

Ibrahim. Both expect Muslim scholars to exert self-criticism, to go beyond an “intra-civilizational clash” in order to “formulate a universal Islamic Weltanschauung,” (Ibrahim, pp. 4-5) and “to explain themselves as Muslims and their faith in all of its aspects.” (Butterworth, p. 120) *Citizenship, Security, and Democracy* certainly accomplishes a step in this direction. These selected conference papers, which are extremely diverse in discipline, length and approach, offer renewed reflections that address the concerns of scholars and policymakers, as well as a wider audience interested in those

topics. One should note that this diversity is also at the root of some of the shortcomings of the collection. Since some essays’ arguments suffer from a lack of clarity and empirical anchoring, the guiding thread of this collection remains barely identifiable for the reader. Despite its weaknesses, *Citizenship, Security and Democracy* constitutes a thought-provoking assembly of papers and one can hope that it will give rise to further public discussions, academic articles, and monographs.

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The Roots of Balkanization: Eastern Europe C.E. 500-1500

By *Ion Grumeza*

Lanham: University Press of America, 2010, 228 pages, ISBN 9780761851349.

In his book, Ion Grumeza ambitiously sets about “to fill a gap with authoritative material on how the process of Balkanization came about, to separate fact from fiction and trace the patterns of ethnic and cultural life that originated fifteen centuries ago.” (p. ix) Furthermore, the book “traces the creation of the present Balkan nations and examines their influence on Eastern Europe.” (p.xiii) With this impressive aim in mind, the author has studied some hundred historical books on the Balkans, or at least this is what we find in his bibliography.

Incidentally, Grumeza distinguishes between the Balkans, which includes “the Balkan Peninsula and its population up to the Danube river,” and Eastern Europe. However, a mysterious group of nations called “Balkanians” is singled out on p. xi, which, according to the author, “include

the Czechs, Slovaks, Hungarians, and Romanians, who belong to Eastern Europe along with nations once located beyond the Iron Curtain—Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Ukraine, and Russia.” Thus, from the very start a confusion sets in about who belongs and who does not belong to the doomed region, where, according to the author, “[i]nherited fears, suspicion, revenge, and religious fanaticism are as alive and volatile ... today as they were hundreds of years ago, all due to the legacy of Balkanization.” (p.v). To make this so-called legacy even more ominous, Grumeza adds to it an aspect of total dependency: “Balkanization” is “[t]his ethnic amalgam, and overall nightmarish human situation that no one can solve.” (p.ix)

The introductory pages suffice to discourage the book’s potential readership from reading on. I find it pointless to flog

a dead horse by listing all the distortions, factual errors, misrepresentations and dull ethnocentrism plaguing the book. For the sake of illustrating very briefly what awaits the readers, who might venture into the text, I will offer a few quotes, randomly chosen among many others. Contrary to the consensus view of most historians that Serbs and Croats are Slavic peoples, Grumeza, places their origins in the Middle East. "Initially the Serbs were Turkish people of Iranian extraction," the author claims. (p.31) "Croats were believed to be of Iranian origin, but they may have their origins in a group of Sarmatians who were dislocated by the Huns." (p.34) Moreover, the author does not show any research on how he arrived at these conclusions—and this is the case with most of the conclusions in his book.

Some parts of the book not only read like an elementary school textbook of a by-gone time, but also smack of ethno-racism. "Gypsies and Jews, two other migratory peoples who also came to Eastern Europe, did not impose themselves on existing settlements with the sword, but rather by providing help to everyone. They never constituted a nation ...While Gypsies were considered barbarians because of their heritage and unique behaviours, the Jews were acknowledged for spreading civilization through trade and for their dedication to scholarly work. Nevertheless, both peoples stood apart from the majority of the population in the Balkans because their looks and clothing were different from those of the other ethnic groups." (p.41)

Under the "Turks" label, Grumeza has included "groups of Arabs, Moors, Saracens and Seljuks—all Muslims who in later time period I call "Ottomans." (p.xi) Lumping these diverse civilizations, populations

and ethnic groups under the category of "Turks" on the pretext that they were all Muslims is reminiscent of the way in which Muslims of various ethnic backgrounds were commonly referred to as "Turks" in the Christian nation-states, which emerged in the Balkans after the break-up of the Ottoman Empire. As for the suggested overlap between "Muslims" and "Ottomans," this is a confusion on the term "Ottoman," which theoretically applied to all subjects of the Empire, Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

And so the story goes until the Epilogue, where we can find conclusions along the following lines: "Today, Eastern European cultures retain the same basic values they developed in the Middle Ages, regardless of what the western world considers moral and right. In the Balkans, the loss of one's ethnic identity is considered worse than dying, and clan dominance over a territory is still the main force that unites ethnic groups. This phenomenon is the product of ongoing wars in which both the victors and the victims are always ready to participate (sic!)... This is the main root of the Balkanization process." (p.209)

The above excerpts attest to severe deficiencies in terms of sources, references and approaches used. The book gives a highly distorted and derogatory picture of a region with a complex history, using unsubstantiated claims and sweeping observations as a major tool of representation. It is unfathomable that this book was actually published at all, and we can question by who and why this manuscript was recommended at the University Press of America for publication. Perhaps the so-called "Balkanization" was seen as an evergreen topic, securing immediate vast readership—which the paperback edition of the book also seems to imply.

The term “Balkanization” (which, as Grumeza correctly points out on p. v, appeared after the Balkan wars of the early 20th century) was powerfully propelled in both journalistic and scholarly writing following the post-1989 break-up of the Socialist Federation of Yugoslavia into a number of smaller new states. The post-Yugoslav recycling of the image of the Balkans as a place of never ending, centuries-old animosities and conflicts between different communities and groups mapped neatly onto earlier Western self-aggrandising strategies of representation, built vis-à-vis an inferior, internal “Other”—strategies, which were brilliantly described by the historian Maria Todorova in her authoritative study “Imagining the Balkans.”¹ It is interesting to note that this seminal reading in the field of the Balkan studies is not even included in Grumeza’s bibliography.

Two decades after the collapse of former Yugoslavia, we can find serious scholarly works, challenging the “Balkan ghosts”²-type mythology about the region. As it has been convincingly demonstrated, such myths served to mask the root causes of the post-communist conflicts in the region, causes related to increasing economic and social grievances, and aggressive nationalist identity politics.³ Despite that it unjustly vilifies the region and carries little explanatory value, the metaphor of “Balkanization” was turned into an easy, inflated and often

rather irrelevant tag for all sorts of divisive social dynamics, and indiscriminately used in both academic and popular writing.

The book by Grumeza reminds us, once again, that writers, dealing with complicated issues of history and memory, both in the Balkans and beyond, bear a special burden of responsibility. The recycling, endorsing and perpetuating of ethnocentric historical misrepresentations cannot be simply glossed over as banal, since they are, in the final analysis, inherently political.

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Endnotes

1. Maria Todorova. *Imagining the Balkans*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

2. I refer here to Robert Kaplan’s book *Balkan Ghosts*, which appeared in 1993 (New York: St. Martin’s Press) and can probably count as a corner-stone in the unleashed myth-making about the region as a place of “ancient ethnic hatreds.”

3. For a critique on “ancient ethnic hatred” constructions see, among others, Dubravka Zarkov, “Gender, Orientalism and ‘History of Ethnic Hatred’ in former Yugoslavia.” in Lutz, Phoenix and Yuval-Davis (eds.). *Crossfires, Nationalism, Racism and Gender in Europe*, 1995, pp. 105-120. According to Milica Bakic-Hayden, the “ancient hatreds” rhetoric is obscuring “the modernity of the conflict based on contested notions of state, nation, national identity and sovereignty” (“Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia.” *Slavic Review*, Vol. 54, N. 4, 1995, pp. 917-31, here p. 929).