

Book Reviews

Nationalism, Globalization, and Orthodoxy. The Social Origins of Ethnic Conflict in the Balkans. By VICTOR ROUDOMETOF. Westport, CT & London: Greenwood Press, 2001. Pp.304, index. ISBN 0-313-31949-9. \$95.00.

The author himself describes his study as a 'sociological history' of Balkan nationalisms. Perhaps this is the most accurate way to present an almost complete modern history of the Balkans, based on a 40-page long bibliography, loaded with hundreds of notes, and structured along a central sociological argument. It claims that the production of ethnic conflicts in the Balkans is a direct consequence of the manner in which this region was integrated into the modern world and not a proof of its backwardness or tribalism. In particular Roudometof claims that ethnic homogenization was the product of the reception that the concept of 'nation' received within the Ottoman Balkan society and, an expression of the Balkan states' claim to modernity.

The study was first conceived at the peak of the Balkanmania, which dominated US policy makers – analysts and journalists in the early 1990s. Naturally, much of the initial crop of writings on the subject was neither scholarly nor informed. The best known attempts to revise the pejorative, and simplified approach of Balkan history and policy are by Woodward, Todorova and Mazower. Simultaneously, to these important works were added numerous articles, monographs and manuals expressing various and opposing trends, ranking from reheated nationalistic nineteenth-century approaches to post-modernist unfounded reinterpretations.

Roudometof ventured to incorporate almost all these products of rather recent historical research and social anthropology into a global social theory. To verify his argument in time and in space, i.e. in every Balkan state from the seventeenth to the twenty-first century he utilized most of the Anglo-Saxon bibliography on the Balkans in addition to extensive Greek secondary literature. He ended up, he says, with a 665-page manuscript, which he reduced to 500 pages in 1997 to produce a book of 300 pages four years later. Traces of this amazing struggle to master his writings can still be found at the notes, where centuries of history suffocate to death.

The fact that Roudometof was writing history for non-specialists obliged him to write extensively on well-known historical events. In the first two chapters he revisits the history of the Greek and Serbian revolutions and the 1821 events in the Danubian principalities, the cultural-ideological network of the Ottoman Balkans as well as the issue of national ideology in relation to ethnicity, social

structure and the Orthodox Church. All these to prove that the revolutionary movements were not 'genuinely national' (as if such a movement exists anywhere in a genuine form). Western European ideas and socio-economic regional factors had fostered them, he argues. In the third chapter, in order to discuss the pursuit of citizenship, he covers the whole history of federalism in the nineteenth-century Balkans, as well as Ottomanism and Constitutionalism in the declining empire, in addition to the Young Turks' movement. In the fourth and fifth chapters Roudometof examines the construction of a secular state through the redeployment of religious categories and the contribution of the intelligentsia to this end. To do so he had to review extensively Greek, Serbian, Bulgarian, Macedonian-Slav and Albanian romanticism which includes the issues of language and national education in every Balkan state. After the articulation of nationhood Roudometof discusses the articulation of irredentism (sixth chapter). Therefore he scrutinises domestic policies and phenomena, which include agricultural reforms, clientelism, the role of the military and paramilitary, and irredentism as an issue in politics. Then he proceeds to the minority question and the quest for homogenization as a side effect in the pursuit of modernity. Again, almost in detail, he covers all the basic facts and domestic policies from the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire to the Second World War political revisionism, and then (eighth chapter) to the making and unmaking of post war Yugoslavia, including the last heated decade of the twentieth century.

In short the deployment of his globalisation theory forced Roudometof to rewrite a complete Balkan history. For the historians this was not a prerequisite in order to follow his main argument while sociologists, on the other hand, may be overwhelmed by such a dense historical synopsis. Nevertheless both would agree that the book is organized in such a way that readers can follow without any difficulty or confusion – in spite of some overlapping – the paths of his argument through centuries of events and a sea of academic information. They would also agree that his thesis is masterly argued and indeed a matter of fact although in 2001, after scores of similar studies, his basic idea – nationalism as an expression of a west-inspired modernity – is not exactly pioneering. In fact the allegations for Balkan 'tribalism' and 'backwardness' did not originate from academic work nor, I am afraid, will they be tempered by scientific work be it of such quality as the present study by Roudometof. Did they deserve such a scholarly treatment after all?

Roudometof might have easily gone a step forward. It was not only the idea of the homogenous nation, which was a human construction of Western inspiration but also the notion of ethnicity. Sugar has coined the term 'new ethnicity' to distinguish this ideological product of nationalism from ethnicity as the origin of nationalism. Roudometof suggests that in the Ottoman Balkans there were *ethnies* 'clearly aware of their differences' (p.48). However the definition of *ethnie* he quotes from Smith (p.71, n.2) can hardly be applied to the Greeks, Albanians, Bulgarians, Serbs and Romanians as distinguished population groups in the eighteenth century or even afterwards. All these peoples may have been aware of their differences – at least partly – but definitely not of their similarities on a wide scale. Social fragmentation was the rule even within population groups, clans or villages, which shared the same language. Their common ethnicity was constructed in retrospect to fit the model of the nation that was fashioned by the elites. But this was not an easy task neither for the founding fathers nor for the modernizers. As Sugar has put it, 'Ethnonationalism is nationalism that has failed to take off because it lacked sufficient growth to take it beyond the stage of semimodernity.'

The book is strongly recommended to all those – be they American journalists or Balkan nationalists – who believe that the Orthodox Balkan peoples are locked in a constant conflict with the Muslims and with each other. It is also recommended for its wealth of information to any serious student of Balkan affairs excluding freshers. First they should try Stavrianos, Jelavich and Pavlowitch and then dive into Roudometof's multidimensional theory. I believe they will profit most this way.

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