



T H E

M A G I C

O F T H E

S T A T E

MICHAEL TAUSSIG

How foolish it would be to suppose that one only needs to point out this origin and this misty shroud of delusion in order to destroy the world that counts for real, so-called "reality." We can destroy only as creators.

Nietzsche, The Gay Science



The
Magic
of the
State

Michael Taussig

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Rarely could an author have had such patient, calm, and imaginative editors as Bill Germano and Matthew DeBord of Routledge.

Rachel Moore suffered a grievous blow to the face during research for this work, but her smile remains as radiant as her mind, its effervescent and at times wickedly humorous light floating on every page that follows.



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□ — PREFACE

*A Note
on Names
and Naming*

Torn between the overlapping claims of fiction and those of documentary, I have allowed this magic of the state to settle in its awkwardness in the division of the forms. I have changed the names of places and people where necessary to preserve anonymity, but also to render more adequately the fictional features without which documentary, including history and ethnography, could not be. Through something like Brecht's estrangement-effect, naming as renaming can provide insight into what we call history, its making no less than its retelling, especially history of the spirits of the dead as the mark of nation and state, but I have in mind, by renaming, something else as well — namely the evocation of a fictive nation-state in place of real ones so as to better grasp the elusive nature of stately being. After all it is not only the writer of fiction who fuses reality with dreamlike states. This privilege also belongs, as Kafka taught, to the being-in-the-world of the modern state itself.

PART ONE

— THE
SPIRIT QUEEN'S
COURT



MARIA LIONZA - REINA DE LA MONTAÑA



I

The Spirit Queen

How naturally we entify and give life to such. Take the case of God, the economy, and the state, abstract entities we credit with Being, species of things awesome with life-force of their own, transcendent over mere mortals. Clearly they are fetishes, invented wholes of materialized artifice into whose woeful insufficiency of being we have placed soulstuff. Hence the big S of the State. Hence its magic of attraction and repulsion, tied to the Nation, to more than a whiff of a certain sexuality reminiscent of the Law of the Father and, lest we forget, to the specter of death, human death in that soul-stirring insufficiency of Being. It is with this, then, with the magical harnessing of the dead for stately purpose, that I wish, on an admittedly unsure and naive footing, to begin.

What it is about the dead that makes them so powerful in this regard, I do not know. Could it be that with disembodiment, presence expands? Language is like that too. In fact language depends on this lingering on as an idea tracing an outline around a once solid, breathing form, troubling the body's once bodiedness. Circling endlessly,