

'White privilege' and shortcuts to anti-racism

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Abstract: By unpacking the way in which the concept of 'white privilege' is taking over as a shortcut in the analysis of racism, this article assesses its use in anti-racist movements. Using the author's experiences as both an academic and an activist of colour in the Netherlands, it focuses on two schisms that are emerging in social movements. The first schism pits class-based against race-based analyses. The second schism is a questioning of solidarity politics, also marked by the rise of political articulations in terms of personalised and skin-colour based positions, with terminologies such as 'non-black-people-of-colour' (NBPoC), leading to implied hierarchies of oppression. Drawing on the conceptual legacies of radical black thinkers and activists, from W. E. B. Du Bois, and A. Sivanandan to Assata Shakur and Angela Davis, the article asks how to recover and meaningfully engage with radical universalist principles as a means of overcoming such 'shortcuts' whilst fighting racism. The piece builds on an understanding of 'radical kinship' and proposes internationalism as a way to recreate a dynamic anti-racist, anti-capitalist movement at a time when racism is on the rise.

Keywords: A. Sivanandan, Angela Davis, anti-racism, consciousness raising, intersectionality, Netherlands politics, non-black people of colour, solidarity, W. E. B. Du Bois, white privilege

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Introduction

Numerous tributes and obituaries appeared when A. Sivanandan, founder of this journal, *Race & Class*, passed away. Strikingly, whereas the exponent of 'we are here because you were there' or 'who you are is what you do' is well known, the political vision that informed the aphorisms is less known. Rereading Sivanandan, it sometimes seems as though today we are reinventing, or retheorising, 'the fight against racism'; we must discuss where racism comes from, how it is reproduced, how it relates to other social processes, how it can be curbed and eventually overcome. And there is no one agreement on the way forward in the varied activist realm.

Different motivations and foci are found among public intellectuals – for example, Cornel West and Ta-Nehisi Coates sparring about the state of black America – or superimposed through cultural phenomena such as around Marvel's blockbuster *Black Panther*.¹ In fact, despite the false choice posited between the performative subject of black liberation in the lead character T'Challa as prince of (the idealistic) Wakanda or the villain Killmonger from (working-class) Oakland, it carried weight precisely because it generates debates that reflected these different politics.

But equally important, albeit counter-intuitively, these tense debates also reflect a positive development in the struggle: for there is a new generation of activists prepared to confront the state and protest at the horrible treatment of refugees, the murderous EU borders, the humiliating racist traditions like Zwarte Piet (a caricatured traditional blackface character in Belgium and the Netherlands), the perturbing Islamophobia, and the rise of the far Right – racism is an important point on their political activist agenda. And in the wake of continuing anti-racist struggles there is a growing awareness of blind spots and structural bias. But not all ideas or perspectives are 'equal' or equally valuable, as this article proposes. People like Sivanandan had little time for idealised pasts or utopian futures, seeing the circumstances of the struggle against racism as primarily shaped by economic and imperial interests. The past was key to understanding the present, and both are key to understanding how to fight in the future.² The adherence to such a materialist view was not a matter of preference, in his view, but rather a necessity enforced by capitalism, which does not grant us the choice of not taking it into account. Hence, this piece is concerned with the left-wing variant of black politics, one rooted in progressive values of a universal equality which includes transformational change for all working-class (white and racialised) peoples. To properly situate this issue, I look at recent developments within anti-racist activist circles in general, and the Dutch anti-racism debate in particular. I aim to show that materialist interpretations don't align with some of the current analyses of racism and alternative theories around concepts of whiteness and white privilege (WP).

White privilege theory in its application seems to follow two overlapping approaches, arguing from a historical and more structural perspective, or a more contemporary focus, but ultimately focusing on individual benefit:

- 1) for centuries the world has been divided between the dominated (people of colour) and the dominating (whites), this has afforded whites a set of insurmountable privileges that go beyond their class or power status;
- 2) white people will not struggle sufficiently against racist injustice and the exploitation of people of colour because they actually benefit from it.

It is not helpful to reject whiteness studies or WP outright, nor do I wish to conflate the two different propositions; but to review how they change and influence one another, we need to interrogate these concepts critically so as to try to recover their radical essence. What is often missed in the study of racialisation is that there is more than a 'simple' black-white logic, yet whiteness studies, as rooted in a US context, itself over emphasised black-white binaries.³ According to David Roediger, for instance, the Marxist understanding of WP lost out to the non-Marxist variant. But how has it since been stretched into a matter of interpersonal relations? Since academia invested in these frameworks, it has helped embed them further, with negative ramifications for solidarity work. There are two main approaches that tend to reshape activism. In one version of anti-racism, *privilege* is something that keeps having to be mechanically 'acknowledged' or 'checked'; here anti-racism becomes primarily concerned with personal obligations. In the second version, using the same logic, comes a rejection of an all-inclusive 'black', the adoption of terms like 'non-black people of colour' (NBPoC), black people of colour (BPoC) and within this a colour-coded pecking order: white, brown, black.

Analytically, privilege and whiteness theory are useful for helping identify internalised, often invisible, forms of racism. They could also provide tools for unmasking a structural exclusion that ensures that people of colour (PoC) get the short stick every time. But the use of the term WP has somewhat changed – it was originally meant as an ironic reference (not 'really' having it) – and the concept always had a historical-materialist core.⁴ For instance, how does it account for class and neo/post-colonial conditions? These contradictions have been pointed out by anti-racist militants many times before. For instance, a non-materialist focus on colour and culture was indicted by the Black Panther Party as bourgeois (as opposed to revolutionary) nationalism in the 1960s, and in the UK, the personalisation of racism (to be solved by race awareness training, RAT) reached a peak in the 1980s.⁵ And although there is not much documentation, in the Netherlands there have also been practices of unity among oppressed minorities, a willingness to take risks, and an understanding of broad-based identifications.⁶ Such different interpretations influence how WP politics is enacted and performed today, particularly when there is an increasing symbiosis between activism and academia. The competition for a niche among activists and for impact by academics means they are interdependent, and one outcome is that WP is given more space in the academy. Eventually, although useful in certain academic disciplines, the practical base of WP, from which both progressive academics and activists can draw, is limited. But why is it so appealing?

The Left: weak, weaker, weakest

A crucial reason is to be found in a general shift to the Right, which is in itself part of a broader history of (the legitimisation of) racism. Looking more concretely at the Netherlands, the tendency is to project racism as a problem in other countries and to consider colonial history as no longer relevant to present progressive, liberal Dutch culture. This Dutch 'white innocence' is predicated on a deep silence about the country's brutal colonialism and role in slavery,⁷ since a more critical race studies was deliberately countered, all of which combined to impact on policy in academia. These top down processes affected everyday life; and the language of *allochtoon* (foreigners) and *autochtoon* (native Dutch) was normalised. Nor can today's supposed liberal, free-spirited culture be divorced from the nation's self-representation after the second world war,⁸ a period marked by Marshall Plan-type restructuring which helped manufacture a particular notion of 'freedom'. In other words, claiming the 'right' to say anything or insult was regarded as 'freedom of opinion'. This is the discursive ideological face of economic neoliberalism.

A key device for sustaining this national self-image is the notion that anti-Semitism is the principal profile of racist expression, itself the product of the horrific treatment of Jews in the Netherlands.⁹ The construction of anti-Semitism as the only legitimate definition of racism has helped produce a negative conceptualisation of Muslims (with pro-Palestinian/anti-Zionist positions central to accusations of anti-Semitism). This has resulted in attitudes towards Muslims – both as the ungrateful 'other' and a more backward Muslim 'other' – that differ significantly from those towards Indo-Dutch or Surinamese.¹⁰ How does this furthering of notions of the 'other' impinge on how the Left looks at racism?

To answer that, we must consider specifically the history of Dutch *verzuiling* (pillarisation), when society was arranged according to the separation of communities. While Catholics and Protestants, for example, would not share neighbourhoods, churches, businesses, political parties, trade unions or social space, they nonetheless co-existed in (parallel) 'pillars'. Dutch society as a whole congratulated itself on its mostly artificial tolerance. But this approach also helped to obscure relationships between race and class. Taken together, racialised expectations are linked to deeply-rooted notions of superiority disguised as a progressive rejection of cultural relativism, as well as the real motivation behind the much-vaunted Dutch tolerance.¹¹

For the Dutch Left, racism is not a major social issue. This is aggravated by the fact that black radical politics has little standing in the Left canon in general, and intellectuals of colour are ignored or 'creatively paraphrased'.¹² The Euro-American (male) experience is the standard, everything else is largely written off. The paternalist attitude to racism is perhaps stronger in continental Europe's Left due to specific migration histories. Black intellectuals who lived in (colonial) metropolises like London or New York were connected to political cadres as well as migrant communities and could launch internationalist political campaigns

and experiment with different kinds of strategies. Even when they were present in the Netherlands, such as the black Communists Otto and Hermine Huiswoud, they were not included in Left historiography. This is a weakness, compared to, for instance, the United Kingdom and the United States, where the struggle against racism has known a greater range.¹³ My point is that those experiences and struggles determined the collective mindset, which, in turn, constructed a political language, a different theory and praxis, which formed the DNA for later struggles. Thus, the absence of such experiences goes a long way to explaining the weakness of anti-racism on the Left in the Netherlands. But not only there. Such paternalistic politics are found among secular movements (e.g. student uprisings of the '60s), and are similar to the pattern of leftist political development in France, where the attitudes built into the public psyche have always been problematic, especially for black leftist thinkers, forming a significant element of their criticism of white dominance within their Communist parties.¹⁴

The legacy of '80s/'90s right-wing racism synchronised with a social democratic critique. The political and cultural impact of 9/11 in the Netherlands, followed by the assassination of Pim Fortuyn, opened the gates to far-right anti-Muslim and anti-immigration ideas.¹⁵ It was the vacuum on the Left that furthered the rise of Geert Wilders in 2008. Most political parties, for example, took the extraordinary decision that year to back away from the annual demonstration on the international day against racism, giving Wilders free rein. A decade after Wilders broke through, Thierry Baudet emerged. And the parliamentary Left's complacency was repeated in the run up to the 2018 elections, with Baudet's Forum voor Democratie (FvD) even less apologetic in its racism. Dutch left politicians were only half-heartedly committed to challenging the far Right, rejecting demands from grassroots groups on the grounds that such contestation would only legitimate their opponent. The election victory of FvD in 2019 clearly shows that not taking on the Right is not only a betrayal of oppressed groups, but is also evidence of the failed strategies of the political Left and therefore a defeat.¹⁶

One of the outcomes of the confused and opportunistic liberalism of the mainstream Left is that the notion of 'identity politics' has become the red herring: it is viewed as a 'distraction' from class politics. The two main issues symbolising this tension are Islamophobia and the politics around the veil, and Zwarte Piet. For instance, Green Left politician Femke Halsema deplored mothers wearing the veil, suggesting educated Muslim women should be beyond what she deemed an oppressive culture and truly emancipate themselves.¹⁷ Another example is how race- and gender-based demands (e.g. anti-racist critique of Zwarte Piet) have been redefined as 'identity politics', and through that as 'narcissistic political correctness' by University of Amsterdam professor Ewald Engelen, who explained: 'As long as the Left loses itself in the "narcissism of small differences" of identity politics, capital laughs up its sleeve.'¹⁸ Albeit expressed in different forms and on different occasions, it is important to recognise a nativist paternalism in the critiques of both the liberal-Left (Halsema)

and centre-Left (Engelen). This helped unite the Right and parts of the Left in a reluctance to acknowledge racism and a marginalising of anti-racist activists – one important explanation for the attraction of WP theory in some circles as a counter to the paternalism and identity politics.

One consequence is that it allows (bearing in mind the absence of non-white thinkers in the Left canon) whiteness and leftism to be conflated. As a result, the notion of unity is problematised. The prominence of WP theory leads ‘identity politics’ into a cul-de-sac. The ‘Left’ is an object of reproach, though precise criticism is unclear. However, to be on the Left is not determined by having a western or a white identity, but an ideological set of principles and ethics. But the false binary between class struggle and anti-racist struggle is apparent both in a conservative Left and a conservative Right. In other words, this narrative has also emerged in anti-racist arenas, including within so-called decolonial politics.

That you could advocate a fight on both fronts is barely considered and this, in essence, is the confirmation of the need to qualify anti-racism itself: namely that there are two (left and right) anti-racisms. This is partly due to the broken intellectual link between what constitutes the Left and blackness, and thereby between the idea that black and white can forge coalitions in struggle and, through this, come to share other perceptions, which, as I will discuss below, is not in today’s use of WP. Moreover, anti-colonial struggles in the Third World have been suppressed time and time again; progressive coalitions nullified by infiltrators; inspiring figures murdered; united fronts poisoned. So, we cannot wholly blame current generations for the fact that this knowledge has been lost. But how should we respond when PoC leftists that do try to incorporate class analysis into anti-racist issues are criticised; or when those who reject the overblown focus on identity or subjective experience from an anti-racist activist position are dismissed as ‘white apologists’? Then there has to be critical push back, especially because this is not new. The last time when similar conceptualisations of white privilege had a breakthrough was as an ideological expression arising from the changed global political mood (the Thatcher/Reagan era) and an all-out attack on class politics. Individualism and personal identity were heavily promoted after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and ‘systemic critique’ and ‘grand narratives’ correspondingly delegitimised. It seems as though that climate is now re-emerging. Of course, history does not simply repeat itself, but it is relevant that we are now also in a post-financial crisis moment and, partly due to the lack of class struggle, a pessimistic inward-political mood. Can the sharp criticism that was levelled back then help orientate us now?

From psychological wage . . . to psycho-spiritualism?

According to critiques from people like Sivanandan, phenomena like ‘white privilege’, ‘consciousness raising’ or ‘awareness training’ do not provide an adequate evaluation of racism (often articulated as ‘prejudice plus power’), let alone a coherent analysis.¹⁹ But there is another side too. As Sivanandan pointed out, the

entrenching of training as a remedy allowed institutional racism to be reduced to black perception.²⁰ In other words, 'white prejudice' reduced racism to an attitude and de-centred the importance of power relations and structural capitalist exploitation. And this psychologising has also placed individual experience above the role of unity in struggle. This is a problematic proposition because it is actually an ontological negation of a core precept of privilege theories.

Du Bois, whose concept of a 'psychological wage' for whiteness was extracted from its context to be taken further in one particular direction by theorists of whiteness studies,²¹ was himself quite clear about the class function of white supremacy. It was to drive 'such a wedge between white and black workers that there probably are not today in the world two groups of workers with practically identical interests who hate and fear each other so deeply and persistently and who are kept so far apart that neither sees anything of common interest'.²² Note that he does not say there is no other functionality, effect or otherwise, of racism. Du Bois had no illusions about an overall white supremacy. Those from culturally dominant groups have (everyday, institutional, cultural) advantages (privileges), but not everyone by default. These are not *per se* material advantages in the capitalist sense of the wage. The actual 'wage' is higher relative to that of black workers, but, in reality, neither black nor white is being paid what they should compared to the profits that they generate.

The idea is that exploited white classes are compensated by public, psychological advantages. The way these have been referred to – as wages – has contributed to the concept's misappropriation – are these wages or advantages acquired or earned, individual or social, analytical or metaphoric? Privilege exists on many different levels within a racially hierarchical and structured society; it does not exist outside of those social conditions and social relations. Yet, activist discussions based on WP arguments seem to see the idea that this white 'wage' is 'psychological' in and of itself, sometimes even in opposition to Marxist politics, which is odd considering the ideological roots. More importantly, such a critique does not take into account that:

Each form of oppression produces privileges for persons in the oppressor group. However, because the members of an oppressing group are divided by class and usually by other relations of oppression the character of privilege is highly variable.²³

Thus, Du Bois' approach has two key implications: far more than xenophobia, racism is a social reality and racism undermines the interests of white people. A shared exploitation means that the fate of white and black workers under capitalism is interconnected. This matters beyond economic analysis if we understand that liberation from exploitation of ordinary working people is relational and this opens the possibility of joint struggle. Du Bois thought it was important that, despite 'the wages of whiteness' and in the face of the divide-and-rule tactics of bosses, black and white workers would sometimes forge coalitions. If there is an

opening for struggle of both black and white, is it not the responsibility of progressives to seek methods that work against oppression *and* exploitation? Indeed, race and capital are not mutually exclusive, on the contrary. But these important theories, based on Marxist frameworks or universalist epistemologies, have been diluted, while in the process, 'psychological wage' and 'wages of whiteness' are taken on an individualistic and subjective connotation. Accepting that political conditions and social relations have changed and there is less collective interracial struggle, how can the old radical framework be applied empirically and sociologically? As a critical understanding of capitalism recedes, cultural explanations surge, opening the door to WP as a theory in and of itself. How can we prevent radical ideas from skidding from a potential tool for struggle to a fatalistic explanation that the extra (cultural/social/material/political) 'wage' that constitutes white privilege is the reason why anti-racism is not possible? Du Bois never limited himself to prejudice or xenophobia as the realm of white supremacy and pushed for a much more radical approach.

As Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor demonstrates in a brilliant essay about Du Bois, his ground-breaking contribution was showing the social relations of racism embedded in existing economic relations.²⁴ And Camfield argues, in the capitalist mode of production, racism is profitable; in this social reality, dominant groups try to preserve their advantages relative to the (racially) oppressed.²⁵ Weaknesses in activist approaches to WP are precisely the shift from a social to a subjective focus or interpretation of power. This is also at the core of other privilege theories: man over woman, white over black, abled over disabled, straight over queer, etc. When mass struggle is absent, this logic gains certain traction. The emphasis is on the individual taking responsibility, becoming conscious, especially by acknowledging their (relative) privilege. Then, why has more awareness not resulted in more mobilisation?

The privileging of awareness

The theory of WP can help us gain insight into the less visible workings of racism by providing a language and a description. But we notice how fixed ontological claims (such as white people benefitting from the exploitation of people of colour and thus their unlikeliness to struggle against it) became part of a larger shift in anti-racism. This position does not really provide a coherent or transformative theory since it is fused with individual, and personal accountability, a shared responsibility that at times expands to white guilt by virtue of colour. Radical and materialist theories of racism have been weakened and turned into solipsism. As mentioned at the outset, this argument is also a reflection of the negative implications of social movements in previous years that consolidated as part of a historic setback of progressive and collective politics. At the end of the 1970s, the way was cleared for another vision of overcoming oppression, intertwined with academic, postmodern conceptualisations critiquing universal norms and values. The critique of collective frameworks from a subjective position became popular

in some parts of 'progressive' academic circles. While this meant that the white, male, able-bodied, heterosexual paradigm as the norm was finally challenged, it was only at the experiential, subjective level. Given this, how then does anti-racism, focused on acknowledgement or awareness by the individual, function? Does it not widen the gap between theory and praxis?

As Sivanandan demonstrated, pushing power relations and economic exploitation into the background analytically contributes to the depoliticising of anti-racism. This process occurred, for instance, when racism got de-linked from social conditions and became mainly an issue of experience in the 1980s. For mainstream media or established academia, racism became an issue of attitude – prejudice – that could be solved through (state subsidised) 'consciousness raising'. The revival of WP theory is a spinoff from the original formulation, demonstrating the same paradox. Based on the logic that white activists don't really know what racism is since they don't experience it, then they are not entitled to contribute to the struggle either. In this context, the struggle around shared experiences and towards black-white coalitions loses significance and inevitably the focus will be on awareness raising (which is not to say that it can sometimes be annoying when insensitive white activists dominate discussion on strategy and tactics). If we then also opt for 'exposing' white privilege and 'calling out' white views, the next step is that white people are deemed unable to be 'real' comrades. An example of the self-fulfilling prophecy is found in some activist language, for example where 'comrade' is replaced by (rather than an addition of) 'ally' and solidarity becomes (the alternative for rather than a different aspect of) 'positionality'.²⁶ But when there is no principled basis or class analysis, nothing stops the next level in this ontological approach – the question mark over other oppressed minorities who are considered 'non-black' and therefore 'less' oppressed.

Competing oppressions

Racism, as a global phenomenon of oppression and exploitation, has specific local configurations with particular processes of othering and marginalising. Important structuring principles have been obscured through the tendency to exceptionalise subjective skin-colour, or fixed geographic references as a code for oppression. The increase in references to experientially grounded claims that are focused on skin colour differences have given primacy to anti-blackness, which has in turn reinforced essentialist definitions of race.

The invoked ranking of oppression has implications – firstly, it assumes an incremental logic from black to brown to white; secondly, the consequent hierarchies affect solidarities. We see this in certain applications of the term 'non-black people of colour' (code for 'brown', interchangeable with Arabs, North Africans, Asians, Latinx), where NBPoC either manifests the dropping of the collectivist PoC or highlights a specificity of blackness through 'black people of colour' (BPoC). While this incrementalism grows into an ontology (a hierarchy that relies on (ascribed) racialised/geographic features), the specification also coincides with a critique of

coalition politics that was underwritten by the term PoC that was, ironically, put forward by black feminists. Because 'anti-black' oppression also relies on the degree of closeness to 'white', such an order carries political meaning: a default complicity in anti-blackness. In practical usage, this 'NBPOC' does not refer to a collective group but rather produces the assumption that the individual is the collective-writ-small. Therefore, the NBPOC should not speak about or for (real) black struggles but is told to deal with anti-blackness in their own communities.

There are two immediate objections to this reasoning. First, it is strange to hold individuals accountable for varied (historic) injustices through a subjective demarcation regardless of other categories or conditions. Hence, no one is immune if held accountable for what other members of their community do, let alone its general alliance with oppressive forces.²⁷ Secondly, while 'NBPOC' individuals (such as Turks or Moroccans in the Netherlands) are criticised somewhat out of proportion, white 'allies' remain unchallenged and white supremacy as a social reality, which impacts on all PoC, remains untouched. The idea that, for instance, a Dutch-Moroccan is more privileged than a Dutch-Surinamese or a Dutch-Ugandan is mainly a result of a reactionary interpretation. In addition, 'blackness' is linked to an Africa romanticised as a continent and understood in an ahistorical way. Africa is divided by a biological hierarchy of skin colour and facial features – as if there are no cultural, linguistic, or religious differences between East, West, South, North and Central Africa.

Noting differentiations between groups is necessary to understand patterns of oppression and the multi-layered status of marginalisation is an important reason to take experiential knowledge seriously. Such internal differences can be overlooked by projecting standardised categories. Racism is generously distributed across a whole range of victims of anti-refugee politics, anti-blackness, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, etc. But this state of affairs is also used to undermine 'political blackness' or even the collective sense behind PoC. This complexity requires a nuanced approach towards racism; we cannot sweep all kinds of racism into one. The term 'black', when used politically, was not meant as a pigment marker. It denoted unity in struggle; a guideline for revolutionaries of colour who saw in the (racist) state a mutual enemy. So, organising in mixed groups together, uniting against police brutality, helps nail the lie of biological and essentialist notions of colour/race. Such a praxis actually allows one to raise the issue of prejudice within groups. Moreover, transformative awareness about, and radical commitment to, combating internal oppression is a crucial, if underestimated, possibility offered by unifying struggles. Across western metropolises, during particular eras a political outlook was shaped by struggles informed by internationalism and confidence. For them, the term black was a unifying radical denominator, a context in which activists were involved in an optimistic progressive politics within and across their respective communities. This approach is exhibited in neither the current WP approaches nor the invention of 'NBPOC'. That this is easily overlooked confirms the difference between analytical and descriptive tools.

Much of my understanding of political blackness, and its breaking down by state policies of ethnicism, originates in the critical work of Sivanandan about multiculturalism and diversity in the UK.²⁸ It is outside the scope of this article to offer a detailed account and compare the different contexts, but we can see how the bases on which state funds are allocated validate ethnic claims. Anthropologist Francio Guadeloupe has demonstrated this dynamic in a detailed account of the role of blackness and Afrocentricity for Dutch artists and activist scenes. The alignment of ethno-racial categorisation with state aims and funding regimes leads, according to him, to 'strategic essentialism'.²⁹ A white versus black descriptor in line with US usage does not actually have the same historic lineage in the Netherlands. This is where a 'politics of fulfilment' began to matter, and in turn, this accommodates a practice that encourages material and conceptual rivalries, or a 'hyper commercialized meta identity'.³⁰ Unsurprisingly, this does not sit well with progressive politics. It indicates that the meanings of Africa, Afro, black are adapted and/or conflated as part of the larger re-interpretation of anti-racism. An international black nationalism grounded in a supposed sub-Saharan kinship is very unconvincing. This myth of a unified black identity (in the North American sense of the term) supposedly functions as the enduring reality of how race is understood by all peoples of sub-Saharan African descent, with a clear-cut division of human beings into black, brown, and white, as Guadeloupe notes.³¹ In this metanarrative, black identity is the prerogative of persons with what are considered classic sub-Saharan features: dark skin, coiling or curling hair, and genetic ancestry in sub-Saharan Africa. Ultimately, this supposed genetic ancestry (an updated version of the ontology of blood) is an invention where 'Black identity belongs to sub-Saharan people . . . this [is a] metaphysical understanding of colonial history by which blood, skin, bone, and genetic ancestry slips in through the backdoor of [the] social constructivist avowal of race'.³² Taking a similar approach to Guadeloupe, Olaloku-Teriba identifies a pattern where there is 'on one hand, the exceptionalisation of a thing referred to as "anti-blackness"; and on the other, the mobilisation of this charge against "non-black people of colour" who attempt to draw comparison between black struggles and their own'.³³ The 'tension between the presumptions of this universalising analysis of racial categories and the as-yet unresolved question of blackness, what it is and who possesses it, plagues anti-racist politics and organising'.³⁴

A problem emerges when emphasising 'racism denial', or utilising 'brown privilege', nurtures competition between ethnic minority groups. Naturalising differences among oppressed groups gives political currency to the wrong anti-racism. Any criticism of this view by non-black anti-racists is labelled anti-black, and hence, delegitimised. In this outlook, a radical holistic and material analysis of racism is opportunistically coded as 'erasure'. Just like white people who mainly carry responsibility and will not 'know' what racism is, NBPoC will never 'really' know what it is like to be black since realising this can only come from personal experience. But what stops this logic from expanding to every subjective

group? Men will never know what it is like to be women. Cis women will never know what it is like to be trans. Able LGBTQ women will never know what it is like to be a disabled LGBTQ woman. When political responsibility becomes invested in personal accountability or subjective characteristics outside of genuine coalition work, the space for transformative change narrows down. While it can work in a complementary way, replacing social reality with subjective experience and a universal political vision of emancipation with cultural- or colour-based analysis weakens the struggle against oppression rather than strengthening it, as examples in the next section show.

How to miss the point

We sometimes hear 'whities to the back' during protests; for instance, in reference to groups leading a march, or taking centre stage at an activist spectacle, arguably useful in some cases or at particular stages of protest. But we can also hear the opposite during the threat of police violence 'whites to the front'; that is, the notion of the 'white privilege shield'. Compulsory expectations turn into reified roles for white people, and this then allows us to be constantly disappointed in them because it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy: whites are unable to be anti-racist comrades . . . because they are white. The bottom line is that white people can sometimes be allies (lend their support) but at other times should stay out. When the paradigm is not challenged, this can lead to the exponential growth of the privilege-colour order and we have to ask: who is the next in line? For once whites lose or give up their right to speak, the next are so-called 'brown people' (also the generic 'Muslim' or the generic 'Arab', black Muslims are mostly absent from these reductionist terms), who are now indicted for historic or contemporary collaboration in slavery and anti-blackness. Ascribing to such moral equivalences, purely on the basis of religious/cultural affiliation, turns the (actual) oppressed into the (theoretical) oppressor.

Numerous examples of the narrowing down and fragmentation of politics and identities – cloaked in a progressive discourse – have come to the fore: from equating Dutch-Moroccans with militias in Libya to judging all black people as Islamophobic because scores of Surinamese voted for the far-right Islamophobe Geert Wilders; from excluding African-Americans as potential radical subjects because of participation in the military-industrial complex (and thus the bloody wars across the world), to refusing to honour an anti-Nazi resistance monument during an anti-racism march because a number of slaveholders in the Caribbean were Jewish. What all these have in common – apart from the lack of historical knowledge and awareness of the impact of migration – is the embarrassing absence of the role of the state and capital. In addition, it is important to recognise the inherent paradoxes in how privilege-based theories and behaviour-related tactics turn left politics into a recipe for inaction. This mindset prevents proactive engagement because it makes people reluctant to speak out.

These totalising categories have sneaked into our activist circles, framing marginalised communities as themselves accountable for oppression.³⁵ We see this most often in campus politics.

I want to take this further through a concrete example I was part of during a seminar at the University of Amsterdam, where a number of students (and their supporters) accused the organisers of silencing black voices and the scheduled speaker of 'appropriating black feminism'.³⁶ This was on the grounds that a speaker of Turkish origin was deemed 'disrespectful' in addressing black feminism as she herself was not black – despite stating her respect for intersectionality. That statement was condemned as 'whitewashing' of intersectionality and she was framed as 'white-passing', and the talk did not go ahead. During the meeting, some argued that PoC should fight oppression together, others pointed to the fact that the speaker was a woman of colour, which was not accepted by some. An opportunity for a constructive debate, which might have both critiqued (white) institutional complacency and enhanced solidarity, was lost. The important contribution of intersectionality notwithstanding, this case demonstrates the logical outcome of an anti-blackness meshed with privilege theories and then applied to the 'non-black' in the Netherlands. It is important to defend the practice of 'no platforming' in academic settings; for example, to halt the progress of fascist ideas. Interrupting racist speeches and confronting racist speakers is a proud left tradition in student life and an important tool for staff to show support. But that was not the scenario here. Criticism levelled against the way this issue was dealt with was made by many who did not agree with the intervention, saying this was neither effective nor appropriate. The recollections of the event, however, produced a different framework of ideas, centring on students versus staff, black students versus a white establishment. Thus, a narrative took root based on easily digestible binaries and constructed around claims against which internal critique was rendered reactionary. Accounts of such events are important if we are to learn from experience.

But instead of this, a number of students justified their disruption of the seminar on the grounds that a 'white' speaker was taking centre stage while local black activists were not invited, thus erasing black feminist labour. But is this a progressive position? How does this work in the case of a non-white (Turkish) woman working in a European and North American academy, itself infused with power relations against PoC and complicit in Islamophobia? What about the fact that black students were divided as to those who wanted to hear the speaker and those who didn't, and white members were divided between those wanting to support the intervention and those who did not? As the debate took hold and continued (online and offline), 'white' morphed into 'NBPoC'. Objection to this sleight of hand then led to the accusation of erasing 'black' voices. In this, it conflated right-wing attacks on identity politics and denial of racism with a left-wing critique of the limitations of chauvinist or anti-class analysis of racism, thereby imposing a hierarchy of legitimacy over whose voices should carry weight and be

heard. Some attempts to bring historic context or argue for an inclusive understanding of the terms 'black' and 'PoC' were mocked as 'team-political-blackness'. These discursive shifts reduce diverse causes and traditions into a matter of skin colour or erect a barrier between those who could have found common cause. This plays into the standardisation and emptying of meaning of the concepts of 'black' and 'white'.

With definitions shifting, fundamental objectives change too. Perhaps the most confusing is the subtle annexation of the term intersectionality to represent a critique that enables such a hollowing out of concepts of 'black' and 'white'. When Kimberlé Crenshaw first coined the term 'intersectionality', it was in light of a court case against discrimination in which the judge had rejected a plea based on the plaintiff being black and female. He argued that she should make a choice whether to pursue the case against racism or sexism – it could not be both. Crenshaw presented intersectionality as an alternative reflection of the reality of multiple identities that cause overlapping oppressions, understanding it as an interface. It is significant that in the seminar discussed above, the Turkish speaker was going to discuss the ways black feminist voices were side-lined in new trends in intersectionality studies, taken up by white or liberal feminists without crediting black thinkers. On one level this is a relevant critique, but overall it is somewhat weak. As Jenifer Nash argues, if the fight for equality and justice is for all the oppressed then the claim by black feminists that intersectionality is their property has to be rejected.³⁷

Moreover, when conservative politics gain momentum and progressive movements experience a series of downturns, different (subjectivities or identities) can be taken to mean 'separate' instead of 'overlapping'. For instance, not emphasising the overlapping theory in Crenshaw but rehearsing the basement metaphor she offers only inspires a race to the bottom.³⁸ Sometimes this means that, even within anti-racism, white supremacy can go unmentioned and collective oppression that requires solidarity goes unchallenged. The example I discussed shows that while challenging white and hegemonic university structures is valid, disputing and ousting a PoC speaker while leaving the white establishment intact is invalid. It is as if we are looking through the wrong end of the telescope – while the minutiae of progressive ethics take precedence, the struggle for freedom seems absurdly distant.

More about freedom than about blackness

That is why it is key to repeat that there is not one black or one white epistemology; our political differences are in essence ideological and not biological. The trajectory of our activism is not fixed either; we make choices all the time, the legacy or impulse we may want to continue can be different from where we started. That is why for many being aware of racism, though sometimes necessary, is eventually not enough. If consciousness is something that people have to

raise in the (primarily white, male, cis, abled) pyramid of oppression, then it has not served its intended purpose. Worse, it is a poor substitute for an admittedly more difficult task – activism invested in taking on structural inequality through the tough work of coalition building.

Some time after the intersectionality seminar at the University of Amsterdam, black revolutionary Angela Davis visited the Netherlands, and met with a number of the people involved in that fight. In her reflections on her visit there, she questioned the disproportionate problematising of solidarity in the movement, asked why an insistence on joint struggle with other marginalised groups was lacking, and asked why political claims were increasingly replaced by a discourse of pain and oppression, which she pointedly termed 'hyper-empathy'.³⁹ She described the popularity of this type of engagement as a capitulation – echoing the conservative black nationalism of the '60s – and spoke of how she and her comrades actually struggled against such positions and that their approach was anti-racism with an international scope; their radicalism was 'more about freedom than . . . about blackness'. Thus, the black power movement, so often held up as the historical ideal, was a struggle for freedom and for that reason by default against capitalism and imperialism. Its epistemology challenges the idea that the experience of slavery had an ontological imprint both in how it constructed a particular anti-blackness and a kind of dehumanisation of the black body that Wilderson III describes as 'social death'.⁴⁰

A denial of criticism on the basis of colour or membership of a certain ethnic group is not only misguided but also contains a conceptual trap. Any strategy based on narrow racialised frames misses key steps in the design of resistance. It allows people to be judged as unable to commit due to their privileges or self-interest in a racist system (rendering any apparent commitment to the struggle suspect) and extends this by alleging the complicity of NBPOC. In such examples, we come to see how certain privilege-inspired theories are also used as a moral yardstick. The progression of these logics along colour lines ends in a zero-sum game. But if the 1960s and 1970s showed us anything, it is that internal divisions can be overcome through coalition building, and that internalised prejudice can be unlearned. Prejudiced attitudes against a particular group (anti-black, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism) will then be more likely to be accounted for in the movement, and, when communities come together through the movement, there will be a recognition, for instance, of colourism or homophobia and such behaviours more likely to change. Collective and class-based struggles keep universal values, such as equality, to the fore and inspire fruitful intersectional coalitions. Internal conversations are important, but people have to be together to have a conversation in the first place. Proximity and trust foster vulnerability and the sharing of experiences and open us to the truly transgressive realisation: that one liberation is bound up with the other.

Yet, when anti-capitalist critique is deemed dated or when experience and identity are stripped of their social relations, anti-racist politics can mutate into a sort of

anti-universalist free-for-all. In this context, authority obtained on the basis of something 'authentic' – one's skin-colour or membership of a specific group – rather than on ethical, historical and social affinity, becomes a political dead end. This is why a misunderstood (e.g. subordinated to a conceptual paradigm of identity) rediscovery of the Combahee River Collective (CRC) statement is problematic. In its understanding of identity as politics – and the manifold (intersectional) nature of it – the CRC in 1977 was ground-breaking. The focus on overlapping oppressions and advancing coalitions between groups was key. To the CRC, class (and anti-imperial and feminist) politics was one of the central components in the struggle against racism. Their arguments were transformative:

We are socialists because we believe that work must be organized for the collective benefit of those who do the work and create the products, and not for the profit of the bosses. Material resources must be equally distributed among those who create these resources. We are not convinced, however, that a socialist revolution that is not also a feminist and anti-racist revolution will guarantee our liberation . . . we know that [Marx's] analysis must be extended further in order for us to understand our specific economic situation as Black women.⁴¹

But as this article shows, today a redefinition of coalition-based intersectionality may also lead to the arbitrary separation of capitalism and racism. Anti-capitalism is considered the focus for (white) socialists, and anti-racism that for black or 'decolonial' activists; the anti-capitalist can be an ally.⁴² To use the works of black Marxists selectively to defend such positions narrows and fragments struggle; in fact, the class versus race schism is a negation of radical legacies.⁴³ It is therefore important to address the amnesia about black voices and movements as a deliberate condition,⁴⁴ as partly the result of removing this 'period of insurgency' from its actual broad-based international context.⁴⁵

And for that reason, it is valuable to keep the Dutch history alive of those who continued the anti-colonial struggle and were violently repressed (Moluccans), or local black Communists (Anton de Kom). It is for activists themselves to decide how to retain the legacy of transformative theory and transgressive praxis; what is important is to have this choice.⁴⁶ One of our most rewarding tasks is to find the political commonalities – even against all the odds – and retell them. But most important is not just to emulate those former militant values but further them. As the Australian indigenous activist Lila Watson put it, 'If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.'⁴⁷ Indeed, it is even more necessary for oppressed groups to find a common axis when deciding who 'we' are.

Towards radical kinships

. . . and when I talk about the masses, I'm talking about the white masses, I'm talking about the black masses, and the brown masses, and the yellow masses,

too. We've got to face the fact that some people say you fight fire best with fire, but we say you put fire out best with water. We say you don't fight racism with racism. We're gonna fight racism with solidarity. We say you don't fight capitalism with no black capitalism; you fight capitalism with socialism. – Fred Hampton, 1969.⁴⁸

It is important that injustice be acknowledged, and experience be embodied in politics as a narrative and a source of knowledge. But what happens when these become totemic, or when concepts slip into dogma, spilling into other (activist) realms where tactics overtake strategy?

Historically, the successful methods of anti-racist resistance were rarely about individual experiences and were mostly framed in an anti-capitalist paradigm – 'the masses' hold the key. This approach was both a rhetoric and a plea which the Black Panther Party understood it had to balance. In Hampton's much-used quote, the meaning is almost missed through its simplicity. The 'masses' may sound populist, but in fact the thinking is transgressive, encompassing not only black and white unity, but also politico-economic struggle. The progressive mutual solidarity of the Rainbow Coalition in 1969 by the Black Panthers, under the leadership of Fred Hampton in Chicago, brought groups and organisations from different ethnic backgrounds together.

The objective – to fight for their common interests – and the 'cross-racial unity' approach was the most dangerous thing imaginable for a capitalist racist state, and thus was intensely undermined and violently attacked. And therefore short-lived. Hampton was killed, and the coalition fell apart.⁴⁹ This was part of a pattern whenever a link between racial oppression, capitalism, and imperialism was made material and central to social movements. The socialist Pan Africanist Ben Barka was murdered by the Moroccan and French secret service (assisted by the CIA) in 1965. Malcolm X was killed after positing that 'you cannot have capitalism without racism', Martin Luther King was assassinated in 1967, for whom 'The evils of capitalism are as real as the evils of militarism and evils of racism'. These positions made them enemies of nationalists, black separatists and white supremacists. These deaths signal that when this kind of politics gains an audience this is the most radical transgression imaginable, and organising across movements becomes a major threat to the state. The fact that the state erases these legacies doesn't mean we have to stop employing these methods, doesn't mean we have to erase our legacies too by accepting individual state incentives and normalising neoliberal paradigms.

Black nationalism and theories of white privilege did not gain ascendancy in the 1960s because programmes fusing anti-capitalism, anti-imperialism and internationalism grew and these challenged the emphasis on skin colour at the expense of class and solidarity. Assata Shakur wrote in her autobiography:

One of the most important things the [BPP] Party did was to make it really clear who the enemy was: not the white people, but the capitalistic,

imperialistic oppressors. They took the Black liberation struggle out of a national and put it in an international context.⁵⁰

The tendency to divide our struggle between black and brown, or to narrow down activism to capitalism versus racism, reflects the weakness of our movement. By stressing what and who we are personally, we split identity from its collective, social and structural context. But, as I showed at the outset, the race/class divide becomes more plausible when those doing class reject, in turn, race.

It is in this form that the role ascribed to privilege increases the presumption that whites (also anti-racist activists) are incapable of really committing to the struggle because they are guilty by virtue of a system that will always favour them. This can morph into 'NBPOC' being considered culpable or even told that they should not use black radical sources. One of my memorable experiences was to be told that I should not cite black Marxists but Edward Said. The idea that a Du Bois is for 'black' people and a Said for certain 'brown' people does not understand that progressive ideologies cross these markers. It makes a farce of radical anti-racist and anti-colonial history that transcends these values. When we reach the point of 'appropriating others' struggles' we have arrived at a rivalry between oppressed peoples, which is exactly what our common oppressors want.

The tragedy is that the black radical men and women who have threatened the racist and imperialist state and/or power structures on precisely these terms are not recognised. Their experiences show that the real threat to racist nation states comes from those who identify with members of other groups, not only their 'own'. And the key is indeed in experience, one that can translate from the individual onto a collective scale, for in this variety of experience lies a great power. Thus, the solidarity expressed between Palestinians and the Sioux people of Standing Rock, whose fight against an oil pipeline on their lands was exemplary, and the resonances with Palestinian struggles to protect sacred sites were clearly understood:

As an indigenous people whose lands have been robbed and pillaged, and who face existential settler-colonial expansion in Palestine, we recognize that Native American and First Nation peoples have endured centuries of violent settler colonialism that has dismantled and robbed them of home, heritage, dignity, security, narrative, land, language, identity, family, trees, cemeteries, animals, livelihoods and life.

We recognize the multitude of ways that Native American and First Nation struggles to protect indigenous territories have ultimately been struggles on behalf of all of humanity to save the Earth we share from toxic globalization of neoliberal and capitalist ethos that threaten our collective survival.⁵¹

With the same revolutionary love, black activists in Ferguson expressed kinship with Palestinians, saying 'When I see them, I see us'. This black-Palestinian

solidarity has grown because both understand the relationship between state violence, the prison system, and militarised surveillance.⁵²

How we can incorporate this genuine kinship more into our own political campaigns and everyday lives today remains to be answered. But as shown, there are many suggestions we can take direction from. Moreover, as Assata Shakur reminds us, 'To win any struggle for liberation, you have to have the way as well as the will.'⁵³ In the end, what we want is a radical alternative based on kinship, a kinship of equality; a universalism grounded in resistance. Criticism is useful only if the goal is justice and joined by material equality; if not, it turns into a kind of moralism that mostly weakens us.

At a time of sharp disagreement between Dutch anti-racist activists, Philomena Essed, the Netherlands' leading analyst on racism, was asked what she would like to endow to activists. She paused and said, 'I think mainly dignity'. It is a reminder that politics and activism are also human and personal issues. To be human is implicated in the struggle because dignity and respect is about more than claiming your own right. We do want acknowledgement, but not at the cost of others. If you belittle or exclude someone today, you stand to lose a comrade tomorrow. That is what Shakur meant when she wrote about being 'responsible for each other and to each other'.⁵⁴ But we live in a different time and operate in new different activist arenas, driven by a social media-gearred sphere that encourages hyper public polemics and reduces mutual respect via a competitive culture of individual accomplishment. To avoid being played off one against the other, our theoretical or tactical differences should be public and made in a spirit of comradeship. We need space for radical intellectual thinking without suppressing critical debate, we don't have to limit our thinking for the sake of action. Political differences were discussed vigorously between Du Bois and Garvey, between Fanon and Negritude, between Malcolm X and Farrakhan. Does this mean that we need to return to an abstract general universalism? What universal values are we talking about? It is crucial to question universality because I do not propose a return to the time when the white, abled, heterosexual man was the unchallenged universal norm. We need our own universalist alliance that is able to overcome divisive tendencies but push towards an emancipation that does not look only into ourselves or our own group for the answer; based on what is called a *radical universalism* this is 'not something that pre-exists; it's a break with the existing state of things' and thus founded on a fraternity of *radical kinship*.⁵⁵ For anti-racists, it means claiming equality and justice in collective coalitions, with strong comrades not submissive allies.

A progressive understanding of experience and awareness is one based on principles of unity and a solidarity nurtured in struggle. Intellectual honesty strengthens politics; this is why constructive criticism is vital. We can be inclusive about differences regarding the understanding of the world we live in. Instead of the focus on undeniable and unbridgeable difference, Rahul Rao pointed to a more difficult yet politically useful 'finding ways of thinking about different forms of injustice together'. I share his critique of the apathy to 'repairing differences'.⁵⁶

Different sets of ideas begin to shape/are shaped by the very labour of activism. The lesson I learned from anti-racism in the Netherlands is that it is critical to interrogate and critique the notion of white privilege as an instrument in activist strategies. It is the 'anchored struggle' which I aim for – doing something together.⁵⁷ Ultimately, as Sivanandan said: 'The people we are writing for are the people we are fighting for.' Whatever our critiques, they should aim to strengthen the struggle against oppression and exploitation. It is where anti-racists are forced to overcome a double divide: inside the political and mainstream Left where the demand is to take racism seriously, and inside the anti-racist, grassroots Left that restricts itself to using certain tools without considering what is missing. This can be overwhelming, but our movements, workplace disputes and strikes, campus sit-ins and demonstrations are sites of resistance where we breathe, where hope overtakes fatalism. Where our scepticism is not frivolous, but sober. And where we learn and unlearn.

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- 2 A. Sivanandan, 'RAT and the degradation of black struggle', *Race & Class* 26, no. 4 (1985): pp. 1–33.
- 3 David Roediger, *Class, Race and Marxism* (London: Verso, 2017), p. 20.
- 4 Roediger, *Class, Race and Marxism*, p. 28. For an accessible introduction in the classroom about whiteness, see Gene Demby, 'The Code Switch Podcast, Episode 1: Can We Talk About Whiteness?', *NPR*, 31 May 2016; or this helpful piece by David Roediger, 'White privilege, white advantage, white and human misery', *Verso Blog*, 8 March 2019, <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/4262-white-privilege-white-advantage-white-and-human-misery>. For a broader critical reflection on the field of 'whiteness studies' see also Andrew Hartman, 'The rise and fall of whiteness Studies', *Race & Class* 46, no. 2 (2004): pp. 22–38.
- 5 A. Sivanandan, 'RAT and the degradation of black struggle', p. 14.
- 6 The Netherlands has a progressive history that included Third Worldism, internationalist solidarity politics (e.g. anti-Pinochet and anti-apartheid South Africa committees) Dolle Mina feminists, and anti-nuclear (Kernbom) peace movement. Though none were perfect on their own, all were making new discoveries and took the political sphere into a more radical position. This narrative is not known as much as it should be, but it could enable us to see the possibilities and learn from the lineages. This absence, even in critical work about race, which hardly mentions the powerful experimental coalitions between Mollucans, Surinamese, Moroccans etc., contributes to a negative tendency.
- 7 Gloria Wekker, *White Innocence: paradoxes of colonialism and race* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2016).

- 8 David T. Goldberg, 'Racisms in Orange: Afterword', in P. Essed and I. Hoving (eds), *Dutch Racism: Thamyris/Intersecting Place, Sex and Race*, no. 27 (Amsterdam/New York: Thamyris Rodopi, 2014).
- 9 David T. Goldberg, 'Racisms in Orange'.
- 10 H. Ghorashi, 'Racism and the "Ungrateful Other" in the Netherlands' in P. Essed and I. Hoving (eds), *Dutch Racism*, pp. 101-116.
- 11 H. Ghorashi, 'Racism and the "ungrateful other"', p. 111.
- 12 Sara Ahmed's work on 'the politics of citation' shows this too; see *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2017). On how black feminist work disappears in white feminist writings see Sirma Bilge, 'Intersectionality undone: saving intersectionality from feminist intersectionality studies', *Du Bois Review* 10, no. 2 (2013): pp. 405-424.
- 13 US historian Robin D. G. Kelley laid out how black members shaped the political choices of the Communist Party.
- 14 'That what I want is that Marxism and communism be placed in the service of black peoples, and not black peoples in the service of Marxism and communism'. See Aimé Césaire, 'Letter to Maurice Thorez' [1956] in *Social Text* 28, no.2, (2010): pp. 149-150.
- 15 We cannot understand the successes of Geert Wilders and Thierry Baudet without these ideological preparations. The rightist Conservative Frits Bolkestein in the early '90s was echoed in a social democratic critique by the Labour Party's Paul Scheffers, the latter's symptomatic opportunism culminated in the iconic populism of the anti-immigrant and Islamophobe figure, Pim Fortuyn. See also M. Aouragh, 'Refusing to be silenced: resisting Islamophobia' in *Dutch Racism*, pp. 355-373.
- 16 See Alex de Jong's analysis of this extraordinary election result: <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2019/03/netherlands-forum-voor-democratie-thierry-baudet>.
- 17 In 2014, a number of anti-racist feminists commented on her ideas. Halsema is now the first woman mayor of Amsterdam and it is interesting to note that the importance of having female mayors does not provoke the same irritation as 'identity politics'.
- 18 Ewald Engelen, 'Links narcisme', *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 31 January 2018. A similar position to Ewald Engelen's in 2018 was discussed by Socialist Party National Secretary Hans van Heijningen, 'Identiteitspolitiek: een heilloze weg', *Spanning* 30 November 2017.
- 19 A. Sivanandan writes, '[R]acism is not . . . a white problem, but a problem of an exploitative white power structure; power is not something white people are born into, but that which they derive from their position in a complex race/sex/class hierarchy; oppression does not equal exploitation; ideas do not equal ideology; the personal is not the political, but the political is personal; and personal liberation is not political liberation.' See A. Sivanandan, 'RAT and the degradation of black struggle', *Race & Class* 26, no. 4 (1985): pp. 1-34.
- 20 A. Sivanandan, 'RAT and the degradation of black struggle', p.14.
- 21 It is outside the scope of this article to provide a complete exegesis of WP - the concept has different interpretations - but one of the most important is by Noel Ignatiev (1967) and, with Ted Allen, 'The White Blindspot' in *Understanding and Fighting White Supremacy* (Chicago: STO, 1976); the most cited by activists is Peggy McIntosh, 'White privilege: unpacking the invisible knapsack', in Scott Plous (Ed.), *Understanding prejudice and discrimination* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003), pp. 191-196. For an insightful background of the historical emergence in the US context, see David Camfield, 'Elements of a Historical-Materialist Theory of Racism', *Historical Materialism* 24, no. 1 (2016): pp. 52-56, and see Sivanandan (1984) on the British context. Camfield warns against reproducing such broad theories within the one term 'privilege theory' since the work of Ignatiev and Allen, and many valuable discussions in Critical Race/whiteness studies do not reflect current versions. However, we have to accept that WP is now the common terminology in activist circles.
- 22 W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1935).

23 David Camfield, pp. 54.

24 See Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, 'WEB Du Bois - Black reconstruction in America 1860-1880', *International Socialist Review* 57 (2008), also 'Race, class and Marxism', *Socialistworker.org*, 4 January 2011.

25 Camfield 2016, p. 31.

26 For example, replacing class/social references with subjective references (e.g. *classism*, instead of capitalism or exploitation). See also Steve Darcy's commentary about the political backgrounds of the shift in terminology: 'The Rise of the Post-New Left Political Vocabulary', *Public Autonomy*, 27 January 2011.

27 See 'Colonial repercussions - Angela Davis and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: planetary utopias', *YouTube*, 24 June 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cc-nGN07gnk&t=4s>, especially towards the end between 3.10-3.20.

28 See also the compartmentalisation of a collective and radical critique into 'black studies', as discussed by Roderick Ferguson in *The reorder of things: the university and its pedagogies of minority difference* (Minnesota, US: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

29 Francio Guadeloupe, *So how does it feel to be a Black man living in the Netherlands: an anthropological account* (Mississippi: Mississippi University Press, 2019), pp. 71-72.

30 Guadeloupe, p. 91.

31 Guadeloupe, p. 144.

32 Guadeloupe, pp. 101-102. In fact, the role of private foundations and municipal or state funding creates further dependencies and makes anti-racism into a kind of profession. It also divides. The UN *Decade of Africa* fuelled the notion of 'real African' based on skin colour. Terms like 'colourism', 'sub-Saharan', 'African', 'Afro' become essentialist categories and shape everyday activist language (in similar funded programmes, Moroccans were excluded based on the definition of Africa as 'black'). As such, black 'activist-intellectuals' are actively promoting themselves and pushing their cause on social media platforms and via 'influencer' networks; they attend seminars and conferences all over the world or give awareness trainings and workshops about racism (cf. Guadeloupe p. 71).

33 See Annie Olaloku-Teriba's excellent piece, 'Afro-Pessimism and the (un)logic of anti-blackness', *Historical Materialism* 26, no. 2 (2018), <http://www.historicalmaterialism.org/articles/afro-pessimism-and-unlogic-anti-blackness>.

34 Annie Olaloku-Teriba, 'Afro-Pessimism and the (un)logic of anti-blackness'.

35 For instance, Muslim/North African/Arabs being told they carry historic accountability for anti-black slavery and the slave trade. This is exactly the same argument brought forward by white supremacists to avoid the topic, or by right-wing historians to challenge critical science.

36 There are different interpretations of this seminar in December 2017. The confusing title could be read as a critique of Afro-pessimism and the link of Black Feminism was unclear. After the first two interruptions, the speaker clarified that she did not critique Afro-pessimism, that she approached intersectionality respectfully and had written about black feminism with renowned academic Patricia Collins. This was not accepted. She explained she did not want to be instrumentalised for issues between students and faculty and criticised the organisers for not having put her in touch with students who wanted to share the stage. One of the few progressive female academic staff of colour in the audience spoke against the treatment of the Turkish speaker and asked to let her speak, but she was in turn reminded of her own ('brown') privilege. The students' critique of lack of diversity in the faculties was valid but the 'cruel irony' as the speaker called it, was that this was one of the few occasions on which the critique was not valid. Prominent anthropologist Gloria Wekker and author of the now famous *White Innocence* called it a shame that the only result was that an important meeting did not take place, and incomprehensible that to hear from a PoC (rather than the usual white liberal feminist) was not seen as a step forward.

- 37 Jennifer Nash, *Black Feminism Reimagined* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2019). Nash adds the important correction that the idea of 'ownership' means something else for radical thought, p. 3. See also: Jennifer Nash, 'Re-thinking Intersectionality', *Feminist Review*, no. 89 (2008): pp. 1-15.
- 38 The metaphor of the basement is that black people in America are trapped; while they are locked at the bottom, other minorities crawl over them to get out, thus other non-whites and migrants can clamber to escape at the expense of black people.
- 39 See 'Colonial repercussions - Angela Davis and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: planetary utopias', *YouTube*, 24 June 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cc-nGN07gnk&t=4s>, especially towards the end between 3.10-3.20.
- 40 Frank B Wilderson III, *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms*, (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2010).
- 41 'The Combahee River Collective Statement' [1977] in Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *How we get free: black feminism and the Combahee River Collective* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2017).
- 42 The exchange between decolonial socialist Sandew Hira ('Gekleurde empowerment is noodzaak voor bevrijding') and international socialist Peyman Jafari ('Racisme is verbonden met kapitalisme') is insightful: *Socialisme.nu*. 7 June 2016.
- 43 Class has always been key - from the early experiences of the African Blood Brotherhood, Black Insurrection, the Negro Reds after the Russian revolution a century ago to DRUM (Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement), the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, the Combahee River Collective, the Black Panther Party. See also R. Ramdin, *The making of the black working class in Britain* (London: Gower Press, 1987); Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a country: race and the unfinished struggle for democracy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2005); Michael C. Dawson, *Behind the Mule: race and class in African-American politics* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995); Anna Tucker and Nestor Castillo, 'Black and Red: the history of black socialism in America', *The Nib*, 14 February, 2018; Dan Georgakas, 'Their Thing was DRUM: Black Power in the Factory' *Left Voice*, 20 June 2016. See also the interesting interview by Daniel Denvir 'Scholar Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor on the Movement for Black Lives platform' *Salon*, 24 August 2016.
- 44 It is astonishing to read references to pioneers like C. L. R. James, W.E. B. Du Bois and Claudia Jones or ground-breaking insights from Cedric Robinson, Carole Boyce Davies, Manning Marable, and Angela Davis put to exclusionary use in ways that go against the ethics and scholarship of these figures themselves.
- 45 Olaloku-Teriba, <http://www.historicalmaterialism.org/articles/afro-pessimism-and-unlogic-anti-blackness>.
- 46 This perhaps related to the fact that Surinamese with Javanese roots wouldn't 'mind' working with Moluccans; I am grateful to Francio Gouadeloupe for pointing me to this, now largely forgotten, history.
- 47 See her bio at: <https://lillanetwork.wordpress.com/about>.
- 48 See <https://youtu.be/sGyZSXAHD0M>.
- 49 Jakobi E. Williams, 'An Arc of Solidarity: remembering Bob Lee (1942-2017)' *Viewpoint Magazine*, 29 March 2017.
- 50 Assata Shakur, *Assata Shakur: an autobiography* (London: Zed Books, 1987), p. 203.
- 51 See Andrew Kadi, 'Palestinians back Standing Rock Sioux in struggle for humanity', *Electronic Intifada*, 10 September 2016, <https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/andrew-kadi/palestinians-back-standing-rock-sioux-struggle-all-humanity#fullstatement>.
- 52 See 'Dream defenders, Black Lives Matter and Ferguson reps take historic trip to Palestine', *Ebony*, 9 January 2015, <https://www.ebony.com/news/dream-defenders-black-lives-matter-ferguson-reps-take-historic-trip-to-palestine/>.
- 53 See Ato Sekyi-Otu, *Left universalism, Africentric essays* (London: Routledge, 2018) and Assata Shakur, pp. 204, 218, 242.

54 Assata Shakur, p. 267.

55 See Asad Haider *Mistaken Identity: race and class in the age of Trump* (London: Verso, 2018) and Greg Thomas, 'The Black Panther Party for Palestine', *Samidoun*, 30 September 2016, <http://samidoun.net/2016/09/the-black-panther-party-for-palestine-by-greg-thomas/>.

56 Rahul Rao, 'Recovering Reparative Readings of Postcolonialism and Marxism', *Critical Sociology* 43, no. 4-5 (2017): pp. 587-598.

57 See special issue of *Race & Class* 60, no. 3 (2019), 'Solidarity here and everywhere': the lifework of Barbara Harlow'.