

## Review of Roudometof's *Nationalism, Globalization, and Orthodoxy*

*Nationalism, Globalization, and Orthodoxy: The Social Origins of Ethnic Conflict in the Balkans* by Victor Roudometof. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2001. pp. 304 + xvii, maps.

Vladimir Solonari

"The Balkans," writes Victor Roudometof in the conclusion to his book, "are not the Ottomans' legacy. On the contrary, the 'making of the Balkans' was the consequences of the adoption and selective appropriation of Western ideas into the European part of the Ottoman Empire" (p. 239). And also, "The adoption of the nation-state model by the Balkan peoples is a manifestation of their modernity, not their "backwardness." . . . Because of the historical factors . . . this reorganization led to the elevation of nationhood into the foundational principle in regional nation-building" (p. 229). His book is thus about the Balkans' "route to modernity" (p. 4). He emphatically refuses to treat the Ottoman legacy as the all-explicatory cause of the Balkans' illnesses of ethnic hatreds, chronic instability, and lack of development. Even more, he displays some sympathy toward this period of the Balkans' history in which he sees a lot of opportunities subsequently lost. Equally, he dismisses all types of primordialist or essentialist presentations of the "constant conflicts" of Christians with Muslim, "Balkan ghosts," and the like, which, he implies, have powerful racist undertones (pp. 1-10, 17-18, 238-39). He also refutes the more moderate argument of Anthony Smith who conceptualizes *ethnie* and *nation* as qualitatively different notions by asserting that Smith's definition of the nation is circular (p. 18, n. 18). By proposing "to treat nations and nationalism" as a discourse (p. 8), Roudometof explicitly sides with the most postmodernist

342      *Review of Roudometof's Nationalism, Globalization, and Orthodoxy*

and constructivist modes of dealing with the problematic of nationalism.

Roudometof calls his method "*sociological history*" (p. 241, his emphasis) or "*'eventful' sociology*: the series of historical events, while all leading one into another, do not imply historical inevitability" (p. 10, my emphasis). He adheres to the Wallersteinian's world-system paradigm, which he skillfully redefines to make it more flexible to include not only economic but also cultural and political factors, as well as to circumvent the dogma of the inescapable underdevelopment of the initially dependent regions (pp. 3-7). He displays a thorough knowledge of a very wide field of literature on the economic, social, cultural, political, and military history of the Balkans since the eighteenth century, most of it in English, French, and Greek, which he reinterprets and renders in a rather readable and informative narration.

The main challenge of the book is, if I understand it correctly, "to show, [that] over the nineteenth century, the Balkan peoples struggled between the options of nationhood and citizenship. The conclusion of this struggle was neither inevitable nor predetermined" (p. 9). (Nationhood is being understood here as what is usually called ethnic as opposed to civic nationalism, V.S.). To answer this challenge convincingly would be a real achievement indeed, especially if accompanied by an explanation as to why the first option prevailed while the second failed. Such a reinterpretation would undoubtedly entail a reconsideration of our understanding of the Balkans. While I feel a strong sympathy toward the main thesis of Roudometof and have no problem in accepting his methodological premises, I doubt whether his account is really convincing. It is so because it lacks clarity and sometimes produces an impression opposite to the one intended. The author is occasionally distracted by the side issues, whose relevance to the main argument remains obscure.

Let us now look more closely at what Roudometof means while talking about the availability of the "citizenship" option in the nineteenth-century Balkans. Roudometof refers to the much discussed *millet* (association) system, whereby the Christian Orthodox population of the Ottoman empire was included in the

*Rum millet*, over which considerable administrative authority was wielded by the Orthodox clergy headed by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople. Membership in the *Rum millet* was, as Roudometof persuasively suggests, the main identity of the Christian Orthodox subjects of the Porte and much more important than their ethnic identity. Ethnic boundaries remained blurred during the Ottoman time and the prestige of Greek culture and language so high that Hellenization and the rise in social status were closely linked. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth century Balkans, only the educated Hellenized strata (including those representatives of it who later “rediscovered” their “true” “national” identity as Bulgarians, for example, under the influence of European Romanticism) were able to receive European Enlightenment ideas. Because the Enlightenment discourse was individual centered and nationhood (or cultural nation) was not part of it, Balkan “revolutionary liberalism” was not nationalistic either.

So, Rigas Velenstinlis's *Grand Map of Greece* (Ellas) of 1797, which comprised all of the Balkans and Anatolia, should be read, according to Roudometof, not as a manifestation of Greek nationalist megalomania. In reality, he suggests, Velenstinlis envisaged the overthrow of the Ottoman Empire by “coordinated efforts of all Balkans people. . . . *Hellas* appears as the secular, liberal facet of the *Rum millet*, the product of an intellectual mutation caused by the reception of the Enlightenment in the Ottoman Balkans” (p. 62). Similarly, the Greek national revolution started in 1814 by the Philiki Eteria's conspiratorial society is seen in these same non-Nationalistic liberal and pan-Hellenic terms (also, the 1821 tragic conflict with Wallachian—or Romanian, as today's Romanians would prefer to say—revolutionary Tudor Vladimirescu is explained by reference to class, not national categories, pp. 28-29). The formation of the independent Greek State in 1830 was due to the internal Ottoman decay, the development of the (“social”) bandit movement on the Balkans, and the intervention of the Great Powers in 1827, driven by the pro-Hellenic feelings in Europe, itself a poignant cultural development. This was similar to the way the Serbs gained autonomy in 1817, more

as a result of the favorable situation and social bandits' movement than an uprising that was in any sense "national."

Once established, those states acquired a logic of their own and found in ethnic nationalism, itself a product of the influence of European Romanticism, a powerful means of legitimization. This in its turn induced ideological and political competition with the intellectual Bulgarian, and later Macedonian and Albanian, elites who were themselves under the influence of Romantic ideas, which led them to construct their own national identities even before the formation of their "own" states.

However, even in this new era of national states, the "citizenship project" did not disappear completely. It survived in the Empire in the form of "Ottomanism" during the Tanzimat (inter-ethnic state, Roudometof calls it) and on the rest of the Peninsula as a vision of the Balkan federation (transnational state, in Roudometof's words). While the second project was realized partially in the formation of the Yugoslav state (both the first and the second), Ottomanism was eventually abandoned by both Christians and Muslims in the Empire. Instrumental in this were growing discrepancies between the two communities, the Christians disproportionately benefiting from the increasing integration of the Empire in the world economy and international exchange, while the Muslims, who lagged behind in terms of both education and wealth, consolidated their quasi-monopoly in public administration and the army. Resulting mutual resentment was coupled with the irredentist pressure from the new states on the Peninsula, which eventually destroyed whatever trust there was and made both Christians and Muslim opt in favor of their respective ethnic nationalisms.

What Roudometof eventually proposes us to do is to reconsider our traditional reading of the projects of the Balkan federation and Ottomanism as ill conceived and doomed to failure from the beginning and to start to treat them more seriously as rather realistic and potentially fruitful ones, whose failure is to be attributed to the particular circumstances of the day (I wonder whether it is not the globalization itself that he *finally* has in mind). He explicitly refers to the ideology of Ottomanism as a *viable* politi-

cal solution (p. 94, emphasis added). While I would like to be persuaded by this argument, I unfortunately remain unconvinced.

To see Ottomanism as a viable project, one has to have at least a vague idea of what the institutional structure of the state it intended to produce would eventually look like, what languages would be used in the public realm, and what kind of historical and other legitimizing discourses would be constructed to buttress this edifice. One also might wish to see this project in a comparative perspective, that is, related to similar successful cases (what are they?) and so forth. Those questions, however, are not addressed. Instead, narration goes on to create a strong impression that the demise and collapse of the Tanzimat were inevitable. It is instructive that in another context, Roudometof calls Ottoman Greeks' plans "dreams" (p. 233). Equally, it is not clear whether the Yugoslavian state was doomed because of the irreconcilable differences between the national elites it united, or, alternatively, its failure was due to the poor institutional design and relative economic deprivation of the 1980s.

The ideological hegemony of the "nationhood" project entailed strong pressure for irredentism as well as for the creation of the ethnically homogeneous societies by means of assimilation and/or expulsion for minorities, who came to be seen as dangerous because their presence on the territory of a given state laid ground for the irredentist claims of its neighbors. I find Roudometof's analysis of the relationships between irredentism and the class structure of the Balkan societies, and in particular the role of the expanded urban strata heavily dependent on the public sector in the promotion of irredentist policies, most illuminating. He is also persuasive in demonstrating free-holding peasants' opposition to these kinds of foreign policies. By stressing how widespread this opposition was and by relating it to the social structure of the Balkan societies, he probably means to suggest that irredentism was by no means an inescapable option. This time I am persuaded. However, I was not able to see a clear link between Roudometof's extensive analysis of the policies of ethnic homogenization of the societies in question and their consequences and the main thrust of the book.

346      *Review of Roudometof's Nationalism, Globalization,  
and Orthodoxy*

Hopefully, nobody, and certainly not myself, would dispute Roudometof's conclusion that in today's global age the Balkan states have to renounce their reliance on the ideology of nationhood in favor of the more inclusive citizenship project. In this respect, he seems to imply that the Balkans' history proves it to be far less unrealistic than people sometimes think. However, I cannot escape feeling that this conclusion stems more from the author's conviction (which I sympathize with) than from what is said in the book, and that it rather descends on the text from without than inexorably stems from it.

Victor Roudometof's is a serious, perceptive, and provocative book. However, its impact could have been greater had it been more cohesive and articulate.