

Reflecting on Diana Mishkova's Beyond Balkanism. The Scholarly Politics of Region Making

Béatrice von Hirschhausen, Guido Franzinetti, John Breuilly, Sabine Rutar, Diana Mishkova

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BOOK SYMPOSIUM

GUIDO FRANZINETTI, JOHN BREUILLY, BÉATRICE VON HIRSCHHAUSEN, SABINE RUTAR, and DIANA MISHKOVA

Reflecting on Diana Mishkova's *Beyond Balkanism. The Scholarly Politics of Region Making*

Abstract. In this scholarly panel, Guido Franzinetti, John Breuilly, Béatrice von Hirschhausen, and Sabine Rutar discuss Diana Mishkova's monograph *Beyond Balkanism. The Scholarly Politics of Region Making*, published in the Routledge Borderland Studies series (2018; paperback edition 2020). The panel focuses, from various angles, precisely on how 'region making' has been influenced by scholarly politics and other kinds of policy discourses. The take of each author is conditioned by their respective expertise in European and global area studies.

Guido Franzinetti is Lecturer in the History of European Territories, Department of Humanistic Studies, University of Eastern Piedmont in Vercelli.

John Breuilly is Emeritus Professor for Ethnicity and Nationalism, London School of Economics.

Béatrice von Hirschhausen is Research Director at the 'Géographie-cité' Unit (UMR 8504), coordinated by the Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS) and the University Panthéon-Sorbonne in Paris; she also works at the Centre Marc Bloch in Berlin.

Sabine Rutar is Senior Researcher at the Leibniz Institute for East and Southeast European Studies in Regensburg and Editor-in-Chief of *Südosteuropa*.

Diana Mishkova is Director of the Centre for Advanced Study in Sofia, and author of the monograph discussed in this panel.

GUIDO FRANZINETTI

Actually Existing Balkans

The announced end of what could be called the Second Belle Époque (1991–2020)[1] is a good moment for a retrospective view of three decades of interlocked changes and turns in historiography. The historical profession in Europe as

[1] Lawrence Summers, Covid-19 Looks Like a Hinge in History, *Financial Times*, 14 May 2020.

a whole—in particular in the field of global studies—is certain to experience some structural changes in the near future because of an imminent re-orientation of the global academic market.[2] The 1990s heralded a whole series of changes in historiography, one of which was the shift away from area studies and towards the less contaminated fields of global and transnational history. This reflected a variety of factors, which included a marked shift to a normative, even prescriptive approach.[3] Balkan studies were strongly affected by the new trends, and by the spillover of the Yugoslav wars of dissolution into journalism, literary criticism, postcolonial studies and (sometimes) historical reconstruction. 'Actually Existing Balkans' were frequently discarded in favour of a predominantly textualised version of the Balkans. Diana Mishkova's *Beyond Balkanism* provides a lucid corrective to the 'Western gaze' on the region (which reads its history mainly in terms of its relation to the paradigmatic 'West'), while avoiding the pitfall of nationalist reflexes (which identify and celebrate its supposed uniqueness).

'Study the historian before you study the facts.'[4] This certainly applies to this book. Diana Mishkova is in some respects the product of a Bulgarian historiography which had achieved a high degree of international respectability by the late 1970s.[5] She was also able to benefit from the greater openings of international exchanges after 1989. All too often these circumstances led to the migration of entire generations of emerging scholars to Western European and North American academic institutions (with the concomitant adaptation to the demands of the local academic market). As Mishkova points out, 'the mass exodus of intellectuals from the Balkans post-1989 created a population of Balkan studies scholars bent on applying pre-packaged postcolonial theory to the region in an attempt to validate their local competence in a globally relevant interpretative framework' (235). The terms of reference have been those set by Edward Said and Larry Wolff; scholars do not need to venture any further.[6]

Mishkova has instead preferred to focus her energies on the Balkan context, and in particular on the creation of the Centre for Advanced Study in Sofia,

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[2] Yojana Sharma, Can Internationalisation Survive in the 'New Normal'?, *University World News*, 22 May 2020, https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20200522091641753. All internet references were accessed on 12 August 2020.

[3] Guido Franzinetti, The Strange Death of Area Studies and the Normative Turn, *Quaderni storici* 50, no. 3 (2015), 834–872, DOI: 10.1408/82694.

[4] Edward H. Carr, What is History? The George Macaulay Trevelyan Lectures Delivered in the University of Cambridge, January – March 1961, London 1962, Chapter 1.

[5] In his 'Bibliographic Essay', Peter F. Sugar highly recommended the studies by Nikolai Todorov, Bistra Cvetkova, Gălăb Gălăbov, Vera Mutafchieva and Ivan Snegarov, and added: 'it is is impossible to list all Bulgarian historians whose work is of value'. Peter F. Sugar, Southeastern Europe under Ottoman Rule, 1354–1804, Seattle 1977, 305–306.

[6] Edward Said, Orientalism, New York 1978; and Larry Wolff, Inventing Eastern Europe, Stanford 1994.

which provided one of a few locally oriented centres for discussion. Her book (and the articles and books which have preceded it) cannot be understood without reference to this cultural and institutional setting, which has never lost sight of scholarly debates which have been produced locally and in the wider region. Given the title of the book, readers might expect to find an argument addressed mainly to the waves of studies inspired (or derived) from Edward Said's *Orientalism* and Maria Todorova's *Imagining the Balkans*. In fact, Mishkova's argument goes well beyond polemics (which inevitably remain enclosed in the confines of these studies). She goes further, in questioning 'to what extent a narrative built around the relation of knowledge to power can dispense with scientific discourse and institutions generating *epistèmes* and "regimes of truth"' (1). In so doing, she avoids the imagological trap into which legions of authors have fallen (and which, at best, can contribute to the intellectual history of the contexts which produced the images). Instead of the 'Western gaze' or 'the imperialism of the imagination',[7] the reader is confronted with a hard-headed approach to the creation of academic discourses (and institutions). This is, as the author declares, an attempt to analyse Balkan 'self-understanding': 'This book […] looks at the Balkans primarily inside-out, from within the Balkans towards its "self" and the outside world' (3). In this sense, Mishkova contributes to an understanding of what one might call 'Actually Existing Balkans', as opposed to their idealisations or demonisations.

In the eyes of a non-specialist outsider such as myself, the key contribution of the book lies in unpicking the various conceptualisations of the Balkan region, as opposed to their ritual denunciation. As John Breuilly makes clear in his contribution to this panel, it is an analysis which could (and should) be applied to other regional conceptualisations.[8] The pre-eminence of linguistic and folkloric comparativism may seem obvious in the European context as a whole, but in the Balkan context it has played (indeed, it continues to play) a key role because of the specific blending of linguistic diversity with a common historical heritage. Ideally, Mishkova could have elaborated on the parallel development of the comparative method in British historical and social sciences as opposed to the linguistically oriented (or derived) comparativism of the German-speaking area.[9] Anthropologists remained largely absent from the Balkan scene until quite recently (with the exception of Greece); for a long time it was a dog who

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7 Vesna Goldsworthy, Inventing Ruritania. The Imperialism of the Imagination, New Haven 1998.

8 John Breuilly, The Global Framework of Region Making, in this panel.

9 Stefan Collini / John Burrow, The Clue to the Maze. The Comparative Method, in: Stefan Collini / Donald Winch / John Burrow, eds, That Noble Science of Politics. A Study in Nineteenth-Century Intellectual History, Cambridge 1983, 207–246; Fredrik Barth et al., One Discipline, Four Ways. British, German, French, and American Anthropology, Chicago 2005.

failed to bark. But precisely for this reason, it might have been an interesting issue to pursue: absences are just as significant as presences. Archaeology, once closely related to anthropology, could also have received more attention.[10] At least in the case of British scholars, the break between the two disciplines had lasting consequences. Mishkova rightly stresses the role of *Slawistik*, the specific form of academic structuring, from the 19th century onwards, of Slavic Studies in the German-speaking lands, especially in consolidating a linguistic and ethnographic approach. Indeed, it is this approach which reflects the quite distinct paths of Balkan Studies in the German-speaking world on the one hand, and in Great Britain and France on the other.

To some extent, some analogies exist with the difference between how East Asia is studied in Western European countries and North America: as Benedict Anderson made clear in his much neglected *Spectre of Comparison*, having—or not having—colonial archives produces quite different perspectives.[11] In the 1930s, British schoolchildren could have had teachers more acquainted with Indian history than with most of European history. For that matter, French schoolchildren were quite likely to have teachers who had begun their careers in Algeria, as Fernand Braudel had. Germany and the Habsburg monarchy may not have had any colonial archives as such, but they most certainly had an academic and intellectual infrastructure (professorships, journals) dating back to the times of Leopold Ranke, one of the founding fathers of modern historiography, who was able to benefit from access to the archives of the Venetian maritime empire, and from his personal connection with Serbian philologist and linguist Vuk Karadžić.

The British contribution to Balkan Studies always proved to be very uneven in its results. Indeed, it is not altogether accurate to classify in the 'academic' category authors such as Robert W. Seton-Watson, Henry Brailsford or Noel Buxton: Seton-Watson never demonstrated any great enthusiasm for academic life (even when financial circumstances led him to join it); Brailsford was a journalist for all of his life; Buxton was a typical 'troublemaker' (philanthropist, politician, and writer).[12] The list could also include travel writer Edith Durham, together with archaeologists and historians Frederick and Margaret Hasluck, who were deliberately excluded from academia. All this goes to confirm how the British approach to the Balkans remained much less structured than that of

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[10] On the relationship between anthropology and archaeology, cf. David Shankland, The Role of History in the Teaching of Anthropology, *Teaching Anthropology. A Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 9, no. 1 (2020), 1–9, DOI: 10.22582/ta.v9i1.551.

[11] Benedict Anderson, Spectre of Comparison. Nationalism, Southeast Asia and the World, London 1998, 8–12.

[12] Alan John Percivale Taylor, The Trouble Makers. Dissent over Foreign Policy, 1792–1939, London 1957.

German-speaking Europe. Before the Cold War, it was essentially an amateur pursuit (regardless of the merits of individual scholars). During the Cold War, attention was mainly concentrated on Yugoslavia and Greece (reflecting the British role during the Second World War). For centuries, Britain had remained oriented to the Mediterranean (as a whole), not to continental Europe.[13]

French studies on the Balkans reflected (as is usual in its academic tradition) a more institutionalised approach, but on a relatively selective basis. The 'pre-eminence and often fusion of human geography and history' (201) to which Mishkova refers, is in fact the expression of a longstanding characteristic of French academic curricula, which facilitated the subsequent rise of the 'Annales' school. Italian studies on the Balkans are absent from the book, but this reflects the overall absence of any sustained reflection on Balkan Studies by Italian Balkanists, save for some occasional contributions. In fact Mishkova's disregard is no great loss, since Italian institutions have never devoted many resources to this field. Overall, surveying the different starting points of Western European traditions of Balkan Studies, Mishkova provides an essential perspective on their entire development over the past century and a half.

According to the nationalist paradigms of the time, the interwar years reflected the expansion and consolidation of Balkan nation states, such as Romania, Serbia (Yugoslavia), and Greece. Mishkova deftly illustrates the way in which 'transnational schemata could be employed to boost new forms of regionalism reproducing the logic of ethno-cultural nationalism' (98). Indeed, this could be applied as a general rule to past and current 'regionalist' plans (and even to 'transnational' historiographical fashions): they have never represented a real alternative to nationalist projects.

Coming to the Cold War period, Mishkova points out that for the first two postwar decades the Balkans were quite simply 'submerged' into Eastern Europe (139). Then, in the mid-1960s, a series of initiatives, starting with the creation of the International Association of Southeast European Studies (*Association Internationale d'Études du Sud-Est Européen*, AIESEE), launched a phase she aptly describes as 'nationalism in a transnational guise'. These were followed, from the mid-1970s onwards, by 'outright nationalist propaganda' (172). This development provides a striking confirmation of the usefulness of an institutional perspective in analysing historiographical discourse.

Meanwhile, Western academia picked up what Mishkova defines as 'Marxist maps' (178), originating from Eastern Europe (Małowist, Kula), then migrating

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[13] Robert Holland, Blue-Water Empire. The British in the Mediterranean since 1800, London 2012; Guido Franzinetti, Southern Europe, in: Diana Mishkova / Balázs Trencsényi, eds, European Regions and Boundaries. A Conceptual History, New York 2017, 100–121, 103.

to France (Braudel) and the USA (Wallerstein).[14] This amounted to a cocktail of some form of Liberalism, any kind of Marxism, and an adaptation of Modernisation Theory. This cocktail produced a series of replicas of the 'World Systems' paradigm, but—as a side effect—also a revival of earlier debates on the origins of backwardness in Eastern Europe.[15] The parallel revival of the debates over *Mitteleuropa* in the 1980s—which were essentially an attempt to imagine an Eastern Europe without the Soviet presence—further confirmed the marginalisation of the Balkans, not merely in historiographic discourse, but in international political discourse as a whole.[16] After all, up to 1985 the post-Tito succession had apparently gone through smoothly, Greece had successfully been integrated into the European Community, Romania had lost its usefulness for Western powers (while it was simply an embarrassment for Soviet leaders), Bulgaria did not arouse much interest, and Albania remained an unknown entity. There seemed nothing much to worry about. Until the end of the Cold War, in the international press the term 'Balkanisation' was more likely to be applied with reference to African states than to Europe. In terms of historiographical categorisation, the Balkans continued to be left on the margins. As Mishkova points out,

> 'on the postwar map of the social and human sciences […] the Balkans did not altogether disappear but came to feature as a historical sub-region of Eastern / East Central Europe […]. Eastern Europe as a whole appeared as the original underdeveloped area, the study of which was deemed relevant dealing with the contemporary developing world. However, Eastern Europe and the Balkans did not become the focal point of a grand theoretical scheme within general social science as did Middle Eastern and Latin American studies. Instead they served mainly to provide data aimed to confirm, improve or refute "general" theories.' (203)

The renewal of interest in the 'Balkans' (in practice, confined to the Yugoslav wars of succession) could not have appeared at a less auspicious moment. The integration of 'East-Central Europe' into 'Europe' was the main interest of the

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14 Marian Małowist, Croissance et régression en Europe, 14e-17e siècles, Paris 1972; Witold Kula, Teoria economica del sistema feudale. Proposta di un modello, Torino 1970; Fernand Braudel, La Méditerranée et le Monde Méditerranéen a l'époque de Philippe II, Paris ^{2}1966; Immanuel Wallerstein, The Modern World-System, vols. 1–3, Seattle 1974–1989.

15 Perry Anderson, Lineages of the Absolutist State, London 1974; Verl F. Hunt, The Rise of Feudalism in Eastern Europe. A Critical Appraisal of the Wallerstein 'World-System' Thesis, *Science & Society* 42, no. 1 (1978), 43–61; Trevor Henry Aston / Charles H. E. Philpin, eds, The Brenner Debate. Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Preindustrial Europe, Cambridge 1987; Daniel Chirot, ed, The Origins of Backwardness in Eastern Europe. Economics and Politics from the Middle Ages until the Early Twentieth Century, Berkeley 1989.

16 Guido Franzinetti, Mitteleuropa in East-Central Europe. From Helsinki to EU Accession, 1975–2004, *European Journal of Social Theory* 11, no. 2 (2008), 219–235, DOI: 10.1177/1368431007087475.

day; the violent dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia—after years of uncritical adulation—was an embarrassment for many historians, no less than for politicians. Yugoslavia had lost its function as a key entity 'between East and West', as a geopolitical go-between. In Western Europe and in the United States, instead of attempting to make sense of what was happening, commentators (and sometimes historians) chose to participate in the blame game based on pre-existing cultural preferences (anticommunist, anticlerical or anti-islamic). Far from promoting sober reflection, the events of the Yugoslav wars promoted hasty revivals of pre-existing historiographical paradigms or cultural templates.[17]

Out of this emerged a series of posthumous Cold War products, starting with Maria Todorova's *Imagining the Balkans* (1997, but in fact already proposed in a 1994 article, if not earlier).[18] This was paralleled, in the field of East Central European studies, by the fully-fledged adoption of the Saidian paradigm, with Larry Wolff's *Inventing Eastern Europe*, which presented Eastern Europe as a direct invention of the Age of Enlightenment.[19] The Yugoslav wars of dissolution led many commentators and scholars to hastily abandon the earlier historicisation of nationalism which had been achieved to some extent during the Golden Age of Nationalism Studies (late 1960s to early 1990s),[20] to which Mishkova herself had contributed.[21] The new orthodoxy was based on the (re)discovery of 'ethnic' nationalism. In the aftermath of the Yugoslav conflict, there was a torrent of explanations of the Yugoslav conflict (of quite

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17 Samuel Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations?, *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993), 22–49, DOI: 10.2307/20045621; Robert D. Kaplan, The Coming Anarchy. How Scarcity, Crime, Overpopulation, Tribalism, and Disease are Rapidly Destroying the Social Fabric of Our Planet, *The Atlantic*, February 1994, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1994/02/the-coming-anarchy/304670/, to name but a few. The term 'clash of civilization' had been coined several years earlier already, cf. Bernard Lewis, The Roots of Muslim Rage, *The Atlantic*, September 1990, 47–60, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1990/09/the-roots-of-muslim-rage/304643/.

18 Maria Todorova, The Balkans. From Discovery to Invention, *Slavic Review* 53, no. 2 (1994), 453–482, DOI: 10.2307/2501301; Maria Todorova, Imagining the Balkans, New York 1997. In her Bulgarian period, she had already published: Maria Todorova, Angliĭski pŭtepisi za Balkanite (kraraĭa na XVI-30-te god. na XIX v.), Sofia 1987.

19 Larry Wolff, Inventing Eastern Europe. The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment, Stanford 1994; Guido Franzinetti, The Idea and the Reality of Eastern Europe in the Eighteenth-Century, *History of European Ideas* 34, no. 4 (2008), 361–368, DOI: 10.1016/j.histeuroideas.2008.07.006.

20 Ernest Gellner, Nations and Nationalism, Oxford 1983; Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, London 1983; Eric J. Hobsbawm, Nations and Nationalism since 1780. Programme, Myth, Reality, Cambridge 1992.

21 Diana Mishkova, Modernization and Political Elites in the Balkans Before the First World War, *East European Politics and Societies* 9, no. 1 (1994), 63–89.

varied quality), and ultimately to a perspective oriented to ensure 'stability' and 'security'.[22]

Todorova's book, thus, came out in perfect timing, in 1997, in between the Dayton peace agreement on Bosnia-Herzegovina of November 1995 and the Kosovo war of 1999. On top of this, the 'cultural turn' and later the 'spatial turn' duly produced their predictable effects, by shifting the discussion from historical explanation to textual analysis. As Mishkova points out, 'Ethical issues have compounded with cognitive ones in that cultural studies tend to replace rather than complement and broaden other strands of analyses' (216). That said, 'the long-standing tradition of attributing cultural-historical coherence and continuity, rather than cultural constructedness, to the Balkans / Southeastern Europe remains strong after 1989' (219).

Mishkova sees the main dividing line in regionalisation as defined by German scholarship in terms of historical region, and by English-language scholarship in terms of cultural studies (*Sonderweg* vs. metaphor, as the title of the chapter puts it). Curiously, at this point the French school of Balkan studies (quite robust, in its own way) seems left out of the picture.[23] While the French approach to the Balkans is less structured and explicit, it could have provided additional elements for a more fine-grained portrayal of the historiographical discourse and scholarly region-making. In her conclusions, Mishkova restates the role of academic structuring of political discourse, and the interplay between regionalist and nationalist perspectives, somewhat distancing herself from the ambitions of 'transnational' approaches. For Balkan scholars 'in the final analysis, the attraction of the "Balkan idea" seems to have resided in the symbolic resources that it provided for posing questions about modernity and negotiating the nation's relationship to the transnational cultural, social, and economic processes' (234). She argues in favour of appreciating 'the flexibility and fuzziness of our units of analysis and comparison and sharpen our sensitivity—as well as responsibility—to the spatial categories we are using' (239).

Ultimately, she provides a coherent reading of Balkan self-understanding which avoids both nationalist identification and the mirage of global history. Regional categorisations do not need to be discarded, but they do need to be understood in their proper institutional context. Mishkova has thus brought

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[22] For a critical overview of some of the products of the time, cf. Gale Stokes et al., Instant History. Understanding the Wars of Yugoslav Succession, *Slavic Review* 55, no. 1 (1996), 136–160; for more comprehensive overviews, John B. Allcock, Explaining Yugoslavia, London 2000; Sabrina P. Ramet, Thinking About Yugoslavia. Scholarly Debates about the Yugoslav Breakup and the Wars in Bosnia and Kosovo, Cambridge 2005.

[23] Cf. for example Bernard Lory, L'Europe balkanique de 1945 à nos jours, Paris 1996; Bernard Lory, Les Balkans: de la transition post-ottomane a la transition post-communiste, Istanbul 2005.

to an end a pursuit which has been present from the very beginning of her intellectual endeavours: to go beyond Balkanism.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR

Guido Franzinetti University of Eastern Piedmont, Department of Humanistic Studies, Piazza Sant' Eusebio, 5, 13100 Vercelli, Italy. E-mail: guido.franzinetti@gmail.com

JOHN BREUILLY

The Global Framework of Region Making

This is a commentary, not a review, and I am not a Balkans expert. Consequently, I assume prior knowledge of Mishkova's superb book and focus on placing it within broader contexts. Concepts of region like the Balkans and Southeastern Europe are but one variant on a general theme. Latin America, Southeast Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, the Far East: all are regional concepts developed within and against empires and uneasily related to their successor nation states. All these concepts are constantly changing and fiercely contested. What, if anything, is distinctive about the Balkans?

One can only engage this question with a framework which permits comparison, something which Mishkova does not require in a one-case monograph. First, I outline one possible framework. Second, taking the relationship between historical linguistics and nationalist ideology, I consider how scholarship and politics must be analysed as both autonomous and inextricably connected. Third, I consider why interwar scholarly concepts of Balkan regionalism were especially rich and innovative and what this suggests for the future of such concepts.

A Comparative Framework

Mishkova distinguishes between the regionalism of insiders and outsiders. I speculate on the origins of these before they take on the interlinked and reflective forms of scholarly argument and political ideology.

In a pre-modern world of limited literacy and restricted spheres of popular communication, we could presume that the first 'insider' notions of region express lived experience. It must be a presumption because lived experience is not accessible to historians. This only becomes possible with collective representa-

tions of experience in such forms as folk song and poetry.[24] Most ideas of place in such discourse will be geographically more circumscribed than a territory as large and diverse as the Balkans. Most inhabitants of this world had no access to regional visual or literary representations of space like maps. Likewise, concepts of time did not assume the secular, linear forms of modernity.[25] By contrast, the conqueror needs extended representations of space and society. (So do other outsiders, like merchants.) Maps enable conquest and control even if before theodolites and trigonometry such maps—diagrammatic and narrative—are by our standards crude. Mishkova notes that imperfect cartographic knowledge characterised the Balkans well into the 19th century. However, what about the pragmatic mapping of Ottoman conquerors? Into what provinces did they divide their European acquisitions? Did such boundaries influence later state divisions? We know that elsewhere apparently arbitrary colonial boundaries, which often became nation-state boundaries, had precolonial roots. Might this be the case in the Balkans? A possible example is the Danube Vilayet which the Russians transformed into the Bulgarian nation-state in 1878.

Whatever the answer, the construction of regions by imperial rulers begins as a pragmatic exercise of power. For example, the 'Middle East' was a term coined around 1900 as Britain obsessed about defending the Suez route to India and when the first oil concession was granted. Southeast Asia as a regional concept began with the formation of the Southeast Asia Command to enable Britain and the USA prosecute the war against Japan.[26] Sub-Saharan, Central, and Tropical Africa were and still are competing imperial regional concepts. After 1989, many people in Central Europe came to prefer that term to East Central Europe. Such constructs are no more stable than the conditions which breed them. The Middle East has been a notoriously flexible term, extending west to Morocco and east to Sri Lanka, mutating with interests (defending Suez, supplying the Pacific war effort, protecting oil supplies, supporting Israel, combatting political Islamism) and the technologies of power. (Air power drastically changes notions of region.)

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[24] My thanks to Tomasz Kamusella who commented on an earlier draft of this essay. Cf. Diana Mishkova, Beyond Balkanism. The Scholarly Politics of Region Making, Abingdon 2018, 45, on the account of one popular folk tale by Bulgarian ethnographer and literary scholar Ivan Shishmanov.

[25] Key texts: Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism, London 1991; Reinhart Koselleck, Futures Past. On the Semantics of Historical Time, New York 2004.

[26] Osamah F. Khalil, The Crossroads of the World. U. S. and British Foreign Policy Doctrines and the Construct of the Middle East, 1902–2007, *Diplomatic History* 38, no. 2 (2014), 299–344, DOI: 10.1093/dh/dht092; Benedict Anderson, A Life Beyond Boundaries, London, New York 2016.

Neither representation of place as lived experience nor as instrument of power yield enduring regional concepts: the former is too circumscribed; the latter too unstable. Furthermore, these two kinds of representation are separate and unrelated. Only in modern times do the two change, converge and are stabilised through scholarship and ideology. Mishkova brilliantly describes and analyses one such instance. How might we generalise from her account?

Modernity extends the range of experience and its collective representations. The Ottoman Empire in Europe was not a static, monolithic territory of timeless peasant society, so I do not set 'modernity' against this caricature of premodern times.[27] Nevertheless, only commencing in the 19th century was there a widespread penetration of capitalism, mass emigration, large-scale popular revolts and much else which signify increasingly extensive social connections. This broadens the experiences represented in oral culture (e. g. stories of life in faraway places) and is accompanied by the growth of popular literature. Outsiders and local elites produce abundant travel writing, and investigations shaped by new ethnographic, linguistic, and other disciplines. Somewhat later they seek to politicise concepts like 'the people' and 'the nation'. At popular level, correspondence with emigrants and the beginning of a mass press open up horizons. What makes the Balkans distinctive is its situation between a weakening Ottoman empire and the increasingly powerful states of Britain, France, Russia, and somewhat later, Germany. The stereotypical contrast between backward Islamic and Asiatic rule and dynamic Christian and European modernity projected a transitional character on to Christian Europe under Ottoman rule. In the 19th century, the contrast was used by outsiders and insiders to legitimise efforts to remove Ottoman power.[28] Given the policy of client-state construction pursued by competing powers, this gave local scholars and politicians more autonomy than in extra-European empires in Africa and the Middle East. (The First World War in the Middle East involved British and French promotion of a shallow and instrumental notion of 'Arab nationalism', something upon which indigenous scholars and politicians built.) This absence of autonomy is less clear-cut in the Far East where China and Japan provided non-European bases for scholarly and political regionalism. With the signal exception of Japan, extra-European regions—formal colonies and informal empire—before 1914 were unable to generate powerful territorial nationalist movements. The dominant form taken

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27 Mark Mazower, The Balkans. A Short History, London 2000, especially Chapters 1 and 2.

28 I was struck some years ago, when visiting an historical museum in Budapest, by how completely Ottoman rule in Transylvania, ended much earlier than in the Balkans, was written out of the dominant nationalist historical narrative. Paintings of Magyar notables were displayed with no reference to the Turkish styles they affected. The implication was that Muslim Ottomans formed a thin alien ruling class which made no discernible impact on native 'Hungarians'.

by politics was local collaboration. Ideologically, this was the era of pan-nationalism, which projected large regional concepts (pan-Africanism, pan-Asianism, pan-Arabism, etc.) but could not convert them into practical politics.

By contrast, the earlier rise of nationalist opposition in Ottoman Europe, supported by powerful outsiders, marginalised any possible pan-nationalism. There had been a 'pan' quality to the original 'Greek' rebellions against the Ottomans but this was based on Orthodox Christianity, not nationality. There was an expansive thrust to later movements for a Greater Greece, Greater Serbia, and Greater Bulgaria but these represented the ambitions of new nation states. The Young Turk movement could be described as originally 'pan-Ottoman' but soon mutated into a form of 'pan-Turkism'.

This left space for outsider scholars and travellers to elaborate cultural concepts of regional identity less concerned with nationalist claims than what they saw as the commonality of a white, Christian, European population seeking liberation from Ottoman rule. The positive stereotypes associated with these ideas quickly shifted to negative ones of violent, anarchic societies consumed by intra-ethnic conflict as the local states fought each other in the Second Balkan War of 1913. That more positive phase sustained the initial elaboration of regionalist concepts by local scholars, as Mishkova richly shows.

This raises questions about the connections between scholarship and politics. Even the most disinterested scholarship is shaped by political conditions; even (perhaps especially) the most opportunist of politicians perceive and manipulate 'reality' through conceptual frames constructed by intellectuals. John Maynard Keynes famously wrote: 'Practical men who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influence, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist.'[29] It is difficult but necessary to distinguish the two activities; a problem with which Max Weber wrestled in his 1919 lectures on politics and scholarship as vocations. His ideas inform the next section of this commentary.[30]

Historical Linguistics. Scholarship and Politics

As Mishkova shows, the scholarly framing of space before 1918 was in terms of religion, empire, civilisation, ethnography, and language. Concepts of religion, empire, and civilisation provided 'trans-regional' frames, as with arguments about the legacies of Rome, Byzantium, and (usually but not always negatively) Ottoman rule for the Balkans.

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[29] John Maynard Keynes, The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money, London 1936, 383.

[30] John Breuilly, Nation, Nation-State, and Nationalism, in: Edith Hanke / Lawrence Scaff / Sam Whimster, eds, The Oxford Handbook of Max Weber, Oxford 2019, 185–205.

Ethnography offered a regional opportunity but was barely institutionalised as a discipline before 1914. By contrast, linguistics had, as Mishkova shows, already acquired the aura of 'science'. It was an intellectual practice favouring native Slav speakers. In the new nation states, university departments of linguistics were established, as well as the formation of institutes and journals. Their scholars could draw upon disciplinary approaches worked out in the larger European states as well as regional investigations both by outsider and local scholars.

What this meant, as I understand Mishkova, is that linguistic investigations of Slav languages—their classification, distribution, and history—were well underway before they became nationalist weapons. They possessed an autonomous intellectual character. One pervasive idea in this fledgling discipline was the triple classification of Slavic language zones, with the north-west and north-east zones divided from the south-west zone by territories occupied by non-Slavic speakers.[31] Linguistic study of the south-west zone underpinned Balkan regionalist cultural concepts. Mishkova's references to different approaches in historical linguistics are scattered across chronologically organised chapters. As an historian who knows little about historical linguistics, I found it difficult to understand why these differences mattered. The writing of Tomasz Kamusella, though mainly on the northern Slav zones, suggested to me what these differences meant for the scholarship-politics relationship.[32] Taking the 'genetic' approach to linguistics, scholars became preoccupied with the origins of existing languages. This involved two major assumptions: there were distinct languages in the present; these distinct languages shared a common past. These assumptions were shaped by Darwinian thought, as in the powerful image of the tree which grows branches which grow twigs. This idea took on an ideological form when shifted from biology to culture and was freighted with ideas of progress and survival of the fittest. The argument also required a distinction between dialect and language which came to be made in terms of intelligibility. Dialects were mutually intelligible and formed a continuum across space; languages were not mutually intelligible and spatially discontinuous. How to connect these ideas to politics? Ottoman power in southeastern Europe was crumbling in the 19th century. The main explanations are to be found in the challenges posed by other states able to harness that set of transformations—economic, political, technological, cultural, societal—we call modernisation. The process was drawn out because of conflicts between these

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31 Tomasz Kamusella, The Triple Division of the Slavic Languages. A Linguistic Finding, a Product of Politics, or an Accident?, IWM Working Paper no. 1, Vienna 2005, 130, https://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/10023/12905/The_Triple_Division_of_the_Slavic_Langua.pdf. All internet references were accessed on 12 August 2020.

32 Kamusella, The Triple Division of the Slavic Languages.

powers as well as uncertainty about whether the best policy was to turn the Ottoman state into a dependent client, or to create local client states, or to impose direct rule. For a complex of reasons, the second alternative became the main one. Such a strategy required legitimations and the argument based on nationality as well as that of freeing Christians from Islamic rule suited external powers and local politicians.

Autonomous scholarship on linguistic evolution (and by analogy other cultural forms) could buttress this local client strategy. That does not mean that nationalism required this prior intellectual history to become a powerful ideology. Ideology is shaped not by logic or evidence but interest and emotion. It can embrace contradictory ideas. Creationist myths derived from the Bible service ideologies of separate languages and races but are incompatible with Darwinism which in turn cannot logically be reconciled with notions of pure and impure languages, or races, or cultures. However, while nationalist ideology combines logically contradictory concepts, there are some ideas which are not conducive to it.

One such idea is what Kamusella calls the 'wave theory' of language. This theory insists that in the long history of overwhelmingly non-literate societies there are no distinct languages but just dialect continua, interrupted only by physical boundaries such as impassable mountains or deserts, or societal (as opposed to elite) invasions which introduce speech forms with different rules and vocabulary.

Written language is another matter entirely. Literacy 'fixes' rules and must be deliberately learnt. In non-literate societies, written languages are quite separate from everyday speech. Deliberate choices made during transitions to popular literacy can be crucial. Luther's decision to use a High German dialect for his publications coincided with the European invention of printing and the Protestant insistence that all Christians be able to read the Bible. Christian missionaries in non-literate societies in the Americas and Africa, especially where there was no large-scale incursion of imperial settlers, codified one dialect to create a written language. An interesting exception which proves the rule is Zambia. Missionaries constructed written languages on the basis of one dialect in the two southern zones and the northeast. These form the basis of regional languages. The thinly populated northwest region received no such missionary attention and to this day has no regional language.

In the Balkans, we can go back to the creation of a written Slavic language (subsequently known as Old Church Slavonic) in the ninth and tenth centuries by the Christian missionaries Cyril and Methodius. This was to enable the formation of a local priesthood and not, as with modern missionary effort, to secure mass literacy. The latter was the purpose when western missionaries

codified Bulgarian in the late 19th century as part of their effort to convert peasants from Greek Orthodoxy.

The irony is that the transformation of a dialect continuum into a distinct written language, coupled with the unique capacity for societal penetration that even small nation states possess, makes persuasive (state-)nationalist ideologies which project back their modern achievements on to the long past of dialects. The wave theory opens up a different view by stressing interaction across supposed language boundaries. Patterns of communication at a particular time matter more than the presumed long-term origins and history of different languages. This provides an opportunity for transnational—regional or wider—accounts of language. One can, by analogy, extend such analysis to cultural history generally.

The Study Platform on Interlocking Nationalisms (SPIN) project based at Amsterdam University has built up large, computer-searchable databases of networks, such as those of folklorists working on 'national' epics in the late 18th and 19th centuries.[33] So, for example, instead of seeing the folk tales published by the brothers Grimm through the lens of a long-run but narrow national history, one sees this as a product of interaction between scholarly elites spread across Europe. Moving to broader cultural history, Rebecca Karl's study of Chinese nationalism around 1900 emphasises, like recent studies of pan-Asianism, the interactions between Japan and China, as well as western imperial powers, rather than the history of China, even as little as two or three decades earlier.[34] Here, the 'national past' figures as a set of conditions which constrain present actions, and as the imagined past of nationalist scholars and politicians, but not as a major factor in current nationalism. Such a factor, by contrast, is found in the interactions within transnational networks of scholars and politicians. We gain a very different view of southeastern Europe if we understand historical linguistics in this way. It develops in a context of widespread 'national indifference', as well as 'regional indifference'.[35] Popular nationalism and scholarship in the service of nationalism by 1900 were little more than future possibilities. However, those possibilities were activated quickly. European great power support for anti-Ottoman movements gave massive impetus to nationalist claims, building on earlier, limited, Greek, Serb and Romanian

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33 Joep Leerssen, ed, Encyclopaedia of Romantic Nationalism in Europe, Amsterdam 2018. Cf. the project's website at https://spinnet.humanities.uva.nl/home.

34 Rebecca E. Karl, Staging the World. Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century, Durham 2002; Cemil Aydin, Pan-Nationalism of Pan-Islamic, Pan-Asian, and Pan-African Thought, in: John Breuilly, ed, The Oxford Handbook of the History of Nationalism, Oxford 2013, 672–693.

35 Jon Fox / Maarten Van Ginderachter, eds, National Indifference and the History of Nationalism in Modern Europe, London 2019. Cf. also Mazower, The Balkans, Chapter 2: 'Before the Nation'.

achievements. The new states rapidly set about 'nation-building', although it would take time to achieve widespread literacy in a 'national' language. The two Balkan Wars, followed by the First World War, had a greater nationalising effect, though these wars also fragmented and pulverised societies through mass conscription, killing and maiming, and population displacement.[36] The strategy of client-state formation was generalised across central Europe in the post-1918 settlement. The victorious allies—Britain, France, USA, Italy—had conflicting views about how Europe and the wider world should be organised but in one negative respect they differed from the defeated powers of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Russia: with the key exception in the Balkans of Italy, they had no plans for the continuation of imperial rule directly (as made clear by German territorial seizures in the short-lived Treaty of Brest-Litovsk), or by establishing satellite, not merely client states, like the short-lived Kingdom of Poland formed in 1916 through the joint initiative of Germany and the Habsburg Empire.

The principle of 'national self-determination' legitimised this European peace settlement. Any larger framework was global, not regional. Woodrow Wilson envisaged the League of Nations as a safeguard against sovereign nation states engaging in internal suppression and external aggression. These high ambitions failed, starting with Wilson's inability to persuade the USA to join the League. Britain and France were preoccupied with internal recovery and the maintenance of an extra-European empire. Meanwhile, the two major defeated powers of Germany and the Soviet Union began a process of recovery, albeit in different and opposed forms, threatening the new nation states that had emerged from the rubble of empires.

The Creative Regionalist Scholarship of the Interwar Period

It is in this context that Mishkova's chapter on the interwar period needs to be placed. I find the most interesting but also puzzling aspect is her account of the creative scholarship developing ideas of the Balkans or Southeastern Europe beyond the boundaries of the nation states, just as narrower nationalist visions were being realised through state power. Admittedly, Mishkova shows how this scholarship uneasily combined with nationalist views, invariably reflecting the state citizenship of the scholar. Nevertheless, there were impressive intellectual advances. How can one explain this creativity, one which I suggest anticipated by some fifty years ideas shaping contemporary nationalism studies?

First, there are the outsider views, especially in Germany. The Versailles settlement stripped Germany of territory, though preserving it as a nation state,

[36] Cf. Mazower, The Balkans, especially Chapter 3: 'Eastern Questions'.

and destroyed the multinational Habsburg Empire, at the expense of its dominant German and Magyar speakers. In the new Weimar Republic, it was not realistic to think of reversing this settlement. This stimulated innovative ideas about how national minorities (meaning primarily German speakers) could survive as collectivities. With the rise of fascist Italy and the formation of the Third Reich, territorial revision was back on the agenda, only now projected and then briefly and barbarically implemented as race empire, not as dominant nationality. The relevant scholarship paralleled this shift, moving from innovative thinking to instrument of power. This shift is reflected in the prehistory of this very journal. It was founded in 1952 at the *Südost-Institut* (Southeast Institute), which had its roots in the *Institut zur Erforschung des deutschen Volkstums im Süden und Südosten* (Institute for Research on the German Ethnic Collective in the South and Southeast) established in 1930. Leading scholars in that institute, such as Franz Ronneberger and Fritz Valjavec, successfully continued academic careers in the Federal Republic.[37] There has been little study of the more creative phase in Weimar Germany and the early years of the Third Reich, except as a final expression of Wilhelmine national thought, or, more often, as the prelude to collaboration with the Nazi regime.[38] However, given limited space and Mishkova's focus on local scholarship, I will not dwell on this subject. As for local scholarship, I suggest some reasons for its creativity. One was that some outcomes following the formation of nation states laid bare the errors and dangers of the simplistic conflation of culture and politics made by nationalist ideology. Another was that the earlier conflicts between these states now appeared irrational, even shameful. Above all, the biggest threats to these states came from outside: the race threat from Nazi Germany and the communist threat from the Soviet Union; the former as imperialism, the latter as revolution.

One way of expressing the common interests of the Balkan states was to elaborate cultural concepts of region. I found fascinating Mishkova's account of the project for a common history textbook for schools. Could scholars also draw inspiration from the pan-nationalist ideologies that flourished in other parts of the world at this time? One intellectual aid to this scholarship involved the taking up of the 'wave theory' of linguistics which nationalism had marginalised. Efforts at a Balkan language union appear to involve just such a theory. As Mishkova shows, interwar scholars could also build upon the work of scholars like Nicolae Iorga, Ivan Shishmanov, and Jovan Cvijić with their respective

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37 Cf. Norbert Spannenberger, Südost-Forschung im Dienst der SS. Zur Biographie von Fritz Valjavec 1909–1945, *Südosteuropa-Mitteilungen* 54, no. 4 (2014), 60–73.

38 Typical of this focus on Nazi links is Ingo Haar / Michael Fahlbusch, eds, German Scholars and Ethnic Cleansing 1919–1945, New York 2006. The subject has generated controversy as students of figures such as Theodor Schieder and Werner Conze dispute with (usually younger) historians who emphasise Schieder's and Conze's roles as regime collaborators.

arguments about Balkan historical legacies, folkore networks, and mass migrations, linking this to the regional character of contemporary interactions.

Such creative ideas struggled against entrenched nationalist ideology and the short-sighted egoism of nation-state regimes, though also highly constrained by very difficult economic and political challenges. In any case, such innovation was cut short by the Second World War, Nazi conquests, conflicts between resistance movements and collaborator regimes, and the postwar division of the Balkans between zones of Soviet and western domination.

Conclusion

One could treat that brief and inconclusive intellectual renaissance as an historical *cul-de-sac*, a minor curiosity not worth much attention. Yet I would argue that studying the conditions which made it possible has greater significance. In some ways, for example, the interwar work of German-speaking scholars in Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, and, later as emigrés in Britain and the USA, anticipated advances in the study of nationalism which came to fruition after 1945.[39] Their ideas in turn provided a platform for ideas about national identity, nationalism, and nation-state formation in key publications around 1980 as the postwar order crumbled. These ideas supported the construction of an intellectual field known as 'nationalism studies' after that order finally fell apart between 1989 and 1991.[40] Today, as in the interwar period, a politics of regionalism beyond the nation state opens up, above all with the European Union. As then, so now this is challenged by nationalism and interests focused on nation states as well as global capitalism. The concepts which scholars innovated in the interwar years, such as those focusing on extended zones of interaction rather than nationally bounded conceptions of culture and politics, need deepening and strengthening. Mishkova's study provides us with a rich store from which to draw.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR

John Breuilly 18 Bradwell Road, Loughton, Milton Keynes, MK5 8AJ, United Kingdom.
E-mail: J.Breuilly@lse.ac.uk

[39] There is no space to pursue this, so I just enumerate some scholars: Karl Renner, Otto Bauer, Heinz Ziegler, Eugen Lemberg, Hans Kohn, Karl Deutsch, Ernest Gellner, Miroslav Hroch.

[40] I develop this point in John Breuilly, Modernism and Writing the History of Nationalism, in: Stefan Berger / Eric Storm, eds, Writing the History of Nationalism, London 2019, 61–82.

BÉATRICE VON HIRSCHHAUSEN

Beyond Region Making?

Diana Mishkova's book *Beyond Balkanism. The Scholarly Politics of Region Making* is exceptionally rich. Thanks to Mishkova's impressive erudition, it covers more than a century and a half of research conducted in more than seven languages by at least four generations of scholars from inside and outside the region. Mishkova systematically questions the work of historians, geographers, linguists, and ethnologists, and their efforts to conceptualise a regional entity positioned between the level of nation states and that of Europe. In her analysis, she contextualises the arguments and categories these scholars have mobilised to define and legitimise the relevance of the Balkans or Southeastern Europe in the light of the political stakes of their time. Her investigation is fascinating due to the variety of approaches that she so accurately reproduces: always sensitive to intellectual affiliations as they shift from one generation to another, as well as to transfers from one linguistic space to another, and to the echoes between disciplines.

Mishkova's approach is built on triple questioning:

> 'Scrutinizing the ways the Balkans / Southeastern Europe was used as a framework of scholarly interpretation and historical (self-)narration; assessing the intricate relationship of regional categories with national modalities of representation, particularly national narratives of history, as well as between local and exogenous conceptualizations; and foregrounding these regional categories, political connotations and usages.' (4)

Her work as a historian of ideas is of great interest for current work in the social sciences for at least two reasons. Firstly, because the picture she paints illuminates the known or unknown, conscious or unconscious, background to the categories we mobilise and the knowledge we seek to produce. Its analysis is essential for understanding 'how we know what we know' about the Balkans (226). Secondly, this background accurately documents how knowledge is linked with the specific contexts of its production. Mishkova's systematic effort to situate the intellectual constructions of the Balkan region in the epistemological, historical, and (geo)political contexts of their formation shows how intimately these constructions are linked to the intellectual and political stakes of their time: those of modernisation and relationship to the notion of progress from the time of the Enlightenment; nationalist stakes at the time of the construction of national states; 'development' and its teleological reading grids at the time of the Cold War; as well as contemporary stakes in connection with globalisation and competition between territories.

The question facing those who seek to produce geographically located knowledge, particularly about this region, is how to think about intermediate

scales without falling into the trap of the 'magic culture–territory–identities triangle'[41] that discredits the idea of cultural region. If scholars refuse to essentialise the nature of a region, should they be content to deconstruct it? In other words, how can the analytical levels between the microsociological level of ethnographic observation and the global level be thought anew? Mishkova addresses this question in the conclusion of her book. I would like to take this opportunity offered by *Südosteuropa* and its editor, Sabine Rutar, to reflect on this question by first going back to an original proposal elaborated at the turn of the 1990s within French-speaking geography, and then elaborate one put forward around the concept of 'phantom space'.

The Balkans as a Space In-Between (*espace entre deux*)

I will begin my reflections with the work of the French geographer Violette Rey. I take the liberty here to complete the picture that Diana Mishkova paints of regional thought on the Balkans. In no way is this meant as a reproach to her for not having included this work in her book—the multilingual amplitude of her references is already immense—but rather to make room in this discussion for the original contributions of French-speaking geography of the 1980s and 1990s. Produced at the end of the socialist era and at the beginning of postsocialism, it seems to me worthy of attention.

Mishkova mentions the first two 'Universal Geographies' that marked the history of francophone geography—that of Elisée Reclus of 1875 (32) and that of Paul Vidal de la Blache and Lucien Gallois of 1934 (106). However, she could also have mentioned the third *Géographie Universelle*, published between 1990 and 1996 under the direction of Roger Brunet. This edition can be considered in many respects as a kind of swan song of regional approaches to francophone geography. After this monumental project, which brought together some sixty authors in a collective endeavour to regionalise and describe the world, no large-scale project has really ventured to challenge the relevance and modalities of regional knowledge. The tenth and last volume of this 'universal geography' is entitled 'Eastern Europe, Russia, and Central Asia'.[42] The definition of its perimeter of study, decided at the beginning of the project in 1986, was based on the borders of the Cold War: the volume referred to the territory of the USSR and to 'Eastern Europe' of that time, that is without the former East Germany (the new *Bundesländer*), which was included in Volume 9 titled 'Northern Europe, Central Europe', and without Greece and Turkey, which were studied

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41 Marie Cuillerai / Marc Abélès, Mondialisation: du géo-culturel au bio-politique, *Anthropologie et sociétés* 26, no. 1 (2002), 11–28, 15, DOI: 10.7202/000700ar.

42 Roger Brunet / Violette Rey, eds, Europes orientales–Russie–Asie centrale, Géographie Universelle, vol. 10, Paris 1996.

in the volumes devoted to Southern Europe and the Middle East respectively. The first part of Volume 10, coordinated by Violette Rey, is entitled 'Eastern Europes', in the plural, and is divided between 'The New Central Europe' (the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, and Croatia), 'Balkan Europe' (Bosnia and Herzegovina, the 'Third Yugoslavia', Macedonia, Albania, and Bulgaria), and 'Other Shores of Europe' (Romania and Poland). The Baltic countries are referred to in the second part of the volume and included within the scope of 'Russia and Neighbouring Countries', written by Roger Brunet. I will not visit here the reasons put forward to justify such regionalisation, but rather present the stance adopted by Violette Rey in thinking about the regional unity of what is now called Central and Eastern Europe. She theorises this ensemble as an 'area in between' (*espace entre deux*), as territories historically positioned at the intersection of influences from more powerful external geopolitical centres. She intends to shift the gaze towards these territories and to consider them in the *longue durée*, rather than as peripheries and more or less degraded forms of the geopolitical centres on which they may have depended. Instead, she wrote, they were sites of a particular experience of historical space and time:

'The outside thwarts and distorts the endogenous forces of organization, which must contain them […]; societies are shaped through perceptions where uncertainty always weighs heavily. Landscapes are fragments of trapped time, palimpsests juxtaposing museum forms, avantgarde forms, unfinished sketches; they express in space the particularity of the relationship that societies maintain with time. The experience of historical time in the in-between space is marked by recurrent adversities; the lack of duration in successive situations prevents accumulation and evolution, to the benefit of oscillations and returns to previous states […]. Multiple interferences and this relationship to time give rise to a proliferation of differences and an exacerbation of otherness; they are bearers of radical creativities, but which, in order to flourish, have to migrate to other, more central places.'[43]

This phenomenological approach to regional characteristics emphasises not only the historical legacies (social, cultural, and material) themselves or their 'synthesis', but also the collective experience they transport—the way they are lived and interpreted by society. It bases the identification of specific features of a region on a kind of hermeneutics of historical spaces and times. It focuses on the recompositions of the meaning that societies give to their own historical experience at each turnaround in the geopolitical situation.

Applied to Balkan Europe, this approach focuses on the joint centripetal and centrifugal effects of the peninsula's in-between position: centripetal when the

[43] Violette Rey, Un espace entre deux, in: Brunet / Rey, eds, Europes orientales, 10–11, 10; cf. Violette Rey, Les Balkans, lecture d'un espace 'd'entre-deux', Anatoli. De l'Adriatique à la Caspienne. Territoires, politique, sociétés 1 (2010), 45–56, DOI: 10.4000/anatoli.368.

interweaving of successive contributions shapes a 'Balkan civilisation' identifiable in culinary traditions, social practices, landscape, music or a certain *Weltanschauung*; centrifugal when, in times of uncertainty about the balance of geopolitical forces, the layering and the mosaic of historical legacies give force to territorial fragmentation and ethnonational conflicts. One could trace, in Rey's analysis, an intellectual tradition stemming from the generations of balkanologists in the first half of the 20th century, which Mishkova analyses in her Chapters 2 and 3. Like them, Rey refers to the idea of a 'synthesis of cultures and civilisations, leading to a crystallisation of a common Balkan mentality, similar lifestyle, and singular rhythm of development for the whole area' (80). Like them, she was interested in the riches and 'potentials of marginality' (96). Like some of them, she takes into consideration the 'effects of physical geography and how the fragmentation of the terrain provides for the fragmentation of societies'.[44] Rey does not quote Victor Papacostea, nor does she quote Jovan Cvijić; instead, she refers to the Romanian geographer Vintilă M. Mihăilescu (1890–1978), who was in part their heir. However, in spite of these analogies, Rey's approach is at the same time different from this 'historicist approach', whose paradigm, as Mishkova emphasises, still inspires contemporary studies seeking to grasp 'what the Balkans are' (226). By making room for the way in which the societies of the Balkan area give meaning to their own historical and geographical position, Rey distances herself from what Mishkova calls the 'metahistorical Balkan narrative' and 'the idea of an "objective" cultural-historical reality' that would be eternal or immutable (171). While taking advantage of the achievements of Brunet's structuralist paradigm of 'universal geography', she introduces into her analysis the changing visions that societies have of their own historical experience, and the effects of these visions on the production of space. She makes room for the imagination of social actors and their capacity to make, undo or redo an ever-recomposed regional 'reality'. She seeks to approach 'ambiguous realities' with 'fuzzy concepts'.[45] It is this attention paid by Rey to the collective experience of societies and to the mediation of geographical space in their relationship to history that I would like to stress here. Her phenomenological perspective opens up a possible escape from the alternative between approaches seeking an understanding of the 'concreteness' of the Balkans and those that deconstruct regional knowledge by seeking to explain 'how we know what we know' about the Balkans (237).

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[44] Violette Rey, Amères fortunes des Balkans, in: Brunet / Rey, eds, Europes orientales, 100–108, 104.

[45] Violette Rey, Concepts flous pour réalités ambiguës, comment lire la balkanisation avec 'l'entre-deux', *Anatoli. De l'Adriatique à la Caspienne. Territoires, politique, sociétés* 4 (2013), 93–107, DOI: 10.4000/anatoli.466.

Why did this original and stimulating proposal not find the echo it deserved in the controversies over Balkan regionalisation? Linguistic and disciplinary configurations of contemporary science provide an element of explanation: the French language as the language of academic communication, as well as geography as a pivotal discipline of regional studies, have long lost the central positions they both had during the interwar period, as is clearly identified in Chapters 2 and 3 of *Beyond Balkanism*. One of the possible research strategies enabling departure from the airbrushed image of a region is to take the observation of the actors and their practices as a starting point, that is, the way in which they constantly situate themselves in regional frameworks. This is what a group of scholars, myself among them, achieved in the 'phantom border' project.[46]

The Balkans as a Phantom?

When reading Mishkova's book, I asked myself how to relate it to my own work and the work of fellow scholars that centred around the concepts of 'phantom borders' and 'phantom spaces'. One departure point was that we wanted to explore the possibility of a 'third way' in terms of offering a solution to the debate that remained open at the time between Maria Todorova and Holm Sundhaussen (220) on the possibility of identifying a 'Europa balcanica'.[47] The traces of imperial borders in the contemporary nation-state spaces of Central and Eastern Europe seemed to offer a field of empirical observation enabling a better understanding of how the legacies of dead empires—'legacy as continuities' and 'legacy as perception' (Todorova)—are spatially articulated. In the following, I summarise briefly the key elements of the concepts of 'phantom space' and 'phantom borders' and establish the link to Mishkova's book.

'Overall, we should be wary of the epistemological fragility of regions […] and involve awareness that tailoring academic research to established spatial categories predetermines to a large extent its conclusions', Mishkova spells out in the conclusion of her book (236). A possible way of escaping this trap of regional frameworks of analysis consists in considering regional differences to

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[46] Cf. Béatrice von Hirschhausen, BMBF-Kompetenznetzwerk 'Phantomgrenzen in Ostmitteleuropa', in: Steffen Wippel / Andrea Fischer-Tahir, eds, Jenseits etablierter Meta-Geographien. Der Nahe Osten und Nordafrika in transregionaler Perspektive, Baden Baden 2018, 172–173. Cf. the project's website at http://phantomgrenzen.eu/. All internet references were accessed on 12 August 2020.

[47] Cf. Maria Todorova, Imagining the Balkans, New York 1997; Holm Sundhaussen, Europa balcanica. Der Balkan als historischer Raum Europas, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 25, no. 4 (1999), 626–653; Maria Todorova, Der Balkan als Analysekategorie. Grenzen, Raum, Zeit, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 28, no. 3 (2002), 470–492; Holm Sundhaussen, Was ist Südosteuropa und warum beschäftigen wir uns (nicht) damit?, *Südosteuropa-Mitteilungen* 42, no. 5–6 (2002), 92–105; Maria Todorova, Die Kategorie Zeit in der Geschichtsschreibung über das östliche Europa, Oskar-Halecki-Vorlesung am GWZO 2003, Leipzig 2007.

be the product of a bottom-up process shaped by the everyday behaviour of people. In this perspective, these differences sometimes appear to structure societal perceptions, while sometimes they can disappear from the consciousness of the population, or from the field of vision of observers. The notion of 'phantom space' was used to conceptualise this ambivalence of the 'intermediate' or 'regional' levels of societal construction. The starting point comprised empirical case studies of the appearance or disappearance of certain traces left by earlier demarcations after their institutional abolishment.[48]

Despite spatial political restructuring, 'phantom borders' may be displayed in statistics or maps, for example in relation to voting behaviour and other social practices, even several decades after the dismantling of historical borders. Rejecting the opposition between mental maps and physical spaces, the concept proposes to consider regional differences simultaneously as a given and a constructed reality. The difficulty inherent both theoretically and empirically in discussing 'phantom spaces' is to identify the mechanisms of their construction in the field of social sciences, beyond the mere register of their discursive production, but without participating in their reification. In this critical perspective, 'phantom borders' and 'phantom spaces' are understood as simultaneously 1) imagined, that is produced and passed on discursively; 2) experienced, that is perceived as experience and updated in practice by the actors and scientific observers; and 3) designed, that is established by territorialisation processes. The emphasis here is thus on the *interaction* between spatial imagination, spatial experience, and spatial design.[49]

An example from Romania, located on either side of the old border that separated Moldavia and Wallachia (the 'Old Kingdom') from the Habsburg Empire, and more specifically from the kingdom of Hungary, may serve to illustrate the new analytical angle.[50] This historical frontier, erased by the Treaty of Trianon a century ago with the attachment of Transylvania and Banat to the new territory of the Kingdom of Romania, reappeared with astonishing clarity on a 2011 map of domestic water supply installations in rural areas (Figure 1). In the absence of investment by the Romanian state to equip villages with running water, the villagers themselves installed pumps and micro water distribution networks to equip their homes with a bathroom and water taps. However, such strategies of domestic modernisation proceeded at very different rates in different regions.

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[48] Béatrice von Hirschhausen et al., 'Phantom Borders' in Eastern Europe. A New Concept for Regional Research, *Slavic Review* 78, no. 2 (2019), 368–389, DOI: 10.1017/slr.2019.93.

[49] These paragraphs are adapted from Béatrice von Hirschhausen, Phantom Borders, in: Transfrontier Euro-Institut Network, ed, Critical Dictionary on Cross-Border Cooperation in Europe, Bern (in print).

[50] Béatrice von Hirschhausen, The Heuristic Interest of the Concept of 'Phantom Borders' in the Understanding of Cultural Regionalization, *L'Espace géographique* 46, no. 2 (2017), 368–389, DOI: 10.3917/eg.462.0106.

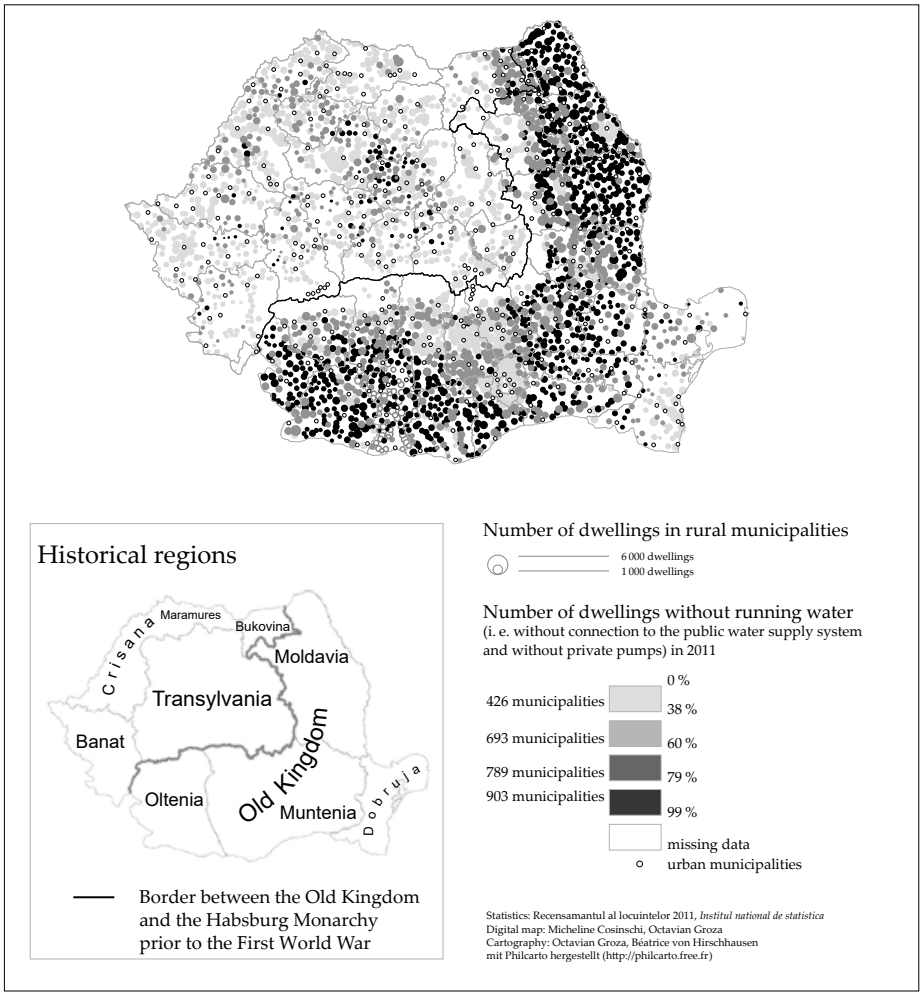


Figure 1

To the east and south of the former imperial border (in Moldavia, Oltenia, and Muntenia), installation proceeded rather slowly: in the vast majority of municipalities, less than 40 % of households had installed running water in their homes at the time of the 2011 housing census. To the west and north of the former border, the installation of water taps was much faster: in most municipalities, more than 60 % of houses had a supply of running water by the same date. This regional difference, which was invisible in the 1992 census (when families in all rural areas were under-equipped), appeared in the 2002 census and increased dramatically during the next census a decade later.

How can this be interpreted? Are these the effects of deep and long-standing structural differences in levels of technical development, reflected, for example, in the morphology of houses: larger and more robust in Banat, smaller and more modest in Oltenia? Or could it be the result of the specific gaze of the observer eager to find precisely the differences between Central Europe and Balkan Europe they are looking for?

It is interesting to note that the difference in the distribution of the running water supply is not reflected in other technical equipment: the share of telephone network connections and of young people using Facebook, for example, is more or less the same everywhere. It is also interesting how the villagers themselves mobilise regional categories to inform their choices: the inhabitants of Banat, asked about the importance of their domestic investments, often refer to their region's Habsburg past and explain their modernising ambitions with their 'mentality' (this is the word they use) as central Europeans. The inhabitants of Oltenia, on the other side of the former border, link their substandard installations to a sense of fatality, part of a lifestyle heritage that they describe as 'medieval'. What matters more than material historical heritage are the stereotypes people themselves attach to the morphological differences between the large brick houses in the villages of Banat and the more modest houses in the villages of Oltenia.

The concept of 'phantom region' does not seek to trace the scholarly or popular origins of these geographical imaginaries that promise progress to Central Europe and backwardness to the Balkans. Rather, it seeks to explain the performative effects of these beliefs, which were deeply established at the time of the surveys conducted between 2012 and 2015, both in the discourse of the villagers and in their respective visions of local normality. It shows that families' different strategies for equipping their homes (or, on the contrary, deferral of investment) can be explained by looking simultaneously at their spaces of experience (including material) and at the future that they believe their village's historical trajectory holds for them.

The concept of 'phantom borders' / 'phantom spaces' focuses on the experience of the actors and not on supposedly stable regional borders / regions. Institutional, social, and structural heritages are permanently interpreted and updated by local actors in a selective way, and represent a set of (more or less) referenced resources. At any point in time, depending on their momentary perception, these local actors can ignore, disqualify, or make use of and reproduce the heritage of the past.

'Phantom borders' / 'phantom space' open up an interpretation of cultural spaces which gives consideration to imagined spaces, new visions of the future, and joint beliefs. Actors constantly update their resources, of course relying on the past, but also with respect to their horizon of expectations. They create

their own world, which takes shape between a certain experience 'full of past reality' and the expectation of an imagined future.[51] The concept of 'phantom borders' / 'phantom space' also considers that the visions of the future are not only endogenous, that is to a certain degree emerging from a given historical path dependency, but also governed by mental maps shaped by higher levels of power. Hegemonic knowledge defines, among other things, the 'centre' and the 'periphery', 'modern' and 'archaic' regions, and thus prescribes geographies of the future to local societies, which more or less willingly internalise them. Local populations thus identify potential spaces for development and define their future horizons within the borders implicitly defined by shared mental maps.

In this critical perspective, the 'phantom' concept designates the performative capacity of previously existing politically shaped territories to construct both the experience and the imagination of a social group, and consequently, the creation of regional patterns in a specific domain. This capacity is not permanent, but is historically situated. 'Phantom spaces' can appear and disappear in certain historical and geopolitical circumstances; also, this capacity is not universal as it may concern certain aspects of social life, while excluding others.

I am convinced that the concept of 'phantom borders' is able to deal with a Balkan Europe without enclosing it in the historicist scheme of a *Sonderweg* and without reducing it to the metaphor of a *liminal space* situated in the sole discursive register of the world's imaginations. In other words, 'phantom borders' allow scholars to escape from the dilemma Mishkova analyses in Chapter 7 ('A *Sonderweg* or a Metaphor?') and to articulate the transmission of the two kinds of imperial legacies distinguished by Todorova: 'legacy as continuity' and 'legacy as perception'—be they Ottoman, Byzantine or Habsburg.[52] The concepts of 'phantom borders' and 'phantom spaces' provide the means to consider their respective dynamics not according to distinct or autonomous trajectories with respect to each other, but through their co-construction. In fact, a 'ghost' is at the same time the 'appearance' of a disappeared being and a 'phantasmagoria': one is never quite sure, in the presence of a ghost, what it manifests of the deceased (his/her body and history) and to what extent it is a projection of the imaginary. It is from this double nature, historical and performative, that the metaphor of the phantom helps us to reflect on the ambivalent regional dynamics of the production and reproduction of Balkan Europe in terms of both experience and imagination. Diana Mishkova would know better than anyone how to situate this theoretical proposition in relation to contemporary political and epistemic contexts. 'The grand theories and narratives of modernity and backwardness, as well, have kept feeding into region-making', she writes (219). In addition,

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[51] Reinhart Koselleck, Futures Past. On the Semantics of Historical Time, New York 2004 (German original 1979).

[52] Cf. Todorova, Imagining the Balkans, 161–183.

she recalls with Andrei Pippidi and Alexander Vezenkov that 'the "making" of Europe as a continent in its present-day meaning [which took root during the Enlightenment] had a crucial impact on the emergence of "the Balkans" as a region distinct from "the Orient"' (224). This quote in fact shows how the question of defining a Balkan regional level has recurrently appeared in the thinking of the region's intellectuals, under the pressure of a Western challenge whose model more often than not has claimed universality. And lastly, what about 'region making' in the context of contemporary crises? What are the effects of the emergence of the narrative of globalisation?

It seems to me that the controversy which has developed over recent decades between historicist approaches referring to a 'Balkan civilisation' and deconstructionist approaches that are interested in its discursive invention should be placed in the context of the transformation of the great narratives and of the yardsticks for measuring access to prosperity. In the new great game of globalisation and competition between territories, the prosperity of societies appears less and less a question of 'progress' or 'backwardness', and more and more a question of the 'cultural' capacities of societies to develop. Concerns about including the actors' perspective and deconstructing reified territorial identities are related to these new approaches. The quest for a 'third way'—the 'phantom' concept—seems necessary to me, not only because 'by our time, "rage to de-construct has rather given way to a fuller and richer exploration of the capacity, and its limits, of people (and things) to act"' (Michael Geyer, quoted by Mishkova, 239), but also because the scholarly project of provincialising Europe and of placing social theories in the geographical frameworks of their production presupposes a fresh reflection on the very notion of 'province'. The concept of a 'phantom region' makes it possible, as proposed by Mishkova in her conclusion, '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 reconfigured in response to changing social, cultural and political processes' (237).

Finally, the idea of the performativity of the regional 'phantoms' seems to me to allow scholars to shift 'the focus of discussion to the social, political, and intellectual mechanisms effecting the materialization of space and borders and, most prominently, to human agency' (239). The future history of ideas will tell whether researchers will follow up on this proposal to think of Balkan societies 'beyond region making'.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR

Béatrice von Hirschhausen Centre Marc Bloch, Friedrichstraße 191, 10117 Berlin, Germany. E-mail: Beatrice.vonHirschhausen@cmb.hu-berlin.de

SABINE RUTAR

Symbolic Geographies, Borderlands, and the Global Condition of Scholars

The following statement in Diana Mishkova's intriguing book *Beyond Balkanism. The Scholarly Politics of Region Making* is the starting point for my commentary: 'The flow of ideas, concepts, and narratives […] was never unidirectional' (234). To my mind, it encapsulates the essence of what is at stake. Mishkova's sound proposal in relation to how scholars study 'areas', and the Balkans in particular, is grounded in an in-depth exploration of the 'transnational flow of ideas and the communication between "Western" and "peripheral" concepts and definitions' (4), and of 'the epistemological pitfalls haunting the search for regional coherence' (5) since the 19th century. In commenting on her findings, I group my remarks around the topoi of 'symbolic geographies', 'borderlands', and the 'global condition' of scholars.[53]

Symbolic Geographies

Mishkova leaves no doubt about the entanglements between scholarly region making and politics. The emergence of Southeast European studies in the German-speaking lands prior to the First World War was related to Austro-Hungarian and German financial and diplomatic circles starting to see the adjacent economic and political area in the Southeast as 'up for grabs' (11). After the Second World War, Anglo-American geopolitical re-shuffling led to a diachronic and synchronic re-definition prompted by Cold War binaries. The 'study areas' that were created now merged the communist-led Southeast European countries with the rest of communist Eastern Europe into Slavic and East European studies, and gave a heavy predominance to Russian studies. Non-communist Greece was treated as part of the West and/or was framed individually as Hellenic studies. The history of the Ottoman Empire, including its Southeast European realms, as well as modern Turkey, became part of Middle Eastern studies.

In this Western hegemonic geopolitical re-shuffling, the Balkans were framed as a 'latecomer to modernization' (192). Balkan history accordingly was 'replete with delays and deficits nearly everywhere: incomplete agricultural modernization, failed industrial revolution, lacking citizenship, underdeveloped civil society, etc. The history of Southeastern Europe thus becomes

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[53] In several ways, this contribution develops my thoughts in Sabine Rutar, Introduction. Beyond the Balkans, in: Sabine Rutar, ed, Beyond the Balkans. Towards an Inclusive History of Southeastern Europe, Vienna, Zurich, Berlin 2014, 7–25.

a history of loss and failure' (192). Much scholarly energy was spent on establishing the causes for such 'backwardness'. At the same time, and, given this approach maybe unsurprisingly, Eastern Europe and the Balkans triggered anything but the important methodological input to social sciences that for example Middle Eastern, Latin American, and postcolonial studies more generally have generated.

After the political changes of 1989/90, social scientists relied on the 'backwardness' paradigm in their efforts to assess the potentialities of the Balkan countries 'to morph into liberal democracies' (192). Once more, politically predefined spaces were created from a firmly Western perspective, such as 'Western Balkans', 'transition countries', and 'postsocialist Europe'. In many ways, the Cold War bipolarity continues to structure scholarly region making even today. The last thirty years have given impressive proof of how 'tailoring research to politically predefined spaces such as Eastern Europe or Central and Southeastern Europe to a large extent preempted its conclusions' (203). What has been forfeited in important ways is the chance to foster a sustainable and entangled conversation, since the end of the Cold War, on what the 20th century meant for *all* of Europe, and how it should be read to provide for democratic stability in the future.[54] The events of 11 September 2001 had additionally detrimental repercussions for this missed dialogue. The once more radically and rapidly changing global geopolitical scene sent the 'transitional' 1990s into untimely oblivion. The 'long decade' between 1989 and 2001 now, to some Western scholars, seems like a 'dreamlike era from 11/9 to 9/11', a 'historical hiatus between the Cold War and the war on terror'.[55] In this reading, the decade of Eastern Europe's 'transition', and of the 1991–1999 Yugoslav wars, was a 'gap decade' between two epochs—before, there had been something (the Cold War), and afterwards, there has been something (something bad). The systemic changes prompted by the fall of the Berlin Wall, as well as the 100,000 dead in the Bosnian war, the longest siege of a city in the 20th century (Sarajevo), genocide returning to Europe (Srebrenica), and hundreds of thousands of refugees have fallen out of sight. The ongoing crisis of the most recent decade, bearing the names of its most visible critical events—financial, euro, Greek, refugee, Ukrainian, Catalan, Brexit, Trump, and now, comprehensively, coronavirus and climate—seems to have, cynically speaking, 'normalised' the

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54 Cf. Sabine Rutar, (Re-)Scaling the Second World War. Regimes of Historicity and the Legacies of the Cold War in Europe, in: Xavier Bougarel / Hannes Grandits / Marija Vulesica, eds, Local Dimensions of the Second World War in Southeastern Europe, Abingdon 2019, 263–281.

55 Charles King, Extreme Politics. Nationalism, Violence, and the End of Europe, Oxford 2010, 4–5.

Balkans, as several of its fragmentising 'symptoms' suddenly plague Europe as a whole and indeed the world as such.[56]

Mishkova points to a 'side-effect' of the events of the last thirty years that I had never thought about in these terms: the massive intellectual brain drain from the Balkans has created a global academic diaspora, a generation of scholars who have been skilfully promoting their 'local competence in a globally relevant interpretive framework' (235). Obviously, here too 'the flow of ideas, concepts, and narratives […] was never unidirectional' (234), and I would be interested to know how Mishkova, who did *not* leave her home country Bulgaria, but has been one of the internationally most visible agents of that country's institutional and intellectual life, sees the complex interplay between diasporic and 'remainer' academic endeavours, in Bulgaria as elsewhere.

The fact that I had never conceptualised the massive migration of intellectuals as effectively contributing to the dissolution of Cold War 'leftover' research paradigms is odd on at least two levels: firstly, because my family became part of the Yugoslav diaspora in the late 1950s when my father and mother came to West Germany from Yugoslavia (Slovenia) as refugees. I have always defined myself as a part of the lively and—owing to the *Gastarbeiter* of the late 1960s and 1970s and subsequently the wars of the 1990s, but also as a result of more recent migration flows—now multigenerational academic diaspora of what was once Yugoslavia. And secondly, because I have been gathering social scientists from Southeastern Europe in this journal for more than a decade, and regardless of *where* they might work and teach, I have witnessed their competence, originality, commitment, and transnational perspectives on a daily basis. I strongly subscribe to the idea that this global(ised) generation of knowledgeable scholars is the driving force behind much that has been genuinely innovative and conceptually convincing, built on the rubble of the overly unreflective, excessively hasty, and often inadequate post-1990 attempts to re-arrange geopolitics, and research designs along with them.

The more immediate legacy that today's Balkan intellectual diaspora can refer to is the work of the scholars who left their communist home countries during the Cold War and re-invented themselves intellectually in the West. But Mishkova skilfully elaborates on a legacy that is perhaps even more valuable and authentic: the impressive, internationally entangled achievements of Balkan scholars during the interwar period. She accomplishes something

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[56] Cf. the dossier 'Europe(an) Matters', *Südosteuropa. Journal of Politics and Society* 64, no. 3 (2016): Erhard Busek, Europe on the Move. A Commentary, 365–371, DOI: 10.1515/soeu-2016-0030; John Breuilly, Brexit and Europe. A Commentary, 372–380, DOI: 10.1515/soeu-2016-0031; Beyond the 'Balkan Route', or Why Southeastern Europe Remains a Core Issue for Europe. A Discussion among Andrea Despot, Hannes Grandits, Wolfgang Höpken, Dušan Reljić, Gabriella Schubert, and Sevasti Trubeta, 381–395, DOI: 10.1515/soeu-2016-0032.

important here, because these scholars are usually neglected when international social scientists reflect on the canonical scholars of the 20th century, and intellectual entanglement. Mishkova links today's scholars back to previous generations, and, importantly, to scholars who made an impact internationally *from within* their home countries.

In her post-1990 chapter (Chapter 7: 'A *Sonderweg* or a Metaphor?'), she could maybe have underpinned her argument even more forcefully. She could have elaborated further on the credit she assigns to the post-1990 global(ised) generation of Balkan scholars. She could have, less modestly, *linked* the diaspora back to those who 'stayed on', who, like herself, did *not* leave, and who skilfully manoeuvred the domestic academic landscape through the systemic changes, albeit not necessarily as part of mainstream academia. (Forced) academic mobility and the 'brain drain' from the Balkans over the last thirty years have 'bounced back home', so that, as a result, notions of the Balkans have been enhanced both from without *and* from within. Consequently, a more structured and more conceptually conscious dialogue on the symbolic geographies that have been informing and dividing 'areas' bears much unexplored potential.

Borderlands

The fact that Mishkova's book was published in the Routledge Borderlands Studies series resonates with me both as a journal editor and as a historian of the northeastern Adriatic, one of Europe's more complex borderlands. *Südosteuropa* carries its area in its name, and has sought to refrain from precisely demarcating territories in region making. Instead, its 'area' is defined by the maritime borders of 'the eastern Adriatic, the eastern Mediterranean, and the Black Sea'.[57] These seaside border markers are an attempt to de-essentialise territory and instead refer to 'fluid and ambiguous spaces, moulded by processes of economic and political integration or shifting geopolitical dividing lines', to quote the rationale behind Routledge's Borderlands Studies series, with which I fully concur. Mishkova's book is placed well here.[58]

'Do we really need a robustly bordered and reasonably coherent area to justify our interest in dealing with it?', asks Mishkova (235) in an oxymoronic twist. No, we do not. Incidentally, her question reads like the headline for recent discussions conducted by the four editors of this journal in the search for a better title for our publication. Our conundrum has been just that: how can we represent the geographic realm the journal deals with without reifying it?

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[57] Cf. the journal's website at https://www.degruyter.com/view/journals/soeu/soeu-overview.xml. All internet references were accessed on 12 August 2020.

[58] Cf. the series description at https://www.routledge.com/Routledge-Borderlands-Studies/book-series/BORDERLAND.

Should we perhaps simply refrain from any geographic boundary expression and trust that scholars will share a tacit understanding that the area between the three seas is what the journal is about? Going *beyond* region making, and yet continuing to refer to it, makes things as impossible as they can get. If we 'un-border' space, we consequently 'un-border' time as well. The core intersection in this journal is that of 'Southeastern Europe' and 'post-1990'. For Greece or Turkey, clearly included in the journal's 'area', this time frame has never made much sense. Lately, the threshold of 1989/90 has increasingly become a part of contemporary history. Historians have started to take over the 1990s from the present-related social sciences. This beginning historicisation has enhanced the journal's pluridisciplinary mission in important ways. It is increasingly becoming a forum for an academic conversation between those whose realm is the 'present' and those who are experts of the 'past'. Disciplinary conventions often have epistemological effects that are no less essentialising than region making. While disciplinary boundary-crossing has always been a substantial part of this journal's profile, the new focus of contemporary history on the post-1990 decade has made this task more interesting, more complex, and more fruitful. Obviously, time borders are functional borders, too. They are part and parcel of what Mishkova calls the 'social processual nature of spaces' (238). This is mirrored in the boundaries between scholarly disciplines. But until now, nobody has convincingly explained to me where the exact boundary between 'present' and 'past' could be drawn when it comes to the social sciences. Which is why there should *be* an enhanced interdisciplinary dialogue, as promoted by this journal.[59]

This said, my scholarly identity is that of a borderland historian of the 'long' 20th century, who likes to engage in comparative microhistories. I am well aware of the rich potential of border regions both for creatively handling plurilingualism and for miscommunication across linguistic boundaries. Borders, especially ideological ones such as that between Italy and Yugoslavia during the Cold War, have an epistemological afterlife. If Cold War binaries have continued to substantially shape post-Cold War historiography in Europe, on the ground where the systems literally met they have created idiosyncrasies, ambivalences, and contradictions. However, the northeastern Adriatic borderland also showcases another essential feature of borders: here, borderlines moved rather than people, or at least to the same degree as the people, throughout the 20th century. Changing borders transformed people's life worlds without physical relocation, estranging them from the place they lived in. As one colleague

[59] We decided to encapsulate our reflections regarding the porous borders of space *and* time in the word 'comparative'. From 2021 onwards, *Südosteuropa. Journal of Politics of Society* will be called *Comparative Southeast European Studies.* It will be transformed into an open access journal, maintaining its comprehensively multidisciplinary profile.

put it: 'Even though my grandfather lived in the same village [Dolina, near Trieste, S. R.] all his life, he changed citizenship six times: Austria-Hungary, Italy, Germany, Yugoslavia, Free Territory of Trieste, then Italy once more. If I count the EU, he held seven.'[60]

If I extend these observations about the Balkan fringes to the entire Balkans as a borderland par excellence, it is easy to deduce what historiography should look like: it should be de-constructivist, de-essentialising, plurilingual, and focussed on processes, entanglements, shared history, historical overlappings, ambiguities, fluidities, even paradoxes. Many hitherto insoluble epistemic conflicts over who possesses sovereignty over historical interpretation could thus become accessible and meaningful. Contacts, interactions, movements, exchange, and transfer have most frequently taken place in an asymmetric manner, and often enough violently, within the Balkans and in contact with the wider world.

In the Balkans, writing history in a nation-state framework has seen an upsurge since 1990 that easily matches its counterparts—area studies as well as global and transnational history. This upsurge has hidden the commonalities beneath the exclusivist national master narratives thus fostered. In fact, the parallel histories of nationalism and nationalisation are at stake here: entangling the results of each historiographic tradition shows just how much the Balkan societies have been immersed in parallel histories. If these were put into a complex perspective, history would not become less conflictual, but it would become less exclusivist and less essentialist (and considerably more interesting). This has been amply proven by the four-volume *Entangled Histories of the Balkans*, in which Diana Mishkova played a substantial part.[61] I would be interested to know more about the impact that these volumes, the result of a European Research Council (ERC) project, have had both domestically and internationally. In what ways have they inspired research designs?

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[60] Borut Klabjan, Ein Spaziergang durch die vielschichtige Vergangenheit von Triest/Trst, in: Tanja von Fransecky et al., eds, Kärnten, Slowenien, Triest. Umkämpfte Erinnerungen, Berlin, Hamburg 2010, 203–208; cf. Sarah F. Green, Lines, Traces, and Tidemarks. Further Reflections on Forms of Border, in: Olga Demetriou / Rozita Dimova, eds, The Political Materialities of Borders. New Theoretical Directions, Manchester 2018, 67–83; and Sabine Rutar, Epistemologische Grenzen und europäische Zeitgeschichte am Beispiel der nordöstlichen Adriaregion, *Europa Regional* 22, no. 3–4 (2014), 192–206, https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-459994.

[61] Roumen Daskalov et al., eds, Entangled Histories of the Balkans, 4 vols., Leiden 2013–2017.

The Global Condition of Scholars

In Europe, global history approaches have, with few exceptions, been focused on the gaze from Western Europe into the world, in an extended exercise to overcome eurocentrism in historiography. This gaze has gone preferably towards Africa, Latin America, and Asia. Eastern Europe has been largely left aside in this agenda, and the Balkans even more so than the rest of Europe's eastern half. Mishkova convincingly argues that 'with few exceptions, historical Balkan studies failed to […] open its methodological horizons to the broader field of human sciences. Balkan studies forfeited the chance to […] interrogate categories that western social science took as universal' (171). In the subfield of Global Labour History, for example, it took almost twenty years for Eastern Europe and the Balkans to start to become integrated more substantially.[62]

Twenty-five years ago, Thomas Welskopp aptly summed up the functions of trans-/international comparison: 1) to identify questions that would probably never have come up otherwise; 2) to correct false presumptions, especially when building typologies; 3) to double-check the description of one case by communicating with the comparative case, thus avoiding that either is measured against the other by way of one being treated as the 'norm'; 4) to broaden the general perspective, without losing sight of details and empiricism.[63] A decade ago, Diana Mishkova urged Balkan scholars to engage more in a 'direct dialogue with the theoretical and conceptual discussions unfolding in other areas'.[64] I wonder what she thinks about the developments over the last ten years. Studies in modern Southeast European history can hardly do without reference to France, Great Britain, Germany, and even Italy. But have scholars of western societies started to look at their 'area' with an eye on developments in, say, Poland, Serbia, Bulgaria, or Greece? As Mishkova so assertively shows, the gaps in such reciprocal, balanced inquiry and curiosity in thinking about Europe's subregions lack historical legitimacy.

A global history perspective can indeed serve as a corrective towards overcoming the perennial problem of overlooking the European borderlands, and the southeastern ones in particular. The concluding words of Mark Mazower's *Dark Continent* are conducive to this aim: 'If Europeans can give up their desperate desire to find a single workable definition of themselves and if they can accept a more modest place in the world, they may come to terms more

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62 Cf. Marsha Siefert, ed, Labor in State-Socialist Eastern Europe, 1945–1989. Contributions to a History of Work, Budapest, New York 2020.

63 Thomas Welskopp, Stolpersteine auf dem Königsweg. Methodenkritische Anmerkungen zum internationalen Vergleich in der Gesellschaftsgeschichte, *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 35 (1995), 339–367, esp. 363–365.

64 Diana Mishkova, Symbolic Geographies and Visions of Identity. A Balkan Perspective, *European Journal of Social Theory* 11, no. 2 (2008), 237–256, 238.

easily with the diversity and dissension which will be as much their future as their past.'[65] The Balkans deserve to be seen as an intriguing location in global history. I am pessimistic, though: how many scholars academically socialised in the West, and of the historiographic guild, will turn to Mishkova's book and subsequently engage in historiographic dialogue, which then might lead to real innovation? Even if the field of Balkan studies has undertaken several giant steps towards epistemological inclusion, with Diana Mishkova as one of its spearheads, scholars still have been conversing mainly among their 'area' peers, reifying the politics of region making. Colleagues from regions *beyond* the Balkans who start to 'think' the Balkans as much as Southeast Europeanists 'think' the 'West' are rare. Global history has not yet helped much here. But such thinking would be a substantial move forward.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR

Sabine Rutar Leibniz Institute for East and Southeast European Studies, Landshuter Str. 4, 93407 Regensburg, Germany. E-mail: rutar@ios-regensburg.de

DIANA MISHKOVA

Notions of Region and Practising Regional Studies

For the sake of lending some coherence to my response to the four comments, I will address first the observations concerning the notion of region. In a next step, I reflect on those comments that touch upon the practice of regional studies. First of all, however, I wish to thank the participants in this panel for engaging in this intellectual exercise circling around my book *Beyond Balkanism*.

It seems almost inevitable that both John Breuilly's 'comparative framework' and Sabine Rutar's 'symbolic geographies' should foreground western agency in region making—either as a 'pragmatic exercise of power' (Breuilly) or as resulting from 'Western hegemonic geopolitical reshuffling' (Rutar). This, as I have tried to survey in my book, is justified in terms of antecedence (almost all mesoregions were initially defined from without) and asymmetry in knowledge production, and is hence nothing that would be idiosyncratic of the Balkans. My work on the concepts and images of the Balkans, on the other hand, has convinced me that to understand the persistence of regional categories in our everyday speech and of regionalisation as a way of organising our knowl-

[65] Mark Mazower, Epilogue. Making Europe, in: Mark Mazower, Dark Continent. Europe's Twentieth Century, New York 2000 (orig. 1998), 395–403, 403.

edge of the world generally, much bigger weight should be assigned to the 'native' usages and meanings of these concepts and to the role they play in the 'native' social and political imagery. This no doubt adds to the instability and contingency of regions but also, and more importantly, to their unremittingly contested definitions, therefore shifting criteria for inclusion and exclusion. 'Regions thus do not emerge as objectified and disjointed units functioning as quasi-national entities with fixed boundaries and clear-cut lines between insiders and outsiders, but rather as flexible and historically changing frameworks for interpreting certain phenomena.'[66] A consensus transpires among the participants in the panel regarding the understanding of space and borders as hinging on the premises of their social production and the ideological underpinnings behind such production. Normative political and cultural presumptions have been spurring regions ever since antiquity: the original division of Europe into a 'civilised' South and a 'barbaric' North was later substituted by an equally moralistic East–West divide. Religious divides (Catholic Latin, Protestant Germanic, and Orthodox Greco-Slavic), often underscored by racial ones, have been similarly powerful engines of 'cultural-spiritual' regionalisations. The great turning point in the spatialisation of historical experience, however, coincided with the advent of the era of high modernity, and found its original form in the post-Enlightenment logic of organising knowledge along civilisational dividing lines. Temporal terms such as 'development', 'progress', 'conservatism', 'stagnation', and 'delay' acquired spatial embeddedness, and spatial terms such as 'the East', 'the West', 'the North', 'the South', as well as 'centre', 'periphery', 'borderlands', or just 'the lands beyond' became historical terms. The modern symbolic (hierarchically graded) map of Europe is the product of this peculiar merger of cultural-historical and spatial imaginations. John Breuilly is right when stating that only in modern times do the representations of place as lived experience and as instrument of power 'change, converge and are stabilised through scholarship and ideology'. The politicisation of regional terminology, however, did not come about before the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Until then, albeit driven by the great European states' growing economic and geopolitical interest in the Balkans, not only linguistics and folklore (or philology) but also 'scientific geography' had possessed an autonomous intellectual character.

The morphology of symbolic geography / region making suggests an intimate relation between the construction of space, on one hand, and the formation of identities and identity politics, on the other. Regional concepts are first of all products of cultural-historical ('civilisational') self-identification and

[66] Diana Mishkova / Balázs Trencsényi, Conceptualizing Spaces within Europe. The Case of Meso-Regions, in: Willibald Steinmetz / Michael Freeden / Javier Fernández-Sebastián, Conceptual History in the European Space, New York, Oxford 2017, 212–35, 217–218.

self-positioning (coupled with the mirrored positioning of the 'other'), while the 'reality' of regions resides in the real consequences of this signifying process, through which people conceptualise or envision their place in the world.

Turning for a moment to the embedded 'top-down' processes of boundary-making, I wish to answer John Breuilly's question whether the Ottomans' division of their European acquisitions influenced later state borders, in a way analogous to the precolonial roots of apparently arbitrary colonial boundaries elsewhere. There is in fact little analogy here. The provincial units of the empire (*vilayets*) had little impact on later state divisions. Albeit formally part of the 'Concert of Europe', the Ottoman empire had little say in the drawing of the successor states' borders. 'Turkey-in-Europe' itself was conceived as an exercise of pragmatic power by the western powers, similar to the 'Middle East', 'Southeast Asia', etc., regional concepts Breuilly refers to, however—and this is an interesting difference—one that was intended for an empire of a non-colonial, premodern type ruling over Christian populations. This goes some way in explaining the marginalisation of pan-nationalism in the Balkans: the early emergence of the modern Balkan nation states and the drawing of their boundaries were to a large extent the result of the inability of the great powers to agree on the partitioning of 'Turkey-in-Europe' between themselves, in contrast to Poland, for example. It should be noted, though, that pan-nationalism did not obtain in the Habsburg realm either. On the other hand, this left space for later balkanologists to treat Balkan nationalism and, by implication, nationalist violence, as a western importation, against which they could project the image of a pan-Balkan commonality, where also the shared divisive effects of this imported 'commodity' featured as a building element.

Returning to the morphology of region making, Béatrice von Hirschhausen observes that 'one of the possible research strategies enabling departure from the airbrushed image of a region is to take the observations of the actors and their practices as a starting point, that is the way in which they constantly situate themselves in regional frameworks'. For Guido Franzinetti, delving into institutionally and academically embedded conceptualisations of the Balkans is a way of understanding the 'Actually Existing Balkans'. I cannot agree more. To be sure, regionalisation often underpins or competes with other modes of self-description and may be more salient in cultural and political debates in certain periods than in others. The core question, as I see it, is who deploys, when and to what ends, (a particular) regional terminology and with what effect.

Hence my reading of Violette Rey's take on the Balkans, which she considers 'archetypal' for the whole of Eastern Europe, is more ambivalent than Béatrice von Hirschhausen's. (Had Routledge been slightly more lenient with the size of my book, Rey's interpretation would have found a place in it.) Rey professes an attempt 'to identify the spatial mechanisms that perpetuate the set of *features*

and give it such durability that they contribute to the construction of a durable and singular civilisational entity'. For her, *discontinuity* is 'the main Balkan property' with millennia-old roots, the major cleavages being wreaked by three religions and four alphabets and the 'distinct cultural attitudes' they shaped and which have been 'based on a geographical space with a surprisingly fragmented relief that gave a physical basis to the [internal] segmentations'. She conceptualises the spatial processes that underlie the 'individualisation' of the Balkans, meaning 'specific features with civilisational content', as encapsulated in its 'in-betweenness' (*espace entre-deux*)—a notion with a long pedigree in balkanist scholarship, which Rey defines as made up of three interactive components: 1) a space where developments are governed by external and competing forces stronger than inside forces—an asymmetry that produces internal fragmentations, discontinuities and instability; 2) a space where recurrent radical reversals engender a cyclical experience of time and prevent accumulation of development; 3) a space where all kinds of discontinuities further creativity but where these same discontinuities prevent their effective local implementation, thus engendering frustration. In the end,

> 'such spatial and temporal relations result in an *abundance of differences and an exacerbation of otherness, an anxiety about destiny that is always unpredictable* […] a *tension between territorial constructions* in small-scale "cells" [territories of ethnic minorities] and very large-scale spatial organizations [e. g. religious denominations]; a tension that maintains hidden discontinuities, *hinders the multiple diffusion phenomena through which evolutions and integration processes take place*; a tension that *thwarts medium-scale constructions* [national states]; a tension that *makes more exclusive the role of clan and community solidarity*.'[67]

I am with von Hirschhausen in recognising affinities here with the interwar phenomenological approaches to Balkanness (though Rey's hermeneutics is by far gloomier in that she sees the recurrence of the past as unheroic and regressive), with all the pros and cons of such a choice. Moving away from the 'objectivity' of the Balkans (though not from the objective forces that shape its intermediate situation) towards reenactment of its *singularité de destin* on an existential level deserves appreciation—a memorable paragon in this sense is István Bibó's *The Misery of the Eastern European Small States*.[68] But is it indeed the 'local's' understanding, or rather Rey's assumption that such a common

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[67] Violette Rey, Les Balkans, lecture d'un espace 'd'entre-deux', *Anatoli. De l'Adriatique à la Caspienne. Territoires, politique, sociétés* 1 (2010), 45–56, 45–47; Violette Rey, 'L'entre deux' balkanique, *Geography, Environment, Sustainability* 3, no. 3 (2010), 32–41; Violette Rey, Concepts flous pour réalités ambiguës, comment lire la balkanisation avec l'entre-deux, *Anatoli. De l'Adriatique à la Caspienne. Territoires, politique, sociétés* 4 (2013), 93–107, 105–106 (emphases added).

[68] István Bibó, A kelet-európai kisállamok nyomorúsága, Budapest 1946.

understanding exists? I cannot do full justice to Rey's argument here but, analytically, I would have been more attracted to her approach had it been less holistic and metasocial: post-1989 electoral geography of Eastern Europe as often overlaps with former imperial divisions (Habsburg, Russian, Ottoman) as it crosses them; from a present-day perspective, the 'civilisational' difference ('discontinuity') between post-Habsburg Catholic-cum-Protestant Hungary and post-Ottoman Orthodox Romania looks much more negligible than it did in the 1990s (despite the impression conveyed by differences in architectural land- and urban skyscapes); to see a resemblance between small peasant land ownership coexisting with 'gigantic agricultural enterprises' in post-1990s Bulgaria and the land regime under the Ottomans needs a very high bird eye unobstructed by causal links—the land redistribution in the country after 1879 was as radical as the demolition of mosques, while across the region the post-1989 land redistribution was emphatically advertised as 'land *restitution*'.[69]

All in all, Rey asserts a peculiar 'in-between' relation to time and space, which crystalises into the 'specific characteristic' of the area, ominously yet logically reenacting itself. A cross-regional comparison might have suggested, and not only in this case, a more differentiated vision: compared to present-day Spain, 'in-between' Poland appears to be pretty well-integrated, with barely any tension between territorial constructions of different scale and perceptions of unpredictability, even if the ghosts of supremacist Germany and Russia still loom large in Polish political and social imagery. More crucially in terms of region making, in an *espace entre deux* marked by such fractures and discontinuities, can we talk, together with Rey, of a shared perception of a *singularité de destin* of its inhabitants (e. g. of the Czechs, the Romanians, the Albanians and the Greeks) other than that relating to the fractures and discontinuities themselves? Eastern Europe (and the Balkans) appears as a zone of divergences and disjunctures, but also of encounters and transfers, where borders often act as interfaces, defining rather than dividing spaces. This being said, I understand the reasons for Béatrice von Hirschhausen's affinity with such an approach: Rey's sensitivity to the 'inescapable ambiguity of these geographical situations', her reluctance to fall back on multicultural relativism or (geographic or historical) monocausality, and her ethical engagement with 'understanding the dilemmas' of the people living in these areas clearly dissociates her interpretation from popular 'operational simplifications' a la Huntington and his like.[70]

Sabine Rutar's focus on the Balkans as borderland has a precedence in Józef Chlebowczyk, for whom the whole area bordering the Baltic, Adriatic, Aegean, and Black Seas presents a coherent analytical unit encapsulated in the cate-

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[69] Rey, Concepts flous pour réalités ambiguës, 97–100.

[70] Samuel Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order, New York 1997.

gory of borderland, denoting 'areas where different linguistic-ethnic groups, nationalities and ethnic communities come into contact and coexist' and, as such, 'develop in a specific way'.[71] Borderlands in some recent writings have morphed, tellingly, into 'bloodlands'.[72] For Rutar, borderlands warrant above all a different kind of history writing and, more generally, of *doing* regional studies—an issue discussed by all four commentators to which I now turn. Starting with practitioners, Rutar reflects on the centrality of the relationship between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' in the production of regional knowledge. In the book, I flinched from undertaking a sociology of this production, while being keen to draw attention to the entanglements between internal and external perspectives on two levels: more explicitly, in terms of conceptual exchange and, less so, in terms of personnel (the massive presence of diaspora / émigré scholars from the region in research centres outside the region). With an eye to the contemporary situation, Rutar wishes that I had been 'less modest' in *linking* the diaspora back to those who 'stayed on' (like myself) on the premise that 'academic mobility and the "brain drain" from the Balkans over the last thirty years has "bounced back home", so that, as a result, notions of the Balkans have been enhanced both from without and from within'. As a result, we can expect that a 'more conceptually conscious dialogue on the symbolic geographies' will come about.

This is a singularly sanguine supposition which I wish tallied better with the actual situation, at least in Bulgaria. I shall limit my comment to the field of history writing since it is the main one in this country (next to a few language departments) where the Balkans features as an object of institutionalised academic study. On the whole, during the last couple of decades we have witnessed a powerful renationalisation of the public and academic spheres across Eastern Europe. History writing, which never eliminated the national grand narratives, has been particularly affected by this renationalising trend. Stripped of political relevance, the institutes and departments of Balkan studies have suffered financial deprivation and a shortage of cadres. Rather than diminishing it, academic mobility has rendered the gap between indigenous and exogenous historical knowledge production more conspicuous. Instead of cross-fertilisation, as per Rutar's rational expectation, one may actually speak about two parallel historiographical cultures: a 'self-reflective' one ('the driving force behind much that has been genuinely innovative and conceptually convincing', as Rutar envisions it), produced mainly, though not exclusively, outside of the country or by returnee foreign-trained scholars, typically with no or precarious institutional embedment, and a 'self-centred' ('exclusivist and

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71 Józef Chlebowczyk, On Small and Young Nations in Europe. Nation-Forming Processes in Ethnic Borderlands in East-Central Europe, Wrocław 1980, esp. 9–40.

72 Timothy Snyder, Bloodlands. Europe between Hitler and Stalin, New York 2010.

essentialist') national one produced in the state academic institutions. The two cultures exist in parallel, barely 'touching' each other, and when they happen to meet—an ongoing case is the asymmetric dispute attending the Bulgarian–North Macedonian historical commission set up to solve the most conflictual issues between the two national narratives as a precondition to North Macedonia's opening pre-accession talks with the EU—the result is a 'short circuit' explosion, mutual rejection and crude politicisation of the debate. I cannot go here into the reasons for this state of affairs in the history departments and the profession generally, but it is quite telling that the four volumes of the *Entangled Histories of the Balkans*, on which Rutar seems to have pinned hopes for change, were met with silence at home: although between 2013 and 2019 all volumes were translated into Bulgarian, they spurred no real debate, let alone visible impact. The favoured reaction of the local historical mainstream to this kind of 'provocation' is to ignore and drown it in a sort of show of mute contempt. (The only [positive] reviews came from a small circle of literary scholars.) Practitioners of Balkan studies outside the region, on the other hand, have been strongly appreciative. As for my personal location in this context it is, and is largely perceived locally as, extraterritorial, due to my anchorage in the Centre for Advanced Study—an international academic body committed to 'self-reflective' research. Guido Franzinetti is right to stress the importance of this cultural and institutional setting for my formation as a historian of the Balkans and a professed mediator between domestic and foreign academia. In a broader sense, however, the Centre, although structurally important as a 'subversive pocket' for local scholars, by its sheer size and positionality is hardly able to effect systemic change.

John Breuilly's concern with the link between scholarship and politics in region making is of different nature, pondering the role of historical linguistics and 'dialect continua', in particular. I concur with the general orientation of his argument, yet would be cautious to project the 'wave theory' onto the Balkans save, admittedly, between Serbian and Bulgarian. We are faced with a region where languages belonging to different language families (i. e. with 'different rules and vocabularies', two of which, Greek and Slavic, were codified very early on as written *and* liturgical) interacted in the course of many centuries so intensely as to produce morphological similarities between themselves. Nineteenth-century linguists tended to attribute these similarities to a common origin of all these languages, but by the 1920s this theory was abandoned in favour of the *Sprachbund* (linguistic area), which attributes the similarities between so dissimilar tongues to a long-standing practice of bi- and tri-lingualism. Therefore, we are still dealing with interaction across language boundaries that 'provides an opportunity for transnational accounts of language and cultural history generally', however, one abiding not to a 'wave theory' but

to multi-lingualism at an everyday level. It is, on the other hand, not hard to envisage the political implications of a Slavic 'dialect continuum'—the notion of 'Slavic Europe' in both the Russian (Slavophile) and the French (qua counterforce to 'Germandom') political vocabulary being one of the conspicuous ones.

As an approach to 'lived spaces'—different from though not necessarily opposed to symbolic geography—the phantom borders one is fascinating. To quote von Hirschhausen, the phantom borders approach considers regional differences the result of 'a bottom-up process mediated through the everyday behaviour of people […] focused on the experience of the actors'; phantom borders (i. e. the selectively reactivated boundaries of extinct empires) are being, interactively, 'imagined' (produced and passed on discursively), 'perceived as experience' and 'designed' through territorialisation processes.[73] At this stage of testing this approach on the ground, I encounter several riddles that need to be solved before trying to gauge the applicability of this approach on a mesoregional scale. Supranational regions (such as the Balkans or Central Europe) are 'imaginable' but not liable to be 'experienced' or 'designed' in the way a microregion or one 'delineated' by a particular landscape (e. g. architectural style like in Oltenia and Banat) can be. A mesoregion stretches far beyond the living space of actors, it lacks administrative borders, internal coherence, and territoriality (that is, effective control of public and political life). A mesoregion is, in this sense, a discursive construction par excellence. Phantom borders, I would surmise, can reactivate former divisions effected by empires, states, political regimes or conflicts, but it is hard to imagine that they can chart a supranational (meso) region that transcends such divisions. The irregularity and contingency with which phantom borders resurface preclude more or less reliable cartographic mappings. Such radical de-essentialisation of space and borders, namely knowing how those we seek to understand interpret themselves and their world, is, arguably, the most attractive aspect of the approach. But it also invites us to grapple with some taxing issues. What does the randomness of occurrence of phantom differentials in some instances and non-occurrence in other instances tell us about the nature of these borders and the identities they perform? If there are structural or material reasons that explain the occurrence of such differentials (e. g. the houses in Banat appear structurally more suitable for reconstruction than those in Oltenia, where it makes more sense to build a new house than refurbish the old one), how come that people explain them in terms of cultural legacy? When we are talking, not of material or institutional, but of cultural legacies, the question of *transmission* becomes crucial. It is in this sense significant that, after 1989, the imagery of 'Central Europe' and the

[73] For the full elaboration of the approach, cf. Béatrice von Hirschhausen et al., 'Phantom Borders' in Eastern Europe. A New Concept for Regional Research, *Slavic Review* 78, no. 2 (2019), 368–389.

Habsburg nostalgia, which dissident intellectuals had spurred in the 1980s, owed their survival to intellectuals from the one-time peripheral provinces of the Habsburg Empire, like Banat. The cultural programme of the Romanian *A Treia Europă* ('The Third Europe') research group based in Timișoara (in Banat) tried not just to resurrect their region's Central European identity but to redefine Central Europe by repositioning the 'imperial margins' as its cultural centre, detached from the 'Mitteleuropean dictate' of Vienna and Budapest, with the former Habsburg provinces of Bukovina (today part of Romania and Ukraine) and Banat now appearing as the quintessential Central European zones of interethnic, multilingual, and cultural convergence.[74]

So, is the Banatian villagers' modernising self-perception as Habsburg heritors the product of a specific relation to time and memory (as Rey would probably have it), an extrapolation from a baroque landscape tangibly superior to a predominantly wooden one, or a *vulgata* of the public discourse of 'The Third Europe'? All of these might interconnect and reinforce each other, but if we want to come to grips with the core question raised at the beginning—who deploys, when and to what ends, (a particular) regional terminology and with what effect—we need to be able in each case to identify the specific channels of transmitting images, legacies and collective memory of spaces that exceed the living one. The recent revival of area studies (which now show responsiveness to the local perspective) bears witness to the value of regions as analytical categories, above and beyond their prominence in political and everyday parlance. And as John Breuilly's intervention suggests, cross-regional (and, I would add, intra-regional) comparisons can supply insights and knowledge that may otherwise remain hidden. For now, my preference stays (as in the conclusion of the book) with regions understood as open-ended spaces charted by long-standing (and usually asymmetrical) encounters—contacts, interactions, movements, exchanges, and transfers—and as a starting point for engaging with shifting spatial frameworks (some reaching out to Europe, others to the Near East), depending on the period and the problematique. Not as cultural areas, but, to borrow from Artemis Leontis's projection of the Mediterranean, as 'the meaningful background for certain ways of thinking and living, an entanglement of differences and a fine, fragile mesh of interdependencies, a set of interconnected histories'.[75] Historians of Europe may continue

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[74] Adriana Babeți / Cornel Ungureanu, eds, Europa Centrală. Nevroze, dileme, utopii, Iași 1997; Maciej Janowski / Constantin Iordachi / Balázs Trencsényi, Why Bother about Historical Regions? Debates over Central Europe in Hungary, Poland and Romania, *East Central Europe. L'Europe du Centre-Est. Eine wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift* 32, no. 1–2 (2005), 5–58, 40–42, DOI: 10.1163/18763308–90001031.

[75] Artemis Leontis, Mediterranean Topographies before Balkanization, in: Mauro Peressini / Ratiba Hadj-Moussa, eds, Mediterranean Reconsidered. Representations, Emergences, Recompositions, Quebec 2005, 246.

to overlook the European borderlands. This state of the art needs to be faced up front by continuously grappling with the major intellectual challenge that my fellow-regionalist Balázs Trencsényi formulated as 'how to produce regionally relevant knowledge without closing ourselves into a "ghetto" of regional specialists, and how to enter the global debates without just "reproducing" the mainstream intellectual trends that circulate in the Western "core(s)"'.[76]

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR

Diana Mishkova Centre for Advanced Study, 7 Stefan Karadja Str., vh. 3, 1000 Sofia, Bulgaria. E-mail: mishkova@cas.bg

[76] Balázs Trencsényi, Beyond the Region? Transnational Studies in East Central Europe, lecture at 'Reimers Konferenzen Revisited', Forschungskolleg Humanwissenschaften der Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main, Bad Homburg 29–30 June 2015.