# Identity, Affect, Alliance: Thinking Whiteness Transnationally

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ABSTRACT: This article interrogates affective investments in whiteness, both in antiracist movements and in their white supremacist counterparts. I do so by charting a comparative analysis between West-European and US-American processes of racialization and show up their respective restricting impact on identity formation. Combining approaches from affect theory and queer studies I advocate for an understanding of Race as alliance rather than identity.

## Fuzzy Edges

"What's your racial identity? 'Cause I can tell you're not all white." So begins the first semester of my study-abroad at UC Berkeley during college. While I often half-ironically describe my racial identity as 'white as a toilet bowl,' this interpolation, targeted at my then-only-budding critical consciousness, kicked off a series of questions: Am I not white? Should I be? Should I be glad that I am not? My initial confusion was cleared up lightly when the person who had asked me this explained that this was meant as a compliment, for we were all a diverse, queer,[1] multi-racial, multi-ethnic community, and to have something more than mere whiteness to show for yourself was a badge of pride. What to do? Should I quickly flip through my ancestors, pull up the story of how my Jewish grandmother dyed her hair blonde before she fled Poland during the Holocaust? Rush out, take a nifty DNA test, and present the results? Or simply point out that the German whom my Californian classmate envisioned was perhaps mere product of some stereotypical representation from a Hollywood movie? Secondly, what was it that had apparently given me away as 'not-quite-white'; was it skin tone, hair color or texture, height, weight? The way that I move in my body, mannerisms, habitus? Or was it what was near and around my body, such as the way I dressed, or the people that I surrounded myself with? All of this is to get to the following: What exactly do we mean when we refer to whiteness? What is it that has to line up for a body to be read as *properly* white, without any interruptions, such as

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[1]   While I reject the use of the term "queer" as an identity marker (see, for example, Butler, *Notes* 70), I have reproduced it here for the sake of this anecdote.

those illustrated in my example? And what to make of the fact that these criteria appear to differ depending on location, that this moment at Berkeley was the first instance of this happening to me?

Without reading too much into this encounter, I do think that this moment of being called upon to slot myself into a legible racial box helps me to illustrate a larger point: That to get hung up on questions of the individual and affect instead of interrogating the systemic structures that undergird racialization backs the subject into a corner from which I can see no productive way forward. This is of course not to say that I do not enjoy white privilege. The point here, rather, is that those who appear to blur and traverse the boundaries between racial categories remind us that these categories themselves are social constructs with fuzzy edges that continuously overlap and bleed into one another.

That is why in the following, I interrogate the concept of whiteness as it is currently used in academic discourse. I do this across three parts: I first lay out the field of (Critical) Whiteness Studies[2] as it currently stands: I engage with a contemporary academic debate on whiteness and draw largely on Robyn Wiegman's contribution to this debate for my own argument. Secondly, I compare and contrast socially constructed categories of Race and ethnicity between Western Europe and the United States and interrogate whether this comparison allows for a transnational understanding of Race more broadly, and whiteness more concretely. In the third part, I use queer theory to read processes of racialization and contemporary approaches in (Critical) Whiteness Studies against the grain, so as to outline a picture of the affective investments in identity formation and the norm-upholding function that these can have.

## 1: Race, Ethnicity, Visibility

I begin here by addressing previous forms of (Critical) Whiteness Studies and the critiques that have been voiced about them: As James Baldwin writes, Europeans arrived in the United States and became white "by deciding that they were white" (qtd. in Wiegman 159). Robyn Wiegman uses this quote to remind her readers that in the context of the United States, "white ethnics by and large chose whiteness, and even struggled to be recognized as white" (159). One important starting point for me here is to assess these critiques of whiteness as a racial category and ask whether the era of *Make America Great Again* presents us with a political backlash of white masculinity, or whether this is merely heightened visibility of white anger that has been present

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[2]    For the difference between Whiteness Studies and Critical Whiteness Studies see Anoop Nayak.

all this time. As Anoop Nayak writes, "whiteness cannot have an equal place at the table of multiculturalism, for even if 'whites' as social group are globally a 'minority' whiteness remains hegemonic" (752). I read this discourse around whiteness alongside "the complicated backstory to our present-day crisis of racialized political anxieties" (Eley 151), as we have unfortunately been able to witness play out all across Europe in recent years.

As Robyn Wiegman explains, Whiteness Studies emerged as an academic field in the United States in the 1990s, but from the start faced various problems as an academic discipline: As she critiques, the then-emerging field posited that "white scholars had an ethical duty to attend to their own racial identity […], that the project of doing so constituted an autonomous academic field, and […] that this field *by definition* was engaged in antiracist work" (157). Wiegman's central point of critique is that Whiteness Studies was founded upon a "decisive and haunting lack," meaning that it was "[mimicking] identity knowledges, but without the political calculus that brought Ethnic, Women's and Lesbian/Gay Studies into being, Whiteness Studies garnered its disciplinary shape in a compensatory relation to that which it was not" (191).

Before diving deeper into these forms of critique, all of which I consider valid and important, I would like to contrast this formulation of how the *whiteness* in Whiteness Studies of the 1990s was conceived with Geoff Eley's elaborations on the emergence and invisibility of Race as a marker of social structure in Europe: In tracing Stuart Hall's and Paul Gilroy's writings from the 1980s, Eley describes how British academia, as well as society at large, grappled with growing hostilities against "foreigners, immigrants, and colonial subjects" (151) within the national borders, and concludes that, in the British context, the "centrality of 'culture'" (169) remained as the central dividing factor.

> The shocking encounter with Nazi atrocities, genocide, and all the other consequences of the Third Reich's avowedly "racial state" fundamentally delegitimated the use of the concept. As a discursively allowable ground of reference, "race" was simply no longer available: it was scientifically meaningless and disproven; it had no basis in objective realities; and it was purely ideological. It should simply not be used. (Eley 172)

As Eley's analysis makes clear, talking about Race as a category of social analysis has no place in contemporary European discourse, and, as Eley further points out, discourse around culture and/or ethnicity have replaced Race as an analytical category across Europe in the post-WWII period. I use this comparative analysis as a departure point here, since I believe it points us towards a complication of discourse around whiteness, one which I do not see reflected in critiques of current attempts at defining whiteness or Whiteness Studies in the United States, as voiced for instance by Wiegman. In her writings, the ways in which whiteness operates, as well as attempts at critiquing it, are informed greatly by economic factors. Thus a connection to

labor history becomes crucial, since many of the foundational texts of Whiteness Studies depended upon this factor: "[L]abor history jump starts […] the critical project of imagining an antiracist white subject in the present, for if whiteness is historically produced and if its production requires something more than the physical characteristic of skin color, then whiteness as a form of political identification, if not racial identity, can be undone" (173).[3] From this it becomes apparent that, in contrast to much of contemporary US Race discourse that limits whiteness to superficial factors, it is in fact comprised of more than just skin color or hair texture, and perhaps also dependent upon a combination of racial and ethno-cultural factors. We should take note of this point here already because this assessment will be of crucial importance in the comparative analysis between European and US concepts of Race-making later in this article.

According to Wiegman, Whiteness Studies is a field apparently made up primarily of white people. She describes—and critiques— the "longing that resided in the disciplinary apparatus of Whiteness Studies" and, drawing on Richard Dyer's fears about a field of Whiteness Studies that centers around white subjects, asserts that this indicates a "profound desire for a white subject that could survive knowing what made it" (191). Sara Ahmed, who also draws on Dyer, argues similarly that her biggest fear about Whiteness Studies is that it might serve solely to make anti-racist white people feel better about themselves ("Declarations" 33). Given the current onslaught of white nationalism and white supremacy, both in Europe and the United States, I think it becomes increasingly important to decenter these white emotions and seek ways to study whiteness that remove the white subject that Wiegman speaks of. And how can we think about a transnational idea of whiteness, using the critiques voiced by Wiegman and others in order to try to understand European whiteness, for instance?

It is also important to remind ourselves here that racial categories themselves are markers of racial domination and tied to colonial histories. That is why any debate about racialization and racial identity should ask from where it gets its classifications. An important reminder here is Édouard Glissant's concept of 'opacity,' the refusal to be seen, known, or categorized. As Glissant—and the Négritude movement that followed him—lays out, opacity is untranslatability, and unknowability in opposition to the racial taxonomies imposed by white European settler-colonists who sought to "understand" people and render racialized, non-white Others transparent to them (189-90). Glissant advocates for an alterity that is unquantifiable,

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[3]   This approach is critiqued by Nayak, who posits that the divide between 'money whites' and 'white trash' populations is a privilege afforded to white people and not to other races (741).

and a diversity that exceeds categories of identifiable difference. Glissant writes, for instance, that we need to understand identities, including our own, as obscure, and that it is important to accept our own opacity for others, just as we accept their opacity to us (193). To feel solidarity with or for an Other, it should not be necessary to see, understand, or "grasp" them, to put it in Glissant's own words (193). Importantly, Glissant demands a "right to opacity for everyone" (194).[4] While rooted in a decolonial struggle and empowerment for those racialized as Black by white Europeans, Glissant at the same time asks us to interrogate racial categories as a whole, and to see the value in not categorizing others, but instead to appreciate the value that lies in encountering them as individuals, not as members of a social group that we have slotted them into. In the third part of this article, I will draw a closer connection between the concept of opacity and that of queerness, and explain why I think that the two work excellently side by side. Before doing so, however, I will dive into the differences between European and US-American discourses around Race and racialization.

## 2: Thinking Whiteness Transnationally (?)

Geoff Eley lays out extensively the importance—and at the same time the invisibility—of Race in European nation-making, or as he calls it, the "centrality of 'Race' in Western Europe's political unconscious" (139). He traces this phenomenon back to French Universalism (149-50) and meticulously lays out the ways in which the French way of disallowing Race as a formal social category in state administration was adopted in large parts of Western and Northern Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.[5] This leads to the current status quo where, despite coming out of World War II with different positions on racialization, countries across Europe have arrived at the same position, in that "racialized distinctions invariably placed people of color outside the operative democratic democracy of the people" (151). This illustrates for us that racialization in Northern and Western European contexts operates as one of the most important markers in defining nationhood. In other words: People of Color—anybody marked as non-white—are classified as racial others who do not belong to the national

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[4]   This is not to say that white people get to negate their whiteness, and my use of this quote does in no way indicate that I seek to deny my own white privilege.

[5]   A supplementary focus on Southern, Central, or Eastern Europe is fascinating to me for future inquiry, but outside the scope of this very project. Hence, I can only hint at the possibilities and complications that expanding a pan-European concept of Race may present.

body. To be accepted as a citizen of any Northern or Western European nation, one has to be white.

While being crucially important for the ways in which national belonging is constructed in these European discourses, however, as both Geoff Eley and Rita Chin work out, Race has become tabooed as a marker of social difference in Europe after the end of the Second World War. Instead, discourses about immigration into Europe focused solely on "cultural difference" (Chin 139), obscuring and skewing processes of racialization, and providing an especially complex playing field for whiteness. Chin refers to this as "'new racism'—a system of racialized thinking in which culture supplanted biology as the discursive key marker of incommensurable difference" (140). The focus in Europe, as we can thus see, lies on cultural difference over epidermal factors (in other words: ethnic difference over racial difference), meaning that discussions about Race are obscured and supplanted by discussion about ethno-cultural difference.

Given that I began this paper with an instance of my own racialization in the US being different from that in Germany, I feel tempted to ask whether a transnational idea of whiteness might ever seem feasible or productive, be it trans-European, trans-Atlantic (for the sake of this article between Germany and the US), or even global in scope. I think it bears repeating that we must not treat whiteness as just one racial category among others. Given that it has been used to subject, dominate, and exploit those marked as non-white time and time again, and continues to do so, we cannot accept it as an identity marker as we might other racial categories. In *Toward a Global Idea of Race*, Denise Ferreira Da Silva traces the development of modern nation states as identity markers, specifically European historical processes, in the following way:

> Nevertheless, even as they focus on "nationalism," the force producing the idea of the nation as an "objective entity," as the ideological strategy and write the nation as an "imagined community" or a "myth," critical analysts of the nation agree that by the end of the last century, producing a people as a national subject, as the product and agent of the temporal trajectory that actualizes its "intrinsic difference"—not as an isolated moral collective but as always already a moment, a particular actualization, of the transcendental I—would become central for defining their position in the global space. Under these conditions, the nation constituted a fundamental dimension of the modern political subject, because the construction of a collectivity as an interior-temporal thing, a transparent I, was central to support claims of sovereignty (self-determination), the juridical and military control of a given territory, and the right and ability to explore its economic resources, as well as the dominion of distinct people inhabiting the same territory and the colonial appropriation of other regions of the global space. (194-95)

I use Da Silva's definition here because—albeit longwinded—it raises a crucial point: nation-states, as one can gather from Da Silva, are highly complex identity markers, and yet at the same time highly effective in the formation of collective identities, especially in contexts of racialization. This brings up the question whether each nation produces its own racial hierarchies, or whether, playing on the title of Da Silva's book, one could envision a transnational, or even 'global idea of whiteness.' In order to do so, the role of whiteness in European nationalisms needs to be interrogated. We find a discussion of this in Eley, who argues that there are many places "where the materialities of race may be found," and for whom it therefore is important to accept Race as existing not just as a marker of ethnic or cultural difference, but as something that "exists materially in social relations and practices" (177). The focus on nationalism as an identity marker is of course important in any discussion of racialization and whiteness, since it is in the realm of individual nationalisms that Ahmed, Wiegman, Chin, and Eley locate the strongest capacity of the dangerous workings of racism.

The differences in regional constructions of Race and racialization are presented clearly by Chin. In *The Crisis of Multiculturalism in Europe*, she traces the different ways in which immigration and racialization play out in Europe vis-a-vis the United States. As Chin lays out, there are great differences between the United States' self-fashioning as a nation of immigrants and subsequent awareness about multiculturalism, and European self-definition of nationhood, after the "reversal of migratory patterns" (2) in the post-World War Two era, which have led to the fact that "most Western European democracies have grappled with the question of what to do with the ethnic, racial, and religious minorities within their borders" (4). Chin further points out that a "comparative approach [among European nations] is absolutely crucial to our understanding of European multiculturalism," because while these nations "initially approached the issue of immigrants from different starting points […] they end[ed] up in the same place" (5). Tracing the development of racial and ethnic discourses in Western Europe since 1945, Chin assesses that "Europeans have come to define multiculturalism as the central fault line in their society, history, and politics" (3), and that a homogenized notion of one 'Islam' has emerged as the central point of argument for cultural difference (4). Chin mentions different forms of multiculturalism that exist across Europe, such as conservative, liberal, or pluralist ones (19), and explains that these are dependent upon respective national political debates. What combines all of these, I believe, is that each of them hinges upon an implicit definition of national cultural norms and values, which are, as I have elaborated upon earlier in this paper, deeply interconnected with European concepts of whiteness. Before I move on to a discussion of the combination of whiteness and nationalism, however, I first need to lay out the role that affect plays in racialization.

## 3: Identity, Affective Investment, Alliance

It is in the awareness of—and opposition to—norms that a fascinating link to queerness emerges: If queerness means interrogating (primarily sexual) norms and positioning oneself in opposition to these,[6] how, then, can we think of a critical rejection of racial categories? This approach looks towards Queer Theory for inspiration, while we should perhaps tread carefully when assessing the success of this field of thought in society at large. While the past years have seen at least marginal advances in upending the gender binary (social media behemoth Facebook currently lets users choose between 60 different gender identities to cater to their users' individual identities, much to the dissatisfaction of reactionaries), the prevalent categories of 'man' and 'woman' still appear vastly dominant across all sectors of public life, at least at the time of this writing. Given my above elaborations on some of the ways in which Race is socially constructed, my attempt here is then to bridge the link from queer theory, pointing out the seemingly natural, but socially constructed categories of 'man' and 'woman,' and the, as I have shown in this essay, similarly socially constructed categories of Race and/or ethnicity. Sure enough, we cannot step in front of a white nationalist demonstration, either in Germany or the US, and point out that such a thing as whiteness does not actually exist. Instead, I would like to suggest assessing the affective investments that people have in their respective socially produced identity categories in the first place.

Having escaped Nazi Germany for the United States, Hannah Arendt published the essay "Organized Guilt and Universal Responsibility," in which she describes the ways in which the white, non-Jewish German population dealt with their own complicity in the horrors of the Third Reich, and the role that pride and shame play in this process. I take this as a starting point for a complication of the concept of whiteness with Affect Studies, since the affective investment in racialization plays an important part also in the concept of white pride or white shame that Wiegman warns against, as I have demonstrated in the first part of this article. Arendt writes:

> For many years now we have met Germans who declare that they are ashamed of being Germans. I have often felt tempted to answer that I am ashamed of being human. This elemental shame, which many people of the most various nationalities share with one another today, is what is finally left of our sense of international solidarity; and it has not yet found an adequate political expression […]. For the idea of humanity, when purged of all sentimentality, has the very serious consequence that in one form or another men

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6　For a detailed description of the project of Queer Studies, see Butler, "Critically Queer."

> must assume responsibility for all crimes committed by men and that all nations share the onus of evil committed by all others. (154)

For one, it should be mentioned that this quote, like all others about European contexts in this article, makes the Holocaust the center of racialization, which omits Germany's colonial history. Certainly German racism existed long before the Holocaust. This is missing from Arendt's discussion of guilt and shame and begs the question whether perhaps instead of pride and shame, we are in this case confronted with willful ignorance. That being said, I nevertheless would like to use Arendt's concept of pride and shame—especially shame for the human condition—and connect it back to Wiegman's critique of Whiteness Studies: Instead of focusing on "white antiracist self-creation" (192), I think it becomes important to move above and beyond this affective investment of white people. Similarly, a critique of affective investment in white antiracism comes from Ahmed, who writes: "The shameful white subject expresses shame about its racism, and in expressing it shames, it 'shows' that it is not racist: if we are shamed, we mean well. The white subject that is shamed by whiteness is also a white subject that is proud about its shame" ("Declarations" 28). This presents us with the conundrum that on the one hand, going along with Arendt, shame for the human condition, and thus shame for racism of any kind, appears as something valuable, while at the same time, going along with Wiegman and Ahmed, white shame appears utterly unhelpful, since it centers white feelings. Instead, as Ahmed suggests in a later article, an affective response to non-white critiques of whiteness commonly produces "white discomfort" ("Phenomenology" 163), which I would like to offer as one way of thinking differently about affective responses to critiques of whiteness. Important here of course is to de-center whiteness, and perhaps studying its effects is what we should be interested in above all else, which leads me to ask whether studying 'white oppression' might be a more fitting name for the academic study of what is usually referred to as 'Whiteness Studies.'

I would like to suggest here that a field of whiteness studies should perhaps begin by de-centering white thoughts, feelings, and assessments, and instead begin groundwork of assessing stories about the effects of white supremacist work, past and present. For instance, we might consider *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* here: Its narration of the lynchings, threats, and constant oppression that Malcolm X and his family had to endure, I believe, is one of the most important books about the history of whiteness in the United States. Most importantly, this book does not center around white feelings, but instead provides insights into the effects of white hatred and white supremacy on the lives of Black people. I suggest here that it is most productive to move our focus over onto those who suffer from the effects of white supremacy instead of staying locked inside of a framework that seeks to understand and rationalize the motivations of those who follow this movement.

Trying to make sense of Arendt's concept of elemental shame for a contemporary critique of whiteness and the potentially counterproductive affective investments in such a critique, I think it is important to underpin that, going along with Judith Butler, pride and shame are essentially two sides of the same coin, since both of them are strong affective investments in the same subject ("Critically Queer" 23). I am taking this approach to think here about affective investments in whiteness: After all, white pride is one of the central concerns and worst-case scenarios that Wiegman and the people that she cites, such as Richard Dyer, might come out of the academic pursuit of Whiteness Studies (139). As commented on earlier, the biggest critique that both Wiegman and Dyer as well as Ahmed formulate about (Critical) Whiteness Studies as an academic field is that it might center white feelings and thus end up being a self-serving discipline for white academics who grapple with their white guilt. Hence, I would like to inquire into the performativity of Critical Race Theory itself. Torn somewhere between the rejection of biologism, the acknowledgement of the existence of racialization and racism—and European models avoiding Race altogether in the treatment of race as an ethno-cultural phenomenon—I arrive at questions about the notion of performance and performativity, taken from Gender Studies.

Let me illustrate what I mean by this, and why I think it is important for a discussion of whiteness, with a brief detour into gender performance: According to Judith Butler, who works extensively with Sigmund Freud's writings on the subject, melancholia is inherent in all gender performance: If gender is always an imitation, a performance of a socially constructed idea of what a gender identity is, then any affective investment in a gender identity (e.g. somebody proclaiming that they are proud or being a man) is in effect mourning for an ideal of masculinity.[7] Importantly, Butler calls these performances of gender compulsory, meaning that despite being socially constructed, they hold great power over individuals who are socially coerced into enacting them. While gender and Race produce vastly different social outcomes, I would like to ponder this point for a moment and point out that, similarly, Anne Cheng states that racialization itself can be considered a melancholic activity. As she lays out, processes of racialization are acts of "self-constitution through denying and re-assimilating the Other" (54), which, much like in Butler's concept of the gender binary and the necessity of the Other, is a fascinating approach to me when thinking back to the Baldwin's quote about Europeans

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[7]    In Butler's words: "The effect of an ungrieved loss (a sustaining of the lost object/Other as a psychic figure with the consequence of heightened identification with that Other, self-beratement, and the acting out of unresolved anger and love), it may be that performance, understood as 'acting out,' is significantly related to the problem of unacknowledged loss" (*Precarious*, 24-25).

declaring themselves white upon arriving in America, with which I opened my analysis. As Cheng's article illustrates, Freud's concept of mourning and melancholia can be applied to formations of Race, at least when Race is formed through means of ascribing ethno-cultural difference, as is common in the West-European paradigm.

Furthermore—and please forgive me for weaving together theorists and texts at this pace—we can connect Butler's approach of melancholia and compulsory performance to Arjun Appadurai's book *Fear of Small Numbers*: While Appadurai's work is largely about India and its treatment of Muslim minorities, his work on the connection between religious identity and nationalism provides valuable insights into ethnic homogeneity and conformity reminiscient of Hannah Arendt. Let us consider for instance Appadurai's concept of "predatory identities" and their relation to racialized Others, which I consider a brilliant approach towards understanding European discourse's attempts to grapple with immigrant populations: He explains that the existence of ethnic or racial minorities within a national body is commonly perceived as a threat by subjects belonging to a respective majoritarian social group. Appadurai calls this "predatory identities" (52) and lays out how the very existence of the minority signals the ethnic non-purity of the nation. The majority's "anxieties of incompleteness" thus propel the urge to purify (Appadurai 52), which reminds me of Arendt's concepts on conformism and conformity as an integral part of the human condition and needs to be actively worked against. If not actively combatted, Arendt states, conformism will lead to the rise of totalitarianism ("The Public" 43), a statement that we find echoed in Appadurai, who writes: "My suggestion is that all majoritarianisms [sic] have in them the seeds of genocide, since they are invariably connected with ideas about the singularity and completeness of the national ethnos" (57). As this makes clear, racialization and nationalism are linked and often mirror one another; a fact that we should perhaps keep in mind when we set out to dismantle white supremacy.

Let me return at this point to Judith Butler's critique of using "queer" as an identity marker: In *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, she writes the following:

> A politics of alliance […] rests upon, and requires, an ethics of cohabitation. But for now, let me say that if the allocation of rights to one group is instrumentalized for the disenfranchisement of basic entitlements to another, then the group entitled is surely obligated to refuse the terms on which political and legal recognition and rights are being given. This does not mean that any of us give up existing rights, but only that we recognize that rights are only meaningful within a broader struggle for social justice, and that if rights are differentially distributed, then inequality is being instituted through the tactical deployment and justification for gay and lesbian rights. As a result, I propose we remember that the term queer does not designate identity, but alliance, and it is a good

term to invoke as we make uneasy and unpredictable alliances in the struggle for social, political, and economic justice. (70)

It is with this quote that I see a link between queer theory and questions of whiteness that is so striking, it almost hits me in the face: Just like Butler reminds us that 'queer' designates not identity, but alliance, I propose we consider contemplating racial formations through the same lens. As my above discussion has revealed, both are socially constructed categories that carry great significance as identity markers for those slotted into them by society at large. When we are thus called upon with sentences such as 'I can tell you're not all white,' I propose not taking this as a call to clarify one's belonging—or un-belonging—to an identity category. This is also where the link to Glissant's concept of opacity from the first part of this article comes back to us: My response to being addressed as 'not all white' in that case would not be concerned with skin, hair, habitus, clothes, or any other personal characteristic, but instead would prompt a critical consideration of how I engage my white structural positionality in terms of alliances with those who are non-white. This, then, means that my racial identity is not about making myself visible to or classifiable by other people, or about my subjectivity, but that it is instead about the alliances that I form based upon such encounters.[8] When Butler thus writes that queerness denotes not identity, but alliance, it is my understanding that she does not ask us to ignore the ways in which the identities of LGBTQIA people are considered deviant by cissexist heteronormativity. Instead, I think it is an acknowledgement of these and subsequent formations of alliance, seeing where we are being othered, oppressed, or excluded, and thus forming new, affective ways of helping one another.

We may also be reminded here of Eve Kosofsky Sedwick's *Epistemology of the Closet*: In this 1990 text, the author laments that the public act of *coming out* of a metaphorical closet, in which the non-heterosexual subject had supposedly been hiding, serves mainly heteronormativity. For one thing, this concept of the closet illustrates for Sedgwick what she calls "compulsory heterosexuality" (81), meaning that heterosexual subjects are not asked or expected to *come out* of anything. Secondly, and more importantly, the author illustrates with this that erotics and sexual desire are subsumed into one and the same identity category, labelled with the word *gay*, which describes no longer merely genital acts, but one's "personality structure" (82-83). This, in turn, allows for an assumed binary opposition between

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8    This does, of course, in no way negate or lessen in any way my own whiteness and the privilege that comes along with it. As I argue throughout this article, whiteness cannot be wished or theorized away, as much as a white subject that is shameful about their whiteness may want to.

heterosexuality and homosexuality which, according Sedgwick, are mirrored in other identities that one might *come out* as, such as Jewish, fat, Black, or female (75). As Marlon B. Ross points out, these identity categories cannot be equated. While some of them may require *coming out* because they are not visible to the outside world, other identity markers, such as Blackness, are always already visible, as cases of racial profiling by police remind us. The productive moment that I still take from Sedgwick, however, is her assessment that identity categories are not only markers for the minoritized subjects who identify with them, but they are also crucial for the majoritarian group that seeks to classify and codify its own belonging to a position of naturalized dominance.[9]

Another powerful critique of (or rather addendum to the way we can think about) identity comes from José Muñoz: In the introduction to *Disidentifications*, he reminds us that "the fiction of identity is one that is accessed with relative ease by most majoritarian subjects" (5), while minority subjects "must work with/resist the conditions of (im)possibility that dominant culture generates" (6). Most powerful to me here is the interrogation into identity categories themselves: Muñoz writes that the "essentialized understanding of identity […] by its very nature must reduce identities to lowest-common-denominator terms" (6). This takes me right back to the anecdote with which I have opened this article: For whichever reason, the threshold for being read as *properly white* had apparently not been met, an unambiguous belonging to the identity category of whiteness thus negated, and an invitation to the category *Person of Color* thus extended to me. At the same time, negating my own whiteness would have felt like negation of privilege, and a misappropriation of this category: *Person of Color*. What I hope to show with this example is that self-identification is apparently not important when others see you as belonging to a specific identity category. Living in Los Angeles, I regularly get racialized as Latin-American. Back when I still cleared this up, the reasons given included 'you carry yourself like a Latino,' 'your teeth look Puerto Rican,' and 'you looked upset and I assumed it was because of the protests in Chile.' Does this mean that I am less white? I do not think so. Would this assessment change if I became the target of anti-Latinx xenophobia? Perhaps? While I do acknowledge that these examples illustrate the white privilege that I have enjoyed for all my life, they also make it all the more interesting to me to take Muñoz's approach of acknowledging the power that identity categories hold over us—while neither accepting nor rejecting them—to think about new ways forward in the fight against white supremacy.

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[9]    We may also think back here to Glissant's *opacity*, a claim voiced in opposition to colonial European regimes that sought to classify and thus make legible Black populations.

Muñoz's project is to turn towards the practice of disidentification, meaning that to perform the self in ways that are aware of the pre-scripted identity categories available to us while not rejecting them, but acknowledging them, and appropriating them depending on the minoritarian subject's respective personal needs. This process, in Muñoz referred to *identities-in-difference*, is one that I would like to remind us of here: If whiteness, as I have discussed above, is both an affective state and a negation of alliance with non-white subjects, while at the same time a negation of one's own whiteness means negating the racial privileges enjoyed as a white (or white-passing) subject, then a different way of relating to the category of whiteness itself becomes necessary. And remember here that, as I have discussed earlier in this this part, that investment in identity categories is always highly affective.

Now, what were to happen if we took these thoughts of interrogating the sexual and gender identity categories that are available to us, that we are all too often asked to slot ourselves into, or perhaps that give us powerful ways of locating ourselves, and used the lessons from queer theory to think about instances of racialization and the fight against white supremacy? For one thing, we need to ask what it means to be a white supremacist in this context. As a shorthand answer, I propose that this is somebody unwilling to see themselves in alliance with anyone they deem non-white, or 'not all white,' to mirror the language from the example with which I began this paper. In other words, they cling to the "bad object" that is whiteness and try to defend it as a neutral or innocent category (Wiegman 197).

## Concluding Thoughts

As I have pointed out with this article, defining whiteness remains a difficult feat. As my anecdotal introduction has shown, conceiving of whiteness as an individual trait rather than a vector of power proves insufficient, and most likely creates awkward feelings instead of social action. Instead, as I have illustrated here, we might perhaps also think of it as an affective investment and look at it from the angle of alliance rather than identity. I have pointed to the complexities of trying to define whiteness and attempting to critically study it, while at the same time recognizing its persistence in the formation of individual nationalisms. I have shown that discussions about Race are as tabooed as they are important. In using critiques of previous iterations of Whiteness Studies, I have shown that a comparative analysis between European and US views of whiteness is crucial, and that a future project of properly critiquing whiteness needs to involve epidermal, economic, and ethno-cultural factors alike. I have furthermore pointed towards the ways in which whiteness is defined in Europe vis-a-vis the United States, so as to further complicate the critiques that I have elaborated on.

I have also pointed out the importance of whiteness in nationalisms. As my discussion of pride and shame in relation to whiteness has shown, affective investments in Race seem to be standing in the way of attempts to empty it of its power to be abused by racist and xenophobic forces. In other words, I have shown that there can be no Race without racism. Hence, I arrive at the conclusion that a definition of whiteness in a transnational framework will have to take into consideration critical analysis of various ethno-cultural markers, which further complicates attempts at establishing a field of (Critical) Whiteness Studies, but at the same time marks an important pillar in this larger project. The biggest gap, with which I end this article, is that of a question about the potential transnational concept of whiteness: Given the links between affect and identity that I have pointed out in this article, the main question moving forward becomes how we can conceive of an altogether different type of affective investment into whiteness, one that works actively to combat white supremacy, without centering around the feelings of white people.

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