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THE DEATH OF THE PEOPLE

In Memory of Elleni Centime Zeleke

ABSTRACT
Death, Derrida suggests in *Politics of Friendship*, is a question of numbers. Yet, death is also always "mine," which is why Heidegger can say that "the dying of Others is not something which we experience in a genuine sense; at most we are always just 'there alongside'." Between my death and the death of everyone, between the one and the infinitely many, I have found myself wondering about a different measure, a more limited and distinct grammatical — or arithmetic — register, in which is raised the question of *our* death. The death, not of humanity, nor quite the death of all others, but the death of the people, the death of *we who count* and count for and on each other (or imagine we do). This is where Derrida's calculability or incalculability of death intervenes at its most opaque, it seems to me. Somewhere between the one and the very many, the universal many of humanity, between what Heidegger calls "mineness" (which, when it comes to death, remains a *possibility*) and the death of (all) others, there would be found *the death of we, the people*.

KEYWORDS
death, people, Derrida, Heidegger, numbers

The grammar of death — the possibility of the impossible — is a complex affair. The dead, each already hidden under the banality of that collective noun, are, after all, *many*. Infinitely too many. Or perhaps it was always the *arithmetic* of death. A question of number, as Jacques Derrida strikingly phrased it.

> Are we sure we can distinguish between death (so-called natural death) and killing, *then* between murder *tout court* (any crime against life, be it purely "animal life," as one says, thinking one knows where the living begins and ends) and homicide, *then* between homicide and genocide (first of all in the person of each individual representing the genus, *then* beyond the individual: at what number does a genocide begin, genocide *per se* or its metonymy? And why should the *question of number* persist at the center of these reflections? What is a *génos*, and why would genocide concern only a species — a race, an ethnic group, a

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> nation, a religious community — of "the human race"?), *then* between homicide and — we are told this would be altogether different matter — the crime against humanity, *then* between war, the crime of war — which, we are told, would be something else again — and the crime against humanity. (Derrida 1997: xi-xii)

A question of number. Yet death, death itself, as it were, seems to remain, if it remains, a singular and individual affair, the affair of individuals. Whether examined by philosophers, researched by psychologists and anthropologists, or taught to children, death is dominated by the singular, by the number one.[1] We — for it is nevertheless a "we" that insists on speaking the undisputed truth that all of us die — respond to and care about each and every single death. It is a "we" as well, a collective that, for the most part, gathers in mourning and in remembrance of each among the dead. We remember the dead — and with that word we oscillate still between the individual and the collective. And though Derrida points to the limits of that knowledge, we do know something about collective death, about mass death.[2] We remember it, yet death, which is itself an emblematically singular term or concept, continues to be dominated by the singular.[3] Ultimately — and the word seems to make sense here — death, the death we do not know and do not experience, that death is, it has always been, first of all "my own." Martin Heidegger famously summarizes this secular tradition, whereby, "in so far as it 'is' at all," death is that which, "by its very essence, . . . is in every case mine" (Heidegger 1962: 284; Derrida 1993: 22). The admittedly inescapable, individual and personal character of death, of each irreplaceable death, makes its plural declension unlikely, implausible, even disrespectful, not to say, obscene. Besides, Heidegger continues, "the dying of Others is not something which we experience in a genuine sense; at most we are always just 'there alongside'" (282).

We know, of course, that, for the entirety of history and well beyond the recorded archives, many have died. Generations upon generations, across centuries and millennia, have vanished into oblivion, carried by or unto death, with only very few among them making it into, or managing to remain inscribed in our collective memories. We know, therefore, that *others* die. We know that *we all die*. Still, the reasons are perhaps not so obvious to debate Heidegger's assertion about the death of others ("not something which we experience in

1 Just as it concerns individuals, death remains mostly singular, the limit of an equally singular life. In his own explorations, Derrida attends, with Martin Heidegger, to the disciplines of death, mentioning "the work of the historian, the biologist, the psychologist, and the theologian of death" (Derrida 1993: 80). Nevertheless, Derrida makes clear that "concerning the threshold of death," it is a certain "we" that is engaged, "we are engaged here toward a certain possibility of the impossible" (11)

2 In her remarkable book, Edith Wyschogrod (1985) insists on the historical novelty of what she calls "man-made mass death."

3 "What forms a future, and consequently what truly comes about, is always the singular death—which does not mean that death does not come about in the community [*dans la communauté*] . . . But communion is not what comes of death [*l'avenir de la mort*], no more than death is the simple perpetual past of community" (Nancy 1991: 13).

a genuine sense"), the death of all others. Is not death, once again, the most individual of events? Does not the death of each and every individual count, and count, first of all, for the first among all concerned? Is death not the final limit to which each and every one of us is first and solitarily exposed? "The loneliness of the dying," is the way the great sociologist Norbert Elias had it, who included "the denial of death" in that odd confrontation: "Others die, I do not" (Elias 2001: 1; and see Becker 1973). Which might explain why Elias insists that "it is not actually death itself that arouses fear and terror, but the anticipatory image of death." Which is to say, of *my* death, as Elias makes amply clear. "If I were here and now to become painlessly dead, that would not be in the least terrifying for me" (44; and see Kearl 1989). The knowledge and the denial of death, even the terror of death, persists as being exclusively, *individually* ours, each and everyone of us. Yet, it is no less true, as Elias clearly recognizes, that all of us, not just each of us, but all of us (as a *species* this time) are facing death and, ever more plausibly now, even total extinction. Together.

Between my death and the death of every one, between the one and the infinitely many, I find myself wondering about a different measure, a more limited and distinct grammatical — or arithmetic — register, in which is raised the question of *our* death. The death, not of humanity, nor quite the death of all others, but the death of the people, the death of *we who count* and count for and on each other (or imagine we do). As Marc Crépon formulates it, it is a question of "what kind of political community is suggested or excluded by the thought of death," and more specifically, by the fact of death, to be distinguished from its manner or commemoration (Crépon 2013: 11, 41). This is where Derrida's calculability or incalculability of death intervenes at its most opaque, it seems to me. Somewhere between the one and the many, the universal many of humanity, between what Heidegger calls "mineness" (which, when it comes to death, remains a *possibility*) and the death of (all) others (of which Heidegger does write in the third person plural, as does Emmanuel Levinas too, after him), there would be found — as only death is inevitably found — *the death of we, the people.*

And when I say "death" here, I do not mean to foreground violent death, violence and destruction. I rather mean to leave open a different plural and a distinct plurality, a plurality of ends, you might say, just as Heidegger did — and Derrida as well — when they sought to distinguish, in their reflections on death, between end and completion, conclusions or modes of ending, between dying or perishing, ways of leaving or of disappearing (Derrida 1993: 31). I shall insist that the death of the people is not necessarily a violent event, a violent end, not always the result of a war (a civil or uncivil war), nor of a genocide. It might instead follow the lines of what Hobbes (1996) and Rousseau (2002), among others, described as the dissolution of the body politic, or else of what W.E.B. Du Bois called, in "The Conservation of Races," a different, assimilationist trajectory, a strange "salvation," even, whereby we — and it is, again, of a collective that Du Bois unequivocally speak, of course — we, then, would

demonstrate "our being able to lose our race identity in the commingled blood of the nation" and reach for "self-obliteration" (Du Bois 2007: 183-84).

At once obvious and impossible, spoken — as lip service, feeble consolation, or resigned *constat* — but largely unreflected, our death (Nietzsche writes, but differently, of "our greatest danger"), the death of that contained and proximate collective, the death of we, the people, seems to have escaped our attention, remaining largely unthought.[4] And rightly so, perhaps, as historians and anthropologists of death and of "cultures of death" have amply showed, along with Pericles of Athens, that the collective stands rather — how could it not? — on the side of life, on the side of survival and of commemoration, on the side of life *with, after, or against* death, but always there where "the living reconfigure the social world" (Engelke 2019: 31). The collective stands on the side of the eternal, in other words, guaranteeing (or aspiring to guarantee) the immortality of memory, preserving that which, those whom, ephemerality carries into the mists of time past. And let me underscore that there is no need for the people or the community to be understood as "organic" — far from Dinesh D'Souza (2018), Pheng Cheah (2003) also evokes the death of the nation — in order to recognize that it can come about historically, it can be born or founded. The people or the community can even be, as Jean-Luc Nancy reminds us, a "community of death," a "community of death — or of the dead" [*une communauté de mort — ou de morts*] (Nancy 1991: 13).

Yet, if it is true that each death must be resolutely confronted, if each and every individual must meet the end alone (do they? do we? do we always?), I ask again whether there does not remain a particular dimension, which registers neither at the level of an individual experience (assuming that "my death" could ever be an experience), nor at the level of a truth universally acknowledged for all of mankind, that inescapable fact to which we — and I do mean, we — are apparently resigned (there are those who rebel), namely, the general, collective fate of our species, the final gathering of all nations and, indeed, the end of all living beings. Somewhere in between, between "the world and me" (Coates 2015, borrowing from Du Bois 2007), are there not innumerable, if smaller, collectives, families, tribes, or nations, communities who speak and think, in some manner of speech, in the first person plural? "What collectivity," after all, "what community, are we talking about?" (Crépon 2013: 110). Such is what I mean to evoke by writing of *our death*. It is of such death, in any case, that I want to speak as it might indeed give us pause. It should at the very least

4 The translation of Philippe Ariès's book (1981) may provisionally suffice to illustrate. Rightly described as "the classic history of western attitudes toward death over the last one thousand years," *The Hour of Our Death* translates the original French, *L'homme devant la mort,* or "man facing death." The book is a cultural study and obviously engages with collective attitudes, but it remains focused on death exclusively in the singular, the death of the individual. This is not quite sufficiently rendered in the English, but the French original, which begins with "nous mourrons tous" [we all die] goes on to thematize "la mort de soi" [the death of the self] and "la mort de toi [the death of you, rendered as 'the death of the other']."

serve as an access point, an alternative or shorthand for the phrase I chose for a title. Such is my resolute concern, or should I say — should *we* say — our resolute concern: the death of the people, the death of "we, the people." My aim is to meander toward and around that mortal concern, to initiate a moment or movement of sober contemplation, of collective — I would not want too quickly to say popular or populist, racial or national — reflection. *Mementote mori!*

Today, of course, not even the inordinate ambiguities of the word "people" could distract from the scandal, the sheer obscenity even, of the question I am raising. Is the people mortal? Of course, peoples are mortal, whatever form they have or give themselves; whatever form their life and death (*our* life and death) takes. Surely, we all know this. Peoples, small and large, groups of people, certainly have died or disappeared. As I write, the Palestinian people are dying under the multifarious assault of impossibly large bombs and innumerable bullets, under subjugation and immurement, famine and scarcity, not to omit constant settler violence, and the threat of more violence and destruction. As are, to an always incommensurable extent, the people of Ukraine and the people of Haiti, of Kashmir, of Sudan and of Ethiopia. Black people continue to be murdered with unending impunity by the police or else are left to die by the European Union's literal (and not only littoral) death-grip over and beyond the Mediterranean. By Europe and its proxies. On every continent, "global subalterns" and Indigenous peoples are under constant and ever evolving threats, lethal threats along with clear and present dangers, as they still await acknowledgment of the genocidal wars and enslaving or extracting policies that have been unleashed upon them for centuries. They are the targets of extreme violence, still facing what Denise Ferreira da Silva calls "the horizon of death" that is the global color line (Ferreira da Silva 2007: 34).[5] Elsewhere, or not, the COVID pandemic, which was just now raging, exacerbated collective injustice the world over, along with equally obscene inequalities across communities in life and in death.

Not all people or peoples die in the same way, of course, nor all at the same time and in the same frightening and sudden number (the differential of life, and not only of medical, environmental and political conditions). But unlike the death of God, the death of nature, the death of the father or that of the author (the news of which having failed to reach as widely as some might think), the death of the people, the often violent or painful end of *many*, the destruction of cities and the collapse of states, the gradual and unspectacular disappearance of empires or of entire collectives, seem better known, all-too well-known, in fact. Machiavellian, Spenglerian and other "organic," civilizational

5 For Ferreira da Silva, "the racial is the productive tool of reason that writes the 'I' and its 'others' before the horizon of death," not "the declaration of death of the 'other of modernity'" (2007: 69). Nevertheless, in globality, "political subjects always already stand before the horizon of death and, as the foundational statement of race relations establishes, the historical destiny of the (affectable) others of Europe is obliteration" (239, and see 267).

conceptions aside, it has been so for a very long time.[6] True, it is only quite recently that Raphael Lemkin's contribution to the languages of the law, and of our everyday now, came to name the particular and gruesome form of a people's death, to name genocide the violent and murderous death of a people — and still a question of number. Arguably, though, history, the writing of history, tells us of little else than the death of peoples and collectives. Civilizations (Minoan, Mesopotamian, Mayan) collapsed, empires (Roman, "Aztec," Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman) fell apart, languages vanished (Latin, Sanskrit, along with less famous others) and peoples, ancient and modern, indeed died or disappeared (the Phoenicians, the Etruscans, the Taino). Though often extreme, the violence involved varied, as did the speed of the "death event."[7] And yet, even when granting the singularity and value of each and every individual death, history (and now, statistics as well) forces us to acknowledge that the death of many, the death, the mass-death, of specific peoples, may be neither rare, nor modern, nor, indeed, singular. But then neither are war and genocide the only way of death, nor have these always been total or complete. After the death event, surviving remnants may yet constitute a people — the same or another, speaking the same language, practicing the same rituals or producing the same artifacts of culture, belonging to the same territory — or not. Some peoples, in any case, appear to have exited the stage of history with no more than a whimper, the sheer passing of time — less the matter of fact slide into oblivion than the unregistered or un-archived event, the non-fact, of their disappearance.[8] Still, much as there is that we shall never know, we have learned that Sodom, like Atlantis and later Troy, was destroyed; Carthage fell and Rome — the *Eternal* City — did too; as did Jerusalem. Later, Yugoslavia followed the Soviet Union in collapsing and disappearing (Davis 2012; Kennedy 1989). The peoples of these cities and states — and of many a kingdom or empire — vanished from the earth, even if not all of them died a painful or terrifying death at the exact time of collective destruction. The death of a people, then. But what is a people?

6 "[L]ike all other natural things that are born and grow rapidly, states that grow quickly cannot sufficiently develop their roots, trunks and branches, and will be destroyed by the first chill wind of adversity," is one such view offered by Machiavelli (2019, ch. vii, 23); writing elsewhere of Sparta, Rome, and Venice, Machiavelli recalls more generally that "all things of men are in motion and cannot stay steady, they must either rise or fall" (Machiavelli 1996, I.6, 23). A good historical and scholarly survey along with different views of social collapse and destruction can be found in Tainter 1988.

7 I borrow the phrase "death event" from Edith Wyschogrod's profound meditation (1985). Much of what I write in this essay is inspired by Wyschogrod, even if I shall keep a certain distance from her specific arguments. The "death event," should this have to be said, bears in no way on debates that distinguish death — always individual death, in any case — as event and death as process (Belshaw 2009: 7-9).

8 "Genocide is not a fact," writes Marc Nichanian (2010), asking us to think about the factuality of the fact, its institution by the historical disciplines, and its understanding, manipulation, and premeditated effacement by the perpetrators.

What Is a People?

Raising a proximate question, Ernest Renan — of all people — sought to clear "the most dangerous misunderstandings," and "the most disastrous mistakes" involved in its treatment, one whereby, all-too often and today still, "race is confused with nation and a sovereignty analogous to that of truly existing peoples [*des peuples réellement existants*] is attributed to ethnographic or, rather, linguistic groups" (Renan 2018: 247).[9] Are we speaking of peoples, then, of nations, or of states? Renan, whose contributions to the idea of race and to the brutal practices of racism are hardly negligible, wanted here exclusively to understand the nation. And for him, nations, those properly called nations, "are something fairly new in history" (248). Renan broached the matter by deploying a richer and more diverse lexicon for the explicit purpose of distinguishing (perhaps rather discriminating) between "the vast *agglomerations* of men found in China, Egypt or ancient Babylonia" and "the *tribes* of the Hebrews and the Arabs, the *city* as it existed in Athens or Sparta, the *assemblies* of the various territories in the Carolingian Empire." Some "*communities*," Renan clarified, "are without a *patrie* and are maintained by a *religious bond* alone" (Renan here mentions "the Israelites and the Parsees"). Such collectives are by no means the same as "*nations*, such as France, England and the majority of the modern European sovereign states," nor should they be confused, it seems, with "*confederations* after the fashion of Switzerland and America, and *kinships*, such as those that *race*, or rather language, establishes between the different branches of the Teutons or the different branches of the Slavs" [*les différentes branches de Germains, les différentes branches de Slaves*] (247; emphases added). Having announced his aversion to "the slightest confusion regarding the meaning of words," Renan locates his inquiry at a definite, but general, level choosing to linger in a register that belong neither to ethnography, nor quite to sociology or political philosophy. For better or for worse, Renan refers rather to "modes of groupings [*modes de groupements*]," or simply to "groupings."[10] And he insists that "each of these groupings" (agglomerations and cities, tribes, races, religions, etc.) "exists, or has existed, and cannot be confused with another except with the direst of consequences." At no point, though, does Renan single out the word "people," nor does he explore its differential specificity with regard to nation, race, or religion, or any of the "modes of groupings" he evokes and interrogates.

For myself, I have long found it difficult to suffer any of Ernest Renan's agendas, scholarly, national, colonial, or other. Yet, I cannot but feel partial to the notion that there is more to be said about the vocabulary we use, the categorical divisions we invoke still when designating "groupings" and other human (and nonhuman) collectives and the form they established or refrained from establishing for themselves ("society against the state," to mention Pierre Clastres's felicitous phrase [1989]). In my own concern with language, some

9 More recently, John McClelland (1989) attended to the history of a different "confusion" (and more often than not, equation) between "people" and "crowd," "mob," or "masses."

10 The translation I am using has "types of groupings" for "modes de groupements" (247).

of which, for my sins, I did learn from Ernest Renan, I have been pushed to marvel at the significance of positions and debates that adamantly distinguish, with little philological care, worlds and realms, that affirm or dispute the difference between religion and race, between "politics" (etymologically, like *state,* a Greek term) and "society" (like "nation," a Latinate word), or again between "politics" and "religion" or "culture" (Latin, again).[11] The problem is not eased nor diminished by registering the unequal impact of "intra-linguistic translations" (as Jakobson had it) between Greek and Greek, say, between "politics" and "economics," or else between "ethics" and "politics." Renan's phrase ("modes of grouping") hardly resolves the question, nor does it assist us in defining a collective, *etically* or *emically*, should we wish to do so according to the lexicons and methods of anthropology, history, politics, law, or philosophy. Unlike Keguro Macharia's "we-formations," Renan's "modes of grouping" cannot yet be trusted to function as "wake formations" (Macharia 2015, and see Sharpe 2016). But they might suspend the wholesale acceptance of divisions and distributions drawn from all-too privileged, insufficiently interrogated linguistic traditions, contexts or disciplines and render visible the path to a different inquiry with regard to people or peoples — another Latinate term too, to be sure, but one that, in English, covers an inordinate range, while holding a peculiar charge, as we shall see.

Now, the meaning of the "human" has long been conceived in its defining rapport to mortality and to death, a rapport often deemed "ethical" or "religious" (now largely monopolized by state bureaucracy and corporate profit, by medicalized governmentality) (Jankelévitch 1977; Dastur 2015). I want to propose that our understanding of *people* — as a signifier of "modes of grouping," which may loosely include those Renan designated as tribes and families, religions and races, agglomerations, cities and nations, and even those groupings to which we casually refer in English with expressions like "some people" or "my people" and even "these people"[12] — might be enriched, however darkly, by what Derrida calls "une politique de la mort," and by the question: Is the people mortal?

El pueblo unido jamás sera vencido!

The scandal I mentioned earlier is no way diminished by what I have said so far, nor do I intend for it to be. I am obviously not calling for the death of people, any people. But we know, do we not, that peoples are mortal, all-too mortal. We know this because we ridicule (though we do not *refute*) the Aryan

11 Such questions have been raised before, of course see e.g., Benveniste (1974), on *polis* and *civitas,* and Elias (2000) on *civilisation* and *Kultur*.

12 Carita Klippi (2006) deploys disciplinary registers, writing illuminatingly of the people as a collective noun, a "concept [that] oscillates between the social and moral concept of *populace*, the political concept of *nation* and the economic concept of *working class* . . . [*the people*] is also an ensemble of individuals who together constitute a community whose extent may vary" (359).

claim to "a thousand-year Reich," but less so "the Eternal City" or — from the sublime — the current American postal stamp that proclaims "Forever."[13] We nonetheless recall that, in their modern instantiation, peoples — which is to say, in this most popular formulation, *nations* — "often loom out of an immemorial past, and still more important, glide into a limitless future" (Anderson 2006: 11-12; Abulof 2015). Stathis Gourgouris (2021) puts it well, therefore, when he writes that "nations come into historical consciousness precisely by articulating their own self-interpretation while relegating to damned oblivion the historical time of their nonexistence" (1).[14] Which is only to say, in short, that "no nation can imagine its death" (15).

Can it imagine its birth?

In his reading of the American Declaration of Independence, Jacques Derrida laid out the paradoxes of the birth of a people (Derrida did not speak of "The Birth of a Nation," but who could forget it?), of a people giving birth to itself (Derrida 1986; Barrett, Field and Scott 2022). Cognizant of that other declaration, whereby sovereignty was attributed to the nation "precisely because it has already inscribed this element of birth in the very heart of the political community" (Agamben 1998: 128),[15] Derrida underscores the well-rehearsed concerns and preoccupations of peoples with births and beginnings, with foundations and with institutions, with origins, old or new. He attends, however, to the paradoxes, indeed, aporias, thereby entailed.

> Here then is the "good people" who engage themselves and engage only themselves in signing, in having their own declaration signed. The "we" of the declaration speaks "in the name of the people."
>
> But this people does not exist. They do *not* exist as an entity, it does *not* exist, *before* this declaration, not *as such.* If it gives birth to itself, as free and independent subject, as possible signer, this can hold only in the act of the signature. The signature invents the signer. This signer can only authorize him- or herself to sign once he or she has come to the end [*parvenu au bout*], if one can say this, of his or her own signature, in a sort of fabulous retroactivity. That first signature authorizes him or her to sign. This happens every day, but it is fabulous . . . (Derrida 1986: 10).

13 "One does not dare think out Nazism," wrote Jean-François Lyotard (1988), "because it has been beaten down like a mad dog, by a police action, and not in conformity with the rules accepted by its adversaries' genres of discourse (argumentation for liberalism, contradiction for Marxism). It has not been refuted" (106).

14 Referring to Anderson, Gourgouris explains that "*an imagined community always imagines itself*. In so doing, however, it must occlude this act by instituting itself as an ontological presence that has, somehow or other, always already existed. hence the 'origin' of the timeless and perpetual Nation" (18).

15 Agamben is commenting on the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, and he goes on to explain that "the nation—the term derives etymologically from *nascere* (to be born)—thus closes the open circle of man's birth" (128).

What Derrida makes manifest in his fabulous reading is the significance and the difficulty of beginnings, their impossible possibility, if one might evoke an already familiar turn of phrase. But it is of course well-understood that peoples multifariously preoccupy themselves with narrating their (often immemorial) origins, theorizing their birth or foundation, signing or countersigning — enshrining — the establishment of a dynasty or of a covenant. Aware of the fabulous metamorphosis whereby they move from nonexistence toward an eternal life of sorts, peoples rarely conceive of an end to that fable (though in his famous Funeral Oration, as reported by Thucydides, it is remarkable that Pericles speaks not of a future, much less of immortality, but rather of the *memory* of Athens). When they do, we might expect an account of the end of the world, not, as Ernesto de Martino wrote, the end of *a* world (2023: 6). Births and beginnings, then. Such would be the stuff of political thought and imagination. And yet, however lightly or fleetingly, what Derrida is nevertheless doing here is to evoke an end, the end of a signature, yes, but also the end of a trajectory and, perhaps, the end of all things or at least the end of a signatory ("once he or she has come to the end [*parvenu au bout*], if one can say this"), an end that has as much to do with birth, therefore, as with death, with absence and nonexistence. As Derrida puts it elsewhere, there is a sending off and a destination, a dissemination of signs, words and sentences according to "the precipitative supposition of a *we* that, by definition and by destination, has not yet arrived to itself. Not before, at the earliest, the end and the arrival of this sentence whose very logic and grammar are improbable" (Derrida 1997: 77). Derrida is speaking here of writing, after all, and of a "fabulous retroactivity." So, is the people, we, the people, mortal?

A Question of Number

In his remarkable study of the "mortality and morality of nations," Uriel Abulof (2015) proposes to consider *small* nations and the peculiar relation they have, Abulof argues, to the possibility of their collective demise (Abulof defines mortality as "the awareness of the inevitability, availability, and indeterminacy of death," an individual and collective awareness that is countered, he says, by "symbolic immortality"[3]). Abulof finds particular inspiration in Milan Kundera's description of "small nations," a notion that, Abulof insists with Kundera, is not quantitative, even if it is in fact the case that the three collectives he attends to (French Canadians, Afrikaners, and Israeli Jews) are not only among numerically smaller national collectives, but are in fact marked, in their historical experience and consciousness, as minorities (Anidjar 2023).

What Abulof elaborates might be described as a series of deaths and resurrections (one might also call them metamorphoses). The convulsive history of each of the three groups includes numerous moments of existential crisis, of existential danger, whereby the very *perpetuation* of the group, the basic nature of their collective identity and political existence or future, is put into question. And in a few spectacular cases, the collective is so significantly transformed

that one might easily consider that the collective did, in fact die, as some very much argued. Consider a nation, then, whose very name is changed (multiple times in the case of French Canadians, who went from French to *Canadiens* to French Canadians and later *Québecois*). Or whose existence, once defined as and by religion (Catholicism), no longer understands itself in such terms (French Canadians, again), whose national belonging shifts radically (replacing, in fact, Canadian with Québecois). Or else, a collective who loses its sovereignty and, if not its right, its capacity for self-determination and whose political existence subsequently takes a completely new form in a transformed political arrangement (Afrikaners). Contrast these cases now with the third collective, Israeli Jews, who today "regard the Jewish state as indispensable to their collective survival," consider that "it is not possible to abandon one's Jewishness" and self-consciously proclaim that the death of the people *will never happen* ("Masada will not fall again") (186, 303; and see Zerubavel 1995). This is a people whose very name, as well as form, has changed over the course of history (from Hebrews to Israelites and Judean to Jews and Israelis), whose self-understanding hovers between the religious, the ethnic (or racial) and the national, and whose historical consciousness is greatly determined by the possibility of disappearance and annihilation, a possibility that was tragically realized under the Nazi regime. For this nation, abandoning what defines it would be impossible. It would be tantamount to annihilation.

It might be time to recall that, contending with the death of the people was never the privilege of small nations. No less, no less towering a figure than Abraham Lincoln, was indeed "imagining the end" (Lear 2022: 87).[16] The end of the people. Yet, Lincoln seems to have been of two minds, to have considered at least two distinct options. "If destruction be our lot," Lincoln predicted on January 27, 1838, "we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of freemen, we must live through all time, or die by suicide" (Lincoln 1989a: 29). Lincoln — who kept assuming the first-person plural — is already of two minds, since he clearly establishes an alternative. Either "we must live through all time," *or* we must face *our death.* Yet, Lincoln is better known for a later iteration (November 19, 1863, to be precise), one that has indeed proved much more memorable.

> It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us — that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion — that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain — that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom — and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth. (Lincoln 1989b: 536)

16 Lear attends primarily to questions of mourning, *after* the end, as it were, and illuminates in intriguing ways the context of Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address." Lear joins Lincoln in his valuation, adding reasons "why it is so important that a government of the people, by the people, and for the people should not perish from the Earth" (90). Lear affirms this while consciously considering the mass extinction looming upon us all, something that can hardly be understood as a mere contradiction.

To be sure, Lincoln (whose own "death contained the redemptive promise of national immortality" [Faust 2008: 158]) is here considering the *government* of the people rather than the people "itself" as mortal. How to be certain of the difference? After Renan, one might speak of that "mode of grouping" we call the state (though Renan also recalled "confederations such as exist in Switzerland or in America"), that strange and oddly amorphous form that has been perceived alternatively as the protector and the destroyer of the people (Nandy 2003). Surely, the oscillation between the collective we, "we, the people," and "the government of the people" complicates the question at hand. We might want to ask again about the subject of death, about the subject of collective death. Is it the people or the state (Anidjar 2017)? Renan wanted to distinguish, there where we still have not determined how and whether states and city-states, tribes and nations, races and religions and indeed peoples can vanish, have vanished, and have — sometimes — left survivors of sorts. If granted, the magnitude and significance of the event, cataclysmic or not, is not thereby established, nor is the confusion easily cleared as to the nature of the subject of death. My attempt to address *our death*, in any case, to inquire into the death of the people, is not about accuracy. It is not normative, nor is it simply metaphorical. My question is whether any "mode of grouping," any people (the people, these people, my people, even the state) might be interrogated, confronted, indeed, possibly afflicted, by the event, the death event, that I am calling the death of the people.

Now, as he explores "how states die," and what he aptly calls "the rise and fall of states and nations," the historian Norman Davies notes that "political philosophers . . . have been thinking about statehood for millennia, though state demise has seldom been at the forefront of their preoccupations" (Davis 2011: 729; and see Fazal 2007, Wheatley 2023). Davies takes on the task in a rare but exemplary and studious manner, and he manages to count and recount many an occurrence of state dissolution, of varying magnitude or catastrophic significance. The very language Davies mobilizes to describe the mechanisms by which states or nations — and indeed peoples — meet their end, speaks evidently and directly to the question that occupies us here. Among these mechanisms, Davies lists "implosion, conquest, merger, liquidation and infant mortality" (2011: 732). Insisting that conquest, for instance, "is not necessarily prelude to annihilation" (734) — though it very much was that in the Americas and elsewhere — Davies concludes his book by elaborating on the death of *young* states and what he calls the "test of infancy." With ominous echoes and an odd preference for lasting fame, Davies reminds us that "the best-known polities in history" have successfully passed the test, whereas "those which failed the test have perished without making their mark. In the chronicles of bodies politic, as in the human condition in general, this has been the way of the world since time immemorial" (738).

Davies' reflections constitute an important addition, and a true challenge. They resonate, moreover, with earlier considerations on the "dissolution of the commonwealth" by Thomas Hobbes (1996), for instance, and, more graphically,

on "*la mort du corps politique*" by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (2002). Davies mentions both, of course. Yet, what are we to make of the distinction here inscribed again between the different modes of grouping evoked? And what does death have to do with it? The image of the body politic and its mortality harkens to yet earlier times, to the Christian medieval theory of the corporation, which was formulated, Ernst Kantorowicz notoriously reminds us, when medieval jurists began to conceive of the king's two bodies, of "the prince with both a body natural and corruptible, on the one hand, and a body politic and immortal, on the other" (Kantorowicz 2016: xxvi)? From its humble beginnings, the theory — which also became the theory of the *perpetual corporation* — evolved (Schwartz 2012). "It naturally took some time before the findings of the jurists — the identity in succession and the legal immortality of the corporation — began to sink in and be combined with the idea of the state as an everlasting, ever living organism or with the emotional concept of *patria*" (Kantorowicz 2016: 311). This is how "personified collectives and corporate bodies . . . projected into past and future," how "they preserved their identity despite changes," how they became "legally immortal." As a result, "individual components . . . , mortal components," who "at any given moment constituted the collective," acquired a lesser significance, a "relative insignificance." They began to be deemed "unimportant as compared to the immortal body politic which survived its constituents, and could survive its own physical destruction"(311-12). Like the king who, when he dies, lives still, one could begin to imagine uttering the impossible: "The people is dead! Long live the people!" Not: "we are dead," since, like the unconscious, the collective could not (or no longer) conceive of its own death, but nevertheless something like "our death," that most impossible of impossibilities.

To be sure, Kantorowicz may have omitted a few older references, references to which Hannah Arendt went on to call our attention, with regard, specifically, to the immortality of the body politic. Arendt mentions Plato and Cicero, and even "the Hebrew creed which stresses the potential immortality of the people, as distinguished from the pagan immortality of the world on one side, and the Christian immortality of the individual life on the other" (Arendt 1998: 314-15). Arendt is adamant that there is in that collective immortality something "so un-Christian, so basically alien to the religious spirit of the whole period which separates the end of antiquity from the modern age" (Arendt 1990: 230). Whether or not she is correct (and Kantorowicz's work suggests she is not quite), Arendt does underscore the significance of an "all-pervasive preoccupation with permanence, with a 'perpetual state'," a "deeply felt desire for an Eternal City on earth" along with the conviction that 'a Commonwealth rightly ordered, may for any internal causes be as immortal or long-lived as the World'" (Arendt 1990: 229; quoting James Harrington). In "On Violence," Arendt had marked a profound distinction between the death of the individual ("whether . . . in actual dying or in the inner awareness of one's own mortality"), which she described as "perhaps the most antipolitical experience there is," and the death of the collective. When "faced collectively," Arendt went on

to write, "death changes its countenance; now nothing seems more likely to intensify our vitality than its proximity." Even here, Arendt entertained no more than the death of individuals, albeit formulated, this time, as raising collective awareness "that our own death is accompanied by the potential immortality of the group we belong to and, in the final analysis, of the species." It is as if, Arendt concludes, "the immortal life of the species" were "nourished, as it were, by the sempiternal dying of its individual members" (Arendt 1972: 165).[17]

Between Arendt and Kantorowicz, and with the sources to which they alert us, it might be reasonable to deduce that the people is not, in fact, mortal, that, whatever form a people gives itself, it sees, for itself, an infinite trajectory, an immortal destiny. At the same time, no people can pretend to ignore the death of other peoples, whether these are historically earlier peoples or contemporaries, friends, relatives, or enemies. Does that mean that we, we the people, know death? Do we believe in death, in our death?

Do We Believe in Death?

There are three things, three vectors of thought, that seem to me generally missing from meditations on death, three things that might have registered on one discipline of knowledge or another (history and psychology, say, as opposed to philosophy and anthropology), but that have yet to congeal toward a broader understanding of death. Each of these three things is "about" death — it tells us, teaches us, something about death — as well as "about" repetition, in a sense that will have to be clarified. Most significantly for my purposes here, each of the three has everything to do with the death of the people. Finally, each also has to do with the matter of belief, or more precisely, with the granting of a certain credit, the accreditation of the people.

1. **Death is learned.** None of us come into this world *knowing* death. We may never know our own death, but sooner or later, we will know death. We will experience, inevitably, what Heidegger calls "the death of others." Which is another way to say *we do not all learn death in the same way*. One might therefore say that, in addition to a *culture of death*, but even in its absence, there is a *tradition of death*, a specific way death reaches us — by which I mean each of the many deaths, close or far, of which we will learn, by which we will be affected and transformed, for the better and for the worse. We learn death, therefore, and the nature of the people — we the people, which we are or become — is what is at play each and every time, with each and every death. Death is thus repeated, iterated. It is repeatedly taught, transmitted, learned and practiced.

17 Arendt acknowledged that "death as an equalizer plays hardly any role in political philosophy, although human mortality — the fact that men are 'mortals,' as the Greeks used to say — was understood as the strongest motive for political action in prephilosophic political thought," as that which "prompted them to establish a body politic which was potentially immortal" (165.).

Which is to say, finally, that, just like a culture of death, no tradition of death is anything less than *collective,* a matter of groupings, of peoples.

2. **We, the people, count.** We (which is to say, each of us, alone and together) experience the death of many people, some close, some impossibly far. How many? And who, among them, counts? We are also told by many people about the death of many people, by people and rituals and funerals — or their impossibility; by way of news or memory and by way of art and any number of artifacts, practices and products, by way of war and destruction, by way of illness and suffering (Azoulay 2001; Penfold-Mounce 2018). Sooner or later, we learn that *everyone dies*, that an almost infinite number of people have died before us. What we all learn, in other words, which may or may not convince us of our death but will certainly have terrified us, is that many, every single individual before us really, generations upon generations, millions after millions, have died. We also learn (and this is equally, if not more, significant) that *some* among the dead, even among the temporally distant dead, matter *otherwise* or *more*. Our dead, of course, but also the memorable and commemorated dead. We learn about death by *learning to count*, in other words, by learning whose death counts.
3. Some of us have or will *practice* death by meting it out, by **actively engaging in killing**. Some of us will have become murderers or assassins, soldiers or police, torturers, executioners, and occasional or accidental killers.[18] Some of us will develop the weapons and make the bombs, others will sell the knives and the guns (and the bombs too) (Franklin 1988). Remotely or not, some of us will pull the trigger or order the drone strike — or indeed the "first strike" (which will most likely be the last strike). But even those who will not partake of these activities, shall learn about death and murder, about death *from* murder or from killing (let us concede the difference still). Should we grant that we learn thereby very little, almost nothing, about *our death*, about our own death? Did Cain understand nothing of death once he had killed Abel? He learned, as many have since, of the dispatching of the other, of the death of the other, of so many others, by murder. And we learned too. We know, we have come to know that, since the beginning of time, there have been many murders, innumerable but willed death events, countless occurrences of mass death.

Ideally, I would attend to each of these vectors in more details, but here it might be sufficient to recall that what is, to my mind, the most concise summary

18 Emmanuel Lévinas, who dedicated his second book to the victims of the Holocaust, placed murder at the center of his thought. In *Totality and Infinity,* Lévinas was already insisting on the face of the other, "the hard resistance of these eyes without protection"(Lévinas 1979: 262) and the infinite transcendence that is "stronger than murder" (199). Lévinas consistently deploys a grammar of the singular, death — my own and the other's — in the singular.

— if perhaps also the most hurried, considering — of the things I have just laid out. "Even today," Sigmund Freud wrote in 1915, "the history of the world which our children learn at school is essentially a series of murders of peoples" [*Noch heute ist das, was unsere Kinder in der Schule als Weltgeschichte lernen, im wesentlichen eine Reihenfolge von Völkermorden*] (Freud 1915, 292). And do note that Freud is speaking of peoples. The death of peoples.

In Lieu of an Ending: Learning Death

But how, how exactly, do we learn this and know this? How do we learn this history? How do we learn about, and relate to, come to assume our mortality, our death? How does death insinuate or force itself into our life, how does it enter our being, our selves? It may be significant that, according to Heidegger, one of the most exacting modern thinkers of death, this lesson, which he deemed a completion of sorts, a making-whole, nevertheless taxes our credulity. In fact, "this existentially 'possible' Being-towards-death remains, from the existentiell point of view, a fantastical exaction [*eine phantastische Zumutung*]. The fact that an authentic potentiality-for-Being-a-whole [*eines eigentlichen Ganzseinkönnens*] is ontologically possible for Dasein, signifies nothing, so long as corresponding ontical potentiality-for-Being has not been demonstrated in Dasein itself" (Heidegger 1962, § 53, 311). Conceptual difficulties (or "jargon") aside, it may suffice to recognize that "Being-towards-death," just like "authenticity" [*Eigentlichkeit*], is not an everyday given for Heidegger, much less a position maintained or a property owned. It is certainly not an a priori, nor there from the beginning either. Death, my death, must be learned and demonstrated. The reason for this necessary learning step is that "Dasein does not, proximally and for the most part, have any explicit or even any theoretical knowledge of the fact that it has been delivered over to its death, and that death thus belongs to Being-in-the-world" (295). Furthermore, and "factically, there are many who, proximally and for the most part, do not know about death" (295). In order for that (new) knowledge, in order for death not to remain a "fantastical exaction," here "a merely fictitious arbitrary construction [*nur dichtende, willkürliche Konstruktion*]," then "Being-towards-death" must be acceded to, awaited and anticipated (as Derrida insists in his reading of Heidegger), in a process of appropriation (of making one's own, one's proper, *eigentlich*), a making possible. Remember that "factically, Dasein maintains itself proximally and for the most part in an inauthentic Being-towards-death" (304). It is thus not given to every Dasein, not without (fantastical?) exertion, to *make* death its own. Each Dasein must accomplish this task, this "ontological task" [*ontologische Aufgabe*] for itself — or fail to do so. Accordingly, death, "the certain possibility of death," if it does disclose "Dasein as a possibility," does so "only in such a way that, in anticipating this possibility, Dasein *makes* this possibility *possible* for itself as its own most potentiality-for-Being" (*es vorlaufend zu ihr diese Möglichkeit als eigenstes Seinkönnen für sich* ermöglicht" (309).

How does Dasein learn so to anticipate? How does it learn to comport itself toward its ownmost possibility, toward death? Is there something in its past — or in the present, and even future — that enables Dasein to turn, in anticipation, toward death? Heidegger registers that there has to be, in what might be called a history of the everyday (the ontical, the present-at-hand), something, some things, that Dasein will have learned with regard to death. Heidegger entertains this possibility, the possibility of what I have called *a tradition of death*, but only to dismiss it as an impossibility. It *cannot* be, Heidegger writes; or, as his translators not entirely incorrectly put it, "we cannot compute the certainty of death by ascertaining how many cases of death we encounter" [*Die Gewißheit des Todes kann nicht errechnet werden aus Feststellungen von begegnenden Todesfällen*] (ibid). We do encounter cases of death, then, and perhaps many. We might in fact count them, but that count must be discounted (here Derrida differs, insisting on the incalculable). It does not suffice in any case — in every case of death — to maintain or sustain the certainty of death. Such certainty "is by no means of the kind which maintains itself [*hält sich*] in the truth of the present-at-hand" (ibid.).

Still, Dasein must learn, it will in any case have learned, about death. Dasein, which, Heidegger finds important to recall in this context, is "Being-with [*Mitsein*]," is bound to be affected by death, which is to say that death is not always-already there but rather that it occurs as an event (*Ereignis*), the event that puts Dasein on its way, that cannot but put Dasein on its way toward appropriation, the making of death as its ownmost (*eigentlich*) possibility. Heidegger says that as a "non-relational possibility" [*unbezügliche Möglichkeit*], death is that which "individualizes" [*vereinzelt*] (earlier Heidegger had explained that if — and it is a big if — "Dasein stands before itself as this possibility," the possibility that death is, if and "when it stands before itself in this way," then "all its relations to any other Dasein have been undone" [294]). Death, the event of death which is not to be counted or related, does such work, does its work, but only to further "make" — or unmake — Dasein (for insofar as Dasein stands before itself, it appears to have been unmade too, divided from itself). Death, in any case, "makes Dasein, as Being-with, have some understanding of the potentiality-for-Being of Others [*das Dasein also Mitsein verstehend zu machen für das Seinkönnen des Anderen*]." Insofar as it individualizes, death is indeed non-relational, but it is also, Heidegger makes clear, the condition of possibility of relation, the necessary possibility whereas Dasein can relate to the possible being of others, to others as having the possibility (and therefore, the impossibility) of being. Once death has done its work — but death's work is never simply *done* — others as possibilities of being, are no longer a danger for Dasein, the danger of Dasein's failing to recognize Others as dangerous, the danger, that is, of "getting outstripped by the existence-possibilities of Others" [*Existenzmöglichkeiten des Anderen*] (308). Between the possibilities of existence and the final and complete possibility of being, there is a difference that death makes, and it is a difference that has to do with Dasein's relation to itself and to others, to itself as other too. Dasein must be separated

from what it is, Being-with, individualized by that which is without relation, *the* without-relation, that death is, *if it is*, in order to be capable of becoming that which Dasein is, as being-with. The "individualizing" that death is brings a massive failure, in other words. It "makes manifest that all Being-alongside the things with which we concern ourselves and all Being-with Others" [*alles Sein bei dem Besorgten und jedes Mitsein mit Anderen*], will fail us when our ownmost potentiality-for-Being is the issue." That is why Dasein's work, like death's, is never done. "Dasein can be *authentically itself* only if it makes this possible for itself of its own accord" [*wenn es such von ihm selbst her dazu ermöglicht*] (ibid.). Just earlier, Heidegger had made clear that this making-possible involved a "wrenching away," a separation from what Heidegger famously called "the They [*das Man*]," which I would rather have translated "the many" or better yet, "people" — the idiomatic translation of what "the They" does for the most part, namely, speak or talk (*man sagt, man redet*) being "people say").[19] Dasein must wrench itself away from "people," and it must work hard at it, for Dasein, "only reveals its factical lostness in the everydayness of the they-self," the everydayness of people (307). Crucially, though, it is from people, people who themselves may or may not have "the definite character of Being-towards-death" (298), that Dasein hears and learns about death. And what Heidegger does, what he says he does, is merely to provide an interpretation of this fact, "of the everyday manner in which people talk about death *and the way death enters into Dasein*" [*der alltäglichen Rede des Man über den Tod und seine Weise,* in das Dasein hereinzustehen] (302-303, emphasis added; and compare the way "the 'end' *enters* into Dasein's average everydayness" [*das »Ende« in die durchschnittliche Alltäglichkeit des Daseins hereinsteht*] [293]). Thus, "our analysis of death remains purely 'this-worldly' in so far as it interprets that phenomenon merely in the way in which it *enters into* [*hereinsteht*] any particular Dasein*"* (292). As Heidegger finally phrases it, "cases of death [*die Todesfälle*] may be the factical occasion for Dasein's first paying attention to death at all" [*das Dasein zunächst überhaupt auf den Tod aufmerksam wird*] (301). Thus, we learn death from the people who speak and die around us. We receive death, we pay attention to it. We all learn (from) a tradition of death. Can we believe it?

When we first hear about death, when people tell us about death or we experience the death of others, death appears to us, no doubt, with a measure of certainty. But death, Heidegger insists, does not really impress itself upon us as anything more than a fiction, a fantastical exaction. "One knows about the certainty of death, and yet 'is' not authentically certain of one's own" (302). Heidegger's argument is thus both that "people implant in Dasein the illusion

19 "Man sagt: der Tod kommt gewiß," writes Heidegger, which Macquarie and Robinson translate: "They say, 'It is certain that 'Death' is coming'" and I would render: "People say: 'Death is coming for sure'" (301/G257). The English word "many" can be traced to a cluster of German words among which is *man,* making it another good candidate to translate Heidegger here. As a noun, the OED confirms, "many" also translates *hoi polloi*, the people, the multitude, a large group of people.

that it is *itself* certain of its death" (301) and that "people deny that death is certain" (302). And people, some people, certainly do talk often enough as if death were always remote somehow. In Heidegger's rendering, what people say is that "so far as one knows, all men 'die'" which is another way to say that "death is probable in the highest degree for every man, yet it is not 'unconditionally' certain." (302) The certainty of death, in other words, is no more than "empirical." Why, then, should we believe it? Why should we come to believe for ourselves that we, we ourselves, will die? The very idea (an idea to which the founder of modern subjectivity and great believer in its attendant, apodictic certainty, René Descartes, was, incidentally, indifferent to the utmost) "necessarily falls short of the highest certainty, the apodictic, which we reach in certain domains of theoretical knowledge" (301). Along with the people, Dasein must be persuaded, it must come to believe that, certain as it might be, death is only certain *as a possibility*. That is one significant reason why making death one's own is hard work. It must be believed to be seen for what it no doubt is: our ownmost possibility.

This argument, whereby we do (and must) learn death from the people and for the people, the non-apodictic certainty of death as a possibility, is certainly not meant for us to interpose anything between us and ourselves — our death, ourselves — nor is it to make "the dying of Others" an alternative theme, "the theme for our analysis of Dasein's end and totality" (283) and "a substitute theme for the analysis of totality" (284). It is merely to make "the death of Others," really, the people dying and the people talking, something "impressive" enough (282). It is to make the very lesson, a lesson about learning, and about learning death. The tradition of death. The death of the people. It is this difficult, even impossible and at any rate *incredible*, lesson that we ourselves learn from people.

Have we understood or learned, then? Do we believe? Do we, do people, believe in death? In the death of the people? According to a remarkable book recently written by Abou Farman (2020), there is a growing number of people who, not content to not believe in *life after death*, now do not believe in *death after life*. They do not believe in immortality either, mind you. They simply do not believe in death. So much for the certainty of death. But what about those who do? What about those who *must* and might therefore be said to live, as Christina Sharpe (2016) puts it, *in the wake*? What is it that might bring about a "demonstration" (as Heidegger has it) of death as the most certain of possibilities not for me, but for us? "Only *Dasein,* seul le *Dasein*," Derrida comments. And "only in the act of authentic (*eigentlich*), resolute, determinate, and decided assumption by which *Dasein* would take upon itself the possibility of this impossibility that the aporia *as such* would announce itself *as such* and purely to *Dasein* as its most proper possibility, hence as the most proper essence of *Dasein,* its freedom, its ability to question, and its opening to the meaning of being" (Derrida 1993: 74-75).

Only Dasein, then. Is the people not mortal? Could the people not take upon itself the possibility of this impossibility, its most proper possibility, its

freedom, its ability to question, and its opening to the meaning of being? What could make us — us, the people — learn of our death? What would make us able to confront and assume, resolutely assume, the possibility of this impossibility that death is, that our death is, and to initiate, finally, of the people, by the people, and for the people, a "politics of death" (Derrida 1993: 59)?

We do know that some peoples, nations, and collectives have developed a more conscious, a more resolute and determinate relation to their death. Some peoples are clearly aware of the possibility of their own, collective death, the death of we, the people. Can we learn from these peoples? Is there, in fact, a lesson to be learned? Can death, collective death, be learned and confronted? Does the ethical obligation to resolutely assume and face one's mortality apply to collectives? Is there such a *political* obligation, such a political necessity? Is there an exercise, a political "exercise that consists in learning to die in order to attain the new immortality, that is, *meletē thanatou*, the care taken with death, the exercise of death, the "practicing (for) death" that Socrates speaks of in the *Phaedo*" (Derrida 2008: 14)? Is that what Derrida meant when he referred to a "politics of death?" Did Derrida mean that the people, that we, the people, should face our own death? Learn its possibility and learn from it? Or, a committed advocate of survival, of secular survival, as some have claimed, did Derrida mean that we should make our survival, our immortality, our *eternity* ever more resilient, ever more secure, ever more lasting and seek to live, as that American postal stamp has it, *forever*?

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Gil Aniđar

Smrt naroda

Apstrakt

Smrt, kako sugeriše Derida u *Politici prijateljstva*, predstavlja pitanje brojeva. Ipak, smrt je uvek i „moja", zbog čega Hajdeger može reći da „umiranje Drugih nije nešto što istinski doživljavamo; u najboljem slučaju, mi smo uvek samo 'tu, pored'." Između moje smrti i smrti svih, između jednog i beskrajno mnogih, počeo sam da razmišljam o drugačijoj meri, ograničenijem i određenijem gramatičkom — ili aritmetičkom — okviru u kojem se postavlja pitanje naše smrti. Ne smrti čovečanstva, niti baš smrti svih drugih, već smrti naroda, smrti nas koji brojimo i koji smo bitni jedni drugima (ili to zamišljamo). Čini mi se da je upravo ovde Deridina računljivost ili neizračunljivost smrti najneprozirnija. Negde između jednog i mnoštva, univerzalnog mnoštva čovečanstva, između onoga što Hajdeger naziva „mojošću" (koja, kada je u pitanju smrt, ostaje mogućnost) i smrti (svih) drugih, mogla bi se pronaći smrt nas, naroda.

Ključne reči: smrt, narod, Derida, Hajdeger, brojevi