

Victor Roudometof, *Nationalism, Globalization, and Orthodoxy: the Social Origins of Ethnic Conflict in the Balkans*. Westport, CN and London: Greenwood Press, 2001. xvii + 304 pp. £58.50 (hbk).

This book provides a welcome corrective to the stubbornly held view (even in some academic circles) that primordial attachments and 'ancient ethnic hatreds' have shaped much of recent Balkan history.

The idea that the Balkan peninsula has witnessed the clash of rival Muslim, Western and Eastern Christian 'civilisations' is a product of nationalist Balkan historiography of the nineteenth century. Self-governing states had been established in Serbia and Greece by the 1830s thanks to the efforts of mercantile and intellectual groups which believed themselves capable of mimicking the political and economic progress seen in Western Europe. The route chosen was that of creating ethnically homogeneous states and promoting irredentist designs on adjacent territory felt to be part of the national homeland.

Political institutions were refashioned in order that the national message could be inculcated to a largely illiterate peasantry. Education was promoted in order that everyday Greeks, Serbs and later Bulgarian peasantries were transformed into 'imagined national communities'.

Roudometof shows that there was considerable peasant scepticism and resistance towards a nation-building project that involved a large-scale transfer of resources from the countryside to the cities in order to satisfy the professional and political appetites of nation-building elites, particularly the military. He argues (providing ample proof for his claim) that the process of transforming the Greeks, Bulgarians and Serbs into fully fledged nations was a slow one, still largely incomplete by 1878. Rather provocatively, he insists that an alternative developmental path lay open for the Balkans, the adoption of a federation with transnational or interethnic citizenship at its basis.

Balkan federalism enjoyed support in Bulgaria especially, where continuous defeats in wars with an irredentist goal would produce a widespread popular reaction against the nation-state ideology. But the strength of rivalry among the national elites, and their grip on the state machine for much of the time, frustrated progress. So did the failure of efforts from the 1840s to the 1870s to transform the Ottoman empire into a constitutional monarchy with a political identity that would include both the Muslim and the non-Muslim communities.

Reference is also made to the frequent international interventions that had the effect of leaving ever-more-frustrated local nationalisms, a topic that might have been explored in more detail. Of course, federalism was very much at odds with centralising trends in much of the rest of the world at this time.

The failure of the discourse of 'citizenship' to hold its own before that of 'nationalism' 'was not due to the absence of civil society, democratic values, or cultural attributes', a view that has found favour among statesmen, diplomats and not a few academics. Instead, Roudometof ascribes the wrecking role played by uncontrolled nationalism in the region down to the present to 'the adoption and selective appropriation of Western ideas into the European part of the Ottoman Empire' (p. 239). Nationhood crowded out citizenship in what proved to be a defective modernisation process. Interestingly, he parts company with Maria Todorova by arguing that 'the Balkans are *not* the Ottomans' legacy' (p. 239). He believes that ruinous policies in the twentieth century centring around the misallocation of resources, the pushing of nationalism to destructive lengths, and the building up of brittle state power at the

expense of civil society can, to a large extent, be traced back to the wrong steps taken on the path to modernity from the nineteenth century by young states eager to prove their Western credentials.

Most of the book deals with the first century of national development (1820–1920) and the quality of scholarship to be found in these chapters will assure it a high reputation. Two others following deal with the interwar period and that of communist rule in all of the Balkans except Greece. Much attention is paid to the Yugoslav experiment, which Roudometof argues ‘faced all the problems that had plagued the pursuit of interethnic and transnational citizenship in the nineteenth century’ (p. 196). In these chapters the scholarship is less wide-ranging and the way that communism reinforced the politics of ethnicity is arguably neglected. Nevertheless, a scintillating conclusion draws the main threads of his thesis together with great lucidity and in the final page he argues that ‘the region’s basic problem for the next century concerns the local states’ ability to develop stable regional cooperation and a shared system of rules for dealing with their ethnic heterogeneity’.

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