, Linda Fisher, and Baber Johansen (as discussant) joined us in 1996, as did Noni Korf Vidal the following year.

On a Personal Note

I might say a few words about my own motivations for this project. Having grown up in the placid, peaceful Midwestern United States, my own experiences with authority are simple in comparison to those analyzed here. It is perhaps, above all, my confrontation with that difference, between the triviality of my own experience and the trauma of the other, that has spurred me on in this project. In retrospect, I could trace the origin of my interest back to the question of what changed in Germany after Hitler's death, after the end of Nazism. But that is too easy and too abstract.

Although the question of the relation between the political and personal and the authority of the Father surfaced continually during fieldwork in Germany in the 1980s, it beckoned to me again shortly after my own father's death in 1995, at which time I was trying to register two other events. One had to do with the major changes in State Socialist political regimes of 1989 (which I had been studying ethnographically since 1986). Here they were, all within a few months of each other, collapsing, disintegrating, transforming themselves out of existence. Were these quick turnabouts in regime, these sudden disappearances, real? How could I trust what I was seeing? Are there any telltale signs that signal the actuality of a change?

The other event was a visit in 1994 to two of my closest friends from my undergraduate days, that is, twenty years after we had completed our degrees together. What struck me was that they had not only changed very little, but also seemed to be reversing earlier changes and consciously repeating the lives of their own parents about whom they had been critical some twenty years prior. Marriage, children, private homes—they were following the sequence like a beaver builds a dam, as if preprogrammed into the American way. They seemed to have abandoned all the utopic interests, which at one point we had shared and to which I continued to cling—or rather, they exchanged these interests for a more mundane vision.

If I experienced the one event, continuity in the lives of my friends, as mere loss of utopia, I experienced the other event, the death of my own father, also as liberation. It did not just end something for me, for the rupture in our relationship was well over a decade old. But his death provided closure to these other losses for which he had somehow been the locus. And it enabled me to begin an examination of the "Death of the Father."