

# IDENTITY POLITICS, SOLIDARITY, AND THE AESTHETICS OF RACIALIZATION

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Critics of identity politics such as Mark Lilla (2017) and Asad Haider (2018) assert the often heard criticism that contemporary identity politics of marginalized or subordinated groups reinforce a vulgar tribalism. Identity politics is perceived as that which cannot serve as a force for just societal change since it is thought to undermine the possibility of crossing differences and engendering solidarity.<sup>1</sup> Realizing this possibility is seen to be especially important for addressing the racial polarization and cultural divisions that are evidenced in the United States today. However, such critiques against identity politics jettison any deep understanding or recognition of the structures and orientations that sustain the call to racial identity politics as found, for example, in the Black Lives Matter movement. In this article, I will examine what those structures and orientations are and explore the ways in which such an examination may reframe our understanding of what it is that might be required for the cultivation of solidarity.

Identity politics is a notion originally conceived in the late 1970s by the Combahee River Collective (CRC), a group of Black lesbian feminists who did not see parts of their experiences and concerns reflected or addressed by either the Black liberation movement or the feminist movement. For the CRC, “the most radical politics emerged from placing their own experience at the center of their analysis and rooting their politics in their own particular identities” (Haider 2018, 7–8). At the same time, the CRC also emphasized coalition building, since one of their other grounding assumptions was that major systems of oppression were interlocking, and that any real change or liberation could only come about through working in solidarity, through coalition building, with all who are oppressed (Combahee River Collective 1977, 8–9).

<sup>1</sup> Utilizing Lawrence Blum’s (2007) definition, solidarity indicates “a kind of pulling together of a group in the face of perceived adversity, [which indicates] generally but not necessarily human-created adversity” (53).

Haider (2018) argues that contemporary identity politics has strayed far from what its originators conceived it to be. Both Haider and Lilla (2017) point to the notions that Amy Chua (2018), in her article for *The Guardian*, identified as plaguing contemporary identity politics: (1) the stance against universalist rhetoric; (2) epistemological exclusivity, which indicates that “out-group members cannot share in the knowledge possessed by in-group members” (e.g., “You can’t understand x because you are white”); and (3) the stance against cultural appropriation, which is “rooted in the belief that groups have exclusive rights to their own histories, symbols, and traditions.” Lilla (2017) writes that identity politics “fetishizes our individual and group attachments, applauds self-absorption,” and thus is a depoliticizing force (132). Solidarity, for Lilla, has to be cultivated through the realm of what he calls “shared citizenship” (126), which he states is the “work of generations” (132) and which arises from the old model of citizenship from which we have purportedly strayed. The old model emphasized

passion and commitment, but also knowledge and argument. Curiosity about the world outside your own head and about people unlike yourself. Care for this country and its citizens, all of them, and a willingness to sacrifice for them. And the ambition to imagine a common future for all of us. (140–41)

Here, solidarity seems to be based on the holding of certain values and dispositions together, values and dispositions that are to be cultivated over generations. One has to ask, however, what do these values and dispositions actually mean within the context of the different experiences that different groups in this country have undergone? Whose values and dispositions are actually being upheld? What are the accepted forms of the embodiment and enactment of these values and dispositions? Without an engagement with such questions, Lilla’s articulation of citizenship remains aligned with socialization intent on reproducing the socio-political status quo, where an “in-group” can be strengthened and maintained only if identity affiliations are bracketed (DesRoches 2015, 540).

But even more so, as theorists such as Katherine Franke (2016) and Shaireen Rasheed (2020) have indicated, Lilla’s argument remains in the service of repositioning whiteness. As Rasheed notes, the exhortation to bracket identity affiliations and the lived experiences that go along with such affiliations are done in the name of a purported neutrality, which in reality puts the very existence and safety of those who are subordinated and marginalized in jeopardy. Quoting Franke with reference to Mark Lilla’s attack on identity politics, Rasheed writes:

[i]t is a liberalism that figures the lives and interests of white men as the neutral, unmarked terrain around which a politics of “common interest” can and should be built. And it is a liberalism that regards the protests of people of color and women as a complaint or a feeling, ignoring the facts upon which those protests are based—facts about real, dead, tortured, raped, and starved bodies. (2020, 156)

In other words, Lilla's (2017) critique of identity politics can be seen itself to be built upon the shoulders of a pernicious white identity politics that serves to reinforce a system of racism.

Approaching the critique of identity politics from a Marxist foundation and thus in distinction from Lilla's focus on the ideals of shared citizenship, Haider (2018) tries, nevertheless, to point toward a solidarity that goes beyond the binary of identity politics and class solidarity and therefore beyond any "orthodox class reductionism" (Chen 2018). Haider notes that early socialist organizations did not recognize the uniqueness of Black workers' demands, which stemmed from the discrimination and racist violence they were facing within the workplace and beyond (59). Thus, Haider provides a nod toward the view that white supremacy serves to buttress racial solidarity among whites over class solidarity across races, and thus serves as an obstacle to building socialism (51). But concomitantly, Haider argues that contemporary identity politics that take the form of racial identity politics actually serve "as the *neutralization* of movements against racial oppression" by setting up the ideology of Blackness versus anti-Blackness, which hinges on the very epistemological exclusivity and protectionist stance towards a group's histories, symbols and traditions as noted earlier (12; emphasis in original). Hence, according to Haider, contemporary identity claims "lose their grounding in mass movements" (22). However, as the Field Street Collective (2018) note in their review of Haider's book: "[t]he book's narrow conception of identity does not investigate the term as a potential signifier of shared history or culture. It is also unclear whether attachments to specific identities should or could be 'set aside' without the transformation of the conditions that materially reproduce them." Correlatively, as Listen Chen (2018) notes, Haider fails to offer any sustained analysis of the "historical *production* of race" (emphasis in original). Consequently, to illuminate that which sustains the call to racial identity politics for marginalized or subordinated populations such as those represented by the Black Lives Matter movement within the United States, I will draw upon insights from critical phenomenology and affect theory in conjunction with Nell Irvin Painter's (2010) historical accounting of the enlargement of whiteness, W. E. B. Du Bois' (1920) reflections on the 1917 East St. Louis riots against Black workers, and Arlie Russell Hochschild's (2016) ethnographic research on the United States Tea Party members' adherence to conservative politics. If the call to solidarity is to be delinked from the discourse of domination, it must take into account both the relational as well as intersectional nature of any identity, which consequently will point toward the need for a differential mobilization of solidarity predicated on a shift of current material and affective conditions.

## THE AESTHETICS OF RACIALIZATION

What gets lost or remains unaddressed in the way the critiques against identity politics are currently framed is precisely the reality of what I call the mobilization of the aesthetics of racialization, by which I mean our experiencing the world and coming to our identities by being interpellated through and by certain movements, patternings, cadences and tempos

in relation to spaces, bodies, and things. Such mobilization is to be understood through the terms of the socio-political materiality of race. The socio-political materiality of race is a counterpoint to any naturalistic or biological sense of race. But this does not mean that race is just a socially constructed idea and thus merely “a cultural *representation* of people” (Saldanha 2006, 9; emphasis in original). As noted by Linda Martin Alcoff (2014), race is not a “mythic overlay that can be discursively corrected” (266). Rather, drawing upon ideas presented by theorists such as Charles Mills (2014), Alcoff (2014) and Michalinos Zembylas (2017), we can understand the socio-political materiality of race to indicate race’s reality in the way macro-historical events (i.e., slavery, colonial conquest, imperial wars, famines, land annexation) are entangled with “material, affective and discursive elements . . . [which] might include skin color, segregation, colonialism, oppression, law, language, the educational system and migration,” enabling the very *happening* of race and its lived experience (Zembylas 2017, 401; emphasis in original).

Zembylas (2017) highlights the notion that race is a contingent but not arbitrary event and is the “‘product’ of affective power relations” (401), where affects are to be understood in the following ways: affects are (1) “transpersonal [in that] they are “positioned within and between bodies, formed through relations and interactions between bodies.” They are (2) indicative of “capacities rather than existing properties of the body.” In other words, affects indicate the unspecifiable-in-advance things a body may be capable of doing in any given situation. Lastly, they are (3) “non-cognitive” in that they are pre-representational (399). Importantly, this understanding of affect subverts the binaries of “power/resistance, public/private . . . the world ‘out there’ (external) and the body (internal)” (2020, 42). Affective elements sustain the very event of racialization.

Zembylas (2017) rightly emphasizes that a body’s capacities emerge as an open-ended achievement on the basis of affective power relations and thus such capacities are not pre-determined by social structures or fixed identities (401). Hence, a key educational task, as Zembylas notes, would be to explore how new configurations of affective openings may arise within the educational endeavor. However, for the purposes of this paper in understanding the oppressive social relations to which Black bodies are often subjected, and to which racial identity politics is often a response, it is important to not rush to the theoretical endpoint of affects’ liberatory potential: to call out a body’s capacities in ways that “enable new ways of feeling and being with others, beyond what is already known and assumed” (402). As will be illustrated in the sections below, tarrying in the exploration and analysis of the patternings and movements through which bodies in this current social and political moment in the United States often emerge as Black provides one with a broader prism through which to understand both the call to racial identity politics as well as the call toward solidarity.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> It is important to note here that the analysis that follows below is not an assertion of the neoliberal understanding of identity politics as an ethos of vulnerability. In the neoliberal narrative, it is upon a victimized identity that identity groups make their claims on “rights, status and privilege” (Brunila and Rossi 2017, 288). Here, the victimized identity is defined through “psycho-emotional vulnerabilities,” “individual harm and psychic pain” (291). Therapeutic solutions are offered and prioritized, thereby “individualizing structural exclusions” (292). What is foreclosed is the ability to view societal problems as structural problems, which require a change in policies in order to address them. In addition, with

Sara Ahmed's (2007) analysis of the different bodily orientations or starting points for bodies marked through whiteness and for those of color, is instructive here. According to Ahmed:

whiteness indicates a body that is extended by the spaces it inhabits, and where those spaces have already taken its shape. To be extended by spaces indicates that certain physical objects, styles, capacities, aspirations, techniques, habits are within reach.

In contrast, she continues:

the body of color is structured/produced through a disorientation of the body-that-is-not-at-home, which keeps certain physical objects, styles, capacities, aspirations, and techniques out of reach. Here, the body is not extended by the spaces one inhabits, but encounters explicit points of stress, pressure points, and points of stoppage that restrict what one can do, bringing to the fore the background into which white bodies normally sink. (154)<sup>3</sup>

Current media accounts are rife with conflict-laden incidents in which social interactions undergone by Black people reflect the playing out in everyday life of the theoretical analysis provided by Ahmed. Shopping in a store, driving a car, walking down the street, jogging in a park, barbecuing or bird-watching in a park, standing in an elevator, sleeping in a common room at a university, eating lunch on campus, sitting at a Starbucks, entering their own home, leaving their Airbnb rental, are all but a few of the many everyday occurrences where Black bodies have been actualized as Black through affective power relations and reacted to with fear, hostility or suspicion, illustrating, sometimes with devastating effect, how bodies of color are not extended by the spaces they inhabit (Sinha and Rasheed 2020, 16).

Correlative to Ahmed's analysis, theorists such as Helen Ngo (2016), Tyson Lewis (2016), and Alia Al-Saji (2014) highlight our fundamental relation to the world through the historico-racial body schema. Deriving from the Merleau-Pontian notion of the body schema, which, as Lewis notes, signifies the "pre-representational sensory motor capacity functioning below the level of reflective awareness, and 'which provides a posture toward a certain task, actual or possible,'" the historico-racial body schema extends our

the neoliberal rendering of identity politics, as subjects are made weak and interchangeable, they are also made competitive, resulting in what is termed "oppression olympics," where groups compete for the distribution of reparative measures based on the ranking of the harms to which they have been subjected. The understanding of the systemic interconnection of harms is foreclosed. Furthermore, the neoliberal rendering of the ethos of vulnerability is to be distinguished from the decolonial analysis of the harms and trauma that befall indigenous populations and non-majoritarian identity groups. The decolonial analysis of traumatized embodied positionalities exceeds and deconstructs the boundaries of the neoliberal framework of individual rights and privileges. See Adefarkan (2018).

<sup>3</sup> See also Sinha (2018, 220).

understanding of the body schema as already racialized (Sinha and Rasheed 2020, 15). Both Ahmed (2017) and Lewis (2016) note that race doesn't just interrupt the body schema but is constitutive of it and structures its mode of operation. Thus, as Lewis highlights, the body can serve as a site of the "inscription" and reinscription "of racialization" (Lewis 2016, 127). Ngo (2016) notes that the above occurs effortlessly through the recalling and reiteration of "responses that reside within the body schema," and it takes place pre-cognitively and pre-psychologically on the basis of habituation (854). As Ngo explains, habituation indicates a bodily orienting where one actively takes up residence in the spatiality of something, reanimating the past into the present. For example, "the repeated tensing of one's muscles, the stiffening of the back, the hardening or narrowing of the eyes or expression, the flinching or recoil, the hurried indignant movement toward another [or] the solicitous going toward, are all actions through which one may relate to the other as threatening, to be feared, [to be questioned], mistrusted, disdained or even pitied." Such bodily action arises easily "and points toward a relation with the racialized other as an over-determined body that is repeatedly re-positioned as such in the very moment of bodily gesture and visual perception" (Sinha and Rasheed 2020, 17). Racializing perception thus closes down the receptive capacity and affective openness of vision (Al-Saji 2014, 140).

As I will show in the section below, the effects of social and political practices, understood through the entanglement of "affective, material and discursive elements," have resulted in and reinforced habituated ways of seeing and feeling about Blackness, which while not sedimented in a hard and fast way, are continuously reanimated and operative on a wide social scale (Zembylas 2020, 42). Habituation as marked by reanimation of the past into the present does not signify the historical *predetermination* of orientations and actions, but rather, utilizing Frank Margonis's (2016) conceptualization of neocolonial relationality through the metaphor of "neocolonial dances," it signifies "an extension of behaviors and scripts handed down from prior generations" (8) which indicates also "a re-creation that occurs with new contours and new moves" (6). At the same time, Margonis notes that such dances are accompanied by an element of force such that one "often fall[s] into these dances in obedience to the institutions and social relationships they inhabit" (7).

Hence, one can argue that it is the very living-in-the-world through the historico-racial body schema that underpins the contemporary orientation toward racial identity politics as found in the Black Lives Matter movement. The historical iteration of Black freedom movements aiming to tackle "issues of Black inequality," which Yohuru Williams (2016) highlights as coalescing around the "campaigns for decent housing, quality education, the right to vote, equal access to transportation and places of public accommodation, fair labor practices, and freedom from both legal and extralegal form of Jim Crow justice" can be seen to be a response to the reanimation of the white historico-racial body schema and its habituated privileges (xiii). Habituated white privileges are to be understood as the settling into the spatiality of something as a region of power and possibility in ways foreclosed from or not as easily accessible to bodies of color.<sup>4</sup> Such reanimation and privilege are encoded

<sup>4</sup> See Lewis (2016, 10) and Ngo (2016, 850).

through social policies and practices that are grounded in white supremacy, which takes its shape at the very intersection of racism and capitalism.

### **INSIGHTS OF INTERDISCIPLINARY THOUGHT: PAINTER, DU BOIS, AND HOCHSCHILD**

Nell Irvin Painter's (2010) genealogy of whiteness, read in tandem with Du Bois' (1920) ruminations on the East St. Louis riots against Black workers in the essay "Of Work and Wealth," powerfully illuminates the intersection of racism and capitalism. While neither text is in itself phenomenological, they can be read through each other to foreground the very process of the sedimentation of the phenomenological and affective dynamics of whiteness as it occurs through such an intersection.

Painter chronicles whiteness not through a "single enduring definition," but as that which gains its contours through multiple historical enlargements, taking place "against a backdrop of the Black/white dichotomy" (201). The expansion of whiteness, understood through the terms of who could be shepherded under it and the structures that shape it, could be seen to take place under the influence of a number of social and political events; through the persistent racial animus that depended upon the invocation of an abject, racialized other; and through the "selective democratization of capitalism," indicating the inclusion of white non-elites into the process of economic mobility made possible through policies and practices that concomitantly reinforced the racial stratification of society (Robinson 2019). Painter (2010) recounted how whiteness was originally linked to a Teutonic/Anglo-Saxon heritage, signifying more than just skin color. Nineteenth century racial science and theory viewed European groups through a hierarchy of races, with those designated as Anglo-Saxon or Teutonic occupying the upper echelon. Hence, in the United States, the Irish, Italians, Southern and Eastern Europeans, all at one time or another occupied the lower racial rungs. However, unlike African Americans, Asians, and Native Americans, who were left out of the European racial hierarchy altogether and viewed instead through an even lower racial or "alien" to the American designation, the previously reviled European groups were able to become part of the white American fabric (357).

Painter (2010) details the alignment of European ethnic groups with "Americanness" and whiteness on the basis of a number of factors, of which I will provide a brief and by no means comprehensive overview. Through the removal of property qualifications for voting for free white males in the first half of the nineteenth-century, "male Europeans and their free male children could be naturalized and vote as white" (201). Their right to vote "led to involvement in politics, government patronage and civil service jobs," and eventually control of the labor unions (205). Government programs such as the 1933 New Deal benefitted the European ethnic immigrants but not the hundreds of thousand working class Blacks who had moved from the South to the North and were left out of the New Deal's provisions on labor, housing, and education (Painter 2010, 347–48). Black workers working on farms and in domestic service, were excluded from the newly created Social Security administration (348). Economic competition was intertwined with racial violence,

and inclusion in whiteness was further solidified for groups such as the Irish, by fighting against those still considered not white. In addition, with the rise of Nazi Germany, the US intellectual ethos began to connect racial science, *as it applied to whites*, to racial prejudice, and intellectuals such as Horace Kallen began to speak of American culture's greatness as lying in its plurality (Painter 2010, 327, 362).

After WWII federal programs such as the GI Bill of rights, unemployment compensation, low interest fixed rate long term loans and mortgages, 14.5 billion dollars worth of education subsidies for Veterans, and FHA financing of more than 120 billion dollars in housing, continued to set the ground for postwar prosperity for many of the ethnic groups (366–67). But since the GI Bill did not include an “antidiscrimination clause [and the Bill was] administered locally along Jim Crow lines,” African Americans were left out from these programs' reach and benefits (371). With the decimation of urban areas directly linked to the inequity of federal funding, Black families, prevented from moving to the suburbs, remained behind in urban centers, now reframed through the imagery of “the Black ghetto” (372). Americanness and whiteness came to be equated with the middle class, but African Americans were effectively shut out of such an identification. Additionally, media normalized the presence of the newer ethnic groups as American. As Painter notes, the 1950's made Frank Sinatra and Annette Funicello “into One Hundred Percent Americans who happened to be Italian” (368). Thus, taking all the above into account, Painter writes, the figure of the Black person became “conflated with those of the degenerate families and alien races of the century's first half” (372).

What is key to understand is that this enlargement of whiteness, which took place in relation to an abject racialized other in conjunction with the racial stratification that arose from the “racially exclusive pathways of mobility” (Robinson 2019) worked in an embodied way, through the affective, “material and discursive effects of ‘social relations of power’” (Adefarakan 2018, 240). It functioned as a force upon bodies where there was a taking hold of and a holding onto of certain patternings and movements, among and between bodies, spaces and things.<sup>5</sup> This point can be brought into relief through a reading of Du Bois' (1920) essay, “Of Work and Wealth,” which provides a snapshot of the human toll exacted by some of the historical events chronicled by Painter.

In “Of Work and Wealth,” Du Bois drew out the experience of the resentment and conflict sown within white workers against Black workers through the intersection of racism and capitalism. The white American worker had begun to reap the benefits of unionization, not just in terms of higher wages, but in terms of the rising of their dreams toward a middle-class existence and all its trappings. However, unionization and its benefits were more often than not foreclosed for Black workers since most unions would not admit them. As the need for workers increased on the part of the Northern employers, they turned to the Black workers in the South. As Du Bois (1920) wrote, driven by the need “to escape hunger and insult, the hand of oppression, and the shadow of death” (90), they were willing to work for the low wages offered by Northern employers, thereby undercutting the white unionized workers and “their dream of a great monopoly of common labor” (93).

<sup>5</sup> See Ngo (2016, 864).

Union leaders deflected the subsequent fury of the white workers onto the Black workers by pointing to the very fact of their Blackness and the degeneracy it purportedly signified to be the cause of the white workers' ills.

For the purposes of this paper, what is important to emphasize is that Du Bois (1920) was pointing to something that could not be encapsulated by the notion that it was merely a question of a false or illusory understanding on behalf of the white workers who could not see how the structures of the selective democratization of capitalism served to harm *both* Blacks and whites. It was not merely a question of white workers' inability to see how the very exclusion of Black workers from the structures of economic guardianship, such as unions, could be used by those in power to protect their own economic interests at the expense of workers' interests by compelling Black workers to work for wages that undercut the white workers and their unions. Du Bois was also highlighting the fomentation of conflict in ways that that could not be collapsed into merely economic or class terms and thus understood solely through the strictures of false belief or false consciousness. He wrote:

Everything in the history of the United States, from slavery to Sunday supplements, from disenfranchisement to residence segregation, from “Jim-Crow” cars to a “Jim-Crow” army draft—all this history of discrimination and insult festered to make men think and willing to think that the venting of their unbridled anger against 12,000,000 humble, upstriving workers was a way of settling the industrial tangle of the ages. It was the logic of the broken plate, which, seared of old across its pattern, cracks never again, save along the old destruction. (94)

And:

So hell flamed in East St. Louis! The white men drove even Black union men out of their unions and when the Black men, beaten by night and assaulted, flew to arms and shot back at the marauders, five thousand rioters arose and surged like a crested stormwave, from noonday until midnight; they killed and beat and murdered; they dashed out the brains of children and stripped off the clothes of women; they drove victims into the flames and hanged the helpless to the lighting poles. Fathers were killed before the faces of mothers; children were burned; heads were cut off with axes; pregnant women crawled and spawned in dark, wet fields. . . . Firemen, policemen, and militiamen stood with hanging hands or even joined eagerly with the mob. (94–95)

Du Bois' powerful depictions pointed to the very *festering* of the history of discrimination and insult levelled against those marked as Black, as it played out or was lived through the white workers' bodies, minds, and actions. We can understand a festering as a progressive deterioration within one's whole being, occurring through the reanimating of old fissures and breakages, as Du Bois' “logic of the broken plate” seems to signify. A festering of the history of discrimination and insult gives rise to certain “contingent but not arbitrary,” to

use Zembylas' phrasing, relations and interactions among and between bodies and spaces, providing the contours of what some bodies who are at "home" can do and what other bodies not-at-home can or cannot do. In short, the reviling of Blackness must also be understood in terms of the recurring reanimation of the memory of that which is to be abased, a memory inscribed and reinscribed in bodies as a muscle memory that takes hold and *is held* through a living-in-the-world that functions through the iterations of the history of discrimination and insult entangled within social structures and practices.

Significantly, traces of the patternings and movements based on such a festering continue to be evidenced in contemporary society today, haunting our everyday existence and shaping our perceptions and comportments toward each other and the world.<sup>6</sup> How police may react when they encounter Black bodies, how store employees may react to customers of color, and how non-Black people may react to Black bodies going about their everyday lives may be seen to be evocative of Du Bois' "logic of the broken plate." Correlatively, one can make the case that a corresponding logic is at play in the deeply conservative orientation of Tea Party members living in the economically, environmentally, and educationally downtrodden Louisiana Bayou County, as depicted by Arlie Russell Hochschild (2016) in her book *Strangers in Their Own Land*. While a full accounting of Hochschild's ethnographic research is not possible within the space of this paper, and while Hochschild does not present any sustained analysis of race within this work, we can nevertheless interpret her account of her subjects' narratives, in part, through a phenomenological and affective framework, based upon her descriptions of their orientations to other people and the world.

Hochschild highlights her subjects' sense that they were stuck patiently waiting in line to attain the "American Dream of prosperity and security," while others such as Blacks, women, immigrants, refugees, even animals on the endangered species list, were cutting in line ahead of them undeservedly (136–39). She notes, "[m]issing from the image of Blacks in the minds of those I came to know was a man or woman standing patiently in line next to them waiting for a well-deserved reward." And, for many "older right-wing whites . . . Blacks entered their lives, not as neighbors and colleagues, but through the television screen and newspaper," which presented the contrasting images of rich sports and entertainment stars and Blacks on welfare (147). Hochschild quotes a restaurant proprietor who states:

I hear stories and they break my heart. But then sometimes I don't know if I'm being had. I get men applying for a job. I give them a job and they don't show up. Is it just to put on their record that they applied and can continue on unemployment insurance? . . . A man from the Red Cross came asking for food for Sunday dinner for the homeless. I gave it to him because it's food. But I don't even want to go over there to see. Maybe they're not trying to be independent. (146)

Hochschild also highlights her subjects' distrust of government as driven not only by the sense that it displaced community, took away individual freedom, failed to protect citizenry, and was populated by officials who did not live modestly, but also by the sense

<sup>6</sup> See Balfour (2010, 556).

that “[the federal government] was taking from people of good character and giving to people of bad character” (114). Hochschild (2016) noted that while her subjects did not mention social class, “and enormous care was given to speak delicately and indirectly of Blacks, although fear-tinged talk of Muslims was blunt,” their flashpoint pointed toward “the local welfare offices that gave federal money to beneficiaries—Louisiana Head Start, Louisiana Family Independence Temporary assistance Program, Medicaid, the national School Lunch and Breakfast Program, [and] the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children” (114–15).

Though Hochschild highlights issues of unacknowledged class conflict at play in her subjects’ reasoning and actions, I argue that the issue of race could also be seen lurking prominently in the background. Her subjects’ narratives foregrounded how perceptions can be closed off from seeing certain groups as being subject to oppression in ways that go beyond the struggles and hardships suffered by one’s own group, in this case, the members of the Tea Party in Louisiana Bayou County. Hochschild’s subjects’ perceptions and interactions with others was habituated through the policies and practices that constituted their milieu: for example, de facto school segregation and the residential segregation upon which it depends, distorted or deficient media representation of people of color, predatory lending practices that devastate communities of color, voter suppression, inequitable funding for schools within communities of color, and neglect in the hiring and retention of educators of color. Such policies and practices contribute to the expulsion, disenfranchisement, or disempowerment of certain groups from the various social, cultural and political spheres of life, serving to cultivate a generalized perception that cannot see groups such as Blacks, for example, as having stood with others “side by side” or as also working hard without reaping its benefits. The orientation of distrust that thus arises leads to the feeling that such groups are unfairly cutting ahead of one in line and thus empowers and legitimizes certain ways of settling into the spatiality of something, that is, how it is possible to move about and interact with others within surrounding spaces. Hence, while old insults and discriminations take on modern forms, they continue to animate responses along the old trajectory, along the “old destruction” that has never fully healed (Du Bois 1920). The reanimation of the historico-racial body schema thus informs Hochschild’s subjects’ very understanding of the context of and response to their struggles and hardships in ways that reinforce structures of white supremacy.

### **CONCLUSION: RE-FRAMING SOLIDARITY**

What might solidarity require within the context of the reality of an aesthetics of racialization and the existence of the habituated historico racial body schema? Based upon the preceding discussion, I posit that solidarity needs to be reframed as built upon the recognition of the ways we are relationally-bound together historically, structurally, institutionally, and territorially.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> I am borrowing from Sigal Ben-Porath (2011) and Zembylas (2012) the language of relationality as signifying a being tied or bound together historically, institutionally and territorially. However, I am not

As it stands, under Mark Lilla's (2017) account, the ethical burden of solidarity falls disproportionately on the shoulders of those who are multiply subordinated and oppressed, precisely because the different attachments and experiences brought about by the different facets of one's identity are seen as having to be bracketed so that social bonding may occur. But the rub here is that social bonding is assumed only on the basis of one's alignment with the dominant modes of understanding and enacting ideals such as equality, freedom and justice. Correlatively, Asad Haider (2018), notwithstanding his nod against class reductionism, also builds his conception of solidarity on an abstractness that does not adequately speak to the material reality of racialization. Calls for solidarity thus become empty abstractions from real material conditions and often end up serving to perpetuate the oppressive identity politics of the dominant majority.

As Elizabeth Cole and Zakiya Luna (2010) note, those with less power and privilege are burdened with the toll of a "double shift" of the work required for solidarity: "Not only must they do the political work, but they must also struggle to decode what is unsaid and then communicate that information back to their coalition partners, who may not be eager to receive feedback reminding them of their blind spots" (94). Cole and Luna further highlight, also in contrast to Lilla and Haider's view, that identity is not a preventative to coalitional work generating political alliances. As their research on the "real-life political struggle and resistance" of activists from various identity categories showed, political alliances could be generated on the basis of "cautious and measured cooperation" as well as "a sense of some shared values," where political identities were "constructed *through* political work, rather than outside of it" (94, 95; emphasis in original).<sup>8</sup> What is important to keep in mind, as Priyamvada Gopal has noted, is that "[s]olidarity is a difficult practice that requires ongoing work" (Carby and Gopal 2020). This difficult practice entails that we understand how our historical, structural, institutional and territorial positioning plays out at not just the cognitive, but also the embodied, material and affective levels. In other words, solidarity needs to be grounded in a people's ability to access their ethical and critical capacity to recognize how the many identity positions of race, caste, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, disability, etc., that any individual inhabits, is linked to certain discourses and power relations. Further, solidarity requires recognition of how different facets of one's identity affect and interact with the different facets of another's identity, serving as the site of oppression of others as well as subordination by others. Finally, it requires recognition of the intersections of a given identity position by other categories of difference, resulting in a reinforcing, weakening or reconfiguration of that very identity.

utilizing this language to signify our ties and linkages in terms of our "common objectives and interests" (555). Rather, I'm using the language of relationality to point to how our actions, choices, practices, values, and beliefs, as well as the structures in which we participate, help create what others experience and who others are and become.

<sup>8</sup> The Black Lives Matter (n.d.) website, for example, highlights the need to move beyond "narrow nationalism," and the affirmation of "Black queer and trans folks, disabled folks, undocumented folks, folks with records, women and all Black lives along the gender spectrum." Hence, the focus on Black lives is posited as opening up to solidarity and political alliance with subordinated groups, as well as centering "those who have been marginalized within Black liberation movements."

Significantly, wherever and whenever an individual occupies identity positions of power and privilege in relation to others, the ethical burden of solidarity falls upon one in a pressing way.

While solidarity “starts with awareness of interdependence” (Direk 2018, 106), it also needs to be sustained by material enactments that enable one to be moved, to feel, and to perceive differently, so that one’s habituated ways of moving and being may begin to take on different patterns and contours. Solidarity is predicated on the possibility of unsettling the ways one settles into the spatiality of something: the positionalities one currently occupies must be understood and engaged from different positionalities. One way to unpack what is meant here is to draw on the need for what Margonis (2016) described as “delinking” from the sustained patterns of colonial violence that were part of the founding of the United States and from the “patterns of thought . . . [that] rationalize and normalize [the] founding acts of violence and their contemporary legacies” (1). As an example, Margonis pointed to the necessity of unsettling imperial authority that finds its iteration or echoes in authoritarian discipline as it emerges in detention or punishment rooms, as well as the standard didactic curricular practices in schools, which are leveled disproportionately toward students of color. Here, what is to be interrupted and redirected is the repeated framing and living of the interaction between students and teachers as one of “imposition and resistance,” which frames students as culturally deficient, defiant or unteachable (Margonis 2016, 7).

Correlatively, Zembylas (2020) spoke of the importance of “dewalling atmospheres” understood through Vrasti and Dayal’s exhortation to “become aware of [the] class and colonial dimension of many of the taken for granted and innocently functional arrangements operative in Western liberal societies” (45). In this vein, Lyudmilla Bryzzheva (2018), self-identifying as a White Russian immigrant educator, highlighted the need for her ongoing vigilance in staying open to the ways in which interactions with her students of color served to unsettle her ease and familiarity with her movements, perceptions, and actions within the space of the racially conscious classroom that she was trying to create. Bryzzheva detailed how her attempts at arranging the classroom space and interaction through the employment of affinity groups and circles inadvertently ended up prioritizing the norms of whiteness and needs of her white students. She writes:

Regardless of intention, in our circle space, participants are invited to inhabit whiteness. In hidden but real ways our circle is about control. We monitor in verbal and non-verbal ways whose stories and what stories are most welcome, whose emotional safety will be guarded, what emotional expressions will be legitimated, what types of disagreements and with whom are deemed appropriate, and how deviations from our unspoken norms will be disciplined: sometimes via silence, sometimes by switching the topic or via non-verbal expressions. Niceness and consensus (even if uneasy) are consistently elevated and legitimated. (251)

Thus, Bryzzheva (2018) highlights the ongoing need to stay open to the ways she is ambushed by her own whiteness and to interrupt the whiteness of and in a space (255).

Hence, both the notions of delinking and dewalling point to the very unsettling of Western liberal ideals and arrangements, such as those of

responsible citizenship/subjecthood, to the rules of assessment, etiquette, and advancement, guarding access to our institutions and fields of action, as well as the values promoted in our normative discourses and the desires perpetuated in our “structures of feeling.” (Vrasti and Dayal 2016, 1004)

This is because such ideals and arrangements have often served to both exclude the subordinated from dominant discourses and their terms of universality, as well as violently fit the subordinated into a dominant group’s normalized discourse.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, dewalling atmospheres and delinking from sustained patterns of colonial violence would entail a redirecting or redrawing of the spatial and affective dimensions of life. This could then lead to a reconfiguring of one’s “bodily habits of movement, gesture, perception and orientation,” so that what a body is capable of doing as well as the interactions called out among bodies may take on potentially less oppressive/oppressed and more just configurations (Ngo 2016, 848). It is through such unsettling that the space for new ways of being, moving, feeling, perceiving, and thinking to arise may be potentially opened and meanings other than those engendered by dominant narratives and interactions may emerge, motivating a coming together and commitment to working together in ways that were perhaps previously limited or foreclosed.

I have argued that the movement toward identity politics among subordinated groups can be seen as a response to real material conditions, to the aesthetics of racialization, which overflows the rhetoric that is expressed by identity politics’ castigation as epistemologically exclusive, protective of its histories, symbols and traditions, and reinstating siloed identities incapable of political mobilization. It is only by foregrounding how we come to our identities through the habituated movements, patterns, orientations, and capacities called out of our bodies in relation to spaces, places, other bodies and things, that can we begin to understand what sustains the call toward racial identity politics. Due to the socio-historical workings of white supremacy, which subtends embodied orientations and potentialities, the work of solidarity asks different things from differently-positioned people. Most significantly, solidarity is predicated on both pedagogical and policy enactments that may enable the redirecting or redrawing of our affective lives so we may come together in ways that may be potentially sustained and marked by genuine recognition of and responsiveness to those who are oppressed and subordinated.

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<sup>9</sup> See Medina 2013; Eze 1997; O’Loughlin 2020.

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