

## Historein

Vol 10 (2010)

History between Reflexivity and Critique



### Scale and Cognition in Historical Constructions of Space

*Diana Mishkova*

doi: [10.12681/historein.9](https://doi.org/10.12681/historein.9)

Copyright © 2012, Diana Mishkova



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

### To cite this article:

Mishkova, D. (2011). Scale and Cognition in Historical Constructions of Space. *Historein*, 10, 94–105.  
<https://doi.org/10.12681/historein.9>

# *Scale and Cognition in Historical Constructions of Space*

In the last twenty-odd years, regional history has spawned considerable theoretical interest and claims to be partaking in new trends in historical writing.<sup>1</sup> That regions, as frameworks of historical representation challenging nation-centred history, have moved to this position is, arguably, a consequence of their becoming an active site of convergence of several critical lines of enquiry at the interface of scholarship and politics. The growth of interest in transnational (and global) history approaches – and in their associates (*Transfergeschichte*, connected history, *l'histoire croisée*) – stirred up by the developments towards “globalisation” in the last two decades is perhaps the most obvious one. Cross-national and cross-cultural takes, as opposed to the traditional “national” approach to history, are being found especially relevant for areas such as the Balkans/Southeastern Europe, seen as being marked by overlapping, intersecting, and entangled historical experiences and identities.

**Diana Mishkova**

Centre of Advanced Study, Sofia

This bend, in turn, has led to an interrogation of the premises of comparative history generally and spurred, most notably and vociferously in the German academic milieu, heated, if somewhat scholastic, polemics between comparativists and transnationalists, structuralists and constructivists as regards representations (focusing on interpretation and meaning) and comparisons (dealing with similarities and differences).<sup>2</sup> Predictably, neither side had come to claim a clean victory. For while comparative history has rightly been criticised for mainly pursuing the analysis of different countries, thus reifying the na-

tion-state as the basic unit of history, cross-national historians have to grapple with the place of the nation in their studies. To what extent should cross-national studies seek to recast our knowledge of individual national histories?

All this has been evolving against the backdrop of the spectacular “spatial turn” in social and human sciences of late – more properly, of the reincorporation of space into social and cultural theory. While theorists of history, among others, have obviously contributed to it by fleshing out the notion of “mental mapping”, it was geographers, anthropologists and economists, rather than historians, who endowed the category of space with an emphatic sociotemporal dimension by elaborating on the links between knowledge, power and spatiality. An interesting corollary of the collapse of the two-bloc system is worth noting in this connection. Categories previously grounded in the geopolitical system are now being replaced by those derived from historical-structural characteristics of space. From this perspective, European history becomes conceivable only in relation to the variety of discrete historical spaces, as defined by specific *longue durée* features and relative historical uniformity, whose distinctiveness and lost unity it is now the task of history to recreate.<sup>3</sup> The notion of the “historical (meso-)region” arguably rebuts essentialism or even geographical and political determinants of its boundaries, and has been described as “an artistic device and heuristic concept for comparative analysis in order to identify transnational structures common to a constructed meta-region”.<sup>4</sup> The combination of intraregional and interregional comparisons, furthermore, is seen as intrinsic to such an understanding. Especially after 1989, however, the notion of region *tout court* has been questioned by some as having been prescribed by preexistent political divisions, made obsolete after 1989, and by others, resonating postcolonial concerns, as power- and ideologically driven symbolic constructions.

Needless to say, there is no obvious and unanimous answer to the question of the scholarly (“heuristic”) definition of regions. The question ultimately boils down to identifying, or rather proposing, what might lend an underlying, or overarching, coherence to the political, religious and linguistic diversity characterising these areas. Different disciplines and scientific criteria are likely to provide different, occasionally discordant, answers.<sup>5</sup> The one common characteristic they all seem to share is their self-conscious constructivist method. Indeed, it has been the convergence of the constructivist turn in historiography with the cultural turn in geography that created the epistemological condition for questioning the “natural boundaries” of space.

This essay does not aspire to partake in the debate about “symbolic geographies” vs. structural definitions of historical spaces (and of the implicit politics of each), even though it will be clear that any discussion of how historical or cultural spaces are defined cannot disregard the tension between processes of discursive construction and the search for structural anchor points and commonalities.<sup>6</sup> Nor would it seek to survey the achievements and pitfalls of different disciplinary traditions of regionalist scholarship. Albeit informed primarily by research in histori-

ography, I would deem the musings that follow to be extendable to a wide range of and across humanistic and social disciplines.

Its epistemological contention is of a different order in that it proposes a theoretical perspective to transnational, and more emphatically regionalist, scholarship involving rigorous engagement with the scales of observation, and scale shifts, in the interpretations of history. I am setting off in this from Reinhart Koselleck's observation that the way we impart and interpret a past phenomenon depends crucially on the time perspective in which we posit and observe it. Koselleck himself, when discussing the notion of *Zeitschichten* (layers of time), pays homage to Herder's emblematic statement that "In reality every mutable thing has within itself the measure of its time; . . . no two worldly things have the same measure of time . . . There are therefore (one can state it properly and boldly) at any one time in the Universe innumerable many times."<sup>7</sup> His theory of historical time is centrally concerned with "different passages of time, each according to the chosen thematic, which reveal different tempos of change". The concept of *Zeitschichten* "gestures, like its geological model, towards several levels of time [*Zeitebenen*] of different duration and differentiable origin, which are nonetheless present and effectual at the same time". "There are different layers of the tempos of change," Koselleck maintained, "that we must theoretically distinguish in order to be able to measure uniqueness and persistence with regard to each other."<sup>8</sup> With the dawn of the "new time", or the *Sattelzeit*, this vertical ("geological") multilayeredness of historical time became compounded with a diachronic one – with the retrospective structuration of the past or, what Koselleck calls, the "temporalization of historical perspective": "History was temporalised in the sense that, thanks to the passing of time, it altered according to the given present, and with growing distance the nature of the past also altered"; historians, then, "did not merely report, they 'created' history".<sup>9</sup>

I shall illustrate this timespan dependency with a comment Hugh Seton-Watson once made when reflecting on his itinerary as a historian of Eastern Europe:

To much of the post-First World War generation, and to liberals of the Wilsonian persuasion, . . . the dissolution of the Habsburg monarchy appeared as the last act of a historical process, the replacement of the monarchical absolutism by democracy. But to the generation that saw the Second World War, and then the almost world-wide decolonization which followed it, the end of Austria-Hungary seemed rather the first act in another process: the disintegration of multinational European empires.<sup>10</sup>

Time then assumes a constitutive, creative role with respect to the content and the interpretation of history: it "becomes a dynamic and historical force in its own right", "acquired a quality of generating experience, which, retrospectively applied, permitted the past to be seen anew".<sup>11</sup> This is how "History", in its modern semantics, came to stand for both reality and representation, historical knowledge and the history of historical science.

This seems, or so it does to me, to invite the question: Could we presume a similar constitutive function or capacity of space? Is our historical interpretation of a phenomenon as crucially dependent on the territorial scale, or "measure", within which we posit and approach it? (In another way this is to suggest that once we opt for a certain scale, we also have to be aware of

the constraints our choice imposes on our understanding.) Rather than bringing preconceived theoretical models onto their supposed subjects and thus spatialise historical reality into, for instance, nation-states, centre–periphery or the “three worlds” of the Cold-War period, to mention just a few powerful models, this question reverses the perspective by asking “just what happens when one thinks and describes historical events in spatial terms”.<sup>12</sup> This is to endow space, and scale as its analytical counterpart, with the “agency” of comprising historical events and of revealing diverse aspects of reality or, in the Koselleck’s words, to take the “space–time constitution of empirical stories” seriously.<sup>13</sup>

Obviously, the above question is not, and cannot be, one of the epistemological consequences of spacing alone; it concerns the immanent connection between the temporal and the spatial multilayeredness of historical experience. The hypothesis about the creative force of spacing implicates both dimensions: the recognition of the precedence of the historian’s point of view – for the localisation of historical statement, that is to say – is synonymous with the idea that perspective should be both temporally and spatially determined, “and that this would result in diverse but equally valid texts on the same substantial matter”.<sup>14</sup> Compared to time, however, the term space has remained underhistoricised and undertheorised in an overall theory of history.

Let me make this clear: by raising the above question, I do not mean to endow time and space with an essentialised capacity to wreak change. But nor do I take them as empty categories to be filled with empirical content. What I have in mind are the inherent temporal and spatial dimensions and distinction of any social interaction and activity. Addressing Southeast-European studies as a particular “regime of spatiality” – a task that can only sketchily be undertaken here – should ideally pursue a twofold purpose. It will seek to find out why – that is, in conjunction with what methodological paradigms, political circumstances or strategies, academic/disciplinary environments and interactions, social or geopolitical experiments, performative acts of under-scoring distances or reciprocity – this form of spatialising historical experience had been, and is, seen to be appropriate. In doing so, it will partake in the ongoing reflection on the flexibilisation of space and link it up to the debate on the scales of observation in the social sciences, particularly in history.<sup>15</sup> In the perspective of this author, two positions seem especially relevant to be distinguished in this sense.

One was suggested by Fernand Braudel when discussing the connection between the various *durées* stratifying the social world. While Braudel accepted that to each temporality there corresponded a particular dimension of social reality, that dimension for him was statistical rather than “ontological”. Social laws are, at bottom, insensitive to the variations of scale, and the observations on a microsociological level allow us “to perceive the more general structural laws, just like the physicist detects the proper laws of physics at an infra-molecular level”. The various *durées*, accordingly the various spaces and scales, “interconnect”, “conjoin each other [*s’emboîtent*] with ease”: they are the invariance of the encompassing and homogeneous flow of history, of the “imperious world time”.<sup>16</sup>

A different perspective has been encapsulated in Jacques Revel’s notion of scale shifts, *jeux d’échelles*, whereby each scale of observation throws into relief (“constructs”) aspects of social

reality, which remain inaccessible or invisible at any other. Contrary to the Braudelian conception of *emboîtement*, the results achieved through the articulation of scales are neither compatible nor cumulative: “the social reality is not the same on the different levels of analysis from which it is observed.” Even if cumulative in its combined effects and duration, the phenomenon appears as a multilayered process, which obeys discontinued, nonsuperposable logics, according to the level of analysis on which one is situated. This “discontinuity” and heterogeneity of historical reality is cognitive: it makes possible the constructions of complex objects which take into account the multilayeredness of the social and discloses previously “locked” aspects of the historical world. At the end of the day, it is not the privileging of one scale over the other but “their correlation, which provides the strongest analytical benefit”. That correlation, however, is not re-creative of a “total” world: indeed the main culprit in all that is precisely the “old mirage of an ‘integral resurrection of the past’”, “the idea that between the parts and the whole there exist quasi-organic homological relations”.<sup>17</sup>

I will formulate my own position in advance: *the national and the (meso)regional perspectives to history chart differentiated “spaces of experience” – i.e., the same occurrences are reported and judged in a different manner on the different scales – by way of displacing the valency of past processes, events, actors and institutions, and creating divergent temporalities, different national and regional historical times.* Put differently, the thesis about the spatial relativity of historical judgment suggests that different objects, i.e., spaces, of enquiry are coextensive with different temporal layers, each of which demands a different methodological approach. If corroborated, this hypothesis would necessarily entail the formulation of another one concerning the relationship between different spaces and scales (e.g., *emboîtement* vs. discontinuity). I’ll return to this second hypothesis at the end of this article.<sup>18</sup>

The “testing ground” for these propositions I propose here are not contemporary texts. These are texts that originated with scholars of the region of Southeastern Europe, more widely known at the time as the Balkans, back in the 1930s and where the historical reality of that region was not only plainly articulated but served as an argument for reformulating the core research agenda of the humanities in the region. This choice of “sources” is deliberate. Attempts to go beyond national frameworks and narrow nationalist historiography by devising alternative frameworks are much older than the present-day proponents of transnationalist approaches might make us believe. Awareness of these preexistent but largely suppressed and unreflected traditions of regionalist scholarship could help us, I believe, timespan the way we, at the present time, conceptualise, contemplate and evaluate regionalism as politics and transnationalism as a scholarly project. Last not least, in view of the epistemological question raised above, referring to an earlier tradition of regionalist scholarship would spare me the need to contextualise the answer in terms of the structuralist–poststructuralist debate.

Obviously it cannot be my purpose here to survey the history of Southeast European studies *in extenso*. Suffice it to say that the first regionalist scholarly schemes originated, during the second half of the nineteenth century, with practitioners of neighbouring human sciences, particularly linguists, literary scholars and ethnographers, while historiography – to the extent it ever, prior to the First World War, ventured beyond the national framework of history – largely

followed and emulated their methods. Awareness of and research into the Balkan linguistic community and folklore/ethnography were the first, and for quite some time the only, areas where the idea of a Balkan commonality thrived. The notion of a Southeastern Europe, as far as it surfaced in academic discourse, stood for a *cultural koine* rather than a historical region.<sup>19</sup> In the interwar period one can observe a duality of autarchic nationalist projects in the human sciences and some efforts at creating a transnational comparative agenda. Although, on the whole, the national framework retained its powerful position, the 1930s and the first half of the 1940s saw the crystallisation of a more rigorous and systematic research programme for the region of Southeastern Europe. The initial attempt at defining the new “science of Balkanology”, as it was called, belongs to the two editors of the Belgrade-based *Revue internationale des études balkaniques* – the Croat Petar Skok (1881–1956) and the Serb Milan Budimir (1891–1975), both of them philologists and classicists. In many ways both the object and the methods of this new science, as developed by them, marked a radical departure from the national paradigm.<sup>20</sup>

Starting from the observation about the “duplication of state particularism with scientific particularism”, Budimir and Skok pleaded for the orienting of national academic research “towards the study of a *Balkan organism* that had constituted one whole since the most distant times”.<sup>21</sup> They came up with a map of the “domains of Balkanology” where comparativism was deemed particularly pertinent: above all history (especially political, cultural and religious), linguistics (which had to deal with not just mutual influences but with “establishing the particularity” of the Balkan linguistic union) and folklore, but also economic development, law, “the written or ‘high’ literature”, arts, architecture and especially those sciences whose object was “the Balkan man” – anthropology, demography, statistics, human geography.

A central aspect of the methodology of that “new interdisciplinary science” was a division of labour corresponding to different scales of investigation: the study of only what is specific to a given people should be left to the specialists in the national sciences. This did not imply a rift between regional and national scholars since it was from the latter that regionalists would extract information about particular aspects, their work presenting, what they called, a “superior interconnectedness” by means of inter-Balkan comparisons. The central contention was that a Balkanological perspective alone was capable of shedding proper light on major historical processes which remained incomprehensible within a national framework. “In essence [Balkanology] represents a system of inter-Balkan comparison,” Budimir and Skok affirmed, “whose main objective is *to reveal, understand and define the Balkan reality* such as it has manifested itself, across time and space, in the various spheres of human activity. To get to know *what was and is typical of the Balkans*, such is the object it envisages for itself.”<sup>22</sup>

Another major proponent of Balkanology, the Romanian medievalist Victor Papacostea (1900–1962), has left us perhaps the most radical assertion of what he called the “impossibility of studying the life of any Balkan people separately” and of the imperative for a transnational and multidisciplinary approach to the past of this part of Europe. “Balkanology,” Papacostea reaffirmed, “aims at revealing the *characteristic laws and circumstances*, under whose action there has developed, century after century, the life of the Balkan peoples, in its whole and for each of them.” Remarkably, Papacostea considered the adoption or forced imposition of the very idea of

the nation-state, one that was “created in the West and for the West”, to have had catastrophic consequences in the Balkans – a region that, unlike western Europe, was marked by a unity of economic geography, of culture and civilisation, of political systems and currents of ideas. Above all it was the “common ethnic base” and the “millennia-long mixture of races that has resulted, ever since antiquity, in the strongly relative value of the idea of nationality in the Balkans”.

Papacostea talked instead of a “Balkan nationality” and a “Balkan society” as well as of a “*homo balcanicus*” – a syncretic type defined by complex ethnogenesis, mental and spiritual structures and linked to “the great Balkan community through organic links coming from a compound and lengthy ancestry”. Under such conditions the idea of nationality remained precarious and uncertain, whereas one realised “how intensive the exchange of influences among these peoples was and how easily important elements of culture and civilisation passed from the one to the other. But above all: how misplaced and ridiculous appear the exaltation of national particularisms.” The system of research that Papacostea promoted in the late 1930s thus directly challenged the legitimacy of the nation-state framework of reference and pleaded for locating the study of national history within a transnational context.<sup>23</sup>

Balkan comparativism as conceived here was not only a multidisciplinary and problem-oriented exercise. It evolved along two interdependent directions and analytical scales: as a study of “mutual influences” and exchange between national entities (what we would call today “transfer history”) and of “common Balkan traits” or “Balkan peculiarity” (“entangled” or “transnational history”). Balkanology was meant to deal with the general, the syncretic – the “Balkan reality”, the “Balkan man”, the “Balkan organism” and “characteristic laws” – not with the nationally specific. It came up with a research agenda and a method aimed at a regional “synthesis drawing on the elements of Balkan interdependence and unity”, as Papacostea formulated it. This, at the same time, did not undermine ethnic and national frameworks: the actual historical “actors” were, invariably and self-evidently, “the Balkan peoples”, if not at all time “the Balkan states”. The proposed division and scale shift seemed to imply two parallel historical existences, interrelated yet distinct, each subordinated to its own “laws”, agencies and rhythm. This relationship deserves a closer look.

The “space–time constitution” of the national and the regional stories appears as diverging in many essential ways. National history and regional history were said to rest on dissimilar objects and methods of study. The shift of spatial perspective also entailed a shift in the manner in which the same occurrences were described and judged. The regionalist and the nationalist historiographical valuations of the role of the Ottoman Turks and their centuries-long domination can serve to highlight these discontinuities.

The national interpretations of the effect of Ottoman rule, a central pillar in the national canons of history in the region, invariably described it as having a deeply disruptive effect on the Balkan organics – both inside the national body and between the individual nations in the region – and as detrimental to civilisation. The regionalist perspective, on the other hand, rendered a starkly different picture and assessment. The period of Ottoman rule was seen, above all, as being responsible for lending social and cultural cohesion to the region and underwriting its unique civilisational character. The spheres where the unifying impact of the Ottomans was found to have



been most consequential for the “regional aggregation” are worth noting. By imposing the same political and social conditions, the Turks had effectively amalgamated the mentality of the Balkan peoples. By favouring, at the same time, the mixture of Balkan races, they had to some extent effaced the mental differences that the previous particularist medieval states had induced. Another unifying factor was the introduction of “Oriental urbanism” – the Balkan city created by the Turks which was “totally different from the ancient and the European” and whose strong impact made itself felt in the Balkan vocabulary of everyday life. Remarkably, even folklore and popular literature more generally were found to be the product of Turkish unification: “Among all those peoples, the period of Turkish domination had stimulated the blossoming of national epopees [which are] major sources of pride for these peoples.” It was to the Turkish regime, again, that the romantic literary movement, the “Balkan romanticism”, owed its special complexion, so different from those of European romanticisms. Moreover, the Ottomans were praised as having been protective of Balkan diversity and national “individualities” due to the fact that they had never implemented the denationalising policies characteristic of many European states.<sup>24</sup>

Here was an interpretation which squarely defied both the national and the European canons of history: individual Balkan renaissances, and quite nearly national “individualities” themselves, became conceivable only within the framework of the Ottoman Empire; thus the entire romantic structure of nationhood in its Eurocentric mould was turned on its head without subverting the state-building project as such.

But the relationship between the different scales, the regional and the national, was not just one of disjuncture but of mutual conditioning as well. As it happened, the same regionalist scholars operated on another “Balkanistic” register underwriting a notion of “Balkanism” closely replicating national autochthonism. Two telling imports from the then prevalent nationalist visions – the argument of the profound cultural difference between the countries of the region and the Occident, and the notion of regeneration – became hallmarks of interwar Balkanology. Here are a few illustrations of each.

In the interpretation of the regionalists, the “immanent” Balkan violence, that proverbial European indictment, was asserted to be utterly alien to the local tradition and imposed from the outside. It had made its inroads during the Balkan “Risorgimento”, the period of the national struggles and the creation of the free Balkan states, when a major “reorientation of the Balkan civilisation” took place: the Oriental culture in its Islamic form gave way to the western culture based on scientific and technological progress. All Balkan peoples, once liberated, aimed to develop in accordance with western concepts. “The Balkan men of letters and the scholars of that time considered it to be their primary duty to approach as much as possible the European spirit, to ‘Europeanise,’ to ‘westernise’ themselves, to imitate the ‘European taste’.” It was at this juncture that the Balkan scholars saw the source of a major historical regression: “The European civilisation failed to give the Balkan peoples internal cohesion, appeasement and good mutual relations; it failed to develop among them the spirit of association or nourish the spirit of true independence . . . Europe, which had suffered and continues to suffer from lack of cohesion, was not in a position to bestow on the Balkans what itself did not possess.” Hence the “evident paradox” that a Balkanologist came to encounter: all previous civilisations – the Hellenistic, the Roman, the Byzantine, the Ottoman – had

brought unity to the region, while “modern European culture during the Balkan Risorgimento, on the contrary, divided the inhabitants of the peninsula politically and morally while, at the same time, levelling them through its cultural influence.” The “curious result” was that the only assets Europe readily acknowledged in the local peoples – their epic poetry, music, painting, architecture – dated from the times prior to the European penetration of the Balkans.<sup>25</sup>

Where did this proto-Orientalist critique lead? The conceptual tool kit of the then nationalists (or what Sorin Antohi has called “ethno-ontologists”) and the Balkanologists when devising solutions were in many ways similar. A new authentic spirit, regenerated and elevated to a new level; a new sense of an all-Balkan fatherland; a new Balkan culture based on a longstanding tradition of unity in diversity, regional self-reliance and self-sufficiency – these were the key concepts on which the politics of the “new Balkan science” was made to rest. They resonate intimately with the prevailing “nativist” currents and autarchic thrusts in the nationalist political and intellectual thought of the late 1920s and the 1930s. The themes about the disruptive and degrading impact of Europe and inorganic western imports on the texture of society, the breach of tradition and the lack of cultural continuity, the call for liberation from the tyranny of western precedence and authority, the search for a new identity and a new mission – these were *topoi* that transgressed the boundaries of the national and the regional discourses.

On both levels, furthermore, the prevalent visions for the future, tellingly enough, were premised on the notion of “rebirth”, “revival”, or “regeneration”. The three previous renaissances – “the Latin-Christian of Charlemagne”, “the Romance of the fourteenth century”, and “the German of the eighteenth century” – could not fulfil the “Balkan ideal of fraternal peace and mutual tolerance”. In contrast to them, “the Balkanic renaissance, which should and could embrace the whole of humankind, will not be limited to one race, one religion or one nation . . . It should be supra-national and supra-confessional . . . Only in this way could be raised, in the spiritual sphere, that global empire whose creation Alexander the Great dreamt of. Only thus will the Balkan destinies . . . follow the route laid out by ancient humanism, which can merge with modern Americanism.” Thus envisioned, the Balkanic renaissance was asserted to be not an obsolete utopia, but the inevitable consequence of the needs of the contemporary civilised world: “The empire of Americanism and technique cannot be maintained unless it concludes a durable union with the empire of humanism and the spirit, whose thrones had been occupied by so many sons of the Balkan land . . . One of the Balkan destinies resides . . . in that these peoples could also lay down the conditions for a harmonic fusion of Americanism and humanism, a harmony which the present-day humankind clearly feels a need for”.<sup>26</sup>

In many ways, the regional here exhibits the features of methodological nationalism – a sort of national autochthonism writ large. The national and the regional operated with essentially the same stock of spatial determinants of identity, encapsulated by the notion of *catena mundi*. There was also a clear tendency of replicating the national “cyclical time”, marked by spiritual rebirths or returns to a preexistent authenticity, with a similarly structured regional temporality. It reflected a drive to move away from the linear concept of time – and from its metaphoric derivatives such as “primitivity”, “belatedness”, “backwardness” “catching-up” – and assert the “space-time uniqueness” of the region (as an extrapolated nation) and, in the same stroke, its capacity to generate “uni-

versality". This double manoeuvre became possible through an identical operation of indigenising the norms and the achievements of western civilisation that characterised much of the interwar metapolitical national discourse. Not only did the Balkans prove to be the birthplace of fundamental western values and ideals, thus stultifying the claim about belatedness and backwardness – a favoured repositioning in most nationalist discourses. It had actually preserved them in their pure, unspoiled form and could now bring them back to Europe and the world: indeed, the Balkan renaissance "should always keep its eye on the whole of humankind and the whole humaneness".<sup>27</sup>

Discursive resemblances, migration of concepts and common identitarian dilemmas notwithstanding, the two scales signified different "spaces of experience" and charted different "horizons of expectation". The historical continuity and self-containment of the nation *qua* ethnic community were strongly relativised – indeed undermined – when being transposed on the multinational, occasionally "supranational" region. Balkanology sought the displacement of the nationalist semantic framework whereby the proper understanding of one's nationality and true patriotism would entail the acknowledgment for their transnational embedment. "Our patriotism, if it wants to be real, should be a Balkan patriotism," asserted the founder of the Belgrade Balkan Institute.<sup>28</sup> Finally, what national canons conventionally deplored as implacable contradictions, generated by "foreign" (e.g. Byzantine, Ottoman, European) intervention or emulation, Balkanology described as a precious synthesis endowed with a global mission: the "empire of Americanism" and the "empire of humanism", "biology–ethics: an antithesis that will become a synthesis", as the Croat philosopher Vladimir Dvorniković put it.<sup>29</sup>

It should have become clear that the relationship between the transnational and the national historical frameworks gives full support to neither the Braudelian nor the microhistorical position. (One might evoke at this juncture Braudel's scorn for *la petite histoire* and *l'histoire événementielle*, matched only by that of "fundamentalist" microhistorians, such as Giovanni Levi, for "structural history".) Instead it points to a relationship of mutual conditioning without merging.

There exists between the different scales a methodological aporia, which does not allow their contamination: a hiatus, because their extension cannot be forced into congruence, neither in experience nor in scientific reflection. The interrelation between different levels should not be allowed to annihilate their differences if they are to retain their epistemological object of disclosing the multiple strata of history.<sup>30</sup> In this perspective the regional/transnational and the national cannot be viewed as alternatives: albeit different, the "histories" they render on the same matter are present and effectual at the same time; even when incompatible, they are equally valid. The disputes among human and social scientists about the validation of the one or the other scale are not likely to subside on this admission. But, theoretically and empirically, there seems to be much to gain from a consensus on the spatial determinacy (and limitations) of our judgments and on the importance of taking the notion of *Zeitraum* – "time-space" – as one structuring our historical knowledge, literally.

### NOTES

- 1 An extended version of this article, mainly on account of the empirical material involved, was published in the journal *Southeastern Europe* (Leiden: Brill), presenting a part of my ongoing survey of the history and ideologies of Southeast-European studies since the nineteenth century. Diana Mishkova, "What is in Balkan History? Spaces and Scales in the Tradition of Southeast-European Studies", *Southeastern Europe* 34:1 (2010): 55–86.
- 2 Deborah Cohen and Maura O'Connor (eds), *Comparison and History: Europe in Cross-National Perspective*, New York/London: Routledge, 2004; Matthias Middell, "Konjunkturen des Vergleichs im 20. Jahrhundert", in Waltraud Schreiber (ed.), *Der Vergleich: Eine Methode zur Förderung historischer Kompetenzen*, Neuried: Ars una, 2005, 11–30.
- 3 Arno Strohmeier, "Historische Komparatistik und die Konstruktion von Geschichtsregionen: der Vergleich als Methode der historischen Europaforschung", *Jahrbücher für Geschichte und Kultur Südosteuropas* 1 (1999): 39–55; Wolfgang Höpken, "Zwischen 'allgemeiner Geschichtswissenschaft' und historischer Regionaldisziplin: Die südosteuropäische Geschichtswissenschaft heute", *Südosteuropa Mitteilungen* 1 (2006): 40–49.
- 4 Stefan Troebst, "Introduction: What's in a Historical Region? A Teutonic Perspective", *European Review of History* 10:2 (2003): 173–88; Cf. Wendy Bracewell and Alex Drace-Francis, "South-Eastern Europe: History, Concepts, Boundaries", *Balkanologie* 3:2 (1999): 47–66.
- 5 See, for example, the special issue of *Balkanologie* (3:2, 1999) examining the definitions of Southeastern Europe from various disciplinary perspectives. Cf. Alex Drace-Francis, "Zur Geschichte des Südosteuropakonzepts bis 1914", in Karl Kaser, Dagmar Gramshammer-Hohl and Robert Pichler (eds), *Europa und die Grenzen im Kopf*, Klagenfurt/Celovec: Wieser (2003): 275–86.
- 6 As far as the Balkan region is concerned, the divergent positions came out in the debate between Holm Sundhaussen ("Europa balcanica: Der Balkan als historischer Raum Europas", *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 25:4 (1999): 626–53) and Maria Todorova ("The Balkans as Category of Analysis: Borders, Space, Time", in Gerald Stourzh (ed.), *Annäherungen an eine europäische Geschichtsschreibung*, Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (2002), 57–83.
- 7 Reinhart Koselleck, *Zeitschichten. Studien zur Historik*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002, 20; Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, transl. Keith Tribe, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985, xxii, 247.
- 8 Koselleck, *Zeitschichten*, 9, 207.
- 9 Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 250, 144.
- 10 Hugh Seton-Watson, "On Trying to be a Historian of Eastern Europe", in Dennis Deletant and Harry Hanak (eds), *Historians as Nation-Builders: Central and Southeast Europe*, London: Macmillan, 1988, 1–14 (3).
- 11 Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 246, 141.
- 12 Karl Schlögel, *Im Raume lesen wir die Zeit: Über Zivilisationsgeschichte und Geopolitik*, Munich: Carl Hanser, 2003, 9.
- 13 Koselleck, *Zeitschichten*, 81.
- 14 Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 141.
- 15 On the latter debate from other disciplinary perspectives see, for example, Nicolas Verdier, "L'échelle dans quelques sciences sociales: Petite histoire d'une absence d'interdisciplinarité", in O. Orain, D. Pumain, C. Rozemblat, Nicolas Verdier (eds), *Echelles et temporalités en géographie*, Paris : CNRS, 2004, 25–56.

- 16 Fernand Braudel, "Histoire et Science sociales: La longue durée", *Annales ESC* 4 (1958): 725–53.
- 17 Jacques Revel (ed.), *Jeux d'échelles. Le micro-analyse à l'expérience*, Paris: Seuil-Gallimard, 1996; Carlo Ginzburg, *A distance: Neuf essais sur le point de vue en histoire*, Paris: Gallimard, 2001, 147–64.
- 18 The history of Southeast-European studies, more properly the ways various generations and academic subcultures defined the object of their enquiries in such terms, across a field which brings together (geo)politics, historiographical and methodological currents, disciplinary and institutional venues, provides the broader research canvas of this article. For the history of regionalist historiography on the example of Central, Southeastern and Northern Europe, see the respective chapter, coauthored by this writer (on Southeastern Europe), Bo Stråth (on Northern Europe) and Balazs Trencsényi (on Central Europe) in Matthias Middell and Lluís Roura y Aulinas (eds), *World, Global and European Histories as Challenges to National Representations of the Past*, Oxford: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
- 19 On the first significant attempts at devising regional frames of historical interpretation during the latter part of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, highlighting the interplay of universal, regional and national spaces in the oeuvre of the Bulgarian ethnographer Ivan Shishmanov and the Romanian historian Nicolae Iorga, see Mishkova, "What's in the Balkan History?", 60–70.
- 20 Not surprisingly, this "metaregional" agenda, and a number of institutional venues supporting it, had an immediate political incentive: they emerged simultaneously with or briefly after the conclusion of the Balkan pact in 1934.
- 21 Milan Budimir and Petar Skok. "But et signification des études balkaniques", *Revue internationale des études balkaniques* 1 (1934): 1–28 (2–3).
- 22 *Ibid.*, 23–24, my emphasis.
- 23 Victor Papacostea, "Balcanologia", *Sud-Estul și Contextul European* 6 (1996): 69–78; Victor Papacostea, "Avant-Propos", *Balcania* 1 (1938): iii–vii; and Victor Papacostea, "La Péninsule Balkanique et le problème des études comparées", *Balcania* 6 (1943): iii–xxi.
- 24 Budimir and Skok, "But et signification des études balkaniques", 5–6, 12.
- 25 Petar Skok and Milan Budimir, "Destinées balkaniques", *Revue internationale des études balkaniques* 2:4 (1936): 601–12.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 610, 612–13.
- 27 Here I cannot delve more deeply into the circumstances that made Southeast European regionalism seem a viable option. That would have involved discussing a wide range of problems – relating to state sovereignty and international realignments, development, renegotiating the political community's relationship to the transnational economic, social and cultural processes – to mention just a few.
- 28 Ratko Parežanin, *Za balkansko jedinstvo: Osnivanje, program i rad Balkanskog Instituta u Beogradu (1934–1941)*, Munich: n.p., 1980, 24.
- 29 Vladimir Dvorniković, *Naša kulturna orijentacija u današnjoj Evropi*, Zagreb: V. Vasić, 1930, 103.
- 30 Milan Budimir, "Древността и балканско-славянското възраждане" [Antiquity and the Balkan-Slavic revival], *Родина* [Rodina] 1:4 (1939): 45–56 (56). Here I am borrowing from Koselleck's reflections on the relationship between event and structure (Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 105–115), not because I presume close homology to that between different scales of observation, but because Koselleck's understanding of the *nature* and *epistemological implications* of the relationship between these two temporal entities ties in nicely with my reading of the relationship between different scales.