INTRODUCTION

LEARNING MEMORY, REMEMBERING IDENTITY

Maria Todorova

Memory is fashionable. In fact, it has become so fashionable in the past couple of decades as to be ‘depreciated by surplus use’. ¹ Equally, memory’s doppelgänger identity is now a well-worn cliché. ² As Kerwin Klein points out, identity is part of memory discourse, and

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the two words are typically yoked together. And as if coupling these two notions was not banal enough, this volume goes a step further and adds another controversial and loaded category: the Balkans. In the past decade memory and the manipulation of memory have been postulated as one of the central aspects of Balkan conflicts. In a less analytical vein, a popular if unifying stereotype portrays the Balkans as a region cursed with too much history per square mile, with an excess of historical memory, protracted hatreds, and a proliferation of obstinate and incompatible ethnic and religious identities.

Memory as a cognitive and epistemological problem has primarily been an obsession of historians dealing with Western Europe, predominantly, though not exclusively, of the modern period. Writing about France, Pierre Nora maintains that a shift has occurred from a kind of naturalised collective memory to a self-conscious, uninspired and rather mechanistic activity of preserving memory. He thus posits a transformation from an internalised, social collective memory (milieux de mémoire) to fixed, externalised locations (lieux de mémoire). As Jacques Revel and Lynn Hunt note, ‘In many developed societies, the collective investment in memory is a response to the acceleration of history, to rapid social change, and to the problems of identity that such changes are pressing home with growing urgency.’ This interest in memory erupted at a time when France, ‘a country blessed with, if not overwhelmed by, a long and glorious past ... moved from the front ranks to the status of a middling power. The rise of memory is thus contemporary with a cruel twist in the nation’s history.’ Likewise, the loss of empire after World War Two in Britain coincided with a turn from triumphant empiricism and benign common sense to more brooding contemplations exemplified by oral history, memory from the bottom up, and the discussions around the ‘history workshops’.

The Balkans have been overwhelmed with innumerable ‘cruel twists’ in the region’s national histories over the past two centuries. Rapid social change, turmoil, as well as drastic identity transformations are corollary developments. It is hardly surprising, then, that historical memory should be invoked as the principal tool of explanation, legitimation and mobilisation. The notion of ‘historical memory’ has been conventionally and widely used both in academic circles as well as in popularising educated discourse in an essentialist fashion, as one of the ‘objective’ attributes of the ethnic group and the nation, alongside language, territory, state, economy and social structure, as well as culture. It has been traditionally treated as the repository of ideas about common origins and the past, creating a deep feeling of group solidarity. Memory as a discreet category of analysis, on the other hand, has only recently come under academic scrutiny in Eastern Europe as a whole, and in the Balkans in particular. Yet, this need not necessarily mean that the Balkans are in the stage of, what Nora nostalgically calls, the naturalised collective memory. Alon Confino, a perceptive critic of the notion of memory and of memory studies, notes that there is the tendency and danger of reducing memory, ‘which is fundamentally a concept of culture, to the political’. The usual object of study is the memory constructed by politicians and intellectuals, which is ‘largely a public, often official, and narrowly political memory’. Memory in the private spheres of family, workplace, neighbourhood and friends may be very different, and this poses not only the problem of studying popular memories but also the important and difficult issue of reception, ‘that ogre that awaits every cultural historian’. A largely untapped source for

in Historical Discourse’, 127–50 which provides a convincing analytical critique of the fascination with memory).

3 Kerwin Lee Klein, ‘On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse’, Representations, 69, winter 2000, 143.


6 Most of the memory related studies began as attempts to come to terms with the recent past. In Poland, an ‘Institute of National Remembrance’ has been operating since 1991. Its first investigation was the inquiry about crimes committed by the former Soviet Union against Poland. Today, attention has focused on the memory of the Holocaust, and the specific workings of anti-Semitism, for example Steven J. Zipperstein, Imagining Russian Jewry: Memory, History, Identity, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999. For Russia itself see Kathleen E. Smith, Remembering Stalin’s Victims: Popular Memory and the End of the USSR, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996 and Nanci Adler, Victims of Terror: The Study of the Memorial Movement, Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993. For Bulgaria, Tzvetan Todorov, ed., Voices From the Gulag: Life and Death in Communist Bulgaria, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999. See also Elena Mikhailovska, Pamet i prekhod (Memory and Transition), Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo ‘Sv. Kliment Ohridski’, 1999. There are abundant, if often hasty, studies of the events in the former Yugoslavia drawing analogies to the Holocaust, and that can be read in general collections on genocide, ethnic cleansing, and memories of the Shoah.

scholarly use, the otherwise well known and celebrated East European political anecdote, can help us look beyond the veil of official discourse.

In the late 1980s, at the height of the so-called ‘revival process’, the euphemistic label for the coercive change of names of the Muslim population in Bulgaria, one joke recounted the story of two policemen on the main artery that takes Turkish Garstarbeiter to Germany: the Vienna-Belgrade-Sofia-Istanbul road. The policemen stop a Turkish car for exceeding the speed limit, and one of them beats up the driver. ‘Why are you doing that?’ the other one asks, ‘Just fine him and let him go.’ ‘But weren’t we under their yoke for 500 years?’ says the first. ‘Sure, we were, replies the second, but didn’t you know that?’ ‘No, I just learned it,’ responds the first policeman.

The joke is much more subtle than the message about the constructedness and manipulability of memory. Of course, everyone knows about the 500 years of ‘Turkish yoke’. Even when it is translated into the neutral ‘Ottoman rule’, it still is the inevitable cornerstone of the historical and literary education of the modern independent state both in Bulgaria and elsewhere in the Balkans. The question to be posed is: when is this knowledge informed by the emotive component which makes it inflammable? Is it naïve to think that this happens only when crafty and nasty politicians decide to manipulate the ‘innocent’ and ‘simple-minded’, i.e. implicitly, stupid people. After all, the message of the horror of the yoke has always been there, and in any society there always exists an extreme interpretation as well as an extreme call to arms. The real question is not that memory can be manipulated (of course it can), but why do people hear the message at a particular moment, so that they can then say that they just learned what has always been known.

The anecdote encapsulates in an epigrammatic fashion, and bears witness to the profound, if intuitive, contemplation over serious epistemological problems. One concerns the relationship between collective memory and historical memory. Ever since Henri Bergson, there has been a consensus that the first represents lived experience, while the second is concerned with the preservation of lived experience, i.e. ‘between one’s own sense of having an experience and an external representation of that sense which is presumed to be valid for others as well as yourself’. This understanding has inspired much research into the sites of memory. But, as Susan Crane notes ‘collective memory ultimately is located not in sites but in individuals’. She argues, therefore, that learning history itself is lived experience that becomes part of collective memory, and further asserts, ‘historical research is a lived experience that the self-reflective historian consciously integrates into collective memory’.9

In a different vein, Alon Confino has stressed that approaching memory as a study of collective mentality emphasises its social framework rather than the fragmentary focus on distinct memories that characterise the history of memory. Collective memory, he insists, ‘is an exploration of a shared identity that unites a social group, be it a family or a nation, whose members nonetheless have different interests and motivations’. These indubitable differences beg the answer to the question: what, in the end, holds the nation together? ‘[H]ow did people internationalize the nation and make it in a remarkably short time an everyday mental property—a memory as intimate and authentic as the local, ethnic, and family past’. In line with the implications of the above-mentioned anecdote, he concludes, ‘the crucial issue in the history of memory is not how a past is represented but why it was received or rejected’.10

Can we speak of a collective Balkan mentality and, thus, of Balkan memory and Balkan identity? ‘Balkan mentality’ has been one of the most abused mythologemes in journalistic and, generally, in popular discourse. It is supposed to hint at an analytical explanation of events in the Balkans when real analyses seem to be too difficult or time-consuming, or not worth embarking on. The tradition was started in the interwar period when, after two centuries of gestation, the distinct patterns of perceptions that characterised attitudes toward the Balkans finally crystallised in a specific discourse about the region after the Balkan wars and World War One. In the next decades this discourse that I have called Balkanism gained additional features but its main characteristics were already in place, and in its broad outlines it continues to be handed down, acquiring a dominant explanatory status whenever the Balkans come into the news.11 In this period ‘Balkan mentality’ entered even many scholarly studies as an operative term. This was part of the dubious academic vogue on national psychology or what the Germans called Volkscharakterologie.12 Even

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9 Ibid., 1381, 1382.

10 Alon Confino, ‘Collective Memory’, 1389–90, 1402.


12 See, for example Gerhard Gesemann, ‘Zur Charakterologie der Slaven’ Der parasitäre Balkaner, Slavische Rundschau, Jahrg., 5, 1933, 1–16; idem, ‘Zur parasitäre Balkaner’.
after the demise of this pseudo-scientific discipline, most research on ‘Balkan mentality’ continued to be done on ethnic lines. There have even been attempts to postulate the linguistic basis of a specific ‘Balkan mentality’ and the existence of a *homo balcaninus*. In a thoughtful analysis of the methodological dimensions of the problem, Paschalis Kitromilides concludes that ‘All anthropological and social psychological arguments in favour of the existence of a shared Balkan “mentality” are bound to turn into sociological metaphysics unless they provide convincing answers to the question as to what is specifically Balkan about it.’ His analysis of how the famous Serbian geographer and ethnologist Jovan Cvijić introduced and used the category in *La peninsule balkanique* (Paris: A. Colin, 1918) led Kitromilides to posit the incompatibility between the category ‘Balkan mentality’ and any ethnic or national constructs. While Kitromilides rightly objected to the overgeneralisations of the mentality approach, he allowed for the description of what he calls ‘mental and attitudinal structures’ in a strictly historically-specific context. Thus he allowed for a distinctive and historically plausible set of mental characteristics, valid for the eighteenth-century Balkan Christian Orthodox eucumene. In general, however, he warned: ‘Historical specificity is therefore the critical factor in the description of such sets of recurrent and pervasive assumptions and norms that define the outlook of a collectivity. But to insist upon talking about a diachronic uniformity called “Balkan mentality” is no more than an unverifiable historical legend, and it can turn into a perverse mythology as well.’


16 Kitromilides, ‘“Balkan Mentality”’, 467.

Recently, the category was once again rehashed in an analysis of major characteristics defining the Balkan region as a historical space. The author, Holm Sundhaussen, recognised that mentality was a very controversial category, and that there was no consensus about a Balkan mentality. If at all, it should be applied to discrete periods and groups. Nonetheless, he chose to imbue the notion with a particular characteristic. In doing so, he evinced his belief in a distinct Balkan mentality which he described as the particular propensity for myths. These myths, according to him, included the ‘golden’ pre-Ottoman period, the ‘Turkish yoke’, the pure and organic nation, the national rebirth, the Kosovo-myth, the *haïduk*-myth and the victimisation myths. It is very difficult, of course, to distinguish these myths structurally from the ‘golden’ myth of antiquity, the myth of the Dark Ages, the myth (and practice) of the Nüremberg laws of the 1930s and *ius sanguinis*, the myth of Rome (as in Italian national ideology, not in Russian, with the myth of the Roman Republic, and the Papacy), the myth of the battle of Poitiers (both the one in the eighth, and the one in the fourteenth century), the myth of the *Walküren*, and the myth of a fortress besieged by enemies (both as in Masada as well as in the German military doctrine in World War One). True, Sundhaussen is perfectly aware of these questions when he notes that many of these characteristics are not specific only to the Balkans; what makes up the Balkan specificity, according to him, is the cluster of characteristics that defines its unmistakable profile. However, positing a diachronically stable evolution which produces a cluster of characteristics leads to a static analysis that pays no attention to the fact that these myths, while existing and undergoing a continuous transmission through education or other cultural and political channels, are inflamed and get operative only at certain periods. In recent years, this was the case in Yugoslavia, a country disintegrating and caught up in a civil war. Characteristics of the extraordinary Yugoslav situation were externalised and, in a totally unwarranted fashion, were rhetorically sold to the political class and to the broad public as a Balkan war.18


18 I continue to argue (unsuccessfully) that the description of the Yugoslav War as the ‘Third Balkan war’ or simply as a ‘Balkan War’ is a caricature. Why is the Irish problem confined to Ireland and not projected to its real roots—England—and called a British (or better still, a Western European problem)? Numerous analogous examples can be given. There was no Balkan War in the Balkans: Greece, Romania,
Commenting on my plea that ‘[It] would do much better if the Yugoslav, not Balkan, crisis ceased to be explained in terms of Balkan ghosts, ancient Balkan enmities, primordial Balkan cultural patterns and the proverbial Balkan turmoil, and instead was approached with the same rational criteria that the West reserves for itself: issues of self-determination versus inviolable status quo, citizenship and minority rights, problems of ethnic and religious autonomy, the prospects and limits of secession, the balance between big and small nations and states, the role of international institutions,’ Sundhaussen finds the argument wanting. It betrays, according to him, wishful thinking because it implies that not only the outside observers but also the Balkan players can act in a rational way, based on negotiation and compromise. Against this, there is the evidence of gruesome behaviour—'[T]he desire to remove the adversary from a given territory, and destroy everything that would remind of his former presence, to cleanse not only the present but also the past, and to alter history'—which does not warrant a rational explanation: 'Disastrous mixtures of rationality and emotion, of reason and passion exist also in other parts of Europe. But in the Balkan space many factors come together ... and in their combination they create an inextricable knot.'

This is a rather extraordinary definition of rationality. Or, rather, one could agree with it provided humanity is postulated to be ipso facto irrational. War (with its euphemistic doppelgänger, defence) has been a constant accompaniment of humanity. For the greatest part of human history it has been the chief employer, and even today gets the biggest chunk of the budgets of modern states. Ethnic cleansing has been practised by humankind since the dawn of civilisation. Killing all enemy men, and enslaving the women and children has been a staple act from the times of the ancient Greeks, the ‘cradle of Western civilisation’, until the present. An indiscriminate mass killing of everyone (disregarding age or gender) is mostly (though not exclusively) a modern phenomenon, practised to the greatest extent by the West. From what point of view is the dropping of the atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, or the siege of Leningrad more rational than the bombing of Sarajevo? Or, why is the killing of three million Vietnamese less reprehensible than the 200,000 victims of the Bosnian war? In both cases there are, of course, the attempts to rationalise, and thus legitimise, horrid acts. One may not accept the logic of this rationality, but this is how these acts are advanced. Or, to go just a little further back in history, why is it that we can explain, while at the same time condemning the Hitler phenomenon, as the hijacking of a whole society in a severe social and economic turmoil by an extreme ideology and praxis? Why was it impossible to do that for the Milošević regime and, instead, introduce irrationality as a characteristic of the ‘Balkan mentality’ of Yugoslavia, and by extension, of the whole region? Or, is it that tragedy can be explained in rational terms, whereas, when history repeats itself as farce, it becomes irrational?

The obvious conclusion should not be about comparative barbarity and the double standards in judging events in the West and in the Balkans. This is taken for granted. The conclusion should be that the categories of rationality and irrationality are not implicit in the object of study. They vest with the eye of the beholder and they become characteristics not of the mentality of the region but of the mentality of the observer. ‘Balkan mentality’ and ‘Balkan memory’ are chimerical notions. There are varieties of individual and group memories in the Balkans, but no single ‘Balkan memory’. There are, likewise, instances of collective mentality, and at times one can speak of national mentality. At specific time periods and in specific social groups (like the Orthodox clergy in the eighteenth century) one can even find something like a Balkan-wide mentality, but these should be carefully contextualised and historicised.

This is equally true of a putative Balkan identity. In the past couple of centuries, the largest group that has managed to command a kind of collective identity has been the nation. Supranational identities (like, for example, an European one) are still a social experiment, at best a work-in-progress. National identities in the Balkans, like elsewhere, have been defined and have operated in opposition to each other. There has never been a common Balkan identity. At best, there has been the occasionally romantic, occasionally reluctant recognition of cultural similarities accumulated over the centuries which, at times, assume the form of a defensive common response to anascriptive identity from the outside. One may very carefully speak

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Bulgaria, Turkey, even Albania before the latest conflict, have not been involved in any way with what was essentially a succession struggle strictly confined to Yugoslavia. But one can make, in this respect, a neat methodological point about the disjunction between causes and consequences. The causes for the Yugoslav tragedy have nothing to do with the rest of the Balkans. But the consequences of the Yugoslav tragedy have everything to do with the Balkans, and have produced a “Balkan” crisis.

19 Todorova, Imagining the Balkans, 186.
of the existence of tentative Balkan identities (in the plural) as part of the multiple identifications of the separate Balkan national identities. As I have tried to show, even dealing with the name Balkan has been a problematic issue in identity politics in the region. It has varied from complete rejection of the name as self-identification (as in most cases) to an ambivalent and even positive usage only in the case of the Bulgarians, and for specific geographic and historical reasons. As a whole, whenever a Balkan identity is discussed in the Balkans, it usually has had to do with different ways to cope with stigma and also with self-stigmatisation. On the other hand, the attempts to hypo-staticise a Balkan identity have historically been utopian political exercises, like the movement toward a Balkan federation, doomed from the outset both by internal opposition and, more significantly, by outside forces. It is therefore imperative, when assessing the unprecedented present-day rhetoric, especially in the aftermath of the NATO bombing in Yugoslavia, calling on constructing a positive Southeast European identity, to look carefully into the political motivations behind these calls, as well as the political and cultural costs of the project. After all, identity politics is as a much a form of social control and political mobilisation as any other kind of politics.

The same is true of the notion of region—whether Balkan or Southeast European—which nowadays is understood as the territorialisation of the assumed Balkan identity. But who does the mapping and for what purpose? How stable are regions, either as institutional or cultural entities, or as cognitive categories? And which categories are best suited to define a region?

For a long time, borders have been preferred objects of analysis, especially in examinations of identity. They are a natural first resort, because it is at the margins that the differentiation or disentanglement of entities takes place. Since identity and alterity are clearly in a symbiotic relationship, their most sharply defined characteristics are best articulated at this border encounter. Otherness became in consequence a fundamental category not only of social experience but also of social analysis, and in the past decade has made a powerful inroad in historical studies. Borders, however, turned out to be a problematic first choice not only because they themselves are changing, or are subject to different criteria (geographic, political, ethnic or cultural). More importantly, the excessive focus on borders imposed an unhealthy obsession with distinction, difference, with Otherness.

Recently, there has been a powerful shift away from border studies toward the now fashionable category of space. This approach allows due attention to the cohesive processes and structures within the entity. It has produced valuable works but it also has its caveats, the most important of which, creeping through the back door, is essentialism. The latter has little to do with the theory which has been developed in a thoughtful and refined way primarily by geographers who have stressed the links between knowledge, power and spatiality and have pointed out both the metaphorical and material resonance of ‘space’. Rather, it has to do with the sometimes hasty and unreflective application of the category in concrete historical studies.

It is against this background that I introduce the notion of historical legacy. It does not, in my opinion, displace the notion of space. Instead, it retains the valuable features of the analysis of spatiality while, simultaneously, refining the vector of time, and making it more historically specific. After all, as observed in A Walk in the Woods, the popular play about the Cold War, ‘history is only geography stretched over time’. What is, then, in the light of this approach the answer to the misleadingly simple question: What are the Balkans? In Imagining the Balkans, I suggested that in the array of historical legacies that have shaped the Southeast European peninsula

21 Todorova, Imagining the Balkans, ch. 2 “‘Balkans’ as Self-Designation”.
25 Much of the preceding and ongoing analysis is made at greater length in my ‘The Balkans as Category of Analysis: Borders, Space, Time’, Geschichte und Gesellschaft, forthcoming, in German, in the fall 2001 issue.
until the nineteenth century (the period of Greek antiquity, Hellenism, Roman rule, and so on), two can be marked out as crucial: the Byzantine and the Ottoman. The millennium of Byzantium left a profound political, institutional, legal, religious and cultural imprint. The half millennium of Ottoman rule gave the peninsula its name, and established the longest period of political unity it had experienced. Not only did part of Southeastern Europe acquire a new name during this period, it has been chiefly the Ottoman elements or the ones perceived as such which have mostly given rise to the current stereotype of the Balkans, so that it would not be an exaggeration to say that the Balkans are, in fact, the Ottoman legacy.

For purely cognitive purposes, I made the formal distinction between the Ottoman legacy as continuity and the Ottoman legacy as perception. These should not be interpreted as ‘real’ versus ‘imagined’ characteristics as the perhaps unfortunate use of the terms ‘continuity’ and ‘perception’ implies. The characteristics of the ‘continuity’ are themselves often perceptual, and the perceptions are no less a matter of continuous real social facts. A better way to define the distinction is perhaps to say that in both cases the categories designate social facts but that they are at different removes from experience. In the instance of ‘perception’ the social fact is removed yet a further step from immediate reality, and one can perhaps juxtapose the natural versus the cultural or textual status of the social interaction. The legacy as continuity is a notion different from the characteristics of the Ottoman polity or the Ottoman period in general. It is a process that begins after the Ottoman Empire ceased to exist for particular regions which shaped themselves into successor states, and is the aggregate of characteristics handed down chiefly from the historical situation of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. A systematic review of the workings of the Ottoman legacy as continuity in the political, cultural, social and economic spheres where it displayed different degrees of perseverance showed that in practically all spheres, except the demographic one and the sphere of popular culture, the break with the Ottoman characteristics, i.e. with the legacy as continuity, occurred almost immediately after the onset of political independence of the separate Balkan states and, as a whole, was completed by the end of World War One. Thereafter it was turned into legacy as perception. In the realm of demography, however, because of the highly complicated ethnic picture and the persistence of a sizeable Muslim element, the Ottoman legacy continued for some time and, more importantly, became intertwined with and gradually transformed into the influence of the Turkish nation-state.27 The Ottoman legacy as perception, on the other hand, is the process of interaction between an ever-evolving and accumulating past, and ever-evolving and accumulating perceptions of generations of people who are redefining their evaluations of the past, in a word the question not of reconstructing, but of constructing the past. The legacy as perception is firmly built in the discourse of Balkan nationalism as one of its most important pillars, and displays striking similarities in all Balkan countries. Precisely because it is at the centre of securing present social arrangements, and above all legitimising the state, it is bound to be reproduced for some time to come.

At the same time, the Ottoman legacy as continuity has been in a process of decline for the past century. The countries defined as Balkan (i.e. the ones which participated in the historical Ottoman sphere) have been moving steadily away from their Ottoman legacy, and with this, also from their Balkanness. I want to strongly emphasise that this statement is devoid of any evaluative element. It is with this in mind that I argued that what we are witnessing today in the geographic Balkans (the eradication of the final vestiges of an imperial legacy of ethnic multiplicity and co-existence, although not necessarily idyllic, and its substitution with institutionalised ethnically homogeneous bodies) may well be an advanced stage of the final Europeanisation of the region, and the end of the historic Balkans, if they are, as I think they are, the Ottoman period and the Ottoman legacy. In fact, the British diplomat who wrote the Balkan survey for the Carnegie Endowment in 1913, concluded that one ‘may boldly assert that the only basis of European culture and the only bias towards European civilization to be found in the Balkans,

27 The detailed argument about the Balkans as Ottoman legacy is developed in Imagining the Balkans, 161–83. See also an earlier version: Maria Todorova, ‘The Ottoman Legacy in the Balkans’ in Carl L. Brown, ed., Imperial Legacy: The Ottoman Imprint in the Balkans and the Middle East, New York: Columbia University Press, 1995, 45–77. As far as the geographical borders of the Balkan space are concerned see Imagining the Balkans, 21–31 for different criteria and definitions. There I made the point that, with all due qualifications and for practical purposes, I would include Greece, Albania, Bulgaria, Romania, all the former Yugoslavia with the exception of Slovenia, and partly Turkey under the rubric Balkan. Today, I would revise this as to include Slovenia, on the grounds that twentieth-century Balkan history is unthinkable without the whole Yugoslav entity. The issue to be stressed, however, is the impossibility of a purely geographic criterion, and the arbitrariness (within limits, of course) of applying a historical or cultural one.
after centuries of subjection to Asiatic Byzantinism, is the conscious-
ness of nationality’. Therefore, ‘wherever and whenever in the Bal-
kans national feeling became conscious, then, to that extent, does
civilization begin; and as such consciousness could best come through
war, war in the Balkans was the only road to peace’.28 This was writ-
ten a few months before the outbreak of World War One, yet it is
ironic that Balkan nationalism, which later has been described as
intrinsically alien to Western civic and supposedly civilised national-
ism, was considered to be the only Balkan feature upon which the
mantle of Europeanness was conferred.

At the same time, the region, which has come to be known since
the nineteenth century as ‘the Balkans’, has simultaneously partaken
of several other historical legacies which have carved up the puta-
tively unified space of the peninsula in several opposing or overlap-
ing spaces. After World War Two, for example, ‘Balkans’ was largely
dismissed as a geo-political category, and one part of the Balkans
was included within the rubric Eastern Europe. Nowadays there is an
effort to purge this category from academic and popular use, and
replace it with the discrete notions of Central Europe (or East Cen-
tral Europe) and Southeastern Europe. This makes it all the more
clear that Eastern Europe was a geo-political category that was a
political synonym for communist Europe, or Warsaw Pact Europe. It
was the spatial or territorised embodiment of the socialist (or
communist) historical legacy, so that, like with the Balkans and the
Ottoman legacy, one may postulate that Eastern Europe is the
socialist legacy.

Likewise with other similar processes, the socialist period was a con-
tinuous and complex one. It ended around 1989; the moment it ended,
it was turned into a legacy. What has been said before about the
Ottoman period and the Ottoman legacy, can be applied also to the
communist one. Under the rubric of legacy as continuity, we can look
at the workings of the socialist heritage in different spheres: the
political, the economic, the social, the realm of mentalité, and they
are strikingly similar in all post-communist countries. Whether they
like it or not, for most transitologists the preferred and logical sphere
of reference is Eastern Europe. The socialist legacy as continuity dis-
plays different degrees of perseverance in separate spheres and in
separate countries but, like any legacy, it is bound to subside; after
which it will be relegated to the realm of perception.

28 Nationalism and War in the Near East (By a Diplomatist), Oxford: Clarendon,
1915, 31.

Once we approach Eastern Europe as a distinct historical legacy
(and I would argue it is the socialist/communist one), we are bound
to postulate it as finite. Only, in history this is not an abrupt but a
gradual process. As a long-term process, Eastern Europe is slowly
fading away. Integration with the European institutional framework
may occur over anything between the next ten to hundred years. In
the realm of perception, however, we are speaking of the discrete
experience of two or three generations. Eastern Europe may and
most likely is going to disappear as a category, but it will be more dif-
ficult to obliterate attitudes from the inside as well as from the out-
side. The reason I am invoking this concept and this legacy is that it is
the most important medium through which the recent debate over
Central Europe and the Balkans has to be historiscised. Central
Europe as the emancipatory ideology of the 1980s and the early
1990s, despite the rhetoric of it pertaining to a quasi-Habsburg or
West European space, belongs to the hermeneutic realm of Eastern
Europe (to reiterate, Eastern Europe not as an eternal concept, but
as the historical experience of the Cold War period).

Eastern Europe, before it was turned into a historical legacy, can
be viewed as a space of intersecting historical legacies: the legacies
of the recent multinational dynastic empires of the Ottomans, the
Habsburgs, and the Romanovs, the latter blended with the workings
of the Soviet experience as imperial project. It is too early to make
valid conclusions about the ongoing continuities and perceptions of
the far-too-recent Russian-cum-Soviet imperial legacy but there is a
discernible difference in the treatments of the Habsburg and Otto-
man ones. The so-called Habsburg nostalgia has been evident in
much of the scholarly and artistic output emanating from East Cen-
tral Europe, most strongly in Hungary, with weaker manifestations
among Czechs and Poles. Interestingly, no comparable nostalgia for
the Ottoman legacy is to be discerned. This has little to do, with the
immanent characteristics of either the Habsburgs or the Ottomans,
not even with the fact that one was a Christian, and the other one a
Muslim empire. Rather, it has to do with the success of Austria (and
Germany in general) in the post-World War Two era. If this had not
been the case, alternative memories and assessments would have
been invoked, the elements of differentiation would have been
stressed, and the anti-German rhetoric would have been revived (or,
closer to the truth, would have become more audible).

The socialist legacy is the latest in a sequence of historical legacies,
and, as already pointed out, it became a legacy after the completion
of the socialist or experience in the late 1980s and early 1990s. But it is itself a subcategory of a larger phenomenon which some would argue has also turned into a legacy, while others see it as a still ongoing process. I am referring, of course, to what came in the wake of the Ottoman period and what, depending on the preferred paradigm or terminology, has been defined as the capitalist world economy (Wallerstein), or the capitalist mode of production (Marx), or the ‘iron cage’ of capitalist modernity (Max Weber), or the age of industrialism, or urbanism, or modernisation, or globalisation and its uneven impact. In Lefebvre’s sequence of spatialities, it is the abstract space of contemporary capitalism. For Zygmunt Bauman, it is modernity with its Enlightenment message where capitalism and socialism are ‘married forever in their attachment to modernity,’ and where modernity is turning into a legacy because we are now at crossroads with a road ahead ‘which is still hard to describe.’

The most important conclusion which follows from this whole argument in general is that legacies are not perennial, let alone primordial. Any reification of their characteristics will tend to turn them into artefacts outside the process they are a part of. In this sense, the EU is a subcategory of the capitalist system, or the capitalist mode of production (Marx), or the ‘iron cage’ of capitalist modernity (Max Weber), or the age of industrialism, or urbanism, or modernisation, or globalisation and its uneven impact. In Lefebvre’s sequence of spatialities, it is the abstract space of contemporary capitalism. For Zygmunt Bauman, it is modernity with its Enlightenment message where capitalism and socialism are ‘married forever in their attachment to modernity,’ and where modernity is turning into a legacy because we are now at crossroads with a road ahead ‘which is still hard to describe.’

The attempt to normalise the Balkans has been the guiding principle of the collaborative effort put into this volume. I have in mind obviously a normalisation in the scholarly field, especially in Western scholarship of the Balkans. Although I believe that the production of scientific knowledge moves along a line that only occasionally intersects with the production of popular mythology, the number of scholarly practitioners of Balkan studies who share the most pathetic prejudices about their object of study is staggering. While, as a whole, the rules of scholarly discourse restrict the open articulation of balkanism, in extraordinary times, like the past decade, self-control has been on the wane. Scholarship emanating from the Balkans, on the other hand, does not suffer from this particular affliction. What it has to overcome is a certain parochialism, and a methodological

29 Gregory, Geographical Imaginations, 360.
32 There is a particularly relevant example in the adjacent field of German studies. After all, a couple of generations ago, most explanations of German history insisted on the continuity of violence and militarism, if not from the Teutonic Forest, at least since the Thirty Years War. The matrix of German history has a long a time been explained by the notion of Sonderweg. It is only relatively recently that a change of focus has occurred, interpreting German history not as a deviation from but as a version of the general current of European history, pointing out common features, in a word normalising it. One may object that this happened because Germany itself was normalised, but normalisation is a complex dialectical process which crucially involves outside perceptions and treatment.
33 On the other hand, I have no illusions about the possibility of normalising journalistic discourse about the Balkans. The Balkans exists for the media only as moral stories about violence, victimisation and vitriolic memories. These parts of the Balkans that cannot be described in those terms, i.e. the ones that look normal, do not exist at all. This is true even for the New York Review of Books which has a clear division of labour. The United States and the West, and occasionally a token Oriental produce Art, literature, culture, education, and science. The Balkans are represented sporadically and exclusively in their political hypostasis of a production field of violence and political disruption. But this, then, can be the proper object of a scholarly analysis in media history.
resistance to fashionable trends, which may at first glance seem refreshing. This volume, hopes to have overcome the proverbial parochialism of Balkan Studies which are often set in an isolated national framework. This is obviously, but not only, the result of the continuous working of the national(ist) paradigm. Even for open-minded scholars, it is extremely difficult to master several languages, not to speak of overcoming a score of additional intellectual, political and bureaucratic difficulties, so as to be able to undertake truly comparative research. Very often, even international fora conceived with the most noble of intentions are rarely organically comparative.

Many of the ideas in this collection were first discussed at the international conference on ‘National Memory in Southeastern Europe.’ This conference, organised by the Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeastern Europe, was held in June 1999 on the Greek island of Halki, a few days after the end of NATO’s bombing campaign against Yugoslavia. It had over forty participants, from Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, France, Germany, Greece, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The programme had over thirty presentations, and the intense intellectual exchange has reflected on the chapters included in this volume.

The seventeen articles included in the volume are chronologically located in the last two centuries, the centuries of nationalism, and have the following geographic focus: Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, and Turkey. They are written by a variety of scholars—historians, anthropologists, and literary historians, coming from universities and institutions in the United States, the United Kingdom, Greece, Turkey, Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, and Croatia. It is our belief that the most interesting research nowadays is conducted in the border zones of disciplines, and that disciplinary parochialism can be, if not as dangerous, certainly as boring as national parochialism. The chapters are unified by three major problems, and accordingly are grouped into three parts: the construction of historical memories on different levels, from the individual to the nation; the sites of national memory; the transmission of national memory and the mobilisation of national identities.

Part One deals with the interplay between different levels of identity—individual, local, national, regional—and the creation of historical memory. Milica Bakic-Hayden looks into the mechanisms and strategies of national identification, and the particular place of literature, especially the epic genre, in this process. Defying the approaches to the Kosovo theme as either ‘representation’ or ‘fact,’ she highlights the power of its popular understanding and mobilising potential by positing the Kosovo epic as an instance of national self-interpretation through epic literature. In analysing what she calls the narrative space in the national memory, she emphasises the symbolic power of Kosovo in the complex relationship between territorial and spiritual place. In his reassessment of regionalism within a critical definition of culture, Robert Shannan Peckham explores the dialectical link between nation and region, and stresses the assimilation of the spatial, social or cultural ‘periphery’ together with its simultaneous endowment with authenticity. Using as his example nineteenth-century Greece, but against a broad European canvas, he shows the vectors of internal colonisation of regions, peasants, the urban poor, women and children, as well as ethnic minorities, by the centralised and centralising state.

Moving to the analysis of self and belonging on the individual level and using oral history methods, Leyla Neyzi reflects on the minutiae of the socialisation process in contemporary Turkey. By focusing on the life history of a single young woman who is a migrant to Istanbul from a village in eastern Turkey, she explores how an ordinary person constructs a sense of self in relation to national time, space and narrative. Neyzi describes the intricate and difficult interplay between the personal and collective in the categories of self, time and memory. Nergis Canefe joins issue with the general optimism engendered by the new genres of historical scholarship such as oral history from the vantage point of how to study individual accounts of the communal/national past. Basing her research on the Turkish Cypriot diaspora in London and in Istanbul, she examines the shaping of individual memories of communal pasts in relation to canonised accounts of a given period, especially as reflected in history textbooks. She demonstrates the significant degree of convergence between private and public versions of the communal past despite variations of interpretation.

Basing her analysis on two distinct ethnographic case studies from present-day Albania—a community of northern mountain Albanians, and a community of southern Albanian Aromanians, Stephanie Schwandner-Sieders stresses the correlation between social structure and long patterns of economic activity, and the fixedness or

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34 The conference was, in fact, the first major public event of the Joint History Project, one of the central activities of the Centre. For more information on the Centre see www.cdsee.org.
adaptability of identities. By following up the dynamics of particular categories of time in local discourses, and highlighting the specific role of consecutive generations in mediating individual and collective historical memories, she illustrates the legitimising role of mythical narratives in this time of strenuous political transition. In the final chapter of this part, Maria Todorova questions the permanence of meaning and the ensuing memories it evokes, by examining one of the most persistent tropes in Bulgarian historiography and culture—conversions to Islam—and its treatment in different narrative genres. She specifically follows the metamorphosis of a nineteenth-century literary mystification said to be a seventeenth-century Chronicle, and its employment in different historiographical contexts, as well as its treatment in a popular novel and a controversial film.

Part Two focuses on the tangible aspects of memory, what has come to be known as memory’s sites or realms. These are monuments and memorials, but also individual heroes and anti-heroes who have come to symbolise (or defy) national identity. Maria Bucur explores the spatial and temporal axes of commemorative practices in Romania throughout the twentieth century. In the wake of World War One, when the nineteenth-century veneration of heroes reached an institutionalised form, the numerous war memorials characterised by anonymity correlate well with the overall picture from the rest of Europe although the religious aesthetics seems to be curiously prominent in the Romanian case. The story after World War Two conforms to the general aesthetics of war commemoration in the rest of communist Eastern Europe, and the revisionist turn after 1989 has centred largely on the controversial figure of Ion Antonescu. Unravelling the vicissitudes of Zagreb’s main city square in the past century and a half, Dunja Rihtman-Augustin reflects on the relationship between everyday life and the workings of politics and ideology. At the centre of her analysis is the towering presence and absence of the monument of Ban Josip Jelacic who is invested with the highest cultural capital as Croatia’s national symbol, and undergoes numerous political appropriations. This essay has the added value of bringing in a personal witness account of the forced suppression of memory in the course of this century. In her study of Pavlos Melas, Anastasia Karakasidou aspires to situate this important Greek national hero within two narratives: that of his mythical heroic deeds and controversial death as it survives among the locals; the other, that of amateur historians. By elucidating the historical conditions that propelled Melas to the forefront of national politics, Karakasidou reconstructs how the hero is turned into a venerated national ancestor essential to the collective identity of modern Greece.

Taking cue from Benedict Anderson’s focus on the novel as the site of nascent nationalism, and as the analogy for the nation of the everyday, Keith Brown explores other national sites and their genres which share attributes of the epic. Instead of concentrating on the ubiquitous figure of the national hero, however, he chooses to turn his gaze on the villain of history as an indispensable component of the national narrative. His focus on the case of Boris Sarafov in the Macedonian national narrative allows him to outline the structural characteristics of the anti-hero whose complexity defies easy definition as well as enclosure within the familiar forms of national history. How significant is the distance between heroes and anti-heroes? Is there an organic link between a criminal past and heroisation? These are the questions that Ivan Šolić sets out to address in his essay on present-day national heroes from the recent Yugoslav civil war who have led mafia-affiliated prewar lives. The criminal as popular avenger has had a long tradition, especially in societies under foreign rule where the violation of law and authority is legitimised as resistance to occupation. Social banditry had already been raised to a respectable pedestal as the embodiment of freedom fighting in all Balkan historiographies, and has had its European counterparts in the phenomenon described by Eric Hobsbawm in Bandits. In the Yugoslav case, one can see an implicit return to the original ancient Greek notion of the hero as an individual of excess, outside the law and without moral constraints.

What are the channels through which national memories are fixed and transmitted? What is their legitimising potential and how is it employed? How are national identities stabilised, and by which means are they mobilised? These are the questions around which the chapters of Part Three cluster. The distinction between Parts Two and Three can be described in terms of the deliberations of Matt Matsuda on the difference between ‘monument’ and ‘document.’ While ‘monumentum’ derives from ‘monere,’ to ‘make remember,’ ‘documentum’ is linked to ‘docere,’ to ‘teach or instruct.’ Thus, though both monument and text locate and preserve the past through visual practices (seeing, reading), words have an explicit pedagogical function which is only implied by the veneration or celebration of commemorative imagery. Monuments guard the past, but words instruct the present and teach the future.35

In what is the only chapter that embarks on a cross-national comparison, Diana Mishkova focuses on how Serbian and Romanian elites framed political discourses on development and modernisation with recourse to the myths of origins and organic values was mobilised in the service of the ‘Westernising’ project. Even the conservative option, existing solely in Romania and representing the ideals of an indigenist and often xenophobic project, was Europe-oriented. Likewise, the Serbian version of radicalism with its egalitarian and populist ethos, and romanticised idealisation of tradition, was, in the end, neither conservative nor anti-modernist.

Of course, modern historiography, as it has developed since the nineteenth century, has been recognised as the chief producer of the national narrative, working in close collaboration with and underpinning the activities of the nation-state. The Greek case presents a singular paradox, being one of the strongest articulations of modern European nationalisms. It has been obsessed with the classical, and (less so) with the Byzantine periods, and modern history became incorporated into the national framework only after the 1970s. There is consensus in the ways the authors of this volume view basic issues in the formation of collective, and especially national, identities, the shaping and role of national memories, the place of historians and the relationship between past and history writing, that it may give the wrong impression that this consensus represents the historiographical hegemony about and in the region. This is not so. For Greece, in particular, the dominant ideological framework was the ‘continuity’ paradigm, the belief in the continuous development of the Greek nation from prehistoric times. It is, indeed, the Greek case, as well as the Jewish and some other cases, that have been used to challenge the modernist interpretation of nation formation. Costa Carras’s chapter is an apt illustration and a learned synthesis of this understanding. It also has its important place in this volume as a reminder of the dominant ways of educated thinking about the nation in the region.

The last cluster of articles in this part deals with the significance of textbooks, both at the school and university level. Textbooks as mass, popular and mandatory channels for the transmission of ideas have been a favoured target for scholarly analysis. They have been called the ideological highways where information and values are shaped into memories and identities. The authors of this section clearly treat historical memory as the unavoidable commodity shaped and supplied by textbooks. Dubravka Stojanović close reading of history textbooks in Serbia during the last decade uncovers how the socialisation process into the desired national paradigm occurs on three levels: the level of factual manipulation with the selection, emphasis, rearrangement or purging of facts; the level of perpetuating national stereotypes; finally, the level of an overall deterministic and authoritarian philosophy of history. Her conclusions about the drastic reshaping of the historical message to the present nationalistic political configuration by weakening but not entirely changing the previous ideological matrix invites parallels other post-communist countries. Mirela-Luminiţa Murgescu provides this in a comprehensive review of Romanian history textbooks from the 1990s. Maybe the only East European transition which came close to the label of violent revolution (with a tentative stress on the first), the Romanian case actually displays a remarkable degree of continuity in the educational field. This is especially true of national history which has had a unique tradition under the previous Ceauşescu regime. While the obsession with ethnogenesis is retained, added are Orthodox Christian values. Approaching the problem of textbooks from a slightly different angle, Alexander Kiossev concentrates on the role of the university literature textbook, and its relation to literature with its formative contribution to the nation as imagined community. Its purpose, according to him, is to stabilise ‘national literature’ as a subject and legitimisation of national identity by ‘normalising’ the romantic tenor of the classic literary text into institutionalised positivist clichés.

This volume, as well as the conference, attempts to provide the setting where scholars on and from most countries of the region would focus on broadly-defined problems that could provide the basis for both intra- as well as inter-regional comparisons. It is the collection’s goal, therefore, not so much to contribute to a theoretical refinement of the understanding of memory and identity but to explore and assess the significance of particular manifestations of national identities and national memories in the region. While the majority of these contributions is understandably located within the national space, we hope that they have succeeded in challenging the isolationist national approach by showing how unified they are by a common

36 Alain Choppin, L’histoire des manuels scolaires. une approche globale, cited in this volume by Mirela-Luminiţa Murgescu.
and universal scholarly language and approach. We hope to have been able to demonstrate that the Balkans can be a normal object of study like any other area. Memories in the Balkans, though not the non-existent ‘Balkan memory,’ are like memories elsewhere but have their local specifics which can be the object of our interest. Identities in the Balkans, though not the missing ‘Balkan identity,’ are like identities everywhere, and it is their peculiarities in time and space that have attracted our attention and inspired our exchanges.