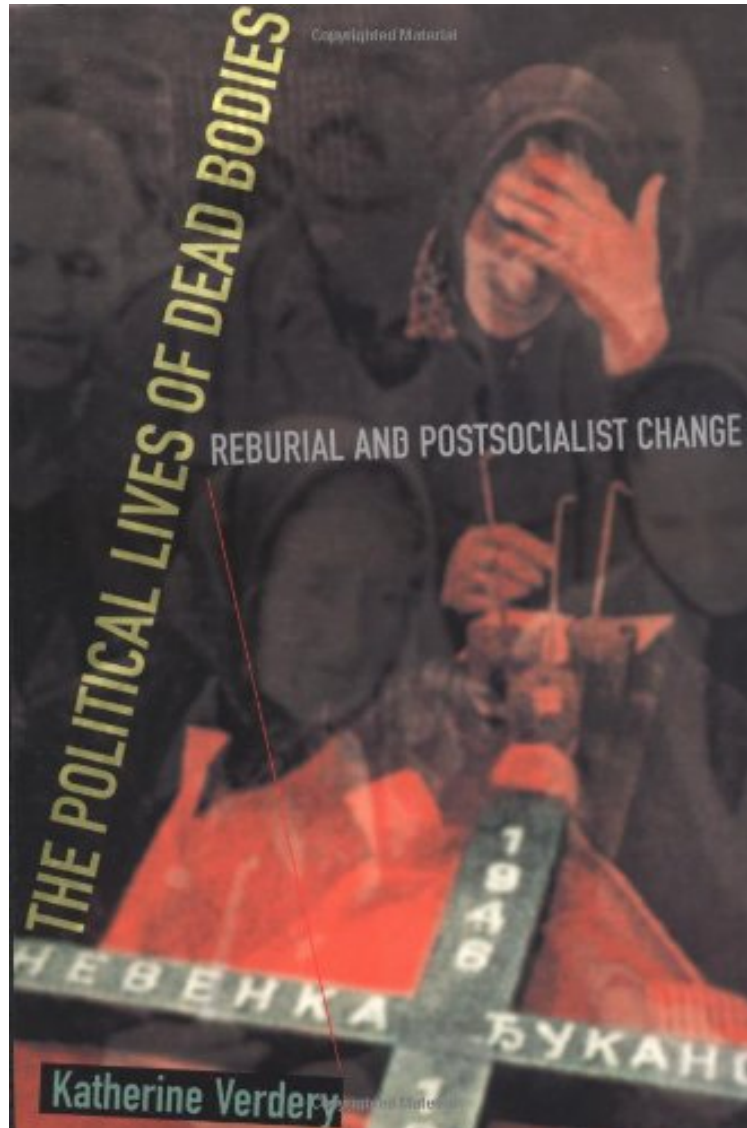


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## The Political Lives of Dead Bodies

*Katherine Verdery*

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#448561 in Books Katherine Verdery 2000-09-15 Original language: English PDF # 1 9.00 x .50 x 5.901, .63  
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**Katherine Verdery : The Political Lives of Dead Bodies** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Political Lives of Dead Bodies:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Four Stars By J. de Verney A thought-provoking and entertaining read. 17 of 17 people found the following review helpful. A Lively, Readable Book By A Customer I'm surprised to read the two reviews above, obviously written by readers who missed the point. The book is full of lively, concrete detail

written in extremely readable prose. (Anyone who finds this kind of writing difficult to read obviously hasn't read much in the social sciences lately. Go read something by Homi Babha or Judith Butler, sweethearts, and come back and tell me Verdery uses too much jargon!) I found the particular cases--particularly the one on Inochentie Micu--a remarkable window into understanding why the postcommunist transition hasn't worked out according to the blueprints of neoliberal planners. It says a remarkable amount about the hopes, fears, and passions of people in the region, none of which are taken into account by those who seek to apply bloodless ideal-typical models to a region with an often bloody history.<sup>5</sup> of 19 people found the following review helpful. very poor By A Customer it is a real pity that the editors didn't choose to publish the whole of Bickerton's review -- there we would, for example, see that Bickerton actually hopes "for a sequel" in order to have the book actually say something one could appreciate. this title certainly doesn't do justice to Verdery's otherwise excellent academic record. it is written in haste, with a complete lack of attention and needed careful reading of details. at the end we get an impression that she is making fun of other people's misery. it was obviously a too difficult task for her aims: the analysis is highly superficial, as if she aspired more to amuse than really teach. but dead bodies is something I find difficult to laugh about, no matter how pathetic the circumstances of their manipulations are.

Since 1989, scores of bodies across Eastern Europe have been exhumed and brought to rest in new gravesites. Katherine Verdery investigates why certain corpses--the bodies of revolutionary leaders, heroes, artists, and other luminaries, as well as more humble folk--have taken on a political life in the turbulent times following the end of Communist Party rule, and what roles they play in revising the past and reorienting the present. Enlivening and invigorating the dialogue on postsocialist politics, this imaginative study helps us understand the dynamic and deeply symbolic nature of politics and how it can breathe new life into old bones.

.com In *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies*, Katherine Verdery tries to jazz up political science by adding a dash of anthropology, examining the ways in which political upheavals are often accompanied by incidents involving the corpses of former leaders or other cultural heroes. "Dead bodies," she says, "have properties that make them particularly effective political symbols. They are thus excellent means for accumulating something essential to political transformation: symbolic capital." Unfortunately, much of the inherent interest in matters such as the return of Transylvanian Catholic bishop Inochentie Micu's bones to his homeland more than two centuries after his death is crushed under the weight of Verdery's prose. By all rights, the role of historical personages in shaping nationalist myths ought to be a fascinating subject, deserving of analysis more dynamic than this: "Because corpses suggest the lived lives of complex human beings, they can be evaluated from many angles and assigned perhaps contradictory virtues, vices, and intentions." (Simon Schama's *Landscape and Memory*, for example, discusses several cases of the intersection of nationalism, historical memory, and natural landscape in a lively, engaging style perfectly accessible to a broad audience.) And although Verdery presents her work as a counterpoint to "the rationalistic and dry sense of politics that so many political analysts employ," readers--even those with patience for vehemently academic writing--may ask themselves who hasn't figured out by the end of the 1990s that culture shapes politics in chaotic and unpredictable ways. --Ron Hogan  
From *Library Journal*  
In this intriguing book, anthropologist Verdery by her own admission a student of dead-body politics points out that some corpses have lived interesting lives above all in Eastern Europe since the fall of communism. Her central question is, What is it about a corpse that seems to invite its use in politics? In the case of her chosen region, the answer is frequently, Plenty. While citing the examples of Nicholas II, Lenin, Imre Nagy, and others, she concentrates most attention on the post-death adventures of a Transylvanian bishop unknown outside Romania and little known inside. She freights this choice with a heavy significance whose justification is not readily apparent. Verdery's profiles of these exhumations of sacred and profane figures and their posthumous travels should appeal to an academic audience in anthropology and sociology.  
Robert H. Johnston, McMaster Univ., Hamilton, Ontario  
Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. A pithy, and highly readable, example of current anthropological approaches to national-level politics. The emergence of such a focus on national-level processes is one of the most important developments in the anthropological study of politics today. (David I. Kertzer *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*) Unusual and provocative... designed to provoke discussion and debate, rather than close it. (Slavic and East European Journal) Verdery certainly deserves praise for having opened up an intriguing (and understudied) topic. The book leaves us hoping for a sequel. (Derek Bickerton *The New York Times Book Review*) For those jaded by a view of nationalis as 'a matter of territorial borders, state-making, "constructionism", or resource competition,' Verdery's work offers welcome refreshment. (Social Anthropology) Were Verdery not one of the premier anthropologists and specialists on eastern Europe, most readers might not take seriously a book that the author herself half-jokingly calls a study in political necrophilia... But this exploration... is entirely serious. (Foreign Affairs) The affairs of Eastern Europe, and especially those of the lands that were once Yugoslavia, now hold the attention of the entire world. Verdery gives readers a new angle of vision on this troubled region. (Carl L. Bankston III *Commonweal*) Writing about a topic involving corpses and reburials presents its own challenges, and Verdery has mastered them admirably. Neither lurid nor cynical, neither too dry nor too sanctimonious, her prose is on the whole

matter-of-factly, but not without lighthearted moments. (Gerhard Sonnert Canadian of Studies in Nationalism)