

Race and the Yugoslav Region: Postsocialist, Post-Conflict, Postcolonial? By Catherine Baker. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018. 256 pp. \$31.94, paperback.

*Chelsi West Ohueri, University of Texas at Austin Dell Medical School*

[chelsiwestohueri@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:chelsiwestohueri@austin.utexas.edu)

Catherine Baker's *Race and the Yugoslav Region* is an in-depth and timely analysis of race in the former Yugoslavia. Despite the numerous works that focus on nationalism and ethnicity in this region, Baker's text is among the first to explore race and racialization. Drawing on critical race theory and postcolonial studies, the author approaches race as a social construct that speaks to notions of hierarchies of modernity, whiteness, and Europeanness. Throughout her book, she draws attention to processes of racialization, that is, how these ideas of race are produced and reproduced to structure the social world (17). There seems to be an assumed racelessness in scholarship on Yugoslavia and southeast Europe, with the region often construed as outside of race. Baker argues, however, that relation to Europe and Europeanness are inherently shaped by whiteness and racialized logics. This book situates Yugoslavia in global conversations about racialized identities and directly speaks to the space between postsocialism and postcolonialism.

Baker is interested in the ways that race, as distinct from nationalism and ethnicity, is produced and reproduced, shaping shifting identities. One of Baker's main lines of inquiry asks how the same collective identities of the Yugoslav region could be tied to both European colonial imagination and whiteness, and also positioned in solidarity with the subjects of colonial oppression and marginalized blackness and brownness. One way that Baker attempts to answer this is through her conceptualization of a *Black Adriatic*, which draws from Paul Gilroy's concept of the *Black Atlantic*. This is not done to equate the experiences of Yugoslavia with the African diaspora but rather to illustrate how the Yugoslav region has a particular raciality shaped by the combined experiences and legacies of empire, Ottoman rule, state socialism, postcolonialism, and global racial formations.

One of the book's key arguments is that state socialism did not cause race to disappear in Yugoslavia (106). As Baker notes, not only did race not disappear, it assumed many forms and was reproduced in complex ways. An example comes from the imagined Yugoslav-African brotherhood during the period of Non-alignment, which involved such noted figures as Aimé Césaire. This imagined brotherhood and shared identity contrasted with participation in European projects that created emergent opportunities for identifications with whiteness. These types of shifting racialized identities, Baker argues, have largely been unexamined in discussions of ethnicity and nationalism in the region.

Beginning with a focus on popular music and drawing from Gloria Wekker's notion of the *cultural archive* (31), Baker illustrates relationships between cultural production and race in Yugoslavia. "Popular music," she writes, "does not just reflect 'race in translation'; it is race in translation" (35). This notion of race in translation is employed throughout the remainder of the text to examine various translations of race, including the ways in which blackness and whiteness have been translated in the region through such mechanisms as hip-hop. The second chapter includes an analysis of ethnicity, nationhood, and migration, highlighting how European colonial imagination directly entered southeast European politics through migratory routes. Tracing the histories of these migratory routes reveals the ways that Yugoslavians negotiate race because histories of race are, "always and already migration histories" (58). By framing the Yugoslav region as a contact zone, and through a historical examination of racial formations and imperial projects, Baker shows how states without colonial legacies are still implicated in colonial and racial structures.

A major strength of the book is the discussion of race during the postsocialist period. The entire Balkan region, Baker argues, has been racialized as a space of otherness, distanced from Europe and modernity but rarely studied in terms of race and racial formations. Building on Milica Bakic-Hayden's notion of "nesting orientalisms" and using the example of Slovenia, Baker illustrates the ways that postsocialism enabled new racialized identifications with whiteness and the West. Baker maintains that these identifications are evident in Slovenia's post-Yugoslav national identity, which positioned the country as the boundary between Europe and the Balkans. She further argues that Slovenia's later response to various refugee groups (ranging from Bosnia to south-east Asia) provides another case in which the country performs identifications with whiteness and the West.

Baker's analysis further helps readers understand how the Yugoslav region was racialized as disordered during the conflict period of the 1990s. To some scholars, the ethnic disorders of the conflict period were a threat to Western peace and security in the post-Cold War period. As such, those fleeing conflict in the Yugoslav region were at times rendered as non-white others, with Bosnians, for example, expressing resentment at being like people from third world countries (130). At the same time, Baker contends that there were ways that unconscious biases of whiteness may have allowed white Europeans and global Northerners to more easily identify with images of suffering Bosnians compared to those of black Africans experiencing conflict and genocide at the same time (129). Baker additionally provides examples of shifting identities tied to security and border practices, such as the example of the 'bogus asylum-seeker' (145), a reference to post-Yugoslav and Albanian migrants who were profiled by EU member states. While members of these countries were othered outside of spheres of European belonging, in other ways they later performed a European white identity through their own countries' security and foreign policy practices (148).

In her conclusion, Baker identifies three different modes for understanding race in the region, particularly the mode of connection (169). Though the Yugoslav and Balkans regions are not theorized much by critical race scholarship, that which constitutes Europe and whiteness are

always shaped by processes of racialization and therefore connected to global racial formations. Here Baker situates Yugoslavia into broader discussions of colonialism and race, contributing important insight to the fields of postcolonial and critical race studies. One limitation of the book is that it could include more analysis of Romani populations. Though Baker does include the voices of scholars who have studied this subject, the book could include a closer examination of the ways that whiteness is performed in relationship to Romani populations in Yugoslavia.

The book is a poignant study of race and references an extensive and rich amount of literature. It fills an important gap in scholarship on Yugoslavia and Southeast Europe which often lacks a critical analysis of race. I believe it is a necessary read for those interested in Southeast and East European Studies, as well as postsocialism studies. Those interested in critical race theory, postcolonial studies, cultural studies, history, and anthropology will obtain a great deal from the text.