



## Reviews: **Global diffusions**

*International Sociology Reviews*

2015, Vol. 30(5) 490–500

© The Author(s) 2015

Reprints and permissions:

[sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav](http://sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav)

DOI: 10.1177/0268580915598100

[iss.sagepub.com](http://iss.sagepub.com)



Victor Roudometof,

*Globalization and Orthodox Christianity: The Transformations of a Religious Tradition*, Routledge: New York, 2014; 228 pp.: ISBN 9780415843737, US\$125.00 (hbk)

**Reviewed by** Eugenia Roussou, *New University of Lisbon, Portugal*

### **Keywords**

Orthodox Christianity, religion and globalization, sociology of religion

Orthodox Christianity has long been a neglected object of study in the social sciences. When it comes to Orthodox Christianity's entanglement with globalization, relevant studies are practically nonexistent. As a theoretical topic, religion and globalization does not constitute a foreign subject to the sociological study of religion. In fact, it has attracted important scholarly attention in recent years (see, among others, Berger, 2002; Beyer, 1994; Obadia, 2010; Turner, 2009). However, scholars have continued to ignore the relevance of Orthodox Christianity in the study of globalization processes through a religious prism. The theoretical value of Victor Roudometof's book lies first and foremost in its attempt to fill in the above-mentioned gap in the field of the sociology of religion, by offering a meticulous historical and social scientific account of the relationship between Orthodox Christianity and globalization.

As the author points out in his introduction, the broader objective of the book is 'to use the historical record of Orthodox Christianity as empirical material to theorize the varied historical entanglements between local cultures and world religions within the context of world-historical globalization' (p. 1). This objective is carefully cultivated through the organization of the book chapters, which are placed in a manner that allows the reader to follow effortlessly the historical development of Orthodoxy, as well as the transformational processes that have influenced this specific religious tradition. Despite its emphasis on the relation between historicity and Orthodox Christianity, the chapter sequence is not necessarily chronological; it is organized methodically in order to subtly guide the reader through the multiplicity of rhetorics, theoretical arguments, and historic and sociological complex articulations of the entanglement between Orthodox Christian religion and globalization.

Chapter 1 offers a rich introduction to all the theoretical debates and problematics touched on in the book. Chapter 2 continues with an account of the premodern era of globalization through a study of Byzantium and its historical global influence on Orthodox Christianity. The chapter focuses on the processes of vernacularization and indigenization of Orthodoxy, two processes that, as Roudometof argues, led to the crystallization of Orthodox Christianity as a religious tradition. The next chapter also focuses on the historical circumstances that shaped Orthodox Christianity, and provides a detailed description of the various historical interactions between the two sides of the Mediterranean, starting from the period of the First Crusade and ending with the second fall of Constantinople. Chapters 2 and 3 are the only ones organized according to temporal continuity in order to highlight the significance of the *longue durée* in the intermingling of Orthodox Christian religion with globalization. Chapter 4 places the various historical processes and trajectories that shaped Orthodox Christianity in the Russian and Ottoman empires at the center of the analysis, whereas the next two chapters bring modernity into the discussion, by inviting the concepts of nationalization and colonization into the argument equivalently, while asking in what ways Western modernity has affected Orthodoxy. Before summing up the main ideas and concluding with Chapter 9, the author draws attention to the important subject of the transnationalization of Orthodox Christianity (Chapter 7), and introduces the concept of globality in order to explore the interchange between deterritorialization and reterritorialization in the Orthodox Christian context.

*Globalization and Orthodox Christianity's* contribution to the scholarly fields of history and sociology of religion is fundamental. It re-evaluates the secularization paradigm, placing globalization at the center of the analysis, and explicitly investigates the multiple historical, social, and cultural trajectories that developed but also transformed Orthodox Christianity across the centuries. According to the author, it is important to note that globalization in this book is not viewed as a consequence of European modernity, but we must instead view modernity as part of the world-historical globalization (p. 7). Drawing on Obadia's (2010) 'globalization and religion' idea that globalization has a crucial impact on religion, Roudometof paints a historical and sociological picture of an understudied religious tradition, cleverly contextualizing it within processes of historical globalization. Roudometof manages to handle intricate concepts such as vernacularization, indigenization, nationalization, transnationalism, globality, and glocalization with a scholarly easiness; as a result, he not only avoids the theoretical and analytical tension that can often be found and/or created among the above-mentioned concepts, but instead embarks on the difficult task of negotiating these in such a successful way that they end up clarifying his argument instead of creating further conceptual and methodological confusions.

The book would have benefited from a more direct dialogue with the concept of religious pluralism. Roudometof briefly mentions pluralism at the beginning of the book, stating that: 'Although religious diversity has been tolerated, religious pluralism has not been part of the recent historical past of Southeastern Europe' (p. 14). Recent publications that focus on the social scientific study of religious diversity in southern Europe have shown that pluralism has always formed part of the religiouscape of southeastern Europe, and its influence persists today (see Mapril and Blanes, 2013). As Berger (2007,

p. 19) asserted, ‘new religious pluralism,’ as he calls it, is the result of globalization. Exploring the historical globalization of Orthodox Christianity should take into consideration the religiously pluralized environments within which it was practiced. Furthermore, although it is clearly stated that the focal point of the book is a historical investigation of Orthodox Christianity, and Roudometof himself recognizes at the end the exclusion of a discussion of Orthodoxy in the 21st century, a conversation with more recent empirical works would enhance the argument; it would expand the book’s influence to current debates about the role of Orthodoxy in a ‘glocalized’ present, making it even more accessible and appealing to related (to sociology and history) disciplines such as social anthropology.

Victor Roudometof’s book adds considerable value to the study of Orthodox Christianity and its historical, social, and cultural roles in the framework of globalization. It is one of the few works that have not hesitated to take up the challenge of basing their analyses on a relatively unknown—and at times even considered as insignificant—religious tradition, and as a result pose novel questions and analytical angles while being engaged with old theoretical debates. Together with the more general debates that are raised, Roudometof raises critical inquiries within Orthodoxy itself: for instance, the perplexity (in terminological terms and in terms of meaning as well) between Orthodox Christianity and Christian Orthodoxy (Chapter 3) has not been thoroughly discussed before. He employs specific case studies, such as the case of the Cypriot Orthodox Church (Chapter 6) and the Orthodox Greek American Church (Chapter 7), in order to bring to the analytical surface far larger issues, like colonialism and transnationalism, which have long formed the path of Orthodox Christianity but simultaneously have never been recognized as dynamic processes influencing and transforming Orthodoxy for many centuries.

On the whole, *Globalization and Orthodox Christianity* is a publication that is bound to attract the interest of a variety of audiences. Although historians and sociologists of religion appear as if they are the main scholarly category this book can appeal to, every social scientist with an interest in religion, globalization, and the intersection between the two will find it theoretically and analytically stimulating. But even beyond the scholarly readership, every individual interested in Orthodox Christianity, its historical development, and its connection with popular theoretical debates will appreciate the argument and benefit from the ideas expressed here.

## References

- Berger P (2002) Globalization and religion. *Hedgehog Review* 4(2): 7–20.
- Berger P (2007) Pluralism, Protestantization, and the voluntary principle. In: Banchoff T (ed.) *Democracy and the New Religious Pluralism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 19–29.
- Beyer P (1994) *Religion and Globalization*. London: Sage.
- Mapril J and Blanes R (eds) (2013) *The Best of all Gods: Sites and Politics of Religious Diversity in Southern Europe*. Leiden: Brill.
- Obadia L (2010) Globalization and the sociology of religion. In: Turner BS (ed.) *The New Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Religion*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 477–497.
- Turner BS (2009) Reshaping the sociology of religion: Globalization, spirituality and the erosion of the social. *Sociological Review* 57(1): 186–200.

## Author biography

Eugenia Roussou is a social anthropologist and a postdoctoral research fellow, at CRIA/FCSH, New University of Lisbon. She has conducted extensive research on Orthodox Christianity, religious pluralism, and the interaction between religion and spirituality in Greece. She is currently working on her postdoctoral project, funded by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology, which examines the relationship between Christianity and new forms of spirituality in Portugal, while looking into the challenges southern European religiosity has to face in times of socioeconomic crisis. *Address:* Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Avenida de Berna, 26-C, 1069-061 Lisboa, Portugal. Email: jennyroussou@gmail.com

Jeremiah I Dibua,

*Development and Diffusionism: Looking beyond Neopatrimonialism in Nigeria, 1962–1985*, Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2013; xviii + 255 pp.: ISBN 9781137286659, £61.00 (hbk)

**Reviewed by** Rabindra Kumar Mohanty, *Biju Patnaik State Police Academy, India*

## Keywords

Eurocentrism, international financial institutions (IFIs), modernization, neocolonialism, Nigeria

Jeremiah Dibua's book, *Development and Diffusionism*, starts as the work of a dyed-in-the-wool historian and concludes as the work of an orthocentric sociologist. He advocates a strong critical investigation of Eurocentric diffusionism in the context of so-called 'developing countries' in general and Afro-Nigerian society in particular. The book is a result of his extensive research on issues concerning Nigeria's development as well as an epistemological consolidation of his publications on the topic between 1989 and 2013. He criticizes the Weberian-influenced neopatrimonial paradigm of planning development and modernization, which is based on generalizations without empirical evidence, which he dubs undue universalism. His historical approach is evidenced by his analysis of African development from the precolonial phase to colonial planning to postcolonial development. He claims that development problems in Nigeria cannot be attributed to internal factors while neglecting external factors, arguing that this position is ahistorical, privileging theory over reality and exhibiting a double standards in analyzing African conditions (p. vi).

Vehemently revisionist in his approach, the book redirects the locus of inquiry into Africa's development, challenging all from neopatrimonialism to Euro-American hegemony and globalism within the context of neocolonialism and the Cold War. The book contains a detailed analysis of development policies and implementation strategies, the role of the state and external forces, including the attendant hiccups in the process. The book consists of seven chapters including an introduction and a conclusion. The first two chapters focus on an explanation of concepts and theories. Chapters 3 and 4 are devoted to an exposition of colonial and postcolonial issues of development in Nigeria, in particular, and vis-a-vis Africa in general. Chapters 5 and 6 discuss two case studies pertaining to agricultural and industrial planning and development in Bendel State. Chapter 7 presents the author's conclusions.