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Transnational Queer Materialism

As early as 2003, Turkey's authoritarian leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan positioned himself and presumably his pious Sunni voter base as the "Negros (zenci)" of Turkey. In the Turkish republic today, "whiteness" also makes an appearance with talk of "white turks" throughout academic and activist work, popular media, and daily life.

In the early 1990s, the Serbo-Croatian-language paper *Danas* ran a lengthy article, "Europe Is Raped Again," by Professor Muradif Kulenović, which theorizes the wartime rape of women through the words of Black Panther Eldridge Cleaver, who calls rape a "dialogue between races" and the "'rebellion' of a black man against the white master via the 'desecration of his women'" (Žarkov 2007: 137, Jaleel 2021: 74–75).

In these examples, the sexual and racial histories of the United States and the transatlantic slave trade are brought to bear on political and economic problems that cannot be said to share those histories in any clean or uncomplicated way. In Turkey, the transatlantic slave trade historically overlapped with other iterations of slavery, including the East African Ottoman slave trade. Today, Turkish claims to Blackness and whiteness are mediated by the country's strategic and shifting relationships with the European Union, the United

States, NATO, and Russia on issues such as climate, migration and refugee crises, security, counter-terrorism, and trade agreements. Claims to Blackness and designations of whiteness unfold in this geopolitical context. Meanwhile, in the former Yugoslavia, Kulenović's invocation of Cleaver's erstwhile take on rape¹ fed narratives that positioned Bosnian and Croat Muslims closer to whiteness, one threatened by Serbian ethno-religious nationalism. Through this maneuver, the economic fallout of the Cold War's end, the withdrawal of Soviet financial support for the unaligned nation, loses its explanatory power for the state's collapse. The conflict becomes "ethnic"—fueled by long-standing animosities between groups. The putative end of socialism and the global triumph of capitalism—the instabilities and global realignments that they wrought—slip from view.

The uses of Blackness in these peripheral European contexts do not come about simply because of the bad intentions or the racisms of those who invoke them. Nor can these uses of Blackness be blamed solely on the unhampered spread of a liberalism that depends on group-based identities of the sort supported by civil and human rights frameworks. These aren't imposed racial categories, policies, or analyses disseminated by state or international governing orders or the NGOs that enact them. Instead, in these examples Blackness and its many histories are taken up in distant locations and re-signified to make sense of and shape the world. In both contexts, Blackness is claimed or deployed to assert a certain kind of victimization and narrate real or perceived injury through particular frames. This has become a kind of global common sense. Erdoğan's "Black Turks" are pious citizens from rural backgrounds, belittled by secular (left) urban elites. On behalf of "Black Turks," Erdoğan continues to justify an authoritarian rule that criminalizes ethnic and religious minorities, queers, and dissident leftists. In the former Yugoslavia, Kulenović's racialization of rape relies on a notion of predatory, sexually savage Blackness that threatens the (would-be) white heart of Europe. We might think of these instances as part of what Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2022: 322) calls "a world movement of racial capitalist relations." From the breakup of the former Yugoslavia to the rise of global authoritarianism, seismic shifts in Cold War, Third World, or European projects create new narratives and relations of power. The "release," for instance, of China, South Africa, Brazil, and India from the old Third World project has created new relations of imperialisms and colonialisms that have in some ways, as Vijay Prashad (2014) writes, little to do with the US or Western Europe. And yet the complex of sex, race, and violence made evident by the turn to those particular racial categories (Black and white) and histories

of rape and slavery have everything to do with US and Western European racial (and therefore gendered, sexual) legacies and the circuits of racial capitalism that encourage their travel.

This special issue begins with an interest in that kind of travel—of concepts and terms that people use to give themselves and their worlds social and political meaning. It brings broader scholarship and interest in racial capitalism—itself a transnational, historical formation—into necessary and explicit conversation with queer studies’ decades-long attempts to grapple with the complex of sexuality, sex, and gender within the study of race and political economy, both in the US and outside of it. This framing is an effort to deepen racial capitalism’s engagement with gender/sex/sexuality, and an invitation to consider racializations in and beyond the transatlantic slave trade. In the same breath, this framing seeks to tackle the thorny issues that the transnationalization of queer studies has engendered as it attempts to bring political economy, the study of race, and geopolitics to bear on the production, meanings, and lived experiences of nondominant genders and sexualities—analyses that so often occur through terminologies, categories, and thought systems produced elsewhere. At issue here are the analytic categories available to think through the political and economic transits of race—including words like *Black* and *white* and *queer* and *trans*—that so often result in a reading of race that universalizes formations that are particular to the US. When those words travel out of context, we are once again caught in the projections of US racial imaginaries that have now turned from historical particularity into generalizable theory and concept. This, as we discuss, is exacerbated by the use of *queer* as a metaphor without a fixed referent (Eng, Halberstam, and Muñoz 2005). Understanding this article’s opening claims to Blackness, for example, as a way of “queering” or “transing” race through its “strange” deployment and travel—a position not unimaginable in a field that gave us queer drones²—would participate in the closed circle of US epistemes just as it attempts to move beyond them and account for the rest of the world. The transits of Blackness and US racial politics in non-US geopolitical contexts are not easily tracked by scholarship on racial capitalism and queer of color critique that erases the specificity of US racial, gender, and sexual formations and presumes their facile portability. Nonetheless, these frameworks often set the theoretical ground that is then applied to non-US contexts.³ This occurs at times, as we discuss, through the use of postcolonial theorists like Frantz Fanon, when these thinkers are uprooted from critical contexts and used to make sense of US racial and colonial violence before they get a ticket to travel the world again, this time

embedded within would-be universal abstractions of Blackness, queerness, or transness.⁴

The appropriations of Blackness in the peripheries of Europe, as well as appropriations of postcolonial theorists by the US academy, each serve—purposefully or inadvertently—the production and reproduction of various racial, ethno-religious, political, and economic orders.⁵ On the edges of Europe, and in the former Yugoslavia, for example, the use of Blackness to frame war rape as ethno-religiously motivated maintains the notion of discrete ethno-religious identities not only as conflict motivators but as indexing social positions that correspond to particular political views. This framing of the conflict as “ethno-religious” ultimately led to the enshrining of these identities within post-conflict agreements and the establishment, for example, of a tripartite inter-ethnic presidency in the constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Here, the appropriation of US Blackness to make sense of conflict known for mass war rape taps into the heart of state formation, providing a cognizable framework for a world struggling to adjust to the putative end of the Cold War (Jaleel 2021: 85). And because this and the Turkish claim to Blackness are attempts to produce and reproduce racial, ethno-religious, political, and economic orders, they require an analysis of gender/sex. How can queer critique and analyses of racial capitalism account for narrations of injury that depend on an unmoored travel of Blackness?

Beginning with the global circuits of racial terminological travel helps us re-envision the production, meanings, and possibilities of queer and trans study and racial capitalism. To do so, we focus on particular strands of queer analysis: (1) those that concern “queers/trans of color” as subjects or (2) deploy some iteration of queer of color critique as a method or analytic. Queer of color critique is an epistemological intervention and a “method for analyzing cultural formations as registries of the intersections of race, political economy, gender, and sexuality . . . [one that situates] those formations within analyses of racial capitalism and the racial state” (Ferguson 2018: 1). Grace Kyungwon Hong and Roderick Ferguson (2011: 2) further define queer of color critique as “emerging from women of color feminism rather than deriving from a white Euro-American gay, lesbian, and queer theory tradition.” Scholars like M. Jacqui Alexander (2006), Martin Manalansan (2003), Gayatri Gopinath (2005), and others continue to participate in this tradition, one that does not view queer of color (as identity or critique) as a universal category but one that depends on situated analyses of the operations of racial capitalism. But some uses of queer and trans of color critique can inadvertently reinforce US racial epistemologies—and the gender/sex systems that

animate them—as such critique moves beyond analyses of US empire to take up new subjects, objects, and relations of study. As queer or trans is simultaneously an analytic, an identity, and a subject position, it can attach to subjects and objects not necessarily sexualized or gendered as nonnormative.⁶ The normative/nonnormative divide can also result in a lumping effect that privileges the distinction between normative and nonnormative over other or more subtle operations of power (Cohen 1997). In the process, this flexibility risks homogenizing what it seeks to name and liberate.

For queer /trans of color, both as a term claimed by individuals and affixed to groups and populations, while also deployed as an analytic, the stakes are compounded by the openness of “of color”—especially when posed against an undifferentiated “whiteness”—and the many histories, legacies, and theorizations of racialization and colonialism that reside therein.⁷ Meanwhile, racial capitalism recognizes that “capital can only be capital when it is accumulating, and it can only accumulate by producing and moving through relations of severe inequality among human groups” (Melamed 2015: 77). As such, the “racial” of racial capitalism describes a process integral to how accumulation and dispossession work through capitalism—it is not an analytic that exists solely for describing how Black or other minoritized people experience targeted suffering. And yet the political, economic, and governance work of gender/sex systems are not always at the forefront of racial capitalist analyses. This omission compounds the ways that the “racial” of racial capitalism so often becomes synonymous with a monolithic account of US Blackness and Black experience—a move often critiqued by Africanist scholarship.⁸ This also ironically runs counter to Cedric J. Robinson’s (2000) approach in *Black Marxism*, which popularized the term *racial capitalism* by describing European racialisms within feudal Europe as preceding the advent of capitalism. What remains to be theorized is a transnational queer approach to historical materialism—one capable of keeping queer of color critique firmly attached to its historical roots in the global study of racial capitalism.

Here, we take up the narrations and values produced by the travels and transits of words like queer of color, like race, like racial capitalism to both co-mobilize and re-theorize queer of color critique and the content and contours of global racial capitalism. From this perspective, queer of color critique and racial capitalism are not only sites from which to critique but entwined objects of critique themselves that are crucial to the circulation of racial terms. With and beyond the story of US empire and the transatlantic slave trade—from peripheral European engagements with Africa to the circulation

of caste in Africa via Indian Ocean worlds—in this special issue we examine some of the histories and present modes of capitalist accumulation that are relevant to telling global stories of race and capitalism, which are entwined with other categories such as caste and religion. A queer/trans lens keeps our attention trained as well on the arrangements and estrangements of the sex/gender systems that power them. So positioned, we enter ongoing debates on the geopolitics of queer studies, the import of queer materialism, and theorizations of racial capitalism by asking (1) what is the “racial” of racial capitalism?, and (2) what is the “of color” in trans/queer of color critique? The questions form a method for thinking global racial capitalism and queer/trans of color study together—what we call *transnational queer materialism*.

In what follows, we outline some of the key debates and omissions in trans/queer studies—particularly certain trans theorizations of Blackness—and racial capitalism to demonstrate the utility of a transnational queer materialist approach. Transnational queer materialism offers “a historiographic approach to queer of color critique: an inquiry into the formation of queer approaches to political economy as part of a broader question of how the reproduction of the terms of freedom and justice, particularly sexual ones, are produced, reproduced, and thwarted” (Jaleel 2022). A transnational queer materialist approach is not about what *is* queer or trans or *who* is queer or trans, but *how* queer/trans as an analytic and field is able to be reproduced or interrupted—the material conditions, infrastructures, feelings, and concepts that make queer/trans subjects, objects, and relations possible. This means that “of color” cannot stand in for the “racial oppression” of minoritized groups in the way that theorizations of racial capitalism can enable when it is reduced to accounts of racialized, especially Black, suffering. The sort of historiography on offer by transnational queer materialism would instead, to apply it to the article’s opening examples, use an analytic to account for how race is mobilized to support and reproduce specific, geopolitical ethno-religious claims to power. In some ways, transnational queer materialism requires paradoxically broadening the scope of queer (of color) inquiry in order to narrow it. In other words, it must look globally in order to more precisely ground a queer and trans studies that is no longer solely about US sexual and gender politics. Transnational queer materialism is also a check against the universal and automatic situating of some bodies as always already queer or trans because they fall outside of a colonial whiteness and the frames of intelligibility dictated by it, resulting in the automatic “queering” or “trans-ing” of entire geographies and populations.

The story, then, that transnational queer materialism tells about Blackness, Erdoğan, and the former Yugoslavia is one that narrates Blackness as intimately tethered to global governance and geopolitics. This story emphasizes how free-range notions of queer, trans, and Black obscure the role of nation-states and their political systems as key players in the creation, maintenance, reproduction, and reconfiguration of racialized gender/sex and the meaning and import of queer critique. In this way, transnational queer materialism pushes against approaches to queerness/transness and Blackness that portray these categories as functionally undifferentiated and/or perpetually victimized no matter their location in space or in time.⁹ The maintenance of monolithic abstractions like queerness, transness, whiteness, and Blackness risk repeating the gestures transnational feminists have warned against, where “fantasized similarity” supports “an elision of material difference” (Grewal and Kaplan 1996: 6).

In an age of rising global authoritarianisms and appropriations of Blackness as injury, transnational queer materialism invites us to reconsider the operations of liberalism and the meanings of reform. Global instability, the uneven development of liberal democratic governance as well as rising right-wing populism and authoritarianism, and the relationships between people, their needs, and their histories can frustrate any easy assessment or dismissal of what in the US context David Eng (2010) has called “queer liberalism.” Beginning here, with the differences between political orders around the globe, opens the door to a transnational queer materialist critique. This focus on geographies, governance, and geopolitics in turn puts pressure on the categories that comprise queer of color critique—queer, of color—and on the presumed contours of racial capitalism and queer materialist inquiry. In the process, queer and trans of color are reconnected to the historical material conditions of sexuality, indigeneity, and raciality—and the many histories and loci of power that drive them. Beginning here, lets us reimagine the question that drives so much left scholarship: how to best respond to proliferating global emergencies, how to best be against the injustices of what Randall Williams (2010) calls a “divided world”—when this “we” is itself divergent and interconnected, critical but also unable to definitively apprehend the many forces of history.

Queer/Black/Trans at the Limits of Empire

From Judith Butler’s “Against Proper Objects” (1994) to the 2005 special issue of *Social Text*, “What’s Queer about Queer Studies Now?” to *Social Text*’s

2020 issue “Left of Queer,” scholars have repeatedly emphasized the contingency of the term *queer* as a way to assess, if not defend, its political relevance and contemplate its potential obsolescence (Eng and Puar 2020). The insistence that *queer* not prescribe proper subjects, objects, or relations of inquiry—a dedication, in other words, to “subjectless” and “objectless” critique—has resulted in the explicit move away from sexuality as queer studies’ “proper object” to a queer studies that runs, as the authors of “What’s Queer about Queer Studies Now?” put it, toward “historical emergency.” In the aftermath, queer might now contend with race and geopolitics, with various Marxisms and postcolonial inheritances—all of these were once, perhaps, not proper objects. But do improper objects remain? *Queer* is after all a term whose less-than-liberatory possibilities have been theorized through homonormativity (Duggan 2003) and homonationalisms (Puar 2007)—as put in bad service by governments and populations to police behavior, shore up borders, or otherwise assemble and control.¹⁰ Better yet, how does queer come to be put in bad service conceptually, in bad relation?

To try to answer this question, we use a transnational queer materialist approach to identify certain epistemic tendencies across some iterations of largely US-based queer/trans studies, Black studies, and especially work occurring at the nexus of the two. Black, trans, and queer studies share the dilemma central to any work that involves “identity” politics: namely “the challenge of calling an object into being without owning or being owned by the call of identity or identification, of recognition or acknowledgment” (Best 2018: 16). Both Black studies and queer/trans studies are concerned with the question of violence and how to understand the systematic production of anti-Black violence and anti-trans/queer violence, respectively, and as co-constitutive phenomena. Approaches to these tense and mobile questions are as varied as their interdisciplinary commitments, methods, and sites of intervention. Here, we are not intending to present a definitive “state of the field” of Black or trans/queer studies. This is a much less ambitious attempt to identify how certain lines of thought or theoretical tendencies might benefit from a closer engagement with transnational queer materialism. Among these tendencies, we note (1) in queer studies in particular, the unmarked travel of US racial categories and rubrics; (2) the decontextualized use of postcolonial theorists like Frantz Fanon to shore up theorizing by US scholars of queer/transness and Blackness; (3) a kind of “queer liberalism overwhelm” in which the failures of US-style democratic governance and the nation-state are extrapolated as universal grounds for analysis; and (4) a romance with ungovernability and fugitivity that uncritically extends these

rubrics beyond largely US-based experiences of slavery. Acknowledging these tendencies moves us closer to accounting for claims of Blackness without Black people taking place on the outskirts of Europe, where Blackness becomes metaphor and simile that depends on the free travel of US racial histories. This travel relies on and in turn reinforces the circulation of racial capitalism as a term that is functionally synonymous with US racial binaries (Black/white) and US histories of slavery even as it dematerializes these histories.

Many modes and kinds of travels of theory and history have contributed to the need for transnational queer materialist critique. These include transits between disciplines and methods as queer moves out of psychoanalytic and literary studies; the global travel of queer of color critique; and the travel of US racial categories under the term racial capitalism. At times, disciplinary transits, namely US queer studies' early roots in literary studies and psychoanalytic theory, have limited the utility of the field to grapple with the geopolitics of racialized gender. In those fields, some queer theorists were invested in radical breaks thought to be initiated by gay sex or queerness writ large. These include psychic oppositionality in the case of Leo Bersani, where sex is a scene of "shattering," but also the strains of queer negativity or antisocial orientations that were often theorized from the closed and fictional worlds of literary texts and other cultural productions, as in Lee Edelman's (2004) *No Future*, where queerness is not tied to individual identity or a collective impulse but is a figural position that opposes sociality itself, given its presumptive investments with reproductive futurity. In this view, queer abjection is the destruction of the social order and against a politics of hope—and not simply because it denounces social life, but, as Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman (2014: xii) clarify, because it upends "social relations that appear . . . irreparable."

José Estaban Muñoz (2006: 825) responds to Edelman's antirelationality, antisociality, and abandonment of reparative social politics in forceful terms: "the antirelational in queer studies was the gay white man's last stand" and thus for Muñoz a final attempt to keep sexuality as a single node of analysis, separate from race, class, and other forms of social difference. As such, Muñoz (2009: 95) rejects Edelman's critique of reproductive futurity emblemized by the child; the heteronormative fixation on the child "is only the stuff of some kids. Racialized kids, queer kids, are not the sovereign princes of futurity." These theoretical and methodological inheritances—the investments in rupture and stark figural claims—can follow *queer* and *trans* to, in particular, the interdisciplinary field of American Studies, where

US empire and US theorizations of racial capitalism set the stage for the kinds of “historical emergency” to which *queer* or *trans* now attend: one overdetermined by US racial histories mistaken for universal ones. This transit to American studies privileged the study of US empire, which has at times stood in for transnational queer materialism as a way to address the world beyond US borders, if not beyond its imperial reach. As Anjali Arondekar and Geeta Patel (2016: 156–57) query, “What would it mean to imagine an analytic of race that would take the transatlantic trade to the Indian Ocean and not produce African subjects in the same trajectory of slavery?” To ask these questions is not in any way to dismiss US-focused projects but to put pressure on their component parts: which and whose “global” histories become relevant, whose concepts and categories carry the day, and what assumptions about race (or more broadly, “difference”) and political economy move through such inquiries and their attendant methods?

While the focus on US empire brought political economic analysis to bear on examinations of sex and sexuality, the corresponding study of racial capitalism on offer is nonetheless limited by the field’s focus on US empire and the racial logics that pertain to it. Chandan Reddy’s (2005: 113) excellent “Asian Diasporas, Neoliberalism, and Family,” for example, analyzes the gay Pakistani US asylum seeker “as formed in the contradiction between heteronormative social relations mandated for immigrants of color by the state’s policies and the liberal state’s ideology of universal sexual freedom as a mask for growing these social relations.” The focus on the US state here means that Reddy’s essay follows how Pakistan must remain a flat figuration—a historical void of a country, a projected geography against which the United States erects itself—and implicitly how the Pakistani asylum seeker’s material circumstances, including his potential class and caste privileges pre-asylum, disappear with it. Transnational queer materialism would build on this work by fleshing out what would be abstractions (both Pakistan and the Pakistani gay asylum seeker). In the process, this fleshing out might perhaps tell us something about the complexities of “racial” and “capitalism” through the intersecting political and economic histories of nations and regions.

Efforts to think race and transness transnationally have at times also stumbled back into US racial categories without attention to other racializing histories. If the global uptake of LGBT+ and queer has raised many eyebrows, queer of color has had little comparable objection, if anything the term seems to unite “queers” and “trans” across geopolitics and geographies as long as they are not “white.” In “Trans Necropolitics. A Transnational Reflection on Violence, Death, and the Trans of Color Afterlife,” for example,

C. Riley Snorton and Jin Haritaworn (2013: 67) rightfully advocate for trans studies and related fields to “push our accounts of violence and anti-violence to beyond limited formulas such as ‘race, gender, and class’ in both their intersectional and post-identitarian formulations” and that “we must be wary of analogizing categories like, women, gay and trans, or even ‘queer of color’ and ‘trans.’ Yet in analyzing the circulation of Black trans women’s death transnationally—including how the death of Tyra Hunter in Washington, DC, and the hate-crime discourse boosted certain forms of transgender inclusion in Germany—Snorton and Haritaworn (2013: 66) argue that “the lives of trans people of color in the global North and West are celebrated and their deaths memorialized, in ways that serve the white citizenry and mask necropolitical violence waged against gender variant people from the global South and East.” But what racial orders and historical relations are captured and missed by the term *trans of color* as it goes to Europe, especially when it is opposed to the free-floating signifier of an undifferentiated “whiteness”? “Homogenous categories of “Turks” and “Muslims,” argued to be the ultimate victims of trans-friendly legislation in Germany, erase the various ethnic, class, and religious differences within and between them.

If the work of “queer” is to respond to “historical emergencies,” then “queer” uses of US Blackness and racializing logics by political actors in the peripheries of Europe are a five-alarm fire that can’t be assuaged by queer studies as usual. Building on these observations, we might put some pressure on what counts as a “historical emergency” subject to queer/trans critique and ask when is an improper object a historical emergency? Is the Turkish “Negro” and white Turk a historical emergency of this sort? Is Kulenović’s attempt to portray war rape through a Black Panther’s take on rape a historical emergency subject to queer of color critique? We think so because these historical emergencies can interrupt the replication of queer analytics that ignore global racial capitalisms and value making beyond the legacies of the US experience of race. The two examples that open our essay illustrate this point.

While there are actual Afro-Turks in the Republic, including those who trace their lineage to the East African slave trade of the Ottoman empire, Erdoğan’s use of the term *zenci* (negro), and at other times *siyah Türk* (Black Turk), does not refer to them. His usage instead dislocates Blackness from its multiple historical contexts, estranging Blackness from broader global discourses about raciality. In Erdoğan’s mouth, Blackness becomes a metaphor for oppression due to systematic and historic discrimination that justifies, if not requires, righteous revolt against the political order and demands a right-

ing of historical wrongs. In a 2003 interview with the *New York Times* shortly after assuming the Turkish prime ministry, Erdoğan claimed that there are white Turks in Turkey, and that there are Black Turks. He, “your brother Erdoğan,” was one of the Black Turks. In 2013, Erdoğan, now the Turkish president, ordered the police forces to attack the Gezi Park protests with tear gas, water cannons, and plastic bullets while nonetheless positioning himself and his Sunni voter base as the oppressed yet again through the metaphor of Blackness: “According to them we do not understand (anything) from politics. According to them we do not understand anything from arts, theater, cinema, painting, poetry. . . . According to them we do not understand anything from aesthetics, architecture. According to them we are uneducated, ignorant, lower-strata/subaltern, people who need to be content with what they receive . . . in other words a “negro” group.”¹² In this context, Erdoğan appropriates Blackness in order to evoke the oppression of pious Muslims in Turkey, including himself, due to the historical discrimination against pious Muslim women with headscarves. Such a claim to Blackness masquerades as a devout stand against secularizing forces imagined to be aligned with ominous “foreign powers,” even as “your brother Erdoğan” brutalizes any political protest against his rule from all classes and religious backgrounds—including Muslim-minority Alevi youth—who were disproportionately murdered in the violent police repression of the uprisings over plans to demolish a public park and to replace it with a shopping mall (Savcı 2021).

Erdoğan makes a case for his own Blackness by “invisibilizing” his government’s violent marginalization of various ethnic and religious minorities while nonetheless attempting in another context to *claim whiteness*. In the course of Turkey’s growing investment in diplomatic ties with Africa south of the Sahara, Erdoğan and his cabinet position themselves as “white” in order to “lend credibility and validity to their promises of know-how transfer, technological advancement, industrialization, modernization and development in individual African countries”—but they distinguish themselves from colonial whiteness (Güner 2021). During and after President Erdoğan and his cabinet members’ various trips to Africa, pro-government media have reported statements by African leaders and simple civilians regarding the “different kind of Whiteness” of Turks. The Turkish government’s “nice (read noncolonialist) white guy” act in Africa unfolds within the history of the East African slave trade to the Ottoman empire and contemporary Turkey’s large arms sales to African countries, not to mention the close to \$80 billion worth of construction projects built by Turkish companies in addition to the “humanitarian aid” provided (Güner 2021).

Erdoğan invoked the same distance from white colonizers in speeches that rhetorically condemn “Europe” for its hypocritical “democracy.” In those speeches, Erdoğan lambasted Europe’s refusal to accept Syrian refugees, omitting the financial compensation Turkey received from the EU to contain three and a half million refugees within its borders and deny them passage to Europe. Also omitted were the dismal living conditions of the refugees stationed in Turkey. Instead of racializing Islam wholesale, transnational queer materialism pays attention to the things that fracture that category, like sect, like class, like gender and sexuality. “The figure of the Muslim” as terroristic might make sense in the US, but in the context of Turkey, we are faced with a Sunni government that has dubbed most Kurds, LGBT activists, and academics for peace terrorists simply because they opposed the war waged on the Kurdish territories (Savcı 2021). Erdoğan’s claims to Blackness as injury on behalf of pious Sunnis serve to mask his regime’s racialized violence against Kurdish citizens.

Meanwhile, in the former Yugoslavia, Kulenović’s explanation of war rape through US feminist theory and histories of US Blackness supported a narrative of “ethnic” conflict that tapped into long-standing, global Euro-American racial projects of state formation and management (Jaleel 2021: 74). As Piro Rexhepi (2023: 14) explains, “The nineteenth century geopolitical mapping of the geographic, temporal, and racial borders of Europe that produced the Ottomans as an intrusion in the Balkans charged newly formed countries such as Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, and Serbia, and later the kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, with the re-Europeanization of the post-Ottoman spatial and social relations.” Such racial imaginaries, forged on the outskirts of Europe, where it rubs elbows with Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, are thus activated through demands to consolidate white power through statecraft. As Rexhepi (2023: 14–15) continues, the notion of the Balkans as “the borderland battlefield” where white Christianity was besieged by its many Others was not just a “European concern.” Instead, “these were joint Euro-American visions of what the eugenicist David Starr Jordan considered ‘the racial unity’ of all white people.” These visions of whiteness at the very edges of Europe were preserved not only through the racialization of various (and perversely sexualized) minorities in the region, including Jews, Muslims, and Roma, but by promoting ethno-nationalisms as the motivation for the many wars and territorial skirmishes to follow.

During the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia, as many scholars of the region have noted, international media, law, and policy understood Croat and Bosnian Muslims as victims of mass rape and Serbian aggression. In

the process, they relied on an association of these particular Muslims with a secular, cosmopolitan whiteness (Atanasoski 2013: 180–81)—the kind that, at least at that time, must be defended—while ignoring the significantly more complicated political and racial history of a region plagued by invasion, partition, and division. This history included—to give one brief, evocative example—the establishment of the Independent State of Croatia as a satellite Nazi state after the 1941 invasion of Yugoslavia by Hungarian, Italian, and German forces. Yet the former Yugoslavia and other “second world” (former state-socialist) countries are absent from most US-based analyses of racial capitalism. Such formulations of racial capitalism then miss how ethno-religious categories of difference are shored up through a geopolitical defense of whiteness (Rexhepi 2023)—even as politically, the former Yugoslavia has been associated with the Brown and Black Global South through its participation in the NonAligned Movement, which Josip Broz Tito, leader of the former Yugoslavia, co-founded with then leaders of Egypt and India, Gamal Nasser and Jawaharlal Nehru. As Catherine Baker (2018: 1–2) explains,

These entanglements, moreover, have created conditions for shifting, ambiguous identifications with symbolic histories and geographies of race. They include not only identifications with “Europe” as a space of modernity, civilisation and (critical race studies would insist) whiteness, but also analogies drawn between “Balkanness” and “blackness” in imagined solidarity, as well as the race-blind anti-colonialism of Yugoslav Non-Alignment (which, under Tito, cast the leader of this European country as a model of national liberation for the Global South).

This omission of robust analysis of how global racial categories have shaped and continue to shape the historical and contemporary politics of the region have furthered the impression—one that was until fairly recently characteristic of even much of the scholarly literature—that race is not relevant to Southeastern Europe. As Baker (2018: 5) writes, “Even studies deconstructing or decentring ethnicity beyond realist frameworks of ‘ethnic war’ still hold their ethnicity and nationhood conversation largely outside race.”¹³ This perception has persisted despite the racialization of the persecuted Roma within white/Black racial binaries. The term *gypsy* (*cigan* in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian) is associated with having dark skin while the term *white gypsy* (*beli cigan/rom* in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian) is not—a distinction that, as Sunnie Rucker-Chang (2019) notes, signals larger regional relationships to Europe and elsewhere. The obfuscation of the racial politics of the region are compounded by another omission: the absence of the “second world”

from the lion's share of transnational and international feminist research, narratives, and discussions of gender and sexual justice (Suchland 2011). This, too, limits how regional racial geopolitics are thought to operate.

As these examples suggest, any global analysis of Blackness must contend with a complex of historical particularities. As such, a transnational queer materialist approach is at odds with strands of Black studies that refuse futurity, political engagement, or solidarity, but ultimately ground that refusal in very specific historical, geopolitical, and economic conceptions of Blackness. Such analysis, typified by the work of Frank Wilderson (2020), risks disavowing the geopolitics of social difference through a narrowing of race to a particular perspective on US-based histories of the transatlantic slave trade. These strands of Black Studies—often gathered under the term *Afropessimism*—frame the systematic production of anti-Black violence as an undifferentiated global commitment, one distinct from other orders of oppression, one where, as Wilderson (2020) puts it, “The spectacle of Black death is essential to the mental health of the world.” For Wilderson, Blackness is “coterminous with slaveness,” and people of color are invariably “junior partners” in the enslavement of Black people because the very definition of freedom is “the freedom not to be Black” (Mitchell 2020: 113). Some might argue that Erdoğan's claim to be a Black Turk and the turn to Eldridge Cleaver to explain rape in the Balkans might prove the point—that unfreedom and injury are synonymous with Blackness and that these appropriations show this to be common knowledge capable of being leveraged for opportunistic political ends. But the material history of Blackness—as an analytic, as a designation—nonetheless matters. Blackness has never been monolithic.

The invocation of a uniform Blackness, we argue, renders it a queer/trans site of social reproduction—the notion of a uniform Blackness up for the claiming functions as an appraising line between groups—one that attempts to shape what ethno-religious orders and what populations within those orders will be valued. In turn, the appropriation of Blackness shows how the racialized production of gender/sex acquires meaning and value for political actors in Turkey and the former Yugoslavia, through their attempts to reproduce certain ethno-religious social and political orders. In Wilderson's account of Blackness, as Nick Mitchell (2020: 122) eloquently writes, so much needs “to disappear, to be forgotten, assumed, overlooked, or silenced, in order for its sense of Black solidarity to appear.” Wilderson's (2020) contention tells us little about what is happening to Blackness as a concept, much less Black people, when Blackness is claimed outside of the US by those in European peripheries. It tells us little about the relationships, for

example, between those claims to Blackness and Black people within their borders, namely Afro Turkish and Afro Albanian population, who trace their ancestry to a different system of slavery: the Ottoman system, where slave status was not determined primarily by race. Blackness in the Afropessimistic tradition can be presented as a transparent claim—something obvious, something identifiable across the globe—in part because the social and geopolitical operations of gender/sex as mechanisms of racial capitalism and as animators of US queer and trans possibility fall from view. But even some work that stakes its critical acumen at the intersection of racialized gender/sex—that operates under the influence of queer/trans materialist traditions or in favor of a transnational global Blackness as a way to theorize the live connections between seemingly disparate struggles—can fall into the trap of reproducing oppression as solidarity. In the process, such work abandons historical social distinctions between groups that might offer other ways of thinking power, violence, and liberation.

Recent work in trans studies, notably Eric Stanley's (2021: 5) *Spheres of Violence: Structuring Antagonism and the Trans/Queer Ungovernable*, follows this track, adding gender/sex analysis to a foundational and unyielding anti-Blackness so that "anti-trans/queer violence is foundational to, and not an aberration of, modernity." For Stanley (2021), efforts to denounce the "poison" (115) of democracy and the dangers of the (US) state, liberalism, and representational democracy transmute trans/queer to "a nonidentity where force is made to live" (26), so that Blackness and trans/queerness are made virtually interchangeable through a relationship to violence. This move—posed, unlike Wilderson's, toward solidarity forged through "the" state's anti-Black and anti-trans/queer foundational settler colonial violence—nonetheless reduces Blackness and trans/queerness to univocal, transhistorical, global death and inhumanity. In turn, it produces a concept of trans/queer that cannot adequately theorize the metaphorical borrowing of Blackness in places like Turkey or the Balkans. Instead, violence across race, across sex/gender, across time, and across geopolitics merges to figure fugitivity and ungovernability as privileged responses to the particular failures of the US state and liberal democracy. This happens in ways that elide the difference between using abstraction to intervene at the level of metaphysics and using that abstraction to prescribe a general orientation or approach to governance—to mistake abstract critique for political praxis. This results, paradoxically, in the obliteration of postcolonial politics—all the messiness of anti-colonial engagements with states and the international order of them—even as postcolonial theory is mobilized to prove a transhistorical point about

Blackness and trans/queerness. This leaves the metaphorical appropriation of Blackness in the service of ethnoreligious politics, for example, outside the bounds of its analysis as such actors universalize what should remain particular historical framings of Blackness.

Ungovernability and “the” State in an Age of Global Authoritarianisms

Special issue contributor Rahul Rao (2020: 2) has noted that “queer theory’s determination to stand askew to the progressive march of time has been shaped by its geopolitical provenance in the contemporary United States and its opposition to what David Eng has described as ‘queer liberalism.’” While, for example, much queer scholarship has rightly focused on the global dissemination of liberal LGBTQ+ rights discourses through transnational NGOs, the conservative counters to these operations often fall from the frame. Kristopher Velasco and Sebastian Cabal Rojas’s forthcoming work, for example, interrogates the meaningfulness of accepting liberalism as a done deal when in 2013 transnational anti-LGBTQ+ spending came to around \$57 million compared to \$2.5 million in “pro-LGBT” funding. These uneven investments are further exacerbated by a notion of time that keeps queer “progress” firmly in Western temporal frames and scholarly inquiries that presume that “we” have our liberal rights in hand. Together, this geopolitical notion of queer progress over time and the reality of conservative funding investments obscure, as Rao (2020: 2) writes, “the shadow of struggles around the decriminalisation of queer sex in places where it seemed . . . that people had not got what they wanted, or had only just got what they wanted, or felt implicated in the fact of others not having what they wanted.” And it directs attention away from how, increasingly, global politics is marked by widespread neoliberal authoritarianisms and sectarianisms organized through racial and sexual management, restriction, and outright violence (bombings, shootings, targeting of gay and trans people and places) even as, increasingly in the US, fascism arrives through liberal processes themselves.¹⁴ Such critiques of liberalism are also made possible by the collapse of social liberalism into economic liberalism, forgetting that many early proponents of economic liberalism themselves were not politically liberal and in fact understood decolonialization and democracy in postcolonial nation-states to be a threat to the global liberal economy (Hong 2020; Slobodian 2018).

The intensification of global authoritarianisms sheds a certain light on US-based Black/queer/trans work that pivots on a generalized anti-state political analysis and practice that range from broad condemnations of “liberalism”

to calls by trans theorists like Stanley (2021) to become “ungovernable.” Justified critiques of particular states or “the state” as a primary unit of political organization become secondary to the idea of the possibility of a radical break, another shattering, the promise of a way to be always otherwise. Broad critiques of “liberalism,” “reformist” politics, the failures of representational democracy, and “the” law can perversely ignore the complexity of postcolonial struggles over state power and control, even as postcolonial theorists, particularly Black postcolonial theorists like Frantz Fanon (1964), are summoned in these same projects as evidence of attention to colonialisms—and even as they are marshaled to speak for all erstwhile colonial subjects. Here, Fanon’s (1964: 44) elaboration of Kantian humanism—his claim that “universality resides in [the] decision to recognize and accept the reciprocal relativism of different cultures, once the colonial status is irreversibly excluded”—is instructive. He and other postcolonial thinkers in this way insist that any breed of universal humanism—understood as something unstable, something changeable—worth entertaining would begin with a rejection of colonialism, so that the idea of “humanity” remains contentless and “no one people or set of ideas” become “the hallmark of what it means to be ‘men’”¹⁵ (Cornell 2000: 77). Blackness and transness as analytics might rightly traverse the international order of states when they travel to intervene at a high level of abstraction—against, for example, humanisms that purport to be universal but instead smuggle in a particular genre of Man (Wyn-ter 2003). But when theorists like Fanon are stripped from their historical context—in this case, the Algerian war against French colonialism, which itself occurs in the context of a global Cold War—and put to use for queer and trans studies in the US, there is a risk of homogenizing state power and the interplay of power between states through a “reciprocal relativism” of colonialisms, which, like states themselves, do not have the same structurations or histories. Such abstraction allows Stanley (2021: 24) to rely on “the racialized phenomenology of Blackness under colonization that Fanon illustrates” as something “to [be] read against and with a continuum of anti-trans/queer racialized violence in the settler colony that is the United States.” As such, Fanon’s theorizations of Blackness can inadvertently feed US academic left theoretical production that ignores how Fanon’s understanding of Blackness is inextricably tied to material politics of the Algerian Revolution against French settler colonialism. Such US uses of Fanon also ignore his commitment to political praxis (versus abstract theory) and his caution against a flattening of Blackness and racism even in the context of France at the time (Davis 2022). Thus, in this analysis, the transnational solidarity

Stanley so movingly seeks can only be forged through a curated archive of violence, one that links state-sponsored terrors and extra-state violence across times and geographies. The unrelenting emphasis on Black/trans/queer death justifies a rejection of “the” state and its processes—not only as a mode of political organization, but also almost entirely as a site of political engagement. As Stanley (2021: 118) writes, “If the attempt to fashion a more perfect democracy is also the order under which its deadly force expands, then ungovernability becomes an abolitionist way of life.”

Fugitivity is the break from bondage, being on the run, living outside of what would define you. But it is also an ontological escape or bursting of the confines of a Blackness defined only by law, racialisms, and racisms: Black is, in this sense, ungovernable, in excess, to use the familiar parlance—“anoriginal lawlessness.” “To become black,” as Amaryah Shaye (2014) writes, “is to refuse being made a something—to be and become nothing. Not because nothing is an absence or lack of life, but precisely because nothing is the abundance and multiplicity out of which life is formed.” And there are so many things to burst—the skin and the state and law and culture—the wrap of governance, that many layered thing. To be clear, we are not suggesting that metaphysical accounts of trans or Black do not matter, but we caution against their uncritical overextension. A free-floating Fanon, and other sorts of Black travel in this vein, can paradoxically limit political possibility when they come solely to denote an anarchic position to “the” state and turn away from the complexity of international politics and transnational social movements and their engagements with institutional governance across local, state, regional, and international orders. If, then, fugitivity and ungovernability are an ongoing refusal to accept standards from elsewhere (Moten 2018), and there are many elsewheres, then what ungovernability entails cannot be a one-size-fits-all agitation. Such a totalizing approach obscures how global racial capitalism often operates beyond the terms and categories of difference relevant to the US. Stanley’s use of ungovernability and fugitivity replicates some of the more totalizing moves of queer antisociality but transmutes them through a critique of democracy and liberalism into an undifferentiated antistate analysis. This occurs in part by way of a Fanon pinned to the categories and categorical content (race as Blackness, Blackness as trans/queer) that, for Stanley, give US liberal democracy social and political meaning.

These sorts of racial travels also prevent analyses of the different ways gender/sex (in concert with religious difference and the reproduction of ethno-religious difference) structures racial formations, including Blackness, in

various times and sites. For queer and trans studies, this means that subjectless and objectless critique—especially the movement of queer and trans study beyond US gender and sexuality—can facilitate these problems. This occurs when subjectless and objectless critique are not expressly interrogated as forms for *reproducing* the dominant geopolitical coordinates of transness and queerness, when they are set *within* an abstracted idea of racial capitalism instead of authorizing a corresponding interrogation of it and the relationships between states, institutions, and peoples that make it possible. What sex or race or more specifically Blackness and transness are or can be—as lived experiences and as analytics or concepts—can’t be detached from the when, how, where, and why of their formulation.¹⁶ Such histories are potential sites from which to rework humanism, “genres of the human” (Wynter 2003), or theories of universalism more broadly. How, for example, might caste systems in India and in Africa (such as those in Senegal,) complicate the relationships between Blackness, status, and “the” state?¹⁷ Or as roundtable contributor Sahin Acikgoz discusses, how does including the Ottoman slave trade, where religion and race were both critical to enslavement in ways that do not always allow us to distinguish clearly between the two, shift the way we theorize the “racial” in racial capitalism? Thinking Indian Oceans slavery and trade systems alongside transatlantic ones emphasizes multi-state and extra-state systems of trade and travel whose racial politics do not fall easily into a false choice of for or against “the” state or “liberalism.” Finally, it is unclear what being anarchic or fugitive entails as a political praxis against a nonexistent state, when, as Achille Mbembe (2003: 32) describes, “many African states can no longer claim monopoly on violence”—where urban militias and private armies without state loyalty rule the day or where there are simply no institutions to save or passively kill the citizens or populations that would be under their purview. It is also unclear what a theory and practice of ungovernability under extreme conditions of state neglect (including US state neglect—think the lead laden water in Flint, Michigan) would entail. If the harm that people suffer through is not the result of a cruelly optimistic attachment to liberal democracy and the state form, what then?

Recent feminist theorizations have used transnational left politics to reimagine the political possibilities of the state form. Lisa Duggan (2023: 246) had this to say in the aftermath of global Leftist infighting after the 2021 election in Ecuador, where some anti-extractivist indigenous groups withheld support for Left candidates who had come into political prominence on the crest of the Pink Tide but nonetheless implemented extractivist economic policy that jeopardized the very existence of indigenous people:

The Eurocentrism of left binary thinking is strangling the political imagination of the left in the Global North. A deep engagement with the history of racial colonialism, with decolonial theory and practice, and with Indigenous ways of thinking and living, accompanied by eco-socialist, feminist, and queer strains within and alongside them, can help lead us out of the impasses of the entrenched binaries, the unwavering attachment to individual European male thinkers, the enmeshment in European histories, the dependence on extractivist economies.

Part of what Duggan recognizes here is the need for histories of governance, politics, and organizing that do not presume an all-or-nothing approach or rehearse a static vision of the state, where politics is framed as a choice between engagement or disengagement with state power and institutions. Instead, following Noura Ekraat's and Veronica Gago's work in Palestine and Argentina, respectively, Duggan (2023: 247) suggests "putting care for people and land into the center of political focus" in order "to connect and create new socialities, new institutions, and new conceptions of power on our way to reimagining the state."

Conclusion: Thinking Transnational Queer Materialism

While Wilderson (2020) and Stanley (2021) cannot address variegated mobilizations of Blackness in the US and around the globe, the Black Radical tradition offers another way to frame Blackness, injury, and its complex relationship to contemporary forms of violence and liberatory struggle against it. Transnational queer materialism builds on Black study and Blackness in the Black Radical tradition that describes a global Blackness attuned to historical context and political economies. In *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, Cedric J. Robinson (2000) famously criticizes Marx and Engels's short-shrifting of the effects of racial ideology on class consciousness and for universalizing the English working class as the prototype of proletarian revolt. As Robinson (2000: i) writes, "Marxism's internationalism was not global; its materialism was exposed as an insufficient explainer of cultural and social forces; and its economic determinism too often politically compromised freedom struggles beyond or outside of the metropole." Robinson instead emphasizes unfree labor resistance across the globe, where the ideological motivations for revolt exceeded the mode of production. Focusing particularly on enslaved African peoples' refusal to surrender the substance of African cultures—the "critical mixes and admixtures of language and thought, of cosmology and metaphysics, of habits, beliefs and

morality” (121–22)—to Western notions of freedom, Robinson identifies Black historical consciousness as a wholesale rejection of the very terms of what Western life had on offer. The Black radical tradition is for Robinson (169) “a revolutionary consciousness that proceeded from the whole historical experience of Black people and not merely from the social formations of capitalist slavery or the relations of the production of colonialism”—a consciousness that always existed in the Black masses, one that was always discoverable, never invented, by the Black intelligentsia. The Black Radical Tradition, then, explodes the categorical assignments of meaning that *proletariat* and *Black* and *slave* and *freedom*—and even *intellectual* and *author*—might be thought to hold, singularly and in relation. This dissolution, however conceptual, is nonetheless tethered to (1) a historical and geographically specific set of actions and locations in time: the slave trade involving the African continent, particularly (but not exclusively) the transatlantic slave trade; (2) a theory of capitalism activated by the kidnapping, trafficking, and sale of the peoples of Africa; and (3) the lived experience of those Africans forcibly removed from their homes—the memories and cultural transmission of those other ways of life as what gives rise to the Black Radical Tradition. This is not to deny or endorse critiques of various aspects of Robinson’s (2000) project but to emphasize *Black Marxism*’s dedication to historical and material specificity within a project premised on refusing—even shattering—the categories and frameworks that make racial, economic, and social structurings cohere and make intuitive sense. Here, Blackness achieves its oppositional form through grounded historical context.

If queer is to have any remaining utility, we must understand how its reproduction is tied to analyses of race and geopolitics. Queer/trans critique cannot passively permit the study of racial capitalism to become, contra Robinson, about how Black people or other groups suffer instead of how capitalism works to spread and consolidate through the production of difference. As Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2022: 321) has remarked, “If we have learned anything from . . . *Black Marxism*, it’s that capitalism and racial practice co-developed because the racial practice was already there [internal to feudal Europe] and it had nothing to do with Black people.” When certain US histories of Blackness become synonymous with racial capitalism, they cloak the many forms of Blackness in the US and across the globe. In particular, the reduction of racial capitalism to Blackness as injury provides no analytic framework that can speak to how Blackness is valued, how it gets summoned in European peripheries to reproduce ethno-religious orders. Transnational queer materialism connects racial capitalism more fully to global

histories of sexuality and gender—which are always histories of racial, ethno-religious, indigenous management. It “queers” racial capitalism by illuminating some of the invisible terms of its reproduction. Transnational queer materialism thus requires queer and queer of color to account for what analyses of racial capitalism let those terms move through the world, just as it insists that racial capitalism account for the gender/sex systems that power it.

Returning to our opening examples, how would transnational queer materialism respond to the “historical emergencies” of peripheral European claims to Blackness in order to name an injury—moments where Blackness becomes a metaphor that alleges wrongdoing that demands redress and even justifies state-backed violence in the pursuit of such relief? In the Turkish case, this would require, as a first step, that Islam is not treated as radical alterity to liberal capitalist relations (Savcı 2021). Arif Dirlik (2013) suggests that since the 1980s the search for alternatives to capitalism has increasingly focused on cultural difference, with Islam rising as a key alternative. In fact, when queer studies analyzes the Islamic non-West, capitalism is often completely absent from discussions and modernity’s central defining feature shifts from capitalism to secularity. As a result Islam is doubly removed from the political economy and rendered as cultural twice over (Savcı 2021). Attention to transnational queer materialism would counter the relegation of the Islamic non-West to a capitalist alternative by remembering the historical investment of the US in moderate Islamic regimes in the Middle East during and after the Cold War. Transnational queer materialism would, for example, understand US involvement in the region in the 1980s as a strategy to fight the spread of “godless” communism on one hand and the radicalization of Islam following the Iranian model on the other—both of which challenged US imperialism and capitalism—as actively shaping the political meaning of Islam.

Transnational queer materialism would also consider how the imbrications of race and religion happen, too, outside of state strictures—beyond both legal and institutional orderings and state-sponsored violence. Revisiting Eastern Europe surfaces another complicated set of claims around Africa, Islam, and whiteness. The 2018–2019 Albanian student protests, which spanned the Albanian public university system, were a series of street protests, online activism, and general disruption in opposition to proposed tuition hikes. A 2019 live report of the protest included a news commenter reading aloud a homemade student protest sign, one that had been popular since the strike’s inception. It read, “European prices, African Salaries, Arian Race, Taliban Standards, Miserable Albania.” The broadcast commented that the sign signaled “the strength and sentiment of rage and disappointment

that the students were delivering home” (Tudor and Rexhepi 2021: 197). Piro Rexhepi, in dialogue with Alyosxa Tudor (2021), however, interprets the sign as part of a story of coloniality and racial capitalism. In short, “How can an Arian race be given African salaries, Taliban standards, and yet pay European prices while not being part of the European market? Or in short, why are Albanians being robbed of their ‘Arian’ race privilege?” (197). The sign is therefore an example of how “race functions as capital that the post-socialist subject can claim, trade, and negotiate in the racial capitalist marketplace of the European Union” (197).

But to put a finer point on it, it is race (“Arian”), region (Africa and the shadow of Blackness so once again race and religion), religion (Taliban-style Islam so again race shot through with sexual savagery), and capitalism (the vision of a prosperous European modernity) that all collide in the crude space of a handmade sign. The complicated maneuvers of “race” in the racial capitalism of Eastern Europe have led, moreover, to heated debates about the meaning of “racialization’ vis-à-vis white Eastern European “migratised positions,” where white Eastern Europeans have claimed racisms against themselves—and demanded to be included in European discussions of racism—in ways that can overwrite postcolonial experiences and theorizations of race and racisms. These complicated debates “between the posts” of post-socialism (where state-sponsored socialism is narrowly construed here as a European phenomena) and postcolonialism (Chari and Verderi 2009) have led some to comment that the “fight for the inclusion of . . . white migratised positions into the definitions of racism, the frustration and the feelings of being left out are not mainly directed against the dominant group but come with envying the perceived recognition of Black and anti-racist interventions” (Tudor and Rexhepi 2021: 193).

It is clear that a general, abstracted stand “against oppression” that demands white Eastern European inclusion can paper over histories of European empire and colonialisms within the margins of Europe by appropriating the form of anti-racist critique through a proximal association with Africa and the Asiatic to protest the economic and political violence of Europe proper (Tudor and Rexhepi 2021). A transnational queer materialist reading of this situation might also consider the interplay between the specific racisms up for discussion in Eastern Europe—the ones that white migratised people might efface and claim to face—as part of the broader global travel of racial categories and imaginaries. If, for example, Albania as one of two Muslim-majority states in Europe is simultaneously “a poorhouse

of Europe,” a “defective democracy,” and the “North Korea of Europe,” the turn to this more complicated geopolitical imaginary and interrogation of the racial categories in use might help clarify the definitional stakes of racism, religion, and geopolitics in the region and beyond it. This would not only involve Albania’s relationship to Euro-American economic and social policy but also consider its historical connections to coloniality and the global circuits of Islam.

Transnational queer/trans materialism questions the abstraction and separation of race and religion, of Blackness as metaphor, and Muslim as a static figuration, by returning them to the material conditions, infrastructures, feelings, and concepts that made them possible. Today, Blackness can be claimed by those jockeying for geopolitical power in ways that conceptually mirror some scholarship that reduces racial capitalism to a one-note tale of universal and unvariegated Black oppression. So much falls from the frame: class, caste politics, the many systems of slavery, other empires and colonial racial systems—and the list goes on. In a world without a singular “imperial” center (Grewal and Kaplan 1994), neat categories of “oppressors” and “oppressed” do not exist. Transnational queer materialism remembers this. As Grace Hong and Roderick Ferguson (2011: 11) have emphasized, women of color feminism and queer of color critique are “not a multiculturalist celebration, not an excuse for presuming a commonality among all racialized peoples, but a cleareyed appraisal of the dividing line between valued and devalued, which can cut within, as well as across, racial groupings.”

Through what we call transnational queer materialism, we have considered once again how to appraise that dividing line—across and within racial groupings, across and within geographies, and across and within epistemes of racialized gender that do not only describe discrete categories, peoples, or populations, but that also, crucially, organize ways of being and living. When Blackness becomes abstracted and synonymous with unvariegated injury—within the US and as it travels, authorized by a certain US history, that American passport—the claims made in its name are never transparent or innocent. They are instead attempts to bend the world, to reproduce, if not reorder, specific racial, ethno-religious, gendered, and sexual positionings and, at times, game geopolitical and economic power. This is a historical hijacking of Blackness—one that finds its odd reflection in the flat-figured “others” of US empire— from “the” Muslim to an empty, oppositional “whiteness.” This is history evacuated of its contradictions and its mess— what transnational queer materialisms sets itself against.

Notes

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- 1 Eldridge Cleaver (1967: 33--34) describes his once-held view on the rape of white women as an insurrectionary act and the circumstances that led him to retract the claim.
- 2 In an award-winning *International Feminist Journal of Politics* article entitled "Drone Disorientations," Cara Dagget (2015: 362) discusses how unmanned weapons "queer the experience of killing in war."
- 3 As Anjali Arondekar and Geeta Patel (2016: 156--57) write, "The pervasive understanding of race as understood primarily through the history of the transatlantic slave trade, [is] such that this idea of race could be said to constitute the background against which all representations of racial formation take place."
- 4 For other work on queer geopolitics and terminological travel, see Arondekar and Patel (2016) and Mikdashi and Puar (2016).
- 5 We follow Michelle Murphy (2011: 23--23), whose concept of "distributed reproduction" stretches beyond family making to consider "reproductive politics—and the question of what is reproduction—as a struggle over ontology" that requires "tracking the dispersion of sexed living being into its infrastructural and political economic milieu."
- 6 See Amy Villarejo's (2005) discussion of "queer of color" about potential issues that arise from theorizing the nonnormative as both a symptom of racial capitalism and a site of agentive resistance to it.
- 7 Indigenous studies scholars have also debated the practice of reading some bodies, regions, and subjects as de facto queer. In a response to Audra Simpson's discussion of the state as a white, straight heteropatriarchy, Byrd (2020: 113) notes: "[Simpson] suggests a nonnormative, nonstraightness for all Indigenous bodies and their flesh that resists settler governance. . . . The nondifferentiation of a possible queer or gender non-conforming Indigenous body who does not or cannot reproduce is collapsed into the materiality of the Indigenous woman as already queer."
- 8 See Pierre (2019), who explores in part how diasporic models of Blackness can obscure the complicated histories of race and exchange in modern Africa. See also Clarke and Thomas (2020).
- 9 As Stuart Hall (1987: 45) writes, "'Black' has always been an unstable identity, psychically, culturally, and politically" as well as "a narrative, a story, a history . . . something constructed, told, spoken, not simply found."
- 10 Such "liberal" uses of queer and queer theory have been critiqued by a number of scholars, including Kadji Amin (2016). In response, Amin offers attachment genealogy as a method that "engage[s] queer's multiple pasts . . . in order to differently animate queer's dense affective histories" (174). Beyond the question of whose attachments and histories matter in the making of queer studies is the question of what methods we use to make those histories and recognize those attachments. Given the travel of theory and the travel of US histories of Blackness, where, when, and how global political economies explicitly

- fit into the recognition and narration of such queer histories, attachments, and desires remains an open question. We respond to it with transnational queer materialism.
- 11 In contrast, Fatima El-Tayeb's (2011: xiv) *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe* discusses "processes of ethnicization in postwar Europe that closely interact and overlap with longer-term, in part precapitalist processes of racialization," including the ambiguity of the "whiteness" of Eastern and Southern Europeans migrants and various differences within immigrant and minority groups.
- 12 For a lengthier discussion of Erdoğan's use of Black Turks and its political genealogy, see Michael Ferguson (2013).
- 13 See Rucker-Chang (2018) for an exploration of the movement of US civil rights discourses to Roma populations in the European "South." See also Miglena S. Todorova (2018) on how the 20th twentieth-century travel of US Black women and feminists to socialist countries influenced understandings of racism, imperialism, patriarchy, and capitalism in the US and abroad.
- 14 For a broader discussion of the authoritarian turn see Bassi and LaFleur (2022).
- 15 Cornell (2000: 77) reads reciprocal relativism as "an appeal to universality . . . perfectly consistent" with "Kant's own insistence that a concept of humanity as an idea coherent with moral freedom must remain contentless at least on the abstract level of philosophy."
- 16 If, for example, the state does not hold together civil life but is in fact itself held together by civil life, as Marx and Engels ([1845] 1975, 121) suggest, then attention to the various forms civil life take would in turn tell us something about the various historical workings of states over time. Stanley uses Marx and Engels's analysis to suggest that "as anarchists like Kuwasi Balagoon saw in nationalism, and Frantz Fanon discerned in his analysis of colonialism, the state is fashioned from singularities, yet [possessing a] structure [that] maintains the racialized, gendered, and classed demands that enable its appearance as an intelligible force." Building on Marx and Engels's account of civil life and the state, Stanley, however, then draws from Balagoon and Fanon to conclude that, "categories most viciously subjected to violence have persisted since the moment of settler contact and chattel slavery, yet the tools administering this cruelty are ever adapting, which is among the reasons for their endurance" (8). We agree that the tools are ever adapting—but so too are the categories and their relations and contents.
- 17 For example, Shobana Shankar (2022) builds on the work of the Senegalese scientist Cheikh Anta Diop, to argue that the "association between caste and race was made and remade in different historical moments by Africans and Asians because they are experiences of power, not merely abstract categories." See also Shankar (2021). See also Hazel V. Carby (2021, n.p.): "After the Abolition Act of 1833, the British repurposed slave ships to transport more than a million indentured labourers from India to work on plantations in their colonies around the globe, resulting in the complex entanglements of caste and race in British Guiana, Jamaica, and Trinidad."

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