



Daniel Chirot

Returning to Reality

Culture, Modernisation and Various Eastern Europes

The "clash of civilisations" as largely a function of uneven modernisation suggests that it will not last much longer, which advocates a return to the older tradition of functional–evolutionary theorists. In Europe, Daniel Chirot warns that the differentiation between "East" and "Central" Europe draws a new border between "East" and "West" which will result in excluding the poorer parts of Europe and will keep them poorer in delaying their modernisation.

Cultural anthropologists have largely given up on the notion that there has been a social evolution, despite the uncomfortable fact that their archaeologist colleagues are faced with the reality of evolutionary stages all the time. Most cultural anthropologists now favour a multicultural perspective that pronounces all cultures more or less equal (Kuper 1999). It might seem strange to equate this methodological approach with the one favoured by Samuel Huntington's famous book (1996) about the inevitable clash of civilisations caused by the near immutability of boundaries between major cultural traditions, but both follow a common logic. (Though Huntington's book is a call for a more isolationist American foreign policy disguised as an interpretative historical essay, it is the historical aspect of his thesis that has become influential rather than the policy recommendations.) Huntington's "civilisations" are far broader than what most anthropologists would call "cultures"; and for Huntington there is a clear value hierarchy, with the West seen as a morally superior, if presently endangered civilisation. Contemporary anthropologists reject such a hierarchy and, if anything, tend to reverse it (Clifford and Marcus 1986). Both approaches, however, deny the validity of the old functionalist–evolutionary theory that sees humanity's history as a long march toward a common, modern type of society first reached by the West but accessible to all other humans.

The history of how cultural anthropology shifted from its functional–evolutionary base during the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century to an increasingly postmodernist rejection of any such notions is an interesting one but need not detain us here. What is important is rather to see how much this shift was produced by an ideological change that began in the late 1960s. It was not new knowledge as such that caused the old theory to be abandoned but a political reinterpretation that increasingly viewed Western European and American culture as imperialistic, mechanistic, alienating, and somehow inauthentic. This was not a new phenomenon in intellectual life, as it had its roots in the anti–Enlightenment, anti–universalistic, and anti–modernist thought of Rousseau and especially Herder who believed that each culture has its own unique virtue and could only suffer from being polluted by the arrogant French (Gellner 1992: 26–27;

Chirot 1996).

The "civilisational" approach is equally ideological but much older. Long ago the Greeks consigned the Persians to an irremediably despotic and obscurantist but menacing Asian civilisation, and most other non-Greeks (including the Macedonians) to the status of barbarians. (Aeschylus 1996; Green 1991: 6–7) The Greeks were hardly unique, however, as all the great classical agrarian cultures and religions – or at least their elites – were quite certain that they possessed the one true way of organising societies and leading the proper life (Lewis 1995).

In the end, then as now, it amounts to a question of taste. If it is the Western way, or now the American way that one despises, then multicultural anthropology which privileges everything non-western, non-modern, and anti-capitalist offers the theory of choice. If, on the other hand, one appreciates Western, especially American individualism, progress, and democracy as well as the material success brought by capitalism, then those parts of the world that have not adopted (and perhaps never can adopt) the Western ways are either barbarians or hopelessly despotic "Asiatics." Underneath much of the rhetoric about such issues that is all there is – taste. The master ideologues on both sides of the discussion accuse the others of bad faith, bigotry, hypocrisy, or just plain blindness, but both Huntingtonians and multiculturalists in all their varieties agree that human societies do not, *cannot* evolve toward a roughly similar, single modern type of social structure with a broadly common modern culture.

How good a representation of the world does either side of this ideological divide offer? Neither does a very satisfactory job, though for opposite reasons. The multiculturalists have to pretend that there has been no progress, and more than that, they have to deny the nearly universal desire for a better material life and more personal freedom. Intellectual critics (including religious ones) may rail against crass American tastes and low brow culture, as romantic anti-modernists decried industrial England in the nineteenth century, but most people everywhere want to be as free, as rich, as mobile and as easily able to enjoy carefree (or so it seems from American films, television, and popular music) sex as Americans. More than a century ago, Nietzsche's deep hatred for his own increasingly bourgeois world, and his contempt of all things English captured the anti-modern intellectual's aristocratic disdain for industrial civilisation and the way it spread material benefits as well as democratic privileges to the vulgar masses (Nietzsche 1954: 565–567, 802).

On the other hand, to insist that only Westerners can enjoy the fruits of modernisation is also misleading. It may have been that Greek and Roman notions of individual freedom and private property for a small elite ultimately gave Western Europe a head start in the race to modernity, as many, including David Landes (1998: 31–32), have suggested. Or, more likely, it may be that the rationalising ethic of some Western Christians was the key to the early commercial, scientific, and finally industrial and political revolutions of the West, as Max Weber would have it (1998). However, to be first has never meant that followers cannot do as well or better. We are long past thinking that only Japan seems able to imitate the West because of the dubious proposition that its mixture of Shinto and Buddhism is somehow "Protestant" (Bellah 1957). Now, as the pages of the *Far Eastern Economic Review* regularly attest, some substantial portions of China – not only Taiwan, but also Hong Kong and the coastal cities from Canton to Shanghai – have become some of the most dynamic economic parts of the globe, and the area around Bangalore in India

has become one of the world's centres of the software industry. Malaysia, Turkey and Brazil have become major industrial economies with per capita GNPs that place them in the upper middle income ranks of countries in the world (World Bank 2000, 10–13, Table 1.1). This does not even include the transformation of some of the most Catholic, previously backward parts of Europe that were once considered hopelessly unprogressive, such as Spain, Ireland, and Portugal, into advanced modern economies.

Democracy and an increasing respect for individual rights are not exclusively Western concepts either. People all over the world, from Iran to Indonesia to Mexico are demanding political and legal rights that go far beyond those that were available to the vast majority of Western Europeans in the nineteenth century but are a fundamental part of the continuing liberal revolution that has been a basic part of modernisation for two centuries¹.

All of the world may not be on the verge of adopting a single cultural model, but many of the key elements of what has come to be defined as the modern, liberal Western, democratic, individualistic, capitalist way of life have spread very widely, and continue to do so. That is the true meaning of what is commonly called globalisation, and that is why globalisation appals those who want to resist this trend (Friedman 1999). If this is so, and if the denials of this trend are largely ideological, is it worth debating an issue that boils down to a matter of wilful distortions of fact and misunderstanding about the nature of modern social change? The answer is unequivocally yes, if only because policy decisions are made on the basis of such ideological tastes and misunderstandings. The debate itself shapes our understanding of what is taking place, and often distorts our perceptions of reality.

After the publication of Samuel Huntington's 1996 book, *The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order*, for example, some Turkish intellectuals took the position that since the West was consigning them to eternal Muslim backwardness and obscurantism, they might as well abandon all efforts to join Europe and move closer to Iran and the Arab world. Fortunately, this tendency has lost ground in Turkey. As a demonstration of how wrong it is to classify groups by their seemingly deep cultural predispositions, many Islamists in Turkey want to join Europe, which they see as protecting religious and civil rights, while the supposedly Westernising hard line Kemalists in the army are increasingly nationalistic and turning away from Europe for precisely the same reason. They want to maintain an authoritarian, militaristic system in place. In the 1970s, the socialist Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit was fervently opposed to joining Europe because it was too capitalistic and exploitative. Now, again as Prime Minister, the same Ecevit is fervently in favour of joining Europe².

Similar doubts about joining Europe have been voiced by some Russian intellectuals who took their being relegated by Huntington's analysis to Christian Orthodox barbarism as an excuse to promote a revived version of anti-capitalist, anti-democratic and anti-Western Slavophilism. Russia was bound to fail and be rejected by the West anyway if it tried to take a Westernising approach, so it should develop its own, uniquely pure, communitarian, and native version of modernisation. It was communism's adoption of this position that gave it considerable legitimacy among Russian nationalists, but the failure of communism left this "Russian idea" in a limbo from which it is only slowly recovering (McDaniel 1996). Now, there are voices in Russia claiming that it is happening all over again – the West is rejecting Russia, so Russia must find its own solution by rejecting Western

modernisation and going back to its genuine roots (Ziuganov 1996; Khazanov 1997). Unfortunately, if such attitudes prevail, they will bring another century of backwardness and misery to Russia.

Here we can see that the Huntingtonian approach has much in common with what the multiculturalists are demanding. Among the intellectuals in India who most appreciate postmodernist ideas (Chakrabarty 1992), one finds the same kind of anti-modernist response as among Islamic fundamentalists in some of the Muslim world countries, though they would deny this heatedly. The fact that substantial portions of the population feel threatened by modernisation means that these intellectuals have an audience and that policy errors could stop the recent, rapid economic growth in India by returning to the autarkic, failed policy that guided Congress during the first four decades of Indian independence.

In non-western societies both those who accept a Huntingtonian interpretation and the multiculturalists turn their backs on modernisation as a Western import that does not fit their conception of the good society and both are convinced that the Western model is wrong for them.

What is the reality, and which theoretical stance best explains the nature of progressive social change in the modern world? Strangely enough, it is the very functionalist-evolutionary perspective abandoned first by cultural anthropology, and subsequently by sociology in the 1970s.

Taking an evolutionary-functional perspective on change alters the debate about the "clash of civilisations" because it suggests that seemingly irreconcilable cultural differences are more a product of different rates of modernisation than of permanent cultural divisions.

Cultures are codes, like genetic codes, sets of rules that guide social organisation and personal behaviour. They may be less precise than genetic codes, and they certainly can be subjected to wilful human change, so the analogy to biological evolution is only that: an analogy. Nevertheless, the similarities are important. Over generations, people work out codes of conduct that are enshrined as customs and laws, tastes and preferences, and guiding concepts of how to react to various exigencies. New rules, tastes, and customs constantly enter into cultures, sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. These may have little or no significant effect on a society, they may be beneficial and contribute to survival, or they may be harmful. The key to understanding social change is that the circumstances in which any society lives, even the most isolated and remote ones, are never permanently fixed. It turns out, more or less by accident, that certain cultural patterns are more flexible and allow for easier adaptation as climates, social environments, technologies, and population densities change. Cultural patterns that are too inflexible, or that fail to provide successful solutions to serious new problems faced by a society provoke crises. These may be fatal, or they may lead to greater flexibility. As with biological evolution, the rate of change is almost certainly not constant, but irregular, a matter of "punctuated equilibrium" as periods of relatively slow change are followed by sudden clumps of serious new challenges (Sahlins and Service 1960; Boserup 1981).

Long ago, Shmuel Eisenstadt tried to show that there were strong commonalities between all the classical agrarian empires of the past though he later fell into the error of insisting that at some time each of the major world religions set its sphere of influence on a path from which deviation was almost

impossible (Eisenstadt 1963; 1968). Indeed, agrarian kingdoms and empires all developed warrior aristocracies at one time or another because this was an efficient way to fight wars, and because those who became professional war lords possessed the physical strength to grab a surplus from their peasants. Only in remote mountains or otherwise protected regions did more democratic, tribal cultures survive. This was such a universal development that it overrode all the supposedly enormous cultural differences between the classical civilisations.

Similarly, urban merchants arose everywhere and they were more likely to quantify and rationalise their surroundings than lords or peasants were. In the long run, religious elites everywhere tended to downplay the virtues of military bravura and the calculating greed of merchants, and the official clerks who served ruling dynasties emphasised the role of learning and administrative rationality. These combinations of classes and value predispositions arose over and over again with startling regularity because these types of occupations and attitudes were in demand and were best able to keep advanced agrarian societies functioning (Weber 1968: 1351–1352).

The so-called big cultural barriers between the major cultural clumps known as civilisations were largely produced by accidental differences in the distributions of power between the same sets of competing kings, warrior aristocrats, merchants, clerks, priests, peasants and neighbouring hill or desert tribes hovering on the edge of established agrarian states. Geography, the accident of being on a migratory or trade route, the quality of the land and the frequency with which it was subjected to natural catastrophes such as floods or droughts, the nearness of distance from nomadic and less civilised border tribes – these determined different outcomes. There were cultural differences, to be sure, but the basics were very similar in all agrarian states, except that accidents made some groups relatively more powerful in some places and not in others.

To give a major example, it was the accidental independence of merchant cities in Western Europe combined with the fact that the best lands of Western Europe were not subject to frequent climatic extremes or exposed to nomadic raids that lay behind the "European miracle" (Jones 1981). The greater independence of towns and merchants allowed the greater flowering of a rationalising ethic, and the long term stability in agricultural production without too many interruptions built up a capital base unmatched elsewhere except to some extent in China. Finally, the failure to unite Europe (unlike China, which kept on coming back together), allowed more stimulating technological, economic and intellectual competition to push evolutionary change faster. But the cultural elements that made up Western civilisation in the Middle Ages were the same as those elsewhere, and only small differences in the relative weight of each determined a different outcome (Chirot 1986).

No agrarian civilisation solved the problem of population cycles. In good times, population growth outstripped technological progress and caused declining per capita returns in food production as well as the overproduction of grasping nobles. Wars, disease and famines then erupted until the situation was redressed. This endless cycle made up much of the drama of classical history, from China to India to the Middle East to Europe and even to the Mesoamerican classical civilisations. This is why from the time when agrarian states first established themselves in antiquity until the late Middle Ages the human population grew relatively slowly (McEvedy and Jones 1978: 342–351).

The story of how the West broke out of this pattern was a mainstay of social science theorising throughout the nineteenth and well into the middle of the twentieth century. Only in recent decades has this problem ceased to be the single most important one posed by the social sciences. Then, at least in sociology, World Systems theorists came along to sneer at the problem by claiming that Western European were only better thieves and not cultural innovators, and postmodernist multiculturalists began to deny that the West had invented anything worthwhile at all (Wallerstein 1974; Abu-Lughod 1989; Lyotard 1979). Yet, something did happen in the West and it transformed the world as much as did the much earlier agrarian revolution that occurred in the millennia before about 3000 BC. As in the earlier revolution, the human population began to grow very rapidly again and human societies were dramatically altered. The biggest difference is that this second great transformation took place within, at most, three or four hundred years rather than three or four thousand (Diamond 1997: 176–191, 215–292).

Now, once again, humanity is faced with a new set of unprecedented challenges and has been obliged to adapt to the new circumstances by creating new types of social organisations, new cultures. As in the agrarian past, however, only a fairly narrow set of workable options exist, though all sorts of experiments have been and will continue to be tried everywhere as people struggle to combine old habits with new requirements. In the modern transformation it turns out that the set of possible solutions are narrower than ever before because of the emergence of a single world market and because of the fantastic progress in the speed of communications. Societies and systems that do not adapt will fall behind, their people will become restless and rebellious, and they will fail.

One difference now may be that evolutionary pressures exposing failures no longer need to manifest themselves mostly through military conquests, enslavements, famines, or forced expulsions as they did in the past. The customs, laws, ideologies, and forms of organisation that block free exchanges of ideas and technologies, of goods and capital, of labour and skills have only to produce slower economic growth for people to raise the level of discontent. Those hostile to the new requirements may think that the rich capitalist powers, now led by the United States, are plotting their destruction. But no plot or direct intervention is really necessary. Fundamentalist Muslim regimes or right wing corporatist autocracies or corrupt, closed plutocracies or other such holdovers from the late agrarian age wound themselves by insisting on maintaining poorly adapted social and economic systems. Typically, their leaders understand this but hold on to power desperately, afraid that adaptation to the new requirements will sweep them away. They are most afraid of the free exchange of ideas and information since that will make their failures all the more apparent to the people they rule.

Where does this leave the "clash of civilisations"? An evolutionary–functionalist line of theory suggests that the "clash" is largely a function of uneven modernisation and is therefore unlikely to last very much longer, certainly not much more than through the present century. It is not fixed eternally in either the historical past or the future. This makes both the Huntingtonian contention that modernisation cannot occur in certain cultures appear as historically nearsighted and theoretically shallow. It makes the multiculturalist, postmodernist rejection of modernisation as expression of temporary Western hegemony seem completely at odds with what is happening in the world. On the other hand, it suggests that we would do well to return to the older tradition of functional–evolutionary theorists that culminated in the

1950s with Talcott Parsons (Parsons and Smelser, 1956). If this is applied to problems of contemporary economic modernisation, what used to be called "modernisation theory," as most succinctly summarised by Walt W. Rostow in his elaboration of a model of the stages of economic growth (1960) merits rehabilitation if we are to understand contemporary economic and developmental inequalities and what paths modernising economies will take in the future.

The Question of Eastern and Central Europe

How, then, does this apply to the debate about "Eastern" and "Central" Europe? Fundamentally it makes the whole discussion seem both parochial and deeply misleading. It must be admitted that emphasising the distinction was a brilliant piece of anti-Soviet propaganda that did much to energise the anti-Communist resistance among intellectuals³. Inasmuch as wishing to be recognised as part of the "real" Europe, and as "Central Europe" was supposed to be close to the "West," it was an appeal for the benefits enjoyed by the West but denied to those under communist rule. What were those benefits? They included economic modernisation and prosperity, stable and secure democracy and respect for individual rights. Of course those are things desired by majorities everywhere in the world even if many of their elites insist on trying to withhold them under one pretext or another. It is not only Western or Central Europeans who wish for these benefits. If the appeal to the notion of Central Europe meant that the intellectual activists claimed to be closer to the West than to other Europeans or non-Europeans, if it meant that they had been so close to achieving these goals that ridding themselves of communism would allow them to catch up to the West more quickly than, say, Romanians or Russians, then their claim was plausible. But if it meant that somehow people born in a certain part of Europe had the capacity to become modern while others did not, then the whole notion was nonsensical. Taiwan and South Korea are, in reality, more "Western European" than most of Central Europe, even today, because of their vibrant and stable democracies and high levels of economic modernisation⁴. That is just another way of saying that they are more modernised.

Insisting that the differences in levels of economic success between various parts of the post-communist world are related to very deep cultural legacies misses the real reasons for them and also makes them seem more permanent than they really are. We now know that substantial modernisation can take place in three generations, or perhaps even less. Some backward parts of Eastern Europe, such as Romania or Bulgaria, for example, have all the elements in place for rapid modernisation. If Serbia had not been led into a disastrous political adventure by its misguided intellectuals (who genuinely believed in a separate "Serbian" mission) and by the Milosevic government, it would have emerged from communism no more backward than Poland. The differences in degree of modernisation between Romania or Bulgaria, and, say, Hungary or Poland, need not last more than one or two generations. Similarly, all of post-communist Europe has the capacity to substantially catch up to Western European levels well before the end of this new century.

After all, in 1950 Spain, Portugal, Greece and Ireland were so backward that hardly anyone thought they might have reached near-Western levels of modernity by 2000. According to *The Economist*, in 2000 Ireland's per capita Gross Domestic Product was US\$ 29,800, and the United Kingdom's was US\$ 25,900! (2001: 84–85) Given the fact that Ireland at the start of the twentieth century was considered culturally and economically backward, and that as late

as 1970 its level of economic development was rated as roughly equal to Hungary's (Zauberman 1976: 611–612), this is extraordinary. In 2000 Hungary's per capita GDP was US\$ 5,830 (*The Economist* 2001, 85).

One need not go to Taiwan or South Korea for economic miracles, though it is worth remembering that those countries in 1950 had per capita incomes lower than Ghana – then the Gold Coast – in West Africa, and also lower than Romania. In fact, if an adjustment is made for prices, Ghana was close to twice as rich in per capita GDP in the early 1950s as Taiwan, and Romania was only slightly poorer than Japan (Summers and Heston 1984).

To be sure, it would be a gross exaggeration to claim that cultural legacies are meaningless. In most of sub-Saharan Africa, for example, the absence of any tradition of literacy or of bureaucratic states, a weak sense of private property rights, and the near universal reliance on kinship ties as the sole means of social support have created corrupt, nepotistic, and inefficient governing structures that make economic development almost impossible (Jackson and Rosberg 1982).

In Eastern Europe Andrew Janos' recent work has confirmed that the division between Eastern Orthodox and Catholicism has made an important political and economic difference, with the Catholic parts of this region demonstrating greater political opposition to Communism before 1989 and performing far better economically since (Janos 2000: 38–39, 326–327). This evidence cannot be neglected, but it should not serve as an excuse for claiming that such differences are too deeply ingrained to ever be changed.

My point is that the power of cultural tradition should not be overemphasised because under the right circumstances, it can be overturned within a few generations. Greece and Greek Cyprus, for example, have as Eastern Orthodox a tradition as those parts of Eastern Europe that fell under communism, but because they remained in the West European orbit, these two countries have substantially modernised and made rapid economic progress in the past half century. Greece's per capita GDP in 2000 was US\$ 12,400, more than twice as high as Hungary's, whereas in 1950 it was, at best, only 60% of Hungary's. Romania, which had a per capita GDP equal to about 80% of Greece's in 1950 now has one equal to barely 15% of the Greek per capita GDP (*The Economist* 2001: 84–86; Summers and Heston 1984). Clearly, the combined effects of Orthodoxy and communism have proved particularly noxious, whereas close contact with the West has quite rapidly ameliorated some of the negative effects of the Orthodox tradition in Greece. Both Janos (2000) and Tim McDaniel (1996) have explained why Orthodoxy and communism reinforced each other's anti-development cultures, but this does not mean that it is some ancient characteristic of Orthodoxy that accounts for the misery in post-communist Orthodox societies.

If we go back to the reasons for the West's early modernisation between the fifteenth and the nineteenth century, an argument could be made that a kind of civilisational divide existed between the progressive Northwest and Southern as well as Eastern Europe. In fact, the corner of Europe that came to be known as "The West" was unique. The reasons for its rise have been alluded to already. In comparison, the north-eastern parts of Eastern Europe had more primitive agrarian techniques, lower population densities, and, by and large, worse soils and harsher climates. As for south-eastern Europe under Ottoman rule, it was not backward because of some unique characteristic of its cultural tradition or that of the Ottomans. On the contrary, it consisted of a set of very

ordinary agro–pastoralist societies that were subjected to the same catastrophic population and ecological cycles as all other similar societies. The Ottoman sphere was ordinary and only looked backward compared to that one, unique corner of north–western Europe that first evolved beyond the agrarian stage. Areas further north and west in eastern Europe that were in immediate contact with the West benefited from the transfer of technology and thus reached higher levels of agricultural productivity than the more remote areas of south–eastern and far eastern Europe, including Russia (Adanir 1989; Gunst 1989). Material differences certainly reflected cultural differences as well, but rather than being unusual, backward Eastern European societies, including Russia, were like agrarian state societies everywhere, subject to slow growth, violent cycles of growth and decline, and chronic insecurity that discouraged capital growth and improvements.

Once the West had established itself as a dominant part of the world and its influence began to spread, these old differences began to crumble. It took something unusual to break out of the old agrarian pattern, but subsequently, creating modern industrial societies based on existing Western models has become easier. And this is exactly what began to happen, first in the nineteenth century in those parts of Eastern Europe most exposed to the West and then in the twentieth in the more remote parts of South–eastern Europe. Just as the leap from pre–agrarian, stateless societies eventually spread all over the globe over millennia, so the industrial transformation is happening over a few centuries, and we are still in the middle of it.

Central Europe industrialised slowly when compared to the West, but Germany caught up quickly. Bohemia–Moravia, now the Czech Republic, was the most Westernised part of Central Europe after Germany, and though it remained behind the rich economies of Western Europe, by the 1920s and 1930s it had one of the leading industrial export economies in the world and many of its social indicators placed it close to Western Europe (Janos 2000: 130–140). In Poland, also, those parts closest to and most influenced by Germany, were already more advanced than the eastern parts of Poland in the eighteenth century (Kochanowicz 1989).

The enormous difference in degree of industrial strength, technological prowess, urbanisation, literacy, and all the other indicators of modernity that existed at the start of the twentieth century between Eastern Europe and Western Europe hide the fact that a century earlier most of the West had also been illiterate, poor, and rural. Nor should it conceal the fact that where modernisation had a chance to catch hold, in parts of the Habsburg Empire, in Russian Poland and parts of the Baltic, including, of course, St. Petersburg and some other parts of Russia, the process advanced much faster than it originally had in Western Europe from 1500 to 1800. Russia exhibited remarkable industrial growth and rapid increases in literacy in the decades before World War I, thus creating a strong base for modernisation, which the Soviets steadfastly were to claim had never existed (Grossman 1973).

Even World War I and the economically irrational redrawing of boundaries that followed did not stop economic modernisation in Eastern Europe. In fact, it was during the 1920s and 1930s that modernisation really took hold in many parts of the Balkans for the first time. This was not merely the establishment of new states with bloated civil services and military machines, but the real penetration of literacy, of better farming techniques, and even of some industry (Chirot 1989 b).

If it had not been for World War II, and even worse, the imposition of communism after World War II, few if any parts of Eastern Europe would have been frozen in backwardness. Rather, they would have enjoyed the very rapid advances experienced by Iberia, Greece, Cyprus, and Ireland since 1950.

On the face of it, this is somewhat strange. Communism did not mean to retard modernisation, but instead claimed to accelerate it. Urbanisation, mass literacy, and industrialisation were all pushed. What was lacking was the more essential part of modernisation, teaching individuals how to operate in markets rather than in traditional communities. By leaving out that part, communism created the physical structure of modernity without sufficiently changing people's attitudes. One of the bizarre aspects of communism has been the way it froze traditional social expectations in place even as it tried to revolutionise production methods. Communal solidarity rather than individual responsibility and socially rather than market set prices prevailed, and created a deeply flawed, inefficient system. Communism combined the worst of alienating Western modernity with the retention of pre-modern ways of operating in society.

It is certain that this reinforced whatever cultural divide there was between the Western and Eastern parts of Europe, even as the gap between north-western and south-western Europe (and Greece) was closing. As for Eastern Europe, those parts of North-eastern Europe that had had the advantage of three generations of modernisation before 1939 have been recovering from communism with reasonable speed since 1989. They retained a reservoir of knowledge about how to cope with markets and a world in which individuals are responsible for themselves, not communal support systems. They had enough people with entrepreneurial and technical skills to make post-communism work.

South-eastern Europe and what was Sovietised by the Bolshevik Revolution has not been so fortunate. In Russia whatever modernisation occurred before 1917, a generation's worth at most, was obliterated by 80 years of communism. In a country like Romania, where modernisation only began after World War I, a single generation's work was also not enough to resist the damages of two generations of communism.

These unfortunate areas are in a sense starting all over again, and will need a good three generations to get back on track. But three generations is not an eternity, and any attempt to claim that there are major civilisational divides between Central and Eastern Europe is as misleading as it would be to say that the Catholic Irish are too primitive, too superstitious, sometimes too feminine, at other times too brutish and perhaps too drunk, in short, too weak, emotional, and backward to ever reach the heights of English Protestant civilisation. Such beliefs were commonplace, and in fact lie at the heart of the stereotypes that still divide Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland (Ruane and Todd 1996: 43–47; Kiberd 1992: 235–242). The dredging up of reconstructed memories of old religious wars is a pretext, a way of trying to legitimise a perceived civilisational difference that has now evaporated in the reality of Catholic Ireland's economic boom.

If this is so, what can be said of those who continue to insist that there is a Central and an Eastern Europe that are divided by a deep civilisational divide? Some who say this specialise in emphasising small differences for aesthetic reasons. There is nothing wrong with that, and it may even be illuminating. It provides insights that are both interesting and worth entertaining, as long as we

remember the historical and predictive limitations of such a literary perspective. Others who stress the differences between "East" and "Central" (really, "East" and "West," as we have seen), however, have more noxious aims. They want to exclude those who are now poorer, the Balkans, and to have their revenge on their former oppressors, the Russians. They want to keep those parts of Europe backward. Unfortunately, if such a view prevails, it has a chance of succeeding, because excluding South-eastern Europe and the Slavic parts of the former USSR from Europe can delay their modernisation. Not only that, but it can strengthen those deluded intellectuals in places like Romania or Russia who believe that their cultures are so unique that they should not, cannot become Western. It was precisely this search for a non-western, non-democratic, non-individualistic, non-bourgeois path to modernisation that made communism possible and sustained it for many decades. It was such a sense of uniqueness and disgust with the reality of English and French bourgeois democratic modernisation that gave romantic German nationalism its ugliest aspects and contributed so greatly to the rise of Nazism (Stern 1974). It is the very same feeling that gives rise to the worst aspects of Islamic fundamentalism⁵. It would be tragic indeed if such retrograde and harmful ideologies, or analogous ones came back to any part of Europe excluded by definition from being "Western" or "Central."

References

- Abu-Lughod, Janet. 1989. *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250–1350*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Adanir, Fikret. 1989. "Tradition and Rural Change in South-eastern Europe During Ottoman Rule." In Daniel Chirot, ed. *The Origins of Backwardness in Eastern Europe* (see Chirot, below).
- Aeschylus. 1996. *The Persians*. Translation by Edith Hall. Warminster, Eng.: Aris & Phillips.
- Ajami, Fouad. 1998. *The Dream Palace of the Arabs: A Generation's Odyssey*. New York: Vintage.
- Bellah, Robert N. 1957. *Tokugawa Religion: The Cultural Roots of Modern Japan*. New York: The Free Press.
- Boserup, Ester. 1981. *Population And Technological Change: A Study of Long-Term Trends*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. 1992. "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History", *Representations* 32 (Winter).
- Chirot, Daniel. 1986. "The Rise of the West," *American Sociological Review* 50:2.
- Chirot, Daniel, ed. 1989 a. *The Origins of Backwardness in Eastern Europe: Economic And Political Change from the Middle Ages until the Early Twentieth Century*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Chirot, Daniel. 1989 b. "Ideology, Reality, and Competing Models of Development in Eastern Europe Between the Two World Wars." *Eastern European Politics and Societies* 3:3 (Fall).

- Chirot, Daniel. 1996. "Herder's Multicultural Theory of Nationalism and its Consequences," *East European Politics and Societies* 10:1(Winter).
- Clifford, James and George E. Marcus, eds. 1986. *Writing Culture: The Poetics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Diamond, Jared. 1997. *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fate of Human Societies*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- The Economist*. 2001. *The World in 2001*. London: The Economist Group.
- Eisenstadt, Shmuel N. 1963. *The Political System of Empires*. New York: The Free Press.
- Eisenstadt, Shmuel N., ed. 1986. *The Origins and Diversity of Axial Age Civilizations*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Friedman, Thomas L. 1999. *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux.
- Gellner, Ernest. 1992. *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*. London: Routledge.
- Green, Peter. 1991. *Alexander of Macedon, 356–323 B.C.: A Historical Biography*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Grossman, Gregory. 1973. "The Industrialisation of Russia and the Soviet Union.: In Carlo M. Cipolla, ed., *The Fontana Economic History of Europe*, Volume 4, Part 2, The Emergence of Industrial Societies. Glasgow: Fontana / Collins.
- Gunst, Peter. 1989. "Agrarian Systems of Central and Eastern Europe." In Daniel Chirot, ed. *The Origins of Backwardness in Eastern Europe* (see Chirot, above).
- Huntington, Samuel. 1996. *The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Jackson, Robert H. and Carl G. Rosberg. 1982. *Personal Rule in Black Africa: Prince, Autocrat, Prophet, Tyrant*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Janos, Andrew C. 2000. *East Central Europe in the Modern World*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Jones, Eric L. 1981. *The European Miracle*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kasaba, Resat and Nicole Watts, eds. 2001. Section on "Human Rights in Turkey", *Human Rights* 2:4.
- Khazanov, Anatoly M. 1997. "Ethnic Nationalism in the Russian Federation," *Daedalus* 126:3.
- Kochanowicz, Jacek. 1989. The Polish Economy and the Evolution of Dependency. In Daniel Chirot, ed. *The Origins of Backwardness in Eastern Europe* (see Chirot, above).

- Kundera, Milan. 1984. "The Tragedy of Central Europe." *New York Review of Books*, April 26, 1984, 33.
- Kuper, Adam. 1999. *Culture: The Anthropologists' Account*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Landes, David S. 1998. *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why Some Are So Rich and Some So Poor*. New York: Norton.
- Lewis, Bernard. 1995. *Cultures in Conflict: Christians, Muslims, and Jews in the Age of Discovery*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lyotard, Jean-François. 1979. *La condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir*. Paris: Minuit.
- McDaniel, Tim. 1996. *The Agony of the Russian Idea*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- McEvedy, Colin and Richard Jones. 1978. *Atlas of World Population History*. Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin Books.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1954. *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*. New York: Random House.
- Parsons, Talcott and Neil J. Smelser. 1956. *Economy and Society*. Glencoe: Free Press.
- Rostow, Walt W. 1960. *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sahlins, Marshall D. and Elman R. Service. 1960. *Evolution and Culture*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Stern, Fritz. 1974. *The Politics of Cultural Despair*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Summers, Robert and A. Heston. 1984. "Improved International Comparisons of Real Product and its Composition, 1950-1980." *The Review of Income and Wealth*, ser. 30, no. 2, 207-262.
- Vogel, Ezra F. 1991. *The Four Little Dragons: The Spread of Industrialisation in East Asia*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Wallerstein, Immanuel. 1974. "The Rise and Future Demise of the World Capitalist System: Concepts for Comparative Analysis". *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 16:2.
- Weber, Max. 1968. *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich. New York: Bedminster.
- Weber, Max. 1998. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Translated by Talcott Parsons and edited by Randall Collins. Los Angeles: Roxbury Publishing.

World Bank. 2000. *World Development Indicators*. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

Yavuz, Hakan. 1999. "Towards an Islamic Liberalism? The Nurcu Movement and Fetullah Gulen," *Middle East Journal* 53:4.

Zauberman, Alfred. 1976. "Russia and Eastern Europe 1920–1970." In Carlo M. Cipolla, ed., *The Fontana Economic History of Europe*, Volume 6, Part 2, Contemporary Economies. Glasgow: Collins / Fontana.

Ziuganov, Gennadii A. 1996. *Rossiiā – rodina moia. Ideologiia gosudarstvennogopatriotizma*. Moscow: Informpechat.

-
- ¹ A look at the Document section of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (www.unhch.ch/) only begins to indicate how seriously the issue of basic human rights is taken in a growing number of countries in the world, if only to satisfy international opinion and to avoid condemnation.
- ² That is not to say that the Islamists would maintain a pro-European position if they were in power, of course, but that political competition forces people to reconsider their ideological positions and may, over time, produce real shifts. See the Turkish newspapers *Radikal* and *Yeni Safak* to follow the twists and turns of these debates. Also, see Kasaba and Watts (2001) and Yavuz (1999).
- ³ Milan Kundera did not invent but certainly revived and transformed the term "Central Europe" in the early 1980s and put it to brilliant propagandistic use. See his 1984 essay, "The Tragedy of Central Europe".
- ⁴ It is useful to recall how much the East Asian economic miracles decisively and quickly rejected the anti-commercial bias of Confucianism in order to modernise and Westernise quickly after 1950. See Ezra Vogel (1991).
- ⁵ This is the constant theme running through Fouad Ajami's 1998 book, *The Dream Palace of the Arabs*. Faced by failure in their own nations, Arab intellectuals increasingly blame the West which they once wanted to emulate but which they now say has let them down. The incompetence and brutality of their own Arab leaders is too much to face, so they turn to anti-modern, anti-Western rage that feeds on frustration and leaves only Muslim fundamentalism as a strong alternative to complete despondency.

Published 2002-01-11
 Original in English
 Contribution by Transit
 © Transit