

Reviews

- Adam Burgess, *Divided Europe* (Pluto Press, 1997) pp.222, £13.99.
 William Miller, Stephen White and Paul Heywood (eds) *Values And Political Change In Postcommunist Europe* (Macmillan Press, 1998) pp.460, £60.00 (hbk).
 Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford UP 1997) pp.257, £17.99.

These three books challenge the view that there is a cultural division between West and East Europe which pre-dates the Cold War and has left a legacy which justifies the differential treatment of the 'new' democracies of the former Soviet Bloc today. Although Central and East European states have liberal democratic political systems and market-led economies, it is argued in the democratisation literature that this cultural legacy means that Western institutions can not simply be transferred to the East. It is often stated that people in this region lack a democratic culture and that democracy will need a lengthy process of 'consolidation'.

William Miller, Stephen White and Paul Heywood, in *Values and Political Change in Postcommunist Europe*, empirically critique the view of a cultural divide through extensive opinion surveys conducted in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Ukraine and Russia, between 1993 and 1996. They conclude that political values and support for democratic political systems is little different in East and West Europe. Political values may vary slightly between states and between social strata, but the similarities outweigh the differences and there is no geographic East/West division which correlates with political values. In terms of support for liberal values, the rule of law, multi-party elections and tolerance for minorities, socialist values, of state economic intervention, and nationalist values, of cultural conformity, regional autonomy and irredentism, the historical legacy of British constitutional democracy fares no better than that of Habsburg, Romanov and Ottoman rule, inter-war authoritarianism and Soviet domination. In fact, comparable surveys showed the British public to have less trust

in politicians, to be less tolerant of public protest and to be more inclined to both socialist and nationalist values than the public in Central East European states (pp.389-412).

Far from any determining historical legacies, the extensive opinion surveys of Miller et al, reveal that views of the present constituted the biggest influence on voting intentions and attitudes towards the post-Communist transition. One indicator of the rapidity of value change and the fluid nature of political culture is the statistics of support for communist ideals. Around 20 per cent of former members of the Communist Party stated they had never believed in its ideals as membership was a career necessity, however around 40 per cent of former members had switched from believing in its ideals to not believing, and 25 per cent of non-members made a similar value switch. Former members of the Communist Party had only marginally different values to non-members and 'in every country, economic complaints were more strongly related to current voting intentions than to past membership' (p.316).

Far from a lack of democratic culture, in all the countries surveyed, a large majority of the public supported liberal and democratic values. The high levels of support for democratic institutions and structured voting patterns demonstrated that 'there was no evidence that the people of the former Soviet Union and East Central Europe were not ready for democracy' (p.28). As Miller et al conclude 'the lines of division that have excited so many theorists and historians seem remarkably faint in terms of contemporary political values' (p.28).

Where there was less support for post-1989 reforms, this was expressed in support for socialist values rather than an opposition to democracy per se. This greater attachment to socialist values had little to do with people having problems adapting psychologically to rapid change, but seemed more related to the fact that for many people in the region there had been no rapid change only stagnation. One of the main determinants of support for multi-party elections, and transition more generally, was whether people had gained or lost out through the reform process. Unsurprisingly, social strata and geographic regions most marginalised by marketisation showed least enthusiasm about the empowering nature of market reforms and political pluralism. 'The old, the working class and those who lived in Russia tended towards socialist

values, while those who worked in the private sector, the highly educated... and the Czechs all tended against socialist values' (p.333). Far from political values being a determining factor in political or economic transition, it would appear that they are consequential to this, shaped by lived experience rather than historical legacies, whether from the post-World War Two period or some earlier time.

While Miller et al provide an interesting and useful empirical corrective to the popular conception that there is a cultural divide or an historical legacy which shapes political values in Eastern Europe, Maria Todorova and Adam Burgess approach the question from a more historical and theoretical perspective. Both these authors consider the complex interplay between Western ideological and strategic concerns in the treatment of the East as culturally distinct. They chart how, through the self-flattery of perceiving 'Western' culture as progressive, civic-pluralist and non-nationalist, the problems of capitalist development and Western state rivalries have historically been displaced to the East. During the twentieth century a non-Western culture has been held responsible for the problems engendered by Great Power manipulation of 'Balkan' rivalries, capitalist collapse in the inter-war period, and the destructive consequences of nationalism in World War Two.

Although both these authors trace the historical linkages between the past and present-day essentialist treatments of culture, history and ethnicity in the East, they differ in their analysis. Todorova, in *Imagining the Balkans*, follows the discourse approach of Edward Said's *Orientalism* and the more recent treatment in Larry Wolff's *Inventing Eastern Europe*. She stresses the continuity of Western approaches to the East, locating the conception of a cultural divide in an Enlightenment bias towards 'urban bourgeois culture' and negative view of the less advanced states on the periphery of capitalist development, dominated by a 'superstitious, irrational, and backward rural tradition' (p.111). Burgess, in *Divided Europe*, provides a useful corrective, drawing out the difference between the nineteenth century condemnation of a lack of development and twentieth century views which rejected this universalist perspective and have tended to see the limits of capitalist development as fixed and rooted in history or culture (pp.85-88).

Burgess and Todorova analyse how a fixed culturalist understanding of the East/West divide has re-emerged after the Cold

War. Todorova locating this in the apologia for, and the consequences of, East Europe's marginalisation and exclusion from Western institutions such as the European Union. South and East Europe are no longer of strategic importance with the end of the East/West geo-political axis and exclusion from the Western club has forced East European states to compete with each other to demonstrate their 'Westernness'. As she notes, this process of exclusion and division was directly linked to the violent fragmentation of Yugoslavia, as Slovenia and Croatia sought to ditch the poorer republics and demonstrate their Western values. The Yugoslav wars in turn fed the pre-Cold War stereotypes of historically and ethnically determined rivalries (p.136).

As Burgess outlines, once 'ethnicity' and 'history' are seen to have a special importance in explaining events in the East: 'responsibility for any problems which befall the region are laid squarely at the feet of people in the region themselves ... The flip side of this reasoning is that the role of external forces, in particular those of the West, are conveniently taken out of the picture' (p.5). The key event in this process for both Burgess and Todorova has been the Yugoslav wars where not only did Western powers decisively intervene prior to the outbreak of conflict, through European and US support for separatist movements which undermined the possibility of negotiated solutions, but the common perception has been that the West stood by and did too little to resolve a 'Balkan' conflict.

Todorova notes that the essentialist understanding of 'Balkan rivalries' would never be employed to understand political conflict in the West. She urges that instead the Yugoslav crisis should be 'approached with the same rational criteria that the West reserves for itself', which would include an understanding of present-day pressures on the region, including those originating from the new international context (p.186). Burgess equally condemns those explanations that seek to read history backwards through the transcendental medium of 'culture', he cogently argues: "'culture" has no explanatory power in itself. It can describe how people react to circumstances ... but it can not explain why... The real pressures and opportunities of social existence determine the patterns of life, not the other way around' (p.11).

Burgess draws out the consequences of this essentialist perspective today. The commonplace prejudice that there is a separate

political culture in the East has meant that the region has become open to Western influence and intervention under the guise of tutoring and educating the people in the new democracies about civil society and political pluralism. The new East/West divide is being shaped through the relationship of democratisation whereby mature Western democracies judge East European states against an idealist view of their own political systems. This judgmental approach moralises the East/West divide and blames Eastern political culture, rather than the lack of Western investment and Western desires for protected markets, for exclusionary policies towards the East.

Burgess argues that rather than democratisation and civil society building being a useful goal-setting framework for European integration, this is in fact a process of exclusion as formal democracy is no longer seen as good enough to join the Western club. A fictitious cultural divide has been used to justify a new division of Europe in the tautological language of the democratisation industry which argues that by definition 'new' democracies can not have Western culture or be fully 'consolidated' (p.191).

David Chandler