

We Who Make One Another: Liberatory Solidarity as Relational

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ABSTRACT

Which conceptions of solidarity will help subjugated, oppressed groups pose liberatory challenges to the regimes under which they suffer? Activists and scholars concerned with liberation err by constraining solidarity to the parameters outlined in conventional moral and political theory and, therefore, by imagining solidarity as dependent on models of identity and shared interests. Organized movements may aim for expanded access to institutional claims and for cultural representation, and yet liberatory movements also have more specific objectives: to challenge the legitimacy of oppressive political and moral regimes, and to put those regimes in the obediential service of the vulnerable and oppressed. I critique notions of solidarity conceived in political philosophy as shared interests, and as a functions of identity in discourses about anti-racist, feminist, and pro-indigenous movements for social justice and cultural inclusion. Using the works of Enrique Dussel, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and Elaine Scarry, I argue that a notion of solidarity developed as a relational concept, primarily as a reference to the laborious activities of relating, can serve as a resource for liberatory projects once we describe the three main ideas as a coherent proposition: *liberatory solidarity as relational*. The concept refers to when individuals and groups continue to relate, to make one another, for the purposes of liberation despite countervailing exploitative power relations, incentives, and disincentives. Those seeking emancipatory change either labor to relate for the sake of liberation, or preserve the bigger-picture status quo in which disparate and episodic enclave movements rise and fall on the terms set by identity politics and fictive individualistic autonomy.

Dedication

Para las nepantleras.

Motto

Liberation: vanguard of morality and justice.

Solidarity: means to liberation.

Relation: *sine qua non* of solidarity.

Invocation

It would not suffice to call the document issued by Lincoln on January 1, 1863 “The *Citizenry* Proclamation” any more than it would make sense to refer the events beginning on January 27, 1945 as “the *democratization* of Auschwitz,” and in the future I hope no one could think to call the end of the prison industrial complex the result of “prison *egalitarianism*.” Emancipation, liberation, and abolition rise and fall on different priorities and objectives than political rights, social justice, and moral community. Theories and practices of liberation, morality, and politics complement, but cannot supplant one another. Cruelty and suffering thrive when hospitality, the healing that results from liberation, has no say in moral good and political right. When must good and right, decent and fair, however carefully reasoned and well justified, submit to the appeal of those in agony?

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Preface

For most of my life I have worked in various capacities as an organizer and political activist, often focusing on issues of social inequity and acting for the interests of people from historically underrepresented populations. Developing strategies and campaigns with people from various underrepresented communities and populations typically involved working on behalf who share in more than one community, who describe themselves using multiple identities. While organizing around women's and feminist issues I had to consider the interests of people of color and matters of race. Likewise, to effectively work for the anti-racist interests of people of color involved addressing the anti-patriarchal interests of women. Some of my work has also addressed the struggle of immigrants and refugees. Living and working in a wealthy, industrialized nation with a history of settler colonialism, I had to learn to address the interests of underrepresented communities broadly, including issues related to sexuality, poverty, gender identity and gender expression, disabilities, age, religious and spiritual beliefs, veterans, and many other historically, arbitrarily marginalized classifications.

In general, organizers work for solidarity among people from different backgrounds, along with those whose interests differ, and we do so with a particular goal of helping people improve their overall circumstances. As Christine de Pizan noted in the 14th century C.E., well before liberal political philosophers in the modern period, "...something which is done for the good of some but to the detriment of others is not simply a private or an individual good. In fact, it constitutes a type of injury done to one party in order to benefit the other: it thus only profits the second party at the expense of the first" and, moreover, "attacking one party in the belief that you are benefiting a third party is unfair."¹ To overlook, ignore or subordinate people from one

¹ de Pizan (2006).

group in order to advance the interests of those in another group tends to count as a failure – that is, the improvement of circumstances for one group of oppressed people that causes loss to one or more disadvantaged groups merely shifts disparities among the dispossessed and marginalized, it does not eliminate disparities or destructive social circumstances. Nor does it eliminate occasionally benevolent oppressive regimes.

Ostensibly, building relations among people from different backgrounds and with different interests requires understanding the way people identify – and how we want others to recognize us. However, applying theories of identity and identity politics posed the most challenging problems I faced, the greatest failures for which I bear responsibility, and the principal wastes of time and energy. Numerous campaigns and projects could have produced far more beneficial outcomes had matters of identity played only some part instead of, as it often turned out, playing the decisive part and, largely, as a result of the way cultural and institutional systems exploit social disparities and hostilities among people from historically underrepresented backgrounds. I tried very hard for a long time to build relations by changing my ideas of identity and by learning to outwit many beliefs and behaviors endemic to identity politics. It turns out, I had focused on the wrong variable. Rather focusing on identity, I needed to more intricately understand concepts of *relations* if I intended to foster solidarity.

To work for solidarity, an organizer takes on the ambiguous and tenuous tasks of “building relationships” with the intent that forms of collective power (e.g. communication networks, aggregated material resources, mass influence, coordinated tactics, sheer immutable strength, etc.) may result and, perhaps, serve to help improve the circumstances of those who have suffered oppression. And not simply for the short term, but in some lasting way such that both redresses former cruelties and injustices as well as preventing future harms and

discrimination. Solidarity developed for these purposes relies in some part on the confluence of laboring for liberation and the relationships that, when sustained, make emancipation more feasible, or at least less infeasible.

I have come to face a number of problems in attempting to think about solidarity and relations. This dissertation represents one part of my attempt to work out initial conceptual questions. As I explain throughout, scholars and practitioners frequently *use* language about “relationships” but they do not *explain* what they have in mind. Theorists tend to take for granted that readers will understand (or ignore?) their references to relations, and activists frequently work to build relations but without articulating what they have achieved (or failed to achieve) in doing so. It seems reasonable to present as a fact or propose as a supposition that people are *relational creatures* - that relationships comprise a fundamental condition of life. Then why, I came to wonder, have none of the theorists who most influence me bothered to describe what they have in mind with regard to basic, root notions of *relation*? Moreover, when I succeeded or failed to help foster solidarity among individuals and communities, what had my organizing work accomplished or failed to accomplish in terms of relationships? Why did individuals and groups sometimes resist the rewards and punishments, the countervailing influences that can erode solidarity? And, far more often the case, why did some individuals and groups fail to sustain solidarity even when it seemed clear to all involved that the collective benefits of certain relations far out-measured factional or episodic gains?

The education, training, and experience I received as an organizer and a scholar prepared me most of all with extensive skills at gerrymandering notions of identity, typically as the primary or dominant strategy for fostering different kinds of relationships among individuals and groups. Among my scholarly and activist peers and mentors I notice that we often want to know

how to relate but we never quite talk about relation directly. We tend to talk about identity and circumstances and all sorts of different notions, but not specifically about relation.

Scholarly theories and activist rhetorics of identity have yet to provide a reliable means of explaining the accidental and chosen memberships people have, and the different or similar circumstances people share in terms specific to *both* liberation and solidarity. Despite how my argument may at times appear unforgiving or fatalist about theories of identity, I do not count such theories as wholly useless or inevitably toxic. I do, however, consider identity and the underlying idealist models of recognition ill-suited for liberatory priorities and objectives even while better understandings of identity may help resolve questions of conceptual and practical import in terms of moral and political theory.

For several years as my concerns grew regarding the limits of identity discourses, I conducted concurrent research in ethics and political philosophy with specific emphases on oppression, moral self-deception, social justice, feminism, race, indigeneity, and a range of different theoretical interventions against cultural and institutional hegemony. I thought that by better understanding the morality and immorality of oppression, and theories of social justice I would find the resources to better comprehend how solidarity helps people endure against oppression. To a great extent these fields of thought do provide rich insights. However, I could not find adequate resources to think through solidarity. When I consulted fields of feminism, anti-racism, and pro-indigenous fields of thought as feasible models of replacing historical cruelties, I found rich diagnostic instruments about hegemonic detriments to relationships, but few theories that could guide emancipatory action conceived relationally.

I think that tells us something: perhaps relations make sense in some subtle ways because people relate all the time, in some way or another, and we get used to it. Or, from a somewhat

pessimistic take, perhaps many people share some sort of false consciousness about relations and yet we do not give due consideration to our assumptions about the laborious aspects of relating. In what follows I propose a notion of relations that may in some cases, and hopefully in many cases, elucidate what happens when people relate. If the description I offer, *relations as making*, bears relevance to oppressed groups in the contemporary world, then it does so by alerting us to consider what we make of one another as a result of the ways we do and do not cultivate and sustain relationships.

In the course of working on this dissertation I learned that, much like the absence of discourse about a root notion of relation, I had never before considered *liberation* as its own field of thought that complements ethical and political theory. Despite the long history of liberatory thought that lingers in the background of the western, Anglo-American academy and over a century of burgeoning social activism, I had mistakenly treated liberation as a subfield of ethics and politics as if emancipation stems from the same tasks and objectives of moral and political philosophy. Taking liberatory thought as its own field of inquiry, yet of course still intimate with questions ethics and politics, I have found that the pressing concerns of those who reap the arbitrary rewards of cultural and institutional oppression differ from the questions of those who endure such conditions – questions arising from the suffering of those in need of liberation.

By investigating notions of relation and liberation, I defend a theory of *liberatory solidarity as relational*. The concepts I describe will at best call attention to the consequences we pose one another if we choose to adopt liberatory priorities and objectives; they alert us to take seriously how we make one another when we engage in the labor of relation. With hope that I might prevent or forestall a misreading, I want to clarify that I propose *relation as making* to elucidate the consequences of labor, a materialist concept, and do not intend that a reader

interpellate phenomenological or idealist understandings in place of theoretical materialism that aims to explain features of human activities. *What I cause, or ask, or hope for another person to endure, and what another person causes, or asks, or hopes for me to endure has consequences for the way we make ourselves in making one another insofar as relation counts as laborious.*

Some other versions of liberatory solidarity as relational may suffice where mine does not, and I concede that the model requires practical application in order to determine its efficacy. That is, I make no *a priori* claim about the reliability of the theory in advance of what happens in application, and contend that even if my version does not provide adequate resources for everyone who seeks to organize responses to patterned oppression then it at least substantively illustrates the potential benefits of theorizing notions of relation, liberation, and solidarity vis-à-vis one another. Those who seek feminist, anti-racist, and pro-indigenous liberation will at some point have to consider what we make of one another.

Introduction

The 20th and 21st centuries appear replete with examples of liberatory movements attempting to foster and sustain solidarity among disparate factions of oppressed groups. Many of these movements struggled and continue to struggle against sexist patriarchies, racism, heterosexism, ableism, neocolonial/neoliberal destruction of indigenous peoples and habitats, and the many manifestations of cultural hegemonies and institutionalized oppressions. Not only have these movements attempted to cope with dominant societal regimes that sustain cruelties and exclusions, but also with the difficulties of disparate power relations, internalized oppression, and horizontal hostilities – with what many colloquially refer to as “people divided against one another.”² These terms collectively refer to the ways individuals cope with systematic oppression by internalizing – i.e. collude in – degradation of their own dignity, and then visit similar degradation on members of their own and other subjugated social groups.

Collusion with oppressive cultural traditions and institutional practices does not happen without societal power relations based in patterns of benefits and detriments that both incentivize complicity with an oppressive regime while simultaneously disincentivizing organized resistance. The problems at issue also exceed voluntary collusion and include patterned institutional circumstances that reify inter-group and intra-group inequities. Thinking about liberation involves attention to matters of chosen collusion and resistance as well as concerns about cultural and institutional distributions of authority and political rule, otherwise we may only think of solutions in terms of volunteerism. In response, activists working to organize emancipatory movements tend to seek collective action by fostering solidarity among disparate groups in a way that can somehow counter oppressive, sometimes benevolent regimes that

² Pharr (1996: 28-38).

exploit hostilities among marginalized populations. If successful, such coalitions could serve as a way of overpowering and, thus, challenging oppression and cultural hegemony.³ Furthermore, liberation from oppression depends in some significant ways on solidarity movements that, when effective, prevent or forestall the so-called “division” of people “against one another.”

Taking care not to conflate the individual manifestations of internalized oppression with intra-group horizontal hostilities, the two expressions of oppression yet reify one another. The respective descriptions of oppressive circumstances refer to different parts of a mutually reinforcing vicious cycle, if you will, in which individuals act out the subjugation of groups to which they belong, or to which societal norms have assigned them.⁴ Consider just one of many such cases.

In 1960 Patrice Lumumba wrote the following in a letter from prison:

They have corrupted some of our countrymen; they have bought others; they have done their part to distort the truth and defile our independence. What else can I say? ‘That whether dead or alive, free or in prison by order of the colonialists, it is not my person that is important. What is important is the Congo, our poor people whose independence has been turned into a cage, with people looking at us from outside the bars, sometimes with charitable compassion, sometimes with glee and delight. But my faith will remain unshakable. I know and feel in my very heart of hearts that sooner or later my people will rid themselves of all their enemies, foreign and domestic, that they will rise up as one to say no to the shame and degradation of colonialism and regain their dignity in the pure light of day.’⁵

In the opening sentence “they” refers to Belgium, the United States, and the European-dominated United Nations who had either resisted or delayed Congolese independence from colonial rule. Through direct military, economic, and political coercion, the former Belgian colonial powers and allies sustained regimes in Congo that, as Lumumba explains, turned

³ Ibid.

⁴ Theorized in various ways by scholars such as Crenshaw (1991), Cudd (2006), and Young & Allen (2011).

⁵ Lumumba quoted in Jean Van Lierde ed., *Lumumba Speaks: The Speeches and Writings of Patrice Lumumba, 1958-1961* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1972). - See more at: <http://www.blackpast.org/patrice-lumumbas-letter-pauline-lumumba-1960#sthash.I5HCoOqa.dpuf>.

independence “into a cage,” sometimes meting out scraps of increased freedom so as to sate against open rebellion. In this cage the Congolese peoples turned against one another, “divided” in a way that advantaged neocolonial interests at the expense of the dignity and livelihood of historically indigenous populations. As the letter proceeds, Lumumba vests his analysis with moral condemnation against indignity, and the call for political sovereignty under the banner of justice. However, “justice” and “independence” as conceived under the dominant, oppressive international and domestic regimes had effectively mitigated the kinds of changes consistent with his conception of liberation, namely, emancipation.

Lumumba’s emancipatory conceptions of dignity, justice, and independence differ from other versions that permitted collusion with western, industrialized nations. He explains further,

We are not alone. Africa, Asia, and the free and liberated peoples in every corner of the globe will ever remain at the side of the millions of Congolese who will not abandon the struggle until the day when there will be no more colonizers and no more of their mercenaries in our country. I want my children, whom I leave behind and perhaps will never see again, to be told that the future of the Congo is beautiful and that their country expects them, as it expects every Congolese, to fulfill the sacred task of rebuilding our independence, our sovereignty; for without justice there is no dignity and without independence there are no free men. [...]History will one day have its say; it will not be the history taught in the United Nations, Washington, Paris, or Brussels, however, but the history taught in the countries that have rid themselves of colonialism and its puppets. Africa will write its own history and both north and south of the Sahara it will be a history full of glory and dignity.⁶

Notice how Lumumba calls for *political justice* and *moral dignity* while distinguishing *independence* as a particular kind of necessity – a mode of thought in response to the suffering organized and enforced by colonial and allegedly postcolonial regimes. The notion of independence that informs Lumumba’s thinking bears closer attention as a particular sort of concern distinct from questions of normative cultural practices and institutional operations; activists working against oppressive distributions of social power, internalized oppression, and

⁶ Ibid.

horizontal hostility would err to think that this liberatory conception of independence fits neatly within moral and political reasoning. As I discuss in greater detail below, liberation poses a necessary, complementary balance to ethical practices and political norms, as well as to the kinds of propositions germane to moral and political theory.

Lumumba did not live to see the liberatory independence he imagined. Government agencies in Belgium and the United States conspired with United Nations officials to fund and bolster domestic antagonism among Congolese.⁷ Their strategy worked and Lumumba's erstwhile rivals – Congolese acting out incentivized horizontal hostilities – assassinated him in January of 1961, effectively carrying out the interests of nations claiming to represent democracy.⁸ For want of control of the natural resources in the Congo, western industrialized nations used their brute means to prevent putting the Congolese government in control of its own people, forbidding the Congolese state regime from serving the Congolese. The people of the Congo, and Lumumba in this particular case, needed no widely accepted theory of morality, nor a well justified model of political justice in order to make claims within the context of liberatory thought. Or, put more directly, the power and legitimacy of Lumumba's call for independence *subsumes from* dire conditions from which follows the need for liberation. Whether or not theories and practices of morality and justice answer the call, the need for liberation stems from the circumstances of arbitrary rule by cruel regimes.⁹

Given the problems of incentivized horizontal hostility and disincentivized collective action, what kind of solidarity can we imagine capable of meeting the demands of liberation? *Liberation*, here, denotes a wide range of theories and strategies that prioritize the alterity of

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Chronicled in de Witte (2001).

⁹ Dussel (1985: §3.1.8.3); Dussel (2008: §1.3, §2.3).

persons and groups, and set on the objectives of challenging the legitimacy of dominant regimes of power so as to then put any dominant regime in the service of the dispossessed and subjugated.¹⁰ Movements organized to achieve moral recognition in response to cultural hegemony and for political representation in response to institutionalized oppression may or may not derive from moral and political reasoning; such movements redress moral and political problems, but they have their genesis in the need for liberation.

Solidarity conceived within the context of moral and political problems can bring about changes, such as increased tolerance and expansion of access to civil rights for select populations – “togglings” among the demands of factional, sometimes mutually hostile, social groups who episodically seek enfranchisement particular to their historically conditioned interests. These sorts of improvements gained by toggling do likely address the varying claims of historically disenfranchised groups in ways that count as progress, but only *episodically*. The sporadic expansion of attitudes of pluralistic affirmation and social welfare benefits endemic to so-called social justice movements do not necessarily dismantle or positively replace caustic regimes. A society’s dominant regime can maim the dignity of persons, systematically derogating certain groups, even while providing various benefits and privileges that technically sustain basic livelihood and some forms of moral recognition. And a society’s normative processes may appear morally respectful and politically just so far as its citizens know. Yet, for those whom a society systematically derogates, liberatory thought generates the kinds of priorities and objectives needed to then demand changes to moral norms and political benefits at the level of power institutionally and culturally consolidated by ruling regimes.

¹⁰ Dussel (1985: §1.2.1.2, §2.6.3, §2.6.7.3, §2.6.8.3).

Solidarity, identity, and interest

Suppose individuals may comprehend a need for solidarity and also engage in practices to foster collective action inconsistent with liberatory priorities and objectives. The liberatory genesis, the call for solidarity of a certain kind, does not always carry into the way people conceive of and/or carry out practices of solidarity; not all forms of solidarity count as liberatory even if initiated by want of liberatory emancipation. Recall Lumumba's letter and consider the recipient. He wrote it to Pauline Lumumba, the woman to whom he remained married until his death. While her husband focused on one aspect of decolonial independence for the nation, Pauline Lumumba organized women to bring attention to the conditions of Congolese women as an overlooked and underaddressed matter inherent in questions of national emancipation.¹¹

Patrice Lumumba's image of decolonial independence had not adequately addressed the emancipation of women as a necessary feature of liberation. As a result, some argue, this brought about conflicts among the leaders of Congolese liberationists at a time when it appeared to many that decolonial, anti-racist solidarity involved sacrificing the concerns of women.¹² Ostensibly, patriarchy could remain intact while advancing anti-racist decolonization; conversely, to some it seemed the dismantling of patriarchy would require sacrificing anti-racist decolonization. Amid this sort of "division," whether segregated by macro-level systems of power or by adopting the ideologies of horizontal hostilities over liberation, those who seek forms of episodic, enclave improvements can and often do ultimately weaken one another to the advantage of the already-dominant.

As a minimal, non-demanding notion, the term "solidarity" can refer to absences of hostilities among individuals and groups imagined as collectives (e.g. communities, neighbors,

¹¹ Bower (2010: 1-39).

¹² Ibid.

citizens, peoples, nations, etc.). Thus, we can apply the term “negative solidarity” akin to how Johan Galtung describes “negative peace” as the absence of personal/interpersonal violence.¹³ Galtung argues that the lack of personal violence (negative peace) differs from “positive peace” a designation for conditions that lack structural violence due to the presence of a positively defined condition of social justice. By analogy, then, “positive solidarity” should similarly indicate something like conditions in which people enjoy both positive and negative peace, the absences of both personal and structural violence in the presence of social justice. This thin description has parity with negative peace/the absence of interpersonal violence as a reflection of moral practices, ostensibly informed by some form of moral reasoning, and positive peace/the absences of structural violence as a reflection of institutional powers informed by a well-justified conception of political justice. Primarily in accord with these two modes of thought, modern and contemporary theorists and activists describe solidarity in terms of shared historical origins, mutual sympathies, tolerance and affirmation of identities, shared political and economic interests, and the collective endurance of similar circumstances.

In a recent treatise on the topic in the context western thought, Sally Scholz describes solidarity as a “morally rich” notion that “[...] mediates between the individual and the community and entails positive moral duties.”¹⁴ Following from this, she provides a typology that distinguishes among social, political, and civic solidarity. Importantly, she also rebuffs the tendency to conflate solidarity proper with forms of “parasitical solidarity.”¹⁵ These latter concepts function as rhetorical instruments for stimulating hostilities and only function absent the qualities of a necessary “moral relation” germane to actual solidarity. In Scholz’s view, an

¹³ Galtung (1969: 182-184).

¹⁴ Scholz (2008: 4-12).

¹⁵ Ibid.

interest in social justice informs proper political solidarity and, therefore, conditions so-called moral relations.¹⁶

Scholz, like most scholars of moral and political solidarities, invokes notions of “relation” without further qualification, and/or by imposing metaphorical descriptions. Perhaps solidarities conditioned primarily by moral and political thought serve purposes, such as social justice, that garner no deeper questions about “relation.” Sociologists such as James Hawdon and John Ryan who directly address solidarity as generated and sustained in terms of relations leave the concept undertheorized and merely synonymous with terms such as “activities” and “interactions” but with no further qualification.¹⁷ I contend, however, that liberatory solidarity serves purposes for which moral and political conceptions of solidarity may not suffice, and in ways that depend on notions of relation.

Specifically, solidarity particular to liberation cannot satisfy patriarchy while achieving anti-racist ends, nor can we call it liberatory solidarity to achieve an end to sexist patriarchy in a way that treats racism as a secondary or lower priority. Consider some of the different ways that scholars and activists tend to posit theories of identity and interest as bases for solidarity in response to institutional oppression, horizontal hostilities, and internalized oppression. These sorts of problems pose difficulties for how to foster coherent emancipatory movements in defiance of systematic oppression, and plagues activists and scholars no less today in addressing neoliberal capitalist globalization than the problems did in earlier forms during the rise of women’s movements and anti-slavery abolitionism under the guise of essentialist discourses in the 1700’s and 1800’s. The advent of anti-essentialist social constructivism in the early and mid-20th century, and the burgeoning discourses of intersectionality in the late 20th and early 21st

¹⁶ Ibid. 189-230.

¹⁷ Hawdon and Ryan (2011).

century, remain intricately engaged in attempts to cultivate mutually reinforcing cultural and political movements. At present, questions of identity and interest, how to ethically and judiciously recognize and be recognized for who we are, and how to shift institutional distributions in accord with dignity, persist as the dominant devices for fostering solidarity against varying forms of oppression and cultural hegemonies.

Why not turn to shared identity and/or shared political interest as a basis for liberatory solidarity? Perhaps an identity as a decolonial anti-racist emancipator can include women's liberation and, likewise, an identity as a women's liberationist can include anti-racist, decolonial emancipator. And whether or not we reconcile to some sort of shared identity, perhaps individuals and groups can collectively organize around the understanding of their shared interests or stakes in institutions. I hope that some theory of identity might achieve the consonance and affinity this requires; likewise for models of shared interest. But neither has yet emerged, at least not in the form needed for widespread liberatory movements – even if it has bolstered some sort of stability in terms of domestic social tranquility, institutional operations, and economic trends.

Feminists, anti-racists, and pro-indigenous advocates have called for *changes* to moral practices and political governance, but these do not necessarily count as emancipatory. The stability of a regime does not amount to its moral fortitude, to political justice, nor to its capacity to liberate those who suffer its oppressive conditions. Even oppression can foster stability. Indeed, the proliferation of intricate and compelling identity and interest discourses have yet to provide for similarly compelling models of liberatory solidarity among disenfranchised peoples. I can therefore find no compelling reason to treat identity and interest as the default dependent

variables with regard to liberation, broadly, nor for cultivating emancipatory solidarity in particular.

My challenge stems from at least two constraints upon conventional notions of solidarity conceived in terms of identity and shared interests. One, I reject the tendency to model solidarity too narrowly in accord with parameters set forth in moral and political theory that, therefore, undertheorizes solidarity specifically in the context of liberation as a substantive field of thought that complements moral and political theories. Two, I refute the assumption that identity serves as the *sine qua non* of solidarity; theorizing as if some versions of solidarity do not stem from other operative concepts, whether or not a model resolves matters of identity. Though differentiated for a particular function, such as in modeling economics and democratic representation, theories of political interest seem dependent on and prefigured by the prototypes of identification, recognition, and representation. As I aim to show, some conceptions of solidarity may very well persist inclusive of, but not dependent on models of identity and shared interests. Liberatory solidarity as relational can happen whether or not those involved share compatible modes of recognizing identities.

A pragmatic approach to solidarity

Do social movements require a conceptually exhaustive, infeasible theory of solidarity for such a notion to benefit emancipatory movements? Or, can theories of solidarity provide fragmentary conceptual resources, works-in-progress that catalyze liberatory agendas despite certain conjectural imperfections? Following a pragmatist approach I assume that theoretical models of solidarity function as thought devices, proposed reference points that assist with

practical planning and action.¹⁸ The model I defend takes the form of a description intended to serve liberatory projects in pragmatic ways. It does not suffice to close questions about the overall meaning of solidarity, though it may pose challenges to certain models – particularly, versions that do not explicate a substantive description of relations as a foundational concept.

Given the way historically patterned oppression and cultural hegemonies persist, and cruelly so, I think it not only preferable but necessary to develop fallible (i.e. empirically sound) models of solidarity as resources that can assist and perhaps even spur practical strategies. To treat descriptions of solidarity as devices, instrumentally as John Dewey and William James might have it, permits if not also *encourages* trial-and-error attempts to foster liberatory projects *even as theories and concepts remain under development.*¹⁹ A conceptually thick model of solidarity may turn out quite thin in practice and, vice versa, a practically robust version may, as Elaine Scarry suggests, “resist representation.”²⁰ *I argue that a description of solidarity specific to liberation can help to catalyze and guide solidarity in practice, and must permit that the practical application will differ from the original description that kicks it off in the first place. Let me explain more about why I consider this crucial.*

Events such as those in the Congo in the 1960s occurred all over the world, and continue to occur at present in the newer forms of neoliberal interventions.²¹ Domestically and internationally, principally tolerant peoples and institutionally regulated governmental regimes operate on conventions of moral inclusion and social justice. And yet patterned suffering remains a perpetual byproduct or requisite operating norm of wealthy, industrialized/industrializing nations, often taking the forms of poverty, sexism, racism, heterosexism, ableism, the radical

¹⁸ Dewey (1910: 127-131).

¹⁹ James and Kuklick (1981).

²⁰ Scarry (1994).

²¹ For an extensive survey of case studies consult Featherstone (2012).

neocolonial dispossession and destruction of indigenous peoples, habitats, and so forth. Even with expanded inclusion in a society's cultural norms and political representation in governing institutions, such as with ongoing domestic civil rights movements in the U.S.A. and indigenous voices represented at the United Nations, sporadic positive changes to dominant regimes do not amount to liberatory independence of the sort that puts cultural norms and political institutions *in the service of redressing suffering and ameliorating oppression*. The modes of reasoning that condition the regular operations of a society can run amok of even well-supported objectives unless balanced with some form of liberatory thought, applied pragmatically in response to the localized manifestations of larger systems. *Practices* used in Guatemala to deter corporately funded military destructions of indigenous peoples, and the practices used in Detroit to reclaim municipal governance from private profiteers may differ even if both movements refer to, catalyze from, liberatory solidarity.

Throughout the 20th century, various solidarity movements and discourses of liberation proliferated along with, and perhaps even in direct response to the spread of neocolonial and neoliberal geopolitics.²² Among many others, figures such as Max Weber, Hannah Arendt, Mary Parker Follett, and W.E.B. Du Bois posed models of solidarity along the lines of civic friendship, cooperation, collective action, and shared identity.²³ On the basis of these and other conceptions of solidarity, activists and organizers developed cultural and political changes in countries all over the world, from localized labor rights and workers' movements in the spirit of trade unions to insurgencies involving civil disobedience and at times even violent or destructive means. Calls for solidarity and liberation seem to share parity in an important way. I think it less likely that the most important parity in solidarity movements stems from particular practices or issues

²² Ibid.

²³ Scholz (2008).

addressed. Rather, as I argue, *liberatory thought foments the feasibility of relating to sustain solidarity*.

Activists who fix on any particular version of solidarity as the ultimate defeater of other versions will, I think, run the risk of forgetting that the merit of the concept depends on what it ultimately fosters (or fostered, as we may observe in retrospect). *Solidarity qua solidarity* and *solidarity qua collective action* differ from *solidarity qua practical modes of laboring for liberation*. To conceive of solidarity independent from the purposes of liberation may garner collective action, and at the same time also leave open the prime opportunity for dominant regimes to exploit horizontal hostilities. Conversely, I propose a description of solidarity that I think consistent with liberatory priorities and objectives, at least as I explain those terms. It must remain an open question whether to theorize liberation as I suggest, or in some other way that better achieves emancipatory ends. Even if the particular content of a theory of liberation varies, I intend to show why *liberatory solidarity qua relational* provides at least a useful structure for a composite concept built using conceptions of liberation, solidarity, and relation. It can, I propose, serve as a fallible instrument for all sorts of applications while by no means offering a guaranteed outcome when put into practice.

The context for liberatory solidarity as relational

I theorize *liberatory solidarity as relational* in order to augment the deficiencies of theories beholden to moral and political thought, particularly the kinds of solidarity scholars have made overly dependent on identity and interest. Proposing this model requires conceptualizing three constitutive parts in tandem and making the following general assumptions. First, for a movement or project to count as liberatory it will matter to select priorities and objectives for

liberation as a distinctive prospect – a way to delineate the kinds of outcomes at which to aim, concerns to take as priorities, guidelines for adjudicating among emancipation and other desired purposes, and so forth.

Second, liberatory movements will emerge from relations that oppressive regimes historically disincentivized, or openly sought to exploit, relations cultivated by individuals and groups who act in defiance of incentives and disincentives, who refuse to sustain a status quo. To make liberatory solidarity feasible, it must comport with a baseline notion of “relation” – a foundational primer from which to develop local, comprehensive understandings of the consequences of relating. Not to conflate “comprehensive” with an exhaustive or universal connotation, such as “relation is...” (object, noun) but rather, consider “to relate” (verb) a reference to labors in which persons partake with consequences they will endure. Unless liberation and relation comport with one another, mutually reinforcing one another, a society’s dominant regime will likely exploit historically incentivized antipathies among underrepresented and subjugated populations. Conversely, relations fostered in tandem with liberatory intentions may supersede the incentives and disincentives a dominant regime metes out in order to “divide and conquer.”

Third, a description of solidarity consistent with liberation and relation will cohere with the two prior assumptions. Specifically, this version of solidarity refers to when persons and groups continue to relate for the sake of liberation despite countervailing incentives and disincentives. This turns on describing what happens when persons relate, and the underlying notion of relation at play. Theorizing the three main parts in together will, then, designate *liberatory solidarity as relational*. By designating liberatory solidarity as *relational*, I argue that it differs in some important ways depending on a chosen description of *relation*.

When relation refers to spatial locations, or metaphors for structural and positional imagery, the resulting conception of solidarity may square well with similarly structural, explanatory portrayals of institutional oppression. In the same way, models of distributive social justice that depend on diagnosing hierarchical positioning such as wealth, status, interests, identities, and opportunities seem to comport with individual and group identities and intersectional markers. The spatial metaphors for relations and corresponding diagnoses cannot, however, replace or elucidate relation sufficiently or completely enough for liberatory purposes. I elaborate on this point in chapters two, three, and four.

Questions about “who relates?” as a matter of identity, and “why relate?” as a question of interests, may have implications for emancipatory movements, and yet follow from a prior question: “what happens when we relate?” or, more comprehensively, “to what does ‘relation’ refer and, given that, what sorts of consequences do we pose one another when we relate?” Following from these assumptions and the questions I have raised, let me briefly summarize the fields of theory I use to develop *liberatory solidarity as relational* and, where helpful, return to the aforementioned questions and assumptions.

To advance the tripartite concept, I first outline a basic model of liberatory priorities and objectives, developed from Enrique Dussel’s much broader and more complex philosophical investigations into the topic.²⁴ On this account, those intent on fostering liberation set their *priority* as a particular kind of respect for alterity, a priority carried out through activities organized around the dual *objectives* of (1) challenging dominant claims to power and (2) seeking to put dominant regimes in the service of those made vulnerable by moral practices and regularly operating political institutions. Solidarity based in conventional moral and political

²⁴ Dussel (1985).

theories can resolve *some* of the problems stemming from institutionalized oppression, cultural hegemony, and systematic subjugation. However, the impetus to bring about the end of oppressive regimes likely requires intervention based on liberatory thought. To that end, I distinguish among moral, political, and liberatory thought, but not radically so. Each field of concern necessarily *intimates* similar and varying challenges and bolsters the other two, reciprocally.

To ask questions of morality and politics without also considering questions of liberation, and vice versa, would result in a deficiency for all three.²⁵ Even when substantively justified in theory, practical applications of morality and politics can produce victims – “others” who dominant regimes marginalize via stabilized, entrenched (difficult to de-stabilize) cultural practices and institutional systems. When this occurs, some conception of liberation informs the oppressed and their allies as they consider how to challenge the status quo. And it does so whether or not they share comprehensive conceptions of moral norms and social justice.

Responding to the second problem, the matter of constraining solidarity as a derivative of identity and/or interest, I propose the notion of *relations as making* in order to then argue for solidarity as relational. That is, solidarity can refer primarily to what happens when people relate and this begs the question, how to consider “relation”? What sort of activities and consequences does the use and mention of the term “relation” intimate or impute? Despite the ubiquity of the language of relationships, which sort of fundamental notion of relation intimates the consequences persons and groups pose one another? Solidarity, to relate in the kinds of ways that bring about otherwise infeasible liberatory changes, requires making one another in the process. I

²⁵ Placing such emphasis on questions of morality and justice without corresponding emphasis on liberation as a vanguard of revolutions in the former two fields has, arguably, posed scholars all sorts of conceptual, theoretical, and practical problems, not the least of which includes hypersensitivity to violence and insensitivity to suffering.

propose this description as the consequence of relation, a laborious activity. I, therefore, explain liberatory solidarity as a *relational concept* and argue to that end that at least some versions of solidarity depend on the particular conceptions of relations one assumes or proposes.

Finally, considering the priority and objectives of liberation in tandem with relation as making, I argue that *liberatory solidarity as relational refers to when individuals and groups continue to relate, to make one another, for the purposes of liberation despite countervailing exploitative power relations, incentives, and disincentives*. The power needed to foster liberation may, then, hinge on tendencies to endure making one another for the purposes of liberation or, conversely, to endure systematic dominance and subordination in perpetuity. To supplement the parameters I have set so far, next I elaborate on the deficiency of common rhetorical references to “relation” and its derivatives. This will illustrate why it matters to add a substantive conception of relations into discourse about solidarity and liberation.

Relation, spatial metaphors, and identity

If you had to choose a particular notion of relation, which aspects of your life would you stake on that description? Likewise, if you had to, how would you describe “relation,” and what shares of your limited resources would you entrust to that description? Depending on how scholars and activists conceptualize relations, theories and practices pose substantive consequences. The case for liberatory solidarity as relational depends on showing how the composite derives from all three constitutive notions, yet the novel contribution stems from describing *relation as making*. For this reason, I think it will help to expound on the peculiar ubiquity of relation as a pivotal and yet undertheorized term. By “undertheorized” I have two concerns in mind.

One concern stems from the tendency to make use of unstated notions of relations without which scholars cannot develop their theories and ideas, and without which activists cannot develop emancipatory projects. A second concern stems from the tendency to use metaphorical or euphemistic terms in describing relations, but without explaining the background ideas. I bring a specific conception of relations under careful consideration by both calling attention to the problems of undertheorizing relations and, then, by proposing a description of relations that illustrates what happens when people relate.

An application of the derivative terms, such as *relationship*, *relating*, *relative to*, *related*, etc. can obfuscate or belie the importance of the term if used casually. Within contemporary scholarship, and more broadly in common sense rhetoric among activists, the predominant discursive mode of referring to relations posits individuals and groups as if oriented spatially in terms of distance, closeness, nearness, proximity, etc.²⁶ Through the pervasive mode of discussing relations scholars appeal to structural and positional metaphors for locating subjects as “relative to” one another in a spatial and temporal scheme. However, this account of relations -- a “schematic,” “spatial,” or “structural-positional” approach -- tells only part of the story of human interactions in social life.²⁷

If we undertheorize notions of relation or conflate common terms with loose metaphorical connotations, we likely do not understand the consequences people pose one another when they relate. Or, even if we do understand such consequences, the loose metaphorical references run the risk of distorting or befuddling the stakes of relation. As Barbara Ellen Smith argues, practical and conceptual problems stem from rigidly treating “[...] ‘difference’ as a collection of bounded categories, a taxonomy of social life. Implicitly, society is

²⁶ As I discuss in much greater detail, giving special attention to the works of Scholz (2008) and Shelby (2005).

²⁷ Matheis (2014).

conceptualized as a grid of boxes (differences) into which individual members fit; the challenge for the feminist (or any enlightened, multicultural person) is to extend out of these boxes, to make the effort to learn about those of others, and – the greatest challenge of all – to establish political solidarity (or respectful relationships) with those who are different.”²⁸

Albeit, schematic metaphors for relations may play vital roles in projects that support liberatory collective action such as expository analyses of equality and oppression. Conceptual mapping that illustrates inequalities and patterned cruelties often relies on structural-positional rhetoric, and this can help to advance liberatory resistance. However, to rely solely or primarily on the schematic metaphors fails to explain relations in which subjects think, feel and act as if they relate in any substantial ways otherwise unexplained by spatial positioning.²⁹ The deficiency persists throughout academic research and social change movements, even in the work of theorists and activists who sincerely claim, think, and act in favor of substantive, mutual human cooperation. Only for some persons and groups will the spatial representation of oppressions motivate greater inclination to participate in emancipatory movements. This cannot, I show, supplant a theory of solidarity as relational.

The schematic metaphors used to describe and theorize oppression and equality indicate some conceptions of relation at work, but these remain inadequate for a substantive analysis of the kind I think necessary. Theories predicated on a structural-positional notion of relations do not help us to justify solutions to social problems in terms of complex models of human social relations. Without a theory of solidarity based in a practical theory of relations, we may not have the conceptual clarity needed to reveal or make feasible (practically achievable) the creation of

²⁸ Smith (2009: 14).

²⁹ I have argued this point more extensively in Matheis, Christian. “Feminist in solidarity: A critique of structural-positional relations within theories of oppression and equality.” Working paper. Presented at the annual meeting of The Society for Philosophy in the Contemporary World (Corvallis, OR. 2011).

notions of mutual “cooperation” and “coordinated” social practices. That is, actions designed with theoretically substantive insights and practically actionable strategies that marginalized groups can use to ameliorate suffering and, hopefully, develop legitimate forms of emancipatory social organization.³⁰

Consider these basic consequences for intellectual projects. First, in general, when scholars uncritically use notions of relation, casually applying semantic terms by referring to relations without explicating what they have in mind, a key feature of their broader projects remain uncertain and open to various different interpretations. Second, when theorists simplistically invoke notions of relation in discussing how people share social life with one another, we should not leave it to chance or inference what notions of relation we have in mind. To think of morality and relations as synonymous, politics and relations as synonymous, liberation and relations as synonymous, likely offers just as little conceptual clarity as ignoring the nuances of relations altogether. If a scholar invokes or discusses relations at all, either the notion plays a role in the theory or we can consider it superfluous - in which case we might do better to omit relation from consideration, which I think unlikely.

Now, also consider the consequences for activists who attempt to foster collective action among individuals and groups who may or may not immediately conceive of themselves as benefitting from liberatory projects. If notions of relation remain ambiguous, activists may default to the use of alternative rhetorics such as conceptions of identity or interest in order to motivate commitment to joint projects. To assume a casual reference to relation may then also result in missed opportunities to motivate people to do just that – to relate despite countervailing social forces. Consider how the prevalence of spatial metaphors ciphers out (zeroes, nullifies)

³⁰ Not that both “cooperation” and “coordination” are derivatives of spatial conceptions which result in various implications when the descriptions of each term are altered.

attention to the consequences of relating.³¹ In lieu of treating relation as a foundational concept, scholars tend instead to “fill the void” with identity and interest, with questions germane to moral and political theories, and not explicitly to liberation. Persons may think of themselves and one another according to their obligations and social constraints, such as in terms of laws and moral norms, but these ideas do not take the place of notions of relation.

To think of collective action, joint projects, and social obligations as synonymous with relation misses the mark, just as does treating notions of relation as if incidental to such projects. I take up the concern that scholars and activists who render notions of solidarity without substantive explanations of relation provide tenuous, unintelligible and often unworkable resources for fostering collective projects in the interests of liberation. Thus, scholarly accounts of solidarity remain in large part unworkable for liberatory movements without a substantive theory of relations that makes it possible to discuss what happens when people relate. A lack of clarity about notions of “relation” poses a subtle, pervasive, and substantial problem for those interested in scholarship and action intended to foster solidarity.

Perhaps most notably, theoretical and autobiographical scholarship on *sisterhood* often refers to liberatory goals in tandem with relationships while aiming to address the multitude of ways dominant cultural and political regimes exploit sex, gender, race, class, nationality, and other factors. Those who have made extensive contributions in these areas of thought include figures such as Robin Morgan, Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, and many more.³²

As Hill Collins notes,

The longed-for group solidarity promised under the rubric “sisterhood” posited by contemporary feminists seems designed to build a community among women that is grounded in shared conditions of existence. However, imagining multicultural, multiethnic, multiracial, multiclass women’s groups predicated on family-based notions

³¹ McLuhan (1994: 115-116).

³² Morgan (1970, 1984, 2007), Collins (1998), and hooks (2000: 43-67).

of sisterhood is much easier than building such communities across lived, institutionalized segregation.³³

Quite often, models of sisterhood and solidarity derive from branches of both essentialist and/or feminist standpoint theory (and note the spatial metaphor inherent in the term “standpoint”). As such, theorists of sisterhood aim to provide resources for developing *shared consciousness*, or less demanding *mutual understandings* among women who live in varying circumstances, facing different forms of patriarchy and sexist oppression – and who would, presumably, mutually benefit from comprehensive, organized liberatory movements as anti-racist, anti-patriarchal, pro-indigenous, and so forth.

Hill notes, “Standpoint theory posits a distinctive relationship among a group’s position in hierarchical power relations, the experiences attached to differential group positionality, and the standpoint that a group constructs in interpreting these experiences.”³⁴ I contend that these portrayals, while beneficial to some extent, fall short in a number of ways. The structural-positional metaphors do little if anything to systematically elucidate the stakes of relation, the consequences persons pose one another when relating. The metaphors also fail to elucidate why dominant, hegemonic regimes can exploit relations of certain kinds (such as assignments to economic labor roles) but, we can hope, may not interfere with relations of other kinds such as “sisterhood.” We need a clearer picture of relations to show the potency of these kinds of interventions.

Following from what I have argued above, spatial metaphors that overshadow rhetorical references to relationships cannot explain what, if anything, about relating poses difficulties and/or opportunities for solidarity when trying to do the kinds of community building Hill

³³ Collins (1998: 222).

³⁴ Collins (1998: 193-194).

Collins thinks necessary. I intend to show that *relation as making* likely comports with the aims of sisterhood, as well as various broader conceptions of solidarity familiar to anti-racist, feminist, and pro-indigenous movements. For sisterhood and various models of collective action to hold, relation as making or another similar concept must operate in the background.

I do not, I should note, supply this theoretical component as if the concept has never before come into consideration. Indeed, I think *relation as making* or something like it operates at least on a subtle level even when we take the term for granted or too casually gloss over its implications. Rather, I propose a description that allows scholars to critically re-think theories of solidarity, and affords activists a way of reconsidering the implications for different strategies of fostering collective action.

Following from discourses in liberalism originating in European Enlightenment, contemporary (20th and 21st century) scholarship on alienation and oppression, and corollary analyses of equality, have yielded indispensable critiques of institutionalized cruelties and inequalities.³⁵ Those working with various social movements have benefited, and continue to benefit from scholarship on institutional factors that limit social mobility, access to opportunity and inequity in distribution of material goods, rights, opportunities, and other social benefits.³⁶ Based on this scholarly work, theorists and activists use structural and spatial social positioning as analytical resources that help with *imagining* people as “relative to” one another in structural schemes. From these sorts of schematic notions of relation we come to understand one another in important regards as, for instance, positionally nearer and farther, higher and lower, visible and invisible, and so forth – as structurally and procedurally related.

To lay out some of the semantic distinctions at play in discourse on solidarity grants

³⁵ Ibid. 193-194.

³⁶ Ibid.

some advantages, but I intend to offer an account in which semantic clarity comprises only an illustrative part of the project. Inasmuch as theories of oppression and equality, and broader theories of ethics and politics, primarily appeal to the metaphorical descriptions of structural-positional relations, theoretical and practical projects remain simultaneously incapable of two necessary moves. First, we cannot use theoretical models based in schematic metaphors to attain accurate understandings of social circumstances that “divide” and embattle individuals and groups. We need a workable description of solidarity as a relational concept in order to even attempt to explain why people sometimes fail to develop solidarity.

Second, what can we say about the qualities of actual or potential human relations given the ways in which contemporary theories of distributive justice, for instance, tend to assume or describe notions of relations? We can only say very little about solidarity by way of institutional equalities/inequalities, since some forms of solidarity refer to a relational concept and not a strictly political or moral concept. Structural-positional modes of describing relations do not adequately elucidate the relational features of solidarity. Some key solutions to the problems elucidated through theories of equality and oppression cannot likely come from theories that depend so much on spatial metaphors. That is, theories of equality and oppression posited on spatial metaphors can help illustrate some of the problems, but if *liberatory* solutions to those problems require collective actions prefigured by relational solidarity then we must begin from a workable description of relations.

Even with respect to the benefits of these interventions, to rely solely or primarily on schematic metaphors of relation constrains and undermines the potential for developing relevant, workable and actionable theories and strategies of solidarity suited for activist projects. Alternatively, theories of solidarity based in a careful consideration of relations may help people

organize solutions in response to various forms of oppression. Lacking attention to relations, scholars and activists with interest in fostering solidarity tend to instead conceptualize problems and solutions using various theories and conceptions of identity.³⁷ I contend that we may use theories of identity to respond to some problems, but that we cannot expect identity theories to resolve all problems of relations. I have in mind here theories of identity developed out of modern and contemporary thought provincial to European scholars, namely to conceptions of identity and recognition following from Hegelian idealism.³⁸ Through the use of identity narratives and identity recognition we tend to prioritize narrow emphases on individual and group recognition as if to do so generally results in solidarity, collective actions, and/or liberatory outcomes. Agreements about identity and consensus on theories of identity may help people decide how to represent their similarities and differences, but *identities cannot suffice in place of relations*.

A more skeptical take on theories of identity illuminates a different problem. To put it in Jane Nardal's terms, choosing among identities and appealing for recognition of those identities functions as if considering the sauces with which one may be eaten or consumed.³⁹ I interpret Nardal's metaphor as critical of the ways in which people can manipulate notions of identity without substantively altering the sources of power and authority that delineate the terms of obtaining or losing recognition.⁴⁰ Who sets the terms of recognition? Her skepticism about the benefits of identity and recognition helps to show that through discourse on identity, many scholars pose and respond to questions about solidarity as if to define who or what relates:

³⁷ Warnke (2007).

³⁸ I argue this point more extensively in Matheis (2012).

³⁹ Sharpley-Whiting (2002: 51).

⁴⁰ Moreover, this criticism bears similarities to Agamben's (1998) description of rights and laws as the terms by which people can violate one another through the apparatuses of a state.

individuals, agents, subjects, singularities, actors, objects, selves, beings, persons, others, and so forth. Doing so conflates final agreement, or at least broad consensus, about how to define *what* relates (phenomenologically, metaphysically, ontologically) with *what happens* when people relate (pragmatically, materialistically).⁴¹ To couch solidarity and notions of relations primarily as derivatives of identity and recognition, scholars limit or overlook the necessity to elucidate what happens when people relate in particular situations, at particular times, and as a result of particular factors.

Strategies and Methodology

Throughout the project I engage with a variety of fields of thought, but I select from a particular set of discourses to establish the basis for the theory. This narrower range of resources include philosophies of liberation, subfields of pragmatism including classical pragmatism, anti-racist pragmatism, and feminist pragmatism, and materialism.

Dussel's model of liberatory philosophy provides a broadly scrutinized and widely vetted engagement with the topic. Certainly, other models of liberation and emancipation might also work. To my understanding, Dussel's work synthesizes from among many works in the field and, arguably, he intends to offer a theory "from the periphery."⁴² That is, a theory that designates the legitimacy or illegitimacy of ruling societal regimes as dependent on the way social systems respond (or not) to the subjugated and oppressed. The various subfields of pragmatism I draw from emphasize the fallibility of descriptive terms, sometimes taken as tentative truth-claims, that remain open to revision given new circumstances and evidence. This sort of reasoning renders with humility in that I propose descriptions of concepts, or theorize

⁴¹ As with Jean-Luc Nancy's (1991) investigations of "singularity."

⁴² Dussel (1985: §1.2.1.2).

relations as what I call a “propositional description.” Rather than argue with conviction for the final metaphysical conditions or phenomenological reality of relations, I argue for the workability of the proposed descriptions as *feasible* solutions. Materialist thought places emphasis on labor, and the changes that laboring creatures undergo and endure. In this way, the emphasis remains on *laborious activities and suffering*, the way persons can suffer and relieve suffering, versus the arguably masculine, sexist emphasis on *violence* – an emphasis endemic to philosophy and critical theory writ large. Let me explain the importance of each field here in a bit more detail.

First, Enrique Dussel’s theory of liberation develops out of scholarship in philosophy, history, narrative theory, postcolonial studies, and Latin American thought – to name but a few. In this realm of work, we find influences by figures such as Frantz Fanon, Paul Ricouer, Karl-Otto Apel, and Menchu Tum. Dussel’s work provides the broader discussion from which I draw the priorities and objectives of liberatory thought most relevant to my analysis. However, another feature of his work helps to set the methodological parameters for the strategy of proposing liberatory solidarity as relational. Namely, Dussel’s articulation of *ego conquiero* (“I think”) as a derivative of the hegemonic *ego conquiero* (“I conquer”) helps elucidate a problematic disposition in much of modern and contemporary western thought.⁴³ With this intervention, Dussel rejects the notion that beneficial philosophical interventions must rely on the kinds of questions that conquer a subject of inquiry, demanding a conclusive resolution with utter certainty set narrowly by the inquirer-observer.

The positive thesis, here, indicates that some important philosophical interventions develop out of constraining curiosity and interrogative questioning. *We may not need to know*

⁴³ Ibid. §1.1.2.2, §1.1.7, §2.4.6.1.

what we want to know in order to still respect people from whom we differ; another person need not dismantle or reveal the secrets of her alterity for me to treat them with regard. To effectively engage the subject matter of relations likely requires admitting that certain mysteries remain unresolved. However, even though some facets of life “resist representation,” (Scarry), I suggest people tend to perceive enough and to know enough to treat the unrepresentable (or as yet unrepresented) facets of relation as alertive to making.⁴⁴ Persons and groups can relate to bring about liberation whether or not they understand one another in great detail.

Dussel’s work also informs my motivation for thinking *feasibility* over *possibility*.⁴⁵ In his modeling of liberation, he contends that conventional moral and political philosophies assume an attribution of possibility about hypothetical, allegedly universal human subjects who might, it seems, at any time change or overcome the circumstances. Under conditions of methodological possibility, theories set hypothetical options broadly. Some developments in moral and political theory advance on the basis of thought experiments about human possibilities and the possibilities available to hypothetical societies. For example, questions about the ontological status and metaphysical conditions owing to the possibility of human freedom versus determination. However, the overly broad parameters of hypothetical possibilities do not tend to address the problems associated with systematic oppressions. Indeed, theorizing in the context of broad possibilities likely disadvantages or under-acknowledges the circumstances of marginalized, subjugated populations who must redress patterned cruelties given the *feasible* options available to persons who labor in limited spans of life. I intend for liberatory solidarity as relational to serve persons and groups who desire a feasible end to historically conditioned

⁴⁴ Scarry (1994).

⁴⁵ Dussel (1985: §4.3.7.5), Dussel (2008: §8.3).

institutional and cultural oppression and who cannot, therefore, plan interventions on the potentially impractical breadth of possibility.

I make no specific claims about solidarity, relation, and liberation in the context of metaphysics or phenomenologies, per se. Rather, I rely on classical pragmatist projects, such as Dewey's "postulate of immediate empiricism" to propose descriptions of key concepts as feasible resources that require revision depending on their efficacy when put into practice.⁴⁶ I describe the three main notions of liberation, relation, and solidarity in tandem as a composite model – as notions that make sense dependent upon one another – while also suggesting that the concepts may need revision in order to adequately serve particular populations in their unique circumstances.

Along these lines, I also make use of recent work in feminist pragmatism, namely Sharyn Clough's pragmatic model of feminist science and science criticism.⁴⁷ In Clough's work she prescribes empirical processes by which we consider the truth of individual beliefs, policy justifications (and overall scientific theories) as assigned locally and fallibly. Moreover, she suggests that what really matters is the "empirical task of analyzing the causal relations between our theories and the world." According to Clough people continuously adjust criteria for truth claims in response to new information – people "triangulate" by comparing their respective truth-claims with those of others and with real things in the world. In order to adjudicate truth claims about relations, people with varying truth claims must prepare to compare their narratives, and their reasons for relying on their respective narratives, while agreeing to the basic idea about relations as real.

I intend for this to advance the anti-racist and feminist pragmatism found in the works of

⁴⁶ Dewey (1905).

⁴⁷ Clough (2003: 5, 12).

Naomi Zack and Tommy Shelby. In drawing from and responding to both scholars, I mainly modify Zack's approach to a theory of women's commonality by altering the use-mention role of concepts to a more specific "alertive" role.⁴⁸ For Zack, the use-mention distinction allows scholars and activists to take account of the role concepts such as "race" and "women" play in social epistemologies when mentioned, while refusing to use those particular versions in developing responses. Instead of *using* a concept in the hegemonic form as mentioned, we do better by responding to the version *mentioned*. Responses to the *mention* break from furthering the *use* by developing ostensibly more critical and anti-hegemonic meanings – that is, to replace racist notions of race with socially just conceptions of race.

Taking this approach holds implications for Shelby's theory of black racial solidarity for the purposes of social justice, based largely on the same kinds of pragmatist methodology.⁴⁹ I argue instead that both the use and mention of certain concepts need not require new definitions of meaning, and that the proliferation of revised meanings need not take primary attention in the work of anti-hegemonic liberation. Rather, the mention and use of some concepts can play an alertive role by calling attention not to the need for further modeling of meaning, but instead *to act to resolve actual, real-time problems manifesting in the contemporary world*. Uses and mentions of "gender" can alert us to the need to redress patriarchies that manifest in cultural and institutional contexts whether or not we collectively agree on a substantive definition of the term.

Third, Scarry's intricate analysis of the materialism of Marx, Engels, and other scholars offers the pivotal resource for a description of *relation as making* grounded in conceptions of activity, work, labor, and making.⁵⁰ As Scarry explains,

⁴⁸ Zack (2005).

⁴⁹ Shelby (2005).

⁵⁰ Scarry (1985: 82).

It is in the very nature of work – as is dramatically visible in forms of physical labor and craft such as coal mining, farming, building, or inventing – that the worker “works” to bring about severe alterations in the world (relocating a rock; creating a piano or a hayfield or a house where there was none) and only brings about those alterations by consenting to be himself [sic] deeply altered [...].⁵¹

Scarry traces the underlying notion of making as descended from pre-Judaic, ancient Hebraic thought and argues further that the concept seems to reconcile with a variety of cosmologies of labor, making, change, alteration, creative acts, and so forth.⁵² As Marx and Engels did for the purposes of illustrating *alienation*, I appropriate this materialist conception of labor and making in order to illustrate the consequences of *relating*. “Relation” in this sense refers to making one another when we labor to relate; in laboring upon one another the laborious activities make and remake the laborers. Those who relate alter one another in the activity of relating. Rather than address inquiries such as “what does relation mean?” or “what is a relation?” this materialist conception of relation places the emphasis on the *consequences* of laborious activities or, to put it in terms of inquiry, “what happens when persons relate?” To that end, when choosing to pursue liberatory ends in solidarity, relation as making calls attention to, or “alerts,” us to consider what we make of one another.

Applications and Limitations of my project

This project will not finally or conclusively resolve questions about how to practically apply the model of liberatory solidarity as relational, though I will make suggestions to that effect. I take a strong position on the importance of theorizing liberation, relation, and solidarity in tandem as a tripartite composite, but a much more tentative position on the exact descriptions of each concept. The model I offer as an intervention for my purposes may differ from the model

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

someone else could develop for other purposes by replacing the descriptions of each notion, and yet both approaches could technically substantiate the overall goal of a theory of *liberatory solidarity as relational*. To do so, I leave open the sorts of questions needed to define essential meanings of terms in favor of proposing descriptions the efficacy of which we can only come to fully understand when tested in practice. Moreover, as explained earlier, the composite conception may differ depending on variations in the description of each of the three respective components.

Despite my best attempts to describe the respective components and the overall theory as open and fallible, some persons and groups may find it entirely unworkable for their particular circumstances. Even those who earnestly attend to relations as the consequences of making one another, and who seek to sustain solidarity as relational, may discover limitations I cannot predict in the theoretical model. I do not, for instance, give an extensive account of the implications of my argument for economic models.⁵³ Nor do I show the relevance of liberatory solidarity as relational given recent empirical studies in neuroscience and social psychology. While I think the proposed model holds interesting implications for both economics and psychological sciences, I only go as far as explaining the structure of the concept from which various other projects may emerge. Again, as a pragmatist intervention it remains open to tests in application in a variety of contexts.

The workability or efficacy of the project depends in large part on treating the core concepts as *catalysts* versus as *commands* or *conclusions*. The model can serve most readily as a *hermeneutical* resource for retrospectively understanding when relational solidarity did or did not occur, and why. It may also serve as a *heuristic* model, prospectively, but the potential for

⁵³ Hardt and Negri (2009: 160-161, 163-167, 180, 196) offer a line of critical theory that, to some extent, corroborates my argument.

applying it to praxis requires translation into localized strategies that go beyond the scope of detail in this theoretical project. The proposed descriptions can *alert* individuals to attend to one another – to consider what we expect and cause one another to endure, to abide, to suffer, etc. One could of course try to apply the proposed descriptions as commands or demands by imposing deeply held convictions, though I do not intend for that use. I only anticipate that this theory can provoke or invite a shift in attention that benefits those who seek to redress oppression in favor of emancipation.

I sustain a relatively agnostic position about delineations among “person” and “culture.” What counts as person/individual, and what counts as culture/collective may deserve substantive attention. Perhaps even more so given the implications of my arguments about relation as making. Nonetheless, I set these matters aside for theorists more interested in individual and collective identities, cultural theory, standpoint epistemologies, intersubjectivity, communicative action, and other branches of research. Fields of thought occupied with modeling agents, subjects, citizens, singularities, and other such propositions will perhaps need to reconcile individuality and commonality in terms of relation as making, or not as circumstances may require. For some scholars, defining the phenomenological conditions for personage in correspondence with what count as cultures seems a requisite theoretical move. I do not share this assumption, nor do I endorse the absolute necessity of doing so. Perhaps to the dismay of those committed to models of agency, authenticity, identity, and recognition this seems untenable. I treat references to individuals and cultures as no more or less beneficial when posed as pragmatic descriptions than the central terms I place under consideration. Conceptions of *individuality* and *culture*, therefore, garner no special ontological priority within this discussion.

The liberatory, pragmatist, and materialist model of proposed descriptions may bear some deficiencies if translated into different languages and colloquial contexts. To the first point, I attempt throughout to use simple verbs and action statements in place of nouns and definitions that require an understanding of more advanced colloquial connotations. That should, I hope, make it workable to translate the descriptions more easily than it would if written otherwise. To the second point, the argumentative abstractions of this scholarly project refer to activist interventions and yet at some points may not hold adequate familiarity with the rhetoric and connotations activists use in daily practice. It falls outside the scope of this project to develop a “common sense” version, though if any of this project has merit then that certainly warrants future attention.

Throughout the argument, I rely on broad references to suffering and the maiming or destruction of dignity as a result of suffering. Simpatico with Elaine Scarry and Philip Hallie, I consider some forms of suffering, pain, and indignity so difficult, perhaps even impossible to semantically codify, narrate, and describe that the testimony or claim of those who suffer may count as the only evidence available. Despite the way some scholars and activists may want an objective test of suffering – the reality and/or degree of pain – or consensus over what does and does not count as indignity, I do not attempt to fulfill such a desire. Some of the harms that cultural hegemony and institutionalized oppression inflict upon persons and groups, individually and collectively, remain not only difficult to empirically observe, but in many cases also incredible; that is, unbelievable, without credibility. I think this has more to do with the way that patterned institutional cruelties discredit those who claim they suffer, making them appear less trustworthy about their claim, and far less to do with the empirical evidence someone might present to substantiate his assertion. In favor of liberation, I assume that those with control of a

dominant regime ought to show that they do not cause harm, and that it does not bear upon the oppressed to continuously defend their claims of suffering to those with ruling authority.

Under the terms of liberatory thought I explicate later, at some point we either believe or attempt to trust those who claim to suffer as we would want another to believe our incredible claim, or we do not have much hope for sustaining the relations necessary to make emancipation feasible. I will not, therefore, adequately defend an ontological classification of suffering, indignity, and pain to the satisfaction of those steeped in many branches of moral and political philosophy.⁵⁴ *Liberatory thought intent on redressing and ending suffering for the long-term helps to alert us to anguish and indignity, calls attention suffering, and provokes us to consider whether to involve ourselves in the service of others by counteracting systematic harms. Liberatory thought, at least as I appeal to it, simply may not help to answer all manner of questions about the very suffering it aims to heal.*

Finally, my argument for relation as making raises questions about dignity that extend beyond the scope of defending the composite of liberatory solidarity as relational. In *The Time is Always Now: Black Thought and the Transformation of U.S. Democracy*,⁵⁵ Nick Bromell wrestles with the concept of dignity and questions masculine tendencies to, often implicitly, posit dignity as a "force."⁵⁶ Citing Harriet Jacobs, Bromell explains, "...Jacobs locates herself within a network of relationships and makes clear that she has learned about her dignity by observing

⁵⁴ I do, however, think that some thought experiments can help elucidate interesting and important details about pain that might serve as alertive reference points. For instance, Tom Dougherty (2011) illustrates how risk-averse, time-biased individuals who prefer pleasures to be future and pains to be past will irrationally, he asserts, inflict pain on themselves. Dougherty calls it a puzzle and rationally impermissible that humans have this sort of vulnerability. I wonder, though, whether his underlying assumptions about aversion of pain over-generalize all kinds of pain, agony, suffering, discomfort, misery, etc. too narrowly into a single concept. Perhaps humans, individuals and society's, benefit from a disposition to endure. I do not know. But I remain suspicious about analyses of pain that hint at unqualified phobias about bodily discomfort as if alien to human life.

⁵⁵ Bromell (2013).

⁵⁶ Ibid. 21.

others and modeling her behavior on theirs."⁵⁷ He continues,

As we have seen, slave narratives suggest that the feeling of dignity is rarely something one can will or exercise agency about; nor does a sense of one's dignity always lead to or take the form of resistance. Dignity occupies a middle space between these terms. It refers to the always-present possibility that a person might recover, remember, or reclaim her sense of intrinsic self-worth through intersubjective exchanges in which the very thing is being slighted or affirmed. [...] Thus, our dignity is something we cannot ever be the sole creators of possessors of; we need relations with others in which they recognize it; by its nature, dignity is something socially produced and affirmed (or denied).⁵⁸

Bromell highlights the way that dignity depends on relations of a particular kind and arises in "relations with others." Following Immanuel Kant's work to articulate and defend dignity, theorists have considered whether dignity depends in some ways on social relationships.⁵⁹

Elizabeth Porter notes in *Feminist Perspectives on Ethics* that philosophers typically defend dignity as a universal category to protect the inherent worth all persons qua persons and, yet, identity politics arise to protect individuality when conceptions of personage and dignity lead to erasure of distinct features.⁶⁰ As I discuss in greater detail throughout the project (particularly in chapters 1 and 2), some forms of solidarity extend from liberatory thought to bolster dignity in response to suffering and degradation, and these forms require a relevant conception of relation without which liberation remains practically untenable. Again, though it falls outside of the main discussion, in the conclusion I suggest additional attention to dignity vis-à-vis relation as making.

Organization of the project

Though collected here as a dissertation, the following chapters engage a variety of fields in contemporary literature relevant to a particular component of the subject matter and its

⁵⁷ Ibid. 22.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 25.

⁵⁹ MacIntyre (2007), Rosen (2012: 6, 12, 135).

⁶⁰ Porter (2014: 91-92).

application. The reader will hopefully forgive recurrences of phrasing and argumentation within and among the chapters since certain portions of the conceptual work bear repeating. In the overarching analysis I make use of the aforementioned fields of liberatory thought, pragmatism, materialism, feminism, and anti-racist scholarship to challenge the forms of hegemony internalized by these very same discourses. Each section reads as a stand-alone essay while at the same time responding to the same research question, and carrying out the same strategies and methods.

In chapter 1 I develop the basic theoretical model of liberatory solidarity as relational. This includes substantively describing the three core concepts and setting the parameters for theorizing the model in accord with liberatory thought according to the aforementioned strategies informed by liberatory and pragmatist thought. I place primary emphasis on the notion of relations as making, granting it extra attention as the topic most in need of attentive elaboration but by no means the singularly important concept at play in the project. The chapter closes with an application of the model to a hypothetical case example.

Chapter 2 places the model in conversation with contemporary analytical models of solidarity and I further analyze how theories of solidarity differ depending on the underlying fields of moral, political, and liberatory thought admitted for consideration. I argue more specifically that the priorities and objectives endemic to models of political solidarity differ from those of liberatory solidarity. This comes to greater clarity as I discuss liberatory solidarity as relational in comparison with three recent candidate conceptions of solidarity developed Sally Scholz, Tommie Shelby, and Avery Kolers. Because liberatory solidarity must bear relevance to the specific concerns that historically oppressed groups face, some versions of solidarity may offer better resources than others for organizing liberatory movements to end cultural and

institutional forms of oppression. Whereas solidarity in terms of moral and political theories can provide some forms of respite from oppression, and even cultural and political rule for some, those approaches simply may not foster liberatory emancipation from the long-term status quo that sustains cultural and institutional cruelties overall. In conclusion, I further outline the limitations of applying this approach to contemporary scholarly and activist work.

In chapter 3 I expound on the model by showing its relevance to contemporary feminist scholarship, particularly to sub-fields of feminist thought intent on fostering broad anti-oppression movements. I contend that activists and scholars interested in ending patriarchal oppression will either endure relations of solidarity in order to foster liberation for one another, or will forsake liberation and prefer to live under the heel of sexism and patriarchy. I then compare the relational account of liberatory solidarity with modern and contemporary theories of identity, particularly those designed to foster collective action in the context of discourses of oppression and equality. In conclusion, I briefly discuss some of the likely challenges of applying a relational account of liberatory solidarity to the task of organizing movements.

Chapter 4 follows a similar course of inquiry but with special emphasis on late 20th century critical race theory and philosophies of race. I show that these modes of theory may make important contributions to anti-racist efforts, but have not yet given the attention to relations needed for achieving liberatory ends. This results in large part from the tendency for anti-racist scholarship to revolve around questions of race eliminativism and race conservatism – whether to wholly eliminate race as a social epistemology, or to conserve some aspects of racial discourses. I argue the benefits for liberationists of rejecting the primacy of the eliminativism-conservatism tension in anti-racist scholarship. Thus, I treat semantic mentions of "race" not as indicators of the need to define terminologies, but as alertive prompts to consider the need for

moral, political, and liberatory redress of historical inequalities and cultural hegemonies. I then explain how liberatory solidarity as relational can help to advance anti-racist scholarly and activist projects even as we sustain certain contentious discourses and disagreements.

The conclusion provides a retrospective on the benefits and limitations of liberatory solidarity as relational and speculates on the implications for future research given my argument for relations as making. In particular, I anticipate attempts to portray liberatory movements as failures when a conscientious critique can at most show their limited efficacy as incomplete solutions to vast problems. Instead, fostering liberatory movements requires placing primary scrutiny on the actual *failures* of ruling regimes that generate the need for liberation: cultural hegemonies and institutional oppression used to orchestrate the dominance of particular establishments. I recommend further consideration of the implications for theories of market economics, and the benefits of a more expansive *philosophy of relation*. In summation, I suggest the need for a relational account of dignity, and make cursory suggestions for how to apply the theoretical model to actual practices of organizing movements.

Which sort of solidarity sustained Patrice and Pauline Lumumba and their peers, even if only for a brief time, in the anti-racist, pro-women, pro-indigenous liberatory endeavors to end colonial rule in the Congo? Even if episodic, temporary, how might activists and scholars characterize the kinds of solidarity that can endure despite countervailing incentives and disincentives? As I argue, the broad theoretical model of liberatory solidarity as relational can serve this role by providing a basis for application of in particular geopolitical and social contexts.

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**Chapter 1: We Who Make One Another: On the relational foundations of liberatory
solidarity**

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Abstract: A notion of *relation as making* operates as the fundamental concept intimated by the notion of liberatory solidarity that I defend. When people relate, we make one another. I derive this proposition from a concept of laborious activity prefigured in ancient thought that is formative in modern materialist theories: to labor at making something changes the laborer. One cannot labor to relate without such labors making oneself and others in the process. This notion of relation can alert us to primary concerns involved in developing conceptions of solidarity that individuals and groups can apply in order to labor together for liberatory transformation of political institutions and moral codes. To that end, I argue for solidarity as a relational concept that constitutes a resource for liberation and not as a virtue restricted solely to moral or political concerns. Nor does this notion of relation refer strictly to a metaphysical condition or phenomenological meaning, but instead to a fallible description. I suggest application of this theory to scholarly and activist projects, particularly for those who may benefit from anti-racist, feminist, and pro-indigenous movements for liberation.

Keywords: solidarity, liberation, making, laborious activity, Scarry, Dussel, Marx, Feuerbach, feminism, anti-racist, pro-indigenous

Introduction

In 1985 at the United Nations Decade for Women Conference in Nairobi, Kenya, aboriginal elder Lilla Watson voiced a specific charge for liberatory movements: "If you have come here to help me, you are wasting our time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."⁶¹ A few years earlier in 1983, Audre Lorde famously challenged the identity politics and horizontal hostilities burgeoning amid post- civil rights era identity politics. In Lorde's words,

As a Black, lesbian, feminist, socialist, poet, mother of two including one boy and a member of an interracial couple, I usually find myself part of some group in which the majority defines me as deviant, difficult, inferior or just plain 'wrong.' From my membership in all of these groups I have learned that oppression and the intolerance of difference come in all shapes and sexes and colors and sexualities; and that among those of us who share the goals of liberation and a workable future for our children, there can be no hierarchies of oppression.

Despite the way that theories of identity have dominated social and political movements and philosophical discourses about solidarity, the liberatory propositions operating in the background of both Watson's and Lorde's statements do not refer to identity or experience or subjectivity, per se. Rather, Watson and Lorde emphasize *relations* and the practical goal of liberatory changes to the sociopolitical status quo that they and their comrades intended to challenge.

For Watson, the liberation of one or a few remains relationally "bound up" with the liberation of others. Similarly, Lorde calls for liberation in response to what she later describes as, "[...] a standard of right-wing cynicism to encourage members of oppressed groups to act against each other, and so long as we are divided because of our particular identities we cannot join together in effective political action."⁶² In both noteworthy cases, some foundational notion

⁶¹ Watson quoted in Eckermann (2010: 193).

⁶² Ibid. Lorde.

of relation seems at issue in the mention of "divisions" and "acting against one another."

As I explain throughout the following chapter, scholars and practitioners frequently *use* language about "relationships" and "relating" but they do not tend to *explain* what they have in mind. Perhaps theorists tend to take for granted that readers will understand (or at least not question) their references to relations, and activists tend to do work to build relations but without articulating what they have achieved (or failed to achieve) in doing so. Maybe it seems too obvious to emphasize that people are relational creatures -- that relationships comprise a fundamental condition of our lives. Yet, I wonder, why have so few scholars bothered to describe what they have in mind with regard to the activities of relating? By more carefully considering notions of liberation and relation, theories of solidarity may provide a workable resource for emancipatory movements – and may do so whether or not we resolve a method of defining the identities of subjects essentially, as social constructs, intersectionally, or otherwise. That is, identity and other strategies of defining subjects may not matter as much for liberatory solidarity as it does for moral and political interests.

Which conceptions of solidarity will help subjugated, oppressed groups challenge the regimes under which they suffer detrimental conditions? As I aim to show, a notion of solidarity developed as a relational concept can serve as a resource for liberatory projects once we describe the three main ideas as a coherent proposition. Toward that end, I primarily argue that a notion of *relation as making* one another operates as the fundamental concept intimated in liberatory ideas of solidarity. Suppose that for the sake of liberatory movements I must put up with you and you with me, that relation refers to laboriously enduring one another as a pivotal difference between either liberation or further marginalization. If so, then it matters to consider: What do we make of one another, what changes do we risk enduring if we endure one another in relation?

When we relate, we make one another. I derive this proposition from a concept of laborious activity: to labor at making something changes the laborer.⁶³ One cannot labor to relate without such labors making oneself and others in the process. This notion of relation can alert us to primary concerns involved in developing a workable conception of solidarity; workable in that individuals and groups can apply the concept in order to labor together for liberatory transformation of dominant political institutions and moral codes. If otherwise disparate movements consider relation in this way, they may develop broader collective challenges to institutional oppression and cultural hegemony. To that end, I discuss solidarity as a *relational* concept that constitutes a resource for *liberation*, and not as a virtue limited solely to moral or political concerns. Nor does relation refer strictly to a metaphysical category or phenomenological experience, but instead to a propositional and, therefore, fallible description about what happens when people relate. Put differently, relation as making may or may not adequately describe the activity of relating in all cases and I propose it as a tentative description that must remain open to revision when applied in practice.

Relation as making also provides a way to profile and diagnose what some call “horizontal hostility” or, to use conceptually thin or inadequate spatial metaphors, “divisions” – when people with common interests in liberation do not labor in solidarity because they “are divided against one another.”⁶⁴ If those interested in fostering solidarity find the proposition workable, it offers the ability to sustain liberatory movements despite countervailing influences. Here, I have in mind movements such as feminist, anti-racist, and pro-indigenous efforts at dismantling institutional oppression and cultural hegemony.

I aim to show how the three main concepts of liberation, solidarity, and relation constitute

⁶³ Scarry (1985: 252-253).

⁶⁴ Pharr (1996: 35-36, 69).

a whole theory. First, *liberation* denotes emancipatory projects intended to challenge the alleged legitimacy of moral norms and/or political rule that arbitrarily disenfranchises specific populations, and to put political institutions and moral codes into the service of the most vulnerable individuals and groups. This may involve either simplistic changes or broad transformations to political and moral norms. To work for liberation involves challenging the alleged legitimacy of institutions and traditions that fail to respect the alterity of persons.⁶⁵ Alterity, here, refers to the incommensurable and sometimes unknowable features of those who may or may not endorse or participate in given political institutions and moral traditions, but who nonetheless suffer detrimental consequences. Specifically, when political systems and moral norms collude in systemic oppression (or "institutional cruelties").⁶⁶ Later, I explain this model of liberation in the context of Enrique Dussel's philosophy of liberation.⁶⁷

Second, as a relational concept, *liberatory solidarity* relies on various hypothetical propositions and/or actual descriptions about what happens when people relate, laboriously making one another. As laborious activity, what we labor upon labors upon us – an ancient concept revived by modern materialists such as Feuerbach, Marx, and Engels, but undertheorized as a notion of relation.⁶⁸ I expand further on this description as *alervative*, one that scholars and activists can test and accept or reject in practice, retrospectively. That is, it alerts us to attend to the primary concerns and consequences that particular individuals and groups pose one another when we relate. Stated as an axiom: that we relate we make one another, and as we make one another we relate. Elaine Scarry's analysis of the works of Marx, Engels, and other modern

⁶⁵ Dussel (1985: §2.4.3.5-2.4.3.6, §2.4.4, §2.4.5.2, §2.4.6.2, §2.4.7.1, §2.4.9.3, §2.6.4.1, §3.1.4.6, §3.1.7.2, §3.1.9.5, §3.2.3.2, §4.1.5.2, §4.2.6.2).

⁶⁶ Hallie (1981: 24-25, 27-28).

⁶⁷ Dussel (1985: §1.2, §2.6, §5.9).

⁶⁸ Scarry (1985).

materialist scholars elucidates the ancient Judaic and formative precursor to the concept of relations as making that I develop further in this essay.

Third, various possible concepts of solidarity may count as liberatory and relational. At minimum, solidarities refer to when people continue to relate, to make one another in various ways, despite countervailing incentives and disincentives. In solidarity, people bear one another, endure one another, in predictable and unpredictable ways and, in this sense, make one another.⁶⁹ Conversely, to attempt to deny or forestall relation refers to the attempt to reject the possibility of making one another. As I explain greater detail, those interested in fostering liberation through movements based on solidarity will have to choose whether to bear the uncertain consequences of making one another, or the probability of continuing to endure subjugation.

In what follows, I conceive relations as making in order to illustrate the potential uses of the concept in fostering *liberatory solidarity as relational*. I begin with a brief survey of different scholarly attempts to conceptualize and apply notions of solidarity. In particular, I note the conspicuous mention and yet also the persistent deficiency of notions of relation in such theories. I then draw from Enrique Dussel's philosophy of liberation in order to show the importance that a notion of relations plays in fostering liberatory conceptions of solidarity, notions distinguished by their intended use as catalysts for emancipation. With the context of liberation set, I more fully develop the proposed description of relations as making, and show its applicability as a resource for elucidating *solidarity qua relational*. I intend to show that liberatory notions of solidarity as relational will elucidate the necessity of continuing to relate despite countervailing incentives and disincentives. In conclusion I suggest application of this theory to scholarly and

⁶⁹ To understand this may require forbidding a value judgment on labor. As Feuerbach contends in response to Hegel and other idealists of the time, an ideological attempt to divorce mind from body, spirit from labor imposes a false evaluation on the conditions persons endure as persons. Taken as a fact, life involves laborious activities that ideological labor-phobia cannot supplant. Consult: Feuerbach (1972: §5, §7, §10, §64) .

activist projects, such as those that may benefit anti-racist, feminist, and pro-indigenous movements for liberation.

Different concepts of solidarity

Scholars in a diversity of fields explicitly and implicitly reference concepts of solidarity. However, these differ substantively from notions of solidarity as a relational concept in the service of liberation. Among a wide range of options, moral theorists emphasize models of mutualism, community, and intersubjectivity that we might take as candidate conceptions of solidarity. Anarchist scholars such as Bakunin, Kropotkin, Goldman, and Taylor argue that *mutualism* serves as a reliable framework for social organization.⁷⁰ In turn, philosophies of *community* such as those developed by Royce, Tönnies, King, and Etzioni, tend to propose idealized characteristics like loyalty and affinity as criteria for distinguishing communities from other sorts of human social organization.⁷¹ Intersubjectivists offer phenomenological accounts of *interactions* among individuals. Buber and Levinas, for instance, theorize face-to-face, I-Thou, relations as co-constitutive, concluding that one self cannot experience the full scope of being without other selves, and vice-versa.⁷² While each of these fields of thought develop out of a sincere interest in changing human relations, none explicitly theorizes what counts as *relation qua relation*.

Theories of intersubjectivity may come closest to addressing questions about relation by giving characteristic descriptions, but typically limited to phenomenological contexts such as being, experience, and existence. Though these interventions may intimate different features of

⁷⁰ Bakunin (2010); Goldman et al. (1910); Taylor (1982).

⁷¹ Etzioni (1995); King and Washington (1991); Royce (1908); Tönnies (1974).

⁷² Buber (1958); Lévinas (1999).

relations, they do not offer an explicit conception of what counts as a relation in the first place. Moreover, scholarly work in these areas may contribute to different notions of solidarity – that is, some emancipatory movements may very well use intersubjective ideas as resources for developing and sustaining solidarity. However, they have little to say with regard to a root concept of relation, nor about liberation as a particular kind of objective.

Among the few scholars who seem to think that conceptions of relation play an important or fundamental role in addressing moral and political problems, Mary Parker Follett's account deserves attention.⁷³ She argues for a theory of *social interactions* that can reconcile individual interests with social interests, particularly through nuanced understandings of power relations (power over, power to, and co-active power). She intends her work as a clarion call for scholars to analyze social problems and to theorize solutions by focusing on the interests individuals negotiate as they relate. Further, she argues for a theory of "creative experience" by explaining social interests as originating in broadly varying interpersonal relationships. Adequate notions of power can, she thinks, mediate the tensions among theories that privilege interpersonal relations and those that privilege social/political contexts. In Follett's work, person-to-person relationships mediated by certain notions of power both precede and serve as the basis of social/political ethics. Yet, Follett's work to theorize different conceptions of power as a resource for rethinking relations does not elucidate a conception of solidarity, nor does she offer a concept of relation in its own right; she acknowledges the import, but does not propose a specific philosophical conception of relations qua relations.

In several branches of political philosophy, theoretical models of solidarity include, among others, ideas of citizenship, shared interest, nationalism, patriotism, and

⁷³ Follett (1924: ix-xi, xiii, xvi-xvii, 12, 47-49, 61-64, 67, 75-77, 92, 99, 102.); Follett (1918: introduction, chapters V, XI, XXX).

cosmopolitanism.⁷⁴ Some emphasize “acting with others” due to obligations, motives, and outcomes of participation in small-scale (local) and large-scale (global) communities and societies in various ways.⁷⁵ For example, consider Alasdair MacIntyre’s work on communitarian obligations (reminiscent of Hume) that prefigure solidarity as a share in the history of one’s society, Elizabeth Anderson’s emphasis on dignity among one’s peers, which conceives of solidarity through a conception of interest based in shared circumstances, and Miller’s concept of nationalist sentiments such that solidarity stems from shares of responsibility for and dependency on domestic institutions within a nation-state.⁷⁶

We might also consider some versions of solidarity *implicit* in John Rawls’s contractarian ideas of mutual cooperation within a society, as well as in Kwame Anthony Appiah’s scholarship on cosmopolitanism wherein solidarity refers to retaining individual identities (e.g. national citizenship) while also identifying with “strangers” who engage in similar values, projects or activities (e.g. cosmopolitan values and projects as global citizens).⁷⁷ Recent theories of civic solidarity attempt to apply moral sentiment notions such as feelings of “belonging” to bear on political concerns such as distributive injustices.⁷⁸ Notions of solidarity derived from or developed in the context of political theories do not necessarily explicate a base concept of relation, nor do they expressly prioritize liberation as a distinct concern. What may serve as political solidarity for the status quo of a society, for instance in terms of global humanity (cosmopolitanism) and transnationalist political solidarities, does not necessarily count as

⁷⁴ Scholz (2008) provides a comprehensive summary of various conventional conceptions of political solidarity. Moreover, Shelby (2005) outlines what he considers the philosophical foundations of “black solidarity.”

⁷⁵ Kolers (2012: 1-3, 7, 9, 15.). As Kolers acknowledges, “[...] acting in solidarity with others tends to reshape the intellectual life and character of the individual” (15).

⁷⁶ Anderson (1999: 306, 319, 333); MacIntyre (1984a: 286-287, 291, 298-299); Miller (2000: 28, 34, 38-39, 168, 177).

⁷⁷ Rawls (1999: introduction, §1, §3, §5, §14, §17, §25,); Rawls and Kelly (2001); Appiah (2007: xv, 71, 87-99, 134-135).

⁷⁸ Brunkhorst (2005).

liberatory.

Notions of solidarity abound, and quite explicitly, in scholarly work on grassroots organizing, direct-action movements, and coalition politics. These bodies of work generally stress strategies and ideals for activists and organizers to use as guides in fostering interest-based political campaigns. Saul Alinsky, for instance, outlines “rules for radicals” that organizers may apply in conceiving of anti-establishment tactics.⁷⁹ More recently, however, scholars such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Bernice Johnson Reagon, and Suzanne Pharr call for coalition politics as strategies for mitigating discriminatory bias. In doing so, the advocates of coalition politics aim to build larger collective movements by fostering solidarity among smaller movements with similar political and moral interests.⁸⁰ Anzaldúa writes to women of color to express the importance of a contemporary development in social organizing when women of color now work together. As a result, she explains, “Because we occupy the same or similarly oppressed cultural, economic space(s) or share similar oppressions, we can create a solidarity based on a ‘minority’ coalition. We can build alliances around differences, even in groups which are homogenous.”⁸¹

Notably, Pharr emphasizes a move from “politics of domination” toward a “politics of liberation.” She does not, however, extend her notion of liberation beyond an idea of aggregate, mutually tolerant moral and political commitments. A theory of solidarity may or may not provide a distinctive theory of action as a resource for motivating certain kinds of decisions and commitments, but will explain the conditions needed in which action may occur. That is, a theory of solidarity as relational lends to the task but does not itself complete the task of explaining how and why persons engage in collective action and what, if anything, preserves

⁷⁹ Alinsky (1989).

⁸⁰ Johnson Reagon (1983: 356-368); Pharr (1996: 36-37, 81-82, 103-104, 112).

⁸¹ Anzaldúa et al. (2009: 144).

their respective commitments to emancipation.

It will help to consider which kinds of solidarity sustain coalitions engaged in liberatory projects. In practice, liberatory movements may very well make use of coalition politics. Moreover, these sorts of strategies may serve those who intend to develop solidarity as relational for the purposes of liberation, but have not given an explicitly liberatory theories of solidarity, per se. At best, the theories discussed above provide descriptions of interactions that may or may not address the relational and liberatory concerns of particularly vulnerable individuals and groups.

Call the notions above part of a *standard*, *traditional*, or *colloquial* conception of solidarity. They differ specifically from solidarity as a relational concept relevant to liberation in that they do not elucidate or propose anything in particular sustains persons and groups despite contravening influences that benefit the status quo of a ruling regime. Sympathies, institutional dependencies, shared histories, identities, and the like may play all sorts of positive or negative roles in social organization. Movements for liberation need a conception of solidarity that helps explain the stakes of laboring together toward that end. At best, the aforementioned fields of thought may reveal general intuitions about solidarity, and yet they remain deficient insofar as they concern liberatory solidarity as relational. Without clearer conceptual designations of relation and liberation, these theories may pose resources for certain kinds of social organization, interactions, and mutual cooperation, but cannot count as relational in the emancipatory connotation needed for liberatory projects. Social patterns deemed civic friendship, collective action, mutual interest, and shared nationality may follow from solidarity as relational, but solidarity and the outcomes of solidarity do not stand in for one another. For the purposes of liberation, a theory of solidarity must alert people to shared (common) and/or respective

(particular) concerns endemic to relation which, thereafter, make certain kinds of emancipatory social movements not just possible but *feasible*.

Solidarity and liberation

Here, I apply Enrique Dussel's philosophy of liberation to set the context for the use of relational solidarity as relevant to liberatory movements. Various candidate theories of liberation and emancipation may suffice for my purposes, and I think it important to acknowledge that even the most intellectually rigorous notions of liberation may fall short when applied by activists. Still, I consider Dussel's theory of liberation for two reasons. First, he argues for liberation with the intent to prioritize respect for those most in need of emancipation. Second, he takes seriously that those in need of emancipation must at times challenge claims to institutional power and cultural hegemony whether or not they have the full gamut of available resources needed to carry out a regime change. When dominant moral norms and political systems cannot provide emancipatory relief from the suffering they generate and sustain, notions of liberation corroborate justifications for resistance, solidarity offers feasible strategies, and relations provide the means to see it through.

An austere version of liberation, perhaps best termed *resistance*, would aim to forestall the detrimental consequences that prevailing traditions and institutions pose to disenfranchised or vulnerable populations. Dussel theorizes a more robust standard that calls into question dominant moral and political norms of a society and, consequently, those acting for liberation seek to put social traditions and institutions in the service of people made most vulnerable by a society's dominant scheme.⁸² Conceptions of solidarity developed in the context of moral and political

⁸² Dussel refers to the ancient Judaic notion "Habodah" (1985: §2.6.7.3).

philosophies specify priorities and objectives differently than concepts of solidarity for the purposes of liberatory emancipation. While this does not necessarily preclude the possibility that relational notions of solidarity can address moral, political, and liberatory concerns, I take liberation as my primary aim here.

On Dussel's account, liberation sets as its *priority* the task of fostering respect for the "alterity" of "others" normatively excluded from the dominant rule of a society, those least enfranchised and made vulnerable given a society's moral and political norms. Vulnerable, that is, in ways that systematically prevent attempts to ameliorate the ways the dominant regime subjugates them to live amid suffering and the cruel indignities of oppression.⁸³ Borrowing extensively from Levinasian phenomenology, Dussel argues that liberation requires respecting the alterity of persons, acknowledging that from an attitude of liberation one thinks it possible to respectfully "lets others be in their distinctness."⁸⁴ That is, acting to respect others in their "exteriority" (features of persons incommensurable with dominant moral and political norms) while also maintaining corresponding responsibility to them.

Even if virtuous and just with regard to the conventions of a particular moral and political theory, the dominant ruling scheme of a society does not necessarily include a provision for liberation. Consider at least two ways this may occur. One, the *de jure* theoretical resources used to justify and outline a dominant scheme fail to adequately address the alterity of some "others" who remain incommensurable with the theory, and/or, two, the *de facto* operations of moral traditions and political institutions pose discriminatory, detrimental, and perhaps egregiously harmful consequences for some people. When people suffer the detrimental effects of arbitrary, systemic cultural and political discrimination, such as sexism, racism, etc., under the conditions

⁸³ Ibid. Hallie.

⁸⁴ Ibid. §2.6.2.3. Here, Dussel follows Levinas's theory of the exteriority of others.

of dominant moral and political rule, they have a *de facto* need for liberation. Conceptually, a theory of liberation provides resources for challenging the legitimacy of claims to dominant rule. Acted out in practice, liberatory activities seek to place social institutions in service of the disenfranchised “other” -- the poor, the weak, those on the periphery.⁸⁵

Liberatory thought, somewhat like models of transitional justice, need not provide a comprehensive ideal state of justice and morality in order to hold efficacy in helping to redress oppression. In accord with Hallie’s diagnostic and prescriptive work on oppression and ethics, I differentiate among modes of thought about *harms* (institutionalized cruelty), *removing or ceasing harms* (the mere cessation or absences of institutionalized cruelty), and *hospitality* (the presence of active, laborious efforts to heal the harms done by institutionalized cruelty).⁸⁶ Circumstances of historical atrocities and patterned oppression vary so greatly that liberation may involve strategies such as injunctions against the uses of certain institutional resources, reparations in the form as compensatory benefits, and perhaps social reforms intended to redress exclusionary value systems by replacing them with certain forms of pluralism and affirmation. A theory of liberation can provide pragmatic guidance in the form of priorities and objectives, but does not completely delimit which kinds of actions and programs to include or exclude from consideration in every context. The specifics depend on a given case. Actors seeking liberation refuse harms and seek redress of harms, but they need not provide a conclusively justified model of social justice in order to demand respite and/or reparations. This version of liberation comports with a broad theoretical understanding and I avoid offering further specific claims as to the tactics and programmatic content of liberatory campaigns.

Perhaps participants in liberatory movements share some common, coherent conception

⁸⁵ Ibid. §2.6.3, §2.6.7.3.

⁸⁶ Hallie. Ibid.

of social justice that helps them to formulate criticisms and demands. Or, and I think this more likely, they may share common conception of oppression, institutional cruelty, injustice, or familiar narrative of suffering. However, the 20th and early 21st centuries have shown that disenfranchised groups rarely agree full-stop on a single version, or even a cluster of conceptions of either social justice or oppression. Heterogeneity in this regard seems to provide a necessary means of resistance. It remains well beyond the scope of this argument to address those concerns. For now, I can only suggest that the proposition of liberation, solidarity, and relation as I conceptualize them together will at best provide a feasible resource to catalyze solidarity among those who will choose to relate for the mutual benefits of liberation rather than remain subjugated.

Complementary to the *priority* of respect for those whom a society marginalizes, liberation takes on the dual *objectives* of challenging claims to institutional power (moral and political rule), and making that power *obediential*. Specifically, people who act for liberation confront the alleged legitimacy of dominant moral and political norms in situations when such norms systematically disenfranchise certain groups. To do so, liberationists go about testing claims of power against the verifier: “power subsumes from alterity.”⁸⁷ For a regime to count as legitimate in claiming power it derives legitimacy solely from the welfare and living conditions endured by those least central to or involved in the operations of political rule. Conversely, claims to power count as illegitimate in light of the suffering of individuals and groups disenfranchised or made vulnerable by the scheme’s operations as dominant. Persons wielding ruling authority (agents acting on the power of established moral traditions and political institutions) either obey the priority of respect for others on the periphery, or forfeit the *sine qua*

⁸⁷ Ibid.

non of their claims to legitimate rule.⁸⁸

Liberation aims to make cultural and institutional powers obediential to the needs of the vulnerable. The vitality and suffering of disenfranchised parties (those on the periphery) either verify or nullify the legitimacy of the dominant scheme's claim to power. Whether a particular regime retains political and cultural dominance in spite of illegitimacy then falls to organized movements to sort out. Liberation, Dussel contends, reveals the "fetishized" (self-referential, tautological) pseudo-justifications that persevere when evaluating a society's prevailing moral and political ideologies on their own terms.

It remains the purview of moral and political theories to show why persons ought to think it justifiable to conform, to adopt certain norms. However, the success of these theories – providing a compelling "ought" – does not negate the importance of retaining a critically liberatory evaluation of cultural and institutional practices. After all, communities and governments can and do deviate in practice from norms established in principle. In the same vein, the failure of moral and political theorists to provide adequate justifications also does not provide coherent insight into liberatory priorities and objectives. The import of liberatory convictions does not wane simply because moral and political rationales may miss the normative mark, or people fail to carry them out sufficiently in practice. If not for the liberatory concerns latent in many moral and political philosophies, why else would scholars bother with anything other than authoritarianism?⁸⁹ Critically, liberatory analyses provide a resource for questioning

⁸⁸ Dussel articulates a phenomenological distinction between relations as "proxemic" and "proximity" (Ibid. §2.1.2, §2.1.1.3, §2.1.2.2, §2.1.3, §2.1.5.4, §2.3.1.1). The distinction relies on underlying metaphors of spatial distance, and a description of features one might encounter when relating, but no explicit concept of relation qua relation. Here, his theory requires and intimates the need for a more basic notion of relation that can explain the relevance of proxemic and proximity to liberation.

⁸⁹ I consider it an open question, and one worth pondering, whether classical European philosophers such as Hobbes, Rousseau, Locke, Mill, and their ilk would have bothered at all with moral and political theorizing if not for the underlying liberatory motives and concerns of their times.

dominant modes of moral and political reasoning even as societies make use of various dominant cultural and institutional schemes.

Those who refuse to endure further disenfranchisement and suffering, and who cannot appeal for respite within the dominant cultural and institutional scheme have good reason to seek cultural recognition and political representation, but liberatory thought precedes and bolsters those efforts.⁹⁰ And while organized movements may pan out as campaigns for moral recognition in response to cultural hegemony, and/or as appeals for procedural justice in garnering shares of political representation, liberatory efforts aim at comparatively revolutionary changes to a society. However it may turn out, liberation sets the priority and objectives from which those movements arise. A practically useful notion of liberation functions as a resource for deposing fetishized, illegitimate justifications for dominant rule. In challenging prevailing norms, liberation ties power “obedientially” to the needs of those at the periphery.⁹¹ Agents acting on the power of established moral traditions and political institutions either obey the priority of respect for others on periphery, or forfeit the precondition of their claims to legitimate rule.

Consistent with Dussel, I argue that to foster solidarity for the purposes of liberation requires attending to concepts of “relation” as a key concern.⁹² If conceptions of solidarity help people to relate despite countervailing influences, then it matters to theorize a clear concept of

⁹⁰ “The philosophy that knows how to ponder this reality, the de facto world reality, not from the perspective of the center of political, economic, or military power but from beyond the frontiers of that world, from the periphery -- this philosophy will not be ideological. Its reality is the whole earth; for it the ‘wretched of the earth’ (who are not nonbeing) are also real” (Ibid. §1.2.1.2.).

⁹¹ “The philosophy that knows how to ponder this reality, the de facto world reality, not from the perspective of the center of political, economic, or military power but from beyond the frontiers of that world, from the periphery -- this philosophy will not be ideological. Its reality is the whole earth; for it the ‘wretched of the earth’ (who are not nonbeing) are also real” (Ibid. §1.2.1.2.).

⁹² Dussel articulates a phenomenological distinction between relations as “proxemic” and “proximity” (Ibid. §2.1.2, §2.1.1.3, §2.1.2.2, §2.1.3, §2.1.5.4, §2.3.1.1). The distinction relies on underlying metaphors of spatial distance, and a description of features one might encounter when relating, but no explicit concept of relation qua relation. Here, his theory requires and intimates the need for a more basic notion of relation that can explain the relevance of proxemic and proximity to liberation.

relation capable of elucidating the concerns of those in need of liberation. In what follows, I propose that a description of relations as making can establish the efficacy of solidarity for liberatory purposes.

Toward a concept of relations

Here, I apply a Deweyian, pragmatist strategy to designate four criteria that outline both the purpose and limitations a basic notion of relations should meet if relevant to solidarities as a resource for liberation.⁹³ Let me say something first about how unqualified some philosophical works appear in the context of liberatory thought. In the conclusion to "The Postulate of Immediate Empiricism," Dewey remarks on what he probably should have said at the outset of the essay:

Such a method is not spectacular; it permits of no offhand demonstrations of God, freedom, immortality, nor of the exclusive reality of matter, or ideas, or consciousness, etc. But it supplies a way of telling what all these terms mean. It may seem insignificant, or chillingly disappointing, but only upon condition that it be not worked. Philosophic conceptions have, I believe, outlived their usefulness considered as stimulants to emotion, or as a species of sanctions; and a larger, more fruitful and more valuable career awaits them considered as specifically experienced meanings.⁹⁴

In a similar fashion, the description of relations I propose will probably not seem "spectacular" and may even "appear chillingly disappointing" for precisely the reason Dewey notes: I do not work it up in terms more familiar to phenomenology and metaphysics, and instead supply it as but one way call attention to what we endure when we relate. On to the four criteria for relation as making.

⁹³ Dewey (1905). I rely on a practical strategy consistent with Dewey's pragmatist intervention in favor of descriptions and reformed experience: dismissing questions of metaphysical and phenomenological "reality," instead we test the reliability of "truth" claims. In this ongoing process we reform descriptions of experience, and then we either continue to use the descriptions, modify (reform) them, or replace them when we find them unreliable or falsified.

⁹⁴ Ibid. 399.

First, the concept should serve as a *proposition*, one that we may accept or reject as fallible, feasible, or infeasible depending on the particular circumstances of application. The efficacy of the concept will show as empirically sound in practice or not at all. When applied, those who consider relation in terms of making one another may count the proposition workable to the extent that it helps them foster and sustain solidarity. The concept does not need to serve as the sole notion of relations, nor do we need it to eliminate other candidate concepts once and for all.

Second, the concept should play an *alertive* roll, prompting us to consider the risks and consequences involved in relating – to consider better the vulnerabilities necessarily involved in relation. That is, an *alertive description* of relation calls attention to notice the consequences we pose one another when we relate. This does not require that the concept include an ameliorative resource for resolving any and all particular consequences of relation; nor does it need to show how to mitigate what happens when people relate. It need only serve as a harbinger of consequences. Depending on the relevant conditions, consequences may cache out in a wide range of significance: risk of harm, feasibility of healing historical animosities, concessions in terms of trust, preserving or sacrificing historically important traditions, and even changes in psychology, language, food, and daily practices of life. Whether alertive to matters seemingly abstract, specific, or mundane, a notion of relation provides a basis for attending to the consequences we may pose one another. This includes acknowledging the consequences of relation over which we may have little or no control, as well as consequences we may or may not have the ability to predict.

Third, the concept should render with *familiarity* as a basic or minimalist description that can hold broad relevance to the widest possible audience. To that end, the root concept does not

need to conclusively resolve or elucidate all questions of relation *prima facie*, or universally. Indeed, all sorts of mysteries of relation may defy explanation and, admittedly, other conceptions of relation may do better work in some contexts. This also does not require resolving whether anyone treats the concept as metaphor, myth, logical proposition, empirical claim, popular slogan, or some other particular narrative device. It merely needs to provide a minimally descriptive, perhaps even seemingly mundane, emphasis on the consequences of laborious human activities.

Fourth and finally, then, the concept should garner focus on *laborious* activities undertaken by persons with limited lifespans.⁹⁵ In doing so, the proposed notion alerts us to consider the laborious facets of life, not the least of which include enduring emancipatory struggles with limited resources and energy.⁹⁶ Whereas we may imagine all sorts of *possibilities* for persons in ideal conditions, such as attempted by scholars of so-called “ideal theory,” a notion of relation relevant to liberation will emphasize the limitations of *feasible* activities (another cue from Dussel) – that is, the endurable and non-endurable labors in a finite span of life. While some degree of abstraction remains unavoidable in semantically coding any concept, an emphasis on laborious activities limits the range of concerns by emphasizing feasibility of limited lifespan over the broader range of imagined possibilities for otherwise immortal subjects.⁹⁷

In addition to these four criteria, it will also help to delimit the role of a concept of relation by stating what I think it helpful to avoid, and I admit to treating the following

⁹⁵ Based on notions of materialism and sensuousness articulated by Feuerbach (1972).

⁹⁶ Dussel (1985: §4.3.7.5; 2008: §8.3).

⁹⁷ Ibid. As Dussel argues, liberatory thought must emphasize feasibility – theorizing what people can do from the conditions of laborious life – versus theorizing in terms of possibility – what some people might do under ideal conditions. Those in need of liberation, by default, do not live in ideal conditions and, thus, undermine their own need to practically pursue liberatory outcomes if they try to rely on idealized possibilities while enduring non-ideal circumstances.

theoretical conventions as pernicious, negative criteria. This will, I hope, set a clearer context for the positive criteria mentioned earlier. I aim to rule out the narrowing of the concept to definitions of essential meanings and will not ask “what does relation mean?” The candidate conception should also not depend narrowly on a phenomenology of relations. Thus, I also avoid privileging a provincially phenomenological and overly broad context in terms of the experiences of beings in existence. Along similar lines, the concept I propose refers as little as possible to metaphysics and metaphysical preconditions. I do not seek to propose transcendental principles of relations. Even when concepts construed in metaphysical, phenomenological, and/or ideological terms pose relevance to some people, it will not do to assume these strategies make sense to people worldwide.⁹⁸ In keeping with Dewey's provocation, this concept will not get us a fix on “relatedness.” Even with this attempt to provincialize philosophical questions of meaning, phenomenologies, and metaphysics, I intend for the concept of relations as making and the composite theory of liberatory solidarity as relational to remain accessible to those fields of thought.

Finally, I reject the simplistic reduction of a concept of relations too narrowly to questions of causation, inference, and spatiality (in other words, to schematics, structure, position, distance, etc.), and I assume those questions better addressed in terms of the metaphysics of mereology (the study of part-whole relations).⁹⁹ Though we find it commonplace in theories of oppression and equality to apply spatial metaphors (e.g. close, distant, connected, unified, linked, joined, together, etc.) as stand-ins for comprehensive notions of relation, these alone do not elucidate what happens when persons relate.

⁹⁸ Chakrabarty (2000) argues for the importance of "provincializing Europe" and concepts culturally familiar to discourses emerging out of Europe often presented as having universal, worldwide relevance.

⁹⁹ Kleinschmidt, Shieva (2014) provides a recent, robust collection on the topic of mereology.

Relation as making

When we relate we make one another. The basis of this proposition stems from the work of Elaine Scarry who analyzes the way modern materialists discuss laborious activity. Through references to ancient Judaic texts (an interest both she and Dussel share in common), Scarry argues that a specific conception of labor provides the *sine qua non* of scholars such as Feuerbach, Marx, and Engels. Without a foundational notion of labor, modern materialist philosophies could not have posed challenges to ideologies derived from fields such as Platonic essentialism and Hegelian idealism, nor to practical problems inherent in liberal governance and capitalist economic models.¹⁰⁰ Scarry explains,

Perhaps the single most striking formulation occurs in Friedrich Engels's essay, 'The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man.' His provocative essay is now understood to be in some of its arguments much less contestable than it was earlier supposed to be, and in other of its arguments much more contestable. Engels's speculation that the crucial location of the transition from ape to man had been in the hand, the organ of making, rather than in the skull, the attendant of the organ of thinking, has after many years been confirmed by the discoveries of anthropologists. Steven Jay Gould calls attention to the fact that the scientific search for the 'missing link' was for a long time subverted by the search for the wrong body part (the skull rather than the hand), a mistake itself arising from a faulty (and, according to Gould, ideologically stipulated) emphasis on man-as-intellect rather than on man-as-creator, man-as-maker, or man-as-worker [sic]. Engels also introduces into the essay the idea that the hand itself is an artifact, gradually altered by its own activity of altering the external world. He writes, "before the first flint was fashioned into a knife by human hands, a period of time must have elapsed in comparison with which the historical time known to us appears insignificant," and then he continues: "Thus the hand is not only the organ of labour, it is also the product of labour." [...] Although Engels goes on to put forward similar claims about language and the steady refinement of the senses, the hand, the direct agent of making itself remade, remains his central focus.¹⁰¹

The potency of this statement depends on the observation that, "[...] material making is a recreation of the body and the body itself is recreated in that activity."¹⁰² As the products of our

¹⁰⁰ Scarry (1985).

¹⁰¹ Emphasis in original (Ibid. 252-253).

¹⁰²(Ibid. 253-256, quote on 256).

laborious activities, when we relate we “make” ourselves and in doing so we make one another. Unless we assume fictive hyper-autonomy, radical metaphysical segregation, self-making entails making the other. Stated variously: when I labor upon the world the world labors back upon me, what we work upon works back upon us, what we change changes us, what you alter with your labor alters you. Altered by the activity of altering, altered by the labor of relation, laborious acts of making have the consequence of making the laborer. Thus, when persons relate they laboriously make one another. The terms of relation are just that those who relate labor to make one another in various ways, some describable and some indescribable.

Consider as well that the notion of making appears influential in the works of more recent scholars such as Martin Buber and Emanuel Levinas, both of whom focus on accounts of relations. Indeed, Levinas notes that Buber developed his theory of I-Thou/I-It relations in response to a provocation that Buber found while reading Feuerbach.¹⁰³ In turn, Dussel theorizes solidarity as a “material” category that “transforms” persons, and describes solidarity as practical activities (“Give bread to the hungry”) that result from phenomenological conditions.¹⁰⁴ Yet, because he develops the idea in phenomenological terms he does not adequately elucidate solidarity as relational in the context of materially laborious transformations. Scarry provides a strong case to reject the dominant influences of idealism and phenomenology that have led scholars to falsely redress Marx’s materialist insights, erroneously divorcing his work from the material consequences of labor but in terms of existentialist and phenomenological projects.¹⁰⁵ I propose that we do as Scarry suggests and accept “[...] the invitation to attend, with more

¹⁰³ Lévinas (1999: 68)

¹⁰⁴ Dussel (2007: 84, 86)

¹⁰⁵ Arguably, Marx’s thinking on materialism and sensuousness stems from both Feuerbach’s work in “Principles of the Philosophy of the Future” (1972) and “The Essence of Christianity” (1972), but also possibly from his (Marx’s) Judaic family lineage. Scarry’s archival work in *The Body in Pain* seems to corroborate this claim.

commitment, to the subject of making, a subject whose philosophic and ethical import we do not yet fully understand.”¹⁰⁶ In this case, I do so by applying the model of laborious making as the basis for a theory of relations.

The concept leaves open which sorts of activities to count as labors, as laborious, and the content may include manual tasks like construction as well as discursive and symbolic labors such as dialogue, meditation, dance, imaginative exercises, and so forth. As Brian Britt notes in the context of “unexpected attachments” designated by certain semantic invocations in ancient Hebrew texts, some relationships are, “full of surprises (pleasant and unpleasant).”¹⁰⁷ I make no restrictive claims about the specific content of laborious activities, and admit it must remain an open-textured proposition. I do not think relating counts as any less of a laborious activity when someone refuses to think of it as such, and yet I accept that another person may deny the descriptive accuracy of the concept. But I would not admit to denial that leaves us without a substantive description tout court. Treated as a truth-claim, a proposed description, I would want – earnestly so – an alternative description of relation the theory of which better explains relation than what I have offered. We can haggle over the content of the concept of relation, but not the need for some explanation as a foundational component of liberatory solidarity. I think relation as making serves to at least illustrate the need, *if not also embolden calls to action*.

In addition to the question of what does and does not count as laborious, I also leave open the range of strategies involved in such labors. We have all sorts of options from which to choose. Consider but a few. Nietzsche’s philology and Gadamer’s hermeneutics pose interpretive activities as one strategy of relation.¹⁰⁸ Foucault’s “technologies of the self” implies making

¹⁰⁶ Scarry (1985: 277).

¹⁰⁷ Britt (2003: 299).

¹⁰⁸ Nietzsche (1989), Gadamer (1989).

oneself in relation.¹⁰⁹ In feminist discourses, Kittay's ethics of care and Crenshaw's intersectionality can serve as strategies of making one another, and I think the same may hold for methods of consciousness-raising in the works of figures like Steve Biko, and in what Dussel calls "mediations."¹¹⁰ Writing specifically to women of color in the U.S.A, María Lugones recommends "'world'-traveling" and "playfulness" as strategies for coming to understand, as she puts it, "what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes."¹¹¹ I think it misguided to settle on any particular theory of the *means* of relation as the sole or primary explanation, and suggest that it helps to proliferate different accounts. Can we, then, not eliminate some strategies such as may appear cruelty, abuse, neglect, intimidation, etc.? Too extensive to elaborate on here, questions about strategies of relation do deserve closer attention. It may help to consider some delineations among unjustifiable force and permissible force, such as the typology of force, threats, offers, and coercions outlined by Michael Taylor.¹¹² We can, at least, critique the kinds of strategies that run counter to the priorities of objectives of liberation, such as actions that lead to derogation and destruction of dignity.

Consider the way that relation as making helps to problematize cultural hegemony and institutional oppression. Suppose that your cultural upbringing and the patterned social rewards of your society teach you to believe, implicitly or explicitly, in the arbitrary superiority of people with lineage and/or characteristics similar to your own, as well as the inferiority of those who do not share similar lineage or characteristics – or, "the other." Imagine that you react to the subordinated other in any of the following ways: as aesthetically revolting, or treat the other with patronizing tolerance, or perhaps only allow yourself to value the similarities you believe the

¹⁰⁹ Foucault, Rabinow, and Faubion (1997: 223-251).

¹¹⁰ Kittay (1999), Crenshaw (1991), Biko and Stubbs (2002: 48-53), Dussel (1985: §2.3.1.1, §2.3.1.1).

¹¹¹ Lugones in Garry and Pearsall (1996: 419, 432).

¹¹² Taylor (1982: 10-25).

other shares with you while denying differences.

To maintain your dominance you refuse to let an inferior other make you and, though impossible to perfectly achieve, you do all possible to refuse to relate in a way that another can make you. Intentionally and unintentionally, you may aim to reproduce your way of life in the other – evangelically making another subordinate. Or, perhaps you may enjoy cultural and political norms that bolster your sense of superiority while rejecting social contexts that involve relating and, thus, making one another. You may even seek to relate in some sense of the term, but remain committed to a notion of heritage, culture, identity, authenticity or purity that, you hope, proscribes making. To attempt to refuse to let another (an other) make you, to avoid enduring the labor of making one another, may collude in hegemonic, oppressive, and anti-liberatory activities.

But we must also accept that attempts to avoid or refuse to make one another may arise as matters of preserving one's dignity in response to harm. Imagine yourself as someone who has lived enduring the treatment described above – one who has lived arbitrarily and systematically evaluated as subordinate, tolerated paternalistically, and/or treated with revulsion. Would you not attempt to refuse to let another person make you, avoiding laborious interactions, if that person believes and acts as the dominant party I just described? With no liberatory recourse under dominant moral and political schemes, one may suffer, persistently demeaned if not altogether tormented, to have to subject oneself to relation. That is, having to act as if made recognizable in the master's image, or to suffer worse cruelties for defying the status quo.

So much for individuals relating to individuals. What of the broader social implications? Posed as a political problem, let us consider social institutions that systemically distribute and redistribute the benefits and burdens of a society – traditional, economic, legislative, juridical,

executive, etc. At times, such institutions sustain historically arbitrary patterns of dominance and subordination. Even though some institutions aim to redress or ameliorate discrimination and oppression, such as affirmative action programs, these political incarnations do not necessarily count as liberatory. As a result, some persons and groups have more and some persons and groups have less institutional power to make one another according to terms such as Rawlsian “fair play” and, thus, function to one another merely as “complicated objects in a complicated routine.”¹¹³ The manifestation of this as cultural hegemony appears as a moral problem:

Evaluating another (an other) as unworthy (less worthy) of making you as compared with how you rank your worth to make them. Liberatory solidarity as relational based on the notion of relation as making can provide a conceptual means for developing practical challenges to these sorts of conditions.

Relation as making helps to elucidate the stakes of attempting to foster solidarity for the purposes of liberation. The fact that those who relate can demonstrate their capabilities to make one another in any way at all is the primary fact of relations at issue.¹¹⁴ The many various ways that making takes place are extensions from the first fact: relations refer to laborious making. That I affect another person’s ability to affect me, and that another person affects my ability to affect yet another person opens the possibility of considering how we endure one another in solidarity. In what follows, I apply the concepts of solidarity, relation, and liberation to a hypothetical case to clarify the way these concepts work together.

¹¹³ In Rawls’s (1957) words: “In the same way that, failing a special explanation, the criterion for the recognition of suffering is helping him who suffers, acknowledging the duty of fair play is the criterion for recognizing another as a person with similar capacities, interests, and feelings as oneself. The acceptance by participants in a common practice of this duty is a reflection in each of the recognition of the aspirations of the others to be realized by their joint activity. Without this acceptance they would recognize one another as but complicated objects in a complicated routine” (659).

¹¹⁴ There may be a tendency to extend the discussion into discourse on “creation” and “destruction.” The terms of creation and destruction are already inherent in relations as making, but it is not necessary to theorize these concepts further in order to make the point.

Liberatory solidarity as relational

When proposed as a workable proposition, the alertive description of relations as making can help people consider the consequences of laborious activities, emphasizing the benefits and risks involved in enduring one another. Building from this notion of relations, theories of solidarity as relational may incorporate this concept, and in doing so pose such notions of solidarity as resources for liberatory projects. In specific contexts, individuals and groups can explore their respective abilities to continue to relate despite countervailing incentives and disincentives. Perhaps most importantly, those who intend to relate for the purposes of liberation may find that, for the sake of solidarity, they need not resolve all manner of discord, mysteries, and disagreements with one another. Let us consider the following groups: A, B, and C:

Group A benefits from the historically arbitrary advantages of political institutions and moral traditions consistent with her beliefs and preferences. Groups B and C, however, endure the historically arbitrary disadvantages of relative exclusion from the political and moral conditions that benefit A. That is, we can say B and C endure unwarranted institutionalized discrimination. Groups B and C do not share the same moral and political ideals and, moreover, differ extensively in their respective conceptions of both institutional and traditional norms. The society that A enjoys with impunity merely tolerates that B and C have political and moral interests that differ from A. Let us imagine that B and C would benefit from liberatory projects that would challenge the moral and political conditions arbitrarily beneficial to A. Let us also imagine that B and C cannot achieve liberatory objectives by working independently from one another.

That B and C consider the proposition of making one another, they can use it as an alertive resource for exploring the limits of what each may expect the other to endure. Each can consider the consequences of making one another, and whether doing so for the purposes of liberation counts as more or less beneficial than other alternatives. Whatever technical strategies they conspire to employ in working for solidarity as relational, the members of B and C commit to relating, to making one another despite countervailing influences, in order to develop and carry out liberatory challenges to the dominant regime of A.

Suppose we extend the case example to include group D as follows:

Group D has political and moral ideals that radically differ from those of A, B, and C to the extent that D wish not to participate in any society sharing any of their (A, B, and C) ideals. Yet, the current institutions and traditions enjoyed by A, and that tolerate the diversity of B and C, pose D substantial risks. Whereas B and C endure institutionalized discrimination and some episodic toleration, D endures radical alterity as a non-person, unrecognized by the status quo of A's political and moral ideals. As it turns out, B and C learn that they cannot achieve a liberatory challenge without D. Assume that none of the parties B, C, and D wish to dilute their respective moral and political commitments. Moreover, assume that B and C have historically treated D with hostility, and vice-versa.

For B, C, and D to attempt liberation, they must have some conception of solidarity as a relational concept. Recall that the standard or colloquial notions of solidarity may help consider different ideas and activities involved in liberatory work; notions of identity and shared history might, perhaps, come into play as resources. However, if not for the proposed description of relation as a fallible, alertive resource, it remains unclear what else might offer the groups *a strategy for comparing the consequences of solidarity to the consequences life without emancipation*. Either B, C, and D choose to endure one another in solidarity and gain the possible (and perhaps probable) benefits of emancipation, or they endure the certainty of continual domination under the current regime.

More than merely a strategy of formal unification, for groups with various moral and political commitments to relate they must decide the extent of what they can respectively endure when laboriously making one another. If such groups intend to foster and sustain relational solidarity, then they will have to choose to endure making one another despite countervailing incentives and disincentives. This likely requires individuals and groups to consider *both* what they will attempt to endure, as well as what they expect or cause others to endure. For instance, someone may feel rage at the lack of understanding and ignorance of another, just as another may dwell in cognitive dissonance from those who endure oppression and discrimination;

perhaps I do not want to put up with your ignorance just as you do not want to put up with my failure to show empathy. And if all involved do not consider the need to endure one another in relation, to cultivate one another, such patterns will likely repeat to the detriment and folly of liberatory movements. Should they intend to foster and sustain relational solidarity for the purposes of carrying out liberatory projects, they will have to commit to endure making one another despite countervailing influences and, moreover, with some shared conception of the terms of liberation.

This, I should hope, can also include fostering solidarity with those who stand to lose the arbitrary disadvantages of the dominance of their particular moral and political norms. As Frederick Douglass puts it,

Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will. Find out just what any people will quietly submit to and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them, and these will continue till they are resisted with either words or blows, or both. The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress.¹¹⁵

Suppose that, as many activists and scholars contend, in some cases liberation can only come with concessions by A. Solidarity as a relational concept makes it feasible that B, C, and D may also develop an emancipatory program with some or all of A as well. In solidarity, B, C, and D can respond to Douglass's concern by taking his advice on "endurance" – *if* they conscript endurance, also a notion of laborious activity, into the proposition of relations as making. B, C, D, and even A may choose whether to bear one another, to endure one another in predictable and unpredictable ways, once they have a description of relations that catalyzes their ability to consider and decide among the relevant likely options. In this case: relational solidarity and

¹¹⁵ Douglass quoted in Martin (1984: 175).

liberation, or further subjugation.¹¹⁶

The austere proposition about solidarity as a relational concept does not necessarily help to predict, delimit, or designate specific consequences of relating. Relating in liberatory solidarity may forever transform a people, or only alter them for a short period of time. Some may find themselves made vastly different, while others may consider little to have changed. In making one another, solidarity at least involves choosing the risks of vulnerability over the certainties of subjugation, the ways that people live their lives may change extensively or insignificantly. It may come about that people endure changes to deeply important traditions, values, practices, myths, and so forth. Just as well, people may bear the difficulty of changes in resource holdings, land claims, and opportunities limited by different circumstances. The identities people have cherished may remain unchanged, substantially altered, or entirely abandoned. Relating may at times even threaten or bolster dignity. It remains the task of particular people in particular circumstances to consider these sorts of consequences the ones they pose others, and the ones that others pose them – and then to accept or refuse what they find they can and cannot endure.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have imagined the plight of historically underrepresented and marginalized peoples as the motivating concern. I intend the relational account of solidarity to benefit movements such as feminist, anti-racist, and pro-indigenous liberation. To that end, I

¹¹⁶ Despite my extensive research, etymological sources offer no substantial antonym of “relation” or “solidarity,” nor can I find a corollary concept that problematizes life “without relation” in any way other than by negating solidarity and/or appealing to spatial metaphors. Notions of conflict such as “discord” and “disagreement,” both negations, appear frequently. This, I suspect, prompts the need for a careful theoretical diagnosis of whatever we might eventually call it. I have a further hunch that this will complement theories of oppression by explaining in relational terms a set of concerns that have so far eluded description.

conclude by further distinguishing the relational account of solidarity I have proposed from the three most common resources used by scholars and activists who seek to foster solidarity as an ameliorative resource.

Often, scholars err by conflating solidarity with the outcomes or results of solidarity: collective action, shared sympathies, mutualism, unity of interests, and so forth. Granted, these represent the kinds of results that may result from solidarity. I have clarified by contrast with colloquial notions that solidarity does not result from these sorts of things but, the other way around, these sorts of things result from solidarity.

When the stakes of a situation call for liberation, a theory of solidarity qua solidarity offers a more reliable resource for bringing about intended outcomes. People may or may not engage in collective action, but may engage in solidarity relationally. Analyses of oppression and corresponding theories of equality have helped to diagnose and propose ameliorative responses to certain problems, but do not work as theories of solidarity. Understanding oppression in various ways does help to reveal institutional inequalities and cultural hegemony. Yet, theories of oppression merely serve as diagnostic resources. Diagnosing institutional failures can help identify sources of problems for which liberation may count as a solution. Likewise, theories of equality may explain the kinds of outcomes for which to work, but equality in itself not explain how to foster movements capable of achieving those outcomes (and equality still may not meet the demands of liberation). Whether or not scholars and activists work out diagnoses of oppression and corresponding theories of equality, people can continue to engage in solidarity relationally.

I have observed first-hand that grassroots organizers, coalition activists, and the catalysts, makers, and bearers of solidarity's labors, do so by virtue of enduring one another. Faced with

conflicts, disagreements, indignities, careless speech, and even occasional malicious actions, effective organizers forgive, make amends, apologize, adapt, revise beliefs and assumptions, and take on all manner of strategies to sustain relations that, overall, habilitate ongoing collective efforts. Among the difficulties, misdirected emphasis on identity may represent the most pernicious foil in scholarly and activist pursuits of solidarity. Philosophers working across the three main branches of identity theory – *essentialism*, *social constructivism*, and *intersectionality* – have vigorously sought both to foster solidarity, and to resolve problems of oppression and cultural hegemony, by attempting to define what relates. Even the burgeoning *circumstantialist* models that emphasize shared and distinct material conditions as the basis of identity have not catalyzed broadly liberatory movements.¹¹⁷ Concepts such as citizen, agent, subject, singularity, etc. have helped many individuals and groups refute some aspects of injustice, underrepresentation, and social invisibility. And yet, the tug-of-war over identity has not yielded liberation whether via solidarity or through other means. Whether or not people share the similar, or vastly different notions of identity, and whether or not people identify similarly or differently, can continue to foster solidarity relationally.

We need not wed ourselves to modernist preoccupations with identity, recognition, and authenticity in order to develop workable notions of solidarity. Rather than attempt to define what relates and then to figure out how to organize according to those definitions, I think it far more useful to consider what can count as relation. In considering what happens when we relate, solidarity as a relational concept does not require a final theory of identity, and yet in no way precludes that some people may use theories of identity as strategies for making one another. Whether identity as a strategy of relation counts as liberatory or hegemonic in a given context

¹¹⁷ For instance, Naomi Zack's (2005) theory of women's identity as "commonality" based on the circumstances they may share.

also remains an open question. If so, then our best chance of liberation stems from remaining willing to endure the difficulties that come with participation in emancipatory projects, making the best attempt we can to continue to play a part by relating even in the face of contravening influences.

If solidarity does not help otherwise disparate groups to coordinate broad movements for the purposes of liberation, then we might abandon the notion and seek other viable catalysts. Those who want to bring about emancipatory outcomes will need to labor together in solidarity, and this involves accepting the consequences, risks, and benefits of relation for the sake of liberation; we who make one another in liberatory solidarity as relational.

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Chapter 2: Political Solidarity or Liberatory Solidarity? On the relational foundations of liberatory movements.

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Abstract: If theories of solidarity differ according to the specific concerns that historically oppressed groups face, then some versions of solidarity may offer better resources than others for organizing liberatory movements to end cultural and institutional forms of oppression. Whereas solidarity simpatico to terms of moral and political theories can provide some forms of respite from oppression, and even cultural and political rule for a few favored group, they may not foster liberatory emancipation from the long-term status quo that sustains cultural and institutional cruelties overall. Even while grassroots political movements may aim for expanded access to institutional claims and for cultural representation, liberatory movements also have more specific objectives: to challenge the legitimacy of political and moral regimes, and to put those regimes in the obediential service of the vulnerable and oppressed. As I argue, to organize movements around these sorts of objectives will likely require what moral and political solidarity cannot afford. To that end, I propose a notion of *liberatory solidarity as relational* that differs substantively from other forms because it derives from a concept of *relations as making one another*.

Keywords: solidarity, liberation, relation, political solidarity, cultural hegemony, institutional discrimination, Dussel, Scarry, Marx.

Introduction

Do conceptions of moral solidarity and political solidarity offer adequate resources for those in need of emancipation from oppressive regimes? More broadly, on what basis can historically subjugated, marginalized groups decide whether to adopt a particular conception of solidarity as a resource for challenging systemic forms of oppression? Various models of solidarity can help some marginalized groups gain access to shares of political influence, and to expand cultural inclusion. Even while grassroots political movements may aim for expanded access to institutional claims and for cultural representation, liberatory movements also have more specific objectives: to challenge the legitimacy of political and moral regimes, and to put those regimes in the *obediential* service of the vulnerable and oppressed. As I argue, to organize movements on these sorts of objectives will likely require what moral and political solidarity cannot afford. To that end, I propose a notion of *liberatory solidarity as relational* that differs substantively from other forms because it derives from a concept of *relations as making one another* outlined in chapter 1.

If solidarity differs relevant to the specific concerns that historically oppressed groups face, then some versions of solidarity may offer better resources than others for organizing liberatory movements to end cultural and institutional forms of oppression. Whereas solidarity simpatico to terms of moral and political theories can provide some forms of respite from oppression, and even cultural and political rule for some, it may not foster liberatory emancipation from the long-term status quo that sustains cultural and institutional cruelties *overall*.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ Here, I rely on the model of "institutional cruelty" developed by Philip Hallie (1981).

I begin by differentiating moral solidarity from political solidarity. I then draw on Enrique Dussel's *Philosophy of Liberation* as a resource for delineating specific priorities and objectives as unique to liberation. These, I argue, allow movements to pose challenges not just to cultural hegemonies and institutionalized oppression, but to put dominant moral and political regimes qua regimes in the service of liberation. With the context set for liberation, I apply Elaine Scarry's research in materialist thought to offer a conception of *relation as making* that can habilitate liberatory solidarity. I proceed to further distinguish the aims of political solidarity by explaining three recent candidate conceptions as developed in the works of Sally Scholz, Tommie Shelby, and Avery Kolers. In conclusion, I outline some of the limitations of applying this approach to contemporary scholarly and activist work.

Conventional models of solidarity: moral and political

To distinguish liberatory solidarity as relational from moral and political solidarities, let me first characterize these latter two conceptions. As I use the term, *moral solidarity* denotes shared values and norms as the basis of collective tradition, culture, and community. *Political solidarity*, by contrast, refers to shared interests in societal rule – "claims" of having or deserving access to a share of the benefits and burdens of a society's institutions, laws, policies, and systems of governance. I discuss each in turn more fully.

Moral solidarity refers to the sharing of values, norms, responsibilities, or traditions as the basis for a culture, social group, or community. For example, this comports with lines of thinking such as Max Scheler's "life-community," Hannah Arendt's "civic friendship," and Richard Rorty's "science as solidarity."¹¹⁹ Rorty's conception varies, notably so. In some cases

¹¹⁹ Scheler in Ibana (1989), Arendt in Allen (1999), and Rorty (1987: 41).

he describes solidarity as "[...] the attainment of an appropriate mixture of unforced agreement with tolerant disagreement."¹²⁰ Yet, he also offers a textured description of solidarity as something created through "[...] the imaginative ability to see strange people as fellow sufferers."¹²¹ Moral solidarity can also include the basic facts of sharing in the same circumstantial history of one's society, such as in Alasdair MacIntyre's model of communitarianism.¹²² Though you and I may never meet, some form of solidarity extends from the fact of our births into the same nation with its constitutive institutions and cultural traditions preceding us and making us possible. These circumstances without which we could not have come into the world the same way offer a shared reference point for mutual sympathies, even "patriotism" of a certain kind. Even if you revile our nation while I adore it, the fact that we share in its history may provide a version of solidarity. David Hume explains this in the terms of the sympathies (affinities) we have for members of our own nation when we encounter one another traveling abroad, in the context of a nation we do not take as our own.¹²³

What sorts of concerns garner attention in attempting to foster solidarity? Suppose, for the sake of argument, individuals consider their agreements and disagreements about matters of significance such as deeply held values and convictions. A version of moral solidarity could rise on agreements and fall on disagreements. What about concern for suffering as a basis for solidarity? Taking the suffering of others, such as racist persecution, seriously as a moral concern might serve as a basis for solidarity. However, the model I outline does not specify this sort of content. It remains open whether some will foster liberatory solidarity via agreements and toleration of disagreements, moral insight into suffering, or through other considerations that

¹²⁰ Rorty (1987: 41).

¹²¹ Rorty (1989: xvi).

¹²² MacIntyre (1984b).

¹²³ Hume and Selby-Bigge (1896: 316-317, 323, 335 581).

arise out of relation. I will not specify or constrain the ideal or final set of complex considerations endemic to or resulting from relations. The proposition I theorize will at best offer a way to catalyze consideration of the choice whether to relate for the purposes of liberation, or to endure subjugation. I suspect that liberatory solidarity as relational involves complexities such as the mixtures of agreement and disagreement, as well as the imaginative insights into suffering.¹²⁴ However, as I explain later in terms of relational solidarity as a potential feature of making one another, *specific* complexities (e.g. emotions, habits, rituals, aversions, affinities, etc.) may result for some and not for others even though complexities of various sorts likely result.¹²⁵

As I distinguish it, moral solidarity helps to explain when people consider a particular culture or cultures "their own." Having a sense of "one's own culture" on a *collective, group, and community level* comports with the concept having a sense of "one's own worth" at an individual level as used by Rawls to indicate dignity and self-worth.¹²⁶ For example, people in the United States of America may all share in "American culture," enthusiastically or agonistically or both. Even when a person feels conflicted about various aspects of the dominant norms and values of her community's traditions and norms, she nonetheless lives amid the culture as her own.¹²⁷ A

¹²⁴ As Royce (1885) explains, "take whatever thou knowest of desire and of striving, of burning love and of fierce hatred, realize as fully as thou canst what that means, and then with clear certainty add : *Such as that is for me, so is it for him, nothing less*" (158 emphasis in original).

¹²⁵ I design the strategy of theorizing an "alertive proposition" on the grounds of pragmatist thinking inspired by Clough (2003), Dewey (1905), and Zack (2002). On the basis of Dewey's work, I offer descriptions that remain subject to revision and, therefore, open to critique as tentative truth-claims. Clough's work in feminist science studies puts emphasis on the importance of treating descriptive truth-claims as local and fallible, and offers more specific guidelines than Dewey's project (Chapter 1). Complementary to Dewey and Clough, I modify Zack's "use-mention" distinction (80-82) by proposing concepts as "alertive." In this way, even loosely understood concepts prompt attention to more pressing concerns. I take notions of race, for example, as alertive concepts. We can theorize all manner of different meanings about race, but it probably warrants more attention to treat race less as a concept needing definition and more as a concept that alerts attention to moral, political, and liberatory concerns arising out of historically patterned racism.

¹²⁶ Rawls (1999: 79, 297, 348, 423, 436).

¹²⁷ I associate culture and morality in parity with the association of institutional and political, and admit these dichotomies remain questionable. I intend them as one illustrative model for thinking about how morality, politics,

person can feel a range of conflicting sentiments about self-worth at the individual and collective level, taking both self-worth and worth of culture and community as one's own with the constitutive problems and benefits.

Political solidarity references shared interests in various facets of societal rule, including the benefits and burdens at stake in political claims. Scholars give widely divergent accounts of political solidarity. In his work to theorize nationalism David Miller emphasizes a sentiment that arises from sharing the benefits and burdens of social institutions.¹²⁸ Sally Scholz argues that political solidarity refers to, "[...] a unity of individuals each responding to a particular situation of injustice, oppression, social vulnerability, or tyranny. Each individual makes a conscious commitment to a cause" (social justice).¹²⁹ We might also consider political solidarity in terms of Rawls's conceptions of "mutuality" and "cooperation" as the distribution of shares of procedural political rule.¹³⁰ Persons may engage in political solidarity by default, having a circumstantial share of the benefits and burdens of the institutions of their society (as Miller and MacIntyre would have it), and we may at times foster "unity" (as Scholz would have it) with one another when our institutions fail to provide equality and social justice and/or fail to prevent institutional forms of oppression. The former case refers to solidarity as *having a fair share* of the status quo of political rule, and the latter refers to solidarity as a necessary strategy or condition for *getting a fair share* of the status quo of shares of political rule. As I discuss in greater detail later, those already enfranchised whom a society then disenfranchises may appeal on moral and political grounds, but this differs from the liberatory motives of those who, belonging to one or more

and liberation mutually refer to one another while the three fields necessarily differ in important ways. These distinctions may not, and probably do not satisfy all sorts of conceptual analyses. Here, I only use them as minimally illustrative and not maximally conclusive distinctions.

¹²⁸ Miller (2000).

¹²⁹ Scholz (2008: 51).

¹³⁰ Rawls (1999).

historically oppressed groups, have never held enfranchised claims to begin with. For the latter group, a society's regulatory and normative bases of moral and political reasoning rarely, if ever, appear accessible for appeal since it largely serves to keep the haves from ending up have-nots. Liberation, on the other hand, aims to enfranchise the have-nots who have never equitably had.

The descriptions above serve as thin and tentative descriptions of moral and political solidarity, and yet sufficient to consider whether or not such solidarities help to pose liberatory challenges dominant, and sometimes oppressive, regimes. I have characterized moral solidarity and political solidarity this way in order to specify the relevance these fields of thought have to those suffering oppression and cultural hegemonies, and those with liberatory interests. To people seeking respite from institutionalized cruelties and patterned cultural animosity, moral and political theories give rise, respectively, to cultural practices, customs, and habits, as well as to laws, policies, and institutional activities. Moreover, moral and political philosophies bear specific relevance in guiding, or at least revealing, options to appeal – to make claims against harms and cruelties – within the dominant codes of moral practices and institutional procedures. When, as I argue, moral solidarity and political solidarity hold this sort of specific relevance to those suffering oppression, liberatory solidarity catalyzes the feasibility of posing a fundamental challenge not just to procedures of appeal – but to the alleged legitimacy of dominant moral and political regimes *overall*.

Moral conceptions of solidarity may help to explain when a person considers a particular culture or community her own. In a similar manner, political conceptions of solidarity can help to explain when people share similar interests, make claims on government, or perhaps when people take a society's institutions and regulatory policies as their own. The two versions of solidarity, often co-constitutive in theory and in practice, help to establish, change, and sustain

cultural habits and institutional practices in response to certain harms and injustices. The two forms do not necessarily derive from or respond to the suffering of the oppressed, to their appeals, since liberatory priorities and objectives differ substantively from practices rooted in moral codes and institutional distributions in accord with political interests. What of solidarity when dominant communities, cultures, institutions of a society do not take the oppressed groups as the society's own – when a society has *systematically* excluded or subjugated specific groups on arbitrary grounds to such an extent that their claims provoke only patterned minimization and dismissal as incredible?¹³¹ I pose categories of race, sex, gender, disabilities, and sexuality as examples of arbitrary factors applied systematically in the service of a dominant moral and political regime. Those in underrepresented, underserved, minority groups have no substantial credibility on par with the members of a society's dominant paradigm.

Perhaps some forms of oppression based on arbitrary factors can diminish or even come to an end as a result of movements organized on the basis of moral and/or political solidarities. *However, it bears consideration whether some forms of oppression and subjugation will only end as a result of liberatory challenges.* In such cases, moral and political conceptions of solidarity pose weak or even wholly irrelevant resources for the oppressed to challenge dominant, oppressive moral and political regimes. The priorities of moral and political solidarity simply may not include specifically *liberatory* objectives. Making a society less cruel or slightly more bearable differs from emancipation. On moral and political grounds, persons can have good reasons to obey the normative and/or pragmatic call to solidarity; I can have well justified reasons to obey the values of my cultural traditions and political institutions. *And yet, to what sort of theory can I appeal when I need for the moral and political norms to obey me?* Liberatory

¹³¹ Here again I refer to Hallie (1981), as well as to theories of oppression by Crenshaw (1991), Cudd (2006), Frye (1983), and Young and Allen (2011).

thought aims to balance *justified obedience* by offering a resource for questioning the *legitimacy* of moral and political regimes so as to, when necessary, make dominant systems of rule obedient to the vulnerable, the suffering. Thus, before proceeding to further distinguish liberatory solidarity from political solidarity, it will help to outline the basis of a notion of liberation simpliciter.

The priority and objectives of liberation

On what basis can organized movements develop strategies consistent with liberation? That is, what counts as liberatory? Culling from Dussel's broad and formative body of work on the subject, I narrow the field to outline the *priority* and *objectives* endemic to liberatory thought. Liberation takes as the priority a specific kind of respect for the alterity of persons. The two objectives of liberation include, first, challenging the legitimacy of a regime's claims to rule and, second, putting a dominant regime in the obedient service of those most vulnerable, subjugated or least enfranchised.¹³² Those who obey dominant traditions and institutions for the sake of a society's long-term welfare may at times need to seek that the dominant traditions and institutions obey by answering to charges of illegitimacy.¹³³ On this account of liberation, even if dominant norms and institutions count as *justified*, certain persons and groups may still find it necessary to question the *legitimacy* of claims to rule.

Liberatory projects aim to respect alterity by, first, seeking to restrict the harms that dominant regimes pose those who refuse to assimilate, to participate fully, and, second, to

¹³² Dussel (1985: §2.6.8.3); Dussel and Vallega (2012: 305-307, 404, 421).

¹³³ I take it that this resonates with the notion of "appeal" endemic to systems of law and juridical politics. To put it broadly, persons must obey the laws of the land inasmuch as the laws of the land permit appeal of those very same laws and to appeal the decisions made on the basis of laws. Does anyone have a good reason to respect a system of laws as just unless that system permits some forms of appeal? Does appeal count as the sine qua non of justice in law? The laws citizens obey will sometimes need to obey the citizens.

*provide sustenance to others whose refusal to participate may antagonize and confront the norms of a society.*¹³⁴ To theorize alterity, Dussel takes a cue from Levinas and explains how the incommensurability of another person with oneself poses a fact of difference.¹³⁵ On an interpersonal level, respect involves "letting others be" in their alterity rather than seeking to interrogatively comprehend them.¹³⁶

Setting the priority of respect for the alterity of others, liberatory movements raise questions about the extent to which a society's dominant regimes regard or disregard the unique, sometimes radically unwelcomed, qualities of persons and groups. For example, liberatory thought may prompt concern over the way neoliberal democracies treat so-called domestic indigenous nations. The values and institutions of the dominant society may count as justified, as a closed question to many, but the requirement that the dominant society obey respect for the alterity of indigenous peoples remains an open concern. By raising concerns about alterity, persistently pressing for respect for alterity, liberatory movements challenge not only the normative justifications used by those who lay claim to rule, but more specifically the alleged legitimacy of those claims. Calling attention to a lack of respect for alterity may result in doubt about the legitimacy of a dominant regime; liberatory movements may or may not yield in issuing challenges depending on whether and how rulers respond to the call to respect for alterity. At minimum, liberation prompts movements to prioritize questions and the challenges of this sort.

Liberatory projects aim to challenge the moral norms and political arrangements of dominant regimes, specifically by calling into question the legitimacy of claims to power. As

¹³⁴ Dussel. §2.1.6.6.

¹³⁵ Ibid. §2.6.2.3.

¹³⁶ Ibid. §2.6.3, §2.6.7.3.

Dussel's theory contends, "power subsumes from alterity" such that the legitimacy of a given regime's claim to moral influence and political rule, the legitimacy of uses of power, rises or falls on the conditions of those a society makes most vulnerable.¹³⁷ In this way, Dussel's theory of liberation arranges the legitimacy of cultural and institutional schemes in proportion to the way those systems generate or ameliorate vulnerability for marginalized individuals and groups. To the extent that a cultural and political regime cultivates vitality, including for "others in alterity" who disavow allegiance, it counts as legitimate. To the extent that a regime promotes suffering of arbitrary indignities and dispossession (qua Hallie), it loses legitimacy.¹³⁸ If *obediential* to the vulnerability and suffering of others in alterity, then legitimate. If not, then illegitimate. A political regime and the moral traditions it sustains may not show wholesale deference to suffering, but that it takes aims to redress suffering and makes amends in response to abuses it metes out, these concerns matter to liberationists.

*When necessary, liberatory efforts aim to put cultural norms and institutional systems obedientially in the service of those least advantaged, to ameliorate the suffering of vulnerable populations and to advance vitality.*¹³⁹ Liberatory movements may bring about widespread, transformative alterations to a society's moral and political status quo. Yet, some modes of liberation may only pose slight or highly nuanced changes to select facets of sociopolitical systems; emancipation can perhaps result from miniscule changes even though systematic oppression likely only ends by way of macro-level changes. In any case, Dussel contends that liberation involves commiserating with the weak and poor – placing oneself with someone in

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ A broader analysis could use the priority and objectives of liberation here to compare (1) a benevolent autocratic dictatorship that provides for the welfare of its subjects without resorting to arbitrary, discriminatory distribution with (2) a representative democracy organized around and perpetually reifying historically patterned institutional cruelties.

¹³⁹ Ibid. §2.6.7.3.

misery – to act subversively by making oneself the peer, the equal, of the oppressed.¹⁴⁰ This priority, a critical commitment in Dussel's reasoning, guides the challenges posed on the basis of liberatory objectives.¹⁴¹ Whether radical or surgical, the aim remains the same: to alter structural and procedural aspects of a society so as to mitigate vulnerabilities and enhance vitality – to put the power of morally regulated cultures and politically patterned institutions in obediential, legitimate service to those who voice demands for liberation.

The rhetoric of "obedience" may seem unwelcome or passé to contemporary scholars of moral and political theory. Even so, on a broad reading of the implications of Dussel's work, the issue of obedience bolsters all sorts of concepts relevant to these discourses. At least in the field of liberalist traditions promulgated by Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, notions of consent, dissent, right to privacy, individual autonomy and agency, conscientious refusal, civil disobedience, and so forth play a part in theorizing the background question, "why ought I to obey?"¹⁴² Rawls could hardly have discussed *justice as fairness* without addressing "obedience to a system" and civil disobedience (in fact, the subject matter appears in his earlier (1957) discussion of "fair play" and endures until it evolves to the form in *A Theory of Justice*).¹⁴³ Inasmuch as moral and political philosophies can provide justifications to obey, to share traditions and institutions as one's own in solidarity, liberation philosophies also foment questions of legitimacy within the frame of obedience by those who wield social authority; to that end, liberatory questions of *legitimacy* complement *justifications* for moral and political regimes.

Among the options for a theory of liberation, Dussel's conception offers a broadly read and widely vetted resource. This by no means isolates it as the preferred model for all

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. §2.6.8, §2.6.8.2.

¹⁴¹ Dussel and Vallega (2012). Specifically, Chapter 6.

¹⁴² Hobbes (2002), Locke (1764), Rousseau (1923).

¹⁴³ Rawls (1999: xvii, §10-11, and §55-59; 1957: 658).

movements; indeed, some circumstances may call for the need to re-theorize liberation in response to local needs. For my purposes in this essay, I select it for its robust clarity in helping to outline the priority and objectives organized movements may use in selecting their strategies. Among those strategies, fostering and sustaining solidarity – liberatory solidarity – counts as but one.

To restate the contention so far: whereas moral and political conceptions of solidarity may afford some progressive benefits, such as improved respect and recognition via fundamental civil rights laws, we ought not to count these as properly emancipatory unless guided by specifically liberatory objectives. Well justified schemes of moral and political rule may nonetheless face challenges informed by liberatory objectives, and with the priority of respect for the alterity of particularly vulnerable populations. When systematized, cultural hegemony, oppression, subjugation, and similarly detrimental social forces generate incentives and disincentives to obey the dominant scheme of rule. That is, rewards and punishments, benefits and burdens, dignities and indignities that benefit the persistence of the status quo. Persons and groups with liberatory objectives intent challenging such patterns will need to foster relations that endure despite incentives and disincentives to the contrary. This sort of liberatory solidarity as relational will, then, depend in large part on a notion of relation that helps consider what sorts of risks or consequences we pose one another when we relate.

Liberatory Solidarity as Relational

Liberatory solidarity as relational denotes laboriously making one another despite incentives and disincentives to the contrary for the purposes of emancipation. Theorized consistent with relations as making, a alertive concept, this notion of solidarity prompts persons

consider what they can and will endure for the sake of emancipation *as well as* what they cause one another to suffer. Some individuals may have to make all manner of concessions about paradigms of authenticity, identities, subjectivities, agency, and so many conventional concerns. Or, we may find that we have to make few concessions at all so long as we consider dignity and the risks of indignities that we pose one another in relating.

If *relation* refers to the ways in which people make one another, how does that change notions of solidarity? As a propositional description, relations as making helps to posit the potential consequences, risks, and/or benefits of interacting with one another. Suppose that relation involves the risk that people who differ from you will remake you in ways over which you may not have control – not as a possible risk but as an inevitable fact of relation. If so, at least one notion of solidarity may refer to when people, inclusive of various identities, accept the potential consequences of remaking one another inclusive of the uncertainties and vulnerabilities. To push this further, we might also invoke solidarity to refer to what happens when people choose to risk remaking one another as a *priority* that overrides or supervenes on competing priorities; suppose people who endure oppression maintain the possibility of making and remaking one another as the main concern over the comparative familiarity of allegedly authentic group identification. In whichever ways we theorize who and what relates – e.g. identities - a theory of relations can make it possible to then consider and justify notions of solidarity.

Recall the case of the Lumumbas and the Congo in the 1960's. Had various Congolese factions committed to relating for liberatory purposes, making one another in the process, they may have amassed sufficient collective support to reject the interventions by NATO nations. For instance, men with interests in pro-indigenous, anti-racist decolonization would have accepted

the necessity to sustain relational solidarity with women whether or not all involved shared the same and/or different interests, and vice versa. Would men have more likely taken on feminist, anti-patriarchal commitments? Though the interests and identities vary, the need to sustain relations for liberatory purposes would take precedence. Moreover, the Congolese factions who sought respite from oppression by allying with NATO nations against other Congolese factions (enacting horizontal hostility) would, for the sake of liberation, have refused the incentives offered by NATO in favor of liberatory solidarity with other Congolese. I argue this point further in chapters 2 and 3 in the context of anti-racist feminism and feminist anti-racism in order to show the limitations of theories of identity with regard to liberatory solidarity.

Those interested in liberation face a choice of solidarity as relational, whether to endure making one another in various, sometimes unpredictable ways for the sake of emancipatory changes, or to continue to endure and permit oppression and subjugation in perpetuity. As a relational concept, liberatory solidarity offers the feasibility of fostering movements in the interest of broadly emancipatory agendas – e.g. anti-patriarchal, anti-racist, anti-heterosexist, anti-ableist, anti-poverty, anti-transphobic, anti-capitalist, and so forth. *We either choose to labor at relation for the sake of liberation, or we preserve the bigger-picture status quo in which disparate and episodic enclave movements rise and fall on the terms set by identity politics and fictive autonomy.*

Which sort of solidarity: political or liberatory?

At times, moral and political concepts may help people from marginalized groups to analyze and explain solidarity within dominant regimes. These sorts of analyses can, for instance, help to highlight value systems and legal constraints that sustain cultural hegemony and

institutionalized discrimination. Yet, even though such analyses can help elucidate the flaws in the moral and political status quo of a society and help to show what sorts of changes could help to expand access to, inclusion in, that status quo, the dominant regimes may still remain systematically oppressive for the long-term. That is, expanding moral and political solidarity to incrementally include previously oppressed groups can count as a certain kind of benefit to those groups, but not necessarily as *liberatory*. It may count as an achievement of moral regard and political justice for, say, people of indigenous descent who faced historical cruelties when a broader society goes through changes that eliminate segregation in public accommodations such as housing, schools, and healthcare. The removal of certain harms may even precede inclusion in the dominant cultural and political processes of the larger society; members of indigenous communities may join in some forms of moral and political solidarity with those descended from their former oppressors. However, liberation would not require cultural assimilation as a condition of access to political rights and, moreover, members of the historically dominant society would not retain their status as dominant.

Inclusion in the status quo of a dominant moral and political regime may reduce suffering and discrimination of various kinds, but liberation requires different priorities and objectives. Furthermore, and more to the point of this essay, the kind of solidarity necessary for fostering liberation will differ from the kinds of solidarity theorized on the grounds of moral norms and political interests. Given contemporary scholarly and activist emphasis on models of political solidarity, it matters to differentiate it from a specifically liberatory notion. It will not serve the discussion to wholly abandon references to moral solidarity since some conceptions of political solidarity derive from moral reasoning.

Let us take a more careful account of political solidarity in contemporary discourse. As Scholz points out, many 20th century theories of political solidarity had their beginnings in the work of biologists and sociologists to delineate "bonds of commonality."¹⁴⁴ Throughout the last century, various scholarly and activist contributions to social movements applied the term "solidarity" to a range of ideas including commonality, sympathy, collective action, cohesion, mutual support, and a wide range of characterizations.¹⁴⁵ To develop her analysis of political solidarity, Scholz responds to the work of Kurt Bayertz. Bayertz offers an extensive account of solidarity in terms of moral philosophy, and calls for rigorous analysis and discussion of solidarity as a matter deserving attention on the same order historically given to conceptions of justice.¹⁴⁶ On Scholz's account, the heart of political solidarity rests in the "emotional cohesion" and "mutual support" that members of social movements dedicate to one another as they struggle to achieve common goals.¹⁴⁷ Moreover, since it arises as a challenge to oppression and injustices, she counts political solidarity as necessarily nonviolent.¹⁴⁸

For Scholz, theorizing political solidarity requires attention to three levels of concern. First, it matters to distinguish solidarity from other forms of union, community, association, and generalized notions of social groupings.¹⁴⁹ Second, moral relations differentiate solidarities in terms of social solidarity, political solidarity, and civic solidarity. Of these three, political solidarity aims at activism and societal change. Third, Scholz explains, we must take notice of "parasitical solidarity" as types that fail to meet the positive duties that condition social, civic, and political solidarities.¹⁵⁰ Somewhat like the conception of liberatory solidarity I defend,

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. 6.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. 6-12.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. 10-11.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. 10.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. 13.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. 4-5.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

Scholz's political solidarity has particular objectives. That is, it aims at the "ends of social justice" and we cannot rightly count solidarity as political without such aims.¹⁵¹

As mentioned earlier Scholz consigns political solidarity to the foundational concept – *relations* –, declaring "Political solidarity is a relation that forms a unity [...]" and further that commitments in solidarity "[have] the power to transform the individual's life and lifestyle."¹⁵² Here as with other models of solidarity, concepts of relation condition the circumstances on which the more complex descriptions of solidarity rest. Scholz gestures at the works of Sonia Kruks, Maria Lugones, Elizabeth Spelman, and Sandra Lee Bartky, all of whom give variations on the theme: changes in individual subjectivity as a result of relation.¹⁵³ And yet, the concept of relation itself, *relation qua relation*, remains relegated to ambiguity. Similarly, the so-called transformative consequences of such relations garner mention but not with explicit attention to the relational basis for such transformation. Like Scholz, I intend to redress the tendency for "slippage" among different candidate conceptions of solidarity by theorizing solidarity as relational and differentiating it from other accounts. In doing so, I intend the relational conception to serve as a resource for those with specifically liberatory objectives. Where Scholz poses political solidarity as a challenge to oppression and injustice, I too argue for a relational account of liberatory solidarity as a challenge to oppression and injustice – and more robustly as a resource to challenge dominant moral and political regimes qua regimes to hold to liberatory objectives.

Whereas Scholz argues for a generalized version of political solidarity as a vehicle for activism aimed at social justice, consider it in comparison with Tommie Shelby's more specific

¹⁵¹ Ibid. 189.

¹⁵² Ibid. 12-13.

¹⁵³ Ibid. 183-187.

application of political solidarity to anti-racism.¹⁵⁴ As he argues, anti-racist political solidarity stems from "[...] the shared experience of racial oppression and a joint commitment to resist [racial oppression]."¹⁵⁵ Shelby bases solidarity in the ongoing, unfinished attempt to achieve "racial justice" as originally envisioned in black nationalist movements.¹⁵⁶ Emphasizing black racial solidarity, Shelby argues that a person need not adopt or concede to the significance that a racist society attributes to her features as racialized, and can instead choose which sort of significance her "blackness" holds.¹⁵⁷ In this way, she may voluntarily accept membership in groups intent on anti-racist social justice (taking them as her own).¹⁵⁸

Shelby leaves three primary concerns unresolved. First, despite frequent mention of liberation he does not provide an explicit set of criteria for deciding which sorts of anti-racist projects count as liberatory and which do not.¹⁵⁹ Second, he posits racial solidarity on the predicate commitment to "resist" which comports at best with a sub-emancipatory objective that does not specify systematic regime changes, but perhaps merely improved endurance for surviving such regimes. Third, Shelby relies on some implicit conception of relation and involves the term explicitly, but without foregrounding the importance of relations to solidarity.

More recently, Avery Kolers presses for scholars to reconsider the foundational, distinguishing features of solidarity qua solidarity. He contends,

Most contemporary accounts of solidarity discuss coordination and critical dialogue about justice among those who are in solidarity, but in each case, some permutation of just aims and just methods, presumed to be settled upon by subjects who come to agreement about these things—and hence, act in unison—is necessary and sufficient for the justification of that instance of solidarity. Such

¹⁵⁴ Shelby (2005).

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. 11-12.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. 11.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. 214.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. 11, 17, 24, 59, 75, 98, 115, 141, 181, 231.

views ironically treat solidarity (or at least, justifiable solidarity) as unproblematic from the standpoint of justice and individual agency. This approach is built on a foundation that is both normatively and methodologically individualist; as a result, it cannot see the ways solidarity affects individual agency. In contrast, an approach that understands individual agency as compromised and reshaped in solidarity can take seriously the diversity of participants.¹⁶⁰

Alternatively, Kolers argues that "the essential condition of solidarity is acting *with others*, even if one disagrees with the group's chosen ends or means."¹⁶¹ We ought to, he argues, understand this differently from "acting in unison."¹⁶² When *acting in unison*, those who do so have made choices and fostered agreements prior to the decision to act together. However, those *acting with others* do so whether or not they completely share political interests. This version of solidarity meets at least two necessary conditions. First, as "deferential" solidarity calls those acting with others to put aside their respective, individualistic moral judgments in favor of the judgments of other individuals and at times of "solidarity groups."¹⁶³ Second, it offers the condition of "durability" since solidarity qua solidarity "survives incompletely shared interests."¹⁶⁴ Thus, duties of "collective action" follow from the conditions of deference and durability.

Kolers intricately traces hypothetical tensions among deference and autonomy as he sets up the claim that those acting with others on the basis of solidarity go about "building durability."¹⁶⁵ That is, agents acting in solidarity develop an inclination to deference appropriate to the contexts of acting with one another. He frames this in a conspicuously relevant way when he says, "If it is true, then acting in solidarity with others tends to reshape the intellectual life and

¹⁶⁰ Kolers (2012: 2).

¹⁶¹ Kolers (2012: 1).

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid. 8-14.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. 2-3, 4-8.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. 14.

character of the individual."¹⁶⁶ Moreover, he adds that we cannot predict the so-called "directions and specifics" of these sorts of changes.¹⁶⁷ Indeed, for an agent acting with others in solidarity "It is, then, not just her skill set that changes, but her physique, intellect, psychology, and moral commitments. Changes of this sort often occur unnoticed by the agents who undergo them, though other times—such as when abolitionists sought to extirpate their deeply rooted racism—activists deliberately set out to change their own psychology."¹⁶⁸ I take Kolers's analysis here not as peripheral, but as the primary concern for understanding solidarity vis-à-vis liberation: we need to theorize relations in accord with the consequences people endure for the sake of solidarity. What Kolers refers to as *changes*, I later develop more specifically as a particular notion of *relations as making*. In liberatory solidarity as relational, people endure making one another.

For persons and groups who endure longstanding cultural hegemonies and institutional cruelties – marginalized and oppressed peoples – political solidarity poses a particularly limited resource. Indeed, systematic oppression already sets the circumstances against the probability of achieving political solidarity on the terms that Scholz, Shelby, and Kolers respectively claim feasible. Granted, political solidarity can help movements for social justice achieve expansion of equal recognition in response to exclusion on the basis of moral norms, as well as expanded access to institutional benefits and burdens in the contexts of political justice. Yet, two problems remain.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. 15.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

The limits of political solidarity

First, even if we think it technically *possible* for oppressed groups to cultivate changes consistent with social justice on the basis of political solidarity, we ought to understand the *de jure* gains as perpetually *infeasible*.¹⁶⁹ The philosophically abstracted possibilities that scholars of political solidarity offer, while hypothetically available, do not tend to resonate with the actually feasible constraints on those in need of liberation. From feasibility, organizers of liberatory movements consider the difficulties people will likely feasibly endure as having priority over what hypothetical subjects can possibly endure. Sure, we can theorize the possibility of political solidarity fostering broad expansion to affirmative action programs in the interest of making reparations for slavery and Jim Crow era legalized brutalities. But the exclusion, impoverishment, and indentured inequities following generations of subjugation condition the *feasibility* and *infeasibility* of achieving anti-racist reparations while leaving racist moral and political regimes intact for the most part. Moreover, to expect that anti-racist movements for social justice can feasibly persevere in any way other than by solidarity with anti-sexist movements, does not just indicate a lack of understanding of systematic oppression; it indicates a misunderstanding of the limited resources likely available to respective groupings of historically oppressed people.

Second, why should historically marginalized groups think it worthwhile to aim for social justice by way of political solidarity if doing so remains unguided with regard to the specific need for liberation? A liberatory conception of solidarity *feasible* for challenging dominant regimes will rely on *relations* that people sustain despite countervailing circumstances, incentives, and disincentives. Conceptions of social justice informed on moral and political

¹⁶⁹ Consider Dussel's (2012: Chapters 5 & 6) emphasis on the importance of feasibility in liberatory thought (versus possibility).

grounds may fall short of addressing those who certain suffer systematic cruelties. Alternatively, those who aim to prioritize respect for alterity while challenging the claims to power made by dominant regimes and, then put systems of rule in the service of ending oppression will need a basis for persistence in the struggle. To make the case for this sort of solidarity, then, requires a notion that alerts us to consider the consequences persons and groups pose one another when they relate for the sake of liberation.

Liberatory solidarity as relational provides a descriptive conceptual basis for persistence in sustaining relations. Doing so will, if my proposition holds, result in making one another while attending with respect to the kinds of alterity that individuals consider constitutive of their dignity. Whereas solidarity guided or evaluated by moral reasoning and political justifications lacks specific liberatory priorities and objectives, a relational account of solidarity serves as a resource for attaining liberation against countervailing influences, if feasible. Political solidarity broadly construed as the sharing of institutional benefits and burdens, as common interests, does not adequately prioritize respect for alterity, nor does it set the objectives of making institutional and social power obediential to the people that otherwise suffer as a result of consolidated rule under a given regime. If those seeking liberation intend to maintain their own dignity it will depend on making one another dignified amid struggles for emancipation from forces bent on maintaining a status quo that necessarily maims dignity, and not on atomistic conceptions of moral autonomy and political liberty. Whether rhetorically framed as “bonds,” “connections,” “unity,” or in some other pseudo-spatial language, relations result in making one another and those who seek to relate for the purposes of liberation will find this proposition either true or false in the course of laboring for emancipation.

Conclusion

Does it make sense to adhere fervently to the distinctions among moral, political, and liberatory solidarity as I have characterized them? Or, can it work to retreat from these differentiations and admit some confluence among the different modes? I think it more than reasonable to assume that projects organized along different motives and intentions must work in tandem in some situations. For instance, I do not think anything in general proscribes the planning of coordinated projects among a group *fostering civic friendship* in a moral sense, another group intent on *cultivating redistribution of resources* in accord with social justice as a political project, and a third group *calling for liberation*. However, simply because some group that sustains liberatory solidarity as relational happens to participate in other projects does not grant that the group always makes liberatory contributions to the other groups. We may hope so, but that sets the bar too high and the expectations too infallibly. Groups may even toggle among different forms of solidarity, going through periods in which solidarities of different kinds, and with different priorities and objectives tend to direct collective projects. As such, I offer no predictions or delineations at this point about a typology that tells when particular forms of solidarity mutually extinguish one another. Yet, it does warrant further consideration.

As I have argued, a conception of solidarity *specifically relevant to liberatory priorities and objectives* differs from conceptions of moral and political solidarities. Whereas many conceptions of solidarity rely on modeling recognition of identities and claims of shared interests, I describe a notion of *relations* as a foundational component. All sorts of difficulties, some insurmountable, may arise when attempting to put this concept to work in the interest of fostering emancipation from patterned institutional cruelties. Primarily, I have sought to theorize relations as making in order to then show how a liberatory conception of solidarity as relational

takes the complexities, the consequences we pose one another as the focus of attention. As a proposition, this approach offers a fallible and perhaps only contextually suitable resource for challenging institutional and cultural oppression.

Movements organized on the relational basis of liberatory solidarity can challenge the legitimacy of dominant regimes, even those well justified on the basis of moral and political theory. In the next chapter I develop the theory and its implications by placing it in the context of feminist scholarship on identity as a means for fostering solidarity. As I show, anti-racist feminists intent on liberation cannot likely rely on models of identity and intersectionality and will, instead, need a relational account of solidarity.

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Chapter 3: Making Feminism Anti-Racist: A model of liberatory solidarity

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Abstract: In this chapter, I argue for a particular conception of liberatory solidarity as relational, and propose it as a resource for anti-racist feminist organizing. More specifically, I argue that this concept of liberatory solidarity might help enable women and their allies to challenge patriarchy and sexism in many varied forms worldwide. I begin with a brief survey of the challenge of fostering solidarity, and a description of the strategies that feminists have employed in contemporary discourse. I then lay the foundation for the central argument by explicating core concepts of liberation, relation, and solidarity. I propose how the three concepts, when taken as a coherent proposition, illustrate liberatory solidarity as a *relational* concept. To further the case, I return to discuss modern and contemporary theories of identity as tautological with regard to solidarity and, therefore, insufficient for liberatory ends. In conclusion, I address some of the limitations and challenges of applying a liberatory, relational account of solidarity to organized movements.

Keywords: solidarity, liberation, relation, feminist, anti-racist, Dussel, Scarry, Marx.

Introduction

Recently, some intellectuals have sought to recover notions of identity and recognition from pernicious identity politics. The hopeful attempts at recovery made by scholars such as Nancy Fraser and Linda Alcoff, for instance, stems from the goal to retain theories of identity as resources for movements against social injustices. Fraser argues in defense of identity as *social status* that serves the purposes of garnering equal participation, and not as recognition of cultural authenticity. Identities as social statuses allow subordinated groups to organize in the interests of egalitarian redistribution of wealth.¹⁷⁰ Alcoff, critical of Fraser, contends that identity politics as struggles for recognition provide important affirmation of historically derogated identities.¹⁷¹ As such, Alcoff argues, we can find nothing inherently pernicious about identity recognition and identity politics and, moreover, that campaigns of oppressed persons seeking wealth redistribution necessarily also involve campaigns for identity affirmation.¹⁷²

Judith Butler responds to Fraser along different lines, rejecting Fraser's tendency to provincialize certain struggles as "merely cultural" and, therefore, not inherently matters of political economy proper (i.e. distributions of labor and material resources).¹⁷³ Butler asks, "Why would a movement concerned to criticize and transform the ways in which sexuality is socially regulated not be understood as central to the functioning of political economy?"¹⁷⁴ Butler goes on to explain why social movements seeking recognition of identity ought to count, then, as movements for rearrangements in political economy. Arguing vis-à-vis the thinking of Levi-Strauss and Lacan, Butler contends that we have no good reason to diagnose culture and

¹⁷⁰ Fraser (2000: 111-115).

¹⁷¹ Alcoff (2007: 257).

¹⁷² Ibid. 258-259.

¹⁷³ Butler (1997: 270-272).

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. 271.

economy as rigidly distinct modes of production.¹⁷⁵ Sexuality, in particular, serves as an example of the kind of activity that confounds such unwarranted distinctions. We cannot count identities as merely cultural, subordinated as “cultural interventions, and must instead refuse to place culture and identity in categories dispossessed from political economy and, moreover, the production and reproductions of social relations intrinsically bound up in political economy.¹⁷⁶ Challenging cultural hegemony through proliferation of identities can, perhaps, count as liberatory projects.

More recently, with a stated interest in liberation but yet giving no criteria for the parameters that count movements as liberatory, Alcoff and Satya P. Mohanty make the following call for scholarship on identity in the 21st century: “[...] we need new accounts of the relationships among our various identities; we also need ideas about how to make common cause across differences of privilege and geography. We need new thinking.”¹⁷⁷ In response to this charge I propose instead that the crux of organizing movements intent on effectively redressing institutional oppression and cultural hegemonies stems from careful specificity about another core concept at play in the passages above: *relation*. I question the implicit and explicit constraining of solidarity as if dependent on identity; some forms of solidarity may work wholly or partially independent of identity theories, even if most function inclusive of identity. Fortunately, even if problems of identity and identity politics spurs, catalyzes, provokes the call for new thinking this does not constrain anyone with liberatory interests to think solely or primarily about identity.

Following from the model theorized in chapters 1 and 2, this chapter turns on the

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. 275.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. 275-276.

¹⁷⁷ Mohanty et al. (2006: 3).

question, which conception of relation might enable women and their allies to foster the kind of anti-patriarchal solidarity that affords liberatory challenge to patriarchy and sexism in its many varied forms, worldwide? Fundamentally a question of power relations and what sorts of solidarity might help to redress abuses of power along the lines of liberatory intentions, I call attention to whether familiar semantics of “relations” adequately explain the subject matter.

Even if liberatory movements apply workable conceptions of power and authority, influence and force, do such movements have sufficient insight into relationships, and the basis of that to which “relation” refers? Different ideas of solidarity have been proposed in recent decades and may serve the purposes such as fostering and sustaining community, advancing shared political interests, and developing shared moral commitments. Some bear more complexity, some simplicity, and the uses of such notions vary greatly. However, theorizing solidarity, feminist scholars and those working against the various manifestations of sexism, patriarchy, and misogyny have in general paid too little attention to notions of relation despite frequent mentions and references to relations as a key concern. Similarly, feminists have left conceptions of liberation too much to chance when imagining the kinds of solidarity that can help to pose challenges to cultural and institutional hegemonies such as racism, ethnocentrism, systemic poverty, heterosexism, trans*phobia/genderism, ableism, and institutional oppressions in their many varied forms. I put these three concepts – solidarity, relation, and liberation – into play in order to render a coherent description of liberatory solidarity as relational.

To this end, I first consider *liberation* in the sense proposed by Enrique Dussel as, first, a notion intended to help challenge patterns of hegemony endemic to dominant moral norms and claims to political rule as well as, second, to help put moral traditions and political institutions

into the service of a society's most vulnerable populations.¹⁷⁸ Properly, liberatory movements place societal regimes in the service of those who face patterned cruelties and systematic oppression that manifests in cultural and institutional contexts.¹⁷⁹ Second, I use feminist pragmatist and classical pragmatist strategies to propose a description of *relation as making one another* in a specific sense borrowed from materialist scholars.¹⁸⁰ I explain the concept as a propositional description, a descriptive statement that is empirically falsifiable, about what happens when persons relate, and not as a strict or transcendental definition about what relation means. In particular, I draw on Elaine Scarry's analysis of labor and making in the works of Marx and Engels, as well as ancient influences on modernist thinkers.

Third, I propose a notion of liberatory solidarity as a relational concept that does not strictly determine courses of action, but that prompts us to consider a choice of priorities: whether to accept the risks of making one another even if it requires enduring various uncertainties endemic to relation, or to attempt to reject relational solidarity and continue to endure oppression and subjugation. That is, will those of us interested in ending racist, patriarchal, neocolonial oppression endure relations of solidarity in order to foster liberation for one another, or will we forsake liberation and prefer to live under the heel of sexism and patriarchies that operate in concert with racism and ethnocentrism? I then compare the relational account of liberatory solidarity with modern and contemporary theories of identity, particularly those designed to foster solidarity in the context of discourses of oppression and equality. In conclusion, I briefly discuss some of the likely challenges of applying a relational account of liberatory solidarity to the task of organizing movements.

¹⁷⁸ Dussel (1985).

¹⁷⁹ Among scholars of oppression, hegemony, and vulnerability, I recommend the works of Cudd (2006), Frye (1983), Hallie (1981), and Young and Allen (2011).

¹⁸⁰ I rely on the notion of description in Dewey (1905) and fallible, localized testing of concepts in Clough (2003).

Solidarity: typical strategies

To understand the proposition I defend, liberatory solidarity as relational, it helps to consider the strategies at play in contemporary thought. Scholars and activists committed to challenging the worldwide dominance of patriarchy and sexism have tried all sorts of strategies for fostering and sustaining the kind of solidarity capable of achieving liberatory ends. Theorists have implicitly referenced solidarity in all sorts of ways using terms of identification such as "womanists," "feminism," "sisterhood," and so forth.¹⁸¹ "Intersectionality," though not properly an identity in the same way, similarly implies attempts at sharing in social justice and liberatory response to oppression. Feminists, womanists, and anti-sexist activists have developed generalized theories of oppression writ large, as well as theories of oppression specific to women and, then again, theories specific to women in particular cultures.

At the risk of overgeneralizing against the warnings of contemporary identity politics, I speak of "we" as those interested in anti-sexist, anti-patriarchal, anti-colonial liberation that necessarily commit to anti-racist, anti-heterosexist, anti-poverty, and pro-indigenous movements. We have tried all sorts of strategies ranging from broad ideological, phenomenological, and idealist approaches to materialist, descriptive, and highly localized accounts. We have argued for solidarity as a matter of abstract principle, and on the basis of empirical data such as economic inequalities and evidence of systemically patterned abuses.¹⁸² We have tried essentialism, social constructivism, and espousing authenticity as a resilient virtue. We have associated with first-wave, second-wave, third-wave, multicultural, global, intersectional, and no-wave camps. We have tried feminist science studies and analytical value theory, as well as care ethics and the

¹⁸¹ Crenshaw (1991); Hill Collins (1989); Mohanty (2003a).

¹⁸² MacKinnon (1989).

study of women's psychologies through psychoanalytical and empirical methods.¹⁸³ We have challenged the structural formations of governance and law as inherently masculine, as well as the nebulous cultural hegemonies that reward rape culture.¹⁸⁴ Some have proposed new economic theories that historicize and revalue labors deemed specific to women and/or of a reproductive/repetitive sort historically devaluated in patriarchal terms as non-productive and non-creative.¹⁸⁵

Some have concluded it an ill-fated project to work for solidarity, declaring any such move homogenizing and therefore hegemonic.¹⁸⁶ Certainly, some theories that espouse the virtues of commonality have detrimental results. Not the least of which includes advantaging the interests of the already relatively privileged persons among those who face multiple forms of oppression and subjugation.¹⁸⁷ Put more simply, some women have it much better than other women because of how those others suffer, and typically on the basis of arbitrary characteristics; some women collude in oppression and harm other women.

Whether in response to cultural hegemony and/or biases in political and socioeconomic representation, it seems that affirmation of differences and rejection of commonality helps some to preserve their dignity against consolidation and erasure. Feminists have invested great effort in conceptualizing agency, authenticity, and self-determination to counter the paradoxes involved in preserving individual dignity while advancing collective liberation. And yet broadly inclusive

¹⁸³ Clough (2003); Noddings (2003); Zack (2005).

¹⁸⁴ MacKinnon (1989).

¹⁸⁵ Cameron and Gibson-Graham (2003: 147-149).

¹⁸⁶ In August of 2013 Mikki Kendall gained international notoriety for initiating the Twitter hashtag "#SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen" (2013). Many quickly praised Kendall for opening a forum to discuss the historical dismissal of women of color by white feminists, and many also criticized Kendall for further antagonizing tensions among women. Kendall's intervention and the reaction exemplify the need for a form of liberatory solidarity that can offer a feasible solution to both the long-standing silencing and easily exaggerated tensions of white-supremacy endemic to feminist movements.

¹⁸⁷ Mohanty (2003b).

organized liberation remains mysterious if not treated with outright suspicion. Out of conscientious desire to avoid harming one another, primarily by privileging discourses of identities and subjectivities, perhaps we have made ourselves too fearful of how we can relate. Or, wisely cautions, but nonetheless unwilling or unaware of how to go about fostering relations that can catalyze emancipation.

It has eluded us to figure out a theory of relations that fosters liberation while simultaneously respecting the unique qualities of particular persons in particular places and times, including the value and dignity afforded by our associations with certain historically marginalized groups. With affinity for intersectionality theories, Ann Ferguson asks, "[I]s it feasible to suppose that women of different nations, classes, ethnicities, genders and sexualities can put aside their differences and find common cause to challenge global gender injustices, particularly when these may involve challenging the privileges and powers that each of these intersections give some in relation to others?"¹⁸⁸ Again, questions of power relations and solidarity, decisively analyzed as matters to address through discourses of identity. Other scholars have raised similar concerns and have also noted the limitations of identity theory as a resource for solidarity poised to challenge complex forms of domination.

Amy Allen, for instance, draws on the work of Hannah Arendt to critique identity politics and to propose an Arendtian conception of solidarity.¹⁸⁹ Allen explains, "According to Arendt, when individuals bind themselves together by means of promises and engage in concerted action, they become powerful. Arendt understands power relations as 'the human ability not just to act but to act in concert. [Power] is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together' (Arendt, 1969: 44). The power

¹⁸⁸ Ferguson (2010: 245).

¹⁸⁹ Allen (1999).

that arises out of such reciprocal commitments to act in concert, I call solidarity. Insofar as the account of solidarity that can be culled from Arendt's work rests on such revisable commitments and on the concerted action that grows out of them, it represents a great advance over accounts that equate solidarity with repressive identity categories."¹⁹⁰ Like Ferguson, Allen, and Arendt, many scholars who raise similar concerns about identity make implicit references to relations as a key concern for discourses on solidarity (e.g. when Arendt predicates her remarks on the relational requirement that "the group keeps together" and when Ferguson asks whether women "can put aside their differences and find common cause"). Allen's and Ferguson's arguments cohere with liberatory solidarity insofar as they articulate the relational sources of power; however I argue that liberatory solidarity as relational differs from the power that it may produce. To collapse concepts of collective power – a potential benefit of solidarity – with concepts of solidarity relies on a conceptual tautology that obfuscates both notions.

I intend to bring attention to the relational foundations of a particular kind of solidarity that neither explicitly requires nor outright rejects conceptions of identity. Specific to liberatory movements, this approach will provide a model of solidarity that complements, but neither explicitly requires nor forbids any specific theory of identity as a necessary feature. However, as I explain in greater detail later, this relational account of solidarity will reveal how common trends in identity theory, when taken as resources for fostering solidarity, do not adequately theorize a philosophical conception of relations shared by those identified in some particular way.

Despite many complex and insightful attempts to propose a basis for feminist solidarity, scholars and activists have, for the most part, circled one another in our attempts to conceptualize

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. 113.

identity – ideally, in a way that resolves the long-standing essentialism/commonality paradox, and in doing so hopefully provide a basis for solidarity in practice. The simplest version of the paradox appears as a choice of either a) fostering solidarity for engaging in common political projects while conscripting people into essentialist categories, or b) abandoning essentialist categories and in doing so forgoing the possibility of solidarity for the purposes of organizing political projects.¹⁹¹

Let me state the concern with more nuance. The uses of identities have allowed scholars and activists to conceive of and plan collective campaigns and movements for people to whom a given identity holds relevance. By sharing a common identity, those who identify with one another – such as on the basis of race, ethnicity, sex, gender, and so forth – have a means of, among other things, detecting and classifying advantages and disadvantages they commonly endure. Therefore, people with the same identity can contribute their energies and efforts to resolve problems and/or foster conditions that commonly benefit members of the identity group.

Identity has consequences, however, in that “belonging” to or “adopting” a particular identity may require sacrificing or subordinating certain important features of one’s authentic self. *To be black* one must be black in a certain way. *To be a woman* one must be a woman in a certain way. *To be queer*, one must be queer in a certain way. *To be raza or indio* one must be indígena in a certain way. Deviations from the essence of or construction of blackness, womanness, queerness, and/or indigenismo, respectively, results in outsider status. Lesbians and trans*people who tried to participate in early feminist movements found they were permitted to

¹⁹¹ This matter also arises in discourse among feminist scholars on the topic of global justice, and in particular on the consequences of interventions by feminists from wealthy, industrialized nations in the affairs of women from relatively poorer, non-industrialized nations. Allison Jaggar (2008) names the paradox on the global/international scale as a choice whether to commit to “colonial interference” and thus also “moral universalism,” or “callous indifference” and “cultural relativism.”

participate, but only so long as they kept their sexuality and gender identities hidden or subordinated to the priorities of heterosexual women.¹⁹² People of African descent with certain cultural practices, and sometimes with particular tones of skin color, dominated movements for racial civil rights whereas people who did not fit the predominant criteria of blackness counted as suspect. Gay males set the context for movements against prohibitions on sexuality and domestic partnerships, while lesbian women, bisexuals, and people with diverse gender expressions could not include their specific concerns in the “priority” issues of concern for “the movement.” To even name specific concerns about identity often ends up so contentious and controversial that it remains necessary to balance on a precarious discursive tightrope. Do those most in need of liberation from various forms of patriarchy benefit from the precarity that identity discourses render? Yes, inasmuch as these discourses propagate resources for liberatory movements. However, it will not suffice for liberatory movements to constrain philosophical investigations of solidarity to questions of identity.

Framing solidarity as a function of identity comes with a double-bind. *Without* some useful theory, model, or paradigm of identity, what possible hope do people from historically underrepresented backgrounds have of developing popular, mass, or coalition-based movements for social, cultural, and institutional changes? *With* identity comes some hope of collective action, but also the consequences of requiring people to identify with narrow or essentialized categories that cannot help but omit, deny, or otherwise maim some important features of moral, political, social, and cultural concern to individuals?

For all of the good that theories of identity and subjectivity may do in helping us understand or recognize one another, notions of identity have not advanced questions of

¹⁹² Pharr (1996: 2, 4-6, 8, 16, 36, 63-82).

solidarity in *liberatory* ways, which I consider to be a main practical purpose of solidarity. Ostensibly, if scholars can define the subject matter accurately enough then we will know who to liberate and from what sort of conditions they need liberation. This has culminated most recently in theories of intersectionality that primarily attempt to theorize feminism co-constitutively as anti-racist, anti-racism as feminist, and to pluralize anti-patriarchal movements as inclusive of various forms of oppression. With rare exception, modern discourse about anti-patriarchal solidarities remains steeped in post-Continental metaphysics and phenomenology. Questions of identity, being, experience, and definitions of women's subjectivities tend to dominate: Who or what is a woman? What is patriarchy? What is sexism? What is sisterhood? and so forth. In our haste to *define the identity of who or what relates*, to *define subjectivities*, theorists have left aside or underdeveloped questions of relation, *what happens when we relate?*

Suppose that broadly inclusive anti-hegemonic movements depend, in some necessary way, on what we count as *relation* and, moreover, what notions of relation alert us to consider. Something more than mere posturing resides in the contentions of activists who share the kind of sentiment Lilla Watson voices: "If you have come here to help me, you are wasting our time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."¹⁹³ The background proposition in Watson's statement refers not to identity or experience or subjectivity, per se, but to relation and the practical goal of changes to the sociopolitical status quo she and her comrades intended to change; the liberation of one or a few remains relationally "bound up" with the liberation of others. Putting conceptions of liberation and relation at the forefront of consideration affords the possibility of theorizing solidarity that can endure whether or not we resolve a method of defining the identities of subjects.

¹⁹³ Watson quoted in Eckermann (2010: 193).

Later, I discuss theories of identity in greater detail by loosely grouping them according to four general trends in thought: *essentialist*, *social constructivist*, *intersectionality*, and *circumstantialist* approaches. I aim to show how these theories attempt to alter conceptualization of identities in order to avoid essentialism, afford broad inclusion, and provide the possibility for solidarity among people who sometimes commonly and sometimes differently face certain forms of oppression. Next, I outline the main proposition in this essay by discussing the core concepts of liberation, relation, and then solidarity as relational.

Liberation: respect for alterity and obediential power

Much like Marilyn Frye's contention that we cannot call just any difficulty by the name "oppression" and expect it to offer a helpful diagnosis, that oppression must refer to something specific, the same holds for liberation.¹⁹⁴ A concept of liberation relevant and useful to marginalized, subordinated, and underrepresented people will have to offer some specific guidance in diagnosing and responding to oppressive cultural and political regimes. Moreover, I take it as a general assumption that a concept of liberation will show distinct regard for the alterity of persons and communities who differ from one another in immutable ways.

To develop the concept of liberatory solidarity as relational I turn to Enrique Dussel's theory of liberation.¹⁹⁵ Dussel remains a controversial figure among many feminists.¹⁹⁶ Scholars such as Ofelia Schutte diagnose a range of problematic biases in his scholarship such as sexist and masculine-centric prejudices, as well as over-reliance on Eurocentric phenomenologies.¹⁹⁷ Certainly, these problems endemic to his disposition as an author call for criticism. Nevertheless,

¹⁹⁴ Frye (1983).

¹⁹⁵ Dussel (1985).

¹⁹⁶ Schutte (1993).

¹⁹⁷ Ibid. Specifically, chapters 6 and 7.

at this point, Dussel's work represents one of the most long-standing, comprehensive, and widely vetted theories available on the topic.¹⁹⁸ Granting the difficulties in applying his work to anti-patriarchal projects, I make use of three specific components of his theory. First, that liberation denotes a particular kind of respect for the *alterity* of persons. Second, that liberatory projects pose a challenge to dominant moral norms and political regimes by contesting the legitimacy of claims to power. Third, that liberation sets the goal of putting dominant social moral practices and political institutions *obedientially* in the service of those living in circumstances of vulnerability. Let us consider each of these in turn.

*Liberatory projects aim, first, to restrict the harms that dominant regimes pose to "others in alterity," those who refuse to participate fully, and, second, to provide sustenance to others who antagonize and confront the norms of a society.*¹⁹⁹ Following a cue from Levinas, Dussel argues that to work for liberation requires a persistent respect for the alterity of another or "the other." Despite the postmodern contention that all "othering" necessarily subordinates, demeans, or objectifies, Dussel poses an alternative. On his account, respect for another person involves accepting the incommensurability of another's (an other's) life with one's own – the impossibility of pulling someone from the margin of your perceptual center into that center. On an interpersonal level, respect involves "letting others be" in their alterity rather than seeking to interrogatively comprehend them on your terms, in accord with the particularities and preferences of your own life.²⁰⁰ We may feel curious about one another, but curiosity and want of knowing do not render inherent justification to de-mystify each other. And in some ways,

¹⁹⁸ Lisa Tessman's (2005) feminist analysis of virtue ethics in the context of "liberatory struggles" holds some relevance here since her conception of liberation seems, overall, consistent with Dussel's. However, her discussion primarily focuses on questions germane to moral theory.

¹⁹⁹ Dussel. §2.1.6.6.

²⁰⁰ Ibid. §2.6.3, §2.6.7.3.

people cannot de-mystify themselves to one another. Because we can never incorporate another into our totality, that is I cannot make another person wholly commensurable with me and my lifelong circumstances, we accept that we must respect another whether or not we comprehend the particularities of their life and circumstances.

In Dussel's words,

The philosophy that knows how to ponder this reality, the de facto world reality, not from the perspective of the center of political, economic, or military power but from beyond the frontiers of that world, from the periphery – this philosophy will not be ideological. Its reality is the whole earth; for it the 'wretched of the earth' (who are not nonbeing) are also real.²⁰¹

On the level of cultures and institutions, this sort of respect for alterity requires questioning whether dominant systemic moral traditions and political regimes ("of the center") enforce unjustified conformity by those "from the periphery." To what extent do a society's dominant moral and political systems disregard those who refuse to live according to established norms? And, to what extent do dominant regimes sustain respect and consideration for those who refuse to live as citizens, subjects, party members, etc.? It remains the purview of moral and political theories to show why persons ought to think it justifiable to conform, to adopt certain norms. For moral theories, success may count as providing a compelling "ought," and for political theories success in adjudicating among institutional distribution of social responsibilities and individual liberties. However, the success of these theories does not negate the importance of retaining a critically liberatory evaluation of cultural and institutional practices. That is, a basis for calling into question the moral norms and institutional operations that arbitrarily treat some persons and group as non-real (to modify Dussel's proposition about "real" above).

²⁰¹ Ibid. §1.2.1.2.

Communities organized in accord with moral norms and governments as expressions of certain political interests can and do deviate in practice from norms established in principle. In the same vein, the failure of moral and political theorists to provide adequate justifications also does not provide coherent insight into liberatory priorities and objectives. The import of liberatory convictions does not wane simply because moral and political rationales may miss the normative mark, or people fail to carry them out sufficiently in practice. If not for the liberatory concerns latent in many theories of moral and political philosophy, why else would scholars bother with anything other than authoritarianism?²⁰² Critically, liberatory analyses provide a resource for questioning dominant modes of moral and political reasoning even as societies make use of various dominant cultural and institutional schemes.

Liberatory projects aim to challenge dominant moral norms and political regimes, specifically by calling into question the legitimacy of claims to power. In Dussel's model "power subsumes from alterity." That is, the legitimacy of a given regime's claim to moral influence and political rule, the legitimacy of uses of power, rises or falls on the conditions of those a society makes most vulnerable. In this way, Dussel's conception of liberation sets legitimacy of cultural and institutional systems in proportion to the vulnerability those systems generate or ameliorate. To the extent that a cultural and political regime fosters vitality, even for "others in alterity" who disavow allegiance, it counts as legitimate. To the extent that it fosters suffering and dispossession, it loses legitimacy.

When necessary, liberatory efforts aim to put the dominant schemes of cultural practices and institutional systems in the services of those most at risk of suffering as a result of those

²⁰² I consider it an open question, and one worth pondering, whether classical European philosophers such as Hobbes, Rousseau, Locke, Mill, and their ilk would have bothered at all with moral and political theorizing if not for the underlying liberatory motives and concerns of their times.

*schemes, to ameliorate the suffering of vulnerable populations and to advance vitality.*²⁰³

Liberatory strategies may render extensive, even transformative changes to a society's moral and political status quo. Yet, a liberatory strategy may only pose minor or highly specific changes to select facets of sociopolitical systems. I leave it to a more extensive discussion of liberationist philosophies to address how liberation differs as a chaining of liberatory movements, an ongoing process, versus as a punctual or revolutionary event. For Dussel, liberation involves an ongoing aptitude or capacity to work (*habodah*), to discipline oneself, by commiserating with the weak and poor – placing oneself with someone in misery – to act subversively by making oneself the peer, the equal, of the oppressed.²⁰⁴ Whether radical or surgical, the aim remains the same: to alter structural and procedural aspects of a society so as to mitigate vulnerabilities and enhance vitality.

These general propositions both set the context for liberation as a concept as well as pose broad programmatic guidance for liberatory movements. They do not, of course, restrict the range of intentional and accidental circumstances we may count as liberatory and/or beneficial to liberation. Moreover, even if these criteria help in some way to consider who does and does not need liberation, they do not substantively obviate a distinction between oppressed and oppressors; those seeking liberation may select from various theories and conceptions of oppression as they diagnose their circumstances. Instead, the stated priority and objectives function as one possible set of reference points for considering whether a particular movement aims at challenging the dominant status quo so as to make it obedientially responsive to the suffering it may cause. Acting in the interest of liberation involves the intent to respect for others in their alterity and accepting corresponding responsibility to put cultural and political systems in

²⁰³ Ibid. §2.6.7.3.

²⁰⁴ Ibid. §2.6.8, §2.6.8.2.

service of "the other" – and in particular to the poor, the weak, those marginalized on the periphery. Yet, this leaves open the question of which kinds of relations activists and scholars must foster and sustain in order to carry out their agendas. What kind of solidarity affords the feasibility of respecting alterity while challenging dominant claims to power and then putting moral and political regimes into the service of those who need liberation?

Liberatory solidarity as relational

Liberatory solidarity as relational refers to laboriously making one another despite distributions of social authority, incentives, and disincentives to the contrary. In a way, we might consider this a form of persistent suspicion about cultural, political, or economic influences that reward, punish, or somehow interfere in commitments to liberatory priorities and objectives. Using this conception of solidarity as *alertive*, persons consider what they can and will endure for the sake of liberation *as well as* what they cause one another to endure. Some of us may have to make all manner of concessions about paradigms of authenticity, identities, subjectivities, agency, and so many conventional concerns. Or, we may find that we have to make few concessions at all so long as we consider dignity and the risks of indignities that we pose one another in relating. If relation refers to the ways in which people make one another, how does that change notions of solidarity? As a propositional description, a descriptive statement that is falsifiable, empirically sound, relations as making helps to posit the potential consequences, risks, and/or benefits of interacting with one another.

Suppose relation involves the risk that people differ from you will remake you in ways over which you may not have control – not as a possible risk but as an inevitable fact of relation. If so, at least one notion of solidarity may refer to when people, inclusive of various identities,

accept the potential consequences of making (remaking) one another inclusive of the uncertainties and vulnerabilities. To push this further, solidarity of this kind may refer to what happens when people choose to risk making one another as a concern that overrides or supervenes on competing priorities such as group loyalties, ideologies, identities of some kinds, etc.; suppose people who successfully bring a liberatory end to oppression do so by virtue of making another, laboring in relation despite countervailing influences. In whichever ways we theorize who and what relates – e.g. identities – a theory of relations can make it possible to then consider and justify notions of solidarity.

Why count relational solidarity of this sort as liberatory? Those interested in liberation face a choice of solidarity as relational, whether to endure making one another in various, sometimes unpredictable ways for the sake of emancipatory changes, or to continue to endure and permit oppression and subjugation in perpetuity. As a relational concept, liberatory solidarity offers the feasibility of fostering movements in the interest of broadly emancipatory agendas – e.g. anti-patriarchal, anti-racist, anti-heterosexist, anti-ableist, anti-poverty, anti-trans*phobic, anti-colonial, and so forth. We either choose to labor at relation for the sake of liberation, or we preserve the bigger-picture status quo in which disparate and episodic enclave movements rise and fall on the terms set by identity politics and fictive autonomy.

Whither identity?

Do liberatory movements emerge by sorting out who counts among those in need of liberation, and who counts as those benefitting from hegemony and oppression? The catalysts of some liberatory movements may involve sorting of identities and statuses, but such diagnoses do not count as solidarity. That is, theories of identity may contribute to strategies or outcomes

termed “solidarity,” but, as I argue here, these descriptions only pose solidarity *tautologically*. Naomi Zack’s recent work on questions of women’s commonality prompted me to consider whether conceptions of identity offer the only (or best or primary) resource to diagnose and critique oppression, and also whether the use of identity can adequately foster solidarity. Zack theorizes what she calls *category FMP* as “a relational essence” that, she argues, we may use to identify women as either those assigned “female” as a designation at birth (F), biological mothers (M), and/or the primary sexual interests of men (P).²⁰⁵ Conceiving of category FMP as circumstantialist and relational provokes questions about the relational variables at play in discourse on equality, oppression, identity, and solidarity. When scholars and activists typically invoke the term *relation* as a key concept yet without substantive description we conduct analyses as if persons already, obviously consciously agree to some concept or description of what happens when they relate. Instead of constraining solutions to questions of identity, feminists need a relational notion of liberatory solidarity that can, if necessary, work in tandem with theories of identity, and diagnostic theories of oppression. To bring liberatory end to different manifestations of patriarchal sexism we need a conception of solidarity that does not reduce notions of relation to obscurity or insignificance, and that may at the same time complement theories of identity and oppression relevant to particular situations.

At the risk of over-simplifying an expansive body of scholarship on topics of identity, subjectivity, and agency, I offer a characterization of the main themes in modern and contemporary feminist scholarship on solidarity. I begin with a survey of the relevant scholarly terrain and then thematize the trends as belonging to any of four major movements. These four movements include what I refer to as *essentialism*, *social constructivism*, *intersectionality*, and

²⁰⁵ Zack (2005: 8-11, 23-24, 142, 162).

circumstantialist perspectives. These count as neither exclusive categories, nor as ontological distinctions but instead as references to the primary strategies at play in a given body of theory. For example, one may find that a particular scholar gestures at solidarity on the basis of both essentialist and intersectional terms since any theory of identity might reveal the need for liberatory solidarity and yet fail to adequately posit the requisite relations. More importantly, because I cannot here provide an exhaustive review of all of the relevant and highly nuanced literature across many varied subtopics, I will reference pivotal contributions that have generated major shifts in feminist and anti-patriarchal discourse in the 19th, 20th, and 21st century.

I call into question the implicit and explicit framing of solidarity as a general function of identity. More specifically, I propose that while those who seek to foster solidarity for various reasons may or may not make use of notions of identity, liberatory solidarity requires consideration of what happens when we *relate*. That is, theorists and organizers may ultimately find that theories of identity, as well as corresponding conceptions of subjectivity and agency, at best play a secondary role in liberatory solidarity – if at all.

On their own, identity models, even those comprehensively adopted by vast majorities of diverse peoples, will not serve scholars and activists in developing a practically useful concept of liberatory solidarity. If identity alone could do this work, basic political models such as liberal-democratic "citizen" would already have resolved (and would not have furthered) nationalistic and globalized oppression and hegemony. Indeed, historical archives do not show identity as a sufficient resource for fostering liberatory solidarity.

Consider a common use of metaphors. In social, political, ethical, and cultural thought on identity, oppression, and solidarity, nearly all terms and descriptions of relations rely on spatial descriptions and metaphors (structural-positional, schematic imagery). The spatial descriptions

sometimes imply various evaluations, or different kinds of relationships, but nothing specific about what we can call “relation.” Likewise, scholars predominantly rely on spatial conceptions and schematic metaphors in theorizing equality and oppression.²⁰⁶ Theories of identity may help to diagnose equality and oppression, and in ways that augment the spatial imagery, such as in the case of Ann Cudd’s, Iris Marion Young’s, and Philip Hallie’s work to outline criteria for diagnosing oppression.²⁰⁷ Moreover, theories of intersectionality and Zack’s circumstantialist theory of commonality can help people consider one another as possible allies (or threats). None of these strategies, however, explain what we should consider when we invoke “relation,” to say little of relations we have in mind when we invoke “solidarity” as a specific idea.

Essentialist Notions of Identity

Late 19th and early 20th century scholars who make use of essentialist notions of identity found ways to call attention to pervasive social injustices, but by applying categories and notions of identity already established through hegemonic impositions by those with means to force or authorize certain ideas as norms. Consider some prominent scholars who apply essentialist notions. Frederick Douglass makes regular reference to notions of identity and categories of identification (e.g. “race”) throughout his various speeches and essays addressing the injustices of slavery.²⁰⁸ Although W.E.B. Du Bois rarely uses the term “identity” explicitly, he writes in defense of conserving notions such as “manhood” and “common humanity” and “the Negro” in order that his audience can identify people who have shared in certain sufferings and

²⁰⁶ Some scholars, have analyzed time and temporality in order to pose more complex diagnoses of spatial metaphors vis-à-vis social relations. However, these attempts, such as the work of Sarah Sharma (2013), merely expand the metaphors of location and positioning via temporal metaphors while telling us little about how to understand base concepts of relations.

²⁰⁷ Cudd (2006), Hallie (1981), and Young and Allen (2011).

²⁰⁸ Douglass, Foner, and Taylor (1999).

injustices.²⁰⁹ Virginia Woolf, writing about how men and women think of and refer to themselves, asserts essential distinctions between “men” and “women.”²¹⁰ Ida B. Wells wrote that the roles of daughter, sister, wife, and mother embodied the character of women.²¹¹ These figures, only a few select examples, used essentialist notions of identity to raise broad awareness of the struggle of people who might consider themselves as belonging to familiar, generally accepted social categories. Moreover, their writings assisted with organizing among people who already considered themselves belonging, essentially, to certain groups.

Useful only to a certain extent, essentialist notions of identity tended to reify predominant beliefs about fundamentally immutable physiological or spiritual differences – ideas that originated primarily from people in positions of arbitrary advantage, and not from those who endured arbitrary disadvantages. Nor can essentialist identities help to challenge the association of difference with inferiorities/superiorities. The long-standing “separate but equal” paradigm affirmed in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, and subsequent Jim Crow laws throughout the United States count among the most egregious manifestations of essentialism codified into institutional oppression.²¹² Douglass, Wells, Du Bois, Woolf, and other leaders of scholarly and activist movements against sex segregation and racial apartheid relied on essentialist notions of identity that, despite the benefits for catalyzing affinity groups, posed little challenge to, and in some ways furthered patterns of oppression.

Social Constructivist (anti-essentialist) Notions of Identity

Confronted with the limits of essentialist theories of identity, scholars and activists in the

²⁰⁹ Du Bois (2005).

²¹⁰ Woolf and Bradshaw (2008).

²¹¹ Wells-Barnett and DeCosta-Willis (1995).

²¹² "Plessy V. Ferguson" (2010), Mills (1997).

mid- 20th century developed new ways to theorize identity by rejecting essentialism and instead posing identity in terms of social constructions. As socially constructed, identities refer to widely shared patterns of belief, value judgments, and cultural norms, often instantiated through institutional and economic systems. Early on, second-wave feminists rejected essentialist definitions of women as well as essentialist notions of sex and gender used to identify people. Simone de Beauvoir refuted the idea that some people are born women, arguing instead that some people become women as a result of constructive social forces.²¹³ Theorists such as Carol Gilligan, Nancy Chodorow, and Catherine MacKinnon argue using different conceptions of identity as socially constructed, ostensibly in order to cast a wide net that could include people previously excluded from (first-wave) feminist movements.²¹⁴

Similarly, scholars who reject essentialist notions of race and racial identity do so in favor of race as a social construct. Michael Omi and Howard Winant, for instance, refer to racial identities as “formations.” Following from their analysis, we do no better to dismiss race outright as essentialist, nor to accept race purely as ideological.²¹⁵ Racial identities symbolize different conflicts and interests in society and then refer those to particular bodies. Omi & Winant argue that social movements find ways to rearticulate identity, infusing concepts people already believe with new meanings. Activists can manipulate the instability of socially constructed identities in order build solidarity by replacing demeaning or negative self-evaluations with positive conceptions of group association. In this way, subjects redefine themselves and one another by redefining the conceptual content of identity.

Judith Butler takes quite a different approach within the context of social constructivism,

²¹³ Beauvoir, Borde, and Malovany-Chevallier (2010).

²¹⁴ Chodorow (1989), Gilligan (1982), MacKinnon (1989).

²¹⁵ Omi and Winant (1994).

drawing extensively from philosophy of language and from Hegelian phenomenology. In her early work she critiques the idea that society wholly constructs identities, and counters that the performance of certain actions, in part expressing one's "interior" identity, also contributes to identity.²¹⁶ In this way, the performance of identities and the navigation of social norms count as a form of self-making. This approach empowers people, emphasizing individual agency in changing performances. Butler's insights also help to add to new understandings of the essentialism/commonality paradox, illustrating the complexity of attempting to foster solidarity. Rather than argue for solidarity, Butler turns away from the idea by critiquing assumptions about the benefits of "unity," and she argues instead for the importance of remaining suspicious about political action that requires solidarity as a prerequisite. Though I differ from Butler on her account of solidarity as a unity based on identities, her work helps to show how people participate in and can alter identities, and the importance of disrupting certain forms of identity.

Social constructivist theories of identity dispossess tendencies to attribute fundamental, immutable characteristics (e.g. biology, psychology, culture) to persons in order to comprise explanations for identities. Moreover, these theories help to illustrate the social, cultural, and political origins of identities, the limits of social constructions, and possible means of manipulating identities as social constructs. Rather than foster solidarity, or show how certain kinds of relations count as solidarity, these theories aim to diagnose oppression and respond to the essentialism/commonality paradox. Moreover, they do so on terms prefigured by assumptions about being, existence, experience, and other biases particular to Anglo-centric, andro-centric philosophical discourses.

²¹⁶ Butler (1990) and explained more concisely in Weir (1996: 129-130).

Identity and Intersectionality

Arguably, theories of intersectionality have, to-date, contributed the strongest challenge to the essentialism/commonality paradox, and key figures who argue for intersectional models aim to foster solidarity among people who face multiple forms of oppression. Audre Lorde's original contention that a ranked hierarchy of oppressions cannot explain how she always faces challenges as a black woman who loves women may serve as one of the earliest and most popular statements on Intersectionality.²¹⁷ However, the interventions of Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw and Patricia Hill Collins altered conversations about identity. Their work attempts to show why people with some common identities and some distinct identities, as compared with one another, need not sacrifice attributes of unique concern in order to claim commonality.²¹⁸

Whereas prior theories tended to contextualize individuals as enduring one primary form of oppression, intersectionality theorists argue for models of oppression and identity that account for concurrent, simultaneous experiences of identity and confrontations with oppression in various forms. For instance, through earlier essentialist and social-constructivist theories one might argue that a female-bodied person with stereotypically feminine traits primarily suffers from sexist, patriarchal forms of oppression. If this same person happens to have certain disabilities, primarily loves women, and/or has Japanese ancestry, then she would have to choose which sorts of oppression pose her worse problems, and at which times. Intersectionality theories refuse to consider one person's identities as separate categories, or as identities that one can rank in order of priority. Or, put differently, models of intersectionality aim to revise the conceptual content (meanings) of terms such as gender, race, sexuality, class, indigeneity, and so forth through the co-constitutive interactions of identities. Ostensibly, intersectionality provides a way

²¹⁷ Lorde (1983).

²¹⁸ Crenshaw (1991), and Hill Collins (2009).

for people from various racial and ethnic backgrounds who also identify as female to develop common political projects once it becomes possible to retain some common identities and some particular identities.

Later innovations, such as the work by Marie-Claire Belleau, suggest that intersectionality can foster cooperation among people from various backgrounds (e.g. among feminists with different ethnic ancestries).²¹⁹ In this realm of thought, scholars place greater emphasis on identities as *strategies* for ameliorating or dismantling various forms of oppression, concurrently – and through coordinated activities among people who face oppression in different ways. Identities, applied strategically to foster coordinated efforts, aim at some notion like solidarity, but primarily in terms of outcomes such as collective action. All too often, though, paradigms of intersectional identities cannot help solve the paradoxes upon which oppression subsists.

June Jordan tells of coming to consciousness of race, sex, gender, class, and nationality in unexpected ways when as a Black woman she interacted with other Black women in the Bahamas: “we are not particularly women anymore; we are parties to a transaction designed to set us against each other.”²²⁰ Lamenting the insolvency of shared identities as a resource for “unity” or “solidarity,” she explains further,

So far as I can see, the usual race and class concepts of connection, or gender assumptions of unity, do not apply very well. I doubt that they ever did. Otherwise why would Black folks forever bemoan our lack of solidarity when the deal turns real. And if unity on the basis of sexual oppression is something natural, then why do we women, the majority of people on the planet, still have a problem?²²¹

At best, intersectionality theories limit (or counterbalance) resilient and widely endorsed

²¹⁹ Belleau (2007).

²²⁰ Jordan (2003: 8).

²²¹ Ibid. 12.

appeals to essentialism and, moreover, assist with showing how oppression manifests in different ways, simultaneously posing individuals with different kinds of problems. These insights help as strategies for fostering cooperation by providing a check against the possibility that one or a few identities may end up as the dominant reference point in developing collective action. However, intersectionality theories cannot explain the kinds of relations that at times trump or supervene, remain reliable, when identities come into conflict and/or when discourses of identity fail to explain conflicts and problems.

Circumstantialist Strategies

I group the following, somewhat eclectic, array of theories as *circumstantialist* for their tendency to pose semantic descriptions of circumstances and social conditions as things people can adopt (identify with) in order to bring about certain ideal outcomes. To put it differently, circumstantialists use carefully crafted semantic propositions to help people organize in response to various conditions (e.g. cultural hegemony). If people from disparate backgrounds adopt certain descriptions of their circumstances as identities, then they can organize collectively. Whether or not scholars broadly endorse any particular theory (or theories) of identity, it matters more to accurately describe circumstances that prefigure theories of oppression and identity as relevant.

Activists and theorists who advocate for *coalition politics*, such as Bernice Johnson Reagon and Suzanne Pharr, tend to de-prioritize discourse of identity in favor of describing conditions that require political interventions by people who do not yet understand their shared interests. Reagon, for instance, argues the need for long-term efforts to build coalitions among

smaller movements.²²² Those involved in smaller movements may or may not share identities with one another in various ways, but coalitions stem from shared interests. Members of smaller movements sign on to support one another in coalitions to address common concerns, often episodically. For instance, women's reproductive rights advocates may form coalitions with environmental groups and prison reform advocates for the purposes of electing political candidates sympathetic to the concerns of all three groups. Following the election, these groups may not continue to work together in coalition as intimately or as frequently. Pharr emphasizes the importance of describing the “politics of domination” used by “the Right” to dominate social institutions and cultural norms, as well as the importance of articulating a “politics of liberation” whereby people who identify differently can take collective action.²²³ With a better understanding of strategies of domination and possibilities for collective action, members of various groups can develop broader and more inclusive social movements.

Like Reagon and Pharr, many who appeal to coalition politics have interest in applying conceptions of solidarity to organized movements. Moreover, the use of coalition politics generally assumes inclusive strategies for challenging various forms of oppression. Even when effective at mobilizing various interests groups toward a common cause, they offer no outright explanation of the relations solidarity garners. Like other tautological accounts, "coalition" models explain strategies, benefits, and outcomes of solidarity but do not explain solidarity in itself. Nor do coalition models necessarily refer to solidarity as expressly liberatory or relational.

Theorists of *cosmopolitanism* suggest that global, international interactions pose the current and ongoing challenge of adopting identities as global citizens. For instance, Kwame Anthony Appiah argues that people can retain individual identities while also identifying with

²²² Reagon. Ibid.

²²³ Pharr. Ibid.

people who engage in similar projects or activities (“life-projects”).²²⁴ The hostile and uncertain circumstances in the world necessitate adopting collective identities for the sake of solidarity. He poses solidarity as synonym for *community* and, more specifically, a reference to a supposedly *universal human community*. We have no reason, Appiah argues, to choose between local or national identities and global identities, and the circumstances of the world increasingly require adopting multiple identities, simultaneously. Appiah's implicit notion of solidarity holds relevance for moral and political concerns, but not specifically as liberatory or as relational.

In a slightly different vein, Jason Hill argues for a notion of cosmopolitanism that involves (or requires) forgetting the historical contingencies of essentialist identities (and concepts of race) – a right to forget certain origins – in order to foster the kind of world in which we want to live.²²⁵ In fact, Hill rejects most notions of solidarity as “tribalist” concepts stemming from “cosmophobia,” a fear of life in a broader world. He argues instead that cosmopolitan identities provide a better basis for a future in which people create their futures without the contingent problems stemming from pre-modern xenophobia. In summary, cosmopolitan theories provide no general concept of solidarity and, as with other theories, tend to use the terminology tautologically without any explicit discussions of solidarity in terms of the relations allegedly at issue.

Finally, returning to where I began, Naomi Zack intervenes in response to the failure of theorists to critically theorize and refute the essentialism/commonality paradox, and argues for a theory of women’s commonality that women can use to foster solidarity – and political rule.²²⁶ She argues that scholars have gone wrong in confusing essentialist ideas (essentialism) with

²²⁴ Appiah (2005) and (2007).

²²⁵ Hill (2000).

²²⁶ Zack. Ibid.

incontrovertible essential relations to similar conditions (essential, unavoidable circumstances). That is, not everything women share in common counts as an essence that will inevitably serve hegemonic purposes. Further, the paradoxical association of commonality with essentialism has forestalled theorists from developing notions of identity that do not just assist with solidarity, but that stem from solidarity as a priority.

Zack poses what she calls a theory of women's *relational identity*.²²⁷ As such, women are humans who have some historical relationship to what she calls "category FMP"; this includes individuals designated female from birth, or biological mothers, or people who are the primary sexual interests of men. Women worldwide share an uncontroversial relationship to this category in some way or another, and that notion of an essence offers a necessary and sufficient condition for identity as a woman. As far as her theory concerns solidarity, Zack's intervention falls short. Even if we can identify (or define) women as those who have a common relation to the circumstantial description of category FMP, this only provides one possible resource for identifying who might benefit from working in solidarity with one another. Zack gives no clear insight into the kinds of relations that count as solidarity.

So far I have argued that scholars and activists theorize identity predominantly as a resource for diagnosing and ameliorating oppression, and in doing so pose identity as a means to foster solidarity among otherwise disparate groups. Following the inadequacy and negative consequences of applying essentialist notions, social constructivists and theorists of intersectionality seek to resolve the essentialism/commonality paradox. Intersectional accounts of identity have helped to illustrate the possibility of fostering cooperation among people who identify similarly and/or very differently. Yet, intersectionality does not explain "cooperation" or

²²⁷ Zack (2005: 9, 13, 23, 27-28, 85, 93, 113-114, 133, 141, 162).

“solidarity” as relations (which I have argued is necessary for developing an adequate concept of solidarity for practical liberatory purposes), but at best as outcomes or as strategies. Naomi Zack’s theory of women’s common relationship to a particular descriptive category, a circumstantialist approach, attempts to redress identity – and may very well succeed – but she offers no substantive conception of solidarity we can use to consider her claims about the possible uses of her theory for fostering relations of some sort.

Even the most compelling theories of identity lack clarity about what counts as *solidarity qua relations*, and less about relevance to broadly liberatory concerns. What sorts of relations ought people to develop in order to counter oppression and subjugation as a matter of liberation, and by which theory(ies) of relations can they evaluate whether they have developed solidarity as relations of some kind or another? As I have argued, liberatory solidarity as relational hangs together as a coherent proposition for collectively challenging cultural hegemonies and institutionalized oppressions in their many varied forms.

Organizing movements according to identity models does not necessarily result in detriments to liberatory strategies, and identity models may even offer some insurgent resistance and protective responses to oppression. Still, I raise the concern about whether identity models can serve as the basis for solidarity as in the context of liberatory movements. I want to provoke a particular question about essentialism, social constructivism, intersectionality, and circumstantialist models: on what basis should we labor to sustain groups and coalitions on the terms given in models of identity? If for the purposes of cultivating relatively liberal and progressive changes to moral and political regimes, then identity theories may suffice. Perhaps Butler, Alcoff, Mohanty, Fraser, and scholars invested in models of identity and recognition can make a good case for how identities help make dominant regimes obediential to the needs of the

historically dispossessed. However, for specifically liberatory purposes we have to at least admit to skepticism about whether identity models can foster and sustain the kinds of solidarity needed for those ends.

Recall that persons intent on liberation (at least on Dussel's account) cultivate aptitudes and capacities to labor, to discipline themselves in commiserating with the disenfranchised – placing ourselves with those enduring misery – to subvert dominant paradigms of moral and political rule by making ourselves the peers, the equals, of the oppressed. As I have argued, liberatory solidarity as relational may offer a viable conception of how to foster and sustain anti-hegemonic movements consistent with specifically liberatory priorities and objectives.

We who make one another for the sake of feminist liberation

For what purpose do anti-patriarchal scholars and activists need a theory of solidarity? Ostensibly, for the purposes of liberation. What do conventional conceptions of solidarity lack? As I have argued, they lack a notion of relation that sustains liberatory solidarity despite contravening influences. The aim of this sort of solidarity to make the dominant regimes of a society obediential in the service of redressing patterned harms does not come easily or without ongoing challenges, even with a coherent model of solidarity. I suspect various challenges arise during attempts to apply this to organizing and activism.

First, how will persons decide and communicate what they can and will endure for the sake of liberation? How and in which ways will individuals and communities allow themselves to share vulnerabilities? This no doubt appears a deep concern for those already living in extreme vulnerability. Though perhaps an unsatisfying answer, I can only suggest that these difficult questions remain beholden to no specific strategy theory can provide. Decisions about what to

endure in the interest of liberation, or whether to remain under the heel of racist, heterosexist, capitalist, patriarchy, will depend on the circumstances and conditions specific persons face. Some will and some will not have the resources, communal or personal, to feasibly take the risks involved in relating the way liberatory solidarity likely requires. These risks may include physical, emotional, legal, economic, and other forms of precarity. In the more immediate sense, relation as making alerts to the fundamental concern that those who relate make one another consider the world differently as a result of laborious activities, working upon one another. A person who relates, one who labors to make another as another labors to make her, comprises her life on her own labors as well as the labors of others. Some may take risks despite the conditions, incentives and/or disincentives of their immediate circumstances. Only when working through these questions relationally will anyone make of solidarity what they can, or not.

Second, does this relational account of liberatory solidarity pose any guarantees about the success of specific movements? Outright, no, with regard to specific movements. I hold the view that revolutionary acts, such as enduring the risks of making one another for the sake of liberation, may require a specific sort of disposition and not a promise about a particular strategy. That is, *the willingness to give up current conditions with little or no guarantee that a particular movement will produce anything better – and yet with the determination to sustain relational solidarity in critical hope of achieving liberatory outcomes*. In fact, I cannot think of a better description of a revolutionary spirit. Liberatory solidarity as relational may actually result in the dissolution of certain movements in order to form new movements. No one should underestimate this as a tall order. Still, not so tall as to imagine it infeasible for many people worldwide. If and when liberation from racism, sexism, neocolonialism, and other manifestations of oppression

hangs on solidarity as I have argued, then organizers must remain intimately concerned with the lack of guarantees such situations pose.

Finally, if such broadly liberatory movements pan out, who will rule and how will they do so? For Dussel, the tenets of liberation remain eminent as guides for societies. Yet, even though I sympathize with Dussel's visions of societies perpetually guided by liberatory agendas, I think it too specific to assert. During and after liberatory upheavals, whether gradual or radical, specific communities may still need to rely on conventional conceptions of morality and politics so as to work out lingering challenges. I admit that I suspect anarchist scholars have the most compelling understanding of how this can work out, e.g. Kropotkin-inspire "mutual aid," and yet again pragmatism seems to hold here.²²⁸ People will choose the theoretical and practical resources needed to resolve the problems they face.

At some points we may need to give up on the cult of authenticity endemic to several centuries of thinking in terms of identity and recognition. And at some points we may find identities a feature of liberatory organizing. Inclusive of the difficulty in foreshadowing the many likely complications and difficulties involved in making one another relationally, I have aimed to make the case that the choice before us persists: either liberatory solidarity as relational or ongoing suffering under cultural hegemonies and institutional cruelties.

Next, in chapter 4 I further elaborate on the implications for anti-racist efforts. Similar to the moves in this chapter, I discuss the way identity poses an insufficient resource for anti-racist liberation. More specifically, I address the ways that race eliminativism and race conservatism dominate the foreground and background of allegedly anti-racist scholarship and activism, conditioning who may and may not count as partaking in anti-racist solidarity. The

²²⁸ Kropotkin (2006).

predominance of the tension among the two fields leaves false hypotheses of race operative as widely falsified and yet potent social epistemologies. If anti-racists seek not just any version of anti-racism but rather liberatory anti-racism as also anti-patriarchal and anti-colonial, then efforts to that end will require a relational account of solidarity that can sustain movements despite the unresolved disagreements about how and whether to properly theorize race concepts.

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Chapter 4: We anti-racists: Race eliminativists, race conservationists, and liberatory solidarity as relational

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Abstract: Liberatory anti-racist movements differ substantively though not exclusively from anti-racist efforts motivated by moral and political concerns. Conventional moral evaluations and political interventions against racism may leave intact the dominant schemes of cultural and institutional rule, merely adjusting idiosyncratic features of a society to address racism episodically. Analyses of racism in the context of moral and political theory have placed too much emphasis on definitions of racial identities and, conversely, too little emphasis on relations of solidarity among anti-racists as a matter of liberation. As a result, many scholars and activists who seek anti-racist strategies contentiously defend our respective conceptions of "race" and "racism" and, moreover, we staunchly advocate our particular understandings of racial/racialized identities. In many cases both of these concerns culminate in tension over whether to sign on as race eliminativists or as race conservationists. Anti-racist liberation will require specifically liberatory priorities and objectives distinct from, but not wholly disinterested in moral and political objectives. To that end, I defend a conception of *liberatory solidarity as relational* that augments racial justice conceived of as cultural inclusion, morally, and institutional representation, politically. I propose that a liberatory end to racism likely requires *relations of solidarity* among anti-racists in order to achieve our goals. To do so, I defend a notion of relations in two parts: a) I set the terms by which a concept of relations counts as relevant to both liberation and solidarity, and then b) draw on Elaine Scarry's research into materialist thought, namely the works of Marx and Engels, to articulate relations as laboriously making one another.

Keywords: solidarity, race, racism, anti-racist, liberation, relation, intersectionality, Dussel, Scarry, Marx, Shelby.

Introduction

Throughout the 19th, 20th, and early 21st centuries theories of racial solidarity have contributed to anti-racist movements in a plethora of ways, and yet such models of racial solidarity have not made liberatory solidarity among anti-racists a priority.²²⁹ That is, those interested in systematically dismantling racist moral hegemony and institutionalized oppression have not taken seriously enough the differences between *racial solidarity* and *anti-racist solidarity*. Ostensibly, racial solidarity serves as a means of organizing racially marginalized groups in opposition to cultural and political patterns of racism. I will differentiate anti-racist solidarity, solidarity among anti-racists, as a liberatory matter that conventional moral and political conceptions of solidarity cannot likely foster. Certainly, contemporary scholarship in moral theory and political philosophy provides a wide range of analytical resources for diagnosing racism as a form of oppression and injustice and, moreover, provides some resources for conceiving of racial justice. However, as anti-racists, we have said comparatively little about *emancipatory anti-racist solidarity*; that is, about conceptions of solidarity among anti-racists that can help to organize anti-racist movements inclusive of a broad range of racialized identities, diagnostic models of oppression, and social statuses. Despite achieving some measure of cultural inclusion, morally, and institutional representation, politically, anti-racist movements have not yet managed to achieve liberatory goals. In what follows, I offer a conception of anti-racist solidarity that depends on theorizing the three foundational concepts of *liberation*, *relation*, and *solidarity* as constitutive of a whole notion: *liberatory solidarity as relational*.

In contemporary discourses, anti-racists differ a great deal on many fronts and I focus on two of the most discordant debates. First, many anti-racists contentiously defend our respective

²²⁹ Consider recent developments by Blum (2007), Scholz (2008), and Shelby (2005).

conceptions of "race" and "racism" and, second, they staunchly advocate our particular understandings of racial/racIALIZED identities. In many cases both of these concerns wind up in tension over whether to sign on as race *eliminativists* or as race *conservationists*.²³⁰ Race *eliminativists* try to defeat racism by eliminating discourse on race. Race *conservationists*, by contrast, try to defeat racism by carefully conserving discourse on race that challenges racist cultural and institutional historical factors. As I argue, emphases on definitions of race and racial identities have so far left us these two choices, and neither comport with specifically liberatory options even if they square with moral and political objectives under the banner of racial justice. One might justifiably choose between eliminativism or conservationism and thus sign on in some form of solidarity with anti-racist eliminativists or anti-racist conservationists, respectively. This does not impute that anyone who chooses either option would necessarily join in the kind of solidarity capable of catalyzing emancipatory anti-racist movements.

Liberatory anti-racist efforts, which I explain in greater detail later, aim to prioritize the alterity of persons and set out from the dual objectives of, one, challenging dominant moral and political regimes and, two, putting any dominant social systems in the service of ameliorating suffering. Put differently, for the sake of liberation we need a way to respect the unique characteristics and interests of persons and groups while challenging dominant moral and political systems so as to put institutions in the service of historically subjugated and disadvantaged groups – and not merely *du jure* cultural inclusion and institutional representation. If we aim for such an end to racism in its many varied forms, including its manifestations concurrent with sexism, heterosexism, transphobia, and a wide range of hegemonic conditions, then, as I argue, we will need a notion of solidarity specifically relevant to liberation that can

²³⁰ Mallon (2006: 526).

help to organize our efforts. I advocate a conception of liberatory solidarity as relational, a notion that alerts us to consider whether to endure one another for the sake of liberation, or to continue to suffer subjugation and oppression as various manifestations of racism rise and fall in perpetuity.

I assume, then, that it will not suffice to work for racial justice if some measure of racism lingers, and aim instead for anti-racist liberation as a full-stop end to patterned cruelties and discrimination on the basis of false and yet historically pervasive conceptions of race. Bigotries come and go, but the culturally and institutionally patterned relations of power that subsidize preference for certain bigotries ought not to endure. For all of the incremental or episodic good that moral theory can do to help refute cultural hegemonies, and that political theory can do to justify appeals against institutionalized racism, these do not necessarily comport with liberatory priorities and objectives. I pose the challenge that if anti-racist commitments pose any benefit, then we seek a *liberatory* end to racism and we likely need some sort of widespread solidarity among anti-racists in order to achieve our goals. The question to answer, it seems, appears in at least two ways. First, which sort of solidarity can help anti-racists foster relations that can make liberation feasible in spite of countervailing conditions, incentives and disincentives, rewards and punishments? Second, posed from a broader perspective about group relations, which sort of solidarity can help anti-racists relate in ways that makes liberation feasible despite institutional and cultural distribution (mal-distribution) of power?

By articulating solidarity as relational for the purposes of liberation, I differentiate it from conceptions of solidarity conceived in terms culture and community regulated by morality, and from shared interests and institutions as political concepts. Rather, as a concept intended for liberatory purposes, solidarity refers us to consider the consequences involved in human social

relationships. Thus, the root concept of relation at play in theories of relationships called solidarity will matter a great deal. The specifically relational version of liberatory solidarity that I defend plays an *alertive* role, prompting anti-racists to consider whether to endure the risks and vulnerabilities of enduring how we make one another when we relate, or to continue to permit one another to variously suffer racist cultural and institutional norms.

The model of solidarity I propose emends conventional attempts to foster collective movements through the two dominant modes of thought: *identity theory* and *shared definitions*. Rather than narrowly construing solidarity as a function of identity, primarily by defining subjects who may relate, a relational conception of solidarity aims to foster emphases on relations as *laborious*. We may want to know identities as a schema for "who or what relates?" but for the sake of solidarity we gain by considering more carefully, "what happens when persons relate?" Questions of identity and definition need not play the primary role even if such modes of enquiry help some particular groups foster and sustain solidarity. Moreover, I argue that while rhetorical strategies of discerning and defining the meanings of terms, such as "race" and "racism," play an important role in anti-racist movements, such definitional projects cannot on their own suffice as a basis for liberatory solidarity.

The essay proceeds by setting out respective descriptions of the three central concepts, theorizing them as a composite proposition, and then showing the relevance of this approach to anti-racist efforts. First, I discuss Enrique Dussel's theory of *liberation* as a basis for differentiating liberatory projects from moral and political concerns according to a particular set of criteria. Second, I survey common attempts to pose *solidarity* as a secondary function of conceptions of identity and/or definitional projects, primarily in contemporary critical race theory and in contemporary philosophy of race. I aim to show that these modes may make

important contributions to anti-racist efforts, but cannot generate the attention to relations needed for achieving liberatory ends. Moreover, I propose the strategy of treating semantic mentions of "race" not as indicators of the need to define a term, but as alertive prompts to consider the need for moral, political, and liberatory redress of historical inequalities and cultural hegemonies.

Third, I defend a notion of *relations* in two parts: a) I set the terms by which a concept of relations counts as relevant to both liberation and solidarity, and then b) draw on Elaine Scarry's research into materialist thought, namely the works of Marx and Engels, to then articulate relations as laboriously making one another. In light of the first two concepts, liberation and relation, I then argue for anti-racists to consider a liberatory conception of solidarity as relational.

Fourth, I show why this particular conception of solidarity can help to advance anti-racist scholarly and activist projects even as we sustain contentious discourses and disagreements. In conclusion, I predict some of the likely limitations and difficulties involved in problematizing racist regimes according to models of oppression and equality.

For liberation's sake

I take it as a general assumption that anti-racists want broad changes of a liberatory kind. It helps, then, to have some conception of what counts as liberatory. Akin to Marilyn Frye's argument that we cannot call just any sort of difficulty by the name "oppression" and expect it to offer a helpful diagnosis of institutionalized cruelties, that oppression must refer to something specific, the same holds for liberation. A notion of liberation relevant and useful to oppressed, marginalized, subordinated, and underrepresented people will have to offer some specific guidance in diagnosing and responding to oppressive cultural and political regimes, and with the intent of altering the consequences such regimes pose to vulnerable, disenfranchised persons and

groups. In the context of liberation, it does not suffice to seek changes to societies that leave dominant moral and political regimes in the service of a racist status quo even if the status quo involves gradual, incremental improvements (reductions in harms and inequities) over time. Moreover, I take it as a general assumption that a concept of liberation will show distinct regard for the alterity of persons and communities who differ from one another in immutable and chosen ways. Put more simply, some persons and groups will not sign on as members of communities or citizens of nations and their refusal to adopt roles as subjects of a dominant moral and political regime in no way justifies ignoring their claim to liberation. According to the terms of liberatory thought, those who lay claim to rule bear the burden of acting with liberatory respect. Those ruled, and those who refuse the rule of a regime live under no special obligation to defend their claim to respect.²³¹

Here, I turn to Enrique Dussel's theory of liberation.²³² Dussel remains a controversial figure among many scholars.²³³ Ofelia Schutte, among others, notes an array of problematic biases in his scholarship such as sexist and masculine-centric prejudices, as well as reliance on Eurocentric phenomenologies.²³⁴ Certainly, these problems call for critique. Presently, Dussel's work represents one of the most long-standing, comprehensive, and widely vetted theories available on the topic.²³⁵ I acknowledge the difficulties in applying his work to anti-racist projects specifically, and anti-hegemonic works more generally, and I make use of three specific components of his theory. First, liberation denotes a particular kind of respect for the alterity of persons. Second, liberatory projects challenge dominant moral norms and political regimes by

²³¹ Simpatico Anderson (1999).

²³² Dussel (1985: 526).

²³³ Schutte (1993).

²³⁴ Ibid. Specifically, chapters 6 and 7.

²³⁵ Lisa Tessman's (2005) feminist analysis of virtue ethics in the context of "liberatory struggles" holds some relevance here since her conception of liberation seems, overall, consistent with Dussel's. However, her discussion primarily focuses on questions germane to moral theory.

disputing the legitimacy of claims to power. Third, liberation sets the goal of putting dominant moral norms and political institutions in the service of those living in circumstances of vulnerability.

Recall from chapter 1 and 2 the priorities and objectives of liberation. *First, liberatory ventures aim to restrict the harms that dominant regimes pose to "others in alterity," those who refuse to participate fully, and, second, to provide sustenance to others who antagonize and confront the norms of a society.*²³⁶ Dussel expands on the work of Levinas in arguing that to labor for liberation requires a persistent respect for the alterity of another or "the other." Despite the postmodern contention that "othering" always subordinates, demeans, or objectifies, Dussel poses a different way to consider "others." To practice respect for another person one must accept the incommensurability of another's life with one's own – the impossibility of pulling someone from the margin of your lived perceptual center into that center. Demonstrating respect on an interpersonal level begins from a practice of "letting others be" in their alterity rather than seeking to interrogatively conscript them into your comprehension.²³⁷ Although I may feel curious about another person, curiosity and want of knowing do not render inherent justification to interrogate another person. My interests in knowing more about you, de-mystifying you, do not bear out an obligation for you to confide in me, to divulge your secrets. And in some ways, people cannot de-mystify themselves to one another. Since one individual can never wholly incorporate another into either individual's respective totality, since I cannot make another person wholly commensurable with me and my circumstances, I will do better to accept that I must respect another whether or not I comprehend the particularities of hir life and

²³⁶ Dussel. §2.1.6.6.

²³⁷ Ibid. §2.6.3, §2.6.7.3.

circumstances. Even in my ignorance of the complexities of another person's life, I can show respect.

As Dussel explains,

The philosophy that knows how to ponder this reality, the de facto world reality, not from the perspective of the center of political, economic, or military power but from beyond the frontiers of that world, from the periphery -- this philosophy will not be ideological. Its reality is the whole earth; for it the 'wretched of the earth' (who are not nonbeing) are also real.²³⁸

Given how respect applies interpersonally, we can extrapolate how it works at the level of cultures and institutions. In cultural and institutional contexts respect for alterity requires questioning whether dominant systemic moral traditions and political regimes ("of the center") demand unjustified conformity by those "from the periphery."

To what extent do a society's dominant moral and political systems disregard those who refuse to live according to established norms? And, to what extent do dominant regimes sustain respect and consideration for those who refuse to live as citizens, subjects, party members, etc.? It falls to moral and political theories to explain why persons ought to reason out whether conformity to a certain norm does or does not count as justifiable and, then, to adopt those norms. Success for moral theory may involve substantiating a compelling "ought," whereas successful political theories help to adjudicate among different institutional modes of distributing social responsibilities and individual liberties. Even so, success in moral and political reasoning and practice does not negate the importance of retaining a critically liberatory evaluation of cultural and institutional practices. Challenges to moral and political reasoning from within those fields of thought will at best arise as secondary – argue first for moral norms and practices, second for critique of those norms, argue first for political justifications and procedures, second

²³⁸ Ibid. §1.2.1.2.

for critique of those justifications. Liberatory thought provides a specific and primary basis for calling into question the moral norms and institutional operations that arbitrarily treat some persons and group as non-real (to modify Dussel's proposition about "real" above).

Liberatory projects have the objective of challenging dominant moral norms and political regimes, specifically by calling into question the legitimacy of claims to power. Dussel contends that "power subsumes from alterity." In liberatory terms, the legitimacy of a given regime's claim to moral influence and political rule, the legitimacy of uses of power, rises or falls on the vitality and suffering a society metes out. Dussel's version of liberation tethers the legitimacy of cultural and institutional systems in proportion to the vulnerability those systems generate or ameliorate. So, to the extent that a cultural and political regime cultivates vitality, even for "others in alterity" who disavow allegiance, it counts as legitimate. Conversely, as a regime fosters suffering and dispossession, it loses legitimacy.

Of course, social contexts organized by moral norms, and governance systems that express certain political interests can and do deviate in practice from norms established in moral and political theories. Moreover, the success or failure of moral and political theorists to provide adequate justifications for those fields does not necessarily provide coherent insight into liberatory priorities and objectives. The role of liberatory convictions does not wane simply because moral and political rationales succeed or fail to obviate normativity. Indeed, liberatory thought may come into play with the most relevance when people fail to sufficiently carry well-reasoned moral and political theory into effective practices. If not for the liberatory considerations latent in many theories of moral and political philosophy, why else would

scholars bother with anything other than authoritarianism?²³⁹ Critically, liberatory essay provides a resource for questioning dominant modes of moral and political reasoning even as societies make use of various dominant cultural and institutional schemes.

*Liberatory struggles seek to put cultural norms and institutional systems in the services of those least advantaged, to ameliorate the suffering of vulnerable populations and to enhance vitality.*²⁴⁰ Strategies coherent with liberation may render extensive, even transformative changes to a society's moral and political status quo. And yet a liberatory strategy may only seek minor or situationally specific changes to facets of sociopolitical systems. In this way, those who attend to liberatory objectives will cultivate an aptitude or capacity to work, to discipline oneself, by commiserating with the weak and poor – placing oneself with someone in misery – to act subversively by making oneself the peer, the equal, of the oppressed.²⁴¹ Sometimes sweepingly radical and sometimes precisely surgical, the aim remains the same: to alter structural and procedural aspects of a society so as to diminish suffering and vulnerabilities and to enhance vitality.

These reference points both provide a context for liberation as a concept, and offer general programmatic guidance for liberatory movements. Acting in the interest of liberation seeks, even when impossible to fully achieve, to establish respect for others in their alterity and to accept the corresponding responsibility to commit cultural and political systems to the service of "the other" (*habodah*) – particularly, the poor, the weak, those marginalized on the periphery.²⁴² Yet, this leaves open the question of which kinds of relations activists and scholars

²³⁹ I consider it an open question, and one worth pondering, whether classical European philosophers such as Hobbes, Rousseau, Locke, Mill, and their ilk would have bothered at all with moral and political theorizing if not for the underlying liberatory motives and concerns of their times.

²⁴⁰ Ibid. §2.6.7.3.

²⁴¹ Ibid. §2.6.8, §2.6.8.2.

²⁴² Ibid. §2.6.7.3.

must foster and sustain in order to carry out their agendas. What kind of solidarity affords the feasibility of respecting alterity while challenging dominant claims to power and then putting moral and political regimes into the service of those who need liberation?

Liberatory anti-racist movements would differ substantively though not exclusively from anti-racist efforts motivated by moral and political concerns. Conventional moral evaluations and political interventions against racism may leave intact the dominant schemes of cultural and institutional rule, merely adjusting idiosyncratic features of a society to address racism episodically. Typically, sub-emancipatory societal changes merely shift the burdens of a racist status quo from one marginalized group to another, persistently disadvantaging the marginalized while also exploiting hostilities among disenfranchised groups. To make a moral or political claim on one's society against racism can help to ameliorate certain problematic incidents and patterns. Certainly, legislative acts for equal opportunity and affirmative action developed out of moral and political claims, and then enact changes in culture, values, and institutions with tangible results. However, if the dominant historical scheme of rule remains intact, we ought not to count it as liberatory even when such rule bends to challenges brought forth on the basis of morality and politics. Some few may even consider themselves liberated when attaining recognition of identity or status in a racist regime, such as attaining so-called "equal rights," but this too fails to count as liberatory except in a very thin and highly localized sense.

If anti-racists do not seek to challenge contemporary racist cultural and institutional regimes, rooted in well-documented historical atrocities and institutionalized discrimination, we should settle for chasing the scraps of contingent recognition episodically doled out by masters of racist regimes. When indifferent to liberatory objectives, we can use moral and political theories to guide us well in playing the game of individuated self-interest within the confines of

established rule. In this game, historically arbitrary advantages pass on to some groups, historically arbitrary disadvantages pass on to other groups, and incremental changes minimally redistribute advantages and disadvantages but only up to a point that the dominant regime remains in the service of those already advantaged. Even while scholars argue convincingly that this scheme counts as morally permissible and/or politically justifiable, and even though activists tend to organize within these regimes with the hope of gradual improvement in mutual recognition and resource redistributions, we may yet appeal to conceptions of liberation as a different sort of project.

Advocates of anti-racist liberation may even make use of certain cultural and institutional systems. But we err if we too easily conflate the expansion of moral recognition and political claims with the objectives of liberation. Some liberatory changes may come about by harmoniously manipulating established cultural and institutional norms, such as working within legal frameworks. Liberatory movements may also violate moral and political conventions, such as through civil disobedience, economic boycott, sabotage, and by way of other insurgent strategies. The means of liberation may vary in all sorts of ways depending on particulars and contexts. I take no explicit position here on the particular means, only the priority and objectives of liberatory efforts.

More to the point of solidarity, conventional critiques of race and racism have yet to foster adequate, concurrent commitments against concurrent problems such as sexism, heterosexism, transphobia, ableism, poverty, neocolonial ethnocentrism, and the various manifestations of oppression that collude with and sustain racist regimes. Given the way different forms of oppression mutually reinforce one another, for a conception of solidarity to pose any liberatory benefit to anti-racist movements it will have to serve as a resource for anti-

patriarchal, anti-sexist, anti-heterosexist, anti-trans*phobia, anti-ableist, anti-poverty, anti-colonial movements, and so forth. Scholars and activists have invested great effort in defining oppressions and identifying those who endure oppression, and far less effort theorizing relations among those who would benefit from liberation. Next, I survey some of the broad movements in anti-racist scholarship in order to illustrate and critique the emphases on definitions and identities.

Contemporary accounts of solidarity: identities and definitions in critical race theory and philosophies of race

Anti-racist scholarship contains comparatively little emphasis on solidarity among anti-racists, and far less on the matter of anti-racist solidarity in the context of liberation. Critical race theorists drawing on the tradition of critical legal studies have not taken up questions of anti-racist solidarity and instead have focused on legislative politics and jurisprudence as venues for social change.²⁴³ Similarly, philosophers of race working in different discourses have generally left matters of solidarity as a secondary problem to address following attention to other primary questions. Those aiming to analyze the alleged existence of race as a biological fact typically redress these false hypotheses through various appeals to science, metaphysics, phenomenology, and other methodological strategies.²⁴⁴ Philosophers engaged in social, moral, and political questions of race aim to theorize an adequate account of racism, dispute the social relevance of race as a construct, and the extent to which notions of race can benefit anti-racist interventions.²⁴⁵ For the most part this field of scholarship and activist discourses analyzes racial

²⁴³ Crenshaw (1995), and Delgado and Stefancic (2012).

²⁴⁴ For instance, Appiah and Gutmann (1996), Zack (2002), and Zack (2006).

²⁴⁵ Blum (2002), Mills (1997), Young and Allen (2011).

solidarity among people with shared characteristics and/or circumstances, and coalition-building among different groups.

Some liberatory inclinations may motivate anti-racists who place analytical emphases on definitions and identities. Typically, however, these analyses aim to justify the demand for *mutual recognition* in response to cultural hegemony, and *political claims* for redress of institutional inequalities and resource distributions. Generally, as discussed more extensively throughout chapters 2 and 3, two strategies subsidize these interventions: 1) define terminology that elucidates the complexities of oppression and 2) theorize identity as bases for generating shared understanding and, therefore collective action which we then call by the name "solidarity." Even if liberatory intentions help to catalyze enquiry into racialized identities and conceptual definitions of racism, the strategies of identity and definition typical to moral and political theories do not necessarily suffice as sufficient resources for *liberatory solidarity*. Nor can liberationists arbitrarily omit identity and definition projects as irrelevant to liberation; these may pose benefits to some persons and groups, after all. Before I propose an alternative strategy consistent with liberatory objectives it will help to consider some of the modern and contemporary developments in anti-racist scholarship. I loosely group these according to four trends: *essentialism*, *social constructivism*, *intersectionality*, and *circumstantialism*.

Following from European renaissance and Enlightenment era turns in science and Cartesian methodologies, *essentialist* modes of thought emphasize definitions of fundamental, essential characteristics as a basis for categorizing persons as members of groups in contradistinction to one another. The ontological origins of "race" as a concept developed along with the rise in theories of identity and recognition.²⁴⁶ This came to full fruition in the idealist

²⁴⁶ West (1982), and Zack (2002).

writings of Hume, Kant, and Hegel who adopted racialized ontologies as a matter of fact and developed their moral and political theories in accord with essentialist distinctions.²⁴⁷ Despite the lack of evidence for essential qualities as a basis for notions of race, anti-racist scholars later maintained the ontological distinctions.

Consider a few examples. Frederick Douglass makes regular reference to notions of identity and categories of identification throughout his various speeches and essays addressing the injustices of race and slavery.²⁴⁸ In his work these terms do not merely function as idiosyncratic gestures but as pivotal definitions for critique of slavery. Much later, we find that W.E.B. Du Bois rarely uses the term “identity” explicitly, though he writes of “manhood” and “common humanity” and “the Negro,” defending the preservation of racial categories in order that his audience can identify people who have shared in certain sufferings and injustices.²⁴⁹ Useful only to a certain extent, essentialist notions of identity and defined categories tended to reify predominant beliefs about fundamentally immutable differences – ideas that originated primarily from people in positions of arbitrary advantage, and not from those who endured arbitrary disadvantages. Nor can essentialist identities help to challenge the association of difference with inferiorities/superiorities. The decades of law and governance operating under the “separate but equal” paradigm affirmed in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, and subsequent Jim Crow laws throughout the United States count among the most egregious manifestations of essentialist thinking instantiated as institutional oppression.²⁵⁰ Essentialist notions of identity and definitions of race pose weak challenges to, and in some ways furthered patterns of oppression.

²⁴⁷ Zack (2002: 10-26, 30).

²⁴⁸ Douglass, Foner, and Taylor (1999: 21-22, 24, 62, 208).

²⁴⁹ Du Bois (2007: 9, 38,40-42, 75, 137, 182-183, 187-189).

²⁵⁰ "Plessy V. Ferguson" (2010), Mills (1997).

Within the 20th century, *social constructivist* theories arose in response to essentialist conceptions of race and identity. Confronted with the limits of essentialized identities and group definitions, scholars and activists developed new ways to theorize identity by rejecting essentialism and instead posing critiques in terms of social constructions. As socially constructed, identities and defined meanings refer to widely shared patterns of belief, value judgments, and cultural norms, often instantiated through institutional and economic systems. scholars who rejected essentialist notions of race and racial identity did so in favor of race as a social construct.²⁵¹ Among many other scholars, consider how Michael Omi and Howard Winant refer to racial identities as “formations.” Following from their analysis, we do no better to dismiss race outright as essentialist, nor to accept race purely as ideological.²⁵² Racial identities symbolize varying societal conflicts and interests, and then refer those to particular bodies. Omi & Winant argue that social movements find ways to rearticulate identity, infusing concepts people already believe with new meanings.²⁵³ Activists can manipulate the instability of socially constructed concepts in order build solidarity by replacing demeaning or negative self-evaluations with positive conceptions of group association. In this, subjects redefine themselves and one another by redefining the conceptual content of identity.

Social constructivist theories dispossess tendencies to attribute fundamental, immutable characteristics (e.g. certain conceptions of biology, genetics, neuropsychology, etc.) to persons in order to comprise explanations for identities. Moreover, these theories help to illustrate the social, cultural, and political origins of identities, the limits of social constructions, and possible means of manipulating identities as social constructs. However, social constructivist approaches

²⁵¹ Delgado and Stefancic (2012: 7-9, 21, 62-65, 162, 172).

²⁵² Omi and Winant (1994: 4, 10, 71).

²⁵³ Ibid. 117.

remain intractably dedicated to defining oppressions and, then, conceptualizing alternative social constructions. We gain complex diagnoses of systemic hegemony and inequalities, but can do little more than define meaning and identify within the context of identity politics – acting to attain cultural and political recognition through self-identification and self-definition under the banner of increasing individual agency.²⁵⁴ As social constructs, race and racialized identities elucidate the harms of living in racist regimes, and yet only help to foster episodic challenges to particular features of racism.

Intersectionality has, to-date, contributed the strongest challenge to both the erroneous foundations of essentialist thought and the limited efficacy of manipulating and reinventing socially constructed categories. Key figures aim to foster solidarity among people who face multiple forms of oppression by showing the mutually constitutive aspects of identities that differ. Or, put differently, showing how seemingly distinct identities yet reciprocally constitute one another such as the ways that racial identity can modify gender, and vice-versa, and the ways that sexual orientations and race contribute to one's class identity. Audre Lorde's original contention that a ranked hierarchy of oppressions cannot explain how she always faces challenges as a black woman who loves women may serve as one of the earliest and most poignant statements on intersectionality.²⁵⁵ However, the interventions of Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw and Patricia Hill Collins have most overtly illustrated intersectional methods. Their work attempts to show why people with some common identities and some distinct identities, as compared with one another, need not sacrifice attributes of unique concern in order to claim commonality.²⁵⁶ Whereas prior theories tended to contextualize individuals as enduring one

²⁵⁴ For a very recent discussion of race, gender, and "agency," consult Takhar (2013). Specifically, chapters 4 and 5.

²⁵⁵ Lorde (1983).

²⁵⁶ Crenshaw (1991), and Hill Collins (2009).

primary form of oppression, intersectionality theorists argue for models of oppression and identity that account for concurrent, simultaneous experiences of identity and confrontations with oppression in various forms.

For instance, through earlier essentialist and social-constructivist theories one might argue that a darker-skinned person with stereotypically essentialized traits primarily suffers from racist, ethnocentric forms of oppression. If this same person happens to have certain disabilities, primarily loves women, and/or has both Dutch and Japanese national ancestry, then she would have to choose which sorts of oppression pose her worse problems, and at which times. Intersectionality theories refuse to consider one person's identities as if wholly distinct categories, nor as identities that one can rank in order of priority. Moreover, intersectional strategies reject definitions of race and racial oppression that omit concerns about sexism, heterosexism, ableism, colonialism, and a wide gamut of oppressive contexts. Ostensibly, intersectionality provides a way for people from various backgrounds to develop common moral and political projects once it becomes possible to retain some common identities and some particular identities.

More recent innovations, such as the work by Marie-Claire Belleau, gesture at solidarity by suggesting that intersectionality can foster cooperation among people from diverse backgrounds (e.g. among feminists with different ethnic ancestries).²⁵⁷ In this realm of thought, scholars place greater emphasis on identities and definitions as *strategies* for ameliorating or dismantling various forms of oppression, concurrently – and through coordinated activities among people who face oppression in different ways. Definitions of race, and racialized identities, applied strategically to foster coordinated efforts, aim at some notion like solidarity,

²⁵⁷ Belleau (2007).

but primarily in terms of collective action, and outcome of solidarity but not *solidarity qua solidarity*.

Intersectional strategies do expanded attention to various concurrent forms of oppression. Moreover, intersectionality theories limit (or counterbalance) resilient and widely endorsed appeals to essentialism and, moreover, assist with showing how oppression manifests in different ways, simultaneously posing individuals with different kinds of problems. These insights help as strategies for fostering cooperation by providing a check against the possibility that one or a few identities and meanings may end up as the dominant reference point in developing collective action. Why do some people continue to relate and cooperate even when intersectionality in no way applies as an adequate descriptive theory? Intersectionality cannot explain the kinds of relations that at times trump or supervene (remain reliable) when mutually constitutive identities come into conflict and/or when discourses of identity fail to explain conflicts and problems. Persons and groups do sometimes sustain relations whether or not they consider identities intersectionally, and even when some hold antagonist feelings toward others with so-called intersectional identities.

I group the following, somewhat eclectic, array of theories as *circumstantialist* for their tendency to pose semantic descriptions of circumstances and social conditions as things people can adopt (identify with) in order to bring about certain preferred outcomes. To put it differently, circumstantialists use carefully crafted semantic propositions to help people organize in response to various conditions (e.g. cultural hegemony). If people from disparate backgrounds adopt certain shared definitions or descriptions of their circumstances, then they can organize collectively. Whether or not scholars broadly endorse any particular theory (or theories) of

identity, it matters more to accurately describe circumstances that prefigure theories of oppression and identity as relevant.

Activists and theorists who advocate for *coalition politics*, such as Bernice Johnson Reagon and Suzanne Pharr, tend to de-prioritize discourse of identity in favor of describing conditions that require organized interventions by people who may yet share political interests. Reagon, for instance, argues the need for long-term efforts to build coalitions among smaller movements.²⁵⁸ Pharr emphasizes the importance of describing the “politics of domination” used by “the Right” to dominate social institutions and cultural norms, as well as the importance of articulating a “politics of liberation” whereby people who identify differently can take collective action.²⁵⁹ Like Reagon and Pharr, many who appeal to coalition politics have interest in applying conceptions of solidarity to organized movements. Moreover, the use of coalition politics generally assumes inclusive strategies for challenging various forms of oppression. Even when effective at mobilizing various interests groups toward a common cause, they offer no outright explanation of the relations explained as a form of solidarity. Like other tautological accounts, “coalition” strategies, benefits, outcomes of solidarity but does not explain solidarity in itself. Nor does it necessarily refer to solidarity as expressly liberatory.

Theorists of cosmopolitanism suggest that global, international interactions pose the current and ongoing challenge of adopting identities as global citizens. For instance, Kwame Anthony Appiah argues that people can retain individual identities while also identifying with people who engage in similar projects or activities (“life-projects”).²⁶⁰ The hostile and uncertain circumstances in the world necessitate adopting collective identities for the sake of solidarity. In

²⁵⁸ Johnson Reagon (1983: 357-358, 363-365).

²⁵⁹ Pharr (1996: 11-38, 79-85, 87-122).

²⁶⁰ Appiah (2005: xvii, 13, 22, 25, 194).

lieu of direct reference to solidarity, Appiah emphasizes "bonds" of community and, more specifically, a reference to a supposedly universal human community.²⁶¹ We have no need, Appiah argues, to choose between either local or national identities or global identities, and the circumstances of the world increasingly require adopting multiple identities, simultaneously. The definitions of community and identity play the pivotal role in theorizing alternatives to contentious social problems. Appiah's implicit notion of solidarity holds relevance for moral and political concerns, but not specifically as liberatory or as relational.

Quite different from Appiah's theory, Jason Hill argues for a notion of cosmopolitanism that involves (or requires) forgetting the historical contingencies of essentialist identities (and concepts of race) – an obligation to forget certain origins – in order to cultivate the kind of world in which we want to live.²⁶² In fact, Hill rejects most notions of solidarity as “tribalist” concepts stemming from a “cosmophobic” fear of life in a broader world.²⁶³ He argues instead that cosmopolitan identities provide a better basis for a future in which people create their futures without the contingent problems stemming from pre-modern xenophobia. Hill aims to redefine conceptions of "culture" and "self" along phenomenological lines so as to help us "forget" (reject, transcend) prior racist and racialized definitions.²⁶⁴ Whether evocative of visions of global human identity like Appiah, or defending a wholesale departure from dominant concepts as Hill advocates, cosmopolitan theories provide no general concept of solidarity or liberation. Moreover, these strategies tend to use the terminology of relations tautologically without any explicit discussions of solidarity in terms of the relations allegedly at issue.

²⁶¹ Appiah (2007: xii, xix, 47, 64, 85, 104).

²⁶² Hill (2000: 15, 26, 56).

²⁶³ Ibid. 160.

²⁶⁴ Ibid. 3, 113, 155, 168.

Tommie Shelby offers a more explicit attempt at discussing anti-racist solidarity, rejecting conventional appeals to identity in favor of a thin circumstantialist account.²⁶⁵ As he argues, anti-racist solidarity stems from "[...] the shared experience of racial oppression and a joint commitment to resist [racial oppression]."²⁶⁶ Shelby bases solidarity in the ongoing, unfinished attempt to achieve "racial justice" as originally envisioned in black nationalist movements.²⁶⁷ Emphasizing black racial solidarity, Shelby argues that a person need not adopt or concede to the significance that a racist society attributes to her features as racialized, and can instead choose which sort of significance her "blackness" holds.²⁶⁸ In this way, she may voluntarily accept membership in groups intent on anti-racist social justice.²⁶⁹ Shelby's intent to foster solidarity among anti-racists seems to match my own. However, he does not address three concerns that liberatory thought would require. First, despite frequent mention of liberation he does not provide an explicit set of criteria for deciding which sorts of anti-racist projects count as liberatory and which do not.²⁷⁰ Second, his conception appears to rest on a mode of resistance, a sub-liberatory enduring of racist regimes and not an end to racism as a condition of political rule and widely adopted moral practices. Third, he relies on some implicit conception of relation and involves the term explicitly, but without foregrounding the importance of relations to solidarity.²⁷¹

So far I have argued that scholars and activists define concepts and theorize identity predominantly as a resource for diagnosing and ameliorating oppression, and in doing so pose identity as a means to foster solidarity among otherwise disparate persons and groups. Following

²⁶⁵ Shelby (2005).

²⁶⁶ Ibid. 11-12.

²⁶⁷ Ibid. 11.

²⁶⁸ Ibid. 214.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ibid. 11, 17, 24, 59, 75, 98, 115, 141, 181, 231.

²⁷¹ Ibid. 15, 19, 108-109, 190.

the inadequacy and negative consequences of applying essentialist notions, social constructivists and theorists of intersectionality seek to resolve the following paradoxical choice: whether to identify at the risk of essentialism, or to reject identities and forsake commonality. Intersectional accounts of identity have helped to illustrate the possibility of fostering cooperation among people who identify similarly and/or very differently. Yet, intersectionality does not explain “cooperation” or “solidarity” as relations, merely as outcomes or as strategies. Similarly, circumstantialist strategies aim to resolve dependency on identities and definitional projects. Yet, these too offer no substantive conception of relations or solidarity that we can use to consider claims about fostering anti-racist liberation.

Anti-racists have sought to develop a theoretical base that coherently problematizes and/or critiques conceptions of race and racism and, therefore, contends with detrimental uses of racialized identities. Yet, even the most compelling definitional projects and theories of identity lack clarity about what counts as solidarity, and even less about relevance to broadly liberatory concerns. With overly strict reliance on definitions and identities comes a similarly strict choice whether to adopt eliminativist or conservationist commitments.²⁷² Consider the two options. One, if our best definitions and identity theories ultimately fail as powerful descriptors and, therefore, also fail to convincingly call anti-racists to work in solidarity, we ought to eliminate race discourses even if it leaves us without resources to redress well-documented historical inequities. Or, two, when certain definitions and models of identity serve as potent for elucidating racist oppression, we ought to conserve discourses on race even if doing so retains certain racist and

²⁷² Note that the cited discourses in race conservationism and eliminativism refer to dispositions held by anti-racists, ostensibly, and do not imply the same interests if invoked by those intent on dismantling discourse about race in order to sustain and perhaps further consolidate racist power in the interests of white supremacy. Further, I have argued elsewhere against (Matheis 2011) attempts to diagnose “whiteness” using eliminativist and/or conservationist strategies and, as I argue in this project, “whiteness” also functions as an alertive concept.

racIALIZED paradigms. If we go with the first option and eliminate definitional and identity projects, to what resource can we appeal for ameliorating cultural hegemonies and institutional inequalities? If we go with the second option and conserve definitional and identity projects, how do we resolve the way these methods reify racism and/or include some identities while excluding others? The methodologies of defining essential terms and theorizing identities play a part in elucidating oppression, but pose weak resources for theorizing anti-racist efforts as liberatory, to say little of fostering solidarity. Let us pan-out, so to speak, and consider the options available as a result of the different kinds of roles that concepts can play.

The alertive function of concepts

Considering the common ways to use concepts of race, I advocate the treatment of certain notions as *alertive* to the need for moral, political, and liberatory actions. With respect for the potential import and benefit of defining such alertive concepts, the work to both provide definitions and to foster agreement about those definitions need not forestall anti-racist movements. One may put a given concept of "race" to work in different ways, such as making the concept *explanatory*, *justificatory*, *evaluative*, or *conditional*. As an *explanatory* concept, race may refer to complex phenomenological propositions about experience, being, and existence. When *justificatory*, one may apply a concept of race so as to bolster or weaken arguments for or against particular perspectives. The use of race as *evaluative*, often the precarious domain of racist and racialized discourses, allows for comparison of value judgments about all sorts of things such as aesthetics, phenotypic variations, behaviors, moral and political commitments, and so forth. When applied as *conditional*, race denotes a set of circumstances germane to social contexts, such as an enclave, tribe, community or culture. Race can also

function as *alertive* by urgently informing us of the need for redress of moral and political problems generated and sustained by racist and racialized factors.

As an *alertive* concept, or a concept put to use as alertive, we need not *define the meaning* of race in order to then *treat it as useful*. Specifically, anti-racists can treat ambiguous mentions of race as indicators of the need to postulate anti-racist strategies whether or not conceptual analyses yield conceptual clarity. I discern the treatment of race as alertive from Zack's reference to the "use-mention" distinction.²⁷³ As she argues, we can and should *mention* erroneous, yet widely held notions of race, yet we should not *use* them in any sense that continues to perpetuate the failed notions as if they are accurate. In this way, we may *mention* (make reference to) notions of race as social constructions so long as we do not *use* them as foundational concepts for theorizing broader social, political, ethical, and cultural programs.²⁷⁴ One can take anti-racist action even if notions of "race" and "racism" vary greatly. Contrary to the assumptions of race theorists who privilege definitional projects, i.e. the work of discerning or constructing thoroughly resilient meanings of terms, not everything about a concept reduces to or hinges on definition. Whatever else scholars and activists may gain from definitions of race and racialized concepts, anti-racist liberatory projects can progress whether or not we share broad agreement about definitions. So, one may organize evidence around a concept of race, such as might show discrimination occurs on the basis of race, but one may not assert a conception of race as a basis for theorizing the solution to systematic discrimination.

Taking this cue, suppose we treat incidences of mention as alertive to more than an opportunity to discern meanings of the term. Rather, the mention of race and racialized terms can alert, call attention to, the need to what lies at stake for the persons who make mention. When

²⁷³ Zack (2002: 80-82).

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

mentioned by a scholar of phenomenologies, race may alert us to a scholar's interest in expanding discourses on racialized experiences. When mentioned by someone struggling with discrimination in employment, race may alert us to the need to redress racist biases in recruitment, candidate evaluation, and hiring practices. For some persons the definitions of terms and meanings may help meet their scholarly interests, and yet for others the mention of race may generate attention to social and political problems that deserve interventions in policy and practice, perhaps even reparations. To consider race as alertive in particular instances we turn attention to the interests and concerns of those who use and/or mention, but need not forestall liberatory organizing while we concurrently determine (or over-determine) the primary conceptual concerns. The aforementioned scholar who references race in the context of phenomenologies may have much to gain from our treatment of her mention as a call to anti-racist action. Likewise, the person facing discrimination in employment may benefit from our treatment of race as alertive to questions of phenomenology and philosophical definitions. If we intend for anti-racist efforts to cohere with liberation, then it matters to foster solidarity among both the phenomenologist and the person seeking employment *whether or not they express the same uses and mentions of race, hold similar conceptions, or have the same immediate concerns.*

If anti-racists have liberatory commitments, then treating race as alertive enjoins us to the following considerations. First, to understand iterations of race is indicative of racist and racialized cultural and political problems, whether or not we fully understand those problems at the outset. Second, the iterations alert us to the need for solidarity in a way that allows scholars and activists to select the projects and tasks that will serve those ends, while at the same time preserving anti-racist projects that do not necessarily aim at liberation. Certainly, definitions of terms and proliferation of scholarly discourses will play a role in some liberatory, anti-racist

work. However, we need to consider the likelihood that taking liberatory anti-racist action in solidarity may at times *in no way depend* on whether we agree to particular definitions, meanings, and theoretical conceptions about race.

I intend to provoke skepticism about whether definitional projects can serve as a basis for anti-racist liberation even if helpful for diagnosing cultural and institutional oppression. As anti-racists, we can proliferate definitions of race and theories of racialized identities in order to further diagnose manifestations of racism, and this can certainly help provide evidence for moral and political claims. But to think this will pan out as a liberatory challenge misconstrues argumentatively supported evidence as a pivotal resource for liberation. Now, in the 21st century, we do not face a problem of insufficient evidence and weak arguments for anti-racist claims. We have volumes of both on library shelves, in electronic journals, and thoroughly corroborated in over a century of testimonials. Available arguments and evidence from all sorts of intellectual and common-sense sources have successfully rejected race as a false hypothesis (or collection of false hypotheses operating in tandem), as well as racist fallacies predicated on the same terms. We face the problem of figuring out how and why race as a false hypothesis *resists rejection*. Despite vast evidence to the contrary, dominant cultural and institutional regimes operate on, retain, and reinforce the use of false conceptions of race as a basis for sustaining racism in various manifestations.

Which cultural and institutional conditions, incentives, and disincentives reinforce devotion to false hypotheses (empirically erroneous conceptions) of race? Similarly, which distributions of institutional and cultural power sustain such hypotheses as commonly held unconscious biases? Advocates against racist cultural hegemony and oppression who turn to conventional moral and political theory have brought to bear all sorts of definitions and

identities, sometimes resulting in large-scale and small-scale changes in culture, public policy, and resource redistributions. These strategies have not, however, provided a liberatory challenge to dominant regimes that respects the alterity of persons and aims to put cultural and institutional systems in the service of those most in need of respite. Alternatively, treating definitions and identities as alertive to the need for liberatory action further bolsters the need for a specific conception of solidarity that can assist us in achieving effective rejection of false hypotheses of race, racialized paradigms of thought, and racist societal regimes.

Why bother at all with philosophical investigations of race and racism if not for liberatory purposes? Contentious debates among anti-racists typically rely on commitment to two grand background narratives: race eliminativism versus race conservatism.²⁷⁵ Moreover, these two camps tend toward conceptual analyses of "race" as definitional projects -- projects intended to discern a common meaning (or set of meanings). If successful, then the agreed-to definitions will serve as rallying points for anti-racist solidarity. We can, many suppose, then use the shared definitions to both diagnose racism and then develop programs to redress the contemporary consequences of historical reliance on racist and racialized social and political systems. In doing so we can diagnose racism endemic to some branches of feminism, but we ought not to conflate that accomplishment with making anti-racist movements feminist or anti-patriarchal movements also anti-racist.

As I have argued, scholars and activists engaged in discourses of critical race theory and philosophies of race demonstrate broad disagreement about conceptual framing of race and racism. Critical race theorists tend to draw on case studies, narrative strategies, cultural theory, and phenomenological methodologies. Philosophers of race tend to make some use of

²⁷⁵ Mallon (2006).

metaphysics and phenomenology, but have increasingly turned toward philosophy of science and genomics as the pivotal resource for critiquing historically false social constructions of race. One can find few other realms of anti-racist discourse, colloquially and among academic scholars, more contentious than race eliminativists and race conservationists. Advocates of race eliminativism tend to start from an assertion about the biological "unreality" of race in terms of genotypic or phenotypic characteristics, and then impute race as a social construction to recommend outright rejection of any use of notions of race. Race conservationists generally agree about the unreality of race as a social construction, and yet argue that elimination of race discourses closes off arguments for redress of historical atrocities that have led to contemporary cultural hegemony and institutionalized racism.²⁷⁶

If anti-racists do want a liberatory end to racism, then how about solidarity among anti-racists, feminists indigenous peoples, decolonization advocates, trans*gender communities, etc.? What sorts of relations ought people to develop in order to counter oppression and subjugation as a matter of liberation, and by which theory(ies) of relations can they evaluate whether they have developed solidarity as relations of some kind or another? As I have argued, liberatory solidarity as relational hangs together as a coherent proposition for collectively challenging cultural hegemonies and institutionalized oppressions in their many varied forms. Now, let us consider the proposition in the context of anti-racist efforts.

Anti-racists and liberatory solidarity as relational

Liberatory solidarity as relational refers to laboriously making one another despite incentives and disincentives to the contrary. In a way, we might consider this a form of persistent

²⁷⁶ Zack (2002:79).

suspicion about any cultural, political, or economic influences that reward, punish, or somehow interfere in relations. Using this conception of solidarity as *alertive*, persons consider what they can and will endure for the sake of liberation *as well as* what they cause one another to endure. Some of us may have to reconsider the priority we place on paradigms of authenticity, identities, subjectivities, agency, and so many conventional concerns. Or, we may find that we have to make few changes at all so long as we consider dignity and the risks of indignities that we pose one another, relationally.

If relation refers to the ways in which people make one another, how does that change notions of solidarity? As a propositional description, relations as making helps to posit the potential consequences, risks, and/or benefits of interacting with one another. Suppose relation involves the risk that people differ from you will remake you in ways over which you may not have control – not as a possible risk but as an inevitable fact of relation. If so, at least one notion of solidarity may refer to when people, inclusive of various identities, accept the potential consequences of remaking one another inclusive of the uncertainties and vulnerabilities. To push this further, we might also use solidarity to refer to what happens when people choose to risk remaking one another as a *priority* that overrides or supervenes on competing priorities; suppose people who endure oppression maintain the possibility of making and remaking one another as the priority. In whichever ways we theorize who and what relates – e.g. identities - a theory of relations can make it possible to then consider and justify notions of solidarity.

Those interested in liberation face a choice of solidarity as relational, whether to endure making one another in various, sometimes ineffable ways for the sake of emancipatory changes, or to continue to endure and permit oppression and subjugation in perpetuity. As a relational concept, liberatory solidarity offers the feasibility of fostering movements in the interest of

broadly emancipatory agendas – e.g. anti-patriarchal, anti-racist, anti-heterosexist, anti-ableist, anti-poverty, anti-transphobic, anti-colonial, and so forth. We either choose to labor at relation for the sake of liberation, or we preserve the bigger-picture racist status quo in which disparate and episodic enclave movements rise and fall on the terms set by identity politics and fictive autonomy.

We who make one another for the sake of anti-racist liberation

Returning to the question I posed at the outset, as anti-racists, what do we want? I have argued that we seek a specifically liberatory end to racism and, to achieve such ends, we ought to consider solidarity as relational. And in a way that necessarily imputes anti-patriarchal, anti-colonial, and a broader gamut of anti-hegemonic movements. This may or will require reconsidering whether analyses of "oppression" and corollary calls for "equality" can effectively do the work of problematizing our concerns and the complexities of our struggles.

I have made it explicit that I hold skepticism about the liberatory potential of anti-racist efforts framed by definitional projects and models of identity. Moreover, I propose these strategies leave us more often than not with an ill-fated choice between race eliminativism or race conservatism, neither of which provides liberatory courses of action. Although I have made consistent reference to "equality" and "oppression" (and similar ideas such as marginalization, subjugation, othering, etc.), I also harbor doubts about the limits and efficacy of this branch of thought vis-à-vis relation. Theories of oppression do help to obviate cultural hegemonies and institutionalized cruelties. They also provide the opportunity to pose critical responses in terms of morality, politics, and liberation. However, contemporary models of oppression and equality may not effectively problematize our struggles *relationally*. Put more

assertively, we can model problems such as racism in terms of oppression so as to then justify claims of equality and yet say little or nothing explicit about relational features of those problems as also problems of patriarchy, sexism, homophobia, trans*phobia, and so forth.

Framing anti-racist efforts in terms of oppression and equality, we have often theorized persons the way Rawls describes, "[...] as but complicated objects in a complicated routine."²⁷⁷ We can imagine one another as points in a complex spatial metaphor of inequities – divisions, connections, dependencies, hierarchies, dominances, subordinations, ranks, close, near, far, distant, and on and on. By modeling anti-racist analyses primarily on these sorts of structural-positional metaphors leaves open broader questions of relation as a substantive concern. The metaphorical imagery of spatial locations helps to illustrate social statuses and to conceptualize systematic and procedural, particularly for strategies of diagnosing oppression and postulating social equality. It does not supplant the importance of a basic conception of relation. Both complement one another but cannot stand in as synonymous.

To that end, for all the benefits they provide in terms of moral and political claims, I doubt that oppression/equality discourses alone hold specifically liberatory potential. Here, I can only conjecture a deeper concern that oppression/equality paradigms present our problems as a low-hanging fruit – something we critically pursue at the expense of a whole host of relational problems and solutions we hardly ever consider adequately enough. Around and around we go, chasing our tails, while the laborious features of making one another remain intimidating or altogether mystified. So much for trust?

If we want a liberatory end to racist regimes, it will require solidarity with those struggling for liberation against collusive manifestations of cultural hegemonies and

²⁷⁷ Rawls (1957: 659).

institutionalized inequalities. Anti-racists either endure relations of solidarity with those seeking liberation from sexism, heterosexism, trans*phobia, ableism, poverty, and the like – or we concede to the status quo. We who make one another for the sake of anti-racist liberation will choose to endure the challenges and benefits of relations, and those who choose otherwise must concede to life under racist, sexist, heterosexist, ableist, impoverishing, and broadly cruel cultural and institutional regimes.

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Conclusion

Some theories make new technologies possible, and some good theories, in the pragmatic understanding, make new technologies feasible and practical. In this case, I have attempted to offer a theory that can make liberation ever so slightly more feasible and practical by directing attention to the context of relations. I will close the project by returning to where I began, to the details of Patrice and Pauline Lumumba and the struggle for liberation in the Congo. It concerns me how easily one might read about attempts at liberation, such as the 20th century tumult in the Congo, and label these movements as failures. We need to remember that, at least from liberatory commitments, only one entity bears the blame of failure: a dominant regime that will not surrender. As it turns out, those in positions of authority and those who benefit from the unearned advantages of institutional cruelties, oppression, and cultural hegemonies can surrender – can give up their dominance. The Lumumbas, then, and other liberationists today live amid the imperfect and grueling tasks of coping with regimes that have failed them, and have failed many of us today. People who work for liberation may share responsibility for problematic, incomplete, and sometimes detrimental solutions, but not for the problems that caused a need for such solutions in the first place. Feminists did not invent racism. Anti-racists did not design sexist patriarchies. Indigenous anti-colonialists did not originate heterosexism. And so on, down the list of oppressions. If we forget that regimes can surrender and those in power can betray their unwarranted inheritance, we expect something unrealistic of solidarity, we poison our relations with the falsehoods of corrupt rule, and we cannot treat one another with dignity and respect.

Perhaps this project merely illustrates the need to for more substantive engagement with philosophy of liberation and concepts of relation. I have at least shown the benefits of placing

these fields of thought under closer consideration. As a retrospective, here I speculate on the implications that liberatory solidarity as relational, and questions about what we make of one, pose for future research.

A more complex, theoretically and narratively substantive discourse on the philosophy of relation would expand the potential for applying this model. I suspect that careful analyses of relation as a conceptual and rhetorical device would produce ground for fields of critical philosophy. Whereas classical Euro-centric and post-Grecian “classical” traditions in scholarly theory have constrained discussion of relation to formal, predictive modes represented in causation, correlation, inversion, proportion and geometry, I think that fields of materialist, feminist, and indigenous conceptions must differ in some substantive ways. For instance, when feminists emphasize relations as a key concern, whether in terms of care ethics or in terms of feminist political economy, the whole field seems woefully unhinged without something like relation as making. How can anyone take seriously the claims of emphasis on relationships without considering the root concept underlying the whole scheme?

I think Lilla Watson’s call bears repeating: "If you have come here to help me, you are wasting our time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."²⁷⁸ With a substantive understanding of “bound up” as laboriously making one another, the consequences for liberatory projects take on a different sort of clarity. Consider, does oppression harm those who enjoy the unearned advantages garnered from systematic discrimination? Does oppression harm the oppressor?²⁷⁹ A relational account answers this decisively: yes, since one cannot claim dignity when making another derogated. Whatever pleasures and expanded choice options oppression and hegemony may afford some dominant

²⁷⁸ Watson quoted in Eckermann (2010: 193).

²⁷⁹ Roberts in Xing (2007: 26).

group, these cannot supplant dignity *sine qua non* the pleasures and choices satisfy. Given the relational conception of making one another dignified or derogated, and thinking narrowly on such terms, I wonder whether Anderson, Kant, Mill, and Rawls would consider dignity lexically ordered as superior to liberty and equality. My argument belies conceptions of dignity in the context of liberation that at times appears principled, ideal. However, I intend only to posit dignity as a conceptual reference point that can help regulate treatment of one another amid a myriad of non-ideal circumstances and perhaps widely varying moral and political norms. An extensive philosophy of relation, whether in terms of materialist labor and making or some other connotation, may do what this project only glimpses.

I have done very little and, honestly, nothing of merit to show the implications of this theory with regard for market economies and vice versa. Yet, the discussion I wield with regard to moral and political theories depends in practice, at least in some important part, on exchanges of resources in economic terms and bears further consideration. The parties to solidarity, liberatory or otherwise, must deal with resource exchange and labor contributions. Does this beg a theory of liberatory economics? Perhaps. Many have tried and this seems nothing new to scholars in the 20th and 21st century. Does this indicate the benefits of a theory of relational economics? I suspect so. As I have indicated in several places throughout this project, I regard “interest” as a concept prefigured in models of identity and recognition, and I think a relational account of economics may at least require revision to individuated models of interests. That is, ideas of interest as dismantled in an atomistic way from the originary “inter-essence” that conditions the term historically as a reference to *sharing*. The shared resource prefigures the individual’s claim, and the individuated claim does not dispossess the allotment from its origin as a shared pool or communal sum. Rather than the individuated version that mirrors

individuated identity, something important may linger in the attempt to theorize liberatory interest as relational.

The project seems to beg for greater attention to *theories of dignity*, particularly informed by the kind of materialist interventions I have used to develop relations as making. In many places throughout the project I have either explicitly mentioned dignity or have implied the importance of dignity as a key feature of attending to the consequences persons pose one another. When using the term I have relied on what I can gather about dignity more broadly from the works of different scholars and authors of literature. Writers such as Ursula K. Le Guin, Emma Goldman, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Martin Buber, Philip Hallie, Alasdair MacIntyre, and many others discuss dignity either directly, or by way of discussing respect and humiliation (derogation) more generally.²⁸⁰

Do persons and groups need to share some basic conception of dignity in order to relate, to make one another, in non-destructive ways? Yes, I suspect so, but not necessarily in the cognitive-intellectual sense typically implied by scholars when referring to “concepts.” If what I have argued holds true about relations as making and liberatory solidarity as relational, then the making and remaking of dignity may occur in all sorts of relational practices whether or not those who relate would overtly articulate the same or similar versions of dignity as a concept. Furthermore, I think that relational practices as making one another hold the potential to make and remake what indignities, cruelties, have unmade, at least in some cases. Why do I think this arguable? As far as I can tell, “to dignify” someone or something refers to an act of attributing worth, regarding something as worthwhile. In the context of relation as making, to dignify another person makes one another feel or perhaps believe in the dignity of all.

²⁸⁰ Le Guin (1975), Goldman (1969), Marx, Engels, and Tucker (1978), Buber (1958), Hallie (1981), MacIntyre (1984a).

I think this simpatico with several developments in contemporary moral and political theory. Consider these few. For instance, in Buber's *I-Thou*.²⁸¹ I and Thou, the individuals feel one another dignified, respected as whole persons to the extent that they treat each as such. This also seems to comport with Hallie's model of "hospitality" as "unsentimental, efficacious love" that heals the wounds inflicted by institutional cruelties.²⁸² Enduring derogatory patterned institutional cruelties, an individual can come to lose dignity, the self-esteem and self-respect in which one believes she deserves regard of any kind on par with peers and members of a society. And, finally, a relational account of dignity in making one another may run in the background of MacIntyre's argument that "In requiring much from me morally the other members of my community express a kind of respect for me that has nothing to do with expectations of benefit; and those of whom nothing or little is required in respect of morality are treated with a lack of respect which is, if repeated often enough, damaging to the moral capacities of those individuals."²⁸³ The "kind of respect" that comes from a community expecting one to act morally, in some way, may depend on a relational form of dignity.

Like Buber's materialist phenomenological account persons making one another whole, and Hallie's dignifying hospitality, MacIntyre's gesture at the dignifying power of a community's demands on an individual hints at the relational foundations of dignity. I think Suzanne Pharr puts it quite clearly in describing the gift that Mrs. Daisy Bates and the "Little Rock Nine" gave Pharr and countless other children in their commitments to the racial Civil Rights Movement in the 1950's and 1960's:

It gave me my life. The Civil Rights Movement, along with the women's and lesbian and gay movements, gave me the understanding that I am a person of worth and dignity. Because of these great movements that called for justice,

²⁸¹ Buber (1958).

²⁸² Hallie. Ibid.

²⁸³ MacIntyre . Ibid. 292.

participation, and freedom for all of us – including this queer girl from a poor southern family – I was able to put the pieces of my life together to make a whole.²⁸⁴

What we make of one another, derogated or dignified, depends in part on a conception of relations. I think relation as making can fill this role, and perhaps other descriptions can do just as well, or even better. In any case, something like “liberatory dignity as relational” deserves a closer look.

Finally, as mentioned at the outset, the modes of argumentation and abstraction used in this account may not satisfy those interested in a colloquial or everyday version suited for praxis. Still, I can make some suggestions for organizers and activists who may want to make use of the theory in fostering solidarity among specific individuals and groups. First, it may help to treat identity and interest as practices people use to try to relate when they have little else to go on. Because of the familiarity of identity and recognition to so many communities worldwide, it may work better to modify than to abandon or avoid these strategies altogether. Even though I think it would work better to set aside traditional ideologies surrounding identity and interest, at least for a time, some people will likely feel deeply that identities and interests give them the best resources for relating. And this may hold true for some. However, even if discussions of identity and interest can help to initiate dialogues, I suggest at least inviting conversations about “what counts as a relationship, and how do we sustain the kinds of relationships we need to make the changes we want?”

Second, as organizers know well, it takes a great deal of persistence and patience to foster and sustain solidarity. The difficulties compound in the face of identity politics governed by horizontal hostilities and internalized oppression. Where I have argued that liberatory solidarity

²⁸⁴ Pharr (1996: 85).

as relational requires enduring one another, making one another despite systemic power relations, incentives, and disincentives, the demand seems geometrically more complex for the facilitators of solidarity. That is, initially it seems one kind of challenge to endure making one another and another more demanding challenge to organize people, to invite and encourage others to endure making one another. Take heed: the individualistic responsibility, or “savior complex,” can distract any of us. In this case, feeling personally responsible for whether or not liberatory solidarity occurs. If this model holds merits, then individual organizers can certainly act as *catalysts* of relations and even *bearers* of relations (to borrow from Arendt’s critique of “leadership”), but we cannot foster endurance in relationships if we over-burden organizing as the work to *start* (initiate) and to *achieve* (accomplish, conclude).²⁸⁵ Catalyzing, starting, achieving, and bearing belong in some sort of balance. Organizing liberatory solidarity as relational will probably necessitate striking some sort of balance, a capacity to toggle among various modes of response and action.

Liberation, relation, and solidarity, when put together as I have suggested, offer an invitation: what will we make of one another?

²⁸⁵ Arendt (1998: 188-190).

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