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- 1 In the popular and scholarly imaginations, the region of the world bearing the label Southeastern Europe (among others) has typically been conceptualized as either a transitional zone, an area of cultural hybridity and cross-fertilization, or as a site of violent, “tectonic” culture shifts. The area thus appears either as a linking bridge or as a dividing fault line between civilizational complexes. This article examines such problematic understandings from the disciplinary viewpoint of the anthropologist, the ostensible custodian of culture and the culture area. In doing so, I address a series of questions : what spaces have Southeastern Europe and its subsets (like the Balkans) occupied vis-à-vis broad constructs of symbolic geography, such as those of “Europe” (West and East) and the “Mediterranean”? How have specifically anthropological definitions of the region built upon key symbolic boundary markers like those demarcating Occident and Orient, democracy and dictatorship, capitalism and feudalism and so on ? Finally, what are the political and epistemological consequences of defining the world in terms of such culture areas ?

Discovering the Southeastern Europe

- 2 In fixing the boundaries of putative culture areas like Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and Southeastern Europe, anthropologists have not engaged in wholesale geographic imagination or invention, of course, but rather have drawn upon what Gupta and Ferguson deem “the prior conceptual segmentation of the world into different cultures, areas, and sites that makes the enterprise of fieldwork possible”¹. Anthropology thus “inherited a field of significance that preceded its formalization”². Among the deeply rooted images upon which anthropologists in Southeastern Europe have drawn are those familiar to most scholars of the region : of Eastern Europe and

the Balkans as liminal spaces or *demi-mondes* poised between darkness and light³. The transitional status accorded the region reflected the manner in which the moral and geographical entity of “Europe” has been historically constructed in opposition to other geographical and cultural complexes, notably the Orient⁴, with internal symbolic axes in turn differentiating Northern from Southern Europe, and later, Western from Eastern Europe. Lying at the intersection of these various axes, the areas deemed the “Mediterranean”, “Eastern Europe”, and the “Balkans” have been paradoxically associated with both classical antiquity and modern barbarism. In the 18th and 19th centuries, for instance, the Mediterranean was popularly viewed by Northern Europeans (and some Americans) as the “cradle of civilization(s)” whose lessons were eagerly absorbed by aristocratic gentlemen and (as time went on) ever larger numbers of middle-class tourists. John Pemble's study of Victorian and Edwardian travelers to various Mediterranean locales suggests that many apprehended the region as hauntingly familiar, as recalling “the childhood of man”, freedom and life ; at the same time, many visitors regarded the people themselves with disdain⁵. The Romantic movement — and in particular poets like Byron, Keats and Shelley — often contrasted the beauty of the landscape and the architecture of Southern Europe with the roughness of its people, envisioned as decadent or degraded after the evils of foreign conquest (whether it be Bourbon, Austrian, or Turkish).

- 3 In discussing the peoples of Southern Europe, many 19th-century travel accounts focused on the most “primitive” or backward group, the peasantry. Peasant women proved an especial object of curiosity⁶ and, at least in the areas that came to be known as “the Balkans”, were often praised for their beauty in contrast to the rudeness of their menfolk⁷. The Southern peasant, like the non-European primitive, seemed to embody the past in the present as a kind of living fossil⁸. « For many travellers, the south of Europe, like “the South” in general, was their own past. It was equally encompassed in an ideological map of geographical and existential opposition », writes anthropologist Caroline Brettell in her study of 19th-century travel accounts⁹. Just as the peasant possessed both positive and negative connotations for the Northern European, the South in general created contradictory impressions : on the one hand, a place of sunshine and health, light and immortality ; on the other hand, a land of decay, disease and corruption.
- 4 What came to be known as “Eastern Europe” and its Balkan subset represented similarly liminal spaces, physically and historically overlapping as they did upon the ambiguous domain marked out by classical antiquity and contemporary backwardness. Well into the 18th century, for example, the mountainous range that gave the Balkans its geographic appellation was typically referred to by its classical designation of *Haemus* (from the Latin) or *Aemus* (from the Greek)¹⁰. In contrast to the absolute foreignness embodied by the notion of the Orient, then, what became known as Eastern Europe instead seemed to constitute a transitional realm poised between light and darkness, civilization and barbarism. This West/East division displaced (albeit incompletely — perhaps it is better to say they complicated) an older North/South conceptualization that viewed the South (locus of classical antiquity and early Renaissance humanism) as the pre-eminent site of civilization¹¹. Attention to the ancient past ultimately stimulated interest in the ethnographic present, facilitating the reconceptualization of the internal European border from North/South to West/East. Notes Maria Todorova, « the effort to study the ancient world through the lives of the

contemporary inhabitants of the classic lands brought an awareness of the present Greeks and their problems. This was soon extended to the different Slavs and other ethnic groups inhabiting the peninsula who became the live figures of what came increasingly to be seen as the Volksmuseum of Europe »¹².

- 5 The work of Herder and other scholars interested in philology and cultural diffusion furthered the European imaginary's movement into the "ethnographic present". In Herder's intellectual trajectory, Eastern Europe became increasingly figured as the domain of the pure and uncontaminated folk (*Volk*) and their cultural products (*Kultur*). As Ismail Kadare's folklorists breathlessly gasp in his novel, *The File on H*, the Balkans in particular appeared to be the "last living laboratory" of epic ballads. Voicing what had become a common-place view of the region, Kadare's 20th century protagonists are (fictional) descendants of earlier travelers and folklorists, such as the Venetian priest Alberto Fortis and the Serbian philologist Vuk Karadžić, who had viewed the Balkans as a repository of traditional customs and songs.
- 6 In his intellectual history of Eastern Europe, Larry Wolff focuses on its "imagining" by key Enlightenment thinkers like Voltaire, as well as more "native" intellectuals like Fortis and Karadžić. Todorova's *Imagining the Balkans* offers a detailed picture for the "discovery" of the Eastern European subset known as the Balkans. Todorova offers a broader range of sources for Balkan imagery than does Wolff for Eastern Europe and admirably devotes space to the various ways in which peoples of Southeastern Europe have understood, elaborated or rejected notions of Balkans and Balkanness ; this issue of just *who* is Balkan or who is European remains hotly contested in contemporary Southeastern Europe¹³. Todorova sees a particular understanding of "Balkanism" as having evolved independently from "Orientalism" and in certain aspects against it, given that Balkan self-identities have been resolutely constructed in opposition to "Orientals", i.e. Ottoman rulers and their legacies. In contrast to Orientalism, then, which sets up a clear-cut dichotomy between East and West, « balkanism is a discourse about an imputed ambiguity »¹⁴. As with Eastern Europe more generally, the Balkans have thus come to be explicitly defined as a crossroads of civilizations, with Balkan peoples appearing to abide « in a twilight zone illuminated neither by the radiance of the West nor by the exotic glow of the East »¹⁵.
- 7 Like Todorova's work, Vesna Goldsworthy's recent study *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination* focuses on the construction of Balkan backwardness. Goldsworthy offers a different twist, however, in her exploration of « the concept of imaginative, textual colonisation »¹⁶. She does so by narrowing in on British imaginings of the Balkan peninsula, specifically popular culture representations (« vampires, spies, murder and the Orient Express ») in novels and films. Although approaching the topic of the Balkans' "invention" from diverse starting points, both Goldsworthy and Todorova's books reveal that no one concept (or stereotype) of the Balkans exists.
- 8 Todorova does suggest, however, that by the beginning of the 20th century, a more consolidated image of the Balkans began to crystallize outside of the region. The contentious Macedonian question, the Balkan Wars and Franz Ferdinand's assassination in Sarajevo linked the region with an image of endemic violence, cruelty, terrorism and fanaticism. The interwar period brought to the fore another leitmotiv already long present, that of cultural and racial hybridity. 18th- and 19th-century travel accounts had often emphasized the "mongrel nature" of Balkan peoples like those Dalmatians whom one female traveler depicted as « wild like animals » singing « in

their half-Latin, half-Slavic tongue »¹⁷. Though these early descriptions expressed a sense of strangeness, they did not yet possess the wholly pejorative connotation that they would acquire by the 20th century, when they became associated with « hybrid races » and « the handicap of heterogeneity »¹⁸.

- 9 This intermixture presumably explained the tendency to “balkanization”, a term that entered the popular lexicon after World War I to signify what American journalist Paul Scott Mowrer called « the creation, in a region of hopelessly mixed races, of a medley of small states with more or less backward populations, economically and financially weak, covetous, intriguing, afraid, a continual prey to the machinations of the great powers, and to the violent promptings of their own passions »¹⁹. Having entered both journalistic and political discourse, “balkanization” also became a convenient shorthand in academic writing for the danger supposedly inherent in the breakup of « larger political units into smaller, mutually hostile states »²⁰. Though these images of balkanization and factionalism receded somewhat from the intellectual horizon during the subsequent Cold War — replaced by images of collectivistic and authoritarian societies²¹ — since 1989/1991 they have been revived together with their most negative connotations, among them tribalism, barbaric cruelty and atrocities, and blood feud. Indeed, in popular discourse at least, events in former Yugoslavia appear to have given new currency to the image of balkanization as a defining *cultural* characteristic of Southeastern Europe, separating it off to some degree from the rest of Eastern Europe or Central Europe. Given this broad canvas of scholarly, political, and journalistic mappings of Southeastern Europe, how have anthropologists in particular conceptualized this area and its peoples ?

Area studies

- 10 Without a doubt, anthropologists have drawn upon the rich field of images and classifications of the region that my summary here has only hinted at. At the same time, however, Anglo-American anthropological thought has also borne the imprint of specific disciplinary conventions and usage. Given the durability of the culture area notion in anthropology, the historical development of the concept — which constitutes an important part of both the construction of knowledge and the institutional framework (the organization of courses, departments and so on) of anthropology and other disciplines — merits some discussion. By the end of the 19th century, evolutionary classifications of societies and cultures *in time* began to give way to classifications *in space*. Rather than categorizing societies by means of a linear and temporally organized framework (i.e. primitive or civilized, thus less or more advanced upon the evolutionary timeline), the culture area primarily categorized societies across space and according to ostensibly stable sets of culture traits. As stated in the 1968 edition of the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, « Culture areas are geographical territories in which characteristic culture patterns are recognizable through repeated associations of specific traits and, usually, through one or more modes of subsistence that are related to the particular environment »²².
- 11 In anthropology, this particular notion of culture areas developed in the context of museum work, much of it initially focused on native peoples of the Americas. Indeed, the timeless ethnographic moment embodied by the “new” museum display techniques of life groups and dioramas reflects the static view of culture underwriting the very

notion of culture areas²³. While I refer here primarily to an Anglo-American (and, to some degree, French) tradition of anthropology, thereby neglecting a continental European folkloric discipline focused on the study of “popular traditions”²⁴, these understandings of culture areas nonetheless resonate with the Herderian ideas of *Volk* so crucial to that folkloric tradition. Furthermore, this similarity is not coincidental since German-born and educated Franz Boas, the so-called “father of American cultural anthropology”, contributed to U.S. anthropology precisely this Herderian notion of *Kultur*²⁵. Boas helped make culture (and the culture area) the primary focus of American anthropology, in contrast to British and French preoccupations with society and social structure²⁶.

- 12 Together with his students and colleagues Otis Mason, Clark Wissler and Alfred Kroeber, Franz Boas articulated and then refined the culture area concept through efforts to establish areal subdivisions for North American Indian groups. Wissler, for example, attempted to refine the area concept by positing culture centers based upon ethnic factors from which traits diffused outwards and subsequently became fixed by environmental conditions. Heeding Wissler's admonition that « a culture is not to be comprehended until the list of its traits approaches completeness »²⁷, Kroeber and his students painstakingly compiled trait inventories in order to locate the culture centers or climaxes²⁸ from which diffusion originated. Throughout the 1940s, the laborious work of compiling trait lists continued apace and generated massive amounts of data.
- 13 The rise of area studies in the Anglo-American academies after World War II signaled a transformation in the conceptualization and institutionalization of the culture area concept. Within the United States, a broad shift occurred from salvage anthropology's classification and documentation of “vanishing” native cultures to the pragmatic training of linguistic and cultural specialists in areas of vital national interest. The exigencies of global leadership brought by the Second World War and the subsequent Cold War provided the impetus for this change, as « governments discovered an alarming shortage of individuals who were seriously acquainted with the languages, cultures, and topographical characteristics of the world areas in which troops had to fight and about which important political and social decisions had to be made »²⁹.
- 14 The Soviet Union/Eastern Europe and the Middle East were targeted as particularly vital to U.S. strategic interests and after the war Columbia and Harvard Universities (among others) quickly established Russian and East European study centers³⁰. France and Britain also participated, often with American financial support, in the institutional building of area studies or further developed their own traditions of area studies in places like the School of Slavonic and East European Studies at the University of London. In 1955, for example, the Rockefeller Foundation awarded monies to the École Pratique des Hautes Études for the development of studies in the Far East, Soviet Union, India and Islam. Six years later the British University Grants Committee similarly allocated funds for Hayter Centres specializing in area studies³¹.
- 15 The anthropological articulation of culture area concepts for Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean — problematic conceptualizations in and of themselves and at whose even more problematic intersection sits Southeastern Europe — were inextricably bound up with the creation of these interdisciplinary area studies programs and more indirectly with larger geopolitical power shifts. The establishment of NATO bases in the Mediterranean, the threat of communism in Italy and Greece (persisting well into the 1950's), the fear of a Soviet land invasion of Europe through the Balkans, and the

perceived dangers of “Arab nationalism” rank among the prime considerations which rendered both Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean objects of intense interest to Anglo-American policymakers³².

- 16 As a recognized and delimited domain within anthropology, Mediterranean studies began to crystallize in the 1950s in response to British anthropologist E.E. Evans-Pritchard's insistence that anthropologists should conduct fieldwork in “complex societies”. Despite the move to study closer to home, anthropologists still sought out the marginal and the exotic. Thus it was not businessmen in London or New York who anthropologists took as their subjects but rather isolated, “morally backward” peasant communities in the Mediterranean. Alternatively, anthropologists turned their attention to what Katherine Verdery has called the “Communist Other”, often seen to be critically (perhaps fatally) hampered by Czarist or Ottoman legacies of inefficiency and stagnation, as well as by “Asiatic despotism” and Asiatic modes of production³³.
- 17 As a self-conscious discourse of Mediterranean anthropology developed, initial attempts at regional definition relied heavily upon geographical and climatic features, following upon Fernand Braudel's extended discussion of a homogeneous climate³⁴. Anthropologists soon went beyond Braudel's own circumscribed claims to a historical unity extending only through the 16th century, however, and attempted to identify in the contemporary Mediterranean common cultural traits. Anthropologist David Gilmore contends that a Braudelian understanding of historical interchange alone does not make for a culture area: « intense mutual contact does not by itself justify a “unity” label. Were this so, then the entire Hispanic world would constitute a unity, and to stretch the point so would the Sea of Japan or even the North Atlantic. It is rather the combination of historical convergences with synchronic parallels in culture, all within a homogeneous environment, that provides both internal consistency and distinctiveness to the Mediterranean area »³⁵.
- 18 In the face of the enormous linguistic, ethnic and religious diversity of the circum-Mediterranean, anthropologists have argued for an internal consistency to the region on the basis of cultural traits such as scratch plow agriculture, urban orientation, dowry, patronage, and social inequality accompanied by or masked by egalitarian ideologies³⁶.
- 19 In seeking to identify *the* dominant institution or complex that characterizes and therefore embodies the geographical area of the circum-Mediterranean, anthropologists including Pitt-Rivers, J.G. Peristiany and Pierre Bourdieu (as well as a later generation of scholars like Gilmore) quickly fastened upon the so-called “honour and shame complex”. According to this view, Mediterranean societies have in common notions of male honour largely defined in terms of the potentially shameful behavior of female kin and affines³⁷. Despite extensive criticism of this notion in recent years, “honour and shame” remains the privileged cultural diacritic for a putative Mediterranean cultural unity.
- 20 Deeming traits like honour and shame “gatekeeping concepts”³⁸, which work to delimit the range of inquiry and set the direction for the field, anthropologists like Arjun Appadurai have also attacked the broader notion of the culture area supposedly defined by such traits. A few anthropologists who work within so-called Mediterranean societies, like Michael Herzfeld, have gone so far as to deny a regional unity outright. Yet in spite of Herzfeld's reiterated assertions that « we may one day be able to look back on “Mediterranean anthropology” (...) as a culturally, politically and historically

localized discourse »³⁹, most anthropologists accept the classification of the Mediterranean as a cultural entity of some sort, although debates regarding the nature and extent of that unity prove heated. Concepts like honour and shame even appear to be enjoying a revival of sorts in explanations of recent events in the former Yugoslavia, as well as in the re-invocation of indigenous ethnographic concepts like that of Jovan Cvijić's Dinaric man⁴⁰.

- 21 While notions like that of honour and shame often hindered the critical anthropological investigation of Mediterranean societies, the conception of Eastern Europe within anthropology has been even less self-consciously articulated (and less deconstructed) than that of the Mediterranean. The taken-for-granted nature of Eastern Europe as a conceptual entity (at least until 1989) reflected the Cold War political divisions which appeared to render its boundaries obvious and unproblematic (Eastern Europe = Soviet bloc + socialist Yugoslavia and Albania). Prior to World War II, anthropological work in Eastern Europe had tended to focus upon the Balkans, particularly Albania, and the joint family form known as the *zadruga*⁴¹. In the Cold War era, what work was done in Eastern Europe remained weighted towards Yugoslav materials, especially in relation to kinship, migration, industrialization and rural-urban relationships. The influence of this work in broader discussions of European kinship remained slight, however, until fairly recently. As Maria Todorova notes, broad typologies of European family forms often ignored the Balkans and instead discussed Southern Europe primarily in terms of Italian materials⁴².
- 22 Ironically, then, Southeastern spaces like Yugoslavia fell under and in some ways typified the Eastern European rubric, as well as the Mediterranean one, at the same time that they (like these regions generally) remained marginal in broader theoretical discussions. Given its early repudiation of Soviet hegemony and its experiments with self-management and non-alignment, Yugoslavia proved problematic even within the conceptualization of Eastern Europe. (Such difficulties were compounded for Balkan societies like Greece, which were neither Slavic nor socialist but were "Mediterranean".) Furthermore, little of the pioneering work on traditional Balkan peasant society and its "modernization" explicitly conceptualized the region or made claims about Southeastern Europe or Eastern Europe as a whole⁴³.

A geopolitical zone

- 23 Since the *détente* of the mid-1970's (and then again post-1989), a considerable amount of work has been done on other East European countries such as Hungary, Poland and Romania. These states played an important role in the conceptual crystallization of Eastern Europe laid out by Joel Halpern (a scholar of Serbia) and David Kideckel (a student of Romania) in their 1983 review article on the « Anthropology of Eastern Europe ». This article helped define the field constituted by a new generation of Anglo-American scholars which included Gail Kligman, Katherine Verdery, and Martha Lampland, as well as Kideckel and the Halperns, working in Eastern / Southeastern Europe.
- 24 Halpern and Kideckel delimited the region of Eastern Europe along standard geopolitical lines as being comprised by « the Slavic states outside the U.S.S.R. and the geographically contiguous states of Albania, Hungary, and Romania, excluding East Germany for sociocultural historical reasons »⁴⁴. They defined Eastern Europe as

characterized by 1) a rural orientation, given that the « bases of East European national identities have resided historically with the rural folk »⁴⁵ ; 2) an ethnic shatter zone in which ethnic affiliation often coincides with religious affiliations ; and 3) (from 1945 to 1989) state socialism marked by central planning. Halpern and Kideckel's comment that « the historical dynamics of this region form an analog in terms of cultural processes to Southeast Asia »⁴⁶ — Southeast Asia representing a kind of “leftover category”, defined more by what it is not than by what it is — underlines the difficulty anthropologists and others have had of constructing a unified Eastern European culture area, let alone of situating an area like Southeastern Europe (or one of its component parts, like the former Yugoslavia) within such an area. Paradoxically, then, Eastern Europe has appeared simultaneously as an “obvious” region and a “non” region defined in part by what it is not.

- 25 Historian Garrison Walters' description of Eastern Europe offers one typical example of this conceptual hedging on the part of scholars. In 1988, Walters wrote of a region which only a year later would undergo a radical political transformation, « perhaps the only definition that could approach unanimous support is one that simply points out that the solidly Russian areas to the east and the solidly German and Italian lands to the west are *not* a part of Eastern Europe »⁴⁷. Such a definition effectively excludes the areas where I have focused my own anthropological research, the border between Italy and former Yugoslavia. Not surprisingly, it is in such border areas that the difficulties (not to mention the absurdities) of fixing the boundaries of culture areas becomes most apparent. Defining Eastern Europe primarily by political alignments, Walters includes Yugoslavia and Albania with the (former) Soviet bloc states since they shared the same communist “milieu” (a statement, no doubt, that many Albanians and Yugoslavs would have contested). Walters gives Greece a kind of honorary status since « Greece, non-communist after a near miss, will be mentioned frequently simply because the Greek people and their culture had such a profound impact upon the Balkans »⁴⁸.
- 26 As Walter's comments hint at, notions of the Balkans or of Southeastern Europe have remained as poorly defined as the larger Eastern Europe category of which they form a subset. Both inside and outside of Anglo-American anthropology, understandings of the Balkans often rest on primarily geographical references to the states that occupy or border the Balkan peninsula as defined by cartographers : Albania, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Greece⁴⁹. Events in former Yugoslavia during the 1990s, however, suggest the renewed currency of ideas of balkanization as defining, in tautological fashion, the Balkans and as separating this area off from the rest of Eastern Europe (home of transitology) and from Central Europe (site of a renewed vision of Mitteleuropean civility). Although the term “balkanization” is also frequently used in a generic sense⁵⁰, popular discourse about the Yugoslav wars now tends to re-anchor balkanization geographically and to locate it in a primordial ethnicism supposedly specific to the “powder keg of Europe”⁵¹. Among anthropologists, the response to this primordial thesis has been either to counterattack with a kind of historical perennialism, or as has been more common, to proffer instrumental explanations which locate the Yugoslav crisis in the very recent machinations of indigenous élites⁵².
- 27 Now, perhaps more than ever, situating and defining Southeastern Europe has become problematic since the historical and cultural differences that separated Southeastern Europe from the rest of the Cold War bloc of socialist states appear to have been deepened by post-1989 events. Some anthropologists have nonetheless sought to go

beyond the confines of culture area definitions by carving out a discourse centered around a common *post-socialist* space. Distinguished by certain common features such as mafia, problems of privatization, economic stagnation, nationalism, and “democratic deficits”, this thematically defined area potentially includes both Eastern Europe and Southeastern Europe, as well as parts of Asia and Africa.

- 28 In practice, however, the “postsocialist” label often appears to merely reinscribe Eastern Europe. I will offer here merely one anecdotal example of how easily this reinscription occurs. In the mid-1990s, a group of largely U.S. based anthropologists formed an association known as Soyuz in order to promote the anthropological study of post-socialist societies. The name Soyuz indicates that, in this case, postsocialism essentially proves synonymous with the former Soviet bloc. As someone who works in the former Yugoslavia (as well as Italy), I have attended several Soyuz meetings and while always made to feel welcome, I have found relatively few points of dialogue with most of the other scholars. Many of these scholars not only work in former bloc countries but more particularly in the former Soviet Union. (Indeed, the Soyuz events at the annual American Anthropological Association meetings seem to be attracting younger scholars more successfully than the programs of the Anthropology of Eastern Europe group.) At Soyuz's 1998 gathering, a scholar of China attended, saying that he had hoped to find a group interested in broad theoretical issues of socialism/post-socialism but had instead found an association which *de facto* is organized on fairly strict area lines. This episode reveals the difficulties all scholars face in conceptually resituating the areas known as Eastern Europe, Southeastern Europe and so on. Even if we seek to go beyond area definitions by means of conceptual devices such as “postsocialism”, the inertia of institutional practice and scholarly identity/self-selection proves a challenge.
- 29 That said, anthropologists like Katherine Verdery have made impressive contributions to the literature on postsocialism. Verdery has moved between carrying out very specific local analyses (in her case of Romania) and devising broader theoretical frameworks for a socialist and post-socialist space⁵³. In her collection of essays, *What was Socialism and what comes Next ?*, Verdery sketches out points of convergence regarding the problems of socialist command economies, the gendering of tradition and national identity, and the privatization of land. She does so in a manner that provides a critical alternative to the transitologist perspectives dominant in other disciplines, such as political science. At the same time, Verdery herself proves the first to admit that her perspective is inevitably shaped and hence delimited to some degree by the specificity of the Romanian case she knows so well.
- 30 Verdery's most recent work, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies*, even suggests a morbid social geography spanning from the former Soviet Union to former Yugoslavia in which the remains of both illustrious ancestors and anonymous victims of past violence provide crucial moral and political capital in the struggles to reshape these societies⁵⁴. Yet even here, the Yugoslav case is set apart somewhat, appearing either as anomalous or an exaggeration of tendencies found elsewhere in the post-socialist world. Does this suggest some Southeastern European specificity ? Verdery's work further prompts the question as to whether in scholarly analyses, just as in popular discourse, nationalism and virulently exclusive ethnicities are replacing state socialism as key boundary markers for the region(s) of Eastern Europe and Southeastern Europe⁵⁵. Given the difficulties previous generations of anthropologists faced in identifying cultural traits,

are phenomena like nationalism being read (at least implicitly) as cultural expressions of a regional unity ? Has nationalism become the new gatekeeping concept for Eastern Europe and, in particular, Southeastern Europe, not only appearing to define these areas but dictating the focus of research through the kinds of questions asked and the type of research funded ?

- 31 Whether defined as a postsocialist or nationalist space, Southeastern Europe rests uneasily in these varied attempts at new regional and thematic definitions, just as the region rested uneasily in the past. The specificity of the former Yugoslav case proves troublesome, for instance, and the Greek case falls completely out of such classifications. In addition, the presentist focus on recent political arrangements neglects *longue durée* commonalities of the sort Braudel focused on. In popular and political discourse, however, as well as in scholarly practice (courses on « Peoples and Societies of the Balkans/Southeastern Europe/Eastern Europe, etc. » appear to have a long shelf life), regional and culture area understandings have a durability with which scholars must necessarily contend.

Conclusions

- 32 This article has argued that places located within the territorial confines of a Southeastern European space seem to potentially fall under and to stretch across several well-established classificatory rubrics : the Balkans, Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean. This would not prove problematic if one recognized such categories as merely reflecting heuristic and/or historical boundaries. The problem arises, however, when we as scholars begin to talk in terms of cultural unities, with the end result that we ourselves easily fall into the essentialist trap for which we criticize nationalist politicians. If understood in essentialist terms, as they often have been, the traits associated with these areas create all sorts of contradictions when one confronts the problem of how to situate Southeastern Europe. For example, the association of urban values with the Mediterranean and a rural orientation with Eastern Europe implies an irreconcilability between such essentialist categories despite the fact that spaces like former Yugoslavia uneasily straddle both the “Mediterranean” and “Eastern Europe”. In the past, anthropologists like Wissler and Kroeber tried to overcome such difficulties through a series of mental gymnastics, speaking of culture centers and climaxes and treating problematic spaces like Southeastern Europe or the Adriatic littoral as transitional zones⁵⁶. Through such exercises, definitions may become so qualified as to prove useless even within the logic of culture areas.
- 33 More importantly, all too often what we as scholars set out to prove (i.e. the question of is there a unity or how do we conceptualize it ?) becomes the explanation for cultural traits identified. These traits are in turn taken as “proof” of an area's cultural unity, resulting in tautological reasoning⁵⁷. Furthermore, the problem is that academic discourse both reflects and helps constitute new social realities. Though scholars may inherit previously defined fields of signification, they help to shape and legitimize those discursive fields. While scholars must avoid the hubris of presuming that we (and we alone), “invent the world” we must also face up to our responsibility in regards to the knowledge/power nexus. In the present moment, the issue of what name we give to the area sometimes referred to as Southeastern Europe and the related question of

where we draw the boundaries between Europe and Southeastern Europe/the Balkans have become key sites of political contestation in the societies we study.

NOTES

1. **Gupta (Akhil), Ferguson(James)**, « Discipline and Practice : “The Field” as Site, Method and Location in Anthropology », in Gupta (Akhil), Ferguson (James), eds., *Anthropological Locations*, Berkeley : University of California Press, 1997.
2. **Trouillot (Michel-Rolph)**, « Anthropology and the Savage Slot : The Poetics and Politics of Otherness », in Fox (Richard), ed., *Recapturing Anthropology : Working in the Present*, Santa Fe : School of American Research Press, 1991, p. 18.
3. **Wolff(Larry)**, *Inventing Eastern Europe : The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*, Stanford : Stanford University Press, 1994.
4. For useful discussions of how notions of the “West” and “Europe” replaced understandings of Christendom, see : **Chabod(Federico)**, *Storia dell’Idea di Europa*, Bari : Laterza, 1991 ; **Said(Edward)**, *Orientalism*, New York : Vintage Books, 1979 ; **Fabian(Johannes)**, *Time and the Other*, New York : Columbia University Press, 1983.
5. **Pemble(John)**, *The Mediterranean Passion : Victorian and Edwardians in the South*, Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1987.
6. **Brettell (Caroline)**, « “Nineteenth Century Travelers” Accounts of the Mediterranean Peasant », *Ethnohistory*, 33 (2), 1986
7. **Todorova(Maria)**, *Imagining the Balkans*, New York : Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 67, 92.
8. On the ways in which the font of European civilization could also appear to be the site of contemporary European aboriginals, see Michael Herzfeld's excellent studies of the Greek case : **Herzfeld(Michael)**, *Ours Once More : Folklore, Ideology and the Making of Modern Greece*, Austin : University of Texas Press, 1982 ; **Herzfeld (Michael)**, *Anthropology through the Looking-glass : Critical Ethnography in the Margins of Europe*, New York : Cambridge University Press, 1987.
9. **Brettell (Caroline)**, art.cit., p. 169.
10. **Todorova (Maria)**, op.cit., pp. 22-24. See also **Goldsworthy (Vesna)**, *Inventing Ruritania. The Imperialism of the Imagination*, London / New Haven : Yale University Press, 1998, p. 3.
11. **Wolff (Larry)**, op.cit. The initial predominance of the north/south division within Europe should also not be overstated when considered in light of broader symbolic geography. « In medieval cosmography, as the mappae-mundi imply, the east-west axis, and especially the east, appears to hold primary symbolic significance » : **Helm (Mary)**, *Ulysses' Sail*, Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1988, p. 213.
12. **Todorova (Maria)**, op.cit., p. 63.
13. **Hayden (Robert),Bakić-Hayden (Milica)**, « Variations on the Theme “Balkans” : Symbolic Geography in Recent Yugoslav Cultural Politics », *Slavic Review*, 51 (1), 1992 ; **Bracewell (Wendy)**, « “Europeanism”, “Orientalism” and National Myths in Yugoslavia », unpublished manuscript, 1994 ; **Ballinger (Pamela)**, « Convivenza e Civiltà : Visions of Europe at the Edge of the Balkans », in Bianchini (Stefano), Nations (Craig), eds., *The Yugoslav Conflict and its International Implications*, Ravenna : Longo Editore, 1998 ; **Goldsworthy (Vesna)**, op.cit.
14. **Todorova (Maria)**, op.cit., p. 17. Vesna Goldsworthy argues, in contrast, for a balkanized symbolic European geography in which « “Britishness” and “Balkaness” stand at opposing ends

of the hierarchical diagonal (...). A study of late Victorian and Edwardian literature inspired by the Balkans reveals an implicit opposition between Britain and Europe where Europe itself is seen as a threatening Other, an orientalist space of which the Balkan peninsula could be said to represent the most exotic — yet paradoxically “typical” — instance » (**Goldsworthy (Vesna)**, *op.cit.*, p. 9).

15. **Todorova (Maria)**, *op.cit.*, p. 78.

16. **Goldsworthy (Vesna)**, *op.cit.*, p. 211.

17. **Todorova (Maria)**, *op.cit.*, p. 79.

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 124, 128.

19. Quoted in *ibid.*, p.34.

20. **Der Derian (James)**, « S/N : International Theory, Balkanisation and the New World Order », *Millennium*, 20 (3), 1991.

21. See, however, the cautionary note in **Goldsworthy (Vesna)**, *op.cit.*, p. 203. She maintains that « Hidden behind the seemingly clear-cut opposition between “Communist” and “capitalist” Europe in the post-war era, nineteenth-century ideas of the Balkans had remained alive. The “Balkan” identity seemed forceful enough to emerge through any superimposed Communist structures ».

22. **Ehrich (Robert W.)**, **Henderson (Gerald M.)**, « Culture Area », in Sills (David), ed., *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, Vol. III, New York : MacMillan & the Free Press, 1968.

23. **Jacknis (Ira)**, « Franz Boas and Exhibits : On the Limitations of the Museum Method of Anthropology », in Stocking (George Jr.), ed., *Objects and Others*, Madison : University of Wisconsin Press, 1985 ; **Hinsley (Curtis)**, « The World as Marketplace : Commodification of the Exotic at the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893 », *Exhibiting Cultures*, Washington, D.C. : Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990.

24. I focus on the Anglo-American anthropologists who have defined and dominated the discipline ; this hegemonic discourse has effaced its link to various state-building and nationalist projects. For a somewhat dated overview of the ethnological tradition in Yugoslavia, consult **Halpern (Joel)**, **Hammel (E.A.)**, « Observations on the Intellectual History of Ethnology and other Social Sciences in Yugoslavia », *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 11(1), 1969.

25. **Duden (Barbara)**, « Rereading Boas : A Woman Historian's Response to Carl N. Degler », *Culture versus Biology in the Thought of Franz Boas and Alfred L. Kroeber*, New York : Berg, 1989.

26. Kroeber declared the culture area concept « a community product of nearly the whole school of American anthropologists ». Quoted in **Harris (Marvin)**, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory*, New York : Thomas Y. Crowell, 1968, p. 374. Julian Steward similarly maintained that « the culture area concept has become so crucial a tool in the operations of anthropologists that to question it might seem to throw doubt on anthropology itself ». Cited in **Freed (Stanley)**, **Freed (Ruth)**, « Clark Wissler and the Development of Anthropology in the United States », *American Anthropologist*, 85 (4), 1983, p. 812.

27. Cited in **de Waal Malefijt (Annemarie)**, *Images of Man : A History of Anthropological Thought*, New York : Knopf, 1976.

28. Kroeber also speaks of gaps between culturally productive centers and cultural margins or peripheries. **Kroeber (Alfred)**, *Anthropology : Culture Patterns and Processes*, San Diego : Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1963, p. 227.

29. **Wood (Bryce)**, « Area Studies », in Sills (David), ed., *op.cit.*(vol. I), p. 401.

30. The similarly rapid development of Middle East area studies programs represented a (largely American) redefinition of the epistemological space carved out by the earlier Anglo-French Orientalist tradition. On this, see **Said (Edward)**, *op.cit.*

31. **Wood (Bryce)**, *op.cit.*, p. 402.

32. Admittedly, one should be cautious in claiming a direct relation and I certainly recognize that other factors — including the increasing difficulty in conducting fieldwork in many areas

outside of Europe due to independence struggles, the Cold War, and growing hostility towards anthropologists — prompted interest in areas closer to home. Nonetheless, the timing of the development of “Mediterranean anthropology”, in particular, coincides with the renewed strategic relevance accorded the region. Anthropological fieldwork in the Soviet bloc proved much more difficult to obtain permission for and hence less common until the 1970s.

33. Verdery (Katherine), « Images of East : “Orientalism”, “Communism”, and the Toll at the Border », unpublished manuscript, 1988. For an example of this argument in action in popular writing, see the now infamous **Kaplan (Robert)**, *Balkan Ghosts*, New York : Vintage Books, 1994.

34. Braudel (Fernand), *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Time of Philip II*, Vol. I, New York : Harper & Row, 1966.

35. Gilmore (David), « Anthropology of the Mediterranean Area », *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 11, 1982, p. 181.

36. Ibid., pp. 177-180.

37. The “honour and shame” concept was formulated by chance over the course of a 1959 Wenner-Gren conference and follow-up meetings held in 1961 and 1963. The contributors to the seminal 1966 volume *Honour and Shame : Values of Mediterranean Society* generally agreed that an honour and shame system distinguishes the Mediterranean as a cultural entity, reflecting the « constant preoccupation of individuals in small scale, exclusive societies where face-to-face personal, as opposed to anonymous, relations are of paramount importance and where the social personality of the actor is as significant as his office ». **Peristiany (J.G.)**, *Honour and Shame : Values of Mediterranean Society*, Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1966, p. 11.

Participants in a 1983 American Anthropological Association conference session devoted to overhauling the honour and shame paradigm criticized the posited uniformity and uniqueness of the concept and took up « nagging questions about the alleged uniformity, validity and geographical boundedness of honour-and-shame [and] about origin, diffusion, causality ». **Gilmore (David)**, « Introduction : Honour and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean », *American Anthropological Association*, 22, 1987. Various scholars called for comparative research to identify the peculiar Mediterranean variant of this complex. Participants generally agreed that in its Mediterranean variation the honour and shame complex encodes a distinctive power relation of male control over female sexuality. Power competition among men thus becomes mediated through women. While representing an advance, this theoretical refinement nonetheless leaves the larger culture area concept unquestioned.

38. Appadurai (Arjun), « Theory in Anthropology : Center and Periphery », *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 28, 1986.

39. Herzfeld (Michael), « “As in Your Own House” : Hospitality, Ethnography and the Stereotype of Mediterranean Society », *American Anthropological Association*, 22, 1987, p. 88.

40. Meštrović (Stjepan), *Habits of the Balkan Heart : Social Character and the Fall of Communism*, College Station : Texas A & M Press, 1993.

41. Halpern (Joel), Kideckel (David), « Anthropology of Eastern Europe », *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 12, 1983, p. 381. On debates over whether the zadruga represents a distinctive Balkan family form, see **Halpern (Joel), Anderson (D.)**, « The Zadruga, a Century of Change », *Anthropologica*, 12 (1), 1970 ; **Hammel (E.A.)**, « The Zadruga as Process », in Laslett (P.), Wall (R.), eds., *Household and Family in Past Time*, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1972 ; **Byrnes (R.F.)**, ed., *Communal Families in the Balkans : The Zadruga*, Notre Dame : University of Notre Dame Press, 1976 ; **Stahl (Henri)**, « The Domestic Group in the Traditional Balkan Societies », *Zeitschrift für Balkanologie*, 14, 1978. For discussions of Balkan areas which do not exhibit the zadruga, consult the Stahl piece previously noted, **Erlich (Vera)**, *Family in Transition : A Study of 300 Yugoslav Villages*, Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1966 ; and **Winner (Irene)**, « The Question of the Zadruga in Slovenia : Myth and Reality in Zerovnica », *Anthropological Quarterly*, 50 (3), 1977. In an insightful critique, Maria Todorova has gone so far as to suggest abandoning

the term *zadruga* altogether, contending that arguments about the prevalence of the *zadruga* in Southeastern Europe prove “presumptuous”. **Todorova (Maria)**, *Balkan Family Structure and the European Pattern: Demographic Developments in Ottoman Bulgaria*, Washington, D.C.: American University Press, 1993, p. 158.

42. **Todorova (Maria)**, *Balkan Family Structure* (op.cit.), p. 5.

43. Admittedly, the work of Barbara Kerewsky-Halpern and Joel Halpern did make some efforts to situate trends in the Balkans within broader cultural and social processes. In an article on oral traditions, the Halperns classify the Balkans as occupying « perhaps an intermediate position » with oral genealogies existing alongside Byzantine, Ottoman and 19th-century written records. **Halpern (Joel)**, **Kerewsky-Halpern (Barbara)**, « Oral Genealogies and Official Records: Serbian Data », *Southeastern Europe / L'Europe du Sud-est*, 10 (2), 1983, p. 151. Elsewhere, Joel Halpern suggests the usefulness of considering Serbian materials in a comparative light. Comparing culture change in Serbia and Laos, Halpern sought to identify « possible tendencies toward universal organizational patterns ». **Halpern (Joel)**, « Culture Change in Laos and Serbia: Possible Tendencies toward Universal Organizational Patterns », *Human Organization*, 20(3), 1961.

44. **Halpern (Joel)**, **Kideckel (David)**, art.cit..

45. *Ibid.*, p. 379.

46. *Ibid.*

47. **Walters (E. Garrison)**, *The Other Europe: Eastern Europe to 1945*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1988, p. xi.

48. *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

49. **Jelavich (Barbara)**, *History of the Balkans: Twentieth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

50. The 1999 killings at Columbine High in Colorado, for example, have been described in some popular press as a result of the balkanization of American high schools. « the cafeteria is like a tiny former Yugoslavia, with each clique its own faction: the Serbian jocks, Bosnian bikers, Kosovar rebels, etc. », **Corliss (Richard)**, « Bang, You're Dead », *Time*, 03/05/99, p. 50.

51. It may be redundant to cite **Robert Kaplan's** *Balkan Ghosts*, one of the grossest examples of such writing and one frequently taken to task by scholars.

52. In an instance of the former argument, Eugene Hammel locates the origins of the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s in demographic causes (i.e. migration) and the historical creation of boundaries. **Hammel (Eugene)**, « Demography and the origins of the Yugoslav Civil War », *Anthropology Today*, 9 (1), 1993. Considering the creation of new constitutions, as well as the uses of the past (particularly memories of genocide), Robert Hayden has offered powerful instrumentalist analyses of the Yugoslav break-up. See **Hayden (Robert)**, « Constitutional Nationalism in the Formerly Yugoslav Republics », *Slavic Review*, 51 (4), 1992; **Hayden (Robert)**, « Imagined Communities and Real Victims: Self-Determination and Ethnic Cleansing in Yugoslavia », unpublished manuscript, 1993; **Hayden (Robert)**, « Recounting the Dead: The Rediscovery and Redefinition of Wartime Massacres in Late- and Post-Communist Yugoslavia », in Watson (Rubie), ed., *Memory, History and Opposition under State Socialism*, Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1994. Compelling instrumentalist accounts from outside of anthropology include **Silber (Laura)**, **Little (Allan)**, *Yugoslavia: Death of a Nation*, New York: Penguin Books, 1997; **Gagnon (V. P.)**, « Ethnic Nationalism and International Conflict: The Case of Serbia », *International Security*, 19 (3), 1994-1995.

Anthropologist Tone Bringa's work mediates between the perennialist and instrumentalist poles. On the one hand, her monograph on life in a Bosnian village in the period immediately before Yugoslavia's dissolution reveals the long-standing distinctiveness (if not tensions) between Muslims and Croats. **Bringa (Tone)**, *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994. On the other hand, her documentary film *We're All Neighbors* depicts the

rapidity with which hatred is sown from outside within a community once marked by peaceful ethnic coexistence.

53. Verdery (Katherine), *What was Socialism and What Comes Next ?*, Princeton : Princeton University Press.

54. Verdery (Katherine), *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies*, New York : Columbia University Press, 1999.

55. Admittedly, however, Verdery now seems to be turning her attention to privatization and away from issues of nationalism and ethnic conflict. Though anthropologists are actively studying the privatization process in some southeastern countries like Romania and Hungary, the states of former Yugoslavia (the most Balkan of the Balkans ?) continue to be investigated primarily through the lens of identity politics.

56. In a 1963 article, for instance, Donald Pitkins defines Mediterranean Europe as « including the lands of Eastern Spain, south of the Ebro drainage, Italy south of the Po, and Greece. The southern coast of France and the Adriatic exposure of the Balkan peninsula are to be regarded as linking zones and as of essentially secondary importance within the context of the whole area ».

Pitkins (Donald), « Mediterranean Europe », *Anthropological Quarterly*, 36 (3), 1963, p. 120. Pitkins excludes from the Mediterranean the part of the Adriatic coastline that includes Trieste and Venice (both north of the Po River). Contradictorily, however, Pitkins also identifies urbanism as a defining culture trait and includes Venice as a primary example. Venice and her trade colonies in Istria and Dalmatia — so-called Mediterranean-style cities surrounded by Eastern European peasant hinterlands — would thus appear to possess a rather shaky position within this culture area. In proposing that these territories fall outside the “climaxes” of both a Mediterranean and an Eastern Europe area, Pitkins employs the classical language of the culture area concept with unsatisfactory results, thereby underscoring this vocabulary's inherent conceptual deficiencies.

57. On the dangers of this in Mediterranean anthropology, see **Herzfeld (Michael)**, « The Horns of the Mediterraneanist Dilemma », *American Ethnologist*, 11, 1984.

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