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In fact, says Kundera, the European continent had been naturally divided between East and West centuries before the Soviet "iron curtain" descended in 1945. Eastern Europe, which included Russia, was "anchored in Byzantium and the Orthodox Church," while Western Europe was "tied to ancient Rome and the Catholic Church." Kundera's homeland and its neighbors were clearly tied to the West. "After 1945," Kundera writes, "the border between the two Europes shifted several hundred kilometers to the west, and several nations . . . woke up to discover that they were now in the East."

Culturally, however, Central Europeans still considered themselves part of the West. As their native political institutions were stamped out, they clung ever more tenaciously to their culture, the culture of Europe. It is no coincidence, Kundera says, that the region's frequent anti-Soviet rebellions—the Hungarian uprising in 1956, Czechoslovakia's Prague Spring of 1968, and the Polish dissident outbreaks in 1956, 1968, 1970, and 1980—were sparked and nourished by an efflorescence in the arts. "The identity of a people and of a civilization is reflected and concentrated" in culture, Kundera writes. "If this identity is threatened with extinction, cultural life grows correspondingly more intense."

But even as culture was increasing in importance in captive Central Europe, it was declining in Western Europe. Indeed, Kundera believes, the mass-communications media have supplanted culture there: Sophisticated Western Europeans now discuss TV programs, not poetry, painting, or philosophy. They would scarcely notice if their "highbrow" literary journals disappeared, Kundera argues. But the Czechs were "in a state of anguish" when the Soviets shut down such publications in 1968.

The "real tragedy" for Central Europe, Kundera concludes, is not Soviet domination, grim as it is, but the demise of traditional European culture. In 1956, the director of the Hungarian News Agency did indeed die for Europe: "Behind the iron curtain, he did not suspect that the times had changed and that in Europe itself Europe was no longer experienced as a value."

Nigeria's Retreat From Democracy

"Dateline Nigeria: Democracy Down but Not Out" by Jean Herskovits, in *Foreign Policy* (Spring 1984), P.O. Box 984, Farmingdale, N.Y. 11737.

Nigeria was the world's fourth largest democracy until a bloodless coup toppled President Alhaji Shehu Shagari's government on New Year's Eve day of 1983.

Major General Muhammadu Buhari took over "with no resistance and to wide popular acclaim," reports Herskovits, a historian at the State University of New York at Purchase. But Nigerians have not permanently turned their backs on democracy, she says.

The West African nation adopted a parliamentary system when it gained independence from Great Britain in 1960, but an army coup

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A 1980 Nigerian Herald cartoon depicts President Alhaji Shehu Shagari and the leaders of the four top opposition parties sailing the "ship of state." Nigeria's political parties were banned after the 1983 coup.

ended that era in 1965. Nigeria's second republic, established by the military in 1979, was modeled on the American federal system—not out of "adoration" for America, Herskovits says, but out of the feeling that a U.S.-style presidency and separation of powers might work better in a nation of such size and diversity. Nigeria's 100 million people are divided among 250 ethnic groups and speak nearly 400 "mutually unintelligible" languages.

President Shagari, first elected in 1979 and overwhelmingly re-elected in August 1983, fell victim to Nigeria's severe economic crisis. One of the world's top 10 oil exporters, Nigeria has been badly hurt by the world oil glut. The nation's petroleum revenues plummeted from \$22.4 billion in 1980 to \$9.6 billion in 1983. Oil earnings provide 90 percent of the nation's foreign exchange and most of the money for the government's ambitious development projects. To make matters worse, a severe drought in 1983 cut Nigerian food production by up to 50 percent.

As a result of these misfortunes, Nigeria has run up some \$13.5 billion in medium- and long-term debt to Western banks—not much compared to Mexico's \$91 billion, but enough to require harsh austerity measures.

Buhari's chief task is to find a way to put the Nigerian economy back together again. Herskovits argues that he has "preserved the essence" of the second republic: Civilians rule the 19 states; the federal cabinet is composed mostly of civilians and is multiethnic; "freedom of speech seems as unbridled as ever." Herskovits is confident that Buhari will eventually return the reins of power to civilians. One Nigerian diplomat told her: "Democracy is ingrained in us—we will go back to it."