



dēcolonize hellás

DUŠAN I. BJELIĆ

**THE BALKANS
AND BLACK
MARXISM:
TOWARD THE
ABOLITION
OF WHITE
SUPREMACY
IN EUROPE**

ROSA LUXEMBURG STIFTUNG
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Vangelis Calotychos

INTRODUCTION TO THE WORK OF DUŠAN BJELIĆ

The exploration of notions of race and nation is central to the core mission of *dēcolonize hellás*. It is one of its three so-called organizing “clusters.” At first glance, potentially it offers a vital resource for disentangling many pressing and controversial issues unfolding in contemporary Greece, the region and its diaspora today. By contrast, the desire to explore questions of race further back in the time of the nation and its narration, or even before its inception, brings to mind relatively few notable approaches from the relevant literature and a dearth of source material. This would seem a path less well-trodden. Seeing, too, that decolonial theory also issues from work mainly conducted in the Americas, where much of it unfolds in the colonies, some scholars will reject the applicability of colonization for the Greek case, just as they did when postcoloniality entered into the scholarship on the Balkans. Surely, they will counter, slaves and plantations were not part of the Greek historical record. It was, then, especially prescient of the collective that organized the *dēcolonize hellás* conference in November 2021 to end proceedings with a fifth and final keynote address by eminent sociologist Dušan Bjelić. For, as we shall see in his contribution, he set about to squarely address the very issue of slavery and plantations in our region, indeed, in the premodern Greek world, in Cyprus, in the Balkans and in Eastern Mediterranean. More improbably, perhaps, he adopted a theoretical lens drawn from the Black Marxist tradition. In anticipation of his keynote’s argument, let me offer some cursory remarks about how Bjelić’s intellectual trajectory has been marked by a concern around the conjunction of nation (or region), race and colonization.

The secessionist war in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s triggered a call to epistemic arms. The response was not limited to combatting the effects of ethnonationalist pedagogies on the ground. It was too little too late for this in any case. One prominent strand of the feverish intellectual output

from this period emerged from a Balkan intellectual diaspora keen to transcend the groundfire of nationalist historiography and its handmaiden, transnational propaganda. In its theoretical sights, it envisioned a form of cultural studies that would draw together disciplinary perspectives, often in uneasy yet productive synergy with each other. As Dina Mishkova (2018, 212–13) has observed of this paradigm shift, remaking the disciplinary field at the same time as redrawing the national and geopolitical map coincided with the “spatial turn” in cultural geography and critical sociology.

In a period, then, when the secessionist wars in Yugoslavia were threatening the vision of a “new Europe” by cancelling any talk of an end to history, the alterity – or, at that moment in time, the anomaly – of the Balkans against and within European modernity was addressed head on: as an inherent binarism fueling self-essentialization and orientalizing across ethnic groups (Bakić Hayden & Hayden); as self-exoticization and an almost pathological accommodation to the Western gaze (Iordanova); or as a (colonizing) difference of proximity (Fleming). The positionality carved out by such work was nowhere more prominently showcased and widely disseminated than in the last and most synthetic of these works, Maria Todorova’s *Imagining the Balkans* ([1997] 2009), which, for all its processual constructivism, clung to a heartfelt, ontological desire to locate the region *in* Europe, and to view it *through* the prism of a shared European modernity. Todorova’s overwhelming and almost ethical purpose was to moor the offending area in that organic space: “After all, the Balkans are in Europe; they are white; they are predominantly Christian, and therefore the externalization of frustrations on them can circumvent the usual racial or religious bias allegations” (188). If Edward Said’s work was to be invoked, therefore, the emphasis would fall on carefully marking out the purview of that orientalism while steering well clear of the “cognitive fallacies” generated by more universalist categories: like “the emancipatory mantle of postcolonialism ... [that] all too often serves as a cover for the perpetual lament of self-victimization” (2009, 196).

Bjelić came to this debate late. As a contributor to the urgent work of the Belgrade Circle, any aspiration for realizing emancipatory writing from his distant perch as a faculty member in sociology at the University of Southern Maine, in the United States, must have struck him as a very tall order in an already dispiriting scene. Yet, he seized the opportunity to co-edit a critical volume titled *Balkan As Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentation* (2002). Along with his co-editor, the acting director of

the Belgrade Circle, Obrad Savić, and with American poststructuralist and Balkan sociologists from the region as contributors, the volume aimed to chart a discursive and cultural geography beyond the scope of Europe and its modernity. For, while Bjelić no doubt was in agreement with Todorova's aim to counter the stereotypical image of the Balkans and the attendant discursive absolutisms of Western representation, he also found that her analysis around "Balkanism" embodied a language about geography that diverted itself from treating language as geography itself. According to Bjelić, the Balkans is not only the object of literalization but also of literary invention.

Coincidentally, Bjelić's thinking at this time was alive to the introduction of postcolonial theory in modern Greek studies of the diaspora: notions of colonization of the Hellenic ideal (Gourgouris 1996); crypto-coloniality (Herzfeld 2002); self-colonization (Calotychos 2003); and codependencies of colonization and neocolonialism (Hamilakis 2007) were rife. The whitening of the classical ideal in Western Europe, it turned out, had not only served to secure sovereignty but also left behind a legacy of dependency, colonization and the racialization of the local inhabitants. Notably, one of Bjelić's very first analogies in his introduction to *Balkan As Metaphor* sees him couple the Balkans with the American South. Though both have "very different histories, neither history can be understood without recognizing the impact of a colonialism that helped shape both regions' cultures, identities, corresponding regimes of signification" (2002, 2–3). Structured by the West in one instance, and the North in the other, both "identities are structured in relation to a spatio-political order that arrives from the 'outside'" (2002, 3). W.E.B. Du Bois' momentous reflection on "double consciousness" ([1903] 1986) and how African American self-regard was conditioned in the internalized reflection of the white gaze seems particularly apposite. Savić and Bjelić's stance toward cognitive fallacies around the Balkans came with a call for greater self-understanding wherein "metaphor is an autopoietic history-in-process." Intellectual work must seek to prize internal differentiation and reach out to connectivities and solidarities beyond the European axis. Far from being the emblem of some victimhood or subordination typical of postsocialist globalism, according to Todorova, the task at hand was emancipatory in intent and boldly de-centering in practice.

Bjelić's persistent critique of colonization pits him very much against those who would grant it no place in a region that was not strictly colonized



in an economic and political sense. The emergence of decoloniality has since encouraged the inclination among scholars to see colonial workings in different domains, even as the importance of race and the effects of racialization has also become more pronounced. Consequently, by referencing Frantz Fanon's observation on colonial psychology, Bjelić (2009) explores other ways by which splitting and doubling serves up the Balkan subject as a passive supplement to its disapproving master. Leading up to his monograph *Normalizing the Balkans* (2011), he does so with reference to the field of psychoanalysis. In his critique of Julia Kristeva and Slavoj Žižek, expatriate Balkan theorists and psychoanalysts both, he contends that their psychoanalytic training in the West leads them to transpose the debilitating paradigm of center and periphery, empire and colony, not only on their colonized Balkan *confrères*, but, also, – in quite similar terms and in the style of the French cosmopolitan superego – on abjected immigrant labor in Europe. In spite of its universalist claims, the practice of psychoanalysis “is a language deeply influenced by geography,” and it is one where splitting performs – as it does in the case of double consciousness for the African American – terrible damage to a subject viewed as both abject and self-orientalized.

Increasingly impatient with critique in the terms of representation, Bjelić opted for a focus on materialism, governmentality, political economy, and the history of struggle. His focus shifted to the ways by which the Balkans have served as a buffer for preserving European white privilege and sovereignty from “the corridor of races” working their way up the Balkan route. Echoing De Genova (2016), Bjelić warns that forms of national and supranational governmentality are reanimating central concepts of race and postcoloniality. In this, he reminds us how the Balkans had previously been the place for regulating racial supremacy: it was here that the colonial powers deployed their non-white colonial combatants to the front in 1917; where the discourse of race and blood type conditioned notions of biopolitics and ethnic superiority in the interwar period; and where the instrumentalization of class and ethnicity as race contributed to the atrocity in the carve up of territory and genocidal cleansing.

In his keynote, Bjelić continues to reinvest the terrain with its racial history by reaching back to the early modern period. Back then, he claims, the “appropriation of slavery for pure commerce” came about; and it is from here, in fact, that the primordial differentiation driving racial capitalism embedded itself *before* making the transatlantic crossing. In time, in

the modern period, it was grafted onto wage labor and the working class, and, in effect, this leads him back to exploited immigrant labor. Bjelić forsakes Marx (who largely avoids race in his analysis) and instead finds the contours of his argument in the Black Marxist tradition and, more specifically, in the work of Oliver C. Cox, and, principally, Cedric Robinson. They oblige him by guiding him to locate the origins of slavery and racial capitalism not in the encounter in the New World but in the Balkan and Eastern Mediterranean peripheries of the Venetian state in the medieval period. This is where Europeans had already implemented racial rules, administrative hierarchies and ethno-racial separations through slavery in the internally colonized Balkans and Eastern Mediterranean. In Cyprus, more specifically, the first settler state ran sugar plantations in a way that shared some structural affinities with later Caribbean chattel forms of slavery, and all the time, notably, control over these enterprises was systematized, run from afar, and on a large scale. At different times, various peoples of “racially inferior stock” from the region populated the growing slave markets, coping with demand and serving as the building blocks of modernity. Of course, such arrangements also provoked a tradition of resistance and revolt that is nowadays recognizable to “the critical commonality” of Black and Balkan radical interpretive communities.



Dušan I. Bjelić

BLACK MARXISM, RACIAL CAPITALISM AND THE BALKANS–EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN COMPLEX

Black radicalism is a negation of Western civilization.
Cedric J. Robinson (2000, 73)

The publication in 1983 of Cedric Robinson's book *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (2000) delivered something on the order of an analytical “shock and awe” paradigm for European and Balkan studies. The book analyzes Europe through the lens of the Black Radical Tradition (BRT), born not out of the European humanist tradition but from the struggle for African humanity against European racism. Rather than just a revolutionary mode of production, the BRT considers capitalism, first and foremost, an anthropological catastrophe of building European civilization on the commercialization of slavery. Thinking of Europe from the trenches of capitalism's appropriation of labor as slavery, *Black Marxism* locates the origin of world racialism in the West while the origin of capitalism as racialism dislocates from the West to the hinterland of the medieval Balkans and East Mediterranean. In such a radical asymmetry of accounts with the dominant European canon, the BRT predicates on prioritizing its critical analysis on the conditions of the dehumanized *production* of the West as the civilization of racial capitalism over its self-*representation*.

* This article was originally delivered as one of five keynote talks at the online and in situ *dēcolonize hellás* conference held in Athens on November 4–7, 2021. Dušan Bjelić delivered the talk remotely from Portland, Maine, and a recording of the talk, along with the discussion with Vangelis Calotychos, is available at <https://youtu.be/Z1f1OaOd3k0=402s>. Some of the material from the talk has subsequently appeared in Bjelić (2023).



This chapter examines a possibility to re-picture the Balkans' relation to Europe through the lenses of *Black Marxism*. To this end it asks: how could the Balkans and its relation to Europe be analyzed from the particularistic Black perspective rather than from the universalistic canon of European raceless modernity? Such a possibility rests in the gap between European modernity's symbolic exclusion of the medieval Balkans and East Mediterranean from its ontology and *Black Marxism*'s inclusion of the medieval Balkans and East Mediterranean as a historical locus of racial capitalism. *Black Marxism* considers this history as the germane antecedence to transatlantic slavery. Such a historical inclusion could radically break up the habit of Balkans scholars of seeing the Balkans according to the ways in which Europe sees itself, with all its prejudices. The collapse of the real socialisms in the Balkans and the Yugoslav ethnic wars in the 1990s revamped the old geopolitical discourses about the Balkans as an essentialized timeless geography of "balkanization." Influenced by Edward Said's *Orientalism*, scholars of the Balkans began to critically investigate the Western discursive hegemony in rendering the Balkans as Europe's internal "Orient" (Bakić-Hayden 1995; Bakić-Hayden and Hayden 1992; Gourgouris 1996; Todorova 1997; Goldsworthy 1998). Although representing an important break from the dominant "national canon" (Liaikos 2013), these critical studies of the Balkans remained limited to within the paradigm of European modernity. Rather than relying on the history of slavery and capitalism to prioritize the Balkans' *production* of the West, critical studies of the Balkans focused on the problem of the West's *representation* of the Balkans. Informed by *Black Marxism*, and in light of Robinson's history of the regional slavery, the task of this chapter is to critically evaluate these discourses about the Balkans' coloniality. To this end, it will start with the discursive analysis, and then provide a historical account of the region's racial capitalism and its historical relation to colonial slavery as the conditions of the production of Europe as the West.

"Imprisoned in a field of discourse" and the question of the Balkans' coloniality

"Europe is *in theory*," Roberto M. Dainotto declared, "and born inseparably from it" (2007, 19). To Europe *in theory* "balkanization" is the object

signifier. Such a predicament gave rise to the field of the critical studies of the Balkans during, and as a response to, the Western media representation of the 1990s ethnic wars in Yugoslavia as if synonymous with the Balkans. Two features of this new field of studies stand out. First, the critical discourses did not emerge inside the Balkans but, rather, inside the very centers of global power among the Balkan academic diaspora schooled in postcolonial studies, cultural studies, feminism and poststructuralism in the US and in Western European universities. Second, for the most part, these critical discourses differ from the Balkans' dominant national canon of national historiographies. They focus on the West's global discursive hegemony and the ways by which the Balkans came to be known as a timeless geography. Some key and innovative concepts, which are formative of the field of Balkan studies today, are "nesting orientalisms," "balkanism," and "crypto-coloniality."

Milica Bakić-Hayden's (1995) formulation of "nesting orientalisms" was the first discursive attempt to deploy Said's orientalism to de-essentialize the region from the affliction of orientalism. "While geographical boundaries of the 'Orient' shifted throughout history," she writes, "the concept of 'Orient' as 'other' has remained more or less unchanged" (1995, 917). While agreeing with Said's claim that orientalism is about the West as it facilitates and validates the West's colonial conquest, orientalism nests in the Western Balkans by conjuring up internal ethnic conflicts over the ethnic space. The West/East binary of Europe's symbolic geography dividing "civilization" from "barbarism" informs nationalism and the state media which the ethnic populations internalize; this, in turn, encourages and legitimizes ethnic conflict over the ethnic space. This binary nested among the ethnicities bound by space, she explains, sets in motion processes of geopolitical self-essentialization in such a way that each ethnic group sees its eastern neighbor as less civilized and as a threat to its process of Europeanization, while its western neighbor is perceived as more civilized. In this spectrum of the western Balkans space, Slovenes, bordering Austria and Italy, as the most western ethnicity are regarded as the most European and "civilized," while Albanians, bordering Yugoslavia and Greece, are regarded the least European and civilized. The same spatial binary extends to Western Christianity versus Orthodoxy and Islam to the east (Bakić-Hayden 2002). In other words, not only does the Balkans represent timeless geography for Europe, but also for the Balkans it represents heterogenous populations; they internalize these timeless cate-

gories as if they represent their ethnic essences, and, due to the process of self-homogenization, they wage war on their own heterogeneity and in turn reproduce the presence as “balkanization.” “Nesting orientalism” posits the circularity of a geopolitical stereotype – from a distant representation to the local internalization and back to the confirmation of the representation – and so differs from Said’s orientalism, as it does not have a tangential effect on self-essentialization.

“Nesting orientalism” opened the Balkans to postcolonial analysis. Greece, as the West’s liberal foothold in the Balkans, was always a special case. The Greek 2009 financial crises, followed by the EU’s racialized humiliation of the Greek government, actualized the reality of Michael Herzfeld’s earlier claim about Greece’s “crypto-colonial” status inside Europe, which he defines as

the curious alchemy whereby certain countries, buffer zones between the colonized lands and those as yet untamed, were compelled to acquire their political independence at the expense of massive economic dependence, this relationship being articulated in the iconic guise of aggressively national culture fashioned to suit foreign models. Such countries were and are living paradoxes: they are nominally independent, but that independence comes at the price of a sometimes humiliating form of effective dependence. (2002, 900–901)

To achieve a complete decolonial status, such nations are characterized by massive financial dependence and fierce nationalism. To maintain nominal independence, they are regularly subjected to racialized humiliation. In May 2012, for example, while the Prime Minister of Luxembourg and Eurogroup President Jean-Claude Juncker offered a specially engineered global tax haven for some of the world’s richest companies, including Amazon, in an interview given to *Politique Internationale*, he stated that “Greece is a very big nation but a very weak state. It’s the truth: Their fiscal management is not working. There is no staff, no real trade history, which is the heritage of the Ottoman invasion” (Šelmić 2019, 17). The characterization of Greece as Europe’s internal Orient speaks to the validity of the Balkans’ coloniality.

Discourses on “nesting orientalism” and “crypto-colonialism” extended postcolonial studies to address the Balkans’ coloniality. Like in the European Union, the arrival of postcolonial analysis in the Balkans encour-

tered a backlash mostly from the national historiographies (Silverstein 2018, 5). In contrast to the West's colonial legacy, the Balkans' historiographies could reject postcolonial analysis on the ground that the Balkans were neither a colony nor a colonial center. The most significant critique of the validity of the postcolonial analysis of the Balkans comes from historian Maria Todorova. She does not flatly reject postcolonial analysis; she appreciates the urge to postcolonialize the Balkans for postcolonial studies due to its similarity with Said's Orient. However, she points out that, historically speaking, the Balkans and the colonial context differ discursively, ontologically and racially.

In her seminal book *Imagining the Balkans* ([1997] 2009), Todorova locates and historicizes the origin of the timeless geography of the Balkans in *balkanism*, a discourse that originated during the Enlightenment period. The initial "discovery" of the Balkans at the beginning of the twentieth century morphed into "invention" about the place of "balkanization." Acknowledging the historic overlaps with *orientalism*, Todorova insists that balkanism is not a colonial discourse. As she explains, "balkanism was an uninhabited category, something exceptionally rare in the humanities" (193); unlike timeless orientalism, balkanism is transient discourse on the Balkans' modernity. Both discourses originated at the time of the Enlightenment, but whereas *orientalism* emerged among Western academics as a colonial discourse, balkanism emerged in travelogues; diplomatic correspondences; and Western literature, films and journalism to represent the Balkans as a crossroads, a place of geopolitical ambiguity, a "bridge" to be crossed between the West and East. While the East and the Balkans share stereotypical representations, they do so for different geopolitical purposes and, above all, to a different degree and modality of fiction and reality. The "Orient" as a stereotype, according to Said, is a fictive geography and has no history, whereas the Balkans' history and geography are real and concrete. By extension, while the "oriental" subject is to Europe a fictive other, the Balkan subject to Europe is an incomplete European defined by its in-betweenness among the West and East, "This in-betweenness of the Balkans," Todorova writes, "their transitional character, could have made them simply an incomplete other; instead, they are constructed not as other but as incomplete self" (18).

Todorova further expands on the exceptionalism of balkanism. Balkanism is not colonial discourse as in the case of Said's self-referential orientalism, since the Balkans has its own ontology. It begins with the his-

tory of its name, with the arrival of the Ottomans in the fourteenth century. First, it was initially just the name of a mountain, Haemus; subsequently, it became the name of the entire region. Second, “Balkan” is also a negative stereotype – in terms of “balkanization,” “powder keg,” “place of blood and honey” or the literary metaphor of a “bridge” between the West and East. Third, Balkan is also a *scholarly category* of analysis about a “concrete geographic *region*” (2010, 177). Finally, the Balkans carries its “Ottoman *legacy*,” once as a historic continuum and once as a perception; in the frame of “nesting orientalisms,” the Balkans figures as Europe’s timeless Other, while in balkanism the Balkans figures as an incomplete Europe and historically transient category. Considering the entry of East European and some Balkan states to the European Union, Todorova envisions the ending of the “spatial ghettoization” of the Balkans due to fully joining Europe as “multifarious cognitive frameworks over space and time.” She further envisions Europe as “a complex palimpsest of differently shaped entities, not only exposing the porosity of internal frontiers, but also questioning the absolute stability of external ones” ([1997] 2009, 202).

Finally, Todorova claims that balkanism does not represent colonial space because of its relation to categories of race, color, religion, language and gender (194). Predominantly Christian and white, she argues, in the global scheme of race relations, the Balkans are on the side of “white versus colored, Indo-European versus the rest” (19). “It is my thesis,” she concludes her comparative analysis, “that while orientalism is dealing with a difference between (imputed) types, balkanism treats the differences within one type” (19). At the historico-structural level, Todorova argues colonialism is a specific historical system of capitalism as “naked exploitation,” while the imperial Ottomans were military administrators and conquerors rather than capitalists. The postcolonialists’ confusion arises, she insists, out of “a specific ontological Angst to ‘decenter’ Europe” (2010, 190).

In their distinct ways, the concepts of “nesting orientalisms,” balkanism and “crypto-coloniality” affirm Europe’s discursive “imprisonment” of the Balkans. However, two levels of “imprisonment” by discourse must be distinguished here – the “imprisonment” of the Balkans as analyzed above and that of the critical discourses on the Balkans by the paradigm of modernity. Although all these discourses problematize the Balkans’ modernity as the problem of the Balkans’ nationhood, neither one problematizes modernity as the continuation of medieval barbarism and slavery.

“Balkanization” as the geopolitical stereotype about Balkan nationhood is synonymous with Balkan modernity, but it is not the only master category associated with the Balkans; the other is that of “slave” and slavery. According to Paul Verlinden, the very word “slave” derives from the word Slav:

But in the thirteenth century *sclavus*, meaning slave, reappeared, this time in Italy, whence it spread across the whole of Europe. At that period the Italians were, in fact, the initiators of a new trade current which fed the Mediterranean world in particular. They began to import into Italy Slav slaves who came from southeastern Europe and from the shores of the Black Sea. The Slavs became once more the object of a very active trade, so much so that soon their name began to be applied to all the non-free. From Italy Slav slaves spread to the South of France and eastern Spain, where *sclau* in Catalan became the general term for a slave in the fourteenth century. (1970, 36)

The importance of slavery for the development of European modernity challenges the canon that Europe, as the West, produced itself through willful submission to the universal authority of reason; such treatment of epistemology is double racializing.

First, the “will to rational knowledge” presupposes the racial superiority of the new civilization and the entitlement to world dominance; second, this “will to rational knowledge” is predicated on the negation of Africa’s civilization in the production of knowledge in Europe. By excluding slavery as the racialized organization of capitalism from its ontology, the claim to “the will to rational knowledge” as constitutive of nationalities and their states conceals the West as the center of world racialism.

Excluding racialism from the critical studies of the Balkans as timeless, and therefore raceless, geography implicitly recycles this ontology as “racialized modernity” (Hesse 2000). In contrast, these studies should prioritize the Balkans’ slave-based *production* of the West as a historic prototype of what *Black Marxism* calls “racial capitalism” over the West’s *representation* of the Balkans as a geopolitical stereotype. Seeing Europe not as it sees itself but as it is seen from the viewpoint of its historical class of producers, validates the inclusion of *Black Marxism*’s history of racial capitalism in the critical studies of the Balkans.



■ **Black Marxism and the critical overhaul of Balkan studies**

The value of *Black Marxism* is in the radical critique of Eurocentrism. For many European nationalities, Europe resembles a Mondrian painting – a visual rendition of Hobbesian spatial geometry of liberal democracies where colorful national flags occupy Mondrian's geometric fields of color representing Europe as a community of homogenous nations. Robinson counters this image, noting: "It is also important to realize that with respect to the emerging European civilization whose beginnings coincide with the arrivals of these ... barbarians, slave labor as a critical basis of production would continue without any significant interruption into the twentieth century" (2000, 11). Where Europeans commonly consider the Enlightenment as the civilizational continuity of Athens and Rome to the West, Robinson in contrast insists that the "barbarians," slaves and "indispensable immigrants" (25; Braudel 1972, 334) were the political and economic producers of Europe as a modern civilization. Europe initially consisted of racially, ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse populations (Duby 1978, 11) freely moving across the continent, before capitalism first enslaved, then compressed, some of them into nationalities fenced by national borders. The early bourgeoisie, which emerged from particular ethnic, spatial and cultural groups in the West, exploited the peasant proletariat coming from different cultures and spaces. Behind the homogenized nationalities, Robinson concludes, loom ethno-racialized hierarchies. As he put it, the tendency of European civilization through capitalism was "not to homogenize but to differentiate – to exaggerate regional, subcultural, and dialectical differences into 'racial' ones" (26). As a result, he states, "the Slavs became the natural slaves, the racially inferior stock for domination and exploitation during the Middle Ages," and only later, "the Third World began to fill this expanding category of a civilization reproduced by capitalism" (26).

Black Marxism calls the Eurocentric bluff that modernity had negated feudalism; rather, as Robinson insists, Eurocentrism suffers from historical amnesia about feudalism to conceal its racialism. On that score, consider the opening of a paradigmatic paragraph of *Black Marxism*:

The historical development of world capitalism was influenced in a most fundamental way by the particularistic forces of racism and nationalism. This could only be true if the social, psychological, and cultural origins of racism and nationalism both anticipated capitalism in time and formed a

piece with those events that contributed directly to its organization of production and exchange. Feudal society is the key. More particularly, the antagonistic commitments, structures, and ambitions that feudal society encompassed are better conceptualized as those of a developing civilization than as elements of a unified tradition. (2000, 9)

In the very geo-ethnic etymology and genealogy of the category of “slave” lies the link to Robinson’s point about the intersection between the particularistic forces of racism and nationalism anticipating capitalism. “Feudal society is the key” for understanding how capitalism emerged not as a transcendental logic of world history emanating from antiquity, but out of a web of medieval racialized particularities starting with the barbarian invasions and great migrations. As Oliver C. Cox ([1959] 1995) has shown, capitalism developed first as an anomaly, such as the Venetian Republic, then becoming as stable pattern in the Balkans and East Mediterranean. Following Cox, Robinson claims that, “in the medieval and feudal social orders of European hinterland and the Mediterranean, racialism was substantiated by specific sets of exploitation through which particular caste or classes exploited and expropriated disparate peoples” (2000, 66). Slavery, of course, preceded capitalism, but the Venetians commercialized it into a commodity and a tool for capitalist development. This anomaly of the appropriation of slavery for pure commerce, which involved buying slaves and trading them across the Mediterranean and across Europe, facilitated the Venetian colonization of the Dalmatian coast and the Greek islands, which they dotted with sugar and cotton slave-labored plantations. These slave-based enterprises over time established the model for the nascent transatlantic slave trade and colonial capitalism.

Capitalism thus did not emerge out of some European “unified tradition” but from the social structures of racialized antagonisms among medieval Europeans. As Robinson explains: “Racism, I maintain, was not simply a convention for ordering the relations of European to non-European peoples but has its genesis in the ‘internal’ relations of European peoples. As part of the inventory of Western civilization it would reverberate within and without, transferring its toll from the past to the present” (2000, 2). This insight challenges the prevalent encounter thesis about the origins of racism with Europeans encountering non-Europeans in colonies; because Europeans arrived in the “New World” already racialized, they racialized non-Europeans. As Robinson commonly insists, racism begins

not in colonies, which he regards “a new tributary of racism” (Robinson 2019a, 189), but in medieval Europe. The erroneous Eurocentric canon embellishes the West as the world center of racialism. Related to this point, he reminds us of the often-ignored fact that the financial outcome of this internal colonization of the Balkans and East Mediterranean led to the Italian financial support for the Columbus expedition, which challenges the notion that modernity begins with the “discovery” of the New World.

Black Marxism's history of “racial capitalism” debunks the Eurocentric claim about the incommensurability between industrialized European nationalism and colonial racism, but Robinson pointed out that the formation of the English working class included ethno-racism and ethno-racialized hierarchies against the Irish. Also the Italian and the German *Herrenvolk* nationalisms racialized the Slavs, Roma and Jews, in a “phantasmagoria of race” that “became known under the name of fascism” (2000, 207).¹ The incommensurability thesis is problematic because, as Robinson further explains:

it embellishes the inventory of Western racism, extending its shape, and resubstantiating its force and authority by providing simultaneously a cruder and more defensible access to whichever of its forms the occasion demanded. This new racism, initially coincident with the slave social order, by the end of the nineteenth century was being adapted to the most urgent ideological impulses of industrial capitalism: the uncertain amalgamation of a white working class and the more enduring fabrication of an imperial national identity. (2019a, 189)

Considering such a world map of racial capitalism emanating from the West mandates the critical examination of the critical studies of the Balkans and Eurocentric presuppositions about the raceless Balkans. Because these studies glossed over the Balkans' premodern production of the West, they glossed over the Balkans' coloration. Here one recalls Du

1 Anti-Slav racism did not escape Marx and Engels (Robinson 2000, 61; Wendel 1923). Considering a threat to the interest of the German national interest, Engels, in a letter to Marx reporting about the Hungarian 1848 revolution, wrote about the South Slavs formulating “balkanization” as racialism: “these people have related to each other for centuries as rogues and bandits, and, despite all their racial affinities, their mutual hatred is infinitely greater than that between Slavs and Magyars” (Marx and Engels 1973, 233). He further added, “Then we shall fight ‘an implacable life-and-death struggle’ with Slavdom, which has betrayed the revolution; a war of annihilation and ruthless terrorism, not in the interest of Germany but in the interest of revolution!” (245).

Bois' observation about the Balkans' assumption of whiteness as "double consciousness" (Kuperberg 2021, 284). If racial capitalism framed the analysis of the region – that is, if capitalism emerged out of the "antagonistic commitments, structures and ambitions that feudal society encompassed," out of intra-European racialism rather than from the modernity as a supposedly unified representational model – then the Balkans and East Mediterranean are, as Robinson claims, at the center of this racialism. The critique of the geopolitical representation of the Balkans as the place of "balkanization" pertains to a stereotype about how the Balkan nationalities relate to each other as violent "balkanization." Such analysis omits how Europeans have related antagonistically to each other since the time of early feudalism, as well as how this antagonism is built into the West's representations of itself in theory as a unified civilization in relation to the Balkans' antagonistic relations to each other. If the non-Balkan Europeans racialized each other through history, could they represent the Balkans' nationalities as a raceless category?

Finally, *Black Marxism* privileges the continuity of racism over the racism of the color binary. Pushed out of the Balkans and East Mediterranean to the Atlantic by the Ottoman invasion, capitalism survived by changing the color of slave labor from white to black slavery. When Todorova refers to the Balkans as Christian and white, which as a single racial type cannot be racist toward itself because racism presupposes "white versus colored, Indo-European versus the rest" ([1997] 2009, 19), she conceals the "inventory" of European racism behind the discourse on the color binary as the initial locus of racism. This erroneous conceptualization speaks to Todorova's implicit protection of Europe from its "provincialization." To theorize race only in terms of racial binary and as a structural category of the overseas "naked capitalism" betrays not only the medieval history of racial capitalism but also the meaning of race and capitalism. Todorova renders race only as an economic category of colonial capitalism rather than the index of human catastrophe formative of the West as a civilization of racial supremacy.²

2 To fully appreciate how problematic the thinking of the Balkans as raceless nationalities is, one has only to recall that the above-analyzed critical discourses about the Balkans came about after Balkan eugenics flourished between the two wars (Bucur 2002; Trubeta 2013; Turda and Weindling 2006; Turda 2015) and that during World War II all Balkan states had laws and participated in the Holocaust (Arendt 2006; Yeomans 2013). On the Yugoslav region and race, see Baker (2018).



I The case of the Cyprus sugar plantations

The history of the Cyprus sugar plantations illustrates a particular instance of the formation of capitalism through commercialized slavery, which laid the organizational foundations for the capitalist model of transatlantic slavery. The medieval Cyprus sugar plantations, initially run by the Crusades and the French nobility, then expanded by the Venetian bourgeoisie, illustrate how the plantation business model based on slavery formed a template for the spread of sugar plantations beyond Europe. As Robinson observed, “in an unexpected way, this trade in slaves would prove to be the salvation of the Mediterranean bourgeoisie” (2000, 16). The history of the Cyprus sugar plantations is woven into Cox’s sociological history of medieval capitalism. The Trinidadian radical sociologist’s book *The Foundations of Capitalism* ([1959] 1995) stands outside the dominant tradition of Marxian theories of capitalism. Contrary to Marx, he posits that capitalism did not emerge from some universal presuppositions inherent to European history, but rather through the web of incidences crucial for its survival in the volatile rise of the Mediterranean bourgeoisie, such as the conversion of the traditional into the commercial slave trade, which Venice, as the historical outlier, as a kind of a particular anomaly of its time, epitomized (31; Robinson 2019a, 78). Resting on such historical particularity, Venice’s bourgeoisie formed the first constitutional state to serve and protect the elites’ enterprise and had the first nationalist culture. It was also the first economy based on commerce and colonial control of distant lands and populations. By connecting to similar regional capitalist particularities, crisscrossing Mediterranean and mainland Europe by trading salt, sugar species and slaves, Cox concludes (contrary to Marx’s notion of capitalism as class-based industrial society) that Venice consolidated its power and wealth and became the first capitalist state based on the colonial exploitation of slave labor.

On the outskirts of medieval Europe, still in agony over the concepts of Hell and salvation, Venice, with its “fierce materialism”³ (Crowley 2011, xxvi), emerged as “almost an accidental construct” (118). The feudal

3 The poet Petrarch recounted the Venetian vessels arriving as “a mountain swimming on the surface of the sea, and so heavily laden with a huge quantity of cargo that the great part of its bulk was hidden beneath the waves ... What is the source of this thirst for wealth that seizes men’s minds?” (In Crowley 2011, xxvi).

anomaly of Venice thus stands out as a prime example of the historic link between the racialized barbarian invasions in the early medieval period and the rise of the first capitalist state formed, by what Fernand Braudel called, the “indispensable immigrant” (1972, 334). Fleeing from the joint Lombard and Bulgar invasion of today’s northern Italy, the local nobility, along with the skilled workers and artisans, migrated down to the north Adriatic lagoon in the fifth century to settle safe from the Barbarian invasions. Seeking their fortune on the open seas, the Venetian bourgeoisie left behind both feudalism and the economy based on land-based rent and a barter economy. They found themselves in a new situation where the slave trade became the means of economic survival.

Instead, the nobility sought to be the “knights” of trade, commanding fleets on the open sea and calculating their profits. The Venetians replaced the old way of racialized bonding grounded in the manor with a new way of patriotic solidarity that focused on the organized economic end. This new solidarity mandated self-discipline for seeking opportunity via danger on the open sea against pirates, empires and natives (Crowley 2011, 5). The republic, Cox observed, “started with a relatively clean slate – new people, new area, new opportunities for innovation’ ([1959] 1995, 122); Venice was “mathematically manageable,” and its success, indeed the success of capitalism at its earliest stage, stemmed from the “constitutional simplicity of the state, not from its complexities” (Robinson 2000, 82). In an organization of such rational simplicity, the new Venice emerged in power that was asymmetrical to the complexities of the Eastern Empire in its perennial wars with Genova, Ragusa, the Barbarians and Muslims. Poised to dominate through commerce, Venice over time managed to suppress the Eastern Empire and colonize the Adriatic coast and the Greek islands between the tenth and fifteenth century; with such success that Venice, Cox concludes, made the capitalist culture of economic racialization “irreversible” ([1959] 1995, 126).

The fourteenth-century Ottoman invasion of the Balkans and East Mediterranean gradually forced the Italian bourgeoisie to move its interest westward and migrated the established patterns of the slave economy to the Atlantic. On that point of transition, Verlinden observes:

This variety of uses to which slaves were put illustrates clearly the degree to which medieval colonial slavery served as a model for Atlantic colonial slavery. Slave manpower had been employed in the Italian colo-

nies in the Mediterranean for all the kinds of work it would be burdened with in the Atlantic colonies. The only important change was that the white victims of slavery were replaced by a much greater number of African Negroes, captured in raids or bought by traders. (31–32)

As the point of historical link between the Balkans and African slavery, this chapter will analyze the history of the Cyprus sugar plantations as a singular “technological” matrix for the nascent transatlantic colonial plantations (Verlinden, 1970; Greenfield, 1997; Galloway, 1977; Best, 1968; Mintz, 1986; Curtin, 1990; Stanziani, 2013; Simon-Aaron, 2008). As the largest Venetian colony in the East Mediterranean, the medieval Cyprus sugar plantations demonstrate Cox’s history of the singular intersection of feudal wars, conquests, slavery, commerce, Arab agriculture, Venetian capital and the “sweet teat” of the rising European bourgeois for the formation of capitalism. “Had there been no ready consumers for it elsewhere,” affirms Sidney W. Mintz in his history of the “sweet colonialism,” these “huge quantities of land, labor, and capital would never have been funneled into this one curious crop, first domesticated in New Guinea, first processed in India, and first carried to the New World by Columbus” (1986, xviii–xix). In this rather abridged trajectory of history, Cyprus occupied the transition point from Asia to the Americas, when the French and Venetian nobility and their citizens owned and ran slave-based sugar production as a capitalist enterprise (Curtin 1990).

As a desirable commodity in the history of Mediterranean capitalism, sugar figures as the formative locus of the proto-capitalist enterprise. The extraction of sugar from cane was an achievement of the Arab agricultural revolution (Galloway 1977, 179; Mintz 1986, 23). When the First Crusades occupied Palestine in the eleventh century, they encountered Arab sugar production and immediately began to export it to Latin Europe (Galloway 1977, 180). After the Muslims expelled the Crusades from the Levant in 1191, the Crusades expanded sugar production in Cyprus, where the French Lusignan dynasty had established a prosperous colonial kingdom.⁴

4 “Documents of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries show that the royal estate included the sugar producing *casalia* of Lefka and Morphou in the western end of the fertile plain of Mesaoria and that of Potamia southeast of Nicosia”; sugar was also produced, “at Kouklia, Emba, Lemba and Akhelia in the Paphos district and that of Akanthou in the Karpass peninsula” (Coureas 2005, 111).

From the thirteenth and to the fifteenth century, Cyprus was the main export center of sugar to Europe (Curtin 1990, 5).⁵ After the collapse of Byzantium, when Venice overnight became the ruler of the Greek islands, the sugar plantations in Cyprus, as well in Crete, significantly increased. These plantations served the Venetians not only as springs of private wealth, but also as a means of forging colonial settlements that offered strategic value for Venice's dominion and trade (Greenfield 1979, 86).

In his analysis of the rise and fall of the plantation complex, Philip D. Curtin (1990) unpacks the emerging capitalist structures in the Cyprus sugar plantations in contrast to those of the feudal manor. He notes several differences between them as being crucial in the development of the sugar plantation as a capitalist enterprise. In Cyprus, the settler nobility was not restricted by the customary right of land-tenure as it was on the mainland. The settler nobility could own the land in Cyprus and was allowed to organize labor in any way that suited its best interest since the restriction regulating the relationship between serf labor and lords did not apply in the colonies. This novice circumstance, he points out, created an opportunity for innovation on how to run a financially profitable sugar production based on free labor and on the ownership of land. Unlike mainland feudalism, the owners of sugar plantations in Cyprus had direct control over running their privately own enterprises. The other important difference with the feudal manor was the specialized production of a crop for export to a distant metropolis. With these new elements in place, Curtin concludes, "the feudal *seigneur* thus had the option of becoming something like a capitalist plantation owner in his relationship to agricultural enterprise" (1990, 7).

The new organization of the sugar plantation engendered competition between the nobilities as another element of the growing presence of capitalism on the island. A transformative intersection between the feudal social structures and the rationality of capitalism, competition also stood out as an anomaly to mainland feudalism. Because it was inappropriate for anyone of noble status to be involved in profane activity, such as running a sugar plantation, the ruling French noble Lusignan family had to lower

5 "By the mid-fourteenth century the Lusignan crown had invested heavily in its sugar plantations at Kouklia, southeast of Paphos, as had the Hospitallers at Kolossi and the Venetian Cornaro family at Episkopi" (Coureas 2005, 111).

themselves socially to the level of the bourgeoisie. On the other hand, the Venetian Cornaro family, which had no noble origins, gained feudal tenure of their land in 1366 due to their success in running the largest sugar plantation on the island. Their enhanced social status came from their capitalist enterprise.

In Episkopi, the Cornaro family ran the largest sugar plantation on the island with several hundreds of slaves. They significantly improved the irrigation system, used a watermill to crush the sugarcane, and relied on copper kettles and other new equipment for boiling the sugar (Verlinden 1970, 20; Wartburg 1983); they also transferred the technology on sugar refinement from Venice to Cyprus, so they could export both more expensive refined and unrefined sugar to Europe, an ability that naturally increased the competitiveness of their plantations. With Catherine Cornaro, Cyprus became part of the Venetian state in 1489 and made Cyprus a prototype for the first settler-run state. Along with the Venetians, between the fourteenth and fifteenth century, the sugar plantation industry “became international, drawing both capital and management from many of the Christian states bordering the Mediterranean” (Curtin 1990, 8).

Greeks, Bulgarians, Turks and Tatar slaves (Galloway 1977, 190)⁶ shaped the first capitalist matrix of the island’s sugar plantations. The native reservoir of labor could not meet the needs of the fourteenth-century expansion of intense labor and the labor-demanding sugar plantations in Cyprus, an issue that coincided with the dramatic shortage of labor caused by the Black Death (Greenfield 1979, 93). Appropriating slaves from the Black Sea, Syria or North Africa became the solution for sustaining the expanding capitalist production of sugar. While traditionally women had represented two-thirds of all slaves, the sugar plantations changed it in favor of male slavery (Verlinden 1970, 96).

A growing demand for slavery opened slave markets in various cities in Cyprus and Crete. The growing Venetian slave commerce was accompanied by a very strict set of rules regulating social relations in the colo-

6 Venetian records about the commerce of slavery have shown that “Venetians and Greeks from Venetian Crete [exported] capes from Famagusta and Limassol to Rhodes, sold slaves in Famagusta, and recovered sums owed for the purchase of cheese sent to Alexandria, which may have come from Venetian Crete, a major producer and exporter of cheese in this period” (Coureas 2005, 106). Documents from 1283 also show that Ragusa exported Serbs, Bosnians and women from Slavonia as slaves to Cyprus (105).

nies on the basis of ethnic, religious and regional differences. Special rules regulated Jews in the city of Venice as well as in the colonies. They had to live in ghettos (Davis and Ravid 2001; Malkiel 2001), they were not allowed to own slaves, and they could not hold posts in the Venetian administration. Venetian citizens in colonies would lose their posts in a colonial administration and their hold on land in the colonies if they converted to the Orthodox faith. Also, pagan Slavs and Muslims became legitimate populations for the slave trade and forced labor. Given these racialized categorizations, the Venetian authorities regulated all the slave-labor resources and structured how racialism operated on the sugar plantations. In this regard, racialized labor saved capitalism during the Black Death as it did later for labor shortages in colonial America (Williams 1994, 6).⁷

By the middle of the fourteenth century, North African slavery began to play a more important role (Curtin 1990, 29). After the Ottoman invasion of the Balkans and East Mediterranean, sugar production moved westward to the Azores and Madeira, islands off the African coast, where Africans became the dominant slave labor force, after which Africa became the main source of slave labor for the Brazilian and Caribbean sugar plantations. In the context of this historical trajectory, it is important to note that although the Cyprus sugar plantations differed from Caribbean chattel-type slavery, the latter, Curtin argues, nonetheless shared certain structural features that had already been developed in Cyprus.

1. Most of the productive labor was forced; all plantations were designed to produce a specialized crop for export (11).
2. The slave population was not self-sustaining. Because of the high mortality rates and the expanding plantation territories, a fresh stream of new populations was mandated and forced the growth of slave trade (12).
3. The plantation was organized and run like a large-scale capitalist plantation. Private ownership of the land and labor allowed clear capital calculations in terms of new investments and profit projections (12).

⁷ In his celebrated book *Capitalism and Slavery*, Eric Williams argues that racism did not cause slavery, but other way around (1994, 7). This is the central point of racial capitalism, namely, that the primitive accumulation of labor as slavery that was initiated in the Mediterranean produced the socioeconomic structures that America's advanced racial categorizations would later use as a symbolic justification and a regulation of slavery.

4. The owners used their agent-mangers as an internal police force (13).
5. The plantation specialized crop industry operated as an extractivist mode of capitalism, where local labor and resources were extracted for the metropolitan markets (13).
6. Long-distance political control over colonial possessions had occurred often in history, but rarely from such a great distance (13).

Indeed, Curtin concluded that “these six characteristics seem to be those that set off the tropical Atlantic plantations most clearly from other contemporaneous societies” (13). Within the larger historical context of Venetian and Genovese medieval capitalism, which covered space in the East from the Black Sea and the Levant to the West, to Spain and Portugal, colonial enterprises, such as Cyprus sugar, and later cotton plantations (Hill 1948, 817) figured as the organizational matrix of colonial capitalism economically as well as politically. Economically, this included the transfers of new types of plantation management, advisors, knowledge, technologies, financing, slavery, etc., for the Spanish, Portuguese and English colonization of the Americas. Politically, on the basis of protecting the interest of enterprises such as sugar and cotton plantations, the Venetians and Genovese advanced a system of long-distance control of their colonies, which later established the framework for the Spanish, Portuguese and English long-distance control of their colonies. Howard Mumford Jones argued that Venice and Genova influenced English colonialism, first that of Ireland then of North America, as well as English colonial racism. The seed of this long-distance management of colonies, he notes, was in the Venetian and Genovese formation of their colonial outposts in the Eastern Mediterranean.

By establishing outposts in the Aegean islands, at Athens, in the Black Sea, in Egypt and elsewhere, Venice founded trading posts or *fondachi*. These were communes, or states within states. Over them the influence of the metropolis was supreme. The original grant permitting their creation was obtained by the metropolis, buildings were erected at public cost, and magistrates were appointed by the home government. These magistrates, chosen for specified times and given specific instructions, were responsible in Venice to a body somewhat like the (later) English Board of Trade. Venetian laws were carried into the *fondaco*, the trade of

which was of course monopolized by the mother city. Associated with the creation and management of the colony and its trade was the joint-stock company, a fourteenth-century invention by which state action could be concealed as quasi-private enterprise. (1942, 449–50)

Western historians mostly noted this period as a history of Venice (Crowley 2011) or, as part of the history of sugar (Mintz 1986), or, as a history of the plantation as a model of agricultural economy (Best 1968). However, such histories leave out two important consequences for world capitalism that *Black Marxism* emphasized. First, this history gave birth to the labor of the Global South. As Robinson posited:

As the Slavs become the natural slaves, the racially inferior stock for domination and exploitation during the early Middle Ages, as the Tatars came to occupy a similar position in the Italian cities, of the late Middle Ages, so at the system interlocking of capitalism in the sixteenth century, the peoples of the Third World began to fill this expanding category of a civilization reproduced capitalism. (2000, 26)

Secondly, this history is also about the Mediterranean genesis of the “Negro” as the largest and the most brutal case of the primitive accumulation of Third World labor. However, the common notion that racism is a colonial phenomenon, that the empire facilitated the encounter between Europeans and non-Europeans, and that this encounter brought to bear the system of racial discourses, the legalization of chattel slavery, etc., embellishes European racism as the locus of racism. As Robinson makes clear, American racism was just a new “tributary” of European racism; “The new racism, however, did not replace nor displace its European antecedents ... Rather it embellished the inventory of Western racism, extending in shape, and substantiating its force and authority by providing simultaneously a cruder and more defensible access to whichever of its forms the occasion demanded” (2019a, 189). Further, European modernity also “fabricates” the Balkan–East Mediterranean’s “insignificance” (Hadjikyriacou 2011) in the formation of European modernity. In this regard, the desubjugation of the region’s history of racial capitalism opened the door to the future critical reconfiguration of Europe as a civilized composite racialism made up of African, Asian, American, Irish as well as Balkan–East Mediterranean labor.



■ The Balkans and East Mediterranean radical tradition

The development of medieval capitalism and the growing power of the Church authorities stirred up widespread unrest among Europe's proletariat, which Robinson considers the root of radical politics. In his *An Anthropology of Marxism* (2019b), Robinson pays tribute to the medieval political imaginary of Europe's proletariat to question Marx's theory of capitalism and the notion that the society and science of the bourgeoisie preconditioned socialism (Quan 2019b, vii). He stresses that revolutionary imaginary reoccurred in pre-industrial Europe in different contexts and groups, but they all stem from the popular struggle against the authorities. Robinson addresses the importance of the Balkans' heresy that coevolved with Venice's colonialism. Through movements like these, he argues, "a socialist ethos survived over the next several hundred years... Its secular expression eventually included Marxism" (59). Similarly, the roots of the Black Radical Tradition go back to Africa, to the Africans' "collective intelligence" and their modes of social solidarity that served as the basis in their struggle against slavery. *Black Marxism* acknowledges its genealogy as the intersection of the two radical traditions.

Medieval unrest and the rise of popular revolutionary imaginaries revealed the first signs of the internal contradictions of capitalism. The physical geography of the Balkans and East Mediterranean is exceptionally well suited to the full spatial display of these contradictions. The sea, islands and coastlines between the Adriatic and the Levant, between the Black Sea and North Africa, suited the rise of Venice as a "loose network of ports and bases, similar in structure to the way stations of the British Empire." Such conditions provided strategic coherence to the *Stato de Mare*, "Territory of the State" (Crowley 2011, 118). On the other hand, the Sphakia and White Mountains ranges in Crete and the Dinaric Alps in the Western Balkans became rebel territories for the first guerrilla warfare against the Venetian authorities motivated by the egalitarian forms of life.

The most significant uprising was the St Titus revolt, which occurred in the fourteenth-century Venetian colony of Crete. Crete was the strategic hub of the Venetian control of the Mediterranean Sea routes between the Black Sea and the Adriatic for the trade in slaves, sugar, cotton, spices, etc. As Crowley observed, "Crete was Venice's full-blown colonial adventure, which would involve the republic in twenty-seven uprisings and two

centuries of armed struggle. Each new wave of settlers sparked a fresh revolt, led by the great Cretan landowning families, deprived of their estates” (2011, 123). All of the reasons for a revolt against Venetian domination existed in Crete. Along with the military occupation of Crete, Venetians introduced racialized rules and administrative hierarchies as a disciplinary supplement to the Venetian dispossession of land and the use of slavery as well as for the suppression of revolts. In Venice itself, as in Crete, “the Republic practiced an uncompromising policy of racial separation” (123). The Venetian racializing formula of “flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone” established the first legal structural linkage between the ownership of land or administrative power and the principle of ethno-racial separation.

Such racialized control of the island stood in a sharp contrast to the cultural geography of the island. Crete’s population was five times that of the Venetians, and the Greeks showed complete loyalty to the Orthodox faith of the Byzantine Empire. Their dissatisfaction with the loss of landholding combined with a fierce sense of independence, which stood in sharp contrast to the Venetian proclivity for material gain. This contrast gave rise to the first anti-capitalist guerrilla warfare and the formation of the first free enclaves; “among the limestone fastness of Sphakia and the White Mountains, where warrior clans lived by banditry and heroic songs, no Venetian writ ran at all” (Crowley 2011, 123). On August 9, 1363, “angry feudatories, accompanied by townspeople, servants, and soldiers, stormed the ducal place” (McKee 1994, 174) and soon the revolt spread to the rest of the island and also included the Greek nobility and peasantry. The rebels immediately arrested the local administrators and elected their own government that included an island-ruling council and venerable members of the Greek nobility. The local forced rural proletariat – local dependent peasants, migrants and slaves – saw in this rebellion a chance to gain their freedom, first by abandoning their masters and then via the rebels’ negotiation with the Venetian authorities to set them free and allow them to settle where they wished. In other instances, they had been forced to return to the land and their masters.

The significance of this revolt was not just its unprecedented large-scale uprising but, more importantly, the fact that the revolt signified the first mass-scale revolt that had emerged as a political response to the structural conditions of Venetian capitalism. As Sally McKee observed, “state colonization created the potential for an alliance between the colonists and the native population, who found themselves on the same side

of the divide that separated those who govern from those who are governed” (1994, 176). In the solidarity of the oppressed and divided populations of Crete, McKee identified the emerging pattern of anti-capitalist politics. To foster solidarity in this resistance across ethnic and status lines, the first official act of the new rebel government was to eliminate the prohibitions aimed at the hierarchical divide between the island’s Latin and Greek populations, such as allowing a Greek priest to be ordained according to the Orthodox rites outside the island.

Nowhere in the Venetian colonial possessions had such revolt against the unity of the Venetians and the colonized populations occurred before. It explains why Venice took this revolt very seriously and decided to use all its military power to suppress it. For five years the Venetian military waged war on the island against the rebels. Initially the rebels moved into the hills in the western side of the island to wage the first organized guerrilla warfare. It continued until the end of 1368, when Venetian forces captured and executed the last group of rebels. In retrospect, the revolt demonstrated two facets of early capitalism. First, the suppression of the St Titus revolt revealed that capitalism as a new type of economy depended on war and the military suppression in the colonies. Second, it speaks to the birth of the revolutionary imagination. As McKee put it: “Short-lived though the revolt may ultimately have been, the raising of the St Tito standard displayed a flash of imaginative political will which sought to redefine the people of this colony as neither Greek nor Latin, but as Cretan” (1994, 204).

At the other end of the empire along the Adriatic coast and its Dinaric Mountain hinterland, Venice encountered “religious anarchists” (Federici 2014, 54n24), the Bogomils (Loved by God), a heretical movement and militant rebels. In these Robinson saw visions of medieval communism’s anti-capitalist imaginary: “These were the heresies (in company with such communist sects as the Humiliati and Communiati) which defined heresy in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. These heresies, consistent with the mass movements of ‘plebians of town and country,’ required the Church to mount Crusades, armies, and the Inquisition” (46). He further adds:

The ideology of the social movement – Manichean dualism – originated from beyond Europe, in the hinterlands of Croatia, Serbia, Dalmatia, and Asia Minor. As such, the mass movements became identified with heresy. But their actual social practices took the form of socialist communities; the destruction of private property as well as representatives of the

propertied classes; the reinvigoration of communal property; the reconceptualization of the social and spiritual role of women. (2019b, 59)

Bogomils also harbored the first expressions of militant feminism. Silvia Federici (2014) discusses medieval capitalism's appropriation of the female body, depriving women of the land and agricultural labor, suppressing their healing crafts, prohibiting them from a single mode of life, and making them into rebel heretics or "witches." The sexual politics of negative natality among the Bogomils stood in sharp contrast with the Church's mandatory procreation, reflecting the rejection of slavery in the very refusal to bring children into the world to become new slaves. The Bogomils' "radical anarchism" included civil disobedience and class hatred; in the eyes of the Church authorities, "they teach their own people not to obey their masters, they revile the wealthy, hate the king, ridicule the elders, condemn the boyars, regard as vile in the eye of God those who serve the king, and forbid every serf to work for his lord" (56n24). As the radical imaginary of the peasantry of the Balkans, "The Bogomils preached the language of the people, and their message was understood by the people... their loose organization, their attractive solution of the problem of evil, and their commitment to social protest made their movement virtually indestructible" (Browning 1975, 165–66).

The radical vision of the Balkans' heretical egalitarianism inspired a similar vision by the Anabaptists inside Venice itself. In the city republic, the heresy mobilized primarily artisans, such as "cobblers, textile workers, hatters, glovers, knife-grinders, and sword smiths" (Martin 2020, 24). Venetian Anabaptists refused to be governed by dukes and magistrates and advocated Scriptural principles. Michael Gaismair, a miner's son from the Tyrolese town of Sterzing and the key figure in the elaboration of a radical utopian vision, was mobilized by the radical ideas of many peasants and artisans in northern Italy. For the Venetian authorities, the Anabaptists represented a core of the potential religious as well as political dissent within Venice. According to John Jeffries Martin, Venetian Anabaptists with "their radical critique of secular magistrates – undergirded by both a remarkable degree of social cohesion and the presence of an international network of support – points to at least one alternative political imaginary in sixteenth-century Venice" (94).

The Christianization of the pagan Slavs might have been a protective response to Venetian slavery. According to William D. Phillips, already in

840 Venice signed a pact with other Italian cities not to trade Christian slaves;

Thereafter they were forced to look farther afield for their slaves. These they found in nearby Dalmatian across the Adriatic, where they purchased slaves from the traders living at the mouth of the Narenta River and conducted their own raids to obtain Dalmatian slaves ... Despite sporadic attempts by both civil and clerical authorities to halt the slave traffic, the Venetians never gave it up. (1985, 63)

Paolo Sarpi, a theologian, in 1615 defined the Venetian attitude about the Dalmatian Slavs: "If you want Dalmatia to be loyal, keep them ignorant and hungry" (in Edwards 1974, 158).

Yet, with the arrival of the Ottomans to the West Balkans, the Christians became a religious predicament of Muslim enslavement. The burgeoning Venetian capitalism found in the Ottoman neighbors a valuable trading partner; "Caravans numbering forty thousand horse came every year from Hungary, Croatia, and eastern Germany to fetch Venetian salt from Istria" (Molmenti 1906, 124). Trade routes would pass the Dalmatian coast and cross the Western Balkans heading north. These routes were the veins of capital circulation that were so essential for the formation of the continental interconnectedness of trade and capital investments. At this historical and geographical juncture, Balkan banditry mushroomed along these trade roads, robbing and interrupting the growth of Venetian war capitalism.

Venice and the Ottomans with their military means of coercion encircled the Slavic territories in the Western Balkans as a kind of no-man's land, in which the Slav peasantry held territories outside any state authority. For 150 years from the eighth century, the "Slav pirates" from the basin of the Neretva River successfully interrupted and robbed Venetian vessels along the Adriatic coast (Molmenti 1906, 116). After their suppression, Venetians in the fifteenth century encountered another such group, the Uskoks, from the Dalmatian port of Senj. They were something on the order of the warrior community that was engaged in guerrilla warfare on two fronts, at sea against the Venetians and in the hinterland against the Ottomans. Catherine Wendy Bracewell describes the Uskoks so: "In the frontier no-man's land where the authority of the state did not reach, the inhabitants worked out their own codes of behavior. They also developed new forms of community and identity" (2010, 13).

From the fifteenth century, the resistance to Venetian domination along the Dalmatian coast and to Ottoman heavy taxation inland gave rise to, what Eric Hobsbawm called, “social bandits.” The Balkan “social bandits” were part of a broad social phenomenon that spread across Europe, from England to Russia, to Central and Southern Europe. These were the armed communities of the European proletariat that had sprung from the strata of free peasantry that were breaking away from serfdom and slavery. Outlawed by their rulers as criminals, “social bandits,” as Hobsbawm argues, were “considered by their people as heroes, as champions, avengers, fighters for justice, perhaps even leaders of liberation, and in any case as men to be admired helped, and supported” (1969, 13). In the Balkans, these outlaw groups were known as “haiduks,” “klephts,” “Uskoks,” or “comitadji;” and they were considered to be enemies of the Turks, Venetians and Austrians.

While most of the “social bandit” groups throughout Europe remained politically and morally ambiguous, the definition of the haiduk, Hobsbawm insists, was fundamentally political. Hobsbawm acknowledges the haiduks’ tradition of fighting oppressive authority: “haiduks were not only symptoms of unrest, but nuclei of potential liberators, recognized by the people as such” (71). “Haiduk bands were led by (elected) *voivides* or dukes, whose duty it was to supply arms assisted by a standard-bearer or *bairaktar*, who carried the red or green banner and also acted as treasurer and quartermaster” (66). As the Franks indicated, they regarded themselves “as a free man – and as such as good as a lord or king; a man who had in this sense won personal emancipation and therefore superiority” (67). This freedom also “implied equality among haiduks” (67). They were known not as institutional leaders, but just as Novak and his sons, Grujo and Radivoj, Mihat the Herdsman, Rado of Sokol, Vujadin, Panyot Hitov, and Dimirios Makris.⁸

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to show how *Black Marxism* as an articulation of the Black Radical Tradition could be relevant for the critical studies of

⁸ Women were allowed to join haiduks, they would dress and fight like men. About this phenomenon as the Balkans “third sex,” see Grémaux (1989).



the Balkans. Stressing the importance of feudalism and its racialized social conditions for the origin of capitalism as racialism, *Black Marxism* actualizes the importance of the medieval Balkans and the East Mediterranean as the first peripheral geography of the nascent Third World. In this regard, the development of capitalism as racialism spatially and historically connects the Balkans and East Mediterranean slavery with transatlantic slavery. Such historical connectivity opens a space of critical commonality wherein one phenomenon can be analyzed in terms of the other. Critical studies of the Balkans should move away from Eurocentric universalism by embracing the historical particularities of capitalism as racialism. To the extent that slavery produced Europe as the West, the West's discursive construction of the Balkans as the Other, as the incomplete European, as crypto-colonial, or as the pathological European, should be secondary to the primary task of Balkan studies, which is the abolition of Europe as the civilization of racial capitalism.

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How can Black Marxism as an expression of the Black Radical Tradition help us critically study today's Balkans? In his book *Black Marxism*, Cedric Robinson underscores the importance of feudalism and racialized social conventions for the beginnings of capitalism even while reformulating the significance of the Balkan–Eastern Mediterranean space as the periphery's first geography of the Third World. Seen from this perspective, the development of capitalism as racialism connects this area, both spatially and historically, with the transatlantic slave trade. The historical connectivity derived from this relation generates new correspondences where the one phenomenon may be analyzed in terms of the other. Critical Balkan Studies can be withdrawn from a Eurocentric universality and refocused on the historical particularities of racial capitalism. Since slavery defined Europe as the West, the Western discursive construction of the Balkans as the Other, as imperfect Europeans, as crypto-colonial or abject Europeans, should be viewed as secondary to the primary goal of Balkan Studies: the abolition of Europe as a civilization of racial capitalism.

