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Introduction

Reframing the European Pasts: National Discourses and Regional Comparisons

The two decades after 1989 saw the collapse of Cold War historiography which was built on the postulated difference between Eastern and Western Europe. The interpretative framework of scientific debates about the region changed profoundly in the 1990s and prepared the ground for new perspectives. As the political map of the continent was redrawn, what became visible were both the violently ethnocentric reinterpretations of "national cultures," as well as an equally vocal yet publicly much less visible countertrend criticizing these national narratives, and attempting to go beyond them. In addition, a rejuvenated Central European region, blurring the politically constituted borderline between Eastern and Western Europe, redefined its cultural identity by new comparative research in social, cultural, and political history.

The upsurge of international scientific communication injected new methods and terminology into research in and on East Central Europe. Less noted in the general creative euphoria was, however, that not every novelty could be adapted easily in the "foreign" context, since the "imported" terms and theories had close links to the background on which they emerged. A key issue therefore has remained the question of the applicability of methodological toolkits in novel environments, a question that also draws attention to the relation of specific terminologies and analytical procedures to certain topics and questions. Due to this link between themes and methods, each new research field modifies at least partially the historian's analytical options. One should remember the key terms of the nineties: civil society, public sphere, collective memory, citizenship, etc.—and the renewed demand for interdisciplinarity.

It is obvious that the rejuvenation of scientific research in the former Eastern Bloc was linked to the reception of "Western" methods. Furthermore, this westward opening was an ancillary feature of the fundamental transformation of Eastern European societies, and one can still merely speculate on the extent to which the changes in values, politics, lifestyle, and thinking in this part of the continent also have a reverse impact on the perspective of those "Westerners"

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who research this region. Indeed, while the post-colonial critique coming from the emancipated Asian (mostly Indian) contexts on what has been termed as "Eurocentrism" had a strong impact on the former colonial superpowers, its attitude and effect on the former communist societies has been far less visible. It seems as if the primary intellectual effort here was either to reassert oneself into a "common" European cultural realm, or to resort to autochthonist/nativist/chauvinistic cultural self-definitions.

The last two decades brought about the gradual redefinition of institutionalized historiography both in Germany and in East Central Europe. While until the seventies social history and cultural/intellectual history had been strictly separate and often antagonistic genres, today these subdisciplines profit from each other, and most research projects try actually to strike some balance between them. The "rapprochement" engenders newer methodological questions: What are those discursive, institutional, and cognitive frameworks that define historical cultures beyond everyday politics, and how do these frameworks relate to the broader dynamics in the history of mentalities (such as the *Vergesellschaftung* of historical consciousness)?

As Jürgen Kocka reminds us in his introductory essay, far from the Weberian ideal of objective science, history writing is always subject to political decisions. This is particularly true in regard to the mass discipline of national historiography. In contrast, comparative research opens more cosmopolitan and more globalized perspectives by focusing not on one single nation and its specificities, but on a larger interpretative framework. Surely, the distancing effect implied by comparison makes us more suspicious about claims to specificity and strengthens our sense of relativity. This way it is lessening the danger of national self-enclosing. The comparative perspective, however, can also become politically instrumentalized, as it is not all the same to whom we compare ourselves and what variable we choose. The historiographical debates around *Sonderweg* and *Ostforschung* illustrate well that the unbalanced and manipulated comparison of East and West could be turned to serve straightforward political aims.

Surely, one cannot talk today about German culture and academia being wedged between East and West, as in the last fifty years it integrated into the Western framework even if it retained some specific local features. Thus it is meaningless to claim that German scholars fulfill some sort of mediating role by default, but we can talk of a quite specific local knowledge and research network managed by German institutions with regard to East Central Europe. Similarly, the Eastern European paradigm was completely reshaped in the context of the post-1989 political and cultural transformations, which catalyzed a frantic appropriation of Western methodological trends. It became

a possibility for young scholars from these countries to appear on the global market of ideas with their projects sensitive to the specific local problems but at the same time using identical methods with their Western colleagues. Very often this meant the adoption of social constructivist and postmodern/deconstructivist positions. At the same time, such a skeptic historiographical position towards the "national vulgate" cannot rely on a broad social consensus in these countries, still very much under the spell of the upsurge of national(ist) sentiment and mobilization. It rather exists in a relative social isolation, in a parallel structure dependent on the international frameworks of academic funding.

The texts presented here document a long-term interaction and dialogue of scholars from East Central Europe and Germany based on the cooperation of the History Department of the *Central European University* and the *Zentrum* (later, *Berliner Kolleg*) *für Vergleichende Geschichte Europas*, at the *Freie Universität Berlin*. This cooperation yielded a number of joint workshops (in October 2001 and October 2002) as well as student and faculty exchanges, guest lectures, and numerous follow-up projects. In addition to the authors of the texts published in our selection, more than twenty scholars participated in this framework of cooperation, such as Sorin Antohi, Emese Bálint, Lilya Berezhnaya, Ingo Eser, Jörn Grünewald, Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, Constantin Iordachi, Maciej Janowski, Borbála Juhász, Viktor Karády, Jacek Kochanowicz, Michal Kopeček, Nóra Kovács, Chris Lorenz, Mathias Mesenhöller, Dragoş Petrescu, Cristina Petrescu, Alfred Rieber, Oksana Sarkisova, Pierre-Antoine Schorderet, Aleksander Semyonov, Bernhard Struck, Philipp Ther, Balázs Trencsényi, Marius Turda, and Regina Vogel.

The dialogue of German and East Central European scholars documented by this thematic issue tackled the convergences and divergences of the underlying working hypotheses and methods. On the whole, one could not find fundamental methodological or thematic cleavages between the two groups. In one way or another, both groups were touched by the challenge of interdisciplinarity and most projects sought to combine social history, political history, cultural studies and intellectual history, often drawing on the achievements of historical anthropology. Nevertheless, there were certain points where the scholars affiliated with Budapest and Berlin respectively presented rather divergent positions. A good example for this was the question of national narratives: while both groups agreed about the need of relativizing these frameworks in historiography, it became obvious that the participants in the debates interpreted national determination rather differently. While the German scholars were mostly talking about the need of a transnational historiographical

framework in line with the European unification process, Eastern European scholars often stressed the need of reconsidering the national canons themselves and devising alternative formulations to the nationalist historiographical discourses.

For both of these groups, comparative history seemed to be the most promising intellectual operation to transcend the limitations of nation-centered scholarship. One of the main objectives of the *Berliner Kolleg für Vergleichende Geschichte Europas* has been shaped by uneasiness regarding comprehensive accounts of European history. Accounts which were written in Western Europe prior to 1990 were to a large part framed as success stories of the West, Eastern and East Central Europe figured as the locus of backwardness. Working on an inclusive European history requires firsthand knowledge of the sources, languages, and ideas of the East, but to avoid merely adding national histories to another, a comprehensive European history needs a relational approach, be it through comparisons, entanglements, or a combination thereof. In its turn, by its eminently transnational composition of faculty and student body, *Central European University* is a pivotal place for intercultural dialogue and comparative research. The interaction of these two institutions in Budapest and Berlin thus created a space for rethinking the frameworks of European history and also to reconsider the heuristics of cross-regional comparisons.

The first part of the thematic bloc, published in the present issue under the title *Practices and Perceptions,* contains texts which are eminently concerned with these methodological problems. In what was a keynote speech to one of the joint workshops, Jürgen Kocka laid out some of the methodological and ethical problems that comparative history implies. Exoticizing and incorporating "the other" are two major pitfalls, whereas creating an alienating effect of one's own case, by comparing it with other cases (including politically incorrect attempts like the Weberian comparative studies on bureaucracy and religion), provides for interesting results of the comparative approach. In turn, Arnd Bauerkämper stresses the constructedness of European regions shaped by a dualistic concept of spaces, societies, and cultures being "progressive" or "backward," and therefore being "in" or "out" of Europe. Against such essentialist interpretations derived from the modernization paradigm he argues for writing European history by concentrating first on analytical issues and subsequently reconstructing their spatial dimension. As European history is not conceivable as a narrative of separate geographical entities, historical studies should conceive Europe as a variable space of continuous social and cultural exchange.

Focusing on case studies from Western and Southeast Europe, the contributions by Helke Rausch and Dietmar Müller have a common interest for constructing and representing national narratives. Rausch draws on the concepts of "imagined community" and "*lieux de mémoire*" in her analysis of public statues erected with an expressly national intent during the latter part of the nineteenth century in Paris, Berlin, and London. The pursued strategies of state- and middle-class bourgeois committees for the erection of monuments and the process of inauguration shaped and mirrored at the same time the specificities of the political system. In Prussia, cult figures representing state power mirrored an authoritarian and militaristic notion of the nation, while liberal and socialist voices were unable to effectively challenge the monarchic domination. In the British case, monuments in honor of politicians were more numerous and stand for the centrality of parliamentary politics and political institutions. In France discourses about, and the erection of, statues were the most dynamic due to the republican political system and the freedom of political expression. While French liberalism and republicanism could successfully claim to stand for the regeneration of French society after 1871 against the Right, Left, and the Catholic side, the sheer number and strength of the contenders points at the contested nature of the republican position in identity politics.

While Rausch is stressing more the Western European divergences in "staging realms of the past," Dietmar Müller analyzes the process of assigning a place for Jews in the Romanian "nation code" and for (Albanian) Muslims in the Serbian "nation code" in terms of the paradigm of Orientalism. While the Great Powers served as role models for Romanian and Serbian identity construction, these principal "Others" were represented as uncivilized and non-European, preventing the nation-states from their European destiny. This discursive construction of the nation in major debates is identified as a first step which was followed by policy recommendations from intellectuals and actual attempts to fulfill the dream of an ethnically homogenous nation-state. The nation code, however, is not conceptualized as a stable datum, but rather as a continuous process providing for a common language and political field in and on which political deals could be struck. Consequently, the text focuses on some political fields in the interwar period such as the representation of minority interests and parliamentarism, and the attempt to autochthonize economic sectors or entire regions in interwar Romania and Yugoslavia.

Turning to urban history, Markian Prokopovych's contribution challenges common assumptions which originated in problematic comparisons.

The historiography on Lemberg architecture in the "long nineteenth century" predominantly has Vienna and Cracow as reference points, characterizing the Galician capital's architecture either as a bad replica of the Western original or as an example of modernity compared to Cracow's historic style. These value-loaded assumptions in aesthetic respect were duplicated on a political level. Consequently, in Polish and Ukrainian historiography, Lemberg's presumably provincial architecture was explained with the Austrian bureaucracy's conservatism during the *Vormärz*, while their more refined traits began with Galician autonomy since 1867 and culminated in the interwar period—both periods considered under exclusive Polish cultural influence. Against these national interpretations, Prokopovych suggests the approach of entangled history, but in a version which takes the ethnic dimension seriously.

The second part of the texts, to be published in the 2009/2 issue, bears the title *Translations and Transfers.* In the first essay, focusing on the methodological problems of studying translations, László Kontler points at a fundamental aspect of comparison when reminding us that in the history of ideas authors and readers constantly relate "their" texts to others in a more or less conscious manner. He shows a field of cross-fertilization between translational studies and approaches in intellectual history. When both the "Cambridge School" of linguistic contextualism and the Koselleckian *Begriffsgeschichte* are attempting to grasp conceptual change, then findings from reception theory in translational studies should be integrated concerning the position of the reader. The reader, and even more so the translator of texts, are occupying the central position since "concepts do not have histories, only their reception has a history."

Proceeding on sub-state and transnational scales, Borbála Zsuzsanna Török inquires into the cultural contextualization of those marginal territories of Europe whose participation in the larger circulation of knowledge and goods had faced prolonged infrastructural, economic, and political hindrances. The author seeks an answer to the question whether such regions with unusual social fragmentation, economic backwardness, and exotic external image do still belong to the "European" realm. Comparing the divergent trajectories of local learned societies in the eastern province of the Habsburg monarchy, Transylvania, she inquires into the correlation of scholarly practice and the formation of collective identities with regard to internal and external references, patronage and political support. The essay points out that local scholarly endeavors carried the impact of a Central European, Austrian, and German academic tradition, but were shaped by the peculiarities of the

composite environment. This locality could, and indeed, did occasionally look outlandish to native critics and foreign scholars. However, at least at the level of elite culture and scholarship, the province shared the general traits of the Western European practice.

Focusing on ideological transfer and the representation of national identity in another time framework, Maciej Górny compares Marxist histories of historiography in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany in the so-called Stalinist period. All historiographies shared the problem of ideological legitimization, of searching for means to prove their local roots. The outstanding feature of assessing the suitability of historians and schools of historiography to the Marxist historical philosophy was their progressiveness. Yet, not even committed Marxist historians could dismiss the national canon altogether, but were trying to accommodate important nineteenth-century historians from the Romantic and the Positivist schools to the Marxist vision. When progressiveness was tied to unifying the nation in one state, then Joachim Lelewel, the Prussian historical school, František Palacký, and Ľudovit Štúr could be saved from dismissal.

Testing the applicability of trans-cultural analytical concepts, Stefan Mergel studies the culture of election campaigning in postwar Western Europe. His essay is a critique of the concept of "Americanization" as rather a diffuse feeling of being culturally colonized than an analytical tool. He admits however, that some European countries' election cultures might have had similar features with the USA: proximity of political marketing to commercial marketing, personalization and professionalization of campaigns, and media centered strategies. Yet, prior to the 1980s these shared features were only to a small degree the results of American influences, but rather parallel trends due to structural commonalities. Since the 1980s there can be identified an increased trend towards Americanization and Europeanization at the same time. National cultures of electoral campaigning still provide for the filter which prevents total convergence of American and European electioneering styles.

On the whole, by presenting case studies of transnational historical phenomena, the contributions focus on the heuristics of comparative research, posing questions about the validity of regional frameworks of analysis and also about the limits of comparison. The thematic blocs are supplemented by historiographical debates (in this number on *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town* by Rogers Brubaker, Margit Feischmidt, Jon Fox and Liana Grancea; in the next number on István Rév's *Retroactive Justice*) and book reviews. The present thematic issue opens the new series of the

journal *East Central Europe*. It is intended to document the complex regional and global entanglements of scholarship in and on the region. It is hoped that it also substantiates the general program of the journal, perceiving East Central Europe not as a self-enclosing spatial category but as a broad platform for transnational, transgenerational, and interdisciplinary scholarly interaction.

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