

## [Costinescu on Livezeanu and Klimó, 'The Routledge History of East Central Europe since 1700'](#)

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**Irina Livezeanu, Árpád von Klimó, eds.** *The Routledge History of East Central Europe since 1700*. Routledge Histories Series. New York: Routledge, 2017. xvi + 522 pp. \$245.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-415-58433-3.

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Every twenty years or so a new regional synthesis comes out that, while delivering a state of the art for its historical present, aims to authoritatively orientate readers toward the broad processes that have shaped both the deeper past of the region and its historiography. Surveying a landscape that has been greatly enriched by the cumulative juxtaposition of “turns” (for example, spatial, gender) across both locally and globally oriented historiographies, the volume engages its subject matter through a determined transnational approach. In this regard, its approach is congruent with that of the multivolume *Entangled Histories of the Balkans*, particularly its fourth and final volume, *Concepts, Approaches, and (Self-)Representations* (2017), edited by Roumen Daskalov, Diana Mishkova, Tchavadar Marinov, and Alexander Vezenkov, in which the politics of area making are amply discussed. The present volume foregrounds the entanglements (in other words, demographic, cultural, etc.) that the editors and the contributing authors see as constitutive of the region as a unit of analysis and of its actual history. Hence, the underlying methodology is doubly reflexive, in terms of both critically appraising a wealth of recent scholarship and more deeply engaging with actors’ categories and perspectives. The volume provides a thematic, multivocal narrative rather than a primarily subregional or chronological one and does not shy away from offering suggestions in terms of where extant avenues of research might or should lead to. This is made possible by bringing together the assorted expertise of scholars collaborating on a chapter level.

The editors’ introduction provides a critical engagement with the politics of region making that is open to actors’ own understandings and a brief survey of existing textbooks, as well as a consideration of the analytical use of the concept of “backwardness.” It also covers the historiographical and institutional dimensions of scholarship in and about the region, mostly since the fall of communism. The book itself contains ten chapters, only two of which (chapters 8 and 9) are strictly chronological. The rest are organized according to specific themes in the following sequential order: “Space: Empires, Nations, Borders” by Bernhard Struck and James Koranyi, “Rural and Urban Worlds: Between Economic Modernization and Persistent Backwardness” by Jacek Kochanowicz and Bogdan Murgescu, “Demography and Population Movements” by Theodora Dragostinova and David Gerlach, “Religion and Ethnicity: Conflicting and Converging Identifications” by Joel Brady and Edin Hajdarasic, “The Cultures of East Central Europe: Imperial, National, Revolutionary” by Irina Livezeanu, Thomas Ort, and Alex Drace-Francis, “Women’s and Gender History” by Krassimira Daskalova and Susan Zimmerman, “Political Ideologies and Political Movements” by Ulf Brunnbauer

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and Paul Hanebrink, "Communism and Its Legacy" by Malgorzata Fidelis and Irina Gigova, "Returning to 'Europe' and the Rise of Europragmatism: Party Politics and the European Union since 1989" by Reinhard Heinisch, and "Uses and Abuses of the Past" by Patrice Dabrowski and Stefan Troebst. In what follows, I will offer a brief summary of several of the chapters interspersed with a more detailed analysis of three chapters selected according to my familiarity with the subject matter.

Chapter 1 provides a synthetic overview of the region's political history, conceptualized here as a dynamic and contingent process marked by shifting "regimes of territoriality." The starting point is an abbreviated version of Charles Mayer's theoretical toolkit. Emphasis is placed on the levels on which sovereignty, from the individual to the micro- and macro-regional, may be seen to manifest itself in terms of political and cultural belonging. In doing so, the authors challenge both nation-centered periodizations and "traditional international frameworks." They make a good case for "transnational analyses" that do not view major international crises such as 1815 or 1914-18 merely in terms of "total caesuras" but, more importantly, are capable of capturing the longer-term processes that molded the region's space (p. 31). This is done with a view toward explaining how East Central Europe may be seen to have ultimately joined the global trend of superseding territoriality. Accordingly, the authors divide the history of the region into a pre-1860 "absolutist regime of territoriality," a "right-sizing" nation-state-centric process between 1860 and 1960, and a potentially post-territorial order thereafter.

These successive territorial orders mark the shift in the geopolitical grounds for contestation, away from the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth to interimperial rivalry and subsequent nation-building to the south of the region. If before 1760 the domino effect of imperial expansionism reshaped the internal boundaries of the region according to the preexisting mercantilist logic of absolutist territoriality, the Napoleonic era and the relative weakening of the Ottoman Empire marked a shift toward contestation between strengthening local actors and imperial interests. This is not to say, however, that "right-sizing" national projects, whereby "elites in power" labored to build polities whose "borders matched their practical authority" in order to "achieve maximum control" over the inhabitants, were the sole important factors (p. 31). "Suppressed provinces, forgotten places," such as the decreased political and cultural relevance of the Banat or Galicia, could be the outcome of either intra-imperial or nation-making developments, to say nothing of the complex interplay between local, regional, and centralizing identity-building processes (pp. 53-54). Finally, the emergence of a post-territorial order after the 1960s is still an open-ended process, shaped by both the supra-national and the national (think the breakup of Yugoslavia and EU integration).

In sum, while aware that such a synthesis involves difficult choices both in terms of narrative organization and the material covered, I would have liked to see more engagement with the dynamics of how territorial power/knowledge was transferred, adopted, and adapted between geopolitical entities. For example, it would have been helpful if the summary of relative Ottoman decline in terms of conventional political and economic history would have added some indications as to how distinct power/knowledge traditions were integrated during the westernizing Tanzimat period. Still, this does not diminish the original and well-argued quality of the study.

Chapter 2 takes a more straightforward yet well-grounded approach to the economic history of the region and its interaction with the cultural, social, and institutional spheres. Aware of the broader turn in political economy and economic history, which stresses the role of ideas and institutions, as

well as processes of transfer and translation, the authors nonetheless choose to focus on endogenous factors. They emphasize how “backwardness,” both self-perceived and ascribed, shaped modernization policies and processes. Without downplaying the region’s close connection with the West and, by implication, the utility of world-systems analysis in elucidating structural factors of economic underdevelopment, the authors are more interested in neoclassical and neo-institutional perspectives. They drive home the point that the region’s “economic backwardness has been real and not invented” but emphasize that East Central Europe was economically backward only in comparative terms, mainly because its pace of economic growth has been rather slower and more uneven than in the West (p. 112). In this framework, the main indicators of relative backwardness comprise lower “*productivity of the factors of production,*” seen here as key to long-term growth, the slower pace at which innovations were adopted, and the lower levels of “human capital and bad institutions” (p. 82). Consequently, the periodization distinguishes among: a pre-industrial “old order” marked by the gradual disaggregation of serfdom and the role of elites in resisting the spread of capitalism; a period of “belated modernization” spanning the nineteenth century, during which state-building could, at times, produce the unintended effects of middle-class-driven institutional hypertrophy; an “interwar interlude” during which autarchic, protectionist, and ethnocentric reactions to economic crisis and state consolidation diminished the role of global flows; communist modernization with its attending emphasis on industrialization and urbanization via command economies; and “post-communist westernization,” in which a variety of national paths toward westernization and institutional disentanglement from the recent past were crucially mediated by equally variable degrees of Western involvement.

Commendably, this study also shows that “backwardness” need not be theorized in cultural versus economic terms, but that including the perspectives of local actors can integrate the two. This makes for arresting insights, such as “paradoxically the first to gain ‘independence’ as nation-states were the poorer and economically less-developed countries” (p. 92). This is a nice way of underscoring how form can take precedence over function when emulating the West. Additionally, the title of the chapter (“Rural and Urban Worlds”) reflects more the conclusions rather than the premises of the analysis yet without being reductive or reifying these categories as such. Thus, in fleshing out a narrative in which institutional discontinuity between the time periods outlined above lag and the prolonged survival of traditional social structures are determinant factors, the authors have achieved a coherent explanation of the region’s economic underdevelopment in comparison to the West.

Chapter 3 investigates the shifting historical dynamics of migration within and beyond the region, from the early eighteenth-century trend of empires creating heterogeneous borderlands at a time when ethnicity was not yet a salient category for “unmixing,” as it would subsequently become for nation-states. Likewise, chapter 4 disentangles the categories of “religion” and “ethnicity,” paying attention to how historical actors negotiated the often syncretic aspects of lived religion and the growing importance of ethnic affiliation in the course of a long transition from empire to nation-state.

Chapter 5 takes as its starting point the productive polysemy of “culture,” with an emphasis on literary cultures broadly defined. In doing so, this study casts a broad net when capturing the formative influences of the eighteenth century and the Enlightenment, in terms of how geographical peripheries from Venice to St. Petersburg could in fact act as cultural centers for the region. At the same time, the analysis considers a range of specific institutional and social networks that did not necessarily point westward. One example would be the “decidedly modern aspect” that the spread of

Greek in the Balkans took during the period of Phanariot political and cultural ascendancy in the eighteenth century (p. 222). In this way, the authors seek to develop explanatory tools that are more concrete than the “the too often vaguely stated ‘western influence’” (p. 224). Moreover, the chapter avoids falling into the trap of positing national teleologies. Rather, it shows how imperial cultural/linguistic policies, fluid identities, and actors’ awareness of a plurality of audiences shaped the foundational cultural productions of nascent nationalism. Still speaking about the nineteenth century, the foregoing points are further nuanced by an interlude on imagining time and space. This excursus highlights how geographic mobility could foster not only a sense of place but also a sense of place in history, as well as forge dynamics of national self-comparison in the lead-up to 1848. Having thus set the scene, the narrative veers toward a slightly more conventional structural framework.

Starting with the second half of the nineteenth century, the authors provide an overview of the increasingly institutionalized cultural landscape of the emerging nation-state(s), never losing sight of how the political and the cultural were intertwined and became increasingly popularized in reaction. Subsequently, the “modernist turn” (1890-1919) was noteworthy not only because it drew up the perceivably “primitive” but also because it redefined the relationship between official politics and artistic expression. Tellingly, a similarly poignant argument is made with regard to the post-World War I cultural landscape. In Poland, for instance, aesthetic autonomy from the weight of the programmatically “national” was actively desired by many (p. 242). An equally interesting thematization is that of “the militarization of culture” (1938-45). Wartime culture is portrayed not solely with reference to neo-imperial and nationalist mobilization but also in terms of resistance, survival, and instrumentalization, with an apposite vignette on death camps and killing fields. The endpoint of the analysis is 1989, and proper consideration is given to the dynamic tensions among co-optation, resistance, and outright appropriation in the realms of both popular and elite culture at both ends of the communist period. Notably, the authors refuse to simply equate moments of “thaw” with actual liberalization. A pertinent example would be the state-sponsored nationalist turn in Romania, which was well under way by the 1970s. To conclude the analysis of this chapter, one might note that it successfully eschews an overly schematized, chronological succession of major cultural trends (for example, Romanticism begets nationalism, etc.). Rather, this is a polycentric narrative that permits readers to see the ongoing entanglements between imperial and national cultures, arguably until the end of the communist period.

Subsequently, chapter 6 seeks to give equal weight to the legal, cultural, and political dimensions of gender, without focusing strictly on women’s history but also integrating discussions of masculinity and the impact of religious and national scripts on sexuality, activism, and agency. By contrast, chapter 7 is historiographically more traditional in that it offers a systematic overview of relevant “isms” in politics and ideology, from local iterations of liberalism to homegrown agrarian movements. Chapter 8 picks up chronologically where the previous chapter left off, engaging with how the challenges of economic and class transformation affected state- and nation-building policies, as well as how cultural self-understandings changed during the period of communist rule. Chapter 9 then continues with an analysis that is in equal parts economic and cultural, tracing how patterns of post-1989 European integration had to simultaneously reckon with national identity crises, the impact of Western perceptions of the region, and massive economic upheaval. Finally, chapter 10 details how the politics of commemoration shaped national calendars and policies while simultaneously considering the transnational contestation of emerging narratives and canons, from the Polish constitution of 1791 to post-communist cultures of remembrance.

In terms of general conclusions, the volume has achieved its objective of becoming a reference work. It gives due weight to recent historiographical developments, as additionally reflected in the chapter endnotes and suggestions for further reading. Moreover, the authors take the welcome liberty of providing thought-provoking vignettes, which should be stimulating for established practitioners and especially graduate students. All told, this would be more than a worthwhile purchase for a research library and also, list price notwithstanding, for the historian's bookshelf.

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