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Macrosociologies -- Balkan Worlds: The First and Last Europe by Traian Stoianovich

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Abstract (Summary)

Review.

Full Text (784 words)

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Balkan Worlds: The First and Last Europe, by Traian Stoianovich. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1994. 433 pp. \$60.00 cloth. ISBN: 1-56324-032-7. \$24.95 paper. ISBN: 1-56324-033-5.

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This lengthy work spanning the millennia from neolithic times to the present covers as disparate dimensions of Balkan history as earth culture, social biology, technology, society, economy, personality and culture, demography, and ecology. The motivation for this ambitious project is remarked upon in the foreword: Stoianovich attempts to apply to the Balkans what his teacher and mentor Fernand Braudel had undertaken for the Mediterranean world in his monumental work, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*. In compounding existing historical information, Stoianovich's endeavor is indeed as masterful; what is missing is Braudel's analytical rigor. What makes Braudel's work outstanding is his analysis of the possible historical origins of capitalism-Stoianovich fails to articulate effectively his argument on the emergence of the Balkan worlds other than to note the complex nature of Balkan history. Nor does he explain why he selects in his discussions certain dimensions of the Balkan historical experience, such as economy, technology, and personality as opposed to others, such as gender and sexuality, or the life course or how, once he has made his selection, he then connects the various dimensions. How, one may ask, could such an ambitious project be better framed? Stoianovich could have either retained his time-frame of several millennia, but narrowed his dimensions, as Michael Mann has very successfully undertaken to do in *Sources of Social Power* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1986

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), or he could have narrowed his time-frame to the last couple of centuries, but retained his dimensions, as Charles Tilly has demonstrated in his *Coercion, Capital and European States, AD 990-1990* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990).

The book consists of two parts. The first is a substantially revised and enlarged version of an earlier work by the author, entitled *A Study in Balkan Civilization* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967). It makes up 75 percent of the text, and is impressive in the amount of information it compounds, but weak in terms of explaining how and why the Balkans evolved between two civilizations. In addition, scholarly references from the 1950s and 1960s still dominate most of the chapters. It is not inherently wrong to employ references from all time periods, but the use of these references becomes problematic and hinders the analysis when, for example, the author discusses the use of space (pp. 37-42, 235-60) without reference to the works of Michel Foucault, or the employment of hysteria, emotional states, hysteria and childbirth (pp. 59-63) without mentioning the pertinent works in feminist theory. Similarly, the chapter on technology and material resources does not refer to the relevant studies of Anthony Giddens or Michael Mann, and the chapter on personality and culture contains an interesting discussion of the conceptions of work and

time in Balkan history, but once again does not refer to the vast literature on the topic published since Braudel's conception of the long duree; among the missing in this context are Charles Tilly's *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons* (New York: Russell Sage, 1984) and the works of Anthony Giddens and William Sewell Jr. The chapter on the economy, which could have been rigorous given the large literature on the role of the Balkans in the transition from feudalism to capitalism, presents some factual information and makes passing references to Wallerstein's model. Actually, it is in this chapter that the author provides the novel insight (p. 214) that the post-Yugoslavian system lacked the ability for capitalist transformation due to infrastructural inadequacies.

The freshly written second part, comprising two chapters on nationalism and ecology in the last century, provides us with the author's views on the current Balkan conflict. Stoianovich argues that the differential interaction of individual local cultures with the capitalist world has shaped the disparate visions of the Croats, Muslims, and Serbs. What is troublesome in the author's ensuing discussion is his inclination to favor the Serbian position, whereby Serbians always seem to appear as the wronged party (see, for instance, pp. 288, 297-8, 300, 306, 311). Stoianovich also takes issue with scholars who sympathize with Muslim and Croat demands (see, for instance, p. 321), avoids a thorough discussion of the past and present hegemony of Serbian political and military power, and pronounces the Serbs most fit for governance. He concludes the book by wishing that the European Community would embrace the Balkans that have been attempting "to rejoin the European cultures." This reviewer hopes that Muslims and Croats would have as much access to that embrace as the Serbs.

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