



White Enclosures: Racial Capitalism and Coloniality Along the Balkan Route

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Rexhepi's [*White Enclosures*](#) is an insightful book exploring the co-construction of race and borders along the Balkan route. It puts racial exclusion in the Balkans in conversation with broader logics of securitisation and anti-migrant violence in western Europe and North America. The racialisation of Roma, Muslim, and migrant communities in Bosnia, Serbia, Kosovo, Albania, and Bulgaria, it argues, aims to wall up whiteness in the peripheries of white supremacy, where silencing Muslim and immigrant realities allows state authorities to figure their nations as



European.

The book is divided into two parts and five chapters. The first part focusses on the people, movements, and memories that have defied the participation of Balkan countries in the construction of European white enclosures. It examines the work of activists, the rehabilitation of imperial pasts by the heritage industry, and the enforcement of a racial and religious order in Kosovo to show how dissident Muslim and Roma people in the Balkans have historically faced geopolitical erasure, exclusion, and secularisation. The second part looks at the way colonial histories and racialised relations of power in the Balkans have affected people's sense of self through the control of sexuality and intimate bodily conducts. It locates statecraft in the ordering and sanitising of Muslim bodies, drawing fruitful parallels between the straightening of queer bodies and the sealing of borders.

Chapter one focusses on the lives of Alija Izetbegović and Melika Salihbegović, two Muslim Bosnian activists and intellectuals who were arrested under the communist regime. Izetbegović was arrested first in 1946 for “religious extremism” and opposing Tito's regime, then in 1983 for “muslim nationalism” in what became known as the Sarajevo Process, alongside Salihbegović and eleven other Muslim intellectuals. Rexhepi draws on the political stories of these two figures of Muslim activism to argue that racism in Eastern Europe is not a postsocialist phenomenon, but that racialised religious hierarchies already informed politics in the Balkans during the socialist period.

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In chapter two, Rexhepi examines the recovery of Habsburg colonial sites and institutions in Bosnia under the European Union's fostering of heritage capitalism. The author draws on the political neutralisation and celebration of Habsburg imperial sites to show how the reclaiming of Habsburg pasts in Balkan countries has served to recreate European roots and silence radical Islam's past and present importance in the construction of Balkan identities. White enclosures,



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Chapter three attends to the construction of race in post-Ottoman Albania. Rexhepi looks at the racialisation of Albanian Muslims as “enemies within,” made suspicious not because of their racial otherness but because of their proximity to whiteness, to show that racism in Eastern Europe is deliberately vague. Drawing on Ghassan Hage’s insight that racism expands through vagueness rather than the specificity of its targets, the author argues that racist practices in the Balkans rely on empirical “all over the placeness,” on contradictions and ambivalence rather than clarity. White Balkan Muslims, from this perspective, are only passing as white while remaining the objects of European structures of exclusion and control.

The first chapter of the second part, chapter four leaves behind geopolitical considerations on the construction and exclusion of Muslim subjects in the Balkans throughout post-Ottoman and post-Cold War years and turns to the sexual straightening of queer Muslims into hetero or homo-normative European figures. Rexhepi draws on images and imaginaries of nonnormative Albanian bodies to think about heteronormalisation historically. Queer Muslims, insofar as they stand for the endurance of Ottoman pasts in Eastern Europe, the author argues, continue to haunt Albania’s orientation toward Europe, and as such face attempts at normalisation. At stake here is the regulation of sexuality and the construction of intimate compatibilities between Albania and western Europe in the process of European integration.

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Bodies remain central in chapter five, where Rexhepi considers how the construction of Roma and Muslim enclosures in the Balkans is tied to



demographic panics over the imagined threat of creeping sexual, racial, and religious differences. Strategies of enclosure rely on the differentiation between good and bad Muslims, the author suggests, where the “good Bulgarian Muslim,” although still racialised, stands as a figure of assimilation, while Roma Muslims continue to embody the ultimate internal others. This process of differentiation is important in order to understand the way racialisation in Europe works through the moral ordering of legitimate and illegitimate religious minorities, and the progressive incorporation of the former within the bounds of white enclosures.

Rexhepi's is a conceptually dense book, tracing the recent history of racism and Muslim exclusions in the Balkans through the lenses of racial and sexual reconstructions under socialist and postsocialist regimes. It feels at times inaccessible to the average dabbler in East European geopolitics, but this is also one of the book's strengths: to complicate stories that have often been simplified through Euro-American analyses as a series of internal conflicts bringing down inclusive socialist regimes and making room for divisive nationalisms.

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Although the author claims to have sketched “resistance in racialized and refugee populations along the Balkan route” (155), readers may be left wondering about the role contemporary migrations – Muslim and not – across the Balkans have played in the reproduction or transformation of racialised religious hierarchies in recent years. The book is oriented more toward the construction and enforcement of racial enclosures and dominant logics of differentiation than to their contestation by Muslim or migrant minorities. That is, there is little room in the book dedicated to the analysis of Muslim means of resistance against racial and religious b/orders, let alone pages where readers, through ethnographic descriptions, are led to understand what life is like for racialised migrants moving across the white enclosure that is the Balkan route. That said, Rexhepi's book remains central to grasp the Balkans as a key site for the production and



reproduction of whiteness in the margins of Europe. It is an important read to better understand border work, racialisation, and the persistence of imperialism against Europe's "internal others" today.