Marina Matešić and Svetlana Slapšak, *Rod i Balkan: Porodnjavanje balkanizma. Putovanje do druge, s preprekama* (Zagreb: Durieux, 2017), 322 pp.

Rod i Balkan (*Gender and the Balkans*) by Marina Matešić and Svetlana Slapšak should be a must-read for anyone conducting research on the Balkan Peninsula or considering doing so. In the often-unspoken hierarchy of disciplines, the "gender angle" is predominantly overlooked or casually ignored, particularly when it comes from local authors, and especially female writers. Therefore, one more reason to turn to feminist voices is to avoid biases and pitfalls. What makes this book especially valuable is the double perspective on the relationship between gender and the Balkans: first, by the peripheral marginality of the Balkans in relation to the West, and second, by the peripheral positionality of female voices within this same periphery.

Moving away from a mere overview of white/European women's travel writing on the Balkans and its "exotic" inhabitants, this book offers an introspective view on how opinions about the Balkans were constructed. Some of these ideas have been mistakenly understood to be intrinsic qualities of the Balkans and Eastern Europe, as they unfortunately continue to plague academic and therefore broader political discourse, critically engaging with them remains painfully necessary.

Matešić and Slapšak draw on original texts written by Victorian female travelers and read them in the light of works by Meyda Yeğenoğlu, Larry Wolff, Maria Todorova, Edward Said, Misha Glenny, and Michael Herzfeld, among others. The authors meticulously trace the origins, and issues, of some of the understandings/representations of the Balkans' peripheral position as neither a completely white nor entirely Christian zone that comes to be constructed essentially as a bridge between the West (white, European, and generally upper-class) and the Orient (non-white, "savage," and predominantly non-upper-class). The idea of a bridge—a buffer zone, or perhaps a no-man's-land—was reinforced by the formulation of the European Other in Orientalism as it was highlighted forty years ago by Edward Said. Maria Todorova demonstrated that Balkanism and Orientalism cannot be equated (1997), but some of the topics emerging in both domains require our further attention. In order to do so, Matešić and Slapšak turn to the writings of Mary Wortley Montagu (1689–1762), Emily A. S. Strangford (1826-1887), Helena Kosoltsova-Massalskaya a.k.a. Dora d'Istria (1828–1888), Maria F. Karlova (published in 1870), Paulina Irby (1831–1911), and Georgina M. Mackenzie (1833–1874). Jelena Dimitrijević (1862–1945) and Dora d'Istria represent different approaches in this context due to their Serbian and Romanian origins, respectively, but their works echo some of the dichotomies established by their European and Russian counterparts.

Starting with the 18th century, the writing of European women travelers was characterized by their ability to leave their homeland, move freely across borders, and engage in exploration, which until recently had been a solely masculine and aristocratic *acte de passage* (p. 31). Despite their inability to speak any of the local languages, they used the opportunity provided by travel for empowerment in relation to their own marginal status at home, while male travelers moved more often further away from the "heart of darkness" (p. 179) into the (more appealing) Orient. Without going into further details, it remains to be said that the early days of white European feminist travelers are unwrapped layer by layer, and their relation to race, class, religion, and progress is highlighted as the reader moves through the book's eight chapters.

Reading the experience and testimonies of these women, one cannot escape the fact that these issues continue to be relevant today (for instance, the possibility of moving freely across borders as experienced by a white, female, upper-class body in contrast to the anonymous mass of "Others," irrespective of the color of their skin). One often forgets that freedom of (safe) movement is not a right given to all. It was, and continues to be, capital that provides superiority and security in relation to those lacking it. The hospitality that formed the premise for conducting ethnographic research meant the opening of private space to free-moving foreign women, space that until then was off-limits. This, in turn, enabled them to construct their whiteness and emancipation against the description of what was understood as non-European backwardness, especially women's. Racial and cultural differences become inscribed unto the (female) bodies of the inhabitants of the Balkans (p. 61), and such differences formed the early basis for knowledge about the Balkans. The issues produced by such a legacy are felt today, and the authors propose taking a step away from the concept of gender and replacing it with *soj* (originally Turkish, *soy*)—which refers to the biological strain in species, vegetal or animal—in an attempt to deconstruct intersectionality (p. 306).

Although such an approach remains to be explored, the principal value of *Rod i Balkan* is the opening of possible alternatives for intellectual travel, within the imaginary Balkans that were constructed in the past, and the Balkans of today.

Jasmina Gavrankapetanović-Redžić