

Entangled Histories of the Balkans

*Volume Four:
Concepts, Approaches, and (Self-)Representations*

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The Balkans: Region and Beyond

Roumen Daskalov

Balkan¹ history has followed various courses and taken various shapes at different eras, and the studies that deal with it have attempted to make sense of it in different ways. There are the ubiquitous metaphors of a “crossroads” or “powderkeg” or a “battlefield” of civilizations. Some authors have seen ghosts of ancient hatreds haunting the region;² others sought to show that such apparitions were largely imaginary. Some were concerned with drawing the borders of the region and defining its unity and distinctiveness, while others went in pursuit of an evasive human species—*Homo balcanicus*.

The region was most often seen in the prevailing positivist spirit of the times as solidly existing “in here” or “out there,” at least in geographical and cultural terms. Yet it was being constructed or imagined in a variety of ways and for various purposes by the same people (observers both outside and within) who thought it to be hard reality and a fact of life. The Balkans also functioned as a political project of unification and an utopian vision of the future, whether in counteracting actual political fragmentation and rivalries between neighboring nation-states or in opposing external pressures from Great Powers. The region (defined politically or culturally) was projected back in time to different eras, in spite of general agreement that the name “Balkans” originated with the German geographer Johan August Zeune in 1808 and that the Balkans were primarily a Byzantine and Ottoman legacy. The diagnoses of the actual state of the region and the prognoses of its future also vary. Some see it as almost obsolete (because it was an Ottoman legacy) and a remnant of a perception rather than as reality. Others are more sanguine about its future.

This book, the fourth and last volume of *Entangled Histories of the Balkans*, marks the end of an exploration of Balkan history that began several years ago. Some sort of recapitulation is needed, and at least some “conclusions” should

¹ In the following essay I will mostly use the term “Balkans” for the region and sometimes “Southeastern Europe” (when presenting an author who uses this term). I am aware of the various value stakes around these concepts (but refuse to play this game). I also realize that some authors use “the Balkans” to refer to a narrower space (bordering on the Danube to the north) and “Southeastern Europe” to refer to a wider region.

² Robert D. Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey Through History* (New York: St. Martin's, 1993).

be drawn. It would be futile to try to summarize some two thousand pages, and the themes of each volume were laid out in the prefaces. What would be more meaningful is to position this research project within the scholarship of the region, both old and new, and to explain its assumptions and methodological tools as well as its preferences and choices in dealing with the topics.

Geography, Culture, Mentalities

There are various attempts to define and approach the Balkans as a region and an object of study. These entail implicit or explicit assumptions about what they are or are not and have affinities with certain methodologies. What seems obvious is that a region must have geographical boundaries to delimit it. It should also present an internal (cultural) unity of a kind or at least have a degree of coherence, classically described in terms of common or shared “traits” (or features) that differentiate it from other places. In brief, (self-)identity presupposes alterity. The epistemology that goes with that is one of “subject” (the scholar) and his/her “object” of study, approached with the idea of studying it “objectively,” that is, without personal bias.

In older indigenous scholarship, the Balkans were approached and defined in different ways. The Bulgarian ethnographer and literary scholar Ivan Shishmanov saw them as a space of intensive borrowings and resulting commonalities (folklore in particular). The Serb (anthropo)geographer Jovan Cvijić saw them as intersecting and partly overlapping cultural or civilizational spaces shaped by the natural environment and by historical (civilizational) factors and inhabited by specific psychological or personality types. The Romanian historian Nicolae Iorga saw them as a space of shared civilizational legacies resulting in similar institutions. The Croat historian Petar Skok and the Serb historian Milan Budimir saw them as a similar way of life and mentalities forged especially in the imperial Ottoman framework and under Ottoman impact.³ Admittedly, the unity is only relative, and in the case of Cvijić, it is actually fragmented.

Among older, especially interwar, foreign scholarship, German and Austrian scholars showed particularly strong interest in the Balkans, and their *Südostforschung* deserves special treatment.⁴ They tried to delimit the penin-

³ For a more extensive treatment, see the contribution of Diana Mishkova in this volume.

⁴ On the history of the *Südostforschung*, see Fritz Valjavec, “Der Werdegang der deutschen Südostforschung und ihr gegenwärtiger Stand. Zur Geschichte und Methodik,” *Südostforschungen* 6, nos. 1–2 (1941): 1–37; Georg Stadtmüller, “Die Entwicklung der deutschen

sula from a geographical and geo-morphological point of view, particularly by looking for “natural” borders (such as seas, rivers, and mountains). While seas surround the peninsula from the south, the east, and the west, the northern border was an issue of controversy. Most often the Danube, the Sava, and the Kupa were accepted as a northern border. Yet Hungary and Slovakia were also included in the broad notion of Southeastern Europe for historical reasons, as they had been part of the Ottoman Empire, but mostly because of German geopolitical interests and projects. As for the region’s internal geography, what is usually pointed out—aside from its mountainous or semi-mountainous character—is its division into small “compartments” (presumably fostering division and isolation).⁵ In general, *Südostforschung* was dominated by (human) geography, geopolitics, and *Volkskunde* or ethnography (with the latter searching for a pattern of cultural traits—“cultural morphology”).

Although this scholarship claimed “objectivity” in the spirit of positivism, a great deal of it was strongly politicized by German or Austrian interests seeking influence in the Balkans, while some of it was directly connected with Nazi ideology and projects, such as the hegemonic project *Wirtschaftsraum Grossdeutschland Südost*, i.e., a large German economic space extending to the southeast. The very idea of a German *Südost* (Southeast) implied that parts of Southeastern Europe were, in fact, German cultural space (*Kulturboden*), due to the superiority of German culture, or even German soil (*Volksboden*), based on German settlements.⁶

The *Südostforschung* achieved great theoretical and methodological sophistication with Fritz Valjavec, who was closely associated with Nazism. He argued that Southeastern Europe and the Balkans were different concepts with different geographical ranges, especially to the north: the Balkans extend to the Danube and the Sava, while Southeastern Europe comprises the Balkans but extends further to include Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Romania; there are also close links to Asia Minor and to the southern Russian territories. For Valjavec only the Balkans present an unity in a historical and

Südosteuropa-Forschung,” in Georg Stadtmüller, *Geschichte Südosteuropas* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1976), 401–415.

5 On the geographical aspect, see Karl Kaser, *Südosteuropäische Geschichte und Geschichtswissenschaft. Eine Einführung* (Vienna and Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 1990), 103–114.

6 About the *Ost-Forschung*, see Dietmar Müller, “Southeastern Europe as a Historical Meso-Region: Constructing Space in Twentieth-Century German Historiography,” *European Review of History / Revue européenne d’histoire* 10, no. 2 (2003): 393–408, esp. 393–400 and the literature cited there. See also Eduard Mühle, “Hermann Aubin, der deutschen Osten und die deutsche Ostforschung,” in Eduard Mühle, *Für Volk und deutschen Osten. Der Historiker Hermann Aubin und die deutsche Ostforschung* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 2005), 621–636.

cultural (“cultural-morphological”) sense (but not as geographical space), while Southeastern Europe is just a (geo/politically conditioned) geographical concept.⁷ The Balkans are thus a more or less interconnected and integrated “object” of study (*Gegenstand*), while Southeastern Europe is primarily a “working concept” (*Arbeitsbegriff*), in the sense that its unity (in reality) is not a precondition for the research but a way of looking at it and of proceeding (referring to methodology).⁸

From linguistics in particular, there comes the generally accepted notion of a “Balkan language union (or league)” (*Sprachbund*), elaborated (after a prehistory of finding common elements in Balkan languages) by Kristian Sandfeld-Jensen in the 1930s and authoritatively represented by Victor Friedman in the present.⁹ Some have attempted to extend it beyond language to a Balkan (actually Orthodox) “cultural union” based on common Hellenic education and literature and its publics, and the resulting loyalties and identities, such as Raymond Detrez’s “Romaic community” (in our first volume) and Paschalis Kitromilides’s “Orthodox Commonwealth” (with a strong emphasis on the unifying force of Orthodox faith and the Patriarchate).¹⁰

Yet in spite of the intuitive awareness of Balkan commonality, the search for common or shared traits proved very difficult because of a multiplicity of internal ethnic, religious, language, and other cultural differences and variations. This is evident already with Cvijić, whose attention to variety in its different forms subverts the supposed Balkan cultural unity. The confusion becomes still greater when “maps” on various criteria (worked out by different

7 Fritz Valjavec, “Südosteuropa und Balkan,” *Südost-Forschungen* 7, no. 12 (1942): 1–8; “Der Werdegang,” esp. 15–16, 18, 32–33.

8 Valjavec, “Südosteuropa und Balkan,” 5–6, similarly 8.

9 Kristian Sandfeld-Jensen, *Linguistique balkanique. Problèmes et résultats* (Paris: Champion, 1930). The general notion of a linguistic union (*Sprachbund*) is attributed to the Russian linguist N.S. Trubetzkoy, who stressed language interaction and contact-induced change in his *Psychologie du langage*. The important idea here is that the language similarities are between unrelated languages and have resulted from living in contact. See also Victor A. Friedman, *Studies on Albanian and other Balkan Languages* (Peja: Dukagjini, 2004); “The Balkan Languages and Balkan Linguistics,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 40 (October 2011): 275–291; Victor Friedman, “The Place of Balkan Linguistics in Understanding Balkan History and Balkan Modernity,” *Bulletin de l’Association des études sud-est européen* 24–25 (1994–1995): 87–93.

10 Raymond Detrez, “Pre-National Identities in the Balkans,” in *Entangled Histories of the Balkans*, vol. 1, *National Ideologies and Language Policies*, eds. Roumen Daskalov and Tchavdar Marinov (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013), 13–65; Paschalis Kitromilides, *An Orthodox Commonwealth: Symbolic Legacies and Cultural Encounters in Southeastern Europe* (Aldershot, Hampshire, UK: Ashgate Variorum, 2007).

disciplines) are juxtaposed to ascertain that they do not coincide but overlap, and boundaries are fluid and “transitional.” Yet some cultural features have been attributed special significance and elevated to the position of decisive markers. This was especially the case with the aforementioned patriarchal way of life and its virtues,¹¹ recalling the “honor and shame complex” in the Mediterranean (or of “caste” in Southeast Asia). Cultural commonality or unity was also conceived in terms of a set or pattern of cultural traits or what (hardly more convincingly) was called “cultural morphology.”

A recent example is Karl Kaser’s treatment of “patriarchy” as an important defining feature of what he calls “Eurasia Minor” (the Balkans plus Asia Minor and the broader Middle East).¹² In a newly revised edition of one of his books, Kaser sees the discontinuity of elites as the basic problem of the modern Balkans and derives from it a number of other characteristics, such as a shallow bourgeois or civil society; clientelistic networks among the elites; colonization of all important institutions by those networks; a close relationship between political and economic elites, in which the former protect the illegal transactions of the latter in return for economic reward; and finally, distrust of the state by the ordinary citizens. Kaser differentiates between three cultural or civilizational zones in Europe: Eastern, Western, and Southern (Mediterranean). The Balkan Southeast is close to the Mediterranean, which is typified by personalized (rather than institutionalized) social relations and conflict-solving in the form of traditional clientelistic networks, which in the Balkan case are said to be based upon kinship relations—this goes along with distrust of institutions and their colonization by clientelistic groups of followers. By contrast, the Western zone is characterized by “institutionalization of the social relations” and the mediation of conflict by law and institutions.¹³

¹¹ After Cvijić, the patriarchal, heroic way of life was described by Gerhard Gesemann, *Heroische Lebensform. Zur Literatur und Wesenskunde der balkanischen Patriarchalität* (Berlin: Wiking Verlag, 1943).

¹² Karl Kaser, *Patriarchy after Patriarchy: Gender Relations in Turkey and in the Balkans 1500–2000* (Vienna: LIT Verlag, 2008), especially the introduction and the conclusion. Kaser himself admits that “patriarchy” (a complex of ideas, values, and practices) is not specific to Eurasia Minor but characteristic of the whole of Europe and Eurasia over centuries (since the Bronze Age, according to Jack Goody) and that it does not apply to the entire Balkans. There are the additional concepts of “state patriarchy” (under state socialism) and “private patriarchy” (in the family) and the idea of a “patriarchal backlash” after 1989 and with the Islamic trend in Turkey, so that, taken as a whole, the work reaches the conclusion: “after patriarchy—patriarchy again.”

¹³ Karl Kaser, *Südosteuropäische Geschichte und Geschichtswissenschaft*, 2nd ed. (Vienna, Cologne, and Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 2002), 111–118.

Another recent reductionist example comes from the political scientist George Schöpflin. His list of shared Balkan experiences and patterns includes a particular type of imperial rule with alien forms of social knowledge and power and alien forms of exclusion and legitimation, highly oppressive and arbitrary administration, certain myth structures, religious thought-worlds and thought-styles that privilege collective over individual responsibility, a strong sense of hierarchy, weak urbanization, no radical secularization, modernity introduced from above by the state and not matched by society, and the legacy of non-modern networks of power based on patron-client networks and the persistence of informal regulation.¹⁴

To take another example, in the depiction of the Balkans, the ethnologist Klaus Roth differentiates between “constructs” (in perception) and “objective” (observable) realities; outside and inside perspectives; and finally, between elites and common people (and everyday life), where cultural traits are supposed to reside and endure. Then he comes up with a list of features of “Balkan culture” subdivided into the categories of material culture, social relations and structures, behavior, and norms and values. These features include a concentration on familism and kinship, a personalization of relations, clientelism and patronage in politics, orientation toward groups instead of individualism, hospitality, patriarchalism in economic affairs, parochialism even in major cities in the form of associations of people born in the same place, urban/rural antagonism, suspicion of the state and of the rulers and law, underdeveloped civil society, and a preference for direct informal oral communication to written and formal communication.¹⁵ In another work, Roth is even more explicit about the significance of patriarchal (peasant) social forms well into the modernization process in the Balkans and even up to the present day. The reception of the forms of modern Western civilization is, he says, highly selective. It has led to mixing (“syncretism”) with the traditional forms and to adaptations in which technology and items of material culture are readily taken over while foreign forms of behavior and communication, attitudes, and values are rejected and the traditional ones retained. These include the significance of family and kin relations, clientelism, traditional care of the children,

14 George Schöpflin, “Defining South-Eastern Europe,” *Balkanologie* 3, no. 2 (1999): 67–72.

15 Klaus Roth, “Ethnokulturelle Gemeinschaft der Balkanvölker: Konstrukt oder Realität?” in *Der Balkan. Friedenszone oder Pulverfass?* eds. Valeria Heuberger, Arnold Suppan, and Elisabeth Vyslonzil (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1998), 63–78.

personalized relations and dependencies, and strong social control—a kind of (superficial) “symbolic modernization” and a “cultural lag.”¹⁶

Descriptions in terms of culture (traits, attitudes, values, mentalities, etc.) such as the above risk overgeneralizing, essentializing, and eternalizing cultural characteristics. In any case, they come across as quite static or even standing apart from time. Indeed, attempts to construct a repertoire of common Balkan social and cultural features or mental traits may end up creating a caricature, especially if era and social milieu are disregarded. And the more one moves from material things and routines of everyday life to social forms and, beyond that, to mentalities and psychological traits, the more controversial the particular descriptions or checklists become.

As Wendy Bracewell and Alex Drace-Francis pointed out in a recent special issue of *Balkanologie* dedicated to theoretical questions of Balkan studies, the problem with definitions of the region in terms of common (cultural or psychological) traits is “in agreeing on which particular traits are decisive in marking community and demonstrating regional unity; and on how far they override political, religious or linguistic difference.”¹⁷ In the same issue, Pamela Ballinger makes a point about Southern Europe that is likewise valid for the Balkans. She notes that descriptions in terms of “cultural traits” and the notion of a culture area in general (composed as an inventory of cultural traits) have become largely unconvincing. This is the case partly because of the geopolitical interests promoting such studies and the colonial overtones and arrogance of the outside observer, but also because of the tautological reasoning: cultural unity is explained in terms of traits themselves validated in the area’s cultural unity. In fact, the European, mostly German, notion of culture as composed of cultural traits and the tradition of area studies informed by it was exported to the United States by Alfred Kroeber and elaborated by him and his disciples in cultural anthropology; later it returned to Europe (e.g., in studying Southern Europe as an area defined by the famous “honor and shame complex”).¹⁸

16 Klaus Roth, “Wie ‘europäisch’ ist Südosteuropa? Zum Problem des kulturellen Wandels auf der Balkanhalbinsel,” in *Wandel der Volkskultur in Europa. Festschrift für Günter Wiegelmann zum 60. Geburtstag*, eds. Nils-Arvid Bringéus et al. (Münster, 1988), vol. 1, 219–231, esp. 223–229.

17 Wendy Bracewell and Alex Drace-Francis, “South-Eastern Europe: History, Concepts, Boundaries,” *Balkanologie* 3, no. 2 (1999): 47–66, cited on 54.

18 Pamela Ballinger, “Definitional Dilemmas: Southeastern Europe as ‘Culture Area,’” *Balkanologie* 3, no. 2 (1999): 73–91, esp. 81, 90–91.

Another problem is that presumably “objective” or “neutral” descriptions from the outside have become increasingly intolerable to native scholars sensitive to issues of identity and to anything that smacks of colonial attitudes. One may be soul-searching and self-critical in studying the region from within but less inclined to receive negative feedback from outside. This is all the more so as such accounts may be less informed and stereotyped and (as often happens) just passed on from one generation of foreign scholars to the next without regard to change (and disregarding one’s own society’s “backyard”). A recent development, parallel to what is happening in anthropology (and postcolonial studies), is that native scholars from the Balkans would like to talk authoritatively about the region themselves, so that (as Clifford Geertz once put it) what matters is not only what is being said but also who is saying it.¹⁹ With this in mind, Roth’s hope of co-opting indigenous scholars into agreeing on his description (above) is ill-founded.²⁰

As Bracewell and Drace-Francis suggest, a way out of such an impasse is “to conceive of ‘Balkan culture’ less in terms of objective criteria, and more as an argument over meanings and definitions, advanced by particular people, in particular places, for particular purposes” and “asking not whether cultural identifications such as that of Cvijić were accurate, but what symbols they promoted, what images they projected, what interests they were meant to advance.”²¹ Marko Živković provides a good example of this approach in his treatment of the rhetorical re-signification of Cvijić’s mentality types (which in the original were often ambiguous) in journalistic and scholarly discourses during the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s.²² As Živković shows, it was not just that Cvijić’s characterizations of Dinaric highlanders were simplistically treated as “virtues” and those of lowlanders as “vices.” It was also that they were resignified (reversed) to turn positive into negative and vice versa and were assigned ethnic meanings (brigandish, militarist Serbs versus peace-loving, sober Croats). Moreover, both were applied internally to differentiate good from bad Serbs (and good from bad Croats) in critical writings from within the Serb and the Croat communities.

A further problem arises from the fact that Balkan studies (like most area studies) is conceived as an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary field (as

19 This problem is perceived by Wendy Bracewell and Alex Drace-Francis, “South-Eastern Europe,” 47–66, esp. 59.

20 Roth, “Ethnokulturelle Gemeinschaft,” 73.

21 Bracewell and Drace-Francis, “South-Eastern Europe,” 56.

22 Marko Živković, “Violent Highlanders and Peaceful Lowlanders: Uses and Abuses of Ethno-Geography in the Balkans from Versailles to Dayton,” *Replika*, special issue, 1997.

noted by Valjavec and many others later on²³). This has many advantages, yet there are drawbacks in that the various disciplines come with their own approaches, concepts, and interests. The discrepancy is particularly great between history, with its finer sense of time, and the rather timeless abstractions and classifications of political science, sociology, and the older ethnography. Karl Kaser recently proposed an integrative type of Balkan scholarship in the name of “historical anthropology.” The idea was not to try to integrate disciplines and their approaches, which may not be workable, but to converge on the object of study—people—in their various aspects: economic, social, political, and cultural. Whatever one may think of this transdisciplinary bid (and similar recurrent calls for a “synthetic” or “integrative” “science of man”), the differences between the disciplinary approaches and traditions can hardly be overcome and affect the very way the object is perceived and constituted (Kaser himself leans more toward ethnology than history).²⁴

The risky terrain of Balkan mentalities has attracted interest in recent times. The scholars taking a new look at it are trying to avoid some of the old pitfalls and fallacies while updating the concept of mentality itself. One example is Paschalis Kitromilides’s attempt to construct a common “Balkan mentality.” He starts with a critique of Cvijić’s undertaking to describe a shared “Balkan mentality” (in 1918), which, according to him, is undermined by linking it (among other factors) with ethnic identities that are incompatible with one another. Kitromilides is well aware of the controversial status of the concept of “mentality” and the various critiques against it, such as tautology, unverifiable speculation, and simplifying generalizations. He argues that it only makes sense if it is “context-bound,” especially within a certain political context and framework of communication. In search of such a shared mentality, he travels back in time to the pre-national period—more specifically, the eighteenth century, when the Balkans were free of national divisions and individual national mentalities. Religion was then the primary force in shaping the “vision of the world” and the frameworks of daily life and thus of mentalities cautiously understood as “certain recurrent attitudes, beliefs or perceptions of shared interests that characterize a culture.” The other preconditions for the existence of a common “Balkan mentality,” according to Kitromilides, were the overarching political institutions (Ottoman administration, tax system, etc.), the movement of people, and regional networks of economic activities; he also adds the “idea of

23 Valjavec, “Der Werdegang,” 28; Mathias Bernath, “Südosteuropäische Geschichte als gesonderte Disziplin,” *Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte* 20 (1973): 136–144, esp. 135–136.

24 Kaser, *Südosteuropäische Geschichte* (2002 edition), 202–205.

Europe” as a new factor. Kitromilides then proceeds to delineate the “mentality” shaped by Balkan Orthodoxy, the religion of the vast majority of the population, based on the life experiences of several Orthodox authors who wrote autobiographies. This mentality is characterized by a variety of parameters that go beyond the knowledge of the religious doctrine and learning to social life itself. Such parameters include shared symbolism and “maps of meaning,” a sense of time around a common calendar and organization of the life of the individual around the church, a sense of space and geography oriented toward sacred sites (Mount Athos, shrines, graves of saints, places of martyrdom, places of miracles), and the understanding of Ottoman rule as a legitimate order (supported by the Orthodox Patriarchate).²⁵ However, enticing as it may seem, Kitromilides’s attempt is not without its flaws. It is based on evidence from intellectuals only (and disregards other social groups—the author rejects ethnographic descriptions of folk culture). Moreover, for some reason it presumes in some passages—perhaps in a “slip of the tongue”—the recovery of a common “Balkan mentality” instead of an Orthodox Balkan one (even though the author is well aware of his “object”). What one can perhaps say is that, as the Orthodox population was a majority, this mentality was widely shared.

The study of mentalities was updated by the Russian scholar Tatyana Tsiv’yan with a semiotic attempt to reconstruct a common Balkan “model (or picture) of the world” (*model’ mira*), that is, endowed with a specific “Balkan quality” (*balkanskost’*) and characteristic of a *homo balcanicus* (*balkanets*—Balkan man).²⁶ This model of the world, defined as a universal sign system (grounded in language) through which people appropriate and cope with the surrounding milieu, consists of general and universal (“cosmological”) binary oppositions related to structures of space (such as: up/down, earth/sky, earth/the underworld) and time (day/night, summer/winter), as well as to social categories (young/old, man/woman, self/Other) and the fundamental opposition nature/culture (raw/cooked). The Balkan model of the world is presumably grounded in the aforementioned Balkan linguistic union, and its reconstruction actually draws upon the analysis of folklore. Tsiv’yan herself recognizes

25 Paschalis Kitromilides, “‘Balkan Mentality’: History, Legend, Imagination,” in Kitromilides, *An Orthodox Commonwealth*, 163–191, reprinted from *Nations and Nationalism* 2, no. 2 (1996), cited on 169.

26 Tatyana Tsiv’yan, *Lingvisticheskie osnovy balkanskoy modeli mira* (Moscow: Nauka, 1990), esp. 3–7, 64–108; Tatyana Tsiv’yan, *Dvizheniye i put’ v balkanskoy modeli mira* (Moscow: Indrik, 1999). The idea of a *homo balcanicus* also appears in the article by the Bulgarian literary critic Svetlozar Igov, “Homo Balcanicus: krăstopătniyat chovek,” *Literaturno-esteticheski protsesi na Balkanite* (Sofia, 1994), 46–57.

the rigidity of operating with binary oppositions and seeks to remedy it by introducing ambiguities, mixing, revaluations, substitutions, overturning, and so on between the terms (and even holds these to be characteristic of the Balkan “model of the world”). Yet she does not see a problem in constructing a unitary “model of the world” for the Balkans from the Neolithic era to at least the end of the Ottoman era (from which the folklore stems). She is also not deterred by the fact that these oppositions are present in most, if not all, cultures. She deals with it by pointing to some allegedly Balkan specifics (yet without comparison with other cultural units), such as centrality of the opposition Self/Other (We/They); dominance of the Road—land or maritime—and of Movement in the Balkan appropriation of space; a “meandering” representation of space; a certain tragic intensification of the opposition Life/Death through the motif (in folklore) of human sacrifice; and the abovementioned ways of subverting the rigidity of the binary terms.

The present authors refrained from describing the Balkans or parts of it in cultural (or psychological) terms. We came across the problem of mutual perceptions of ethnic or national mentalities and psychological traits on the part of historical actors (in journalistic and scholarly writings), such as in relations between Bulgarian and Greek national activists or between Romanian and Greek rival elites. Rather than approaching such characteristics in terms of truth or falseness (an impossible enterprise and a dead end), we inquired into their social conditioning and their function for the (cultural) self-identification through distancing from the Other. The reciprocity and complementarity in such mutual perceptions, representations, and descriptions were highlighted. Furthermore, it was argued that, once they were set in stereotypes and made immune to change over time, they functioned as rhetorical devices in various sociopolitical situations and lost their grounding in the initial situation that engendered them (and thus the plausibility they might have had).

The Balkans as a Historical Region: *Longue-Durée* Structures

The older type of scholarship in the German-speaking world continued in a modified form for some time after 1945, cleansed of expansionist concepts and not German-centered yet only partly depoliticized. It was only in the 1970s that the older tradition was overcome and a new type of Balkan scholarship emerged there. A new overall definition proposed by Mathias Bernath enjoyed a wide consensus. It held that Southeastern Europe constituted a “historical region” (in his term: “unit of events”—*Geschehenseinheit*) precisely owing to its “in-between” geographical and geopolitical position “between Rome and

Byzantium, the Habsburgs and the Ottomans, between the hegemonic claims of the modern Great Powers in East and West.”²⁷ Bernath emphasized the plurality of the region in terms of landscape, language and ethnic makeup, and cultural and social forms and spoke of “unity in diversity” (*Einheit in der Vielfalt*). He also insisted that it was necessary to study the region as a whole and its exposure to supranational hegemonic influences and powers while also studying the history of individual peoples and nations. As Dietmar Müller has remarked, the formula of “unity in diversity” solved the problem of defining such a varied region with fluid boundaries and often contradictory traits by making it part of the very definition: “The puzzling variety of ethnic groups with different religions and cultures, with no clear boundaries between them, i.e. the presumed boundaries according to one criterion and generated by one type of disciplinary knowledge not being corroborated by another, would be due to Southeastern Europe’s in-between position, which discouraged processes of unification and homogenization and led instead to processes of hegemonic stratification with coexisting super- and substrata.”²⁸

The new developments in defining the Balkans took place under the banner of structural (and economic) history and drew on modernization theory in particular, unlike the previous geographical and cultural approaches. The Balkans came to be defined in terms of *longue-durée* periods with specific “structural” (i.e., durable) features or characteristics. In addition to shedding the political projects and ideological contaminations of the interwar era and overcoming the German-centered perspective, the advance over the older scholarship consisted of viewing the region expressly as a “historical region,” that is, not immutable in its outlook but undergoing changes.

The concept of “region” is, of course, very old, but in historiography it can be traced back to the interwar period. It was first elaborated in a debate on Eastern Europe between Polish, Czech, and German historians, which was triggered by the Polish historian Oskar Halecki at the Fifth International Congress of Historians in Brussels in 1923 and culminated at the Seventh International

27 Bernath, “Südosteuropäische Geschichte,” cited on 142, “unity in diversity” on 143. Bernath provided also one of the first (albeit short) descriptions of the regions in structural terms (143–144).

28 Müller, “Southeastern Europe,” 394. The “unity in diversity” formula has been questioned in more recent times, for instance, by Holm Sundhaussen, because if diversity is emphasized, it is not clear where the unity is. See Holm Sundhaussen, “Was ist Südosteuropa und warum beschäftigen wir uns (nicht) damit?” *Südosteuropa Mitteilungen* 42, nos. 5–6 (2002): 92–105, esp. 101.

Congress of Historians in Warsaw in 1934.²⁹ The regionalization was taken up and politically appreciated in the Cold War context. In works written in the United States after 1945, Halecki differentiated between two historical meso-regions: “old” Western Europe and “new” Eastern Europe. He also differentiated between two intermediary ones: “West Central Europe” (meaning divided Germany) and “East Central Europe” (meaning the “people’s democracies” under Soviet hegemony); the latter was considered a “kidnapped” part of “the West” and an *antemurale* against Russia. In the 1980s the writers Milan Kundera and Czesław Miłosz and the historians György Konrád and Jenő Szűcs³⁰ attempted to draw a border, culturally and historically, between their “East Central Europe”—*Mittleuropa* (Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary)—and the rest of Eastern Europe, a concept that, after 1989, was politically instrumentalized to secure membership in the European Union.³¹ This was also the first and still moderate challenge to the wider notion of Southeastern Europe—a notion that included Slovenia, Croatia, Vojvodina, and Transylvania.³²

Halecki’s programmatic writings laid the groundwork for the present-day concept of “historical region” (*Geschichtsregion*), initially called “historical space” (*Geschichtsraum*) or “cultural space” (*Kulturraum*), which was elaborated in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland from the 1960s onwards. It is bolstered by the present drive to “regionalize” Europe in an effort to overcome the national framework and as a response to the process of European integration (the “project Europe”). Among the particular sub-regions (meso-regions) of Europe, Southeastern Europe and East Central Europe are the most elaborated, while Northeastern Europe (the Baltics) is less so, and Russia, with its Eurasian dimension, is more of a universe in itself (and constitutes what is left over from “Eastern Europe” after the three other sub-regions are subtracted). Austrian historian Arno Strohmeyer has recently defined a “historical region” as “a historical-structural spatial category used to designate a region of relative

29 About the debate, see Piotr Wandycz, “East European History and Its Meaning: The Halecki-Bidlo-Handelsman Debate,” *War and Society*, eds. Jónás Pál, Peter Pastor, et al. (Budapest: n.p., 1992), 308–319.

30 Jenő Szűcs, “The Three Historical Regions of Europe: An Outline,” *Acta Historica: Revue de l’Académie des Sciences de Hongrie* 29 (1983): 131–184, reprinted in *Civil Society and the State: New European Perspectives*, ed. John Keane (London and New York: Verso, 1988), 291–332.

31 See Stefan Troebst, “Introduction: What’s in a Historical Region? A Teutonic Perspective,” *European Review of History / Revue européenne d’histoire* 10, no. 2 (2003): 172–188. For a highly critical view of the “Myth of Central Europe,” see Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 140–160.

32 Müller, “Southeastern Europe,” 400.

historical uniformity, which can be delimited through historical features as a part of Europe with specific particularity.”³³ To the aforementioned European sub-regions he adds “Western Europe” and “Northwestern Europe.” Strohmeier stresses that a historical region is not defined by geographical borders but presents an abstract and oscillating “space” with *longue-durée* features, which distinguishes it from other historical regions. In practice, the *differentia specifica* of a region is presented by a cluster of half a dozen to a dozen “structural markers.”³⁴

The same author provides an example of how the comparative approach can be applied in the construction of “historical regions” in the case of Central Eastern Europe.³⁵ The idea is to start with a certain characteristic feature (*Merkmal*) of a smaller historical region (*Kleinregion*)—in this case, the sociopolitical structure of estates (*Ständewesen*) and the political views and legitimation associated with them in Austria in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—and then proceed with an intra-regional comparison in order to establish whether this is indeed a characteristic feature of the whole region. The final step is to an inter-regional comparison of the same feature, to see if it is “specific” for the region and thus marks it as a distinct, and hence authentic, region. The inter-regional comparison in this case involves juxtaposing Austria with the Russian and the Ottoman empires. It shows a clear difference with the Ottoman Empire and a not-so-marked difference with the Russian Empire, where estates existed. Additionally, there is a reference to Europe as a whole (in fact: Western Europe), with the conclusion that, through the political theory of

33 Arno Strohmeier, “Historische Komparatistik und die Konstruktion von Geschichtsregionen: der Vergleich als Methode der historischen Europaforschung,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte und Kultur Südosteuropas* 1 (1999): 39–55, cited on 47.

34 On the subregions of Eastern Europe (Central Eastern Europe, Southeastern Europe, Northeastern Europe, and Russia), see Klaus Zernak, *Osteuropa. Eine Einführung in seine Geschichte* (Munich: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1977); Szűcs, “The Three Historical Regions.” A short structural description or *Strukturgeschichte* of Central Eastern Europe (with a critique of negative judgments as the result of comparison with a “normal” development in the West) appears in Philipp Ther, “Comparisons, Cultural Transfers, and the Study of Networks: Toward a Transnational History of Europe,” in *Comparative and Transnational History: Central European Approaches and New Perspectives*, eds. Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Jürgen Kocka (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2009), 204–225, esp. 211. For longer versions, see W. Eberhard et al., eds., *Westmitteleuropa—Ostmitteleuropa. Vergleiche und Beziehungen* (Munich, 1992); Klaus Zernack, *Polen und Russland: Zwei Wege in der europäischen Geschichte* (Berlin, 1994).

35 Arno Strohmeier, “Historische Komparatistik.”

(legitimate) resistance of the estates, Central Eastern Europe participated in “overall” European spiritual trends of political theory.

Yet (at least for me) there arise questions, such as: is just one feature enough to define a region? In case of other features: what if there is no geographical overlap between them? If Europe is to be an overarching reference, why only Western Europe? More generally: if every region of Europe is “specific” (in some ways), can Europe as a whole be constructed as an overarching region? What, then, will be the common denominator? Finally, there is a certain irony in crediting freedoms for the estates with a role in developing freedom more generally (not to mention that the serfdom of the peasant majority in Central Eastern Europe went hand-in-hand with these freedoms³⁶) while equating the absence of estates in the Ottoman Empire with an absence of (collective) freedoms yet omitting the absence of serfs and some collective rights of the religious communities (*millets*). The more general point I am making is that regional “features” allow various agendas to be pursued under the guise of scholarly objectivity.

The region-building in historical science has also been encouraged by the more general “spatial turn” in the social sciences.³⁷ The new spatiality rejects connection with interwar geo-determinism and geopolitics (that of Karl Haushofer and other thinkers of geopolitics) and rehabilitates the importance of space in history as well. However, especially with more radical geographers such as Hans-Dietrich Schultz, space is not a geographical reality but a construction (as indicated by the title: “Spaces Are Not, Spaces Are Being Made”), and so is the presentation of space in maps, according to radical deconstructionist cartographers.³⁸ As Benjamin Schenk pointed out, the new interest in

36 The development towards freedom—but of the European West—is a central theme of the narrative of Jenő Szűcs, “The Three Historical Regions.”

37 About the “spatial turn,” see Jürgen Osterhammel, “Die Wiederkehr des Raumes: Geopolitik, Geohistorie und historische Geographie,” *Neue Politische Literatur* 43 (1998): 374–397. This is an extensive overview of the literature on borders, geopolitics, and geo-history past and present. Among the advocates of the “spatial turn” is Karl Schlögel: see Karl Schlögel, *Im Raume lesen wir die Zeit. Über Zivilisationsgeschichte und Geopolitik* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2003); Karl Schlögel, “Die Wiederkehr des Raumes. Die Konkretwerdung der Welt nach dem Verschwinden der Systeme,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, no. 139 (September 16, 1999), supplement “Bilder und Zeiten,” i–ii.

38 Hans-Dietrich Schultz, “Räume sind nicht, Räume werden gemacht. Zur Genese ‘Mitteleuropas’ in der deutschen Geographie,” *Europa Regional* 5, no. 1 (1997): 2–14. Schultz investigates the concept of “Central Europe” (*Mitteleuropa*) as “German space” in the older German geography and *Länderkunde* with the concomitant idea of “natural borders” and reveals their deeply political nature in the political rivalry with France and in German

social and historical space, unlike the older one, is not essentialist but regards space as a product of human activity and perception. In other words, it recognizes the socially constructed nature of spaces and their perception, their symbolic coding, and so on. Schenk recognizes a certain tension between the treatment of historical regions as “invented,” “constructions,” and a product of perception and communication versus the understanding of a historical region as *Strukturraum* (structural or structured space). However, he hopes the two positions can be reconciled.³⁹

Why construct historical meso-regions? The scholarly purpose is said to be to create a framework for transnational comparative analysis and highlight inter-regional differences and regional specifics according to the logic that there is no identity without alterity. Historians are careful to distance themselves from essentialist and deterministic ways of viewing regions and to affirm that these are “an artistic device and heuristic concept for comparative analysis in order to identify transnational structures common to a constructed meta-region which is in general not congruent with geographical or contemporary political boundaries.”⁴⁰ What is thus emphasized is the constructed nature and heuristic purposes of such meso-regions, as well as their flexibility both in terms of space and time. In view of the renewed interest in regions, Stefan Troebst wonders whether we are witnessing a “regional turn” alongside the new interest in “space and place.”⁴¹ Or as Jörg Hackmann and Robert Schweitzer put it, while historians previously acted as “nation-builders,” they may now be assuming the role of “region-builders.”⁴² (Zernack’s neologism “Northeastern Europe” is a case in point.) One may wonder whether this is motivated by a desire to leave the “ghetto” of Central Eastern and Southeastern Europe—if everything

imperialism. For cartography, see J.B. Harley, “Deconstructing the Map,” *Cartographica* 26, no. 2 (1989): 1–20; J.B. Harley, “Maps, Knowledge, and Power,” in *The Iconography of Landscape*, eds. Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels (Cambridge University Press, 1988), 277–312.

39 See Benjamin Schenk, “Der spatial turn und die Osteuropäische Geschichte,” in *H-Soz-u-Kult* (June 1, 2006), <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/forum/2006-06-001>.

40 Troebst, “Introduction,” 177. We saw the antecedent of this flexible constructivist notion in Fritz Valjavec’s “working concept” (*Arbeitsbegriff*).

41 Stefan Troebst, “Vom spatial zum regional Turn? Geschichtsregionale Konzeptionen in den Kulturwissenschaften,” *Dimensionen der Kultur- und Gesellschaftsgeschichte. Festschrift für Hannes Siegrist zum 60. Geburtstag* (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2007), 143–159.

42 Jörg Hackmann and Robert Schweitzer, “Introduction: North Eastern Europe as a Historical Region,” *Journal of Baltic Studies* 33 (2002): 361–368, esp. 361.

is a region, then there are no privileged regions—or by a desire to retain some specifics in a globalizing world.

Yet the concept of a historical region is not without problems, not primarily for scholarly reasons but because of the functioning of meso-regions in politics, media, and public discourses. As Troebst has noted, for historians, historical regions may represent something “virtual” that fluctuates in space and time and is subject to revisions, but in the public realm, regions stand for something “real” and a frame of reference for current events and processes. Moreover, the two realms and uses of the terms cannot be hermetically separated, and historians often assume that what has been “constructed” for scholarly purposes actually “is.”⁴³ Politics was involved in the background of the aforementioned interwar debate on Eastern Europe (the Jagiellonian idea versus Slav solidarity), as Piotr Wandycz has convincingly shown.⁴⁴ The “politics of spacing” concerning Eastern Europe in particular is critically analyzed by Maria Todorova using some recent examples, such as the concept of East Central Europe by the aforementioned Hungarian and Czech intellectuals in the 1980s, which was value-laden and political through and through. Initially it was emancipatory (in opposition to the Soviet hegemony), but it turned overtly political and exclusive of the other Eastern European regions in the race for membership in the European Union after 1989. Basically, the issue was about the “quality” of Europeaness and European belonging, from which the Balkans (and Russia) were excluded.⁴⁵ Other authors, not least Eric Hobsbawm, also reacted against Central Eastern Europe’s self-congratulatory region-building and the consequent degrading of the rest of Eastern Europe.⁴⁶

The problem of regions is further aggravated because geographical terms are often value-laden as a result and a symptom of their geo/political and ideological uses. Examples include “Balkans” in Western discourses, *Südost* (“Southeast”), *Mitteleuropa* (Central Europe), and the very term for space (*Raum*) in the Third Reich.⁴⁷ It would be easy if we could separate political

43 Troebst, “Introduction,” 178.

44 Piotr Wandycz, “East European History,” 316–319.

45 Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 140–160; Maria Todorova, “Spacing Europe: What is a Historical Region?” *East Central Europe* 32, nos. 1–2 (2005): 59–78.

46 Hans-Dietrich Schultz, “Räume sind nicht,” esp. 12–13. In his words, spaces like East-Central Europe are mental spaces, spaces of the imagination and of wishes, even though they project themselves upon physical-material space and refer to material objects (here also is the reference to Eric Hobsbawm).

47 Stefan Troebst, “Introduction,” 178–181, 185–187. Also Maria Todorova, “Spacing Europe,” 63–64. Using the terminology of Jakobsonian linguistics, Todorova describes Eastern Europe in general (and East Central Europe and Southeastern Europe) as “marked

and ideological concepts from legitimate (neutral) scholarly designations, as Alexei Miller proposes in the case of East Central Europe, but it is not clear how (in fact, his very exposition of the various political usages points up the difficulties).⁴⁸ Nor can one wait for realities to change in a manner that will “depoliticize” the concepts.

Finally, comparison itself, so often praised as a heuristic means and a way to avoid the essentialization (“ontologizing”) of traits in studying Eastern European regions, is not without problems, as some post-colonial scholars have pointed out with regard to other areas. This is because it tends to emphasize differences and thus freeze (eternalize) alterity and also because, as a rule, the points of comparison come from the West taken as a normative model, so that comparisons lead to ascertaining lacks and deficiencies in the peripheral region: not what is, but what is not. In the best case the peripheral region appears as something peculiar and a deviation from “normal” development.⁴⁹ This is especially evident when discussing the economic development of peripheral regions in terms of modernization theories (see below).

Concerning the Balkans in particular, a sophisticated structural analysis is presented by Holm Sundhaussen. A central methodological point he makes is that a region is defined not by single features (*Merkmale*) but by clusters of characteristics that make it unique. Moreover, these features vary over time:

categories” of regions, in contrast to unmarked categories such as the background norm Europe (implicitly meaning Western Europe) (75–78).

48 Alexei Miller, “Central Europe: A Tool for Historians or a Political Concept?” *European Review of History* (1999): 85–89; Alexei Miller, “Russia, Eastern Europe, Central Europe and the Framework of European History,” in *Annäherungen an eine europäische Geschichtsschreibung*, ed. Gerald Stourzh (Vienna: Verlag des Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2002), 35–43, esp. 38. Miller himself proposes the concept of “borderland” and “transitional zone” as more appropriate tools for studying cultural history and the problem of identities on the eastern part of the Habsburg Empire.

49 Sebastian Conrad and Shalini Randeria, “Einleitung: Geteilte Geschichten—Europa in einer postkolonialen Welt,” in *Jenseits des Europazentrismus. Postkoloniale Perspektiven in den Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften*, eds. Sebastian Conrad and Shalini Randeria (Frankfurt and New York: Campus Verlag, 2002), 9–49, esp. 12–14; Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), 29–32, 34–35. Yet the project of radical difference is difficult to practice. A more realistic possibility, namely to continue to present the history of Europe as a process of Westernization but to take the differences of Eastern Europe (and its contributions to the West) seriously, is discussed by Andreas Kappeler, “Die Bedeutung der Geschichte Osteuropas für ein gesamteuropäisches Geschichtsverständnis,” in *Annäherungen an eine europäische Geschichtsschreibung*, ed. Gerald Stourzh, 43–55, esp. 49–55.

ideally there should be some overlap (*Deckungsgleichheit*) between the various reference systems over a longer period. Furthermore, there are no hard boundaries or eternal features of the Balkans; the reality is fluid, and alongside dominant features, there are all sorts of symbioses, mixed phenomena, “islands,” and gradual transitions. Every classification is “reductionist” and a “simplification,” and from a cognitive point of view, every perception (including academic ones) is an issue of selection and focusing. Yet in order to be valid, the construction of a historical space should be falsifiable: it serves merely to structure our cognitive interest, and it should be tested and modified if necessary. All this amounts to conceiving historical regions as heuristic devices, that is, working concepts to grasp realities and open to re-examination.⁵⁰

In Sundhaussen’s description (expressed here only in keywords), Southeastern Europe is characterized by eight features: the crowding and mixing of ethnic groups in a small area (which complicated the ethnogenesis with long-term consequences); the loss and late reception of the legacy of antiquity; the Byzantine-Orthodox legacy (state domination over the church that affected the development of law and knowledge, etc.); the Ottoman-Islamic legacy (which bolstered the forces of traditionalism and helped preserve archaic social forms and attitudes); social and economic “backwardness” in the modern era (and the resulting underdevelopment of a bourgeois civil society); state- and nation-building on an ethno-national basis and strong national rivalries with claims to “historical rights”; certain (admittedly controversial) mentalities and some especially virulent and politically manipulated myths about the past; the Balkans as an object of the Great Powers (which led Balkan politicians and intellectuals to perceive themselves as victims).⁵¹

In a subsequent work, Sundhaussen (in response to Todorova’s critique, below) defended the indispensability of making differentiations in every definition and in defining regions in particular. He used the concept of “path dependency” to argue for his emphasis on continuity in Balkan development and its distinctiveness from other European regions from the Byzantine era through the Ottomans to the modern national era. He added another defining trait—religiously underpinned anti-Occidentalism—and emphasized the

50 Holm Sundhaussen, “Europa balcanica. Der Balkan als historischer Raum,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 25, no. 4 (1999): 626–653, esp. 628–632. An earlier version of this article is Holm Sundhaussen, “Osteuropa, Südosteuropa, Balkan: Überlegungen zur Konstruktion historischer Raumbegriffe,” in *Was ist Osteuropa?* ed. Holm Sundhaussen (Berlin: Osteuropa-Institut der Freien Universität Berlin, 1988), 4–22. The structural traits appear here in a more poignant formulation.

51 Sundhaussen, “Europa balcanica,” 638–652.

sociocultural and identitarian importance of religion (also for literature, painting, and architecture). Hence the differences between the Greek-Orthodox and the Latin-Roman traditions assumed a primary role.⁵² There is also a further methodological clarification in that the elements of the cluster, which gives historical specificity to the Balkans, are dispersed in their spatial and temporal range and, together with other elements, build variously combined “zones of thickening” (*Verdichtungszones*). It is this combination of eight or nine features overlaid and “thickened” in a cluster that constitutes the Balkans.⁵³ What is noteworthy in this definition is that new features are added at different points in time, but no trait (in spite of the insistence on changeability over long periods) is ever eliminated. With some exaggeration, it could be said that for Sundhaussen, the Balkans are basically the Byzantine tradition.⁵⁴ We will compare this with Todorova’s notion later on.

Such attempts to define the region in structural terms as a “historical region” are not unproblematic. To begin with, the “structural” significance of particular features may be contested. There is, furthermore, the danger of essentialism, that is, that certain traits are regarded as practically immutable over time. *Longue-durée* structural features are durable but not immutable or ahistorical. Finally, the specific features prove in many cases to be formulated in contrast with the West (rather than for their own sake). Moreover, they are regarded as “deviations” from a Western European model that is considered normative, and consequently, they are viewed as inferior. The general objection that Maria Todorova posed to Sundhaussen’s structural description of the Balkans, thus sparking a controversy, was that it amounted to “ontologizing of differences” and “reductionist dichotomies,” especially the Byzantine-Orthodox tradition versus the Roman Catholic.⁵⁵ She was not opposed in principle to the

52 Holm Sundhaussen, “Der Balkan: Ein Plädoyer für Differenz,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 29, no. 4 (2003): 608–624 (this anti-Western attitude appears *en passant* in “Europa balcanica,” 644 and in “Osteuropa, Südosteuropa, Balkan,” 18). Here Sundhaussen voices his discontent with the postmodern fashion of deconstructing notions of space and “realia” as “mental mapping,” which he sees in the case of Eastern Europe as motivated by the desire for unification and doing away with all divisions (608, 624).

53 Sundhaussen, “Der Balkan,” 620–621; “Was ist Südosteuropa?”

54 See Sundhaussen, “Was ist Südosteuropa?” 96–99; “Osteuropa, Südosteuropa, Balkan,” 22; “Der Balkan,” 614–615, 618–619. Sundhaussen argues the Byzantine tradition is mainly what defines the Balkans as a historical region (contrasting with Todorova’s idea that the Balkans are primarily the Ottoman legacy) and that the Ottomans inherited it to a great extent and continued it through the Ottoman era and into the national era.

55 Maria Todorova, “Der Balkan als Analyse-kategorie: Grenzen, Raum, Zeit,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 28, no. 3 (2002): 470–492, esp. 480–492. See also Dietmar Müller’s rendering

construction of regions and the concomitant structural descriptions of their inner space (she practiced them herself in the last chapter of *Imagining the Balkans*). However, she became increasingly skeptical of borders, believing that they led to an obsession with difference and Otherness. She likewise felt structural analyses were rather “static” and ahistorical, and prone to essentialization. So she put forward another approach in terms of “legacies” (below).

Some unconventional “constructivist” attempts at redefining the Balkan region have been made. There is Stefan Troebst’s attempt (following political scientists) to promote an enlarged Southeastern Europe as a “circum-Pontic” space that includes not only the Balkans but also the Caucasus. The historical arguments for this construction go back to the presence of Pontic Greeks from antiquity and within the common Byzantine and Ottoman frameworks, while the Russian penetration supposedly deepened the integration by mercantile means. The inspiration for this regional Black Sea concept is clearly the Braudel idea of the unifying role of the Mediterranean for the “coastal societies.” Whether this has been the case for the Pontic region and how deep the large ports culturally penetrated their hinterlands is another question.⁵⁶

Kaser recently argued for a regional concept of “Eurasia Minor” that includes both the Balkans and the Near East (“between the Danube and Tigris rivers”) on the historical ground that they were part not only of the Byzantine and the Ottoman Empires but also of ancient Greek civilization and even of a very early common or shared Near Eastern civilization that extended to the Balkans, created by sedentary people who cultivated cereals and domesticated animals, and which spread to the rest of Europe much later.⁵⁷ Again, the usefulness of this regional concept with regard to historical eras and distinctive features has been disputed.⁵⁸

of the controversy in a way sympathetic to Sundhaussen: Müller, “Southeastern Europe,” 401–405.

- 56 Stefan Troebst, “Eine neue Südosteuropa-Konzeption? Der Balkan-Schwarzmeer-Kaukasus-Raum in politikwissenschaftlicher Sicht. Ein unvorgreiflicher Vorschlag zur Diskussion,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte und Kultur Südosteuropas* 2 (2000): 153–159. Discussed in Müller, “Southeastern Europe,” 406–407.
- 57 Karl Kaser, *The Balkans and the Near East: Introduction to a Shared History* (Berlin and Vienna: LIT Verlag, 2011), especially the introduction. Kaser justifies associating the Near East with the Balkans based on a “shared” or “joint” history. See also Karl Kaser, “Balkan Studies Today at the University of Graz (and Elsewhere),” www.kakanien.ac.at/beitr/balkans/KKaser1.pdf (accessed December 20, 2013).
- 58 For example, Sundhaussen opposes the inclusion of Asia Minor, as it has long been in a process of de-Grecification and Turkification, starting with the battle of Mantzikert (or Manzikert) in 1071. See Sundhaussen, “Was ist Südosteuropa,” 99–100.

In general, sectoral “Balkan studies” interests has put too much pressure to secure its “object” as a region in order to legitimize the scholarship and the institutions dealing with it (and to justify the funding). It would be healthy to ease the insistence on rigidly defining boundaries, bounding spaces, describing essential features, or even structures, identifying overarching commonalities or formulating specificities vis-à-vis other parts of Europe in favor of heterogeneity within the region. A more “dynamic” and explicitly “constructed” concept of the Balkans as a region would be a better-suited tool for research. On the other hand, Karl Kaser’s proposition (in the second revised edition of his book) to abstain altogether from using a (definable) regional concept of Southeastern Europe because of its constructed character and the inevitable opposition from scholars from the region is hardly realistic (and he does not adhere to it himself, despite trying to dissolve the concept of the Balkans into Southern Europe).⁵⁹

The meaningfulness of the concept of region in general is also a question of “scale”—it is on a certain level of abstraction and for particular purposes and goals that geographic space is constituted as a region. To put it differently, it requires a certain abstraction, so that commonalities may emerge above local differences. Not all topics and research questions are meaningfully treated on the level of region, and some require zooming in to a sub-region or nation-state (or some part of it) or else zooming out to a continent or the globe as a whole.

In our work, which was dominated by a transnational agenda, the authors generally avoided defining boundaries or making “essentialist” definitions of the Balkans, be they in terms of ahistorical cultural traits or even in terms of structural definitions of *longue durée* features. Instead, in accordance with the transnational methodology, relations of various kinds between entities were studied within what is conventionally designated as “the Balkans” (and particular parts of them) but also with other parts of Europe (Central and Western Europe and Russia / the Soviet Union). While such relations also take place in space, the transnational methodology does not require a preliminary definition of spaces. Instead, they are constructed according to the needs and the scope of the research. Moreover, spaces are not necessarily bounded territories, and the category of space can be “non-territorial,” such as “networks” (Philipp

59 Kaser, *Südosteuropäische Geschichte* (2002 edition), 19, 22–23. It is not clear whether Kaser is against attempts to define (and delimit) the region or against the use of the regional concept altogether. Kaser opts for the term “*südöstliches Europa*” in place of “*Südosteuropa*,” precisely because of its indefiniteness and absence of scholarly convention, supposed value-neutrality, and the possibility to extend it to various outlying regions depending on the problem (*Problemstellung*).

Ther) or what Jürgen Osterhammel calls “transnational social spaces” or the category of “mental maps” (“mindscape”, “cognitive maps,” etc.—below).⁶⁰

Still, the composition of the Balkans/Southeastern Europe as a region with boundaries and a certain territory is addressed by Alexander Vezenkov in the present volume. Rather than trying to stipulate boundaries (his opinion on that issue can be inferred), he takes up another, reflexive and critical approach. He lays out the fluctuations in the understanding of these boundaries and territorial spans over time by simultaneously revealing the considerations and hidden motives behind such understandings. Most often, these prove to be political and geopolitical in nature even when they involve “natural boundaries” (rivers and seas). Moreover, he problematizes the very possibility of conceiving the Balkans geographically as peninsular (and thus as a “natural given”). This conception hinged on seeing Europe as a continent, which was not a “natural given” itself but became possible after the geographical discoveries. The rather different geographies of earlier eras are witness to that. The Balkans, in its most widely-agreed-on and present territorial definition, is revealed as the heir of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century “Turkey in Europe” (a product of geopolitics and religious confrontation). Vezenkov also comments on the rationale of the Balkans “opening up” to other areas: Central Europe, the Mediterranean, and more recently the Black Sea and especially the Near East.

The Balkan region is thematized in yet another way by Vezenkov, namely as a function of communications that allow, or impede, contacts and exchanges within the region and with the outside world. As demonstrated, before the railways even the main roads were neglected, and connections by sea and river (the Danube in particular) were faster and more secure than those by land. As a result, ports were better connected to the outside world (Western Europe in particular) than with the interior of the Ottoman Empire, while connections between inland towns at some distance from each other were particularly slow and difficult. The idea that the Balkans were more open to the outside and less internally unified in terms of communication and exchanges is an even more radical way to “subvert” or deconstruct the regional concept, though the author does not draw all consequences.

60 Ther, “Comparisons, Cultural Transfers,” esp. 214–219. Ther’s networks (and cultural spaces) consist primarily of cultural exchanges and transfers. Jürgen Osterhammel, “Transnationale Gesellschaftliche Erweiterung oder Alternative?” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 27 (2001): 464–479, esp. 473–474.

Modernization and Underdevelopment

The Balkans as a region have also been approached and studied from the economic (and social) *longue-durée* perspective of modernization and underdevelopment or peripherization.⁶¹ In fact, this is a “standard” feature in the structural descriptions, but it deserves special attention because of the preponderance of this discourse, its coupling with social structure as another important defining feature, and its wide-ranging implications. While all authors agree that the Balkans lagged behind economically in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the question is when the lag started and how to explain the economic backwardness of the region in the modern era. The Hungarian economic historians Iván Berend and György Ránki, working from the perspective of theories of (under)development (center-periphery relations), date the lag (of Eastern Europe in general) to between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries, with the rise of modern capitalism in the West. Concerning the Ottoman Balkans in particular, they speak of “feudalism” and (in Marxist terms and quite wrongly) of the “Asiatic mode of production,” in the sense of a strongly centralized power, communal (not private) landholding, self-sufficient rural communities, serfdom to the state, and a resulting lack of change and development.⁶² Many economic historians from within the region treat the Ottoman Empire as “feudal” (in agrarian and administrative arrangements) and economically backward and regard it as the main hindrance to development.

The economic historian John Lampe also sees Ottoman hegemony as inimical to development but for different reasons. He cites the Ottoman politico-military model and the heavy burdens of warfare (a sort of “command economy”), primarily fiscal (rather than commercial) orientation, low population density, and local disorder. He emphasizes one negative factor in particular: the borderland position of the Ottoman Balkans and the military rivalry with the Habsburgs (and its fiscal imperatives). Lampe projects economic backwardness as far back as the eleventh century and especially on the eve of the Ottoman conquest, again on account of borderland position (of the First and especially of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom and of the Serbian state,

61 I am not exempt from operating within the same paradigm: Roumen Daskalov, “Development in the Balkan Periphery Prior to World War II: Some Reflections,” *Südost-Forschungen* 57 (Munich) (1998): 207–244.

62 Iván Berend and György Ránki, *The European Periphery and Industrialization 1780–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 11, 42; Iván Berend and György Ránki, *East Central Europe in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1977), 19–20, 27–28, 31–32, 35–36, 39–40.

both neighboring the Byzantine Empire) and reciprocal exhaustion in wars. At the same time, he rejects attempts to explain Balkan backwardness under the Ottomans through dependency theories (with reference to Gundar Frank) and “world system” theories (Immanuel Wallerstein) because of the absence of significant export surplus (in staples) and large-scale disadvantageous trade required by these theories. In the early period of national independence, the external factor is not given much importance either because of weak foreign investment (except in state loans not used for productive purposes) and not-very-significant wheat exports (which could have become an “engine of development” through export-led growth, as in the staple theory).⁶³ In a quite revisionist book, Michael Palairet argues and substantiates that, upon independence, the Balkan states actually experienced an economic regression, which he says lasted for decades.⁶⁴

Descriptions and explanations of the Balkans (and of Eastern Europe in general) in economic terms, whether inspired by modernization theories or by underdevelopment theories, tend to be rather one-sided and reductive—identifying modernization as only economic development—as well as Eurocentric. Furthermore, in the absence of empirical data on earlier eras, they become clearly teleological (not to speak of false renderings of Byzantine and Ottoman “feudalism”).⁶⁵

To counterbalance the one-sidedness of the purely economic approach, Maria Todorova put forward nation-building as one feature just as important (if not more so) of modernity and its temporality. In this respect as well, the overwhelming tendency is to separate and downgrade Eastern nationalism and nation-building as later, derivative, and qualitatively different (“ethnic”

63 John R. Lampe, “Imperial Borderlands or Capitalist Periphery? Redefining Balkan Backwardness, 1520–1914,” in *The Origins of Backwardness in Eastern Europe*, ed. Daniel Chirot (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Oxford: University of California Press, 1989), 177–209; John R. Lampe and Marvin R. Jackson, *Balkan Economic History, 1550–1950: From Imperial Borderlands to Developing Nations* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 6–7. Kaser also dates Balkan backwardness to as early as the eleventh century using additional explanations, such as the theory of “peripheral feudalism” and Marx’s idea of the “Asiatic mode of production.” See Kaser, *Südosteuropäische Geschichte* (1990 edition), 121–142.

64 Michael Palairet, *The Balkan Economies c. 1800–1914: Evolution without Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

65 The teleology or projection of present economic realities and regions far back to early history is evident in Peter Gunst, *Einige Probleme der wirtschaftlichen und sozialen Entwicklung Osteuropas* (Cologne: Forschungsinstitut für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte an der Universität zu Köln, 1977); Peter Gunst, “Agrarian Systems of Central and Eastern Europe,” in *The Origins of Backwardness*, 53–91.

versus “civic”) from the Western prototype taken as a normative model. The sense of “lag and lack” and the notion of “backwardness” and related notions such as incompleteness, failure, catching up, and self-exclusion are also characteristic of indigenous scholarship in Eastern Europe, which is itself dominated by economic historians and political scientists. Instead, Todorova argues that there was a “relative synchronicity” of nation-building in Western and Eastern Europe within a *longue durée* framework (the fifteenth to twentieth centuries). She looks at nation-building as a protracted process, gradual and uneven, initiated by the West, which spread to the rest of Europe and the other continents (while recognizing short-term phenomena of sequential development, transmission, diffusion, etc.). Rather than mere copying and “transplantation,” nation-building is regarded as a global social process of rearrangement of group solidarities as a by-product of modernity (together with urbanization, bureaucratization, communications, etc., but not necessarily industrialization⁶⁶). This is also viewed as a way to avoid the “trap of backwardness” regarding Eastern Europe, on the one hand, and “to deconstruct the category ‘West’ and transform it from a model-like entity into a dynamic one, which itself underwent the process unevenly and over a long period of time,” on the other hand. Todorova further radicalizes this approach to a critique of the “allochronic discourse” and allochronic notion of temporality of much historical writing about Eastern Europe (similarly to cultural anthropology), that is, of looking at it with a feeling of superiority and moral complacency, as if it existed in a time different from that of the modern West.⁶⁷ From this point of view, even the idea of “contemporaneity of the noncontemporaneous” (“*Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen*”) is problematic if it privileges one temporality (as modern) over others (as anachronistic).⁶⁸ Along these lines

66 Ernest Gellner’s theory of nationalism is not very helpful in explaining its development in the Balkans in the absence of industrialization. An explanation in terms of emulation of the West is provided by Gale Stokes, *Three Eras of Political Change in Eastern Europe* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 23–35.

67 Maria Todorova, “The Trap of Backwardness: Modernity, Temporality, and the Study of Eastern European Nationalism,” *Slavic Review* 64, no. 1 (2005): 140–164, cited on 155.

68 Kaser applies this idea (of Ernst Bloch and Reinhart Koselleck) to the simultaneous existence of old and new in the Balkans, in which the old presumably belongs to earlier “time layers” (*Schichten*) because of the uneven development and the succession of one imperial rule by another as well as overlaps in the borderlands (the military border and Bosnia under Austrian-Hungarian rule). See Karl Kaser, *Südosteuropäische Geschichte* (1990), 143–154. A subtler interpretation is found in Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, “Penser l’histoire croisée: entre empirie et réflexivité,” in *De la comparaison à l’histoire croisée*, Le Genre humain 42, eds. Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann

Andreas Lyberatos shows (in this volume) one more way the Balkans has been exoticized vis-à-vis the West, namely by observers perceiving the flow of time here as different from that in Europe, because of the different way of measurement in the Ottoman Empire and a different rhythm of life.

The present four-volume work shows a preference for the theoretical perspective of “multiple modernities” and the critique of Eurocentrism.⁶⁹ This is reflected in the treatment (in the third volume) of the highly reflexive native responses to the European imports (of material items, ideas, laws, institutions) and to the challenges of modernization in general. As we hope to have shown, there were quite creative “adaptations” of the transfers and imports to the local conditions (including the invention and manipulation of “tradition” to meet new needs), and there emerged “hybrid” forms. Other indigenous ideological responses to the Western European (industrial, capitalist) pattern of modernization were an admittedly modest “revisionism” of Western socialism and especially the search for a “third” (agrarian) way of development, along with recourse to imaginative “autochthonism” as a way of gaining (cultural) self-esteem in face of the technological and economic superiority of the West.

The Balkans as Legacies

While Maria Todorova became famous as a proponent of the discursive approach to the Balkans (“mental maps,” “symbolic geographies”—see below), she never divorced it from the realities of the region (what she calls “ontology”). Moreover, she proposed an approach to historical regions in terms of legacies of a *longue durée*.⁷⁰ The legacies that stand for regions are definable with certain characteristics in various spheres: political, economic, social, demographic, and cultural. A legacy starts only after the political structure that engendered it has come to an end, and it is of limited duration. Todorova further differentiates between legacy as continuity and legacy as perception: the

(Paris: Seuil, 2004), 15–49. “Contemporaneity of the noncontemporaneous” here means: “the intercrossing [entrecroisement] of different historical temporalities which, in escaping the standard of a common measure [tout s’écarter d’un standard de mesure commun], penetrate one another [s’interpénètrent] to the point that it is no longer possible to represent them in a linear and one-dimensional way” (40).

69 Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, “Multiple Modernities,” *Daedalus* (winter 2000): 1–29; Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*.

70 Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 161–183. Further developed by Maria Todorova, “Spacing Europe,” 66–78.

latter remains even after the former expires. She later explained that both are real social facts but differently removed from experience; the perception is at a further remove.⁷¹ The Balkans in particular are, according to her, the Ottoman legacy par excellence (in the same way that the categorization of Eastern Europe as a region is a communist legacy): it was dealt a blow with the emergence of the first independent nation-states and expired by the end of World War I (except in demography and popular culture), after which it remained as perception.

Todorova argues that the concept of legacy is an improvement over the concept of a region in that it gives more attention to time while retaining spatiality. She adds the category of "historical period" to designate the duration of the political entities that created legacies (or traditions). Historical periods may be synchronic or overlapping, consecutive or separated by gaps. Thus the eras of the Roman, Byzantine, and early Ottoman Empires were synchronic or overlapping with the period of the great migrations from Central Asia (which also left legacies). The historical legacies, however, are overlapping by definition, even though they fade away in intensity with time. The legacy concept thus takes into account the relativity of regional borders over long periods. Todorova visualizes a region as a palimpsest picture of the various legacies in different colors, horizontally superimposed one upon the other with non-coinciding but partly overlapping borders and with some cognate elements (traits) cutting "vertically" through different legacies.⁷² Sundhaussen also addressed the problem of the region's boundaries shifting over time but opted for a different solution in terms of a "core" and outlying space. He differentiated between the Balkans proper (with the Balkan range as a northern boundary) as the core of the region with a concentration and density of certain traits (the result of overlaying the Byzantine and the Ottoman legacies) and the wider region of Southeastern Europe, where some of these traits also obtain, but others do not.⁷³ In fact, when speaking about legacies, he comes close to

71 Todorova, "Spacing Europe," 69.

72 Ibid., 68–69, 74, 75–78.

73 Sundhaussen, "Europa balcanica," 632–638, 651. According to Sundhaussen, in spite of the different spread of the particular parameters, one can work out the cluster of features (*Merkmalcluster*) that gives the Balkans a singular profile. See also Sundhaussen, "Was ist Südosteuropa," 96, 99–100. Sundhaussen sees the Balkans as the interpenetration (*Durchdringung*) or intersection (*Schnittmenge*) of two historical entities—the Byzantine-Orthodox and the Ottoman-Islamic. Southeastern Europe as a "heuristic concept" consists of one space of thickening or concentration (*Verdichtungsraum*) plus a space of interaction and diffusion (of the features) to the north and to the east (101).

Todorova but in the end retains the preference for fixed spatiality that she tried to destabilize.

In fact, there is an honorable tradition of seeing the Balkans as legacies of civilizations, including the aforementioned Jovan Cvijić, Nicolae Iorga, Petar Skok, and Milan Budimir. There has also been a more recent interest in the Ottoman and other imperial legacies in the Balkans.⁷⁴ The differences concern what legacy is being emphasized (the Byzantine versus the Ottoman), what particular features, the question of continuity, and finally, the enduring value attitude, and, connected with it, how strongly the Balkans are contrasted to post-medieval Western European civilization (Huntington's "clash of civilizations" taken to the extreme). The interest in the perception of legacies has also been kept alive.⁷⁵

The present authors were also interested in legacies but approached them indirectly. They looked (in the third volume of this work) at how legacies were perceived and appropriated and used in national identity-building to identify with a previous "we" and to construct a continuity of history in rival nationalist narratives—another aspect of the issue of legacies in perception. This is how contemporary nations retroactively create their predecessors and claim their legacies. To express it in a Borgesian way, the progeny engenders its forefathers. Precisely in showing the parallel and sometimes competing claims or denials of legacies and predecessors, one can understand how closely connected the Balkan peoples were and still are, even as they try to carve out a past exclusively their own, thus nationalizing history.⁷⁶

The Balkanist Discourse

The other basic approach to the Balkans draws its inspiration from post-colonial, post-structuralist studies of discourse (in the Foucauldian sense of power-knowledge), representations and images ("imagology"). It was inspired by

74 Leon Carl Brown, ed., *Imperial "Legacy": The Ottoman Imprint on the Balkans and the Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996). The substance and specificity of the Ottoman imperial system, hence legacy, is treated in a chapter by Halil İnalcık. The chapter by Maria Todorova on the Ottoman legacy in the Balkans is basically the same as in her *Imagining the Balkans*. See also Raymond Detrez and Barbara Segaert, eds., *Europe and the Historical Legacies in the Balkans* (Brussels: Peter Lang), 2008.

75 Sylvie Gangloff, ed., *The Perception of the Ottoman Legacy in the Balkans* (Paris: L'Harmattan), 2005.

76 See in this vein Stefan Berger and Chris Lorenz, eds., *Nationalizing the Past: Historians as Nation Builders in Modern Europe* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

Edward Said's *Orientalism* and Larry Wolff's "invention" of Eastern Europe by the Enlightenment.⁷⁷ Todorova's seminal study deals primarily (though not only) with the mostly negative discursive constructions and "mental maps" of the Balkans in the West, especially by Western travelers, journalists, writers, and politicians. Such constructions she calls "Balkanism" (playing on Edward Said's *Orientalism*).⁷⁸ It is not necessary here to go into the particular characteristics of Balkanism and its differences from the Orientalist discourse. It is important to note that, just as with the "invention" of Eastern Europe in general, it helped assert outsiders' intellectual mastery of the region, even if in this case it did not amount to outright colonization. In the same vein, though with a narrower focus, Vesna Goldsworthy studied the representations of the Balkans in Western literary texts.⁷⁹

Todorova's critique of the Balkanist discourse, images, and mental mapping engendered heated debate. A central point (made by Sundhaussen) concerns the relation of the Balkanist discourse to "realities"—both because of the strong critique of it and because of the consideration that such a discourse, even if negative, is not necessarily false.⁸⁰ In response, Todorova affirms the primacy of "mental maps" (or scripts, schemata, or frames), which structure the processes of perception and go into the reworking of the information. Balkanism is a particularly stubborn such "script" or "frame." It evolved in journalism, politics, and literature during the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries and reached its peak around the Balkan wars and World War I (and again after 1989), becoming a "discursive hardening" (with reference to James Clifford) and shaping opinions and actions toward the region. Todorova says

77 Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994).

78 Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, esp. the introduction; Maria Todorova, "The Balkans: From Discovery to Invention," *Slavic Review* 53, no. 2 (1994): 453–483. One should mention the pioneering work by John Allcock, "Constructing the Balkans," in *Black Lambs and Grey Falcons: Women Travelers in the Balkans*, eds. John Allcock and Antonia Young (Bradford, UK: Bradford University Press, 1991), 170–191.

79 Vesna Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of Imagination* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press), 1998.

80 Sundhaussen, "Europa balcanica," 652. Other critiques of Todorova's concept of Balkanism appear in Sundhaussen, "Der Balkan," 608–624: that the Balkans were always marginal for the West and were never significant enough to the West to constitute, for instance, its "alter ego"; that she did not analyze the negative image of the Balkans issuing from the Balkan societies themselves and their "Orientalism" (negative images of the Turks); and she does not consider the negative images of the West in the Balkans (Occidentalism) (609–611, 616–617).

she searched for Balkanism in journalism, not academic works, and admits that the academic literature on the field is complex and different from the popular mythology about the Balkans. Finally, she says she has proposed her own Balkan “ontology” in the conventions of scholarly research (in the chapter “Qu’est-ce qu’il y a hors du text?”). Though it is admittedly another “mental map,” she believes it is a more fitting understanding (and one that still does not claim that the world “in itself” and the world in representation coincide).⁸¹ Todorova agrees with Sundhaussen’s remark that “not all negative images of the Balkans are false because they are negative” and even goes a step further to affirm that stereotypes are often based on true and observable features. She is questioning not the contents of these features but their status and function as stereotypes, i.e., as overgeneralizations instrumentalized in individual and collective action.⁸²

Another relevant critique (by Wendy Bracewell and Alex Drace-Francis) is that the post-colonial approach says more about Othering from outside (from the hegemonic West) than about the identity of the Balkan self (except when external representations are accepted and internalized) and thus acts to marginalize as well. Instead, these authors favor a more balanced approach of taking cognizance of how the East looks west, especially of the Balkan abuses of “the map of civilization” and manipulations of notions of geography and of “civilization,” as well as indigenously produced identities plus the Russian and the Ottoman perspectives.⁸³ The excesses and the one-sidedness of post-colonial/post-structuralist “Orientalist” approaches should thus be counterbalanced by “Occidentalism” approaches (meaning a harsh critique of the West⁸⁴).

Further works in the same discursive vein studied popular representations of the Balkans from within and the “symbolic geographies” of particular countries.⁸⁵ The central question here is how one deals with the stigma of being “Balkan”—whether it is internalized or passed on to the neighbor, thus

81 Todorova, “Der Balkan als Analysekategorie,” 470–474.

82 Ibid., 488.

83 Bracewell and Drace-Francis, “South-Eastern Europe,” 56–60. On a similar note, see Sundhaussen, “Der Balkan: Ein Plädoyer,” 609–611, 616–617.

84 Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit, *Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of Its Enemies* (New York: Penguin, 2004).

85 Sorin Antohi, “Romania and the Balkans: From Geocultural Bovarism to Ethnic Ontology,” *Transit*, 2002, no. 21. In this vein, see also Adrian Cioroianu, “The Impossible Escape: Romanians and the Balkans,” in *Balkan as Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentation*, eds. Dušan Bjelić and Obrad Savić (London and Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 209–233.

producing “nesting Orientalisms” (Milica Bakić-Hayden and Robert Hayden⁸⁶) or dealt with in another way, including by a positive reappraisal. It is even possible to play on the Western images of the Balkans (e.g., in Kusturica’s films) or to “sell” the Balkans as a tourist destination or gastronomical or another attraction.

Benjamin Schenk attempted to reconcile the “historical regions” (“realist” or “objectivist”) approach and the “mental maps” (“constructivist”) approach by seeing them as complementary rather than incompatible. He seems to side more with the “realists” than with the “constructivists” (Larry Wolff and Maria Todorova), whose views he simplifies and misrepresents as meaning that historical regions are mere “inventions,” implying pure fantasies. His mediation consists of acknowledging that “historical regions,” even when studied in a scholarly and comparative way (with the usual caveats that they are “working tools” and “heuristic devices”), also have a symbolic dimension in the very terms (their names), which are used as political concepts in discourses of power and identity. Schenk concludes by saying that historical regions are not only historical spaces with specific structures but also concepts, inventions, spaces of desire, and tools in political discourses.⁸⁷

In my opinion, the dichotomy in the title of Schenk’s article—“real” versus “invented”—is misleading. There are always realities that are perceived through differently configured cognitive lenses and reshaped in the mind (“imagined”) in one way or another according to various motives, prejudices, normative assumptions, or purposes. These “images,” “representations,” “mental maps” (mostly in discourses), etc., then feed back into the subsequent perception and representation of the “realities” as a cognitive basis for dealing with them with entirely real effects. In another article concerned with “mental mapping” and buttressed by the authority of neurobiologists and cognitive psychologists, Schenk himself moves in the direction of this approach, as he admits that the names for regions are not value-neutral terms but politically evolved, and that cognitive maps are factors in the historical process. Thus, according to him, while historians will still use geographical regions as objects

86 Milica Bakić-Hayden and Robert Hayden, “Orientalist Variations on the Theme ‘Balkans’: Symbolic Geography in Recent Yugoslav Cultural Politics,” *Slavic Review* 51, no. 1 (1992): 1–15; Milica Bakić-Hayden, “Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia,” *Slavic Review* 54, no. 4 (1995): 917–931.

87 Benjamin Schenk, “The Historical Regions of Europe: Real or Invented? Some Remarks on Historical Comparison and Mental Mapping,” in Benjamin Schenk, *Beyond the Nation: Writing European History Today* (St. Petersburg: Zentrum für Deutschland und Europastudien, 2004), 15–24.

of study, they should be aware “of the historicity and the political character of the terms and of the constructed character of the concepts of space that go with them.”⁸⁸

The geopolitical aspect of constructing a region is particularly pervasive. It is precisely the geopolitical aspect that heightens our awareness that regions are “constructed” by the power centers of the world and often only underwritten and “academically” legitimized by scholars.⁸⁹ This is amply substantiated in the Balkan case: “Turkey in Europe” during the Ottoman Empire, the *Südosteuropäische Wirtschaftsraum* (“economic space”) of the Third Reich,⁹⁰ and—after being subsumed under the notion of communist Eastern Europe during the Cold War—now Southeastern Europe (integrated into the European Union) and the (not yet integrated) “Western Balkans.” I have already mentioned Vezenkov’s contribution to this theme. The geopolitical construction of the sub-region Dobrudja (north and south of the Danubian delta) by the European Great Powers is tackled by Constantin Iordachi in this volume.

The present volume also includes a study by Diana Mishkova of Balkan scholarship (also known as Balkan studies or Balkanology) and its national traditions, institutions, journals, and representative authors, with special attention to its ideological and geo/political background: motivations, biases, and projects.⁹¹ This study of the Balkanist (extra-scholarly) dimension of Balkan scholarship, or what the author calls “academic Balkanisms,” can be regarded as complementing Maria Todorova’s work on Balkanist discourses in the public sphere, in addition to paying more attention to local academic knowledge production (the Balkan “subaltern”). As Mishkova convincingly shows, there were actually many academic Balkanisms with different ideologo-political motivations and agendas, and it is hardly possible to disentangle the political from the

88 Benjamin Schenk, “Mental Maps. Die Konstruktion von geographischen Räumen in Europa seit der Aufklärung,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 28, no. 3 (2002): 493–514, cited on 514.

89 On the constructivist view of regions as “geo/political projects” with various purposes, see Dimitar Bechev, *Constructing South East Europe: The Politics of Balkan Regional Cooperation* (Palgrave Macmillan), 2011. About the “politics of spacing,” see Todorova, “Spacing Europe,” 75–78.

90 In Franz Ronnenberger’s words: “The new political notion ‘Southeast Europe’ derives solely from Germany” (“Die neue politische Begriffsbildung ‘Südosteuropa’ geht einzig und allein von Deutschland aus”). Quoted from Kaser, *Südosteuropäische Geschichte* (1990), 105–106.

91 See also Diana Mishkova, “The Politics of Regionalist Science: The Balkans as a Supranational Space in Late Nineteenth Century Academic Projects,” *East Central Europe* 39 (2012): 266–303.

“purely” academic dimension; academics’ comparative freedom from current political projects simply allowed them to develop their own scholarly politics.

Beyond Region: Transnationalism

A new (and not so new) approach to the Balkans and to regions and space in general is connected with the application of transnational methods and studies. That is where this project is basically positioned. As is widely recognized, the Balkans were and still are a zone of intensive contacts and exchanges, shared legacies, mutual influences, and interdependencies. Our central idea was to apply transnational or relational methodology to the history of the region. Though we shared a belief in the strongly entangled character of the Balkans in the period of “isolationist” nation-states as well, the application of transnational approaches does not require precommitment to an “ontological” picture of a certain kind, as the method is relatively autonomous from the “ontology”; more precisely, it brings about its own selection, emphases, and reconfigurations of the object of study. The present scholars are far from being the first to explore Balkan history from such a perspective. They follow in the footsteps of Shishmanov and Skok and Budimir, as well as, to a point, Iorga, to name just some scholars from the region. As has been rightly pointed out, the transnational approaches were actually developed *avant la lettre* in area studies.⁹² The renewed interest in transnational relational approaches (to use the generic name) is connected with the end of the Cold War, European integration, and the phenomena of globalization.⁹³ But every scholarly interest is in context, and recognizing this does not invalidate it.

As is well known, there are several varieties of transnational or relational ways of doing history.⁹⁴ These include (traditional) comparisons; transfer studies (the first such method to develop); shared and connected history; entangled history; and perhaps the most sophisticated, at least in terms of theoretical

92 Ther, “Comparisons, Cultural Transfers,” 205.

93 On the time-specific historical context of transnational history, see Hartmut Kaelble, “Between Comparison and Transfers—And What Now? A French-German Debate,” in *Comparative and Transnational History*, 35–36. Kaelble lists such developments as globalization, European integration, loosening of the strong loyalties to the European nation-states, and new kinds of transnational wars.

94 On the concept of “transnational history,” see Jürgen Osterhammel, “A ‘Transnational’ History of Society: Continuity or New Departure?” in *Comparative and Transnational History*, 39–51, esp. 44–46.

elaboration—*histoire croisée*.⁹⁵ To quote Jürgen Kocka and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt: “What these different new approaches share is a common interest in the crossing of borders between nations, regions, continents or other spaces, in all kinds of encounters, perceptions, movements, relations and interactions between them, and in the way they perceived, influenced, stamped and constituted one another”; “the entanglement-oriented approaches stress the connections, the continuity, the belonging-together, the hybridity of observable spaces or analytical units.”⁹⁶

We started this research with the transnational and relational perspective and methodology in mind. But rather than committing to one of the aforementioned varieties, we chose the most appropriate method as we proceeded and according to the selected topics and the available materials. Moreover, it is only now in retrospect that we can account more clearly for what was actually done in terms of methodology.

To begin with the most obvious, transfer studies were practiced (especially in the second volume).⁹⁷ We dealt with transfers and imports, most often from outside the region, especially from Western Europe and some from Russia / the Soviet Union, and the responses they provoked. Admittedly, we were basically concerned with the recipient or point of destination (place of arrival) and with the process of translation or transformation. Ideological, legal, and institutional transfers of ideas, laws, institutions, and so on were at the center of interest.⁹⁸ It is here that the permeability and receptiveness of the Balkans, especially in the modern era, come into relief. The guiding idea was to avoid the usual biases in regarding the transfers and “transplants” as distortions and corruptions of the authentic model, and of its functioning in the new milieu as malfunctioning—not least because this wrongly presumes a similarity of

95 A useful summary of these varieties and their combinations is in Hartmut Kaelble, “Between Comparison and Transfers,” 34–38.

96 Jürgen Kocka and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, “Comparison and Beyond: Traditions, Scope, and Perspectives of Comparative History,” in *Comparative and Transnational History*, 1–30, esp. 19–20.

97 Transfer studies were pioneered by Michel Espagne and Michael Werner, eds., *Transferts culturels. Les relations interculturelles dans l'espace franco-allemand (XVIII^e–XX^e siècles)* (Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les civilisations, 1988); Michel Espagne, *Les transferts culturels franco-allemands* (Paris: PUF, 1999).

98 On legal transfers or legal transplants or legal borrowing, see David Nelken, “Comparatists and Transferability,” in *Comparative Legal Studies: Traditions and Transitions*, eds. Pierre Legrand and Roderick Munday (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 437–466. On political transfer, see Henk te Velde, “Political Transfer: An Introduction,” *European Review of History / Revue européenne d'histoire* 12, no. 2 (2005): 205–221.

conditions at both ends. Instead we looked at the transfers as undergoing a normal process of adaptation or accommodation to the local conditions and practices that is called “domestication” (or “naturalization”). The mixing with local practices often creates something new and different—a hybrid, not necessarily something bad.

As is to be expected, not only most modern legal and institutional transfers but also most modern ideas and ideologies came from outside the region. Ironically, so did nationalism, which, in popular Western Balkanist discourses, would become something like a trademark of the region. That is why long-distance transfers, not those from contiguous areas, are more characteristic of the region in the modern era: modernity came from outside. But in the earlier Ottoman era and later on, as regards folklore, cuisine, customs, patterns of behavior, and so on, the intra-regional dimension of transfer prevailed. One such kind of transfer is treated in this volume—the diffusion of a certain type of house throughout the region and in parts of Asia Minor, a design ironically regarded everywhere as “national.”

Comparisons were also made.⁹⁹ I would rather not enter here into the debate between transfer studies and comparative studies¹⁰⁰ or the attempts to combine them¹⁰¹ (or to combine comparative studies with entangled history and

99 Because comparison has been practiced all along, there is enormous literature on this method or (as some call it) practice. Marc Bloch's appeal for comparative history remains a classic: Marc Bloch, “Toward a Comparative History of European Societies,” in *Enterprise and Secular Change*, ed. Frederic C. Lane (Homewood, IL: Richard D. Irwin, 1953), 494–521, originally published as “Pour une histoire comparée des sociétés européennes,” *Revue de synthèse historique*, no. 46 (1928): 15–50. Some recent literature on comparison: Nancy L. Green, “Forms of Comparison,” in *Comparison and History: Europe in Cross-National Perspective*, eds. Deborah Cohen and Maura O'Connor (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 41–56; Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Jürgen Kocka, “Comparative History: Methods, Aims, Problems,” in *Comparison and History*, 23–39, and the other essays in that volume; Hartmut Kaelble and Jürgen Schriewer, eds., *Vergleich und Transfer: Komparatistik in den Sozial-, Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften* (Frankfurt am Main and New York: Campus Verlag, 2003); Jürgen Kocka, “Comparison and Beyond,” *History and Theory* 42, no. 1 (2003): 39–44.

100 Comparativism came under attack by the proponent of transfer studies Michel Espagne, “Sur les limites du comparatisme en histoire culturelle,” *Genèses* 17, no. 17 (1994): 112–121. The argument that comparison is focused on synchrony (rather than diachrony) and is based on the assumption of static units rather than processes appears in Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, “Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity,” *History and Theory* 45 (February 2006): 30–50, esp. 35–36.

101 For example, Johannes Paulmann, “Internationaler Vergleich und interkultureller Transfer. Zwei Forschungsansätze zur europäischen Geschichte des 18. bis 20. Jahrhunderts,”

*histoire croisée*¹⁰²). Still, one aspect concerning the units of comparison should be mentioned: even though comparison is practiced across nation-states and regions, it tends to reconfirm such spatial divisions. This is due to the emphasis on contrasts and, on a more basic level, because one takes the units compared as givens (arguably, this is also the case with transfer studies). There is also the already noted feature of East-West comparisons to privilege (asymmetrically) the West in the sense that one takes its features as a norm and looks for similar features in “the East,” with the result that one finds them less manifest or lacking. As Wendy Bracewell and Alex Drace-Francis note, comparing and contrasting the Balkans to Western Europe as a model often produces accounts of similarities or “deviations” (always on the part of the Balkans), makes use of models and theories from elsewhere, and leads to framing the questions inappropriately (e.g., in discussions of whether the Ottoman system was “feudal,” or of Balkan “backwardness”). Finally, it goes along with an emphasis on “unity” and the coherence of both entities at the expense of their variety, complexity, and changing character.¹⁰³

The Balkans as a region present fertile soil for practicing comparisons between adjacent and contemporaneous societies of the type favored by Marc Bloch (though recently there have been calls for “comparing the incomparable”¹⁰⁴). Admittedly, some of our comparisons were of the asymmetrical type (privileging one of the entities) and made without regard to processes leading to convergences or divergences but with attention to conditions and circumstances of the compared cases and places. Yet they were useful for the usual purpose of establishing similarities and differences, for instance, between types of agrarianism or liberalism or between varieties of populism or socialism.

A kind of “(shared and) connected history” was also practiced, though not on connections between metropolises and colonies, or colonizers and colonized, and not, in any case, on places very distant from each other.¹⁰⁵ Instead,

Historische Zeitschrift 267 (1998): 649–685, esp. 681–685; Jürgen Osterhammel, “A ‘Transnational’ History of Society,” 39–51. The argument is summarized by Hartmut Kaelble, “Between Comparison and Transfers,” 35.

102 Jürgen Kocka, “Comparison and Beyond,” 43–44; Jürgen Kocka and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, “Comparison and Beyond,” 20–21; Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Jürgen Kocka, “Comparative History,” 31–33.

103 Bracewell and Drace-Francis, “South-Eastern Europe,” 51.

104 Marcel Detienne, *Comparer l'incomparable* (Paris: Seuil, 2000).

105 The notion of “connected history” is elaborated by Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia,” in *Beyond Binary Histories: Re-Imagining Eurasia to c. 1830*, ed. Victor Lieberman (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan

we explored connectedness between the Balkan nations that emerged in a shared Ottoman matrix and between nation-states that emerged as a result of secession from the Ottoman Empire but that, for a while, carried on the Empire's legacy. The era of divisive nationalism could not entirely sever such connections and created new ones. We also explored interconnections (even through disputes) between the national Balkan historiographies that emerged as a result of studying long-ago common legacies, such as the Byzantine and even the Thracian legacy, in their efforts to establish historical continuities for their own nations.

The present authors showed a preference for the "entangled history" (*Verflechtungsgeschichte*)¹⁰⁶ approach and used some elements of the cognate

Press, 1999), 289–316. "Connected history" (as opposed to national histories and area studies) is used here to denote the global and connected character of distant parts of the world in the early modern period and some "unifying features" between them. See also Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Explorations in Connected History: From the Tagus to the Ganges* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004); Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Explorations in Connected History: Mughals and Franks* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004). For the notion and application of "connected history," see also Serge Gruzinski, "Les mondes mêlés de la monarchie catholique et autres 'connected histories,'" *Annales: Histoire, sciences sociales* 56, no. 1 (2001): 85–117. Gruzinski applies this notion to relations and exchanges between the Spanish Catholic monarchy and its colonies across the ocean—he calls these "*mondes mêlés de la monarchie*" or "hybrid societies" and speaks of various types of mixing under the notion of "*métissage*."

- 106 The notion of "entangled history" appeared in postcolonial studies and stressed relations between colonizers and colonized societies, maintaining that transfers also take place from the colonies to the mother countries (albeit less frequently). The concept was developed by Shalini Randeria, "Geteilte Geschichte und verwobene Moderne," in *Zukunftsentwürfe: Ideen für eine Kultur der Veränderung*, eds. Jörn Rüsen, Hanna Leitgeb, and Norbert Jegelka (Frankfurt and New York: Campus Verlag, 1999), 87–96. Randeria argues here a concept of "entangled" (*verwobene, verflochtete*) modernity within a "shared" or common (*Geteilte, gemeinsam*) history in a relational and interactional perspective instead of taking the European model and the European path of development as universal and their traits or features as the norm and everything else as "deviations." A more thorough explication appears in Sebastian Conrad and Shalini Randeria, "Einleitung: Geteilte Geschichten—Europa in einer postkolonialen Welt," in *Jenseits des Europazentrismus. Postkoloniale Perspektiven in den Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften*, eds. Sebastian Conrad and Shalini Randeria (Frankfurt and New York: Campus Verlag, 2002), 9–49. According to Conrad and Randeria, the concept of *Geteilte Geschichten* is used to denote from a postcolonial perspective the entanglement (*Verwobenheit* or *Verflechtung*) of the European with the non-European world and imperialism as the common frame of the "mutual constitution of metropolis and colonies" (10), while the term *histoire croisée* is reserved for intra-European transnational relations (11). Randeria's concept of "*geteilten Geschichten*,"

histoire croisée (below). While “entangled history” was initially developed concerning relations between colonizers and colonized societies, metropolis and peripheries—in view of revealing their entangled (*verflechtete*, *verworbene*) histories and even “mutual constitution” within a shared modernity—it was appropriately applied to constellations in Europe. An example is Philipp Ther’s treatment of Central Eastern Europe in terms of entangled histories and what he also calls the “history of relations” (or “relational history”), with the idea that this type of relation goes beyond transfers, contacts, and exchanges to deeper “mutual conditionality,” “mutual correlation,” “structural connectedness,” or even “structural dependence”—and presupposes nearness, unlike transfers taking place from a distance. Ther is particularly interested in the entangled character of German and East Central European history, especially in the mutual articulation of nationalisms, the effects of the presence of sizable minorities on the German polity and democracy, and so on.¹⁰⁷

We found the entangled-history approach to be particularly relevant to the Balkans, as the method was attuned to the Balkans’ “ontology” of a long history of contacts, exchanges, and interactions. The interactions were intense and affected two or more entities, leading to interdependences and mutual articulations in a way that was constitutive to them all. In particular, we studied the long-standing and often conflict-ridden interactions and entanglements between the Bulgarian and the Greek, and the Romanian and the Greek, national movements; the formation of Macedonian nationalism in interaction with Bulgarian, Serb, and Greek nationalisms; and the entanglements of even national communisms or communist nationalisms. The approach also proved useful in studying the formation of national languages with regard to

whose connotations (in English) oscillate between “shared” and “divided,” implies the ambivalence of the exchange and the interaction between Europe and the non-European world (17–18). For applications of the concept of entangled history, see Shalini Randeria, “Entangled Histories of Uneven Modernities: Civil Society, Caste Solidarities and Legal Pluralism in Post-Colonial India,” in *Unraveling Ties: From Social Cohesion to New Practices of Connectedness*, eds. Yehuda Elkana, Ivan Krastev, Elísio Macamo, and Shalini Randeria (Frankfurt and New York: Campus Verlag, 2006), 284–311. See also Sebastian Conrad, “Double Marginalization: A Plea for a Transnational Perspective on German History,” in *Comparative and Transnational History*, 52–76; Sebastian Conrad, “Entangled Memories: Versions of the Past in Germany and Japan, 1945–2001,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 38, no. 1 (2003), 85–99.

- 107 Philipp Ther, “Beyond the Nation: The Relational Basis of Comparative History of Germany and Europe,” *Central European History* 36, no. 1 (2005), 45–73, esp. 68, 70–71. This is combined with an appeal to go beyond the national framing of historiography to multiple histories of one country (instead of one master narrative).

the Other and influenced by the Other in the very attempt to differentiate oneself through language. The approach also proved useful in dealing with Balkan national historiographies that became very much “entangled” exactly when they tried to appropriate for themselves a common and shared past for purposes of their own identity building.

It is precisely in revealing particular and sometimes unexpected interconnections, interactions, crisscrossings, and entanglements within the region and with other places that the strength and innovativeness of this endeavor can be seen. Many of these interactions and entanglements were basic in nation-building and ideological/political projects and identities. However, we did not regard it as our task to “deconstruct” them in some direct and militant way but rather to reveal the connections and entanglements between the national contexts in the Balkans in an undogmatic way that may help us rethink and overcome the national clichés of separateness and isolation.

The *histoire croisée* (literally: “crossed” history) approach was pioneered and propagated in recent decades by Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, and it is theoretically particularly sophisticated.¹⁰⁸ It was initially applied to the study of French-German relations and then tried on other cases.¹⁰⁹ I cannot enter here into its subtleties or how Werner and Zimmermann see it as especially different from the comparative approach and transfer studies (but also from the “shared and connected” and “entangled history” approaches

108 Werner and Zimmermann, “Penser l’histoire croisée,” 15–49; Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, “Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisée.” A slightly reworked version of “Penser l’histoire croisée” and of their article “Penser l’histoire croisée: entre empirie et réflexivité,” *Annales: Histoire, sciences sociales* 58, no. 1 (2003): 7–36 is Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, “Vergleich, Transfer, Verflechtung. Der Ansatz der Histoire croisée und die Herausforderung des Transnationalen,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 28, no. 4 (2002): 607–636.

109 For example, Bénédicte Zimmermann, Claude Didry, and Peter Wagner, eds., *Le travail et la nation. Histoire croisée de la France et de l’Allemagne* (Paris: Éditions de la Maison des Sciences De L’Homme, 1999). To cite the editors’ introduction: “Their similarities and their differences [of French and German societies] are [...] the fruit of one *histoire croisée* during which ‘French’ and ‘German’ formed their national identities in relation to each other through borrowing and re-appropriation or rejection or even assimilation in the extreme case of the Occupation” (3). A German proponent of *histoire croisée* is Mathias Middell: see Michel Espagne and Mathias Middell, eds., *Von der Elbe bis an die Seine: Kulturtransfer zwischen Sachsen und Frankreich im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert* (Leipzig, 1999). On German-French “crossings” of social policies in particular, see also the French scholar Sandrine Kott, “Gemeinschaft oder Solidarität? Unterschiedliche Modelle der französischen und deutschen Sozialpolitik am Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 22, no. 3 (1996): 311–330.

that they consider closer).¹¹⁰ Suffice it to say that some features of the *histoire croisée* approach (as described by its proponents) were particularly important for this research. First (to simplify matters greatly), instead of assuming pre-existing entities and protagonists, it revealed their emergence in the course of interaction, through the logic of differentiation and self-articulation in reciprocity—as well as their being continually transformed by the very process of interaction. Thus there were still no nations when national activists were struggling for the hearts and minds of their compatriots; national territories were something imagined or dreamed of by a minority; instead of standardized languages, there were “dialects” (more neutrally, language varieties), and it was not clear which one would emerge as the norm and still less clear that some would fuse or split later on.

Second, rather than taking a one-sided view of the interacting objects under investigation or aiming at an equidistant treatment of them (*tertium comparationis* of the comparative approach), *histoire croisée* requires that the scholar shifts points of view or perspectives on the interacting entities and thus is more reflexive. There are various points of view that need to be “crossed” in order to understand the “constitution” of the object of research—those that pertain to the interacting entities, to later observers of the interaction, and to the present observer (the historian). The researcher has to historicize the differing viewpoints and understand how they are socially grounded or reflect competition in power struggles. Moreover, s/he has to perform some translation or balancing between them but also position himself or herself among those historically constituted vantage points that take part in the construction of the object itself (as Max Weber emphasized long ago). In the confrontation of the various viewpoints (but also of the language and concepts, disciplinary traditions, and experiences that go with them), which stamp the way of seeing, there occurs not only a mutual highlighting of the points of observation and

110 According to its proponents, *histoire croisée* differs most from comparative history and transfer studies and, like “connected” and “entangled” history, presents an alternative to them. Though each of those alternatives has distinct features, they all belong to the family of “relational” approaches. See Werner and Zimmermann, “Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity,” 31–32. Other authors identify the main features of *histoire croisée* as skepticism of nationally oriented perspectives; taking into account the fundamentally different perspectives of the societies being compared, hence the need to switch perspectives and become increasingly reflexive; going beyond a binational orientation to consider multilateral approaches and research; the importance of reflecting upon the categories of analysis; and the exercise of self-reflexivity. See Kaelble, “Between Comparison and Transfers,” 35; Haupt and Kocka, “Comparative History: Methods, Aims,” 33.

ways of seeing but also a certain balancing and relativization, which may lead to questioning and perhaps correcting one's own position (in any case, it does not allow for the absolutization of standpoints).¹¹¹ In general, *histoire croisée* commends itself for its reflexivity on a number of counts, such as the use of concepts and categories (which have to be historicized), one's own socialization in a certain tradition and scholarly discipline, and the choice of scales of analysis.

To take some examples from our four-volume work: the authors tried to historicize various contemporary and later reactions to the modernizing innovations in the Balkans and their effects. In the study of nation-building, the points of view of rival nationalist protagonists and "their" national historians, of other observers, and so on were "crossed." The relativizing effect of shifting the various perspectives to events and processes was used in order to gain a distance from the usual national and often nationalist biases and to arrive at a (balancing) viewpoint. At a further remove, points of criss-crossing and intersections between national historiographies engaged in battles over a shared historical past (to symbolically appropriate territories and populations) were also studied. One of the impulses behind this endeavor—and in doing regional history in general—was to overcome the parochial and heavily biased national narratives still prevalent in the Balkans. The authors were reacting against such nationalist illusions as the early existence of the nation, as well as its unity and continuity in a certain territory. But they were also reacting—more fundamentally—against the one-sidedness of the national narratives. Saying that we tried to overcome nationalist biases (including those we may have absorbed in our own education) does not commit us to globalism or neoliberalism, even though these are part of the context that makes possible the distancing from (the excesses of) nationalism and the exposure of its blind spots and illusions. That said, of course, I cannot speak for each contributor in this specific regard.

Of course, no approach is universal in its scope of application. The entangled history and *histoire croisée* in particular presuppose intense and prolonged contacts and exchanges in the "object" under study (of two or more entities) that go in both directions and have effects on two or more interacting entities.

¹¹¹ Werner and Zimmermann, "Vergleich, Transfer," 618–620, 623–626, 632–633, 636 (on the "relativizing" effect in particular: 632); Werner and Zimmermann, "Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisée," 38–41. But in this piece they emphatically reject the idea that the intercrossing of perspectives or shifting of viewpoints leads to relativist indecisiveness or infinite speculations. Instead they affirm the gain in knowledge and generation of meaning (49–50).

Where such conditions could not be found, other relational and transnational methods (mentioned above) were applied. These differ in the mode of relatedness they presuppose: intensity of contacts, one- or two-sidedness (or, for several entities, multi-sided interaction), the presence/absence of a shared past, or common “origins,” or perhaps also contiguity/spatial distance. In fact, no method is intrinsically superior to others, even if it may be more sophisticated. Rather, each method is specifically appropriate for studying certain situations and a certain type of transnational relations or interactions and less appropriate for dealing with others. There are, for example, one-directional transfers, two-way exchanges and flows or multi-sided interactions, intense entanglements and intertwining, “structural” interdependence, and so on that require different methodologies (and various ways of proceeding with the material). The choice of method also depends on the materials available. The overall title of this series of volumes reflects the significance we attributed to entangled history and *histoire croisée* in studying the Balkans.

Finally, the transnational methods (especially “entangled” and “crossed” histories) affect the understanding of territorial units, both nation-states and regions. In the extreme case, their utility as units of analysis is denied. To quote a strong statement by Subrahmanyam, the global and connected character of the world in the early modern period cannot be accounted for in terms of area studies (in this case Southeast Asian) with the positing of structural (mostly essentialist) characteristics, such as “caste” or other “civilization constants”: “It is as if these conventional units of analysis, fortuitously defined as givens for the intellectually slothful, and the result of complex (even murky) processes of academic and non-academic engagement, somehow become real and overwhelming. Having helped create these Frankenstein’s monsters, we are obliged to praise them for their beauty, rather than grudgingly acknowledge their limited functional utility.”¹¹²

The authors of the present work did not go to the extreme of dispensing with regions altogether and used the conventional designation “Balkans,” which is, in fact, the most established designation of any European sub-region, as a point of departure and orientation. Yet the advantage of the transnational methods is that they do not commit one to a “substantial” (or ontological) understanding of the region, whether in terms of traits or structures or even legacies. We thus have been able to move freely and explore various exchanges and entanglements both within and outside the region, transcending regionalism.

¹¹² Subrahmanyam, “Connected Histories,” 297–298.