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Arap Bacı'nın Ara Muhaveresi: Under the Shadow of the Ottoman Empire and Its Study

Zavier Wingham

Abstracted beyond comprehension, the Afro-Arab is an elastic figure. She is whoever we need her to be. She is disappeared even as she is named.

Momtaza Mehri[1]

Mukaddeme **(Prologue)**

Between the real and *hayalî*, the known and fabled, the *muhavere* (dialogue]) and *fasıl* (main plot), her shadow—at the very least—awaits. On September 15, 2020, Yapı Kredi Vedat Nedim Tör Museum opened the exhibition *Karagözüm İki Gözü*m, which featured the original shadow puppet figures of Ragıp Tuğtekin, a prominent master of the traditional Turkish shadow theater, alongside the works of other masters and contemporary artists of Karagöz.[2] The exhibition hosted nearly 350 depictions of figures that populate the imagined geographies of the Ottoman Empire in order to detail an art form that "emerged as the folklore of Ottoman culture in the capital city."[3] Fantastic beasts, jinn, hybrid human-animal figures join the chorus of stock characters such as Karagöz, Hacivat, the Circassian, the Kurd, the Persian (*acem*), the Jew, the Migrant (*muhacir*), and Arap Bacı.[4] Thrown against a theatrical curtain, these stock types were meant to offer generalizations "about ethnic and national traits, each being not only a cartoon symbol but also a national type" and associated occupations.[5] To the twin detriments of generalization and geography, the mapping of many stock characters onto historical communities within the Ottoman Empire occurs with little difficulty. Yet Arap Bacı remains a difficult figure to place. In part, her name(s)—Arap Bacı, Arap Cariye, Arap Köle, Bacı Kalfa, Zenciye—hint at the kinds of domestic servitude she labored, and at the same time, these names quietly unfold a racialized Ottoman geography that displaces

I thank Cemal Kafadar for the invitation to share a part of my research, the careful eyes and suggestions of K. Mehmet Kentel and Miray Eroglu, as well as the advice from Michael Gomez and Zachary Lockman. This article has also greatly benefited from many conversations with Beeta Baghoolizadeh, Khemani Gibson, Ali Karjoo-Ravary, Taylor Moore, Eve Troutt Powell, and Briana Royster.

1 Momtaza Mehri, "The Consensus of Seasons," *Shubbak,* June 23, 2021, accessed September 2, 2021, https://www.shubbak.co.uk/the-consensus-of-seasons.

2 *Karagözüm İki Gözüm – Karagöz, My Dear*, September 15, 2020–April 25, 2021. Curator: Cengiz Özek; Cengiz Özek, ed. *Karagözüm İki Gözüm* (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Vedat Nedim Tör Museum, 2020).

3 This quote is pulled directly from the exhibition's description upon entering.

4 The historical figure of Arap Bacı has yet to be fully explored, and thus what is presented in this essay constitutes as preliminary analysis which stems from my doctoral research project. Arap Bacı could be defined as "Arab Sister" or "Arab Midwife" and considered akin to the US historical stereotype, "mammy." When isolated, *bacı* might only yield the connotation of "sister", as it does in Sufi circles. Yet, Beeta Baghoolizadeh's study on slavery in Iran highlights how a similar term, *kaka* (loosely meaning "brother" or "bro"), functioned as a slur, descriptor for a Black male slave, and in time, a term commonly associated with a caricature of a Black man, Kaka Tawfiq. See: Beeta Baghoolizadeh, "Seeing Race and Erasing Slavery: Media and the Construction of Blackness in Iran, 1830-1960" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2018): 182–183, n. 384. Throughout this essay, I leave Arap Bacı in the original in order to capture and name the ways in which Arap Bacı might be understood as a racialized, (un)gendered, (un)sexed, and bonded figure who is enmeshed in fictive relations (sister, mother) which are bound to her servitude (caretaker, wet-nurse). The contemporary figure of Arap Bacı also deserves further attention to how Arap Bacı has morphed from a film character portrayed by Dursune Şirin, an Afro Turk, into a blackface and drag persona portrayed by men. For more, see Tayfun Dalkılıç, "Osmanlı'da Ev İçi Hizmet Köleliğinin Türk Film ve Televizyon Yapımlarındaki Yansıması, Kültürel Çalışmalar Yaklaşımı Çerçevesinde Arap Bacı Örneği" (MA thesis, Anadolu Üniversitesi, 2018).

5 Metin And, *Karagöz: Turkish Shadow Theatre; with an Appendix on the History of Turkish Puppet Theatre* (Istanbul: Dost Yayınları, 1987), 67.

Zavier Wingham
New York University
zcw214@nyu.edu
ORCID: 0000-0001-8472-0790

her as an ungeographic-yet-Black figure.[6] Who and what is she made to represent within this imagined world, rooted in the very real history of a six-century-long empire? Where and how might one research her history, to find "the plot of her undoing"?[7]

This essay is, in part, an attempt to consider how these real and imagined Ottoman geographies are underpinned by the histories and afterlives of exploitation, exploration, and conquest.[8] I am less concerned with retrieving these histories to identify Ottoman-era diversity or to place the African diaspora within a mosaic of Ottoman Istanbul.[9] Rather, I am interested in how reading Arap Bacı and her histories as intimately connected to the production of space might help reframe the study of Istanbul—as well as the Ottoman Empire—and its multilayered relationship to slavery and the African diaspora. Here, the production of space is understood to be co-constituted by both real and imagined geographies. That Arap Bacı cannot be located in Istanbul (and its study)—despite the city (as urban space/place, as seat of imperial power) being central to her domination (the slave market, the harem, the elite house)—but *can* be conjured within the theatrical shadows of an imagined Istanbul, perhaps, evinces the need to further interrogate the co-constitution of space and how geographies and knowledge production are interconnected.

Muhavere (Dialogue)

While the plot of Arap Bacı's undoing begins in the fifteenth century, it also begins in the classroom. It begins with a map exercise to interrogate Western imperialism, one that leaves intact the geographic naturalization of bodies and places. It begins by leaving unspoken the ways in which the geographies and afterlives of trans-Saharan slavery have shaped history, space, and place. Her demise is ensured before it is foretold and in time, others learn how to erase her existence. Teachers and students alike look to the syllabus to chart the emergence of a modern Middle East beginning in the nineteenth century and, as cohort, master a history devoid of slavery, Africa, and its diaspora.[10] On rare occasions, she might be mentioned in passing or as a prelude, but it is certain her plot and its constitutive elements remain marginal in and to the histories (and historiographies) of the Ottoman Empire and modern Middle East. Within these fields and their training, Arap Bacı, her attendant histories and otherwise subjects exist in a state of multi-layered dysgraphic redaction.[11] Africa, the African

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6 Ottomans often labeled Africans as *Arap* (Arab) or *zenci* (black), while acknowledging differences between them and *Habeş* (Abyssinians). Conversely, Ottomans were more informed on the origins of enslaved "white" persons, noting details such as which branch of the Circassian tribe one belonged. For further terminological discussion on *arap*, *zenci*, and *siyah*, see Ayşegül Kayagil, "Vocabularies of (In)Visibilities: (Re)Making the Afro-Turk Identity". *Anthropologia* 7, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 56–61, https://doi.org/10.14672/ada2020162445-66; Y. Hakan Erdem, *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and its demise, 1800–1909* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), 173–184. Müge Akpınar's ethnographic work adds "açık Arap" and "koyu Arap," see Müge Akpınar, "Afro-Türkler: Temsiliyet, Gelenek ve Kimlik," *Uluslararası Kıbrıs Üniversitesi Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi* 26, no. 101 (Fall 2020): 82; Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis, 2006), xii–xiii.

7 Saidiya Hartman, "The Plot of Her Undoing," *Feminist Art Coalition* 2 (2020), accessed October 16, 2021, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c805bf0d86cc90a02b81cdc/t/5db8b219a910fa05af05dbf4/1572385305368/NotesOnFeminism-2_SaidiyaHartman.pdf.

8 McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, xiv.

9 Elsewhere, I have described how recent interests in Afro Turkish history have attempted to enfold Afro Turks into nationalist narratives of citizenship and belonging by anesthetizing the past through multiculturalism. Zavier Wingham, "Rethinking Turkish Multiculturalism," *Central European History Journal* (forthcoming 2021). See also Nancy Reynolds, "Interview with Aron Rodrigue: Difference and Tolerance in the Ottoman Empire," *SEHR* 5, no. 1 (1996), http://www.stanford.edu/group/SHR/5-1/text/rodrigue.html.

10 In order to move beyond my own experience within the academia, I examined syllabi of the courses that were held within the past twenty years focusing either on the history of the modern Middle East or the Ottoman Empire, from several universities including, but not limited to, Columbia University, New York University, Swarthmore College, UC Berkeley, UC San Diego, University of Chicago, and University of North Carolina. From these syllabi and in conjunction with the *Open Syllabus Project*, I identified which texts might be considered "essential" or canonical to Ottoman Studies and Middle Eastern Studies. For example, see: Erol Ülker, "Syllabus - From Ottoman Empire to Turkish Republic, 1839–1980," *Academia.edu*, accessed October 16, 2021, https://www.academia.edu/39530397/Syllabus_-_From_Ottoman_Empire_to_Turkish_Republic_1839-1980.; Cemil Aydın, "HISTORY 274 History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1923," *Duke University*, accessed October 16, 2021, https://sites.duke.edu/duketurkish/files/2014/09/History-of-the-Ottoman-Empire.pdf; Geoff Hamm, "History 109C: The History of the Modern Middle East," *Yumpu*, accessed October 16, 2021, https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/read/45876246/history-109c-middle-east-syllabuspdf-department-of-history-uc-.

11 Christina Sharpe identifies the ways in which a set of quotidian catastrophic events and their deliberate, repetitive reporting, and widespread circulation of Black social, material, and psychic death constitute a "dysgraphia of disaster." She also points to a long history of Black lives being annotated and redacted in the Black diaspora. Here, I deploy dysgraphic

diaspora, and the figure of the Black slave occupy the historical and intellectual position of the unthought within Ottoman studies and, by extension, Middle Eastern studies.

To state such is not a disavowal of extant literature on the African diaspora, but rather to draw attention to how the study of the African diaspora and slavery is not understood as constitutive of these particular geo-histories. Since Gabriel Baer's landmark 1967 article,[12] the field has experienced several waves of scholarship, much of which has been deftly explored by scholars such as Eve Troutt Powell.[13] Terence Walz and Kenneth M. Cuno identify three reasons for why the study of slavery in the Ottoman Empire has emerged relatively late: first, in the construction of post-Ottoman national historiographies, minority and marginal populations have often been elided; second, the incommensurability of the "traumatic American experience of slavery" with those in Middle Eastern societies; third, the limited availability of historical materials and paucity of sources impeded early research, particularly in the case of Egypt's state archives.[14] Much of the earlier work bears the scars of the last two points: invariably, one finds a lamentation of the paucity of materials, archival or societal silences, and forgotten pasts paired with an all-too-familiar insistence on the distinctions (it is a disciplinary warning and enforcement of geography) between the American and Ottoman experiences of slavery. As research by Murat Ergin demonstrates, Ottoman elites crafted a racialized Turkishness centered on Western notions of whiteness, which rendered the African diaspora and its history an impossibility in Ottoman or modern Turkish histories.[15]

The last two reasons identified by Walz and Cuno also, at this present juncture, extend an enigma to the study of Black life and enslavement, one that resonates with nineteenth-century Ottoman articulations of slavery in the face of British abolitionism. As Ottoman elites contended with increasing British pressure, Tanzimat writers such as Ahmed Midhat refused comparison between Western and Ottoman slavery, citing differences in the (in)humane treatment of slaves and civilization.[16] Ottoman elites adopted a bifurcated strategy of articulating kul/harem slavery as the only practice of Ottoman slavery to its Western counterparts, while maintaining domestic and agricultural slavery as the only type of Ottoman enslavement within the empire. As a result, the extensive history of Ottoman enslavement of Africans was "deleted from the representation of Ottoman slavery."[17] Parallel to the Ottoman elites, Ottoman studies, too, has primarily focused on kul/harem slavery, janissaries, and Mamluks to the detriment of studying African enslavement.[18] Similarly, the field has insisted on these

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redaction to connect how Arap Baci's continually absented history is twinned to the field's inability to cohere her plight. See Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 20–21 and 113–120.

12 Gabriel Baer, "Slavery in Nineteenth Century Egypt," *The Journal of African History* 8, no. 3 (1967): 417–441.

13 Eve Troutt Powell, "Will That Subaltern Ever Speak? Finding African Slaves in the Historiography of the Middle East," in *Middle East Historiographies: Narrating the Twentieth Century,* ed. I. Gershoni, Amy Singer, and Y. Hakan Erdem (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), 242–261.

14 Arguably, there are three key periods within (primarily North American) historiography: 1) Baer's 1967 article set the stage for the early study of race and slavery for those working in Egyptian, Ottoman, and Sudanese history; 2) in the 1980s, the works of scholars such as Ehud Toledano, Hakan Erdem, and Leslie Peirce drew attention more specifically to the issue of slavery in the Ottoman Empire; 3) in the early 2000s, work by scholars such as Eve Troutt Powell explicitly threaded histories of colonialism, nationalism, slavery, and race by attending to the African diaspora. See: Suraiya Faroqhi, *Slavery in the Ottoman World: A Literature Survey* (Berlin: EB Verlag, 2017); Powell, "Will That Subaltern Ever Speak?"; Terence Walz and Kenneth M. Cuno, "Introduction," in *Race and Slavery in the Middle East: Histories of Trans-Saharan Africans in Nineteenth-century Egypt, Sudan, and the Ottoman Mediterranean*, eds. Terence Walz and Kenneth M. Cuno (Cairo: The American University in Cairo, 2011), 1–3. Currently, there is significant research underway by scholars such as Faisal Abualhassan, Bayan Abubakr, Erdal Aksoy, Yavuz Aykan, Beeta Baghoolizadeh, Moyagaye Bedward, Hülya Canbakal and Alpay Filiztekin, Ezgi Çakmak, Michael Ferguson, Razan Idris, Ceyda Karamursel, Ayşegül Kayagil, Afifa Ltifi, Taylor Moore, Özgül Özdemir, Hayri Goksin Özkoray, and Bam Willoughby. Moreover, Afro diasporic communities from the region, such as the Afro Turk Association in Izmir (Afrikalılar Kültür Dayanışma ve Yardımlaşma Derneği) and the Collective for Black Iranians, have organized their communities to amplify their own stories, history, and research.

15 Recently, the problems that scholars of African slavery in the Ottoman Empire face have been discussed with increasing attention to the ways that archives, language, and nationalism have shaped research. See: Murat Ergin, *Is the Turk a White Man? Race and Modernity in the Making of Turkish Identity* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2018); Michael Ferguson, "Enslaved and Emancipated Africans on Crete," in *Race and Slavery in the Middle East*, 171–196; Ayşegül Kayagil, "Yok Ama Var: Türkiye'de Irk, Irkçılık, Köleciliğin Hayaletleri," *Cogito* 101 (Spring 2021): 81–92.

16 Erdem, *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire*, 126–132; İsmail Parlatır, *Tanzimat Edebiyatında Kölelik* (Ankara: Yargı Yayınevi, 2012), 58–67.

17 Ehud R. Toledano, "Late Ottoman Concepts of Slavery (1830s–1880s)," *Poetics Today* 14, no. 3 (1993): 501.

18 Bam Willoughby, "Opposing a Spectacle of Blackness: *Arap Baci*, *Baci Kalfa*, *Dadi*, and the Invention of African Presence in Turkey," *Lateral* 10, no. 1 (2021), accessed September 2, 2021, https://csalateral.org/forum/cultural-constructions-race-racism-middle-east-north-africa-southwest-asia-mena-swana/opposing-spectacle-blackness-arap-baci-kalfa-dad-african-presence-turkey-willoughby/; Faroqhi, *Slavery in the Ottoman World.*

same hard divisions and "bordering of thought"[19] which have all but obliterated the African diaspora from the history of the Ottoman Empire. Still, as Momtaza Mehri observes, the outcome is that "the Black figure bears the cost of slavery's legacies, colonial taxonomies, fraught ethnonationalism, pan-Arabist failures, and the airbrushing of unfinished postcolonialisms."[20]

... Arap Bacı's long, absented shadow haunts...

If the past five decades have borne witness to the expansion of Ottoman slavery as a subfield, the current institutional structures, and systems of academic knowledge production within Ottoman studies and Middle Eastern studies departments share little cognition of this. A survey of syllabi across the North American academy reveals the extent to which slavery is absented from the narration of Ottoman and Middle Eastern histories.[21] How and why is it that undergraduate and graduate survey courses of the modern Middle East neglect to mention the history of slavery, Africa, or the African diaspora? The absence is, in part, compounded by the texts utilized in the classroom. Texts which might be considered fundamental to an entry-level Ottoman history course, irrespective to degree-level, invariably mention insofar as much as Donald Quataert does in *The Ottoman Empire, 1700–1922*:

> Slavery remains largely excluded. There is, however, some mounting evidence that the issue of economic slavery may need revisiting. Such slavery was not widespread and domestic slavery did dominate, but some slaves were working in manufacture and agriculture and their activities may require further discussion at a later point. In this regard, I also mention the possibly connected presence of Africans in the northern Ottoman Empire during, for example, the nineteenth century.[22]

Similarly, Omnia El Shakry's preface to a recently edited volume notes the relevancy of attending to notions of anti-Blackness, particularly for "the ways in which histories of slavery have been intimately linked to anti-Blackness in the region," yet neither slavery nor the African diaspora and its histories are included in the text meant to instruct others on how to teach and understand the region. Still, El Shakry finds utility in encountering anti-Blackness (which also constitutes the experiences of Arap Bacı) "as that through which the catastrophic itself can be anticipated, alongside the ongoing experiences of *nakabat* in the Middle East, [so that] we might better begin to contemplate our own disappearance."[23] The communal "we," in the absence of the histories of slavery, Africa and its diaspora begs the question: who is we?

That these histories can be and have been relegated to a preface, a few lines, a footnote, or the dreaded "race week," clarifies the extent to which Arap Bacı has been rendered invisible and suggests a systemic untenability of the field's extant theoretical, conceptual, and epistemological tools addressing Arap Bacı as a bonded, (un)sexed, (un)gendered, and racialized figure.[24] For example, Madeline Zilfi has rightfully pointed to the absence of detailed research on enslaved women, arguing for the importance of gender and the centrality of enslavement to Ottoman life. Yet, Zilfi dismisses the question of race, cautioning against the use of "Atlantic-derived categories, most notably those of race and Africanness" and that "blackness

19 Mehri, "The Consensus of Seasons."
20 Ibid.
21 See footnote 5.
22 Donald Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire: 1700–1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), xii; M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Colin Imber, *The Ottoman Empire, 1300–1650: The Structure of Power* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Caroline Finkel, *Osman's Dream: The Story of the Ottoman Empire, 1300–1923* (New York: Basic Books, 2007); Suraiya Faroqhi, *Approaching Ottoman History: an Introduction to the Sources* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Douglas Howard, *A History of the Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).
23 Omnia El Shakry, "Preface," in *Understanding and Teaching the Modern Middle East*, ed. Omnia El Shakry (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2020), xiii–xiv. Two other texts, which are featured in many Middle Eastern studies syllabi as a semester-long guiding text, also pay marginal attention to the histories mentioned. See William L. Cleveland and Martin P. Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2016); James L. Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).
24 Alexander Weheliye's approach towards racialization and Blackness is instructive here, for reference, see: Alexander Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 3.

and Africanness are and remain unstable and subjective descriptors."[25] The dismissal ignores the very real ways Ottoman statesmen, writers, and travelers developed their own racial and civilizational taxonomies in relation to, on the one hand, slavery, Africa and its diaspora; on the other hand, whiteness and modernity in the nineteenth century.[26] If gender is understood as a set of historically specific discourses, social roles, and identities, then Arap Bacı must be understood through those very discourses that both constitute her continued subjection and to (un)map her existence. To consider her as a "marked woman"—one whose captive body was culturally unmade, becoming neither male, nor female, but taken as quantity—would, then, clear space to ask a question rendered otherwise unanswerable by the field: As Arap Bacı labored as wet nurse, caretaker, and other modes of domestic servitude, how did Ottoman notions of race and Blackness intersect notions of gender and sexuality to hold, as Jennifer Morgan has argued, enslaved African female's existence outside the domains of motherhood, woman, and by extension, modernity?[27] In other words, how might thinking through Ottoman enslavement of Africans, racial capitalism and its afterlives subtend existing narratives of modernity and help unfold (and suture) other coterminous histories and genealogies?[28]

Arap Bacı'nın Ara Muhaveresi (*Arap Bacı*'s Interlude)

Within the shadow puppet world, Arap Bacı's appearance marks a comedic skit—an interlude. She is a figure whose elasticity is shaped to extend the performance of this imaginative Ottoman world which holds her in servitude. Her elasticity takes her from historical figure to imagined stock character/puppet to actress to Blackface character—she is always already understood as a phantasmic reference, summoned from an absented time and space to provide comedic relief.[29] Rather than emplotting Arap Bacı within another minstrelsy of Blackness, instrumentalizing her captive body for the use of others and their enjoyment, or ushering her towards the *fasıl* (plot), I sit with her in the margins, piecing together fragments of her histories, to consider the otherwise unattended geographies, economies, and social realms of Black life.[30] Two examples of such history sutures the Atlantic and Mediterranean, in ways once thought, perhaps, unimaginable.

On or around November 4, 1847, an unspecified Ottoman court in Istanbul condemned a group of slave traders for the unspeakable suffering that a group of enslaved Black people (*zenci*) were made to endure on their sojourn from America to Trablusgarb (modern-day Tripoli, Libya).[31] Prefaced with a reminder of the sharia's authorization of slavery and command to treat slaves in a fatherly (*pederane*) manner, the court admonished the slave traders and threatened them with punishment, should this happen again. In much of the court's writing, they speak of the horrors, inhumane treatment, particularly concerning the (in)humanity of those who mistreat enslaved persons, and other terrible spectacles of enslavement—some

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25 Such dismissal is not unfamiliar to any scholar of the African diaspora, doubly so for Black scholars in Middle Eastern studies. Eve Troutt Powell has called into question how "the specter of great American centrism" has haunted the field, at the cost of excluding the works of Black scholars. Eve Troutt Powell, Jane Abdell, Ezgi Çakmak, Razan Idris, Sherene Seikaly, and Kamal Suleiman. "Blackness in the Middle East: A Virtual Panel Discussion" University of Pennsylvania, September 16, 2020; Madeline C. Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire: The Design of Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), xii.

26 Mustafa Serdar Palabıyık, "Ottoman Travelers' Perceptions of Africa in the Late Ottoman Empire (1860–1922): A Discussion of Civilization, Colonialism and Race," *New Perspectives on Turkey* 46 (2012): 187–212; Selim Deringil, " 'They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery': The Late Ottoman Empire and the Post-colonial Debate," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 2 (2003): 311–342; Murat Ergin, *"Is the Turk a White Man?": Race and Modernity in the Making of Turkish Identity* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

27 Kathleen Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 65–81; Jennifer Morgan, *Laboring Women: Gender and Reproduction in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Saidiya Hartman, "The Belly of the World: A Note on Black Women's Labors," *Souls* 18, no. 1 (2016): 166–173; Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, xxii.

28 Here, I am thinking with K'eguro Macharia's use of suture: "Blackness names, in part, the suture between Africa and Afro-diaspora." See Keguro Macharia, "belated: interruption," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 26, no. 3 (2020): 561–573; Tapji Garba and Sara-Maria Sorentino, "Slavery is a Metaphor: A Critical Commentary on Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's 'Decolonization is Not a Metaphor,' " *Antipode* 52 (2020): 764–782.

29 As discussed in an earlier footnote, Arap Bacı is a multilayered figure. See Willoughby, "Opposing a Spectacle of Blackness"; Tunay Altay, "Is there really no anti-Black racism in Turkey?," *Bianet*, July 4, 2020, https://m.bianet.org/english/people/226799-is-there-really-no-anti-black-racism-in-turkey.

30 "But the margins have always been fertile." Mehri, "The Consensus of Seasons."

31 BOA., A.}MKT. MHM. 2/80 (25 Zilkade 1263 [November 4, 1847]).

of which the court wrote were too heinous to document. Yet, rather than recounting these horrors as evidence of Ottoman enslavement, thereby seemingly confirming the "fixed and naturalized" condition of Arap Bacı's pained embodiment to establish the brutalities of captivity or narrativizing the experience of Ottoman slavery into a recognizable American lexicon, my focus is drawn to how the geographies within the document confound received notions of the Ottoman slave trade.[32] This document highlights the movement of enslaved Black people from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean, from America to Libya and, perhaps, eventually to Istanbul. What might have prompted this movement from one geography of domination to another? What becomes of them once they arrive in either Trablusgarb or Istanbul? Might they have arrived in Istanbul to a slave market that had recently been closed, subjecting them to being sold in the private houses of slave dealers?[33] This document, thus far, remains the only fragment recording this event and cannot answer such questions. However, in considering geography and slavery, my attention is further drawn to the centrality of Ottoman cities and ports, such as Trablusgarb and Istanbul, not only in trading slaves, but also the Ottoman state's later attempt at managing the lives of manumitted Africans under the "Izmir Plan" in the 1880s.[34] How might attending to how the seas and oceans, particularly the Mediterranean, connect cities and people, clarify deeper, nestled spatial projects? Still, another event 164 years later underscores the importance of attending to geographies of domination.

On March 27, 2011, 72 people attempted to flee from Tripoli during the UN-authorized NATO military operations in Libya via a small rubber boat. En route to Lampedusa, Italy, the group lost fuel and their food/water supplies dwindled. Despite repeated distress signals, the watchful eye of at least one military helicopter and interaction with a military vessel, the group was left adrift for at least fourteen days in the Central Mediterranean. The inaction of multiple state actors—several governments, including the Italian and Spanish, as well as NATO, who were aware of the boat's position and condition—resulted in the death of 63 passengers in the boat that would later become known as the "Left-to-Die Boat."[35] That the Mediterranean is marked, or perhaps underscored, by ongoing crossings and drowning incidents might offer an exemplary example of how cascading afterlives of enslavement and Black exclusion come to bear on the abyss that Édouard Glissant similarly identifies in the Atlantic Ocean.[36] What can be understood and said by connecting the nineteenth century's overlapping imperial sovereignties in the Mediterranean waters and the simultaneous exclusion of the Mediterranean in the 1880 Anglo-Ottoman Convention for the suppression of the Black slave trade to Christina Sharpe's identification of the "ongoing crisis of capital in the form of migrants" in this same region?[37] How might an Ottoman history of enslavement, a history of Africans in, on, and around these haunted, unmoored geographies, contextualize Europe's contemporary policing of its borders and precarious surveillance of Black life on a liquid landscape?[38]

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32 Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 18–21.

33 Located near the chicken market (Tavuk Pazarı) close to Grand Bazaar's Nurosmaniye Gate, Istanbul's slave market was the biggest and busiest in the empire. Its abolition in 1847 did not signal the end of slave trading, instead it moved slave trading into private homes. Ehud Toledano, *The Ottoman Slave Trade and Its Suppression: 1840–1890* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 51–54.

34 In an agreement between the British and Ottoman Empires, the treaty contained a clause which stipulated that the Ottoman government would protect, look after, and provide for the livelihoods of those who were relocated. Moreover, it was also stipulated that enslaved Africans on land and sea would be settled in appropriate places and houses, and immediately given manumission papers and provided work. The Izmir Plan also designed to forcefully marry and settle emancipated Africans in Izmir's agricultural hinterland, the afterlives of which have resulted in Afro Turkish communities who still reside in the villages. Abdullah Martal, "Afrika'dan İzmir'e: İzmir'de Bir Köle Misafirhanesi," *Kebikeç* 10 (2000): 171–186; Michael Ferguson and Ehud R. Toledano, "Ottoman Slavery and Abolition in the Nineteenth Century," in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*, ed. David Ellis, Stanley L. Engerman, Seymour Drescher, and Dave Richardson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 197–225.

35 "Left-to-Die Boat," *Forensic Architecture*, accessed September 3, 2021, https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/the-left-to-die-boat.

36 Éduoard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2010)

37 Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 59.

38 Scholars, activists, and artists in and around the Mediterranean, especially those in Italy, have begun to identify the Black Mediterranean and theorize it as a geographic and political paradigm with deep connections to African enslavement through historical and material relationships to the Caribbean Sea and Atlantic Ocean. See: SA Smythe "The Black Mediterranean and the Politics of the Imagination," *Middle East Report* 286 (Spring 2018): 3–9; Smythe, "Black Italianità: Citizenship and Belonging in the Black Mediterranean", *California Italian Studies* 9, no. 1 (2019). https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3nm019xg.; Camilla Hawthorne, "In Search of Black Italia." *Transition*, no. 123 (2017): 152–74.;

Arap Bacı's elasticity extends from the margins, even after death. Around the same time of the crossing from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean, a certain Charles MacFarlane was introduced to Ismael Effendi (Hekim İsmail Paşa [1807–1880], who had recently become the *hekimbaşı* (chief physician) to the sultan and president of the Galatasaray Medical College.[39] In his travelogue, MacFarlane recounts how "all the last improved implements of Paris, London, and Vienna were to be found in the Galata Serai"; there, one could find a botanical garden, a natural history museum, a sufficiently large medical library filled with French texts, medical equipment that had been kept in great condition under the care of the Germans employed in the college, and a French master to instruct in the "language of science." As MacFarlane and Ismael Effendi entered the dissection room, they encountered young Turkish students "handling the black human flesh" from the body of a Black female, as the "horrible looking corpse" of a Black male lay uncovered on a side-board; in an ante-room, were the *disjecta membra* of yet another "Nubian." Beyond the fleshy horrors of dissection, MacFarlane was shocked to see dissections taking place as the Quran prohibited the mutilation of a corpse and, as MacFarlane writes, "neither Christian nor Jewish Rayahs could bear the idea of the body of one of their own family or their own sect being given to the hospital." Instead, the medical college could depend almost exclusively on the mortality of Black slaves and gave slave owners 20–25 pilasters in exchange for their bodies.[40] What are the conditions that rendered the "Black human flesh" a commodity to be (re)territorialized for medical advancement and in doing so, permitted the violation even in death?

At least within Ottoman Istanbul, dissection had been illegal until 1841 and extant secondary literature only mentions that interns, along with their professors, operated on "patients' bodies" at clinics. MacFarlane's account is uncertain of the intervening years but confirms "that such was the state of the supplies to the anatomical school in the spring of 1848."[41] Could this have been an isolated case? While the bulk of this research remains to be undertaken, at least within the context of the Galatasaray Medical College, Taylor M. Moore's recent research illustrates how Ottoman Egyptian medical history might serve as a precursor to this event.[42] In 1829, the first dissection lesson took place in Qasr al-Aini Medical School in Cairo. Khaled Fahmy highlights this as a pivotal moment wherein dissection and autopsy became new modes for "rethinking the universalistic category of modernity in a non-Western context," particularly in the context of Egyptian medical and legal reform.[43] In a painting commemorating this event, a group of ulema surround the dissected body, who are in turn surrounded by a group of students. Until relatively recently, the Black body at the focal point of the painting has not demanded "our" attention and has gone unnoticed and unremarked.[44] Recently Taylor Moore has asserted that if the bodies of Black people were the first to be dissected and, if the first midwives in Egypt were purchased from the slave market, then the bodies upon which new modes of modernity are mapped require our attention—and inquiry.[45] Arap Bacı, even in death, is continually disavowed as a self-possessed subject—she is a bonded, (un)sexed, (un)gendered, and racialized ungeographic-yet-Black territory upon which new modes of medical history were mapped and inscribed. Perhaps, then, there is more in common with the transatlantic slave ships-cum-laboratory than previously imagined.

Robin D.G. Kelley, "Foreword," in Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition,* second edition (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), xix.z

39 I am grateful for Furkan Kefeli for alerting me to MacFarlane's travelogue. Furthermore, I am indebted to Taylor M. Moore for our extended and invaluable conversations on the following discussion and primary source materials. Her forthcoming work on the development of medical science in the Ottoman Empire, in part, also probes the questions and concerns which have been briefly sketched within this article. See Taylor M. Moore, "Down to the Bone: Dissecting Blackness in Early Twentieth-Century Egypt," Blackness in Asian and Middle Eastern Studies Speaker Series, Department of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, UNC Chapel Hill, March 18, 2021.

40 Charles MacFarlane, *Turkey and Its Destiny: The Result of Journeys Made in 1847 and 1848 to Examine into the State of That Country* (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1850), 162–166.

41 Ibid., 166.

42 Moore, "Down to the Bone."

43 Khaled Fahmy, *In Quest of Justice: Islamic Law and Forensic Medicine in Modern Egypt* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), 6.

44 Ibid., 3.

45 In the context of Ottoman Istanbul, Ehud Toledano has also pointed to a case wherein a certain Kamer, a manumitted African midwife, was placed in the medical school because Ottoman families were reluctant to send their daughters to Tanzimat-state schools, and then sent to the province of Erzurum to help reduce the high rate of mother and infant mortality. In the context of Cairo, Moore has pointed to the centrality of African women and their knowledge sets to medical development and advancement in Egypt. Moore, "Down to the Bone"; Ehud R. Toledano, *As If Absent and Silent: Bonds of Enslavement in the Islamic Middle East* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 144–145.