

Part I



Chapter 1:

Boundaries and Histories

A little over a century ago Max Weber participated in a research project on farm labour in Germany. He showed how the social structure of the eastern provinces, where the Prussian *Junkers* were the dominant social class, differed from that of other parts of Germany. As a committed German nationalist, Weber was concerned about the influx of Slav labourers from the east. He related this trend to the peculiarities of Prussian social structure, and to economic changes which had begun to undermine Prussia's dominance in the German state and to transform its social structure along capitalist lines. Seasonal workers from further east were cheaper and easier to discipline than Germans, whose material and ideal aspirations, so Weber found, were on a higher plane. Weber's studies at this period contributed to a shift in German economic policies away from free trade, with the aim of stemming these trends in rural labour markets. The partiality of his analysis is reflected in his extensive treatment of the motivations and ideals of the German labourers, whilst he ignored this dimension among the Poles and Russians who were replacing them.

In spite of some subtleties, Weber's work does not meet the usual standards of anthropological research. For a start it was not based on intensive first-hand experience: the author merely evaluated information provided by landowners in questionnaires. One marvels at how this urban bourgeois was able, on the basis of such materials, to penetrate with such assurance the minds of persons belonging to classes quite alien to his own. Weber's work is nonetheless of great interest, and his concern with the underlying influence of economic changes on Europe's internal frontier has acquired a renewed topicality in the post-communist period. The boundary he perceived between east and west within Germany corresponded quite closely to the border that was to divide Eastern and Western Germany between 1945 and 1990.

Demarcation of the boundary between east and west in Europe in the late twentieth century is no straightforward task. It evidently depends on the boundaries of Europe itself, but these have never been unambiguous. The self-styled European Union countries pursue a cultural policy that proclaims their unity in grand civilizational terms (cf. Shore 1993), but there is no justification for the exclusion of the countries known until recently as the 'eastern bloc'.

2 The Skeleton at the Feast

If one adopts a geographical definition that sets the eastern boundary at the Urals, most of the countries previously thought of as 'behind the iron curtain' would fall in the western half of the continent. On the post-Soviet map, only Russia would fall completely within the eastern half.

If complete agreement on objective, definitive boundaries for Europe is unlikely ever to be reached, the question can be posed instead: what is the history of the boundary between east and west in European consciousness? Many interesting answers have been offered. For example, the historian Iván T. Berend, a Hungarian who considers himself an East-Central European, has no doubt about the antiquity of the boundary:

the River Elbe was in some mystical way already the border between Eastern and Western Europe in the last years of Charlemagne's Empire at the beginning of the ninth century, and again became the border in the peace arrangements after World War II. The Empire represented a Christian, feudal and agriculture-based world that was considered 'European'. As opposed to this, whatever lay east of the Elbe was barbaric and unsettled. (1986: 2-3)

In many western accounts also, Eastern Europe is presented as the generalized 'Other', whose exact boundaries fluctuate according to the viewpoint of the observer. In the decades of the cold war it was of course presented as a political 'Other'. But long before the socialist period there was an east-west divide, or at least an incline, with westerners generally looking down on their neighbours to the east, and sometimes emphatically 'demonizing' all those associated with this point of the compass. Perceptions were often complex and multi-layered. Thus for most German speakers Prussia would be considered eastern. However, at another level all German speakers might view the eastern boundary as beginning with the closest Slavs (Poles), whose overall level of economic development was markedly lower. The Poles in turn regarded themselves as a bulwark of the west, legitimating this idea to a large extent through their position as a major outpost of Catholic Christianity. The *relative* character of the boundary is repeated throughout Central Europe, and again in the Balkan zones. These patterns continue to receive myriad reinforcements in everyday life. For example, geographical accounts, tourist literature and economic reports constantly refer to major cities such as Warsaw, Budapest, Bucharest and Sofia as a 'gateway to the east', but one never knows exactly when the east has been reached.

Stereotypical images of both 'east' and 'west' form the underpinnings of debates that have opened up again in recent years in a number of countries

about 'joining Europe'. Advocates of closer integration with the so-called European Union countries argue that the more western zones are the repository of the core values of Christian civilization. Their opponents, not only in Russia but also in countries like Romania and Poland (cf. Verdery 1991a, Skotnicka-Illasiewicz and Wesołowski 1995), are more likely to define their identity *in opposition to* the idea of Europe. These debates normally have a clear political significance: those who advocate closer incorporation into Europe are also those who urge more liberal economic policies and who are willing to condone the new inequalities of the market. (One should be wary of classifying this as a uniquely Eastern European syndrome: after all plenty of English people also seem to define themselves against the idea of Europe, without their belonging to Europe at some deeper level being called into question; and in Britain too, the debates about national identity have clear political and economic parameters.) These debates within Eastern Europe have been echoed by the persistence in the west of highly negative images of 'the other Europe' after the collapse of communism. The master symbol of the iron curtain seems to have been displaced by that of all-pervasive mafia: as before, the purpose is to emphasize that Eastern Europe still falls well short of democratic, civilized norms in the west.

A closer inspection reveals that this east-west boundary may not be so ancient after all. Larry Wolff (1994) argues that until the eighteenth century the boundary between north and south had greater salience. The stereotypes of barbarism and instability now linked to the east were previously linked to the north. Their displacement was in large measure the accomplishment of the eighteenth century *philosophes*, particularly Voltaire, aided and abetted by the representations of many contemporary travellers. Wolff's account is a salutary reminder of the need to adopt a critical attitude to all representations. It seems clear that the thinkers of the enlightenment and romantic periods played a key role in the formation of the modern stereotypical portrayals of Eastern Europe. How they achieved this, and how representations of other Europeans can be compared with the images undergoing simultaneous consolidation of the other outside Europe, are important fields of enquiry for intellectual historians. However, Wolff's stronger claim, that Eastern Europe is an 'invention', seems to be an unwarranted exaggeration.

First, Berend and other historians have shown that at least some of the key elements of east-west mental cartography were well established before the eighteenth century. It may be more accurate to suggest that, rather than a simple shift occurring from a north-south axis to an east-west axis, for many centuries

4 The Skeleton at the Feast

east and north were in effect lumped together by the literati in Europe's leading centres of cultural production, concentrated in the Mediterranean south. (It is only comparatively recently that the north has managed to turn the tables on the south, e.g. through its adaptation of the mafia stereotype.)

Second, and more important for the anthropological approach developed in this volume, it is essential that the emphasis on *ideas* of Europe, as developed over many centuries by intellectuals, be complemented by other sorts of data. Granted that salient boundaries in the consciousness of intellectuals have varied through time, and granted that the construction of such boundaries is itself a complex moral-political process, are there other, objective factors that underpin the east-west boundary? In this chapter I shall argue that, in terms of political organization and economic development, an east-west boundary, however fuzzy, can be drawn with some measure of objectivity. However, the common elements in the political and economic experiences of modern Eastern Europe must be set alongside other factors operating over longer time spans which speak to the essential unity of the Eurasian landmass. In no sense does my argument provide anthropological support for those who would dig deeper ditches around some 'Fortress Europe' in the west.

The lands between: three regions and three sub-regions

William McNeill (1963) and many other scholars have approached the lands of Eastern Europe as an intermediate zone of political, economic and cultural transitions between Western Europe and steppe Asia. I argue that, while the ideal types associated with these two entities have been grossly distorted in stereotypical representations, this contrast does have a substantial measure of validity. In economic terms the lands west of the Elbe were generally richer and more advanced. They had denser concentrations of population, almost entirely sedentary. They were ethnically more homogeneous, more urbanized, and they developed stronger states. Whilst these processes were unravelling in the west, nomadic societies of Asia were migrating continuously westwards and looking for space in more productive lands. 'Native Europeans' in the region, the most numerous among whom were the ancestors of the Slav peoples of today, experienced the migrations and invasions of Huns, Avars, Hungarians and Tatars, in much the same way that sedentary people have interacted with nomads in other parts of the world. The consequent instability is evident in the archaeological record. Outcomes of this contact ranged from conquest and extermination to various forms of accommodation and absorption. The

Hungarians were the most successful of all these groups in preserving their language and collective identity in Europe.

These historical-geographical and demographic circumstances help to explain why the modern state was well consolidated in Western Europe long before it triumphed in the east. Economic and political resources were weaker in the east, and with many very different groups intermingling, the potential number of would-be nations was large in relation to the space available. Ethnic and religious differences were accentuated by subjugation to very different forms of imperial rule. The awkward implications of all this diversity were realized in the nineteenth century, when nationalist movements and incipient industrialization began to weaken the bases of these empires. In the agrarian age (cf. Gellner 1983) the cultural groupings of Eastern Europe for the most part lived peacefully alongside each other, under a considerable variety of political arrangements. For example, the 'Commonwealth' of Poland and Lithuania was a relatively tolerant, multiethnic power over several centuries, until the demise of the Polish state in the late eighteenth century. Other notable centres of state power within the region, such as Hungary and Serbia, fell to Ottoman forces, but in the case of Poland-Lithuania the internal causes of decline were more significant. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, all the main centres of power in Eastern Europe were located on the margins of the region, in Vienna, Constantinople and St. Petersburg. At this time the peasant masses were still very far from thinking in national terms.

The dramatic success of nationalist currents from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards has caused much Eastern European history to be presented in terms of the histories of its separate nations. This is unfortunate, and anthropologists must be wary of the bias inherent in nationalist histories. Evidence has often been used improperly, sometimes even fabricated. Anthropologists will wish to avoid the sort of slanging match that has characterized exchanges between Hungarian and Romanian historians over Transylvania. They try to grasp the full cultural complexities of multiethnic regions. Most of the work done by anthropologists is rooted in specific local conditions. Regions such as Pomerania and Galicia bear little relation to ethnic and state boundaries. Transylvanians may be Romanian, Hungarian, or German, Macedonians have a newly independent republic, but they are also to be found in Bulgaria and Greece. Ecological factors and political boundaries dating from the pre-nationalist age will often be more significant to the anthropologist than the lines agreed at Versailles or Yalta.

6 The Skeleton at the Feast

If an extensive border zone or 'marchland' exhibits over a long historical period variable combinations of features drawn from ideal types of 'west' and 'east', then it might be more profitable to replace the notion of an east-west divide with some notion of a third type. Jenő Szűcs (1988) has identified 'three historic regions of Europe' – though his argument may be subtly influenced by a desire to link his native Hungary more closely with the west than with its neighbours to the south and east. A similar position has been outlined by Ernest Gellner (1994), who sees Eastern Europe as one of a series of 'time-zones' between the developed states of the Atlantic seaboard and the despotic empires of the east. The zone in between witnessed a late rush to construct a modern nation-state in conditions where neither political unity nor a common 'high culture' and literary language had yet been established. Classifications such as those of Gellner raise problems, however, since examples of allegedly 'eastern' variants of nationalism can be found in western parts of Europe, and some eastern countries, notably Poland and Hungary, did possess consolidated states and a flourishing high culture in the medieval period.

Rather than specify a third region, others have found it more useful to draw distinctions on a sub-regional basis. Most of Eastern Europe in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was controlled by three or four distinctive dynasties. The largest of these, and the most problematic in that its territories extended far into Asia, was the Czarist Empire. South-Eastern Europe, stereotyped since the early nineteenth century as 'the Balkans', was the area of Ottoman Turkish influence. Central-Eastern Europe corresponded roughly to the German *Mitteleuropa*, a concept that has experienced a vigorous revival in recent years, but perhaps saw its heyday under the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (cf. Schöpflin and Wood 1989). North-Eastern Europe included Prussia's share of the plains had formerly belonged to Poland.

However, these political units had little geographical or historical coherence. One needs to be careful in assessing their contemporary relevance, and also the relevance of other alleged long-term continuities. For example, it has often been suggested that the organization of various opposition groups in late socialist Poland and the cohesion of that society derived from the historical experience of national opposition in the nineteenth century and its transmission through social memory. Such a link seems very dubious (though as a myth I would not wish to deny a degree of efficacy). The old boundaries of empires left significant marks, but some of the key differences within the region have depended upon more recent, post-war experiences. For example, the economic policies of socialist Hungary differed from those of neighbouring states. One

might suggest long-term cultural reasons as to why the notions of 'market socialism' were never encouraged in Romania and Bulgaria, more exposed to Ottoman Turkish power over the centuries. But then again, on a cultural basis one might reasonably have expected rather more experimentation with 'market socialism' in Bohemia and Moravia than was in fact the case – for good political reasons. Thus, alongside recognition of long histories of cultural similarity or divergence, which may or may not correspond to state boundaries, it is necessary to take account of decisive political and economic interventions closer to the present. All this complicates the task of specifying sub-regions within Eastern Europe, and ultimately it may not be very fruitful to do so.

Most anthropological investigations will have a more precise focus, both spatial and temporal. However, for some purposes it may still prove useful to consider Eastern Europe as a unit, and this requires a more careful examination of the alleged east-west boundary. During the socialist period the interpretations of a number of historians in Eastern Europe combined with a wave of western historical scholarship to produce a challenging overall picture of the unity of the region, founded essentially on economic dependency and its role in the expansion of capitalism as a 'world system'. The agrarian societies of Eastern Europe were profoundly affected by capitalism at an early stage and, arguably, this had a fundamental impact on all later developments.

The 'second feudalism' in Poland

Witold Kula is a Polish economic historian whose attempt to theorize a model of the workings of the Polish economy in the early modern period was belatedly published in English in 1976. One reason for widespread interest in this work lay in the methods used by Kula to analyze economic activity in a weakly monetized society, one in which economic choices could not generally be explained by reference to price forming markets, although an external market was of decisive importance. Kula suggested that the fundamental dualism of the Polish economy during this period offered a basis for comparisons with other preindustrial economies and with the dualistic economies of the contemporary Third World, though he was careful to point to some difficulties with such comparisons. In feudal Poland the two basic sectors were the demesne, the lands controlled directly by the nobility, and the village plots of their serf peasants. These two sectors were intimately linked and they interacted in a stable system that was not disrupted until the emergence of capitalist relations of production in the nineteenth century.

8 The Skeleton at the Feast

Kula specifies ten features of an ideal-type of late feudalism in Poland. He stresses that these are not necessarily valid for the feudalism of the west and the many other feudalisms identified by historians, but he suggests that they do hold for some other regions of Eastern Europe at the same period. They are as follows: (1976a: 28)

1. Agriculture is predominant in the economy.
2. Land is not a commodity and its ownership is the exclusive preserve of the nobility.
3. The peasant village and the lord's demesne are the two arenas of agricultural production.
4. Institutional barriers inhibit peasant mobility, both socially and territorially.
5. Labour dues (*corvée*) are compulsory for peasants, and most rent is paid in this form.
6. Artisans are restricted to the demesne, or to urban guilds.
7. The economic activities of the lords are uncontrolled by law.
8. The lords are prominent consumers of luxury goods.
9. More advanced countries are easily accessible by up to date means of transportation.
10. There is no state intervention in the economy.

Kula elaborates the workings of this economic system with empirical reference to Polish historical work: here I am concerned only with its basic principles and the contradictory motivations it conceals. The peasants aim to produce a surplus in cash over and above their subsistence needs, and the lords seek to stop them by ensuring that all surplus is produced on the demesne and accrues to them. The peasants have to be allowed their own plots to meet their subsistence needs, and also to meet the subsistence needs of non-producers via rents paid in kind. However, at least some peasants have also to be allowed larger plots, to enable them to provide and reproduce the draught animals required for work on the demesne. This and other vulnerable aspects of the planned economy of the demesne create a potential for more independent activity by the peasants. Failure to provide enough land to them will enfeeble the estate and lead to 'desolation', with the peasants taking flight elsewhere. (Even at this relatively advanced stage of agrarian society, frontier lands were more readily accessible in Eastern Europe than they were in the west.) Providing the peasants with too much land would undermine the dominance of the demesne and cut into its profitability. The problems were complicated

by annual fluctuations in production, whose effects, as Kula shows, were quite different from those of capitalist market fluctuations. In the end, the tendency was towards increased exploitation, and excessive lordly pressure on the peasant sector was one of the factors which led to the system's disintegration.

Kula's Marxist exploration of the internal workings of the economy includes an almost Weberian consideration of the motivations of individual decision-takers. He points out that lords would not have thought in terms of money rents, rather than labour rents, until the nineteenth century. It is much harder for historians to say very much about motivations and ideals in the peasant sector, which is less well documented in the historical record. Kula's long term dynamic, unlike orthodox Marxist accounts of feudalism, also depends upon a number of factors extrinsic to the class struggles at hand, some of which had decisive effects on the outcome of those struggles. Among these were the influx of precious metals and luxury goods into Europe from the sixteenth century; the technical progress of the period, which served to lower the prices of 'advanced' goods produced in Western Europe; new transportation possibilities; and rapidly increasing urbanization and industrialization in the west, which created a demand for increased supplies of basic food products. The consequences of these developments for Eastern Europe were in many respects the opposite of their consequences for the west. In Poland a national price for grain came into existence, where there had been no such market before. The price of transportable goods went up as a consequence of the new exporting possibilities. Most importantly, the growth of a generalised market economy was impeded: domestic industry did not develop, in part because its potential consumers were fascinated by the west and spent the proceeds of their grain surpluses on foreign luxuries. Thus, although the terms of the grain trade were economically favourable to Poland in one sense, in a broader developmental perspective the impact was negative, because the proceeds were squandered by the social stratum which monopolized them. By the time capitalism had penetrated Poland in the nineteenth century (again thanks in part to external circumstances, including the interruption of the grain trade by Napoleon), the country was unable to compete on equal terms with the west; it had first of all to recover from the 'underdevelopment' induced by late feudalism. This 'second serfdom', as Engels called it (though whether Eastern Europe had a first feudalism is debatable), was a system that was instituted in Poland by the ruling noble class as a specific and, from their own class viewpoint, entirely rational response to market opportunities which presented themselves in the west.

10 The Skeleton at the Feast

Kula's interpretation, in orthodox Marxist manner, attaches prime significance to material forces and the class struggle. Yet his account of the transition from feudalism to capitalism is unorthodox, in as much as he shows how the progress of Polish feudalism, unlike the pristine feudalism of the west, was heavily influenced by external forces. These forces combined with internal contradictions, centred on the exploitation of peasant *corvée* labour, to lead to feudalism's eventual replacement by capitalism and the full development of a market economy. The most important external force in this situation was the prior development of capitalism in the west. In the east its initial effect was to help to generate not only an exceptionally conservative feudal social structure, but also retrogression in the forces of production (because some artisanal and proto-industrial activities atrophied in the new conditions). In terms of economic rationality, Kula's analysis resembles the dual approaches followed by some economic anthropologists. The behaviour of all the individuals in the system is rational, according to their own positions in the economy, their preferences, and the information at their disposal. However, the systemic consequences of these rational individual decisions are highly deleterious. Kula concludes that the 'objective rationality' of the whole economy, far from moving to a higher level, was pushed backwards by this late feudal adaptation to the expansion of the west.

Apart from the echoes of both Marx and Weber (and also of Braudel and Chayanov), there is much in Kula's work that will appeal to the historically minded anthropologist. Of course the details on the ground will vary from one region to another. I have carried out fieldwork in an area of Poland which did not experience all the elements of Kula's model: labour dues were less important in the mountainous south, and flight was a more frequent and viable option for peasants than elsewhere (Hann 1985: Ch.2). Such microstudies do not undermine the utility of Kula's ideal-type. There may be room for debate as to whether it should be labelled feudalism. Some anthropologists have been suspicious of generalizing this term anywhere outside North-West Europe (Goody 1971). But the proximity of Eastern Europe, and the numerous ways in which Polish patterns were directly influenced by older patterns in the same broad cultural area of western Christianity, should permit the term to be used in this context, without opening the doors to the recognition of feudalism in the tribal and peasant economies of every continent.

How might anthropologists apply Kula's model? Clearly their experience of the 'motivations and principles' of actors in other non-monetized contexts may be helpful in allowing peasant voices to be heard, where in the historical

records they may be silent or distorted. For example, a fascinating institution to explore in collaboration with historians would be that known as *propinacja*, which according to Kula served to ensure that as much as possible of any surplus the peasant could accumulate was eventually siphoned off by the lord. A monopoly over alcoholic products, usually enforced via Jewish intermediaries who leased taverns from the lord, was sufficient to give control over the main area of peasant consumer expenditure, given the lack of alternatives on the internal market. It seems likely that many lords earned more through this alcohol monopoly than they did through their commodity exports, and that the institution of the *propinacja* developed strongly after the expansion of the export trade. It undoubtedly had repercussions on the position of Jews in society as well as on the national economy, and it has also had long term consequences for popular culture. Kula would be interested in all this, for his Marxism does not require him to reduce all historical explanation to the material dimension, even though this increases the element of uncertainty in his model. For him, as for anthropologists, the 'creative responses' and 'spontaneous activities' of human beings are decisive, including the peasantry's endurance and capacity to resist exploitation. The study of how peasant culture both helped to shape, and was in turn shaped by, the second feudalism may even have some relevance to the workings of a later economic system in Poland, which preserved distinctive features of underdevelopment and dualism.

The 'Asiatic mode of production' in the Balkans

The Ottoman Turks conquered large areas of the Balkans long before they captured Constantinople in 1453 and made it their new capital. They lost most of their European lands during the century preceding the final disintegration of their empire in 1918. The consequences of their long dominance in South-Eastern Europe are much mythologized but poorly understood. Plenty of people have blamed the 'Turkish yoke' for national misfortunes and behavioural patterns that differ from those of an idealized Western Europe. The realities of Ottoman economy and administration differed from the feudal patterns found elsewhere in Europe, but there were also some fundamental similarities to other sub-regions of Eastern Europe.

The most important contrast with the other Imperial powers of Eastern Europe was in the character of the state power. The Ottoman Empire in its golden age (i.e. pre-seventeenth century) was a highly efficient and centralized military machine, personally controlled by a succession of able Sultans. Social

12 The Skeleton at the Feast

structure was much influenced by the need to maintain military readiness, and to provision and finance the centre of power. These requirements were reflected in the Ottoman system of land tenure, which was imposed in the Balkans in essentially the same way as in the Asian parts of the empire. The Sultan's warriors (principally the famed *sipahi* or cavalrymen) were granted 'fiefs' in the conquered territories, called *timars*, on the basis of which their military obligations were reckoned. They extracted surplus from peasant producers: sometimes the exactions were severe, but there is not much evidence that peasants suffered more than they had under their previous Christian lords. In some areas, such as Albania, many of the *timar*-holders were the old lords, some of whom later adopted the Moslem religion, while retaining their tribal identities. The system was unlike feudal systems in that the Ottoman fiefs were the gift of the Sultan, who alone owned all property. On the death of a *timar*-holder, or in the event of failure to perform his duties satisfactorily, the land reverted to the Sultan, who could dispose of it as he wished. This 'prebendal' aspect of the system renders it, in Marxist terminology, an 'Asiatic' mode of production, rather than a variant of feudalism. This category fed off earlier western notions of despotic oriental states. It could not be integrated into the orthodox Marxist tradition, precisely because its long-term stagnation seemed to contradict that tradition's basic assumptions of evolutionary progress. The main feature of this mode was the greater concentration of power at the centre. Lords had less security, and commoners were taxed communally through their villages, rather than through individual rent or *corvée* labour.

Apart from introducing characteristics of the nomadic Asian state into Europe, the Ottomans also embodied the legacy of the great Moslem states of the Middle East. This Moslem legacy had far-reaching effects on the political organization of the Empire after its consolidation at the new capital of Istanbul. In the *millet* system, subjects were classified and allowed various political and economic privileges on the basis of their religion. The *millet* of Rum (Greek Orthodox) was by far the most important, and the Patriarch in Constantinople probably had more influence politically than he had enjoyed in the later Byzantine period. Ottoman tolerance allowed most of their subjects to remain loyal to their faith. Since they themselves disdained to participate in certain activities, Jews, Armenians and above all Greeks were able to play the most important roles in the commercial and diplomatic life of the empire. The army and the higher echelons of the state were recruited from slaves, many of them Christians from the Balkans; they were converted to Islam very early in life and given very careful training to prepare them for their later duties.

The Ottoman Empire reached its greatest territorial expanse in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. However, the problems of waging campaigns in many regions, all of them remote from the capital, were compounded by an increasing disparity in military technology and by a weakening of the central power. The weakness was evident in the decision to spare the lives of the Sultan's siblings, previously routinely murdered as part of the struggle to maintain power. The new and more humane practice left more room for rivalry and intrigue at the core of the empire. It led to power itself moving away from the Sultan and towards the harem, and particularly towards the Sultan's mother. During this same period the slave system of recruitment was largely phased out. Changes in the world economy also had a fundamental impact. The expansion of sea-trading routes undermined Ottoman finances, as the old trade routes through the Levant now yielded less tax income.

The prebendal land tenure arrangements became increasingly unworkable in conditions of a weak state power and a dwindling supply of military spoils available for allocation. In many areas the *sipahi* gave way to the *ayan* who, in return for undertaking to pay taxes to the centre, obtained full hereditary rights to property. The transition to a system of tax-farming as the main means of financing the state probably led to much increased pressure on the peasants at the bottom of the system, i.e. to an increase in the rate of their exploitation. They became less secure on the land. In some areas the new policies led directly to devastation, i.e. population decline, and neglect or abandonment of natural resources. In other areas they led to an apparently dynamic form of commercial farm known as the *chiftlik*. These often aimed to maximize profits by specializing in one crop, which was exported to meet the same burgeoning demand in the west whose effects have been noted already in Poland.

In his detailed study of economic life in Ottoman Europe, Bruce McGowan (1981) stresses that the boom in commercial grain production in the Balkans in the sixteenth century was not *directly* related to the second feudalism elsewhere - but there were nonetheless some striking affinities. The Ottoman lands became increasingly important suppliers of foodstuffs and other basic commodities to the west because of the relative cheapness of land and labour in the Balkans and the strength of western demand. Such specializations then induced the same stunting effects on development potential as in Poland: from this period onwards the Ottoman economy was destined to remain 'extensive'. The essentials of the class relationship between the peasants and *chiftlik* owners were comparable to the lord-peasant relations we have discussed above, and they had similar long-term effects on the development of productive forces both inside and outside agriculture.

14 The Skeleton at the Feast

McGowan provides a detailed examination of judicial records and other documentation from Western Macedonia, where conditions were relatively peaceful externally, soils were relatively fertile, and political control was effective. Circumstances were quite different, e.g. in the vassal states of Moldavia and Wallachia, or in the high ground of adjacent Albania. Brigandry, however, was a major problem in Macedonia too, for none of the agrarian states ever had the resources to police all the territories they claimed to rule. McGowan's material confirms the general transition from the *timar* to a new form of holding, the rise of which was associated with the production of wheat surplus, though this was not necessarily exported outside the Empire. The *sipahi* system was in decline from the end of the sixteenth century. Some moved permanently to towns, others became, by a variety of methods, *chiftlik* owners. According to the Ohrid Law of 1613, they were then for the first time themselves liable to pay taxes. McGowan dates a general tendency towards the taxation of landed property rather than the person from the same period. At the same time controls over the movements and activities of peasants increased: for example, the use of peonage to maintain indebtedness. Later in the same century the mounting expenses of the central Treasury led the Ottomans to look for more new ways of raising taxes, which involved the further proliferation of middlemen and complete loss of central control. The peasant was liable to an array of taxes at local, district and provincial levels, and intra-village equity was eventually abandoned.

In the protracted processes of Ottoman breakdown peasants had to learn basic survival skills, which included a distrust of authority, passivity and dissimulation, dependence upon patronage, and a shrewd acquaintance with bribery and corruption. When pressures were most intense, they had recourse to flight, and even revolt. A few gave active support to bandit rebels (cf. Hobsbawm 1969). Many others resisted more passively. Arguably, these patterns of behaviour, too, were perpetuated in later periods.

McGowan found that general fiscal domination of the peasantry was more important than the institution of the *chiftlik* per se for maintaining the power and fortune of the *ayan* class. It is clear that courts ceased observing the norms of the classical landholding system in the seventeenth century, but less clear how profitable the new types of property were to their managers. Most of them were quite small (perhaps 50 - 75 acres), and they were not so much a sure means of becoming very rich as a rational response by low-level Ottoman officials whose personal security was no longer being effectively guaranteed by the state. Once the usurpation of prebendal land was achieved, the prevailing level of rents was likely to be adjusted upwards, and a struggle with

recalcitrant peasants would ensue. By the end of the nineteenth century highly inefficient forms of sharecropping had become the main form of labour relations in many areas of the Balkans. Thus the price paid by the peasants who had to endure the long centuries of Ottoman decline was considerable. As under the second serfdom in Poland, the rise of an export agriculture linked to the needs of the west was prototypical of the 'development of underdevelopment' elsewhere in the world. While plantation slavery and formal colonization were the instruments of capitalist penetration in the Americas and Africa, sharecropping and *corvée* labour relations were the instruments found in Eastern Europe.

State and society in Central-Eastern Europe

Alongside the Russian, Prussian and Ottoman Empires, the fourth Imperial power of Eastern Europe in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was Austria-Hungary. Her territories at this time included more than a dozen significant national groupings. Geographically they ranged from Bukovina to Bohemia, and from Bosnia to the Eastern Galician lands later incorporated into the Soviet Union. In the last decades of the Empire, Bohemia became a fairly advanced industrial region with an occupational structure similar to Western Europe, including a prominent bourgeoisie. In contrast, Bukovina and many other Balkan zones had scarcely any industrial activity at all. Between these extremes lay the kingdom of Hungary, which had rebelled against the Habsburgs in 1848, but was promoted twenty years later to share the governing of the empire. Most of Hungary had been occupied by the Ottomans for a century and a half after the defeat at Mohács in 1526. The effects of this foreign domination were not uniformly negative: while small villages disappeared and the hinterland was unsafe, market towns on the Great Plain actually prospered under the Ottomans. Their withdrawal left the region underpopulated, a deficiency addressed through resettlement schemes organized by the Habsburgs. These schemes involved the recruitment of a mixture of ethnic groups, especially Germans and Slovaks. In the course of the eighteenth century most of these new settlers, despite promises of perpetual 'free colonist' status, were subjected to another variant of late feudalism. It had similar economic causes, though cattle rather than grain formed the major export commodity of the Great Plain in the eighteenth century.

The historians Iván T. Berend and György Ránki, consciously echoing Braudel, have presented detailed and persuasive analyses of Central Europe's 'long nineteenth century' (1982: 7). This century witnessed the general

16 The Skeleton at the Feast

expansion of capitalist markets throughout the region, but the local responses differed sharply. Common features (which extended also to Russia) included the removal of major institutional impediments to the spread of capitalist relations. Serfdom was abolished in most of Central-Eastern Europe after the rebellions of 1848. Eastern European governments, even the Ottomans, began to encourage an influx of foreign capital and skills. Even if the state's interest was primarily selfish and its development of the transportation network and the telegraph were for administrative and military reasons, these investments had wider beneficial effects. Some governments, and the Habsburg Empire in particular, also encouraged the development of representative political institutions. They undertook educational and welfare programmes which compared respectably with contemporary initiatives in the west.

In cultural and educational development there was tremendous variation across the Austro-Hungarian Empire. By the end of the nineteenth century literacy rates in Austria itself were very high, while in the eastern zone among the Carpathian Ruthenians (who lived on both sides of the Carpathian Mountains and were consequently divided between the separate halves of the Imperial administration), they remained desperately low. In Transylvania, Hungarians and Germans were increasingly urbanized, prosperous and literate, while the majority Romanian population was largely illiterate. Many areas of Hungary itself had by this time completed the 'demographic transition', a substantial decline in death rates having been followed by a decline in fertility. But other regions had yet to embark on this transition. Berend and Ránki argue that progress in demographic, cultural, educational and even political spheres was all related to basic changes taking place in the structure of the economy. Thus Bohemia could move fairly rapidly from a second serfdom not unlike that of Poland into a phase of rapid modernization. Prussia moved similarly, although it took much longer for economic changes to alter the basic structures of *Junker* class domination (thanks paradoxically to Habsburg domination, the Czechs were by this period relatively free of such aristocrats, and this was one of the main factors behind their success). These were examples of successful adaptation, of underdeveloped regions 'catching up' and even, in the case of Germany, ultimately surpassing the west in industrial performance. But the failures were much more numerous. Most of the Polish territories, almost all of the Balkans, including independent Greece and Serbia, and the southern and eastern fringes of the Habsburg Empire, saw no industrial transformation at all in the nineteenth century. Indeed, many areas experienced a severe decline in living standards, as population increased rapidly, whilst rural economies came under increasing threat from cheap grain production in North America.

In between these clear examples of 'failure' and 'success', Berend and Ránki see their own country as exemplifying the intermediate case, that of 'semi-successful' modernization. Some of the progress made in Hungary was facilitated by the country's political status for, as a partner in the empire, the Hungarian capital was a major beneficiary of public investment. Other processes were also under way. Even if the country's major exports were still agricultural products, mainly wheat, farmed by relatively extensive methods, these were not always exported in the raw form in which they left the Balkan zones. Instead, Budapest became a world centre for milling and food processing generally, thanks mainly to local investments and locally manufactured equipment. Moreover, a local entrepreneur (in fact a German immigrant) contributed significant technical inventions to this industry. Foreign investments were crucial at an early stage, but thereafter the pull of western markets encouraged domestic capital accumulation on an increasing scale, whilst the programme of railway building (largely financed from abroad) eventually helped create an engineering industry capable of meeting all needs without importing. These and other developments combined to distinguish Hungary from 'traditional economies of the Balkan type', but they were nevertheless insufficient for her to catch up with the west. As Berend and Ránki sum up: 'Hungary ... had a unique, intermediate position as a country which, responding to the stimulus of Western European industrialization, was able to adopt and take part in the processes initiated by industrialization, without, however, herself undergoing radical economic transformation' (1982: 131-2). Over a long period Hungary had a complementary or dual economy, in which the trend of change was dominated by Austria and the west, just as Hungary in turn dominated the various provinces it governed in its half of the empire. The peasant sector remained by far the largest in terms of employment throughout the Hungarian lands, and living conditions remained generally very poor.

It remains unclear from all this what, if anything, the Habsburg Monarchy was doing wrong in its efforts to promote development in Hungary and other more peripheral regions. It certainly expended considerable effort to build up the sort of infrastructure (transportation, education etc.) required by the new order. Of course, governments in Vienna, like those in Istanbul and St. Petersburg, which also had their reformers and economic planners at different periods, lacked a puritan middle class to take up the challenge they laid down. There were compelling historical reasons for the absence of such a class. Not only was the religious background quite different from that of North-Western Europe, but the legacy of the refeudalization which had followed the initial impact of the expansion of the west was not conducive to embourgeoisement.

18 The Skeleton at the Feast

The Ottomans in particular had systematically inhibited the emergence of indigenous élites in South-Eastern Europe. In much of the rest of Eastern Europe social and cultural hegemony lay with the aristocracies, though Hungary and Poland also possessed a numerous class of rural gentry and petty nobility. The peasantries had opposed feudalism with varying degrees of success, but had become accustomed to immobility in the absence of expanding local markets. Thus despite, and perhaps to some extent because of, their strong states, these populations were in no position to match the economic progress made in the nineteenth century in certain western regions of Europe.

These economic conditions had complex social and cultural consequences. Budapest, with its fine boulevards on the Pest side of the Danube and its Art Nouveau architecture, is one of the outstanding products of the Eastern European bourgeoisie. The fabric of the Hungarian capital was constructed largely by immigrant German workers, whilst the bankers and the captains of industry were to a large extent drawn from the Jewish community. Hungarian arts and nationalist sentiment flourished in the cosmopolitan café society of the turn of the century, and the large intelligentsia included numerous radical elements. Before the First World War the young Karl Polanyi had a prescient vision of capitalist crisis in Europe leading to Fascism. A little later Georg Lukacs welcomed the Bolshevik Revolution and served as a Minister in the short-lived Republic of Councils in Hungary in 1919. Both men were from well-to-do Jewish families; each responded in his own way to the dilemmas of backwardness. The growth of right wing ideologies, in combination with extreme nationalism, both before and after the end of the Empire, can also be seen as a response to these basic imbalances in social and political structures. Another response, perhaps most common in Vienna and an important element in the intellectual background to Imperial collapse, was nihilist. This amounted to the denial of all the values of the west and equally of the consolation of any alternative. For the nihilists the very idea of economic, social and political progress, previously the over-riding goals of Eastern European intellectuals, was rejected. This, too, could be conducive to dazzling creativity in the arts, but it was of little use to the masses of Habsburg society.

The First World War brought the dismemberment of the old Imperial powers. Their 'successor states' were marked by populist parties calling (for the most part ineffectively) for reform of agrarian structures, and also by even stronger nationalist currents. The inter-war decades produced little evidence that new state boundaries, in which many former national minorities had now become majorities, were capable of stabilizing societies and restoring the old faith in progress. Economies had barely begun to recover from the costs of the

First World War before they were plunged into world depression and propelled towards another war. In Hungary, as in most of Eastern Europe, social and political structures at this time still remained closer to feudalism than to the democracies of the west. Capitalist social relations had intensified their impact on the rural masses, but the conditions for industrial modernity, as defined by Gellner (1983), were no nearer to being fulfilled. The entrepreneurial skills of rich peasants and of the bourgeois as a whole continued to rate low in terms of social prestige. Energies that elsewhere were invested into economic strategies were, in Eastern Europe, diverted increasingly into nationalist sentiment. The states were large in relation to their societies; they had trained too many officials, people who saw themselves as an integral part of the intelligentsia, alongside the artists and the academics. From this perspective, the persistence of economic backwardness was the price ultimately paid for an impressive state apparatus and cultural vitality, above all in Austria-Hungary. The channels of social mobility were excessively concentrated upon the bureaucracy, in contrast to the west, where many more alternative routes to prestige were available, in commerce and industry. This contrast was carried through into the socialist period, and its legacy is still very hard to shake off.

The socialist period

Ambivalent attitudes towards the west, the by now familiar mixture of imitation and infatuation, jealousy and principled rejection, intensified in most of Eastern Europe when the region became politically and economically dependent on an eastern superpower. The programmes of the communist parties extolled industrial production, though some of them later tried to appeal to consumerist sentiment. There was much rhetoric about catching up and emulating the west materially. On the other hand, as in the late Imperial period, numerous intellectuals recognized the futility of attempts to imitate western structures in the absence of the basic conditions which make those structures possible, and they reacted by emphasizing the values of their own national culture.

Did the imposition of a common socialist identity do more than confirm the 'peripheral' status of all of Eastern Europe? Did socialism inhibit some of them from moving more quickly to become integrated members of the core, as many self-styled Central Europeans believe? Undoubtedly socialism did impose constraints on the Czechs and the Hungarians, but it certainly did not wipe out all the differences between relatively developed and urbanized northern regions and the rural underdeveloped states once governed from Istanbul.

20 The Skeleton at the Feast

Romania remains very different from Bohemia, Albania from Saxony. Even within Yugoslavia, despite a regional policy designed to level out historical differences, the economic gulf separating Macedonia and Kosovo from Slovenia was as great at the demise of the Republic as it had been at its inception. The proximity and extent of relationships with the west were generally all important. The effects of this 'pull' could appear to be suspended under socialism, for example in a relatively small state like Hungary, which achieved a high degree of regional balance and social homogeneity in the age of socialist redistribution. But even here an east-west imbalance re-emerged rapidly after 1989, and in subjective terms the moral geography probably never altered very much: freedom and affluence were what lay beyond the short stretch of frontier separating Hungary from Austria, and they were not to be found beyond any of the borders with socialist neighbours.

The very sharp lines imposed on the map of Europe by communism certainly served to lend a new measure of unity to the region as it was perceived by westerners during the decades of the cold war. How far did such perceptions correspond to East European realities? Yugoslavia and Albania broke away from direct Soviet influence very early on, though many aspects of the Soviet model remained highly relevant to those countries. A high degree of homogeneity was achieved in the last years of Stalin's life and for a short period thereafter, as communist parties consolidated their power and imposed fundamentally similar institutions to ensure economic and political control. Communists saw themselves, and were seen by most analysts, as building a new type of human society. This progress was thought to depend on the exercise of power by a universal class, and was not supposed to respect diverse historical and cultural traditions.

Political scientists and philosophers have characterized socialism in a variety of ways, too diverse to review here. For a long time the notion of totalitarianism was uppermost in foreign accounts (e.g. Wittfogel 1957, Arendt 1961). By the 1960s, in the less overtly repressive, post-Stalinist climate, political scientists began to realize that it was a mistake to see socialist countries simply in terms of a Leninist hierarchy in which all significant economic and political decisions were taken by a tiny élite. Totalitarianism was accordingly modified by notions such as 'institutional pluralism' (Hough and Fainsod 1979). These accounts were undoubtedly more realistic, but as they were not based on first hand research inside socialist societies they remained seriously defective in terms of providing a satisfactory understanding of how these societies actually worked.

Before considering how anthropologists have contributed to filling this gap, it is also important to note the contribution made by many native East Europeans themselves to presenting a unified picture of their region. I am thinking here not of professional social scientists and historians, though their contributions have been significant. Rather, I have in mind the images of socialism presented by small numbers of so-called dissident writers and critics, some of whom achieved celebrity status in the west when their names were still unknown to fellow citizens in their native countries. Writers of the stature of Solzhenitsyn have painted unforgettable pictures of Stalinist society. More recently, and in a lower key, writers such as the Hungarian sociologist Elemér Hankiss (1990) have emphasized the moral poverty of socialism in contexts where its material achievements seemed to be strongest. The fullest elaboration of this moral critique, directly echoing that of Solzhenitsyn, is Vaclav Havel's (1985) depiction of how the Czechoslovak socialist authorities required their citizens to 'live a lie' after the repression of the liberalization movement in 1968. Havel's call for a rediscovery of the public sphere, of both individual responsibility and a 'vibrant civil society', proved inspirational to many up to and beyond the collapse of socialist power. The critical question is, how realistic, how valid anthropologically are diagnoses such as these? How well do these thinkers know their own people?

The only significant attempt by an anthropologist to outline a general model of socialism draws heavily on these local intellectuals. Katherine Verdery (1991b) achieves an elegant synthesis through linking the texts of dissident Hungarians to the economic shortages and political repression endemic in Romania, the country in which her own fieldwork has taken place. But can the Romanian data be generalized to produce a general model of East European socialist societies? It seems clear that the late Ceauşescu years showed many similarities to the years of Stalinist repression throughout the region in the early 1950s. But most of the rest of the region did not experience any such relapse in the 1980s. Romania itself had followed an interesting and original path during the era of *détente*, which was precisely why relatively large numbers of western anthropologists were able to carry out research there from the 1970s, and why that country is well represented in the discussions in further chapters of this volume.

Whether or not Verdery's model is an adequate representation of the Romanian case, I doubt that it can cope with the diversity demonstrated in the rest of the region. Market socialism in Hungary enabled high levels of consumption that contrasted starkly with shortages in Romania and Poland.

22 The Skeleton at the Feast

Production systems also showed marked divergences, notably in the agricultural sector. Whereas in Poland the old agrarian structure persisted with only minor changes, most other countries implemented some form of collectivization. The Soviet blueprint may have been the same, but the national variants always differed: again, the contrast between Hungary and Romania was particularly marked. Nor was any more uniformity maintained in other spheres of social organization. Cultural expression and the media were far more free in economically unsuccessful Poland than they were in the neighbouring states of Czechoslovakia and East Germany. The political culture which saw nepotism at the highest levels in Bulgaria and Romania was not duplicated in Hungary. And throughout the lower levels of social organization, there was of course tremendous variation in how ordinary people 'muddled through' in their everyday lives (cf. Sampson 1984b). One interesting question is the extent to which these variations could be correlated with economic performance in the socialist period (e.g. the prevalence of informal networking is clearly related to shortages of basic goods in the shops). Some of the variety, including this differentiated pattern of economic achievement, can perhaps be traced back to pre-existing economic and cultural differences within Eastern Europe, which were only briefly disguised by the mid-century imposition of a standardized Stalinist socialist model.

I am not arguing that socialism left no general mark on the cultures and societies of Eastern Europe. Perhaps the most substantial impact was felt in the countryside. Centuries of backwardness could not be quickly overcome. For certain regions it can plausibly be alleged that the gap separating them from western neighbours actually widened during the socialist period. But comparing the conditions in which the populations of Eastern Europe as a whole lived in the last decade of socialism with the conditions of the pre-war decades, some very striking contrasts emerge. In most countries industrialization programmes had led to continuous, sometimes rapid rises in living standards. Even where this was patently not the case, as in Romania, the peasants were better off than they had in the past. Almost everywhere, regardless of which variant of collectivization had been implemented, if it had been implemented at all, the rural-urban balance had improved in favour of villagers. This is not to deny that many more people would have preferred to live in the cities had housing been available for them there. It is not to deny that rural people had to work very hard for the greater rewards open to them in some of the more flexible of socialist economies. But the arrival of most of the basic fruits of modernization transformed peasant life everywhere. However unwelcome the enforced changes in working practices and property relations, these were part of a

transformation that also opened up to rural people new paths of social and geographical mobility. These solid achievements of socialist modernization became more apparent when the balance was tilted sharply back against the countryside in the years following the demise of socialism. The uneven but fundamentally highly positive record of socialist powerholders on behalf of their vast rural constituencies will be investigated in more detail in the following chapter.

Conclusions

This chapter has wrestled with the determination of Eastern Europe's boundaries, and the related issue of how far we can justifiably treat it as a single unit for anthropological analysis. I have suggested that a significant measure of unity can be found in the East European past. I have concentrated on socio-economic themes, and in particular the theme of *dependency* on the west. This argument developed out of a confluence of approaches between Marxist historians writing from within Eastern Europe and western neo-Marxists, approaches which have had considerable impact on anthropological work. The argument should not be used to justify a reification of the east-west boundary: after all, many parts of Southern Europe have experienced comparable processes of underdevelopment, and yet these countries have been welcomed integral members of the European Union.

Generalizations about 'increasing relations with western markets' do not take us very far. These relations had different effects in different sub-regions, and the extent of variation within each sub-region should not be underestimated. Indeed the latter variation is in some respects the most striking, for even some of the most underdeveloped regions, such as the Romanian parts of the Balkans, had their pockets of industrial development by the end of the nineteenth century (as of course did Russia). The dichotomy between 'core' and 'periphery' as popularized by neo-Marxists in the west (Wallerstein 1974) is rejected by Berend and Ránki (1982) because it leaves most parts of Eastern Europe classified unhelpfully as 'semi-periphery'. They want to be able to explain how some parts of the periphery were able to 'succeed' and become full members of the core, whilst others remained peripheral. Berend suggests that various neo-Marxist concepts of 'unequal development' add little to a truism stated long ago, for example in the contributions of scholars such as Bukharin and Toynbee (Berend 1986). He advises students of East European history to pay more attention to the histories of particular populations in particular places, in order to resolve the really interesting questions as to which regions

24 The Skeleton at the Feast

were condemned to underdevelopment, which were able to 'catch up', and which were left, like Hungary, gaining some ground economically but not converging with the western model of modernization in social and political spheres. The proliferation of what, to western eyes, seem strange incongruities: large and backward peasantries alongside prestigious Academies of Science, bourgeois decadence in the towns alongside an anachronistic nobility in the countryside, was the visible product of these contradictory processes of development. (Similar incongruities have been reported from many parts of the Third World, where the same western 'modernization' model has been employed as the basic yardstick of development.)

None of the above accounts of induced underdevelopment in various parts of Eastern Europe included an explanation of why new needs and 'market pull' in the west could not be met just as cheaply by a tightening of the feudal screw in the west itself. Why were landlords in the west unsuccessful in exploiting opportunities which Eastern Europeans were able to adopt, from *Junkers* in Prussia to *chiftlik* owners in the Balkans? To answer this, it is insufficient to look only at demographic factors and relative costs in different regions, at technologies and at the impact of external factors such as metals from the new world. It is essential also to look at the balance of power in society, at what Marxists call the 'social relations of production'. The anthropologist, in tracing how human groups adapt to continuous changes in the 'forces of production', takes it as axiomatic that the pursuit of economic interests is profoundly affected by motivations and ideals rooted in culture. It may sometimes be appropriate to address this dimension at the level of a whole society, for example a national community, thought to possess a common culture. But it will often be more appropriate to explore the culture of specific groups and classes. Weber's analysis of the Prussian *Junkers* is, despite its methodological weaknesses, a good example of the kind of insight the historical anthropologist seeks to achieve.

The best anthropological studies investigate both 'objective' and 'subjective' factors, and these must blend intimately in any assessment of the Eastern European past. The concrete conditions in which settlement took place must be analyzed alongside the ideas that people held about their place in the world. The peoples of Eastern Europe, and certainly their élites, have probably had some sense of being 'latecomers' ever since state structures began to form there more than a thousand years ago. By the time the eastern lands were more densely settled, feudalism was already firmly established in the west. In many parts of the west the rights of peasant communities and of individuals within them were also firmly established. In contrast, the peasants who were induced

to migrate to new settlements in the east, superficially on very attractive terms, were always much more vulnerable towards their lords. Hence the latter were well placed to exploit the conjuncture which arose in European markets after the sixteenth century.

Retgression in the early modern period was followed by the penetration of a capitalist mode of production. Some regions regained parity with the west, while other regions remained entirely agrarian and coped very badly with demographic expansion. Intermediate regions, particularly in Central-Eastern Europe, fell between these extremes. The economic role of the state was extremely important everywhere, even where no industrial take-off occurred, as was the role of foreign capital. But the enlightened functionaries were often outnumbered by the time-serving and the corrupt, and the states were often ineffective.

The role of the state in both stimulating and retarding economic development deserves major emphasis, and links up with the significance of long-term cultural continuities. In the Balkans new nationalist and military élites assumed control, but the traditions of the Ottoman state were not easily eradicated at central or at local levels. Elsewhere strong bureaucracies exercised great power, but even the most ordered of apparatuses, such as the Austro-Hungarian, fell far short of the Weberian ideal of 'rationality'. It is not completely implausible to postulate a link between the behaviour of party officials in the socialist period and that of their predecessors, the *Schlamperei* of the Monarchy; and between the practices of Bulgarian officials under socialism and the Ottoman *sipahi's* practice of extracting the maximum surplus from his peasants during the uncertain duration of his office-holding.

Another legacy of the past which has had a profound influence on the contemporary scene is the growth of nationalist movements. One of the principal forces threatening Imperial governments in the nineteenth century, it bequeathed insoluble problems for the nominally internationalist governments of socialist Eastern Europe in the twentieth. Nationalists created the most powerful legitimating bedrock for all later governments in this region, and most native East European understandings of the past continue to be filtered through nation-centred histories. This reflects the fragility of nations in the east, which have frequently been subject to collapse and dismemberment. An anthropological understanding cannot accept nationalist versions of history at face value, but nor should it scoff at the deep-seated emotions that have gone into their construction. Their implications for wide areas of social life are considered further in Chapter Four.

26 The Skeleton at the Feast

It is difficult to exaggerate the effects of demographic trends on nationalist claims, and on social change more generally. High birthrates in underdeveloped regions were continually undermining the position of more established peoples, which had completed their demographic transition earlier. Many of the 'young nations' of Eastern Europe were young in this literal sense also (Albania has remained by some distance the youngest of all, with 50 per cent of its population aged under fifteen years). We should pay particular attention to high rates of emigration from those regions where no development took place, but where health improvements and falling death rates still led to extreme pressures on a fragile subsistence base. Migration was sometimes seasonal, e.g. to the more profitable latifundia of adjacent farming regions. It was also a mass movement to the New World. All the major national groupings of Eastern Europe were significant suppliers of labour power to American capitalism before 1914. This migratory process was weaker in the inter-war period because of changes in American policies, but it has continued. There is little to suggest that it ever led to any structural improvement in the productive system in the sending country. However, many migrants did return to Eastern Europe and buy up land with their proceeds. Others sent remittances, as some still do. The very existence of these émigré communities might be construed as a reproach to the mode of production that took them to the New World. They were often powerful forces in forging national identities within Eastern Europe and they have continued to play a major role in the 'construction' of the region in the west. Diaspora voices were often heard condemning socialist governments. Today some of them are playing significant economic and even political roles in their homelands. In short, the emigrations of the pre-socialist period were decisive historical events, whose consequences are still a major factor in east-west relations. The emigrations of the post-socialist years may turn out to be no less significant.

In attempting to define Eastern Europe as a unit for anthropological analysis, I have emphasized the continent's ambiguous boundaries and its very loaded moral geography. While noting the origins and evolution of Eastern Europe as a discourse, I have been more interested in the material conditions of economic backwardness. These were by no means uniform, and they are insufficient to support any claim to overall cultural unity. The socialist period

brought about a greater measure of homogeneity for a time, but this was relatively short-lived. Much the same may be true of the recent capitalist transformation. There are important commonalities under the new régimes but, as many have shown in other parts of the world, the spread of 'globalization' is by no means inimical to the persistence of distinct national and local cultural identities. Anthropologists need to recognize continuities and discontinuities in both space and time. They are likely to be dissatisfied with grand theories that oversimplify economic history, and suspicious of theorists who take the west as the only available model for development. However, this has been and remains an attractive model to many of the inhabitants of Eastern Europe. It was, in a curious sense, the modernization model that was replicated in the official programmes of the communist period, as well as in the market economies of today. Detailed local knowledge is essential for understanding social, political and economic interaction in this region, and the investigations must cover both objective and subjective dimensions of history. We need, as Weber realized, to appreciate people's subjective motivations as they set about making their own history - and few have done this as dramatically as East Europeans in the last few years. But we also need, as Marx emphasized, to remember that people do not make their histories in conditions of their own choosing. In the case of Eastern Europe, material backwardness and underdevelopment are key elements in explaining why this region has been in thrall to the west - before, during and after socialism.

Further reading

Most general histories of Eastern Europe contain some discussion of the problems of boundaries and homogeneity. Recommended for longer term perspectives are the works of Okey (1982) Jelavich (1983) and Wandycz (1992). The twentieth century is well covered by Crampton (1994), while Rothschild (1989), Swain and Swain (1993) and Schöpflin (1993) all offer detailed analyses of the socialist period. Legters (1992) offers useful source material for this period. The atlases recently assembled by Magocsi (1993) and Crampton and Crampton (1995) are excellent. Useful supplements to the general works of historians are the accounts provided of this region by historically informed geographers: see Turnock (1988, 1989), and from an earlier generation, Wanklyn (1941). The journal *East European Politics and*

28 The Skeleton at the Feast

Societies provides provides the English language world with good coverage of the region; for anthropology specialists there is also *The Anthropology of East Europe Review* (formerly *Newsletter of the East European Anthropology Group*). Anthropologists will find a useful bibliography in Halpern and Kideckel (1983).

Many tomes have been devoted to the history of particular countries within the region: among contemporary accounts Norman Davies's (1981) study of Poland is outstanding.

Critical and revisionist analysis of some of the specific themes touched on in this chapter, including the key questions of economic backwardness and dependency on the west, can be found in Chirot (1989).