Distribution Agreement

In presenting this thesis or dissertation as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for an advanced degree from Emory University, I hereby grant to Emory University and its agents the non-exclusive license to archive, make accessible, and display my thesis or dissertation in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter known, including display on the world wide web. I understand that I may select some access restrictions as part of the online submission of this thesis or dissertation. I retain all ownership rights to the copyright of the thesis or dissertation. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis or dissertation.

Signature:

______________________________ _______________
Sarah E. MacDonald Date

The Paradox of Privilege: Responsible Solidarity for Faith-Based Activism

By

Sarah E. MacDonald
Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Division of Religion
Ethics and Society

____
Ellen Ott Marshall, Ph.D.
Advisor

____
Elizabeth M. Bounds, Ph.D.
Committee Member

____
Andrea C. White, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Accepted:

____
Lisa A. Tedesco, Ph.D.
Dean of the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies

____
Date

The Paradox of Privilege: Responsible Solidarity for Faith-Based Activism

By

Sarah E. MacDonald

B.A., Calvin College, 1993
M.A., University of Iowa, 1996
M.Div., McCormick Theological Seminary, 2007

Advisor: Ellen Ott Marshall, Ph.D.

An abstract of
a dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the Graduate Division of Religion, Ethics and Society.
2018

Abstract

The Paradox of Privilege: Responsible Solidarity for Faith-Based Activism

By Sarah E. MacDonald

This dissertation articulates a constructive Christian ethic of responsible solidarity, paying critical attention to the moral complications posed by systemic privilege. Recent texts in social ethics and anti-oppression education urge privileged North Americans to engage in political solidarity by "using privilege" for good. Yet is it ethically viable to attempt to use one's privilege on behalf of less privileged others—or do such attempts reinforce systemic inequalities? This is the paradox of privilege: that the unearned advantages of privilege may simultaneously enable *and* constrain efforts for justice. So how might people of faith engage in solidarity in ways that take seriously the real impacts of privilege, yet do not rely upon such privilege as the principal tool for activism?

Inspired by Traci West's "dialogical method," this project builds a conversation between Christian theologies of solidarity, critical whiteness theory, and practices of nonviolence. My fieldwork studied a multiracial team of faith-based solidarity activists from North America and Colombia, who together perform international protective accompaniment. In accompaniment, "foreigners" enter a conflict zone to support communities targeted by armed actors. Accompaniment appears to use the privileged status of accompaniers to increase the safety of the accompanied. However, in the case I studied, because individual teammates do not all experience passport privilege or white privilege, these accompaniers have had to interrogate how privilege gets used—or not—in their work.

From my fieldwork findings, I develop a constructive ethic of solidarity, highlighting two themes. First, the activists I interviewed display a stance I call "strategic realism," which, similar to Reinhold Niebuhr's Christian realism, blends idealism and pragmatism by sometimes drawing on the impure means of privilege in order to reduce immediate violence. However, these activists demonstrate greater accountability to partners and more nuanced power analysis than Niebuhr exhibited, leading them to more effectively contextualize and decenter the power of privilege within solidarity. Second, the activists consistently depict solidarity as a practice of mutuality and interdependence. This perspective does not elide genuine differences, but rather recognizes what accompaniers and accompanied partners can each distinctively contribute to nonviolent resistance and activism for social change.

The Paradox of Privilege: Responsible Solidarity for Faith-Based Activism

By

Sarah E. MacDonald

B.A., Calvin College, 1993
M.A., University of Iowa, 1996
M.Div., McCormick Theological Seminary, 2007

Advisor: Ellen Ott Marshall, Ph.D.

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the Graduate Division of Religion, Ethics and Society.
2018

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Composing these acknowledgments took an absurdly long time because whenever I sat down to try to write out my gratitude, I'd start to cry. To be on the cusp of graduation feels overwhelming; this has been a long time coming. Twenty-five years ago, I entered my first Ph.D. program—where I got as far as one dissertation chapter before dropping out, disillusioned and scarred by academic politics and failures. I left that program convinced I was not cut out to be a scholar.

The Graduate Division of Religion (GDR) at Emory University has allowed me to craft a new story. I had no idea it was possible to love Ph.D. studies this much! The joy I've felt in *this* program—and the fact that *this* dissertation is now complete—is a testimony to the wonderful teachers and mentors, colleagues and friends who have accompanied me throughout this journey.

First and most fundamentally, I am grateful to Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) and to CPT's partners, communities around the world who resiliently, nonviolently resist war, military occupation, and economic imperialism. This dissertation would never have been written without the prior years I spent working with and learning from CPT and grassroots communities in Colombia and Palestine. Particular thanks to Milena Rincón, a CPTer of extraordinary courage and vision, who inspired and supported me from my very first CPT delegation in 2005, through my dissertation fieldwork research. To Sylvia Morrison, CPT's Undoing Racism Coordinator: thank you for all you taught me about resisting oppressions, confronting white privilege, and being an ally. To Kryss Chupp, who trained me in nonviolent direct action: thank you for your consistent friendship and hospitality, and for calling forth a boldness I hadn't known was in me. To Laura Ciaghi, the most passionate, creative, and instinctive activist I know: thank you for your partnership in the field and beyond, for expanding my world, and blessing me on my way. And to the CPT-Colombia team members who welcomed me back in 2015: thank you for supporting my research with such energy, interest, openness, and for the generative interviews you granted me. Alix, Caldwell, Chris, Hannah, Jhon Henry, Milena, Pierre, Stewart, Tracy: your words are the heart and soul of this dissertation.

The other people who have most profoundly shaped this text—and more broadly, my whole scholarly trajectory—are my advisor, Ellen Ott Marshall, and committee members, Liz Bounds and Andrea White. To Andrea, who provided just the right combination of constructive critique and cheerleading: thank you for strengthening my work *and* my self-confidence. To Liz, whose vast knowledge and relational networks amaze me: thank you for your expert guidance through each stage of the Ph.D. program, and even more, for how you model an academic life committed to social justice. And to Ellen, mentor and friend: thank you for being exactly the advisor I needed. You always knew when to give direction and when to give space, when to prod my thinking further and when to urge me to stop revising already and just turn it in! Thank you for your thoughtful questions and excellent teaching, for introducing me to the field of conflict transformation, and most of all, for being a person of such integrity and kindness.

To Laney Graduate School, I am grateful for the many forms of support—both financial and programming—that permitted me to thrive as a Ph.D. student, develop professionally, and complete this dissertation. My studies at Emory have also been supported by fellowships from McCormick Theological Seminary, the Louisville Institute, and the Emory University Women's Club. In addition, I am grateful for the opportunities to work with the Emory Writing Program and the Center for Faculty Development and Excellence. To Joonna Trapp and Donna Troka, the most affirming mentors ever: thank you for helping me broaden and deepen my skills as an educator. I'm pretty sure you can take much credit for the job offer I received!

The Ethics and Society course of study and the GDR as a whole have nurtured me with wonderful teachers and colleagues, more than I can list here. But a few I must recognize by name. To Letitia Campbell, Nikki Young, and Joe Wiinikka-Lydon: thank you for sharing your "elder student" wisdom on everything from surviving exams to constructing an interview guide. To Meredith Coleman-Tobias and Jan Rippentrop, thank you for deep friendships that now stretch across the country. To Kristyn Sessions and Liz Whiting Pierce: thank you for being great classmates, then writing group companions, as we commiserated and celebrated together in turn. To Nicole Symmonds: thank you for shared ventures in rioting and flourishing. To Jojo Ledgister and Won Chul Shin: thank you for always making me feel like my work is amazing—and then inspiring me with your own projects, which fill me with hope. To Matthew Pierce and Andre Ledgister (along with Liz and Jojo): thank you for the good humor and fun-filled dinners. To Layla Karst: thank you for all kinds of practical and emotional support as I raced through this final, whirlwind year at Emory. My time in Atlanta has also been sustained by two spiritual homes: Atlanta Mennonite Fellowship, and Wellsprings Worship of the Deep Waters Center for Prayer and Exploration. Special thanks to pastors James Rissler and Kimberly Broerman and the good people of both these communities, who have all cheered me along the way to this Ph.D.

Finally, I am grateful to those I name as family. My parents, Steve and Anne MacDonald, planted in me a love of reading and writing and a deep value for teaching and learning. Carol Tyx, whom I met during orientation to my first Ph.D. program, has been my dearest friend all these years. Thank you, Carol, for loving me through each new chapter and giving me a home I could always travel back to. Nannette Banks, my sister in spirit, has prayed with me by phone several times a week since my first year at Emory. Thank you, Nannette, for bearing witness, practicing vulnerability, and praying me through every paper, exam, and dissertation stage. Cheryl Totty, my beloved partner, entered my life the year I took comprehensive exams. Somehow, that process didn't frighten her away, and three years later we were married. She is the one person in the world who is possibly even more jubilant than I over this Ph.D. completion. Thank you, Cheryl, for sharpening my thinking on myriad issues, for increasing the beauty and fun in my life, and for stepping boldly with me into brand new adventures together in the North.

DEDICATION

In memory of

Claire Evans, whose years of service with CPT
embodied responsible solidarity,

and

Ieshia Renee Currie, who walked with me
through the sunlight and shadows of Ph.D. studies.

Table of Contents

PART ONE: The Paradox of Privilege Within the Call to Solidarity

Chapter One:
Wrestling with the Paradox of Privilege 1

Chapter Two:
Solidarity and Privilege: Theological Conversations So Far 46

PART TWO: The Context of International Protective Accompaniment

Chapter Three:
Accompaniment Activism: Privilege in Action? 92

Chapter Four:
Christian Peacemaker Teams and
the Double-Edged Implications of Privilege 139

PART THREE: A Constructive Ethic of Responsible Solidarity

Chapter Five:
A Strategic Realist Approach to Privilege and Solidarity 164

Chapter Six:
Solidarity as Mutuality 210

Appendix: Interview Guide 253

Bibliography 257

Chapter One: Wrestling with the Paradox of Privilege

During the past several decades, voices in Christian theological circles have increasingly called people of faith to engage in solidarity as a way of loving neighbors and seeking justice for the poor. Solidarity is a prominent theme in Catholic social teaching, especially as globalization heightens the church's attention to human interdependence and an international common good.[1] Even more, solidarity is at the heart of Latin American liberation theology, which urges the church to seek justice and social change through enacting the biblical "prophetic option expressing preference for, and solidarity with, the poor."[2] Building on this liberationist concern for the vulnerable, feminist, womanist, and *mujerista* theologians and ethicists have developed accounts of solidarity that accent social critique, accountability and coalition-building, moral agency and empowerment, and active resistance to multiple systemic oppressions.[3] While these voices and texts differ in exactly what they believe solidarity to entail, they persistently

---

[1] For example, the website of the United States Conferences of Catholic Bishops lists "solidarity" as one of seven key themes of Catholic social teaching. The page dedicated to this theme of solidarity opens with: "We are one human family whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, wherever they may be. Loving our neighbor has global dimensions in a shrinking world." See "Solidarity," United States Conference of Catholic Bishops website, © 2018, http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/solidarity.cfm.

[2] This quoted phrase comes from the "Final Document" produced by the Latin American Catholic bishops' conference, CELAM, at their General Conference held in Puebla, Mexico, in 1979—one of the key moments in the development of Latin American liberation theology. Cited in Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology,* trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), 44.

[3] Examples include Beverly Wildung Harrison, "Theological Reflection in the Struggle for Liberation: A Feminist Perspective" in *Making the Connections: Essays in Feminist Social Ethics*, ed. Carol Robb (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 235-266; Sharon Welch, *Communities of Resistance and Solidarity: A Feminist Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985); M. Shawn Copeland, "Toward a Critical Christian Feminist Theology of Solidarity," in *Women and Theology*, ed. Mary Ann Hinsdale and Phyllis H. Kaminski (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 3-38; Ada María Isasi-Díaz, "Solidarity: Love of Neighbor in the Twenty-First Century," in *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 86-104; Mary Elizabeth Hobgood, *Dismantling Privilege: An Ethics of Accountability,* rev. ed. (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2009); and C. Melissa Snarr, *All You That Labor: Religion and Ethics in the Living Wage Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).

present solidarity as a Christian responsibility and as the essential gospel call to embody love and justice in the world.

Some recent texts in Christian social ethics are particularly concerned with what solidarity requires of those who, in an unequal and unjust world, experience systemic privileges and greater access to power and resources.[4] In *Constructing Solidarity for a Liberative Ethic*, Tammerie Day draws on antiracist principles and liberation theology to develop an ethic she hopes will help Christian communities, and white readers specifically, better work toward the relational accountability and the "concrete, material changes racial justice requires."[5] Rebecca Todd Peters similarly promotes ethics of solidarity within the disparities of a globalized economy. Peters' book urges "first-world Christians" to develop relationships of solidarity across lines of difference and to seek individual and structural transformation by "using their privilege for the common good."[6] For each of these authors, solidarity is both a guiding Christian value and a potential

[4] My use of the term "privilege" is grounded in an understanding of structural injustice as socially constructed systems which, on the basis of an aspect of identity or perceived identity (e.g. race, ethnicity, national origin or citizenship, social class, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, abilities, etc.), determine a "dominant" group of people, giving members of this group multiple benefits—power, access, resources—while those who are not part of the "dominant" group are oppressed, excluded, marginalized, exploited, denied access and resources. These benefits, or privileges, are also called "unearned advantages," as I will discuss further in a later section in this chapter. I acknowledge that this understanding of "privilege" is a limited use of the term, and it can be problematic if it implies that those who benefit from systemic oppressions have all the power and advantages, while denying the agency and gifts experienced by individuals and communities targeted by oppressions. As one example of a different use of the term "privilege," Kelly Brown Douglas writes of "epistemological privilege," or the "taken-for-granted wisdom" that Black women gain in their everyday struggle for life and liberation. See Douglas, "Twenty Years a Womanist," in *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*, ed. Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 145-57. The unique and essential knowledge of this "epistemological privilege" might be considered an "earned" advantage—which Douglas later contrasts with the "unjust privilege" granted to others solely on the basis of their being (for example) white, male and/or heterosexual. When I speak of "privilege" in this project, unless otherwise specified, I am using the term to refer to such "unjust privilege," or the unearned advantages that attach to a dominant social location, as described in the above definition.

[5] Tammerie Day, *Constructing Solidarity for a Liberative Ethic: Anti-Racism, Action, and Justice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 5.

[6] Rebecca Todd Peters, *Solidarity Ethics: Transformation in a Globalized World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 29.

means for social change. These white feminist ethicists are further alike in that each one attends to the significance of social location, including her own; each opens her text with some account of her own experience of relative privilege; and each explicitly (albeit not exclusively) addresses privileged readers.[7]

In many ways, my work is similar to and building upon texts such as these two. Like Day and Peters, I am a white woman residing in the United States, working in the field of Christian social ethics, and I share their feminist and liberationist values of justice and flourishing for all people. My scholarship, too, emerges from my own experiences and my particular social context—with heightened attention to the ways that I and others who share my race, class, and/or national citizenship are the beneficiaries of global and localized systems of privilege. I also concur with the perspective common to the thinkers I have cited so far: that solidarity is the essential gospel call, and this call makes distinctive demands on those of us who experience systemic privilege.

At the same time, I am trying to heed theologians and ethicists who have expressed wariness toward the rhetoric of solidarity and have named ways that attempts to be in solidarity across lines of difference may go awry. Emilie Townes writes, "Solidarity amidst our differences in the face of structural evil may seem to be an exercise in tempting the agony of the absurd."[8] She goes on to warn how a romanticized vision of solidarity, more focused on unity than on justice, can be "dangerous and life-

[7] Especially because there exist varying forms of oppression and privilege, few people are solely privileged or solely oppressed in their lives and identities. Day uses herself as an example of this, as she discusses how the "marginalizing characteristics" of her female and lesbian identity intersect with her experiences of privilege as a "white, middle-class, well-educated Protestant Christian living in the United States." Day, *Constructing Solidarity*, 6. When I (or the texts I cite) speak to or about "privileged" persons, including myself, I am not assuming that such persons are privileged in all areas of our lives. Rather, I am addressing those areas in which we do experience privilege, in order to examine what impact such privilege has on our responsibility and efforts to be in solidarity with others who do not experience the same privileges.
[8] Emilie M. Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 139.

defeating"—serving rather than challenging an unequal status quo, and ultimately benefitting only those with "the power and leisure to enforce and ignore differences."[9] Townes does not reject solidarity altogether; she acknowledges that dismantling structural injustice requires us to work in coalitions. Yet she resists over-easy, naïve, and damaging attempts at solidarity. Solidarity should not be *assumed* in struggles for justice, she insists, but must be carefully nurtured through hard work, respectful listening, and self-reflective power analysis.

In my project, I join other Christian advocates of solidarity—but cautiously, with the goal of developing a more robust and nuanced ethic of solidarity or, as Townes puts it, "tough solidarity."[10] The aim of this dissertation is to wrestle with the moral implications of systemic privilege in the context of solidarity activism. What does it actually mean to try to "use" one's privilege for good, as Peters suggests? Is this an ethically viable and effective strategy for social change? Or do such attempts to use privilege on behalf of those with less privilege end up instead reinforcing the differential treatment and unjust systems that solidarity activists intend to confront and transform?

These questions illuminate what I identify as the moral paradox of privilege. In this paradox, the unearned advantages of systemic privilege simultaneously enable *and* constrain efforts in the cause of solidarity. On the one hand, awareness of (and often discomfort with) our own privilege may—for reasons good or ill—prod us into taking action for justice. Furthermore, such privilege may give us access to resources and influence that could advance work for justice. Yet on the other hand, the presence of

[9] Townes, 149. All of chapter 7, "Growing like Topsy: Solidarity in the Work of Dismantling Evil," elucidates Townes's concerns about some forms of solidarity, alongside her commitment to a solidarity that values diversity and pursues justice. See especially pp. 150-158.
[10] Townes, 150.

privilege—and the conscious and unconscious ways we draw on it—complicates, perhaps limits, our capacity to relate authentically across lines of difference and to participate constructively in transforming the social order.

This paradox of privilege is writ especially large in the field of international protective accompaniment, a form of third-party nonviolent intervention.[11] In international protective accompaniment, unarmed outsiders (often designated as "internationals"[12]) enter a war zone to be physically present with civilian communities and to support the work of local activists who are endangered by the violence. The theory behind accompaniment is that the armed actors posing the threats will be more hesitant to commit violent acts against or in the presence of these "international" escorts, because of the higher political cost of offending powerful Western nations or harming their citizens.[13] The tactic of nonviolent accompaniment thus appears to use the privileged status of the accompaniers to prevent or diminish violence and human rights abuses and to heighten the safety of those being accompanied. Such use of privilege gets explicitly

---

[11] Accompaniment activism often crosses national borders, as activists travel outside their home countries to intervene in violent conflicts occurring elsewhere in the world. Although accompaniment can and sometimes does get performed domestically, even in these instances, accompaniment is occurring within and often drawing upon the power dynamics of global politics. This is why my project focuses on *international* protective accompaniment.

[12] As just noted, those doing the accompaniment typically come from countries other than that in which the conflict is occurring. In some accompaniment organizations, this is a prerequisite for participation. There are notable exceptions to this, such as the Christian Peacemaker Team (CPT) in Colombia. Since the early years of CPT's presence in Colombia, Colombian nationals have worked alongside North Americans as part of the team. Even here, however, CPT's local partners and neighbors routinely refer to the team members as "internationals" or "foreigners," regardless of the individual accompanier's national identity. This situation highlights—and prompts questions about—how accompaniment draws on particular forms of global status and privilege.

[13] While not all individual accompaniers come from Western nations, the majority do. Furthermore, most (if not all) accompaniment organizations have been founded in and/or are headquartered in Western nations, especially in Europe and North America. In her study of transnational solidarity activism, including accompaniment, Gada Mahrouse notes that the word "international" in this context is in fact code for "Western" and/or "white," and she further attends to how these two categories of citizenship and race are deeply entangled due to the history of Western colonization and global white supremacy. See Mahrouse, *Conflicted Commitments: Race, Privilege, and Power in Transnational Solidarity Activism* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014).

acknowledged in analyses of how accompaniment "works."[14] Yet at the same time, many who practice or study accompaniment are troubled by this tactic, which seems to rest on legacies of colonization and a global racism that blatantly values some lives (and nations) more than others. Even while accompaniment physically and politically brings together persons from very different social locations, it also underlines—and some would say, reproduces—those differences and the varying levels of privilege that accrue to them.

In his study of international accompaniment, Patrick Coy names this conflicted dynamic "the privilege problematic." As a revealing example, Coy tells the story of George, an experienced peace activist who was giving a presentation about his work in conflict zones. When an audience member asked what protected George from harm in the midst of so much violence, George held up his hand, pointed to the bare skin of his forearm, and said, "My white skin." Coy captures the discomforting tension in this exchange when he writes that many activists working in the same accompaniment organization "would have cringed at the crass and public explanation offered by George, even while they would have also had a difficult time denying the truth of his statement."[15] As Coy goes on to detail, accompaniment activists confronting the privilege problematic display a range of responses, from "strategic accommodation and rationalization" to rejecting accompaniment altogether as an inherently flawed tactic. Coy himself is clearly troubled by the privilege problematic, yet he also concludes that this festering problem cannot be easily or straightforwardly resolved "insofar as one can never operate

---

[14] See, for example, Mahrouse, *Conflicted Commitments*; Sara Koopman, "Making Space for Peace: International Protective Accompaniment in Colombia (2007-2009)" (PhD diss., University of British Colombia, 2012); and Liam Mahony and Luis Enrique Eguren, *Unarmed Bodyguards: International Accompaniment for the Protection of Human Rights* (West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press, 1997).

[15] Patrick G. Coy, "The Privilege Problematic in International Nonviolent Accompaniment's Early Decades," *Journal of Religion, Conflict, and Peace* 4, no. 2 (Spring 2011), http://www.religionconflictpeace.org/volume-4-issue-2-spring-2011/privilege-problematic-international-nonviolent-accompaniment's-early.

completely outside the prevailing dynamics of race and privilege that still permeate the social and political systems within which accompaniment is applied."[16]

Coy's article is only one example of the growing attention paid to systemic privilege within the field of international protective accompaniment—attention that, on the one hand, acknowledges how privilege is present and used within accompaniment, and on the other hand, critiques such use of privilege as ethically problematic and strategically limited. Because accompaniment thus highlights the double-edged nature of privilege and this uneasy tension between privilege and solidarity, it offers a provocative context in which to examine the paradox of privilege. That is one reason I have chosen to use international accompaniment as the concrete context for my study and work toward a constructive Christian ethic of solidarity.

But the more profound reason is that international accompaniment is *my* context: this is the field in which I was employed when I first began to notice and wrestle with the paradox of privilege. Since I believe all ethics to be necessarily contextual, I find it important as an ethicist to acknowledge the place where I am standing as I begin my work. This is important, first, because any social analysis or normative claims I make—and prior to that, even the questions I think to ask—will be shaped by my social location, experiences, and context. I join other liberationist scholars in affirming a methodology that is self-reflexive and transparent about one's own particularity,[17] as well as

---

[16] Coy.

[17] I have found womanists and Black feminists especially helpful in exploring how particular social locations and contexts shape our ways of knowing—and consequently, of performing scholarship. Townes, for example, practices a methodology in which she takes seriously her particularity, "not as a form of essentialism, but as epistemology." She presents this focus on particularity as a doorway into "more expansive awareness and vision" (*Womanist Ethics*, 2-3). This use of particularity as a resource for expansion also reflects on the sometimes-vexed question in Christian ethics of the relationship between particular and universal moral concerns. In my thinking on this topic, I have been most influenced by Traci West, whose work I will say more about in the final section of this chapter, when I discuss methodology

accountable to the communities one works within and for. Second, it is not only my discipline of Christian social ethics that asks of me such self-awareness and accountability, but also my topic of—and commitment to—justice-seeking solidarity. If I wish to contribute responsibly to constructing an ethic of solidarity, then I must recognize where I am coming from and consider how my identity and life experiences inform the ways I engage in this work.

Now that I have sketched out the paradox of privilege within the call to solidarity, the remainder of this chapter lays the groundwork for the rest of the dissertation. In the first section, I narrate my journey of coming to see the paradox of privilege. This section serves both to further elaborate the paradox of privilege and to demonstrate how my project emerges from my own context and prior activism. The second section focuses on privilege theory, overviewing how the concept of privilege gets discussed and applied in relation to social inequalities. In particular, I highlight how the question at the heart of this project—whether or not it is ethically viable or even possible to "use" privilege for good—is a concern in many contexts of anti-oppression solidarity activism. Finally, the third section summarizes the goals, methodology, and chapter outline of this dissertation.

I. My own journey: Coming to see the paradox of privilege

In 2005, I started working with Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT), a faith-based organization that offers international accompaniment and nonviolent activism in war zones or other places of lethal conflict. While some of my motivation for joining CPT

---

with greater detail. For more on West's ideas about the relationship between the particular and the universal, as well as between contexts and moral claims, see West, *Disruptive Christian Ethics: When Racism and Women's Lives Matter* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), especially chapters 1 and 2.

stemmed from my commitment to Christian pacifism,[18] I was also prompted by my desire to engage more actively in antiracism efforts and work for social justice. As I increasingly saw connections between war, racism, and global white hegemony, becoming a member of CPT (colloquially called a "CPTer") seemed a logical next step in my own gradually unfolding journey into full-time activism.

Race was not something I had thought about much while growing up in a devoutly conservative, almost entirely white and middle-class community in the United States. But the topic exploded into my consciousness in 1992, when the acquittal of the white police officers who had beaten Rodney King sparked several days of rioting in Los Angeles and caught public attention across the nation. Although my small Midwestern college seemed far away from East LA, the news got us talking, too, and some students of color spoke out about the racism they had experienced on campus.

One evening, a campus ministry sponsored a film about racism. I remember relatively little of the film's content. What I do remember is how convicted I felt watching it. For the first time, I started to think about racism as a current social problem—and more pointedly, as *my* problem. The film named common, painful ways people of color get stereotyped, and I realized I held those stereotypes, too; they were shaping how I perceived and interacted with my classmates of color. I thought of the one Black student in my Shakespeare course, and I had to acknowledge I had been internally dismissing her remarks in class, not because of the content of her comments, but simply because she looked and expressed herself differently than I was accustomed to. *That's a*

---

[18] As I will detail further in chapter 4, CPT began as a ministry of historic peace churches in North America, specifically Mennonites, Church of the Brethren, and Quakers. CPT was originally envisioned as a "nonviolent alternative to war," and its founding was inspired by a challenge to these pacifist churches to live out their pacifism more actively and radically.

racist attitude, I conceded, jarred at what I was discovering in myself, *and before tonight, I didn't even see what I was doing*. The evening's discussion held up a mirror for me, pricking my conscience as I began to recognize my own ignorance and prejudices and to see how I was complicit in a system I had not been aware of.

From this tiny first step, I began studying and learning about the systemic nature, the historical roots, and the ongoing inequitable power relations of racism. Though I had initially perceived racism simply as personal prejudice and hateful acts, as I came to see the structural nature of racism—how it is embedded in and constituted by social, legal, and economic institutions—I began to realize how this systemic injustice not only targets and harms people of color, but also systematically advantages those of us who are white. As Allan Johnson notes, inequality always has two sides: "those who receive less than their fair share *and* those who receive more…. [T]here can't be a short end of the stick without a long end, because it's the longness of the long end that makes the short end short."[19] The more I learned, the more urgently I asked how racism implicates those of us who are white. What is our responsibility in the midst of this structural injustice?

In *Whiteness and Morality*, Jennifer Harvey describes what she calls the "acute moral crisis" of being white.[20] She details how historical and current ideological and material processes have produced racialized selves within a matrix of white supremacy. Such a system grants power, recognition, access, and resources to those of us identified as white,[21] while others are systematically denied these advantages, exploited, and/or

---

[19] Allan G. Johnson, *Privilege, Power, and Difference*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2006), 120.
[20] Jennifer Harvey, *Whiteness and Morality: Pursuing Racial Justice through Reparations and Sovereignty* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).
[21] Harvey reflects the prevalent theoretical perspective that race is socially constructed, rather than biologically or genetically given. She does recognize that physical characteristics, especially skin "color," constitute the typical markers by which racial identity gets "read"—yet she is careful to stress that such characteristics are not innately significant but only become so when given social, political and legal

excluded. If we presume—as does Harvey, as do I—that justice is morally normative and desirable, then perceiving the injustice of such systemic oppressions and privileges should prod us into active resistance and work for change. Yet as Harvey points out, engaging in social activism from the position of a dominant identity is complicated and morally fraught. She asks, "What should it mean for my modes of resistance and the means by which I stand in solidarity with those targeted when I am daily insulated by and unjustly benefit from those very systems I seek to disrupt?"[22] When we recognize the unearned advantages that both cushion our lives and burden our consciences, what should we do? Whether or not we approve (or are even aware), such privileges typically shape our experiences and interactions, and we cannot facilely lay them down or reject them. How, then, do we live with such privilege?

For some, the most ethically responsible answer seems to be to try to use our privilege for good, for the sake of those targeted by the structural oppressions that advantage us. This was what I sought to do when I first chose to work with CPT. Like many others in the organization, I hoped that my visibly white, Western-passport-carrying presence in the war zones of developing nations could garner political and media attention not given to the local inhabitants enduring those wars. If we CPTers could use our privileged status to help protect these endangered civilians and, even more, to support and publicize their resistance and liberation movements, I wondered, might this redeem us from the moral crisis in which our privilege entangled us?

---

meaning. Thus, when Harvey speaks of whiteness or of being white, she is speaking less of particular physical attributes and more of "a socially recognizable and politically significant racial identity (that does have to do with the materiality of our bodies) that emerges and is made real through the interactions of meanings, processes, agencies, and relations" (35). At the same time, Harvey warns that seeing race as socially constructed should not lead us to diminish the reality—the physically, materially, and socially lived experiences—of racial identities and racialized power relations. See *Whiteness and Morality*, chapter 1, especially pp. 19-21, 25-32.

[22] Harvey, 8.

Yet before I had even finished the month-long CPT training, I was asking different questions. I had joined an ongoing conversation within CPT that vigorously challenges these assumptions and this way of articulating our work. If our activism relies on passport privilege and the racial privilege of being identified or perceived as white, then are we in fact reinforcing the racism and other systemic oppressions that undergird and are manifested in the very violence we want to disrupt?

Within CPT, this conversation took on a particular resonance in light of the organization's own "undoing racism" work and efforts to build more internationally and racially diverse teams. Although the majority of CPTers have been white and from the US or Canada, there are some members of color, as well as some members from the Global Majority. The CPT project in Colombia, for example, has included Colombian nationals as part of the team since the project's early years. How can the organization embrace and engage these CPTers—and seek to recruit more like them—if we rely on the color of our skin or our passports to make our activism effective? As I quoted above, Jennifer Harvey names the moral tensions of trying to be in solidarity from a position of privilege. In the context of international accompaniment, the question becomes even more pointed. Not only do those of us who are white and/or Western "unjustly benefit from those very systems [we] seek to disrupt," but the benefits themselves may appear to be the power we draw on to fuel our disruptive activism.

As I spent more time in the field with CPT, the way I explained our work began to shift.[23] I no longer spoke of trying to "use" my privilege to get in the way of violence.

[23] I was certainly not the only CPTer to rethink accompaniment and start explaining our work differently. There were organizational changes beginning to occur already when I entered CPT, and these changes grew more pronounced during my time with CPT. Most visibly, CPT engaged in a Mission and Presentation Re-visioning process that resulted in the organization's new mission, vision, and values statements, as well as a

Instead, I described CPT work as a form of solidarity, forging and strengthening networks between the communities we accompany in war zones and a larger international constituency concerned with justice and human rights. As CPTers, our physical presence in places of conflict, our eyewitness accounts, our photos, videos, reports and media releases all serve to help make these connections. So these, along with other nonviolent tactics, might more aptly be seen as the tools of our work.

Yet this rhetorical shift, while not insignificant, could not fully change the way I and other globally privileged CPTers engaged in the work.[24] Even as we tried to reframe our understanding of international accompaniment, insisting that privilege should *not* be the central power we rely on to achieve our goals, this did not eliminate the presence of systemic privilege in the lives of activists coming from Western nations (activists who are often, though not always, white). Nor could it erase the very real impact such privilege has on power dynamics in the field.

As a concrete example, in 2004 two CPTers working in the southern West Bank of Palestine were badly beaten by extremist Israeli settlers while the CPTers accompanied Palestinian children on their way to school. The attack, serious enough to require hospitalization and lengthy recovery periods, received significant media attention. A few weeks later, two more internationals were attacked in the same area, again while

---

new visual logo. In chapter 4, I will discuss with more detail CPT's journey in making such shifts in organizational identity and presentation.

[24] I do not want to dismiss the rhetorical changes within CPT as insignificant, since they have been part of a larger movement to deepen the organization's antiracist identity and have led to and/or complemented efforts to change practices of recruitment and hiring, trainings, media strategies, and ways of interacting with accompanied partners in the field. Perceptions, attitudes, and speech are part of systemic racism, and addressing and changing those can be important steps in the process of dismantling racism. That said, we must also be wary of the temptation to see these steps as the end goal or sufficient in themselves. Changing how we think and talk about the work *may* help us change how we do the work—but not if we remain content with mere rhetorical shifts without letting those shifts prod us into changing actions, institutional practices and policies, and material realities. As I suggest here (and throughout the dissertation, especially in chapter 4), I would say CPT is in the midst of the journey to make such actual changes, has made some important shifts, and has more antiracism and anti-oppression work yet to do.

accompanying Palestinian schoolchildren. These two attacks were hardly unusual settler activity in the South Hebron hills. Palestinian residents there had for years endured vandalism and physical violence from their settler neighbors, and the schoolchildren themselves had been threatened, chased, and stoned. But these two incidents involving foreigners ignited a different level of attention and led to the Israeli government ordering a military escort to accompany the children on their route to school, an order still in effect as of this writing, more than a decade later.[25]

Granted, the military escort is a "Band-Aid solution" that does not address the underlying systemic injustice of the occupation or the presence of illegal settlements and violent extremist settlers in this area of the West Bank. Still, this escort has made a palpable difference in the daily lives of Palestinians, and more children have been able to attend school with greater regularity. Even as Palestinians in the area continue their nonviolent resistance to the occupation, they (especially the parents of the escorted children) have expressed appreciation for the immediate benefits of the military escort, which they want to see continue as long as it is needed. This story thus offers one example of how the presence of privileged foreigners can have an evident impact on the power dynamics of a conflict situation and may be the catalyst provoking certain positive, albeit limited and insufficient, changes.

---

[25] For a detailed discussion of this military escort (including the history of its start, data about its outcomes and limitations, and contextualization placing this story into the larger framework of Palestinian occupation and dispossession in the region), see Christian Peacemaker Teams and Operation Dove, *The Dangerous Road to Education*, December 2010, https://cpt.org//files/palestine/shh-report_school_patrol_2009-10-the_dangerous_road_to_education.pdf. For a more recent news report about the military escort, see Anne-Marie O'Connor, "In West Bank, Israeli Troops Still Escort Palestinian Children to School," *The Washington Post*, November 1, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/in-the-west-bank-israeli-troops-still-escort-palestinian-children-to-school/2014/11/01/68d513ca-5b89-11e4-b812-38518ae74c67_story.html?utm_term=.4cf5ae332d22.

Therefore, the presence of systemic privilege in solidarity activism is not simply—or only—a problem to be resolved; it is a more complex moral paradox. The unearned advantages of privilege do enable certain actions in the cause of solidarity, and this power may accomplish what appear to be some positive and life-giving ends. Privilege used on others' behalf may offer leverage, enlarging the space for marginalized people to speak and act, to pursue their daily lives and their own activism with greater safety and impact. Yet at the same time, if we rely on the power of privilege to create change, then we reinforce exclusions and hierarchies. We will limit participation in activist organizations and movements to only those participants with certain forms of systemic privilege—whether these boundaries are held in place through explicit recruitment practices or (more commonly) implicit expectations expressed through the ways we talk about and do the work. Furthermore, we may distort partner relationships with those whose liberation struggles we intend to support. It is all too easy for the privileged outsiders to be seen (and to see ourselves) as protectors and heroes, as the leaders and agents of change. This in turn devalues and may undermine the agency, empowerment and leadership of local communities.[26] Finally, even if we try to avoid drawing on privilege as a tool for our work, the presence of unearned systemic advantage persists in our lives and in our world, unjustly benefitting us and—because systemic privileges and oppressions work in tandem[27]—injuring the very people and communities with whom we want to be in solidarity.

---

[26] Ivan Boothe and Lee A. Smithey express this concern in their article "Privilege, Empowerment, and Nonviolent Intervention," *Peace & Change* 32, no. 1 (Jan 2007): 39-61. In *Privilege, Power, and Difference,* Allan Johnson makes a similar point when he warns about the dangers of working toward change in ways that reinforce an "us"/"them" divide, while also enhancing the status of the "givers." He writes, "The act of helping—of being able to help—can reaffirm the social distance between the two groups and heighten everyone's awareness of it" (72).

[27] In the next section I will further discuss how oppression and privilege are not separate realities but

This, then, is the tension inherent in trying to be in solidarity from a position of privilege. The larger goal of our activism must be to ultimately dismantle such unjust systems of privilege and oppression. But meanwhile, as long as these systems exist, we who experience privilege must wrestle with the question: how can we best exercise a responsible solidarity, neither ignoring the reality and moral demands of systemic privilege, nor relying upon this privilege as the primary power and tool for our work?

II. Privilege theory: Making privilege visible—and then what do we do?

Because systemic privilege is such a central concept to my project, in this section I will further define and clarify the term "privilege." Although my overview is hardly comprehensive, I do find it important to note how the concept of privilege has developed and how it gets applied—as well as critiqued—in academic and popular discourses about social inequality.[28] In particular, I highlight here a persistent question in discussions of privilege: once we have become aware of the morally troubling reality of systemic privilege, what should we do?

In my reading about systemic privilege, I have been struck by how often the suggestion appears that we should "use" our privilege in order to provoke social change.

---

mutually reinforcing systemic conditions. On this point, recall how Allan Johnson describes structural inequality as two ends of a stick: that the longness of the long end is what makes the shorter end so short. See p. 10 (note 19) above.

[28] The concept of privilege—and white privilege, in particular—is increasingly present in mainstream public discourse, and it gets actively debated (online especially) between those who find it a useful concept for activism and education and those who question the reality of privilege and its fruitfulness as a concept. An example of the former is the annual White Privilege Conference (WPC), which began in 1999 to raise awareness and to offer opportunities for activist training and networking. An example of the latter is an opinion piece by Tal Fortgang, "Checking My Privilege: Character as the Basis of Privilege"; Fortgang's piece appeared in *The Princeton Tory* in 2014 and quickly went viral. For a discussion of how "white privilege" has entered mainstream discourse, see Cory Weinberg, "The White Privilege Moment," *Inside Higher Ed*, May 28, 2014, https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/05/28/academics-who-study-white-privilege-experience-attention-and-criticism.

In the field of international accompaniment, there is considerable critical attention and lively debate about this notion of using privilege for good. As my brief overview here reveals, the idea of using privilege is hardly limited to that particular form of nonviolent solidarity activism, but is promoted by many anti-oppression activists and educators.

a. Privilege and oppression: Two sides of the same system

Privilege is sometimes glossed as the "other side" of oppression.[29] While oppression systemically exploits, impoverishes, and harms certain groups of people, privileges are the social benefits systemically conferred upon other, "dominant" groups of people. Further, we must recognize that these are not simply two simultaneously occurring realities but rather are interdependent and mutually reinforcing—as Allan Johnson illustrates when he depicts the "short end" of oppression and the "long end" of privilege in the "stick" of inequality. Cynthia Levine-Rasky makes this point when she describes racism as a system that both marginalizes racialized persons and is also "coextensive with economic, political, psychological, and social advantages for whites at the expense of racialized groups."[30]

This expense may be easiest to see when the privileges are finite economic and material goods, such as wealth or property, access to housing, education, employment, loans, or other financial resources. In these cases, if the privileged members of society receive a greater share of such finite goods, this obviously leads to a smaller share being

[29] Peggy McIntosh, for example, explains privilege in this way when she writes that "privilege is a corollary of discrimination; it is the 'upside' of oppression; it is unearned advantage that corresponds to unearned disadvantage in society." McIntosh, "Teaching about Privilege: Transforming Learned Ignorance into Usable Knowledge," in *Deconstructing Privilege: Teaching and Learning as Allies in the Classroom*, ed. Kim A. Case (New York: Routledge, 2013), xi.
[30] Cynthia Levine-Rasky, ed., *Working through Whiteness: International Perspectives* (New York: State University of New York, 2002), 10.

available to the marginalized.[31] But the correlation between benefits for some people at the expense of others also appears when we examine other (perhaps less obviously finite) forms of advantage and disadvantage. For example, privileges may be political or legal benefits, such as the right to vote or fair treatment under the law. If voting access is limited to only certain residents of an area, then that concentrates political power in the hands of those residents able to vote. Likewise, if authorities focus more heavily on policing and convicting only some members of society, then other members experience less scrutiny and consequently greater freedom in their daily lives. Privileges may also take the form of psychological and emotional goods, such as social recognition and a sense of self-worth—feeling "normal," included, valued, respected within society. Here again, the marking of some persons as "normal" or "valuable" rests upon marking others as "abnormal" or of lesser worth.

The language of "privilege" not only describes unequal distribution of goods, but also indicates inequitable access to power. Frances Kendall defines systemic privilege as "the institutional power of individuals to construct systems based on their needs and values."[32] Even more bluntly, Bob Pease explains privilege as benefits that are "derived from the continued subordination of others."[33] Besides pointing toward an unjust hierarchy, these characterizations of systemic privilege highlight how it is a self-

---

[31] I acknowledge that this analysis presumes an underlying "zero-sum game," or an economy of scarcity and of competition for limited resources—presumptions often at play in a capitalist free-market economic paradigm. Such a paradigm certainly merits critique. For a lucid theological critique and a creative proposal for an alternative model—a theology of grace, noncompetitive relationship, and unconditional giving—see Kathryn Tanner, *Economy of Grace* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005). That said, I do think it can be revealing to map concretely how the unearned advantages and disadvantages of systemic privileges and oppressions relate to and reinforce each other in our current social and economic order.

[32] Frances Kendall, *Understanding White Privilege: Creating Pathways to Authentic Relationships Across Race* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 59.

[33] Bob Pease, *Undoing Privilege: Unearned Advantage in a Divided World* (London: Zed Books, 2010), 11.

perpetuating system that will keep the advantaged, or privileged, persons at the center of power—unless deliberate effort is made to dismantle the system.

Some critics of privilege theory argue that "privilege" is an inaccurate term for many of these advantages, which should more aptly be described as "human rights" due to everyone.[34] I appreciate the careful linguistic distinctions underlying this argument, and I agree that it is important to recognize genuine differences between human rights, which are life necessities, and privileges, which by definition are not needed by everyone. Nonetheless, I still find "privilege" a useful term for talking about the unearned benefits granted systemically to those perceived to belong to a "dominant group." I choose to use this term because of the traction it has gained within anti-oppression education. Like other proponents of privilege theory, I agree that these benefits *should* be enjoyed by all. However, the language of "privilege" functions to highlight how, in actuality, only certain people receive these social goods, access, and forms of fair treatment.[35]

Privilege is often described as *unearned* advantage because it does not accrue necessarily from an individual's merit, work, or achievement. Rather, aspects of identity (actual or perceived) become the basis for determining whether an individual will be granted or denied these advantages.[36] Various aspects of identity may serve as the basis for systemic privileges and oppressions; the most theorized ones include: race, ethnicity,

---

[34] See, for example, Lewis R. Gordon, "Critical Reflections on Three Popular Tropes in the Study of Whiteness," in *What White Looks Like: African-American Philosophers on the Whiteness Question*, ed. George Yancy (New York: Routledge, 2004), 173-193.

[35] As one example of a writer making this argument in popular media, see Sian Ferguson, "Privilege 101: A Quick and Dirty Guide," *Everyday Feminism*, September 29, 2014, http://everydayfeminism.com/2014/09/what-is-privilege/. Ferguson's fourth (numbered) point in her blog is: "Privilege describes what everyone should experience." Joseph Barndt makes the same point with a little more detail in *Understanding & Dismantling Racism: The Twenty-first Century Challenge to White America* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 97-98.

[36] This does not mean that a privileged person has not worked hard or does not deserve the benefit(s) she is experiencing. (See my related point in the preceding paragraph and notes.) But naming privilege as "unearned" foregrounds how privilege is attached to "dominant" identities and group membership, and it makes visible the foundations of many large-scale social inequalities.

religion, national origin, social class, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, and physical ability.

Notably, these differing categories of identity give rise to multiple forms of privilege and oppression, which are related to each other in interlocking and mutually constitutive ways. This paradigm of intersecting oppressions was developed first within Black feminist theory, where scholars argued that race or gender alone fails to account for the social subordination experienced by women of color, and so a fuller analysis requires attending to the entangled influences of race, class, and gender.[37] In her seminal 1989 essay, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced the concept of intersectionality in order to critically illuminate how Black women have been marginalized in antidiscrimination law, as well as in feminist and antiracist theory and politics, when these fields focus only on a single basis of discrimination, race *or* sex.[38] Since then, the framework of intersectionality has been further developed by scholars and activists to address a range of social identities, power relations, and institutional structures.[39] One theorist whose writings have been especially influential in drawing attention to intersectionality is Patricia Hill Collins, who

---

[37] Note that the field began with a focus on the US context and on a racialized Black-white binary, but it has produced analysis more broadly applicable to women of color in the US and elsewhere. The paradigm of intersectionality has been taken up by feminist thinkers of many races and national origins and has been extended to analyze multiple aspects of social identity.

[38] Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *The University of Chicago Legal Forum* 140 (1989): 139-167. Crenshaw further elaborates the framework of intersectionality in an essay she published two years later, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (July 1991): 1241.

[39] For a recent overview of how the theory of intersectionality has developed across time, place, and disciplines, see a special issue of *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 10.2 (Fall 2013), entitled *Intersectionality: Challenging Theory, Reframing Politics, and Transforming Movements*, with guest editors Devon W. Carbado, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, Vickie M. Mays, and Barbara Tomlinson.

coined the phrase "matrix of domination" to depict how several "axes" of oppression intersect and work together to create injustice.[40]

While Collins' work has focused largely on how African-Americans, especially Black women, confront and resist these intersecting axes of oppression, her analysis also shines an important light on interlocking systemic privileges—which are, after all, an integral part of the matrix of domination. As Pease points out, the "matrix of domination" describes how people experience and resist oppression on personal, cultural and structural levels; similarly, he adds, the "matrix approach can also be used to help understand how people reproduce or challenge privilege on these three levels."[41] Varying forms of systemic privilege reinforce each other and anchor the matrix of domination in at least two different ways. Most obviously, privileges may supplement each other, and access to one form of privilege may increase access to another. At other times, one form of privilege may function as a kind of "compensation"—what W. E. B. DuBois describes as a "psychological wage"[42]—masking or distracting from a differing form of disadvantage, and thus discouraging groups that experience different though interlocking forms of oppression from uniting in resistance to the entire matrix of domination.

In the study of systemic privilege, intersectionality is an important concept also because it helps us to see a person's identity as complex and multiple—cutting against

---

[40] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 18.
[41] Pease, *Undoing Privilege*, 21. In chapter 3 of *Privilege, Power, and Difference,* Johnson likewise builds explicitly on Collins' "matrix of domination" to consider how capitalism and social class intersect with white privilege and racist oppression.
[42] W. E. B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880* (1935; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 573. DuBois uses this metaphor to describe how the perceived superiority of whiteness was used during the Reconstruction era to "compensate" poor white laborers for their low pay. I will return to DuBois's argument in the following subsection.

the temptation to simply dichotomize people as either "oppressed" or "privileged."[43] As I have noted already, many people simultaneously experience some forms of oppression and other forms of privilege, making their life experiences more complicated and dynamic than simplified dichotomies can account for.[44] It might seem that, within this messy mix, privileges and oppressions would pull against each other in mitigating ways (i.e. making the privilege less beneficial or the oppression less severe), and the natural inclination would be to grasp more tightly one's own particular privileges, rather than working to dismantle the whole system. At times, this surely occurs. Yet as Collins and other activist-minded thinkers demonstrate, attention to intersectionality (or to shifting assemblages)—including to the intersections and encounters between privileges and oppressions—can assist us in building coalitions to more effectively fight injustice.[45]

---

[43] Queer theorist Jasbir Puar has incisively analyzed limitations of intersectionality, pointing out that this paradigm (with its primary metaphor of intersecting axes) may tend to compartmentalize aspects of social identity and/or portray them as more fixed ontological categories. To supplement and complicate this paradigm, Puar proposes a "theory of assemblage," which portrays social identities as fluid configurations assembled (and continuously re-assembled) through discursive practices, material conditions, performative actions, encounters, and shifting relations. See Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); and Puar, "'I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess': Intersectionality, Assemblage, and Affective Politics," *inventions* (08 2011), transversal texts of the eipcp – European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies, http://eipcp.net/transversal/0811/puar/en. Keri Day offers a succinct summary of Puar's theory, pointing out how "assemblage" provides a different angle of vision for analysis, focused more on bodies and emotions. See Day, *Religious Resistance to Neoliberalism: Womanist and Black Feminist Perspectives* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 123-126. For Day, a key question that illuminates the frictions and supplemental relationship between the two theories is: "How is the work of intersectionality (and its focus on identitarian politics to remedy structural injury) *practically* different from assemblage theory (and its focus on affective political work such as love and future movements of care)?" (125).

[44] Pease emphasizes this point as he develops his "intersectional theory of privilege." He warns that ignoring such complexities may incline us toward excusing "abusive practices" among oppressed people, if we see their lives as conditioned solely or principally by domination. Conversely, he argues, intersectional analysis more fully addresses this complexity and may help the oppressed to see and resist exploitation or domination happening in their own communities. See Pease, *Undoing Privilege*, chapter 2, especially p. 22.

[45] This theme appears already in Collins' *Black Feminist Thought* but is developed even more overtly in her more recent *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* (New York: Routledge, 2004), in which she argues that developing effective antiracist politics will require also attending to and resisting sexism and heterosexism, rather than seeing these latter forms of oppression as more limited struggles that only affect some people of color. A similar argument about the importance of building coalitions across difference appears in Anne Bishop, *Becoming an Ally: Breaking the Cycle of Oppression in People*, 2nd ed. (London: Zed Books, 2002).

This may be why intersectionality is becoming an increasingly important theme in the growing field of privilege studies.[46] That said, it is also noticeable that racism and white privilege continue to receive the greatest attention within the field. In this chapter and throughout my dissertation, I focus more on racial privilege and the dynamics of white superiority—including how these dynamics manifest globally and intersect with citizenship (or passport) privilege—because these systemic privileges are especially pertinent within the work of international accompaniment. I do want to note that other forms of privilege—such as those based on gender, sexuality, social class, education, or physical ability—are also present and influential in the work of accompaniment and certainly merit further study.[47] However, to maintain a manageable scope for my study, I focus particularly on white privilege. This is why, in the following two subsections, I primarily reference examples from the literature in critical whiteness studies.

b. Wages, knapsacks, bank accounts: Privilege imaged as assets

Although the academic study of systemic privilege is a relatively recent development, the concept of privilege, especially of white privilege, has a much longer history. In looking at that history, I have been intrigued to notice a pattern in how privilege gets perceived and discussed as assets. W. E. B. DuBois is credited with being the first to describe the dynamics of white privilege. DuBois's *Black Reconstruction in America*, originally published in 1935, depicts the perceived superiority of whiteness as "a sort of public and

---

[46] See, for example, Kim A. Case, ed., *Deconstructing Privilege: Teaching and Learning as Allies in the Classroom*, (New York: Routledge, 2013); as well as Pease, *Undoing Privilege,* and Allan G. Johnson's writings in print and online.
[47] In *Conflicted Commitments,* Mahrouse attends some to the impact of sexism and gender-based privilege in the context of accompaniment and solidarity activism. Mahrouse's work adds important layers to the study of how activism gets shaped by an activist's identity and by other people's reactions to that identity. Her book indicates directions for further research on intersectionality within solidarity and justice activism.

psychological wage" that compensated poor white laborers for their low pay—and thus kept them from uniting with Black laborers against the white propertied class—during the era of Reconstruction following the US Civil War. DuBois goes on to list such "wages" as including: public deference and titles of courtesy, admission to public parks and schools, over-representation within the police force, and more lenient treatment and greater impunity within the courts.[48] In *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, David Roediger builds on DuBois's analysis and memorable metaphor, and Roediger's book has become one of the seminal texts in contemporary whiteness studies.[49] Meanwhile, independent scholar and labor activist Theodore W. Allen began to write and publish about "white skin privilege," which he argues is an invention for the purpose of maintaining social and economic control.[50]

More widespread attention to the concept of privilege came with Peggy McIntosh's 1988 article, "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women's Studies." McIntosh believes her piece caught academic and activist notice because she was writing more personally and concretely about "this rather complicated subject" and allowing readers to gain understanding "without feeling *accused.*"[51] Whatever the reason, her writings have become some of the most influential and frequently cited discussions of privilege, and McIntosh continues to be a guiding voice in the field of privilege studies. Significantly, her seminal essay from 1988 develops from a paradigm of corresponding oppressions and privileges.

---

[48] DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America*, 573-574.
[49] David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991).
[50] Theodore W. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race* (New York: Verso, 1994).
[51] Cited in Joshua Rothman, "The Origins of 'Privilege,'" *The New Yorker,* May 12, 2014, http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/the-origins-of-privilege.

In this essay, McIntosh describes how she came to understand the dynamic of privilege—that is, that the "disadvantaged" status of some people has a flip side in the "over-privileged" status of others—while she herself was experiencing and resisting sexism as a systemic oppression. Through reflecting on male privilege, she realized there must be a parallel phenomenon of white privilege, "similarly denied and protected, but alive and real in its effects."[52] Her essay is an attempt to make visible such unearned advantages by listing everyday forms of privilege that she, as a white woman, experiences in her own socio-political location.

To depict the white privilege she experiences, McIntosh employs a distinctive metaphor, different from yet resonant with DuBois's "wages" of whiteness. McIntosh calls privilege an "invisible package of unearned assets... like an invisible, weightless knapsack of special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, codebooks, passports, visas, clothes, compass, emergency gear, and blank checks."[53] She is very clear that these unearned assets are given only to certain people, depending on which body and social location one is born into and how this body gets coded with identity and relative worth or absence of worth. Furthermore, the very invisibility of the knapsack reflects how white people are conditioned to be oblivious to the existence of white privilege.

In addition to listing several concrete examples of white privilege that she personally experiences, McIntosh carefully distinguishes between two types of privilege. On the one hand, she identifies "positive advantages," or the benefits that should be basic rights enjoyed by all in a just society. Such benefits include, for example, fair treatment

---

[52] Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women's Studies," in *Privilege and Prejudice: Twenty Years with the Invisible Knapsack*, ed. Karen Weekes (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 7.
[53] McIntosh, 7-8.

in court, or respect and decency from one's neighbors, or the freedom to shop without being followed or harassed. On the other hand, McIntosh also recognizes "negative types of advantage," so-called privileges that give "permission to control" or "license to be ignorant, oblivious, arrogant and destructive." Such "arbitrarily conferred dominance" allows a privileged person to ignore or mistreat less powerful people, or to remain oblivious of their languages, customs, or life experiences. This permission to act badly with impunity, McIntosh argues, reinforces hierarchies and is universally destructive, and so should be rejected altogether.[54]

Even as McIntosh delineates between these two types of privilege—urging that the former become more widespread among all people, while the latter be eliminated—she makes clear how she considers systemic privilege in its entirety to be damaging, both to the broader social fabric and to individuals living within this system. McIntosh's critique more heavily stresses how the system unjustly oppresses the disadvantaged, but she does also note how systemic privilege is morally deforming to the privileged. She quite frankly admits that she has had to reassess her own moral condition as she has come to see herself as "unfairly advantaged... a participant in a damaged culture."[55] Many other activists and writers share this view of systemic privilege as morally and psychologically injurious to the privileged; their lists of the moral costs and limitations of privilege

---

[54] McIntosh, 15. Lawrence Blum appreciatively notes that McIntosh's categorization of two types of privilege helps to explore the moral basis for judging white privilege as wrong or unjust. But Blum believes this moral basis merits further exploration, and he calls for even more finely grained distinctions between forms of privilege. Specifically, he suggests the categories of "unjust enrichment" (i.e. when a white person benefits from an injustice suffered by a person of color), "spared injustice" (i.e. when a white person simply does not suffer the injustice experienced by a person of color), and "non-injustice-related privilege" (i.e. unearned advantages that are not due to clear injustices but rather to, say, a majority/minority dynamic). According to Blum, none of these forms of privilege should release their beneficiaries from moral responsibility or should allow for complacency. But he does believe that making—and teaching—such finer moral distinctions would strengthen what he calls "white privilege analysis." See Blum, "'White Privilege': A Mild Critique," *Theory and Research in Education* 6, no. 3 (2008): 309-321.
[55] McIntosh, "White Privilege and Male Privilege," 9.

include: guilt, shame, envy, fear, and defensiveness;[56] isolation, loss, and self-loathing;[57] self-deception, dehumanization, and a lack of personal freedom.[58] These moral costs figure prominently in the arguments aimed at convincing the privileged to join in resisting and dismantling the system of privilege and oppression. Bringing about such social change is not only part of our responsibility, the argument goes, but it is also ultimately for our benefit.

Still, those making this argument insist that simply disapproving of this morally deforming system will not be enough to end it. Nor can we "just divest" ourselves, or give back these unearned privileges. As McIntosh suggests, what we can do is "use" our privilege in order to share power more equitably and to weaken the very system that creates and perpetuates such injustice. In her own life and work, she has tried to identify "ways to collaborate, work as allies, and create change within institutions, policies, and individuals," and like her list of privileges, she names some concrete examples of the activism, protest, and organizing for change that she participates in.[59]

In fact, as McIntosh has continued to write and teach about systemic privilege (especially, but not exclusively, white privilege), she has developed a further metaphor to illustrate more graphically how she understands this possibility of using privilege for social change. Alongside the "invisible knapsack" image, McIntosh now describes "white privilege as a *bank account* which I was given at birth, and did not ask for, but which I

---

[56] Johnson, *Privilege, Power, and Difference*, 127.
[57] Iris de Leon-Hartshorn, Tobin Miller Shearer, and Regina Shands Stoltzfus, *Set Free: A Journey Toward Solidarity Against Racism* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001). See especially chapters 7 and 8.
[58] Barndt, *Understanding & Dismantling Racism*, 7, 81-82, 111-142. See also Tim Wise, *White Like Me: Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son* (New York: Soft Skull Press, 2007).
[59] Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege, Color, and Crime: A Personal Account," in *Images of Color, Images of Crime: Readings*, ed. Coramae Richey Mann, Marjorie S. Katz, and Nancy Rodriguez (Los Angeles: Roxbury Publishing, 1988).

can spend down in the service of social justice."[60] She explains that she developed this new image to help white people realize the power we have to work for change. However, it remains unclear just how "spending down" the bank account of privilege achieves social change, since McIntosh claims that the account "will automatically refill even after I spend it down," and so, "I do not have much to lose within my own life circumstances, by working against injustice."[61]

There is a curious thread running from DuBois's "wages" of whiteness to McIntosh's "invisible knapsack" and "bank account" of white privilege. Each of these metaphors represents (white) privilege as a kind of asset, and each has been developed in order to help explain and make visible a system of racial inequality. However, as similar as these metaphors seem, there is also a key difference in how the authors present the assets of privilege as functioning (or potentially functioning). In DuBois's analysis, the wages of whiteness get paid out in order to keep the system in place. While McIntosh would likely agree that the invisibility of the knapsack serves to maintain an inequitable status quo, she also appears to believe that making the knapsack (or bank account) visible can turn these morally deforming, unearned assets into resources for potentially liberative social change. At least, she suggests, this *may* occur if the bearer of these assets is sufficiently convicted and motivated to take action. Such a vision of privilege as a resource for social change seems absent from DuBois's thinking.

Noting this significant difference returns me to pondering and questioning the ethical implications of trying to use privilege for change and for good. This question is all the more important since McIntosh is not the only anti-oppression educator to promote

---

[60] Peggy McIntosh, "Reflections and Future Directions for Privilege Studies," *Journal of Social Issues* 68, no. 1 (2012): 194-206.
[61] McIntosh, "Reflections and Future Directions," 196.

the idea that systemic privileges represent potential resources for social change. Yet, as I will further discuss in the following subsection, perceiving privilege in this way ignores the cultural and material history of how systems of privilege have been constructed for purposes of maintaining inequitable power relations. Therefore, we need to problematize this notion of using privilege and more critically examine what it really means.

c. "Using" privilege for good?

The literature in privilege studies includes much descriptive analysis, but it is rarely *only* that. The work also features normative value judgments and often emerges from a commitment to social change. In her review of studies of whiteness, Cynthia Levine-Rasky points out how important it is that such study be characterized by critical interrogation, which not only attends to issues of inequality but also represents a "clearly partisan" position in favor of "the emancipation of subordinate groups, radical social change, and… resistance to domination."[62] Without this critical edge, she argues, the field devolves into a study of whiteness as merely a "cultural artifact"—and ultimately reinforces white hegemony and entitlement.[63]

Accompanying this critical, normative aspect of privilege studies is a persistent emphasis within the field on the *constructed* nature of systemic inequalities and of the racialized (or gendered, sexed, etc.) identities upon which such inequalities are based. Several texts examine in detail how systemic oppressions and privileges have been

---

[62] Cynthia Levine-Rasky, "Critical/Relational/Contextual: Toward a Model for Studying Whiteness," in Levine-Rasky, *Working through Whiteness*, 320.

[63] Levine-Rasky, 324. As another example of how the study of white privilege can (and arguably should) combine descriptive and critical analysis, consider Lawrence Blum's assessment in "'White Privilege: A Mild Critique." Blum writes, "'White privilege analysis' (WPA) rests on the presumption that White privilege is a structural feature of the socio-political order in the United States and perhaps the 'West' more generally, and that there is something morally and politically wrong with its being so" (309). I am struck here by Blum's recognition of an explicitly *moral* position underlying this analysis.

created in history through various ideological, material, and legal processes and relations—and further, how the boundaries of identity classifications such as "white" or "non-white" have shifted over time.[64] This emphasis is important because if systems of privilege (and privileged identities) are socially constructed, rather than natural and inevitable givens, then there is hope for change. As Ruth Frankenberg argues, "Whiteness and blackness are historical, not essential, constructs, plural rather than singular, and potentially alterable by means of careful political practice."[65] In a similar move, Bob Pease insists that privilege and oppression are constituted through daily practices and so are susceptible to getting re-enacted differently. He writes, "Understanding how our practices in the world either challenge or reproduce these relations of domination helps us to realize how changing our participation in these relations can impact on the wider structures."[66]

So if the goal is social change—specifically, the dismantling of systemic oppressions and privileges—then what are the steps that may lead toward that? For people with privilege, an important first step is critical examination of that privilege, that is, making the privilege visible in order to unmask its presumed "normality." As

---

[64] As a few examples of texts that explore the construction of racist oppression and corresponding white privilege, see Townes, *Womanist Ethics*; Harvey, *Whiteness and Morality*; Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998); Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2015); David Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White* (New York: Basic Books, 2005); and Paula S. Rothenberg, ed., *White Privilege: Essential Readings on the Other Side of Racism*, 3rd ed. (New York: Worth Publishers, 2008). Roediger's text in particular examines how "whiteness" has gotten redefined over time, and Rothenberg's edited volume also includes some essays on this topic. Note also the paradox of how systemic oppressions and privileges are both abstract conceptualizations *and* physical, material, lived realities. Harvey's *Whiteness and Morality* includes insightful discussion of this paradoxical nature and what it implies.

[65] Ruth Frankenberg, "Introduction: Local Whitenesses, Localizing Whiteness," in *Displacing Whiteness: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 26.

[66] Pease, *Undoing Privilege*, 170.

McIntosh so famously pointed out, the knapsack of privilege is typically *invisible* to those who have it (although those denied privilege usually see its presence and effects quite clearly). Furthermore, this very invisibility of privilege is part of its power.[67] This is why, in both academic and activist circles, there is much critical attention paid to systemic privilege and to privileged identities.[68] *White Privilege: Essential Readings from the Other Side of Racism* is a fairly representative text in this regard: the first three of its four sections are dedicated to making whiteness and white privilege visible.

Once those of us who experience privilege have become aware of that privilege, what are we to do? Again, I find *White Privilege* revealing and somewhat typical in how it presents and responds to this question, which is the focus of the book's final section. Editor Paula Rothenberg frames the answer thus: Since white privilege is so deeply woven into our social fabric that white people cannot simply refuse these unearned advantages, "then the challenge for those of us who are white is to find ways to *use* that privilege to combat racism and the system of privilege as a whole." In other words, Rothenberg—and to a certain extent, the book as a whole—promotes a two-step strategy toward dismantling systemic privilege: "The first step… is to name it and the second is for those of us who can to *use* our privileges to speak out against the system."[69]

---

[67] This point is strongly emphasized in *White Privilege: Essential Readings from the Other Side of Racism,* both in the book's structure and in the explicit arguments of some of the included essays. In her introduction, editor Paula Rothenberg credits Harlon Dalton (among others) for observing that "this culturally encouraged invisibility has been an essential part of the power of whiteness" (2).

[68] It should be noted that such critical studies of privilege—and I include my own project in this—are also fraught with certain tensions, particularly the challenge of how to pay sufficient attention to systemic privilege and privileged persons without reifying its/our central position of importance and power. Levine-Rasky helpfully names this tension in the title of her edited volume, *Working Through Whiteness*. Glossing the title and elaborating on its double meaning, she writes, "We may try to work through whiteness with the intention of studying, interrogating, and defeating the basis of its authority. But we will be working *through* whiteness that defines and regulates that intentionality" (2, emphasis hers).

[69] Rothenberg, "Introduction," *White Privilege*, 5 (emphasis mine). In fairness to the other authors included in this volume, especially those whose essays make up Part Four, I acknowledge that "using" privilege is neither the focus of these essays nor representative of the rhetoric their authors employ. However,

This strategy echoes McIntosh's insistence that, once we become aware of and convicted by the presence of unearned privilege in our lives, the appropriate response is to try to use such privilege for good—"spending down" our assets of privilege for the sake of social change. Several other writers appear to share McIntosh's perspective. Tim Wise and Kim Case explicitly reference her banking metaphor when they depict systemic privilege as a tool that can be leveraged for varied ends, either for great harm or for great good. Wise and Case point out the "sense of ownership and efficacy" that privileged students may develop if these students can "imagine deploying privilege for the sake of equity. Just as a hammer can be used to build a home or commit a violent assault, privilege can be used for constructive or destructive purposes."[70] Another team of educators coins the phrase "privilege investment," which they describe as "the leveraging of privilege to work toward social justice in a manner that benefits individuals from minority groups and oneself."[71] While these writers do not directly reference McIntosh's bank account metaphor, their phrase does call up similar connotations of personal wealth. And strikingly, each of these images—the bank account, the hammer, the investment—depicts privilege not as a moral problem, but as a resource that can be spent or directed according to the will and choice of the privileged person.

It is clear that this depiction of privilege is an intentional strategy on the part of all these authors. Just as McIntosh explains how she developed the bank account metaphor in order to help white people see "that they have power they can use toward social

---

Rothenberg's editorial choice to frame the volume in this way encourages readers to still fit these essays into her paradigm of first naming, then using privilege for good and for change.

[70] Tim Wise and Kim A. Case, "Pedagogy for the Privileged: Addressing Inequality and Injustice without Shame or Blame," in Case, *Deconstructing Privilege*, 30.

[71] Paul B. Perrin et al., "Teaching Social Justice Ally Development among Privileged Students," in Case, *Deconstructing Privilege*, 53.

change,"[72] Wise and Case are likewise concerned with pedagogical strategies that can help privileged students develop as allies and change agents. "Privilege investment" is similarly presented as an approach that educators can use to foster social justice behavior, even among students at varying stages of moral development. All of these activist-minded writers and educators realize that coming to see social injustices—including and especially one's own unearned advantages—may cause the learner to feel defensiveness, guilt or shame, hopelessness, defeat, or even fatalism. And so these writers employ rhetorical strategies that are likely to alleviate such feelings—or at least, redirect the learner to move beyond them—because they believe this will better encourage a privileged person into action. Depicting privilege as a potential resource for change is one way to attempt such alleviation or redirection.

I disagree with this approach. To begin with, soothing white guilt (or the guilt that accrues from any form of privilege) is not the appropriate goal of anti-oppression education. Honest activism requires that we who are privileged face the feelings of guilt that arise as we learn about social injustices and how we are implicated in these systemic harms. This does not mean staying fixated on our own guilt—which is simply another way of keeping ourselves at the center of attention—but it does require candid reckonings and confessions and a refusal to let ourselves squirm away from discomforting truths.

Even more, I fear that these authors' depictions of privilege do more to entrench and normalize white privilege than to challenge and disrupt it. Describing privilege as a tool or resource for social change masks the morally deforming nature and unjust origin of systemic privilege. After all, a tool such as a hammer is morally neutral in itself and only accrues a morally damaging status when wielded for a harmful end such as violent

[72] McIntosh, "Reflections and Future Directions," 196.

assault—an end, furthermore, that is arguably contradictory to the hammer's intended purpose as a tool of construction. This stands in stark contrast to systemic privileges, which—as W. E. B. DuBois and several thinkers since have argued—were created to maintain unjust social control through divisions, hierarchies, and the concentration of power in the hands of certain groups of people. Recognizing that systemic privilege is *not* a morally neutral tool, but rather is both product and cause of social injustice, returns me to my original, vexing question: can trying to use one's privileges for good possibly be an ethically viable strategy for social change?

It is tempting to simply answer "no" and to discard the language and idea of "using privilege." In light of the preceding analysis of privilege as a moral problem and a manifestation of injustice, the notion of *using* such privilege is wrenching. Justice-seeking activists do not want to be complicit with an unjust system. And yet, we cannot shed our skin, so to speak; we cannot evade our social identities that have been framed as "dominant" (such as whiteness), nor can we simply lay aside the privileges that accrue with these identities. We have to live with the paradox of privilege and with its ethical remainder. Therefore, instead of walking away altogether from the concept of using privilege, I find it necessary to more closely study *how* we may experience the presence of privilege in our lives and work and what are our options for response and agency in the midst of this. In the discussion that follows, I will consider two other activist writers who suggest that privilege can get used to protest injustice and promote social change. By examining what they actually mean by this suggestion, I hope to illuminate important aspects of how activists with privilege can and should engage in social justice work.

Bob Pease argues that "privilege is not just something people can choose to ignore and reject, but [it] can also be *utilized* in order to contribute to social change."[73] For Pease, this view of privilege is part of his emphasis on individual agency and on the (greater) responsibility of privileged persons to work for change.[74] Rather than framing privilege as a kind of possession that certain groups of people receive, he stresses its performativity when he insists that systemic privileges (and inequality) are actively and daily "reproduced" by members of privileged groups.[75] The corollary of this point is that these privileged persons can make choices about whether they "want to hold on to their privilege or challenge it."[76] This does not mean that Pease sees privilege operating only on the individual and interpersonal levels; he is clear that it operates also at the level of institutional structures, which constrain and in part determine how individuals behave. Nonetheless, he asserts, individual human actions also "constitute" these structures and power relations and thus may contribute to challenging or changing current arrangements.[77]

Therefore, when Pease alludes to using privilege to provoke social change, he does not seem to be presenting privilege as a resource and certainly not as a morally neutral tool. Instead, this is part of his argument that privileged persons are *complicit in* maintaining an unjust social order and so *responsible for* choosing to act and interact in new ways, which can lead to the reforming of that order. Still, even though Pease discusses at length his underlying sociological theory for why and how privileged people

---

[73] Pease, *Undoing Privilege*, 24 (emphasis mine).
[74] Pease also notes that people who experience oppression have an important role to play in the struggle against that oppression, but he does assert that "the onus to change" is on members of dominant groups and especially "those with access to multiple levels of privilege" (23).
[75] Pease, ix, 17.
[76] Pease, xi.
[77] Pease, 25-27, 33-35.

have both responsibility and a measure of agency to work for change, he does not really unpack what it might look like for us to "utilize" privilege in order to contribute to that change. For a more detailed picture of what it may mean to try to use privilege for good, I turn to another writer who also employs this rhetoric and perspective.

In her discussion of white privilege, Frances Kendall starts with the (by now familiar) premise that, because unearned privileges are granted systemically, we who are white can neither refuse to receive those privileges nor simply give them back. However, we can choose *how* we will use our privileges, including the choice to "use them in such a way as to dismantle the systems that keep the superiority of whiteness in place."[78] To illustrate what she means, Kendall notes that systemic privilege gives some of us greater access to institutions, meetings, and informal conversations in which power gets exercised and decisions made. As we find ourselves in these spaces of privilege and influence (such as boards, leaderships teams, committee meetings, neighborhood organizations, or seemingly "chance" encounters), we can—indeed, we have a moral obligation to—use our presence and voice to shift the parameters of perception, to impact the decisions, and to change the institutional culture.[79] Further, it is not enough to simply try to use our influence productively in the places where we already are. Working actively for social justice also requires that we enter new spaces where we can learn, be challenged, advocate for change, and sometimes directly intervene in situations of violence or injustice. As Kendall recognizes, "Being a genuine ally… requires those of us

[78] Kendall, *Understanding White Privilege*, 62.

[79] See especially chapter 6, "Now That (I Think) I Understand White Privilege, What Do I Do?" in Kendall's *Understanding White Privilege*. In addition, Rothenberg includes a brief but very concrete list of ways that white people can "use" our privilege to "speak out against the system of privilege as a whole." Rothenberg's list ranges from protesting incidents of racist harassment or challenging racist jokes to showing up at hearings to argue for policy changes. See Rothenberg, "Introduction," *White Privilege*, 5.

with privilege to consciously move ourselves into the battle so that members of target groups can more easily move out of the line of fire."[80]

Similar to Pease, when Kendall speaks of using privilege to create personal and systemic change, she appears to be emphasizing the agency and, even more, the responsibility of privileged persons to act. In addition, there is a further nuance that her text reveals. Especially telling is Kendall's warning that "it will take a great deal of work to learn how to *use [our privileges] differently*—to remove barriers for people of color, not to erect them."[81] In other words, the question for Kendall is not *whether* we will experience and exercise privilege—within our current social order, this is an inevitable part of being a member of a privileged group—but rather *how* we can and should do so.[82]

I find this shift from *whether* to *how* enormously helpful in rethinking the ethical dilemma of trying to use privilege for good. Making this shift helps me to better hold together in tension the two-fold reality that systemic privilege is both morally deforming *and* it creates for the privileged an opportunity and a responsibility to act. I am still cautious and uneasy with the rhetoric of "using privilege," since it can so easily slide into viewing privilege as a resource for activism and ignoring how destructive the entire system of privilege really is. Nonetheless, I also think that this rhetoric aptly names what

---

[80] Kendall*, Understanding White Privilege*, 157. Although she is speaking metaphorically here, I find Kendall's words a poignant reflection of what international nonviolent accompaniers are attempting to do in war zones.

[81] Kendall, 100 (emphasis mine).

[82] Kendall here suggests that, in general, white people cannot avoid experiencing and exercising white privilege—at least, until systems of white supremacy have been dismantled—and I agree with her on this point. This does not mean, however, that we will experience (or should exercise) privilege in every circumstance. Consider another revealing quote from Kendall's text: "Because we cannot give our privileges back, our best options are to be clear about what they are, to work actively not to employ them, and instead to use them in a way that benefits those who do not have them" (108). This seemingly contradictory advice—that we should actively try *not* to employ privileges *and* to use them in ways beneficial to others—points out that, even if we cannot refuse white privilege altogether, there are (perhaps many) occasions in which we can refuse to take advantage of the benefits such systemic privilege would offer us personally. This is a very important consideration in constructing an ethics of solidarity.

we as privileged persons will inevitably do at times (and at time be asked to do)—and if this is so, then the question that really demands our attention is the one Kendall suggests: what kind of work must we do in order to learn how to use our privileges differently? For those of us who are trying to be in solidarity from a position of privilege, this does not erase the challenge or the need for us to wrestle with the moral paradox of privilege. But it may give us a more fully aware and honest place in which to stand as we are attempting to navigate that paradox.

III. This project: Goals, methodology, outline

As I have indicated above, I am working in the field of Christian social ethics, and this dissertation is primarily a project in self-consciously contextualized ethics,[83] in which I seek to strengthen and further nuance existing conversations about solidarity as a form of Christian practice, discipleship, and love of neighbor. As an ethicist, I have been most deeply formed by liberationist traditions in Christian theology and ethics, especially those developed by womanists and by feminists of various racial identities. Justice is the ethical norm that most centrally guides my life and scholarship and this project specifically. Black feminist Traci West insists—and I agree—that such a commitment entails a "primary concern for socially and economically marginalized people."[84] While West engages this concern by making the lives of such marginalized people the focus of her study, my project approaches the question from a different angle, focusing on the complications and challenges inherent in the efforts of systemically privileged persons of

[83] I would argue that *all* ethics and ethical formulations are contextual, i.e. emerging from and reflective of ethicists' particular contexts and social locations. However, not all ethicists display this awareness or explicitly reflect on how context has shaped their work. In this project, I am trying to do ethics aware of my own contextuality and aware of the contextual nature of the ethics I construct.

[84] West, *Disruptive Christian Ethics*, xvi.

faith to be in solidarity with the marginalized. But I believe the larger goal motivating our two different projects is a shared goal of working for greater justice in the world.

Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite and Mary Potter Engel, the editors of *Lift Every Voice*, an anthology of liberation theologies from around the world, similarly identify a commitment to social justice as the core principle holding together the varied viewpoints and contexts represented in their volume. Such a commitment, they point out, is not only contextually specific and grounded in particular communities, but it also "grows out of *solidarity* with those suffering and in need."[85] This is an apt description of my own perspective and commitment as I embark on this project. Thistlethwaite and Engel depict liberationist methodology as "contextual, *praxis*-based, communal and concrete, prophetic, and continually renewing,"[86] and these characteristics also indicate key aspects of the methodology guiding my work.

I have already named my belief that the field of ethics is always contextual. My choice to be transparent about my own social location and the life experiences and context that have given shape to this project is *not* a choice for the particular over the universal. As West asserts, liberative social ethics must hold together the universal and the particular, since we cannot do ethics in isolation from particular contexts, nor should we disregard how norms and values, such as justice, are not limited to a singular context. She writes, "Universal moral obligations refer to common interests and capabilities that should be supported across cultural contexts, and are given meaning precisely by particular realities within particular contexts."[87] I agree with her, as well as with the

---

[85] Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite and Mary Potter Engel, eds., *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 1 (emphasis mine).
[86] Thistlethwaite and Engel, 4.
[87] West, *Disruptive Christian Ethics*, 42.

editors of *Lift Every Voice,* who likewise insist, "All theology [and ethics], including so-called universal theology, is inevitably and inescapably contextual and must acknowledge its limits."[88] Therefore, as I claim contextuality and particularity as the starting point of my methodology, I am trying to remain aware of both the limitations and the distinctive contributions that my perspective may offer to the field of Christian social ethics.

Deeply related to contextuality, *praxis* and community also shape liberationist methods. In other words, liberation theologies and ethics are grounded in the historically, socially, and politically specific lived experiences—the everyday practices—of the communities where such theologies and ethics are constructed. West describes the dialectical relationship between theory and practice: "Theory needs practice in order to be authentic, relevant, and truthful. Practice needs theory so that practices might be fully comprehended." In light of this dialectical relationship, West engages in what she calls a "dialogical method," in which theory and practice, texts and contexts, and multiple diverse voices are in conversation, illuminating and critiquing each other.[89] She emphasizes that we should not think of theologians and ethicists as singular individual thinkers, "as if they were isolated islands of knowledge, removed from any community context." Rather, attending to context can help to achieve two important ends: to better understand the assumptions and interests embedded in normative theories, and to enlarge the scope of what (and who) may be received as valid sources of moral knowledge.[90]

West models this dialogical method when, for example, she places two distinct yet related historical sources side by side: texts by Reinhold Niebuhr, one of the "great thinkers" of twentieth-century Christian ethics, and texts by and about Black women

---

[88] Thistlethwaite and Engel, 5.
[89] West, *Disruptive Christian Ethics,* xvii, xxi.
[90] West, 3.

community activists who were living and working in Harlem in the 1930s and 40s—literally sharing the same neighborhood as Niebuhr during those decades.[91] By reading these sources alongside each other, West both contextualizes Niebuhr's ethics (and his influence in the field) and exemplifies how to construct more expansive, accountable Christian ethics that may more effectively address systemic injustices and forms of violence. The final chapter in *Disruptive Christian Ethics* illustrates another form this dialogical method may take, as West weaves together excerpts from interviews she conducted with several contemporary Black women ministers and activists who are confronting heterosexism in the church and in society. She presents these women's lives and testimonies as "another kind of theoretical text," from which we can generate ethical norms and practices relevant not only to these women's local communities, but also to a wider public life concerned with moral leadership and resistance to oppression.[92]

West's dialogical method serves as a model for my work. This dissertation builds a conversation between texts and ideas, activism and practices that represent various fields: Christian social ethics and political theology; social theory, especially critical race theory and critical whiteness studies; anti-oppression activism and education; and the history and practice of particular forms of nonviolent activism. Even more significant than the multidisciplinary nature of this project is how I have followed West in drawing together theory and practice. Like her, I believe that both of these are necessary for constructing robust social ethics, and further, that theory and practice must remain in conversation because each amplifies the meaning of the other. This methodological

---

[91] In chapters 5 and 6 of this dissertation, I will return to West's critical readings of Niebuhr. In chapter 6, I will say more specifically about this dialogue West creates between Niebuhr and these Harlem-based Black women activists, as well as the conclusions she draws from this.
[92] West, *Disruptive Christian Ethics,* 141. See pp. 144-145 for an overview of the normative principles of liberative moral leadership and communal ethics that West draws from these interviews.

commitment reflects the *praxis*-based and communal methods of liberationist work. In my case, the *praxis* shaping my project is transnational solidarity activism, and more specifically the nonviolent tactic of unarmed protective accompaniment. The community that formed me and has remained in dialogue with me as I have pursued this study is Christian Peacemaker Teams, especially the team serving in Colombia.

In order to more fully honor the dialectical relationship between theory and practice—and in recognition that constructive ethics are best developed while (through) listening to multiple voices and diverse perspectives—an essential component of my methodology in this dissertation is the fieldwork I conducted with CPT in Colombia, using the ethnographic methods of participant-observation and in-depth interviews. In chapter 4, I will discuss with more detail the methodology that informed my fieldwork and my reasons for doing this study with CPT-Colombia. Here, I simply want to place that ethnographic work—and especially the interview materials it generated—into the larger picture of my project's overall goals and methodology.[93]

As I have already indicated, my own experiences with CPT gave rise to the questions motivating this project and provided the starting place for the moral reflection here. To broaden the scope and applicability of this reflection, it has been important for me to place my perspective in conversation with the voices of other solidarity activists,

[93] A distinctive characteristic of the Graduate Division of Religion at Emory University is the program's emphasis on using ethnographic methods—not only in the study of religious practices and communities, but also as a source and methodology for constructive ethics and theology. This reflects the relatively recent "ethnographic turn" in Christian theology and ethics, discussed in Christian Scharen and Aana Marie Vigen, eds., *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011). This approach to ethics and theology lifts up the significance of context and particularity as essential components in moral and theological formation and understanding. In their preface, Scharen and Vigen write, "Ethnography is a way to take particularity seriously—to discover truth revealed through embodied habits, relations, practices, narratives, and struggles. And as it is joined with a theological sensibility, our conviction is that each particular life, situation, or community is potentially, albeit only partially, revelatory of transcendent or divine truth" (xxi). Although I do not think of my project as an ethnography per se—as I will explain in chapter 4—I have used these methods in my work because I do "take particularity seriously," and I fully agree with the perspective on ethics and theology that Scharen and Vigen articulate.

especially those whose social identities differ from mine. In addition, doing ethnographic fieldwork with a faith-based team engaged in full-time, daily nonviolent activism has enabled me to better weave together theory and practice as I construct a Christian ethic of responsible solidarity. I offer this ethic with an awareness of its own particularity, open to how my project may contribute to and be challenged by ongoing and developing conversations about and practices of solidarity.

The flow of my dissertation emerges from these goals and methodology. This first chapter both lays out the paradox of privilege that gives rise to my inquiry and unpacks the concept of privilege as used in social theory and anti-oppression activism. Building on this, chapter 2 reviews Christian theologies and ethics of solidarity, as well as emerging theological and ethical concerns with systemic privilege. From this overview of the conversations so far about solidarity and about privilege, I argue that we need to further nuance our ethics of solidarity. Specifically, we must pay greater attention to the moral demands and complications of trying to be in solidarity from positions of privilege. These two initial chapters constitute Part One, "The Paradox of Privilege Within the Call to Solidarity," introducing and contextualizing my project within Christian social ethics. Part One also provides significant discussion of the two main concepts in this project—privilege and solidarity—clarifying how I am theorizing and using these terms.

In Part Two, "The Context of International Protective Accompaniment," I turn to the particular context of accompaniment, to further explore how this arena exposes the paradox of privilege and offers a fruitful space for wrestling with its ethical implications. Chapter 3 gives an overview of accompaniment activism, especially of how racial and passport privileges have gotten both used and critiqued by scholars and practitioners of

accompaniment. In chapter 4, I lift up Christian Peacemaker Teams as an example of one faith-based accompaniment organization that has confronted systemic oppressions and privileges explicitly within their work. This chapter explains the dissertation field research I conducted with the CPT-Colombia project, especially the in-depth interviews with several team members. These interviews, combined with my observations of team life and work, reveal how these CPTers and their local partners both use and resist systemic privileges to enact solidarity and work for change.

Finally, Part Three, "A Constructive Ethic of Responsible Solidarity," comprises the constructive portion of my dissertation. These chapters articulate the insights I have gained from my study, drawing upon my interviews with CPTers as source material for the ethic of solidarity I propose. From these interviews, two central themes emerged: strategic realism, and solidarity as mutuality. First, in chapter 5, I explain the ethical stance I call "strategic realism"—a stance CPTers displayed as they both critiqued privilege as a moral and relational problem in their activism *and* frankly acknowledged how (and why) at times they draw on the power of privilege to achieve certain ends. Because strategic realism maintains the tensions between ideals of justice and a realistic analysis of (and response to) the world as it currently is, I believe this ethical stance can help in navigating the paradox of privilege. In chapter 5, I also examine resonances and divergences between strategic realism and Reinhold Niebuhr's Christian realism. This comparison reveals that responsible solidarity requires contextualized, nuanced power analysis, with attention to multiple forms and sources of power.

Then in chapter 6, I turn to the second theme of my constructive ethic: a vision of solidarity as mutuality. Every interview I conducted in Colombia affirmed this picture of

solidarity as a mutual partnership, in which accompaniers and their accompanied partners are collaborating and supporting each other in a shared struggle for justice. By lifting up solidarity as mutuality, I challenge a prominent Christian tradition (exemplified by Reinhold Niebuhr, among others) that holds up disinterested, self-sacrificial love as the highest ethical ideal. I join white feminists, Black feminists, and womanists who (like other liberationist thinkers) have criticized such a valorization of self-sacrifice as an ideology that sustains inequitable power relations and further oppresses the most vulnerable. At the same time, I recognize that talk of “mutual love”—like the language of “solidarity”—can too easily devolve into romanticized or naïve calls to unity, which, as Emilie Townes has warned, will fail to challenge an unjust status quo. Therefore, in chapter 6, I endeavor to delineate how such solidarity as mutuality must get lived out through concrete commitments, actions, and experiences of interdependence, which both value diversity and affirm human equality.

The ethic of responsible solidarity that I construct has been drawn from my study of international accompaniment and of CPT-Colombia, but it is not limited to such particular settings of nonviolent activism. While I certainly hope this project may prove useful to CPT and similar organizations engaged in international accompaniment or other forms of full-time faith-based activism, the wider intended audience for my project is the Christian church in North America and the field of Christian social ethics. In a world wracked by violence and growing inequalities, by fractious social and political divides, we need more than ever to ask and answer the questions driving this project: how can we genuinely be in solidarity across difference? What are the particular responsibilities and roles for each of us in the struggle for liberation and justice for all?

Chapter Two:
Solidarity and Privilege: Theological Conversations So Far

Because my dissertation concerns the complicating impact of systemic privilege on the ethics and practice of solidarity, in this chapter I will consider what (some) Christian theologians and ethicists have so far said about solidarity and about privilege. In particular, I will highlight how these themes relate to and intersect with each other in the scholarly conversations. In many ways, solidarity and privilege appear to be theological opposites. Solidarity is often represented as a manifestation of foundational Christian values such as justice, love, and communion. In contrast, unearned privileges—as the fruits of systemic oppression, inequality, and domination—get depicted as a form of injustice, a violation of communion, an idolatrous and harmful rupture of the loving relationships that should exist between peoples and between people and God. The specific language used for discussing systemic oppression and privilege varies, but the existence of such social inequities is consistently perceived as a moral and theological problem. Solidarity, meanwhile, is frequently held up as a guiding ideal.

Perhaps not surprisingly, for some theologians and ethicists, solidarity therefore appears to be the answer, or the antidote, to the problem of privilege. Yet others who are wrestling with the dynamics of systemic privilege express more caution about the language of solidarity. They recognize how solidarity can get dangerously misconstrued as a kind of false unity that fails to effectively challenge an inequitable status quo. As I indicated in my previous chapter, I find it important to heed these voices of caution, to listen to what they present as limitations or potential pitfalls in our efforts to engage in solidarity.

Despite—or maybe alongside of—these cautions, I continue to believe that a robust Christian ethic of solidarity can help the church to address systemic injustices that mar our world. However, I do not believe we should see solidarity as a simple antidote to privilege, as if engaging in solidarity could allow us to transcend the forms of systemic privilege that accrue from our identities. We cannot step outside our own social locations, and we who are privileged cannot facilely lay down these unearned advantages. Therefore, we cannot ever be in solidarity outside of or apart from our identities and life experiences. A "tough solidarity"—a more fully responsible, self-critically honest solidarity—demands that we confront this truth. So we must work to understand how systemic privilege affects the praxis of solidarity. Especially, we must take a hard look at the possibilities and limitations of engaging in solidarity from a position of privilege, considering what we can and cannot do as allies in struggles for liberation.

This chapter unfolds in three parts. In the first section, I examine some of the significant ways the concept of solidarity has been leveraged in Christian theology. In particular, I am interested in how varied understandings of solidarity hold quite different implications for what it means to try to be in solidarity from a position of privilege. In the second section, I turn to systemic privilege, looking at how this concept has emerged as a theological category and what it demands of us when we frame privilege as sin. Finally, in the third section, I bring together the concepts of solidarity and privilege, considering the tensions between them and what this implies for an ethic of solidarity for the privileged.

I. Beyond charity: Solidarity as the church's mission in the world

It is beyond the scope of my project to offer a comprehensive overview of Christian theologies of solidarity, much less of the related sociological and political theories of solidarity. However, I do want to draw attention to important moments and perspectives in the rise of solidarity as a significant concept in Christian theology and ethics. This will give some sense of the scholarly conversations I am entering and engaging as I set out to explore the paradox of privilege within the call to solidarity. In addition, it will thicken the description of what I am referring to in this dissertation when I speak of solidarity.

The first subsection below offers a brief sketch of solidarity as a multidisciplinary and contested notion, an essentially modern concept with ancient roots. While I am chiefly interested in how solidarity gets framed in Christian theology and social ethics, this cannot be divorced from solidarity as a sociological and a political construct, as I will demonstrate. The next two subsections will consider the prominence of solidarity in Catholic social teaching and in Latin American liberation theology, highlighting a few key voices and texts. Finally, I will close with a subsection about womanist perspectives on solidarity, drawing on the ethics and theology of Emilie Townes and M. Shawn Copeland. As womanist thinkers, these two scholars clarify how solidarity is a necessary yet fraught component in the work of seeking justice. Such attention to the complications of solidarity—a strategic practice and a Christian value, yet not an easy or undisputed one—will prepare us to then turn to an examination of the even more highly charged place that systemic privilege occupies in Christian theology and ethics.

a. Sketching solidarity

The concept of solidarity has significant history within Christian theology, and yet it also represents relatively recent turns in Christian ethical thinking. In some ways, solidarity is, as political sociologist Hauke Brunkhorst asserts, a "thoroughly modern concept" with European origins in the French revolution.[94] During the nineteenth century, social and political philosophers began to develop theories of solidarity to examine and explain individual and communal relationships, rights, and responsibilities within an increasingly industrialized and interdependent modern society.[95] As Marxist ideas about class struggle took root, the rhetoric of solidarity became a rallying cry to unite workers and build labor movements.

Meanwhile, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Protestant and Catholic churches were also attempting to respond to rapid social and political changes. The rise of Catholic social teaching, like the Protestant Social Gospel Movement in the United States, was an effort to articulate and enact the church's role in promoting a just and compassionate social order. Rebecca Todd Peters reads both of these theological developments as reflective of an emerging Christian understanding that solidarity, expressed especially through concern for the poor and underprivileged, is a concrete and

---

[94] Hauke Brunkhorst, *Solidarity: From Civic Friendship to a Global Legal Community*, trans. Jeffrey Flynn (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 1.

[95] These philosophers include Charles Fourier, Pierre Leroux, Auguste Comte, Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Karl Kautsky. Durkheim in particular developed a systematic and influential theory of solidarity. This theory distinguishes between "mechanical solidarity," or the bonds of common experience and shared worldview that hold people together in traditional societies, and "organic solidarity," or the social glue that sustains modern society, in which labor and economic production are more individualized, specialized, and thus increasingly interdependent. See Émile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893; trans. W. D. Halls, 1933; repr., New York: Free Press, 1997). The nineteenth century was also the era when the word "solidarity" made its way into the English language from the French *solidarité*. According to the online Merriam-Webster dictionary, the first known use of the word is in 1841, while the Online Etymology Dictionary cites the first known use as 1829.

necessary way "to live out God's prophetic call to justice in our world."[96] However, as social theorist Steinar Stjernø argues, only in the second half of the twentieth century has solidarity become an explicit and integrated theme in Christian theology and social ethics.[97] This development has arguably occurred most prominently within and through Latin American liberation theology and Catholic social teaching,[98] resulting in a growing understanding of solidarity as the church's fundamental mission in the world.

As Brunkhorst points out, even while we think of solidarity as an essentially modern notion, the concept has much older roots, both in political usage and in Christian theology. Etymologically, the word has Latin origins; in the Roman legal code, *in solidum* referred to joint liability and responsibility. Additionally, Brunkhorst notes, early Christian beliefs about fraternity and love of neighbor are another source underpinning more recent ideas about solidarity.[99] Stjernø likewise delineates four ways he believes the *idea* of solidarity appears in ancient Christian theology, laying a foundation for later theological uses of the term itself. These four early theological building blocks are:

---

[96] Peters, *Solidarity Ethics*, 24-25.

[97] Steinar Stjernø, *Solidarity in Europe: The History of an Idea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 61, 83. Stjernø's book offers perhaps the most comprehensive study to date of the concept of solidarity as it has developed in European social and political theory and Catholic and Protestant (mainly Lutheran) theology and social ethics. Stjernø suggests that the development and integration of solidarity into Christian theology has "lagged behind developments elsewhere [i.e. in social and political theory]" (83) because throughout much of the nineteenth and twentieth century, the notion of solidarity was associated with class struggle, revolution, and opposition to parties or regimes in power—ideas at odds with much of the teaching and positioning of church hierarchies. While his perspective admittedly reflects Stjernø's own focus on European thought and politics, his basic point—that solidarity has become an explicit, well-developed theological theme only since the 1960s—is supported by other scholars studying the emergence of solidarity within Christian theology and social ethics.

[98] Gerald J. Beyer, citing Stjernø's study, claims that the fullest development of a theory of solidarity has occurred within Catholic social tradition over the past century. Beyer's focus is on Catholic social teaching with particular attention to Pope John Paul II, but he includes discussion of other philosophers and theologians (Latin American liberation theologians prominent among them) who have contributed to and expanded on official Catholic teaching. Meanwhile, Beyer argues, although contemporary Protestant ethicists have begun to address solidarity more, the "explicit usage" of solidarity in this field remains "relatively scant." Beyer, "The Meaning of Solidarity in Catholic Social Teaching," *Political Theology* 15, no. 1 (2014): 7-25.

[99] Brunkhorst, *Solidarity,* 2. See also Peters, *Solidarity Ethics*, 17-18, for a succinct discussion of how early Christian theology and practices of fraternity underlie the modern concept of solidarity.

agape, or God's love for humankind as embodied in Christ's incarnation; charity, or the call to unselfishly love neighbors in imitation of this divine love; fraternity, or early church practices of sharing with others as one would share with family members; and the belief that all human beings are children of God and thus brothers and sisters to each other.[100]

Stjernø's argument here, like Brunkhorst's, illuminates how much the value of love informs understandings of solidarity. Stjernø further points out that, in Catholic social teaching, the concepts of solidarity and of charity, or altruism, are readily intertwined. Such intertwining contrasts with labor movements, which sharply distinguish between solidarity and altruism.[101] Therefore, when solidarity is spoken about in contexts of faith-based activism, some people will likely hear this as a call to empathy toward the vulnerable and to selfless service—while others will likely hear it as a call to partner with oppressed peoples in working for structural justice and radical, perhaps revolutionary, social change.

This very brief overview of solidarity—a modern concept with ancient roots—highlights three key points I want to emphasize. First, understandings of solidarity have emerged from and are leveraged within multiple fields, from sociology to political activism, from moral philosophy to Christian theology. Nor are these discourses mutually exclusive: social and political theories of solidarity have influenced theological and

---

[100] Stjernø, *Solidarity in Europe,* 61. Beyer makes a similar argument to those of Stjernø, Brunkhorst, and Peters, writing, "The conceptual seeds of solidarity lie in the earlier Christian concept of charity, as found for example in Aquinas's thought, and friendship, which Christianity adapted from Greek and Roman philosophy" (13). Beyer also offers detailed discussion of the biblical and theological foundations for solidarity, asserting that, although the term "solidarity" appears nowhere in the Hebrew Bible or the New Testament, there is nonetheless significant scriptural grounding for the concept. See Beyer, "The Meaning of Solidarity," 8-12.

[101] Stjernø, *Solidarity in Europe,* 75.

ethical statements, and vice versa.[102] Thus, the rhetoric of solidarity is politically *and* morally charged. One can hardly speak of solidarity without calling up both political connotations and ethical obligations.

Second, not only is solidarity a multidisciplinary concept, it is also a rather porous one—inexact, often ambiguous, variously used, including in apparently conflicting ways. In part, this underscores the fact that the language of solidarity is employed in varied disciplines and contexts.[103] But more deeply, I believe this reflects the reality that solidarity is, as Juliet Hooker argues, "multiple and overlapping." She explains, "We develop different kinds of solidarities with different kinds of persons with whom we are enmeshed in different kinds of relations." She asserts that these "various solidarities are not mutually exclusive." Still, they will require us to be perpetually balancing potentially competing obligations from these varied allegiances.[104]

In light of these "various solidarities," I do not find it practical to try to pin down solidarity with a singular definition. However, it is important to give the concept some recognizable contours by naming identifying elements that are present across a range of possible forms of solidarity. To this end, I appreciate what Christine Firer Hinze calls the "clarifying framework" she has culled from Sally J. Scholz's scholarship on solidarity. This framework identifies three elements of solidarity: "it is a **form of unity** that binds members together into an identifiable group, that **mediates between individual and**

---

[102] In *Solidarity Ethics,* Peters' overview of the concept of solidarity highlights this cross-pollination between political and religious discourses during the past two centuries. See her chapter "Theories of Solidarity," pp. 17-32.

[103] For examples of varied ways and fields in which ideas of solidarity have been appropriated, see Kurt Bayertz, ed., *Solidarity* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic, 1999), especially the volume's opening chapter, Bayertz, "Four Uses of 'Solidarity,'" 3-28. In this chapter, Bayertz notes that the concept of solidarity, rather than being carefully delineated, is used in "wavering, inexact and often suggestive" fashions (4). He then differentiates and examines four particular uses of "solidarity": in relation to morality, society, liberation, and the welfare state.

[104] Juliet Hooker, *Race and the Politics of Solidarity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 31.

community, and entails **positive moral obligations for members of the group**."[105] In other words, solidarity mediates between individual selfhood and collective identity. It is neither individualistic nor focused so heavily on the collective that individual selves are subsumed. Rather, solidarity presumes interdependent selves linked in some kind of group unity, entailing reciprocal responsibilities and, at its best, mutual benefits.

Notably, as Scholz details in her scholarship, the group unity of solidarity may or may not arise from shared identity characteristics or common experience. It might instead arise from shared commitment to a cause. This is what Scholz calls "political solidarity," which she glosses as "the moral relationships and positive duties of individuals and groups united in solidarity for social change."[106] Such political solidarity requires building coalitions with common goals and coordinated action. Significantly, these coalitions may include individuals who stand in quite different social locations, variously positioned in relation to the injustice being fought. I stress this because such "political solidarity," stretching across differences in social identity and life experience, is the focus in my project.

These first two key points, about the multidisciplinary and capacious nature of the concept of solidarity, can help us see why there are differing interpretations of solidarity and, consequently, disagreements and concerns about the rhetoric and practices of solidarity. This, finally, brings me to my third point: that within Christian theology, the relationship between solidarity and charity is both apparent and contested. As I have

---

[105] Christine Firer Hinze, "Over, Under, Around, and Through: Ethics, Solidarity, and the Saints," *CTSA Proceedings* 66 (2011): 38 (emphasis hers).

[106] Sally J. Scholz, *Political Solidarity* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2008), 12. See p. 5 for Scholz's typology of three different types of solidarity: social, which is based on community bonds arising from shared characteristics or common life experiences; political, which entails mutually undertaken commitments to political action against injustice; and civic, which concerns the "obligations of civil society to protect citizens against vulnerabilities."

noted in my discussion above, Christian teachings about charity are frequently cited as a shaping influence on (political and sociological, as well as theological) theories of solidarity. At the same time, as I will discuss further below, significant voices in Christian theology insist that solidarity—unlike traditional perceptions of charity—must *not* be practiced in an altruistic fashion, and in fact, trying to do so will turn "solidarity" into something that entrenches, rather than dismantles, current unjust power imbalances.

This particular tension around solidarity (i.e. how we should perceive solidarity relative to Christian charity) is so relevant to my project because it concerns the nature of solidary relations. How should activists with systemic privilege relate to and interact with the oppressed or marginalized individuals and communities with whom we are trying to be in solidarity? In the subsections below I will listen to the voices of a few particular Christian theologians to hear what responses they offer to this question, as well as how their perspectives may help us reflect on and nuance our answers.

b. The "virtue" of solidarity: Catholic social teaching and "Sollicitudo Rei Socialis"

One of the areas of Christian theology and ethics that addresses solidarity most explicitly (and frequently) is Catholic social teaching, or official church statements that grapple with social and economic issues and offer guidance on how to behave in the social order. Modern Catholic social teaching has been articulated in papal encyclicals, beginning with Leo XIII's 1891 *Rerum Novarum,* and in conciliar and episcopal documents. The first "explicit entrance" of the "principles of Christian solidarity" into Catholic social teaching occurred in 1931, in Pius XI's *Quadragesimo Anno*.[107] But the first time the actual word

---

[107] Matthew L. Lamb, "Solidarity," in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Social Thought*, ed. Judith A. Dwyer (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1994), 909. This point appears also in Marie Vianney Bilgrien,

"solidarity" appeared in a papal encyclical was in 1961, in John XXIII's *Mater et Magistra.* Stjernø reads these references as embodying the "essence" of the Catholic concept of solidarity, as *Mater et Magistra* calls for collective and governmental actions to reduce global inequalities, thus tying solidarity to social justice and to world peace.[108]

Throughout the 1960s, the significance of solidarity in Catholic social thought—as well as its connections to international development, justice, and peace—grew more pronounced. This decade, which included Vatican II as well as three papal encyclicals, was a pivotal moment in the Catholic Church's re-envisioning of social responsibility and the place of the church in the world. The rise of Latin American liberation theology during this time, especially the Conference of Latin American Bishops held in Medellín in 1968, was also influential in the growing attention given to solidarity.[109] But the greatest credit for making solidarity a dominant theme in contemporary Catholic social teaching is often given to John Paul II, who was influenced not only by the Latin American context and the foment of the 1960s, as already mentioned, but also by *Solidarność*, the labor union movement founded in 1980 in his native Poland.[110]

A pivotal document in developing this theme of solidarity was John Paul II's second encyclical, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, promulgated in 1987. Like earlier encyclicals,

---

Solidarity: A Principle, an Attitude, a Duty? Or the Virtue for an Interdependent World? (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 4.

[108] Stjernø, *Solidarity in Europe,* 68.

[109] See Stjernø, *Solidarity in Europe,* 69; and Bilgrien, *Solidarity*, 13. In "The Meaning of Solidarity," Beyer also recognizes the influence of Latin American liberation theology in Catholic social teaching (CST). Looking a little further ahead chronologically, he writes, "Although the Vatican was sometimes critical of it, Latin American liberation theology unmistakably contributed to Catholic teaching on solidarity. The link between solidarity and the preferential option for the poor, officially endorsed by John Paul II in his 1987 encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, entered CST via Latin America" (14).

[110] For arguments about John Paul II's pivotal role, see Stjernø, *Solidarity in Europe,* 70; Bilgrien, *Solidarity,* 17; and Meghan J. Clark, *The Vision of Catholic Social Thought: The Virtue of Solidarity and the Praxis of Human Rights* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), chapter 1. See Beyer, "The Meaning of Solidarity," 14-15 for discussion of how the Polish context influenced John Paul II's thinking about solidarity.

this document is concerned with global poverty and development. It urges Christians to recognize human interdependence and to practice the "virtue" of solidarity in order to counter "structures of sin," such as military and economic imperialism.[111] With this argument, the encyclical partly presents solidarity as collective social and political action, yet even more markedly, it underscores solidarity as a theological and moral construct, with emphasis on personal and interpersonal responsibility.[112] In *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, solidarity is described as "undoubtedly a *Christian virtue"* with "many points of contact between solidarity and *charity*, which is the distinguishing mark of Christ's disciples." The next sentence heightens this link between solidarity and charity, explaining how "solidarity seeks to go beyond itself, to take on the *specifically Christian* dimension of total gratuity, forgiveness, and reconciliation" (no. 40). A little later, solidarity is linked to the preferential option to the poor, which is depicted as "a *special form* of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity" (no. 42).[113]

Sollicitudo Rei Socialis did much to cement the centrality of solidarity in Catholic social teaching, and it is significant that the encyclical borrows language (and to a certain extent, normative values) from Latin American liberation theology, which will be the focus of the next subsection in this chapter. However, in employing the paradigms of virtue and charity to explicate solidarity, the encyclical places a particular spin on the

---

[111] In his response to *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis,* Gregory Baum helpfully glosses these structures of sin as "institutional realities, such as colonialism and imperialism, that create an unjust distribution of wealth, power, and recognition, and thus push a section of the population to the margin of society where their well-being or even their life is in danger" (112). Baum, "Structures of Sin," in *The Logic of Solidarity: Commentaries on Pope John Paul II's Encyclical "On Social Concern,"* ed. Gregory Baum and Robert Ellsberg (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), 110-126.

[112] Baum, 115. As Baum points out, although *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* "recognizes the power of ideology… the greater emphasis in [the pope's] analysis of social sin lies on personal responsibility" and on "personal agency."

[113] John Paul II, "Encyclical Letter: *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis,"* in Baum and Ellsberg, *The Logic of Solidarity,* 1-62. Emphasis in quoted excerpts appears in the original.

meaning of solidarity. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* can easily be read as promoting the kind of paternalistic altruism that revolutionary social movements and activists (a category that includes liberation theologians) denounce. Such notes of paternalism sound, for example, in the following exhortations to exercise solidarity across all segments of society:

> Those who are more influential, because they have a greater share of goods and common services, should feel *responsible* for the weaker and be ready to share with them all they possess. Those who are weaker, for their part, in the same spirit of *solidarity*, should not adopt a purely *passive* attitude or one that is *destructive* of the social fabric, but, while claiming their legitimate rights, should do what they can for the good of all [no. 39].

Here the call to the "influential," or the privileged, to share the goods they possess echoes a paradigm I critiqued in the previous chapter: the perception of systemic privileges as morally neutral resources one might use on behalf of other, less privileged people. The exhortation here contains no hint that "hav[ing] a greater share of goods and common services" is in any way a moral problem. As William K. Tabb incisively points out, this exhortation directed toward the privileged lacks prophetic analysis of "the sources of their riches" and how those riches may have accrued from structural inequities. What is necessary, Tabb insists, is not merely "responsible use of wealth" but, more deeply, an "investigation of where the wealth came from." Meanwhile, he complains, the exhortation directed toward the oppressed—to avoid either passivity or destructiveness and to seek "the good of all"—is not only unhelpfully vague, but "could be interpreted as condemning action to demand the very redistribution of wealth and power for which the situation of injustice would seem to cry out."[114]

I agree with those critics of *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis,* like Tabb, who find it a disappointingly conservative document. While I appreciate the encyclical's stated

---

[114] William K. Tabb, "John Paul II and Fidel Castro: Two Views of Development," in Baum and Ellsberg, *The Logic of Solidarity,*" 158.

recognition of human interdependence, I do not think the document models a perspective that has truly absorbed what such interdependence must imply. Instead of a theology of solidarity characterized by equality and mutual exchange, the vision of solidarity represented in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* appears to rest on a top-down model of social change. The encyclical seems to value individual charity as much as or more than structural reform, and to rely on the voluntary cooperation of the wealthy more than on the agency, wisdom, and empowerment of the poor. As Mary E. Hobgood asserts, "It champions a solidarity seemingly without struggle," and it shies away from challenging socio-economic privilege.[115]

By lifting up these particular critiques of *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis,* I do not intend a wholesale critique of Catholic social teaching and its promotion of solidarity. On the contrary, I appreciate the contributions of Catholic social teaching—and, more broadly, the larger tradition of intellectual and activist Catholic social thought that has grown in response to this body of teaching—in carving out a significant place for solidarity within Christian theology, as well as re-envisioning the church's mission as solidarity. I also recognize that *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* is neither the final word on solidarity nor entirely representative of how solidarity and related topics, such as liberation or social change, get theorized in Catholic social teaching.[116]

---

[115] Mary E. Hobgood, "Conflicting Paradigms in Social Analysis," in Baum and Ellsberg, *The Logic of Solidarity*, 179, 182.

[116] It should be noted that some of the strongest criticisms of *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* point out how this encyclical differs from other encyclicals or other parts of the tradition of Catholic social teaching. See Hobgood's "Conflicting Paradigms in Social Analysis" as one striking example of this. At the same time, other Catholic scholars criticize Catholic social teaching in general for being too conservative, conflict-avoidant, and skirting the structural analysis and calls for radical political action that genuinely liberative solidarity demands. See Hinze, "Over, Under, Around, and Through" for detailed discussion of such criticisms. See also Dean Brackley, S.J. and Thomas L. Schubeck, S.J., "Moral Theology in Latin America," *Theological Studies* 63 (2002): 123-160. Brackley and Schubeck highlight Latinx theologians who have leveled these criticisms toward Catholic social teaching. Meanwhile, Beyer's "The Meaning of

However, I have found *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* a useful text to consider in the context of my project because it exemplifies how solidarity can easily be conflated with charity—and what that implies for solidary relations when such a conflation occurs. As *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* illustrates, if calls for solidarity are not accompanied by critical questioning of systemic privilege, then those privileges are likely to appear as morally neutral resources to be used on behalf of "weaker" persons and communities. I believe this misrepresents systemic privilege, which is never morally neutral, and it dangerously sets up people with privilege to feel like we are being virtuous or "gratuitously" generous when we attempt to engage in solidarity. Approaching solidary relations in this spirit will reinforce, rather than challenge, relational and structural inequities. If we are concerned instead to promote justice and equality, then we need to unlink our theologies of solidarity from altruistic practices of charity. With this in mind, I believe more fruitful models of solidarity can be found in the theologies and ethics constructed from overtly liberationist perspectives.

c. Solidarity as "orthopraxis": Latin American liberation theology

Perhaps more than anywhere else in Christian theological discourse, solidarity is a central concept in Latin American liberation theology. This in turn has had a profound impact, not only on the growing fields of liberationist theologies and ethics, but also on grassroots social and political activism.[117] In their 2002 survey of Latin American moral

---

Solidarity" addresses and attempts to refute this criticism of Catholic social teaching as too "irenic."

[117] The impact of such liberation theology is especially visible in the Latin American solidarity movement of the 1980s, which built connections across the Americas and prompted many North American people of faith into more explicit political action and advocacy. In chapter 3, I will say more about how this Latin American solidarity movement was instrumental in the development of international nonviolent protective accompaniment. Arguably, liberation theology has not only prompted more radical faith-based activism but has also contributed to the practice of solidarity activism well beyond explicitly Christian communities.

theology, Jesuit scholars Dean Brackley and Thomas Schubeck note that Latinx theologians began using the concept of solidarity in the 1960s.[118] This was the era when the early outlines of liberation theology were emerging through ecclesial gatherings and writings. As Latin American church leaders and Christian base communities critiqued unjust socioeconomic conditions and repressive governments in their region, they began to articulate the gospel as, fundamentally, a message of liberation.[119] This urgent emphasis on liberation became a call to churches and people of faith everywhere to stand in solidarity with the poor and the oppressed. In his seminal work of 1971, *A Theology of Liberation*, Gustavo Gutiérrez made this link explicit by differentiating between the scandalous condition of "material poverty" and the biblical call to "voluntary poverty," that is, a "commitment of solidarity with the poor, with those who suffer misery and injustice." In the theology of liberation that Gutiérrez articulates, such solidarity requires recognizing the evils of material poverty, protesting, and struggling to abolish this poverty.[120]

In the decades since, solidarity has remained a principal theme in this field. As Brackley and Schubeck write, "Today, virtually all moral theologians in Latin America locate solidarity at the center of their ethic."[121] Even more significantly, such an emphasis on solidarity expresses the same concerns with poverty and social justice that motivated early work in liberation theology. Brackley and Schubeck describe how contemporary Latinx theologians employ solidarity as "a banner to counter neoliberalism's

---

[118] Brackley and Schubeck, "Moral Theology in Latin America," 143.
[119] Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, "A Concise History of Liberation Theology," chap. 5 in *Introducing Liberation Theology*. See especially pp. 67-70.
[120] Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, trans. and ed. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973), 300. For Gutiérrez's full typology of poverty and how this relates to solidarity, see chapter 13, "Poverty: Solidarity and Protest," pp. 287-306.
[121] Brackley and Schubeck, "Moral Theology in Latin America," 126.

individualism" and as "the nucleus of an ethic that integrates human rights and other values, including love, justice, freedom, and forgiveness."[122] Their commentary reveals how solidarity as a theological category functions also as social analysis and political action. Indeed, this is characteristic of liberation theology's method, in which "orthopraxis"[123] both precedes and follows from theological reflection, while empirical analysis and practical engagement in the community (through pastoral care, grassroots social activism, or both) are considered integral to the work of theological interpretation.[124]

In addition, Brackley and Schubeck's commentary highlights the connections between a liberationist praxis of solidarity and traditional Christian values of love and justice. As they note, one reason why solidarity has remained in the "center stage" of Latin American theology is that solidarity "seems to many to translate love as described in the New Testament into contemporary Latin American culture."[125] When they expound on the theological foundations for solidarity, love and justice figure prominently. Brackley and Schubeck cite theologians such as Argentine Jesuit Miguel Yáñez and Mexican-born María Pilar Aquino, who present love as the basis of solidarity. Then they turn to theologians who articulate how love and justice operate in concert as "essential elements" of a solidarity that, recognizing the human dignity and equal worth of others, works to establish right relations and just structures. Summarizing this perspective,

---

[122] Brackley and Schubeck, 144.

[123] Orthopraxis, or orthopraxy (literally, "right action"), is a term used to contrast with orthodoxy, which refers to established doctrine, that is, the beliefs considered to be "right." An orthopraxic religion, therefore, prioritizes practices and/or conduct over intellectual assent to doctrines or principles. Liberation theology employs the word "praxis" to refer not simply to action or conduct in general, but more specifically to (public, political) action directed toward transforming the causes and conditions of poverty. When the word "orthopraxis" is used—as it is in Brackley and Schubeck's text—this communicates the perceived high value of such transforming actions, as central to the practice of Christianity.

[124] For a succinct summary of the liberation theology's method, see Brackley and Schubeck, 124.

[125] Brackley and Schubeck, 126.

Brackley and Schubeck write, "Working for the common good is central to social justice; the firm determination to do so is love."[126]

In this discussion, we can hear echoes of the final point I highlighted in my first subsection above: the simultaneous connections and tensions between solidarity and charity. As other scholars of solidarity have pointed out, one might draw a relatively direct line between Christian beliefs about *agape* and contemporary theological emphases on solidarity—and this link does appear in Latin American liberation theology. Yet at the same time, Brackley and Schubeck stress how Latinx theologians relate solidarity to social justice and human rights, thus countering those who would confuse solidarity with "paternalistic assistance, such as almsgiving."[127]

What, then, does Latin American liberation theology imply about the nature of solidary relations between people who experience privilege and affluence and those who suffer oppression and poverty? A representative answer to this question can be found in *Theology of Christian Solidarity*, a text comprising a pair of extended essays written by two early liberation theologians, Jesuit scholars Jon Sobrino and Juan Hernández Pico, who were serving in El Salvador and Nicaragua when they wrote these essays in the early 1980s.[128] During this era, Central America was wracked by violently repressive governments and civil wars spurred on by decades of underdevelopment and growing wealth disparities. The violence suffered by masses of impoverished people in these

---

[126] Brackley and Schubeck, 146.

[127] Brackley and Schubeck, 144.

[128] Jon Sobrino, S.J. and Juan Hernández Pico, S.J., *Theology of Christian Solidarity,* trans. Phillip Berryman (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985). This text was originally published as: Sobrino, "Conllévaos las cargas del reino: Análisis teológico de la solidaridad cristiana" ["Bear the burdens of the kingdom: Theological analysis of Christian solidarity"], *ECA*, San Salvador (March 1982), 157-178; and as Pico "Conllevar las cargas del reino: Un signo de la unidad ecclesial" ["Bearing the burdens of the kingdom: A sign of ecclesial unity"], *Christus*, Mexico City (1982), 59-79. It was subsequently published as *Teología de la solidaridad cristiana* (Managua: Instituto Histórico Centroamericano and Centro Ecuménico Antonio Valdivieso, 1983).

countries caught international attention and prompted what Sobrino describes as "a growing movement of solidarity toward Christians and churches in Latin America."[129] Following liberation theology's method, Sobrino and Pico take this context of solidarity in the midst of poverty and suffering as a starting point for constructing a theology of Christian solidarity. As Pico notes, "Long before becoming a theme in theological reflection, solidarity had been a Christian praxis, a life of love based on faith and hope."[130]

A central concern for these authors is to present solidarity with the poor as God's work and, consequently, the church's fundamental calling, or mission in the world.[131] Sobrino emphasizes that such solidarity is neither "a matter of a one-way flow of aid" nor "an alliance formed to defend one's own interests." Rather, it must be "a process of mutual giving and receiving."[132] In other words, unlike humanitarian or development aid that flows uni-directionally from wealthy nations to needier ones, solidarity is a relationship and an exchange in which the "mission-sending" churches of the First World have much to receive and to learn from the "mission-receiving" churches of the Third

---

[129] Sobrino, *Christian Solidarity,* 1. See note 117 above regarding the connections between liberation theology and political movements of solidarity. As Sobrino makes clear, solidarity with the poor was (and continues to be) practiced by the church in Latin America, as priests and pastors are moved to action and protest. Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador is the best-known example of a church leader who adopted solidarity with the poor as his praxis of ministry. As church leaders in Latin America grew more politically active and outspoken, they became targets of the violence. Again, Archbishop Romero, who was assassinated while conducting mass, exemplifies this. The martyrdom of Romero and other church leaders attracted widespread international attention and outrage, which spurred global networks of activism and protest in solidarity with the people of Latin America. These networks were not limited to Christians, but people of faith did play a significant role. In chapter 3, I will return to this topic of solidarity activism.

[130] Pico, *Christian Solidarity,* 47.

[131] Pico makes these points especially clearly in his essay, as he walks through biblical history to show the unfolding story of "God's taking sides in the struggle between an oppressed people and its oppressor" (48), then demonstrates how the church is called to continue this work and take sides in a similar fashion. Near the end of his essay he writes, "The churches must never lose sight of the fact that the purpose of any mission in history is to provide an avenue for the hope of the poor" (93).

[132] Sobrino, *Christian Solidarity,* 3-5.

World.[133] Likewise, those who enter into solidarity with the poor will find themselves called to fresh insights and to conversion as they receive "new eyes for seeing the ultimate truth of things and new energies for exploring unknown and dangerous paths."[134]

Sobrino does use language of "mutual love" in discussing Christian solidarity.[135] Yet, lest we are tempted to paint solidary relations in overly rosy and comfortable terms, we should notice how he portrays solidarity as a "co-responsibility"[136] that grows from recognizing human interconnectedness and the "mutual cause-and-effect relationship" existing between the conditions of poverty endured by many and the conditions of affluence enjoyed by a few. His critique is especially pointed toward Western Christians and churches as he asks, "Is the exceptional life of some perhaps due to the large-scale exploitation or death of others?"[137] I find it striking that Sobrino uses language of "reparation" when talking about solidarity between First World countries and Latin America. He writes, "Mission [and solidarity] as here portrayed is not only a Christian obligation, it is also an obligation derived from history: reparation for other kinds of church involvement and political intervention of an enslaving nature." Solidarity thus requires prioritizing the interests of the poor over the interests of empire.[138]

In summary, the perspective on solidarity that Sobrino and Pico articulate (which I find an apt representation of Latin American liberation theology more broadly) grounds solidarity not only in Christian love but also, even more deeply perhaps, in the reality of

---

[133] Sobrino, 19-20. Sobrino's discussion of Christian mission is developed throughout pp. 17-24.
[134] Sobrino, 11.
[135] Sobrino, 15.
[136] Pico likewise uses the term "co-responsibility" when explaining the nature of solidarity. He further ties this to the equality that should exist among humans, regardless of differences in national origin, religion, race, culture, etc. See Pico, *Christian Solidarity,* 75-76.
[137] Sobrino, 9-10.
[138] Sobrino, 23-24.

the poor and in the demands of justice, human equality, interconnectedness, and accountability. Consequently, when we who are privileged engage in solidarity with those who are oppressed and exploited, we should not view our actions as heroic, generous, or merciful—but simply as accepting what is our responsibility and moral obligation. In some ways, engaging in solidarity might be viewed as paying down a moral debt. Yet solidarity is also far larger than this. It is inherently relational and mutual, a two-way exchange. As Sobrino and Pico remind us, even while solidarity demands much, it is a salvific process, offering much in return. It is through solidarity that we may recover our human dignity and come to deeper understanding of God, each other, and ourselves.

This perspective on solidarity will reappear in Part Three of this dissertation, especially in chapter 6, "Solidarity as Mutuality." In that chapter, I place excerpts from my fieldwork interviews with CPTers into conversation with texts by two US Latinx theologians, Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Roberto Goizueta. As Cuban-Americans, Isasi-Díaz and Goizueta stand in the lineage of Latin American liberation theology and apply liberationist perspectives to the realities of Latinx communities living in the US. Their mediation between these two contexts (Latin America and the US) make them apt interlocutors for my study of a team of solidarity activists who come from Colombia, North America, and beyond and are working for justice in the Colombian context. Thus, I offer my work in chapter 6—especially the portrait of lived solidarity that I draw from the interview excerpts—as one example of a liberationist orthopraxis of solidarity: grounded in Christian responsibility and love, in human need and interconnectedness, exhibiting the two-way exchange and transformative possibilities of mutual relationship.

d. "Tough solidarity": Womanist perspectives

As I have stressed in my discussion so far, solidarity represents a pivotal value in Christian theology and ethics. Theologies of solidarity have reshaped how many churches perceive and practice Christian mission, and efforts to be in solidarity with the poor may offer significant routes to resisting systemic oppressions. Yet the concept of solidarity is variously understood. It may also get conflated with paternalistic feelings of sympathy or acts of charity, which neither promote the agency of the oppressed nor challenge the superiority thinking of the privileged.

Therefore, as references to solidarity become more frequent and popular, we should be wary of what M. Shawn Copeland labels a "facile adoption" of such rhetoric, in which those of us with privilege ignore or even consume "the experiences and voices of the marginalized and oppressed, while, ever adroitly, dodging the penitential call to conversion."[139] Copeland and other womanists are especially pointed in their critiques of white feminists who have called for "sisterhood" among women while ignoring white women's complicity in racism, classism, and other intersecting oppressions. As Copeland points out, "Black women have been suspicious of sisterhood, apprehending not only the subtle appeal to individualism and self-aggrandizement, but also the *de jure* and *de facto* inequality among the sisters in the family."[140]

Yet even while womanists and feminists of color express suspicions toward the rhetoric of solidarity, they rarely disavow the necessity of building coalitions across

---

[139] M. Shawn Copeland, "Toward a Critical Christian Feminist Theology of Solidarity," in *Women and Theology*, ed. Mary Ann Hinsdale and Phyllis H. Kaminski (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 3.

[140] Copeland, 12. We should note that, even as Copeland points out the dangers of appealing to "sisterhood" without attending to real inequalities among women, she also recognizes the importance of sisterhood for and among Black women. Like solidarity, sisterhood is a concept that cuts more than one way and so requires careful examination.

difference. What is needed, it seems, is not an outright rejection of solidarity but rather a more robust, critically aware ethic of solidarity. Copeland asks, "How do we get beyond naïve, 'politically correct,' clichéd rhetoric about solidarity to Christian social praxis?"[141] This is a pivotal question for my project. So in this final subsection about Christian ethics and theologies of solidarity, I draw on texts by Copeland and by Emilie Townes to consider, first, their analyses of how attempts at solidarity may go awry, and second, their recommendations for how we can instead engage in solidarity more authentically and generatively.

Townes, like Copeland, has a warily mixed reaction to notions of solidarity. In her wide-ranging study of how the structural evils of racism, sexism, and other oppressions have been culturally and materially reproduced throughout US history, Townes concludes, "Solidarity amidst our differences in the face of structural evil may seem to be an exercise in tempting the agony of the absurd."[142] She vividly illustrates this absurdist agony by examining Harriet Beecher Stowe's abolitionist novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, specifically the character Topsy. Stowe's description of Topsy's appearance and behavior becomes, in Townes's words, a "swill pot of caricature," making the enslaved girl appear savage and subhuman. While Stowe apparently intended her portrayal of Topsy to expose and protest the institution of slavery, the novelist in fact has "repeat[ed] the very dehumanizing process she seeks to critique."[143] Even worse, the novel's characterization of Topsy connects to a century-long lineage of racist dolls, children's books, and other material artifacts that have proliferated this denigrating caricature of Black children.

---

[141] Copeland, 24.
[142] Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, 139.
[143] Townes, 140.

Topsy thus stands as a cautionary example of how privileged activists, when well intentioned yet ill informed, can do great damage.

However, Townes does not stop with the history of Topsy as "the first famous pickaninny." Instead she asks, "What happens when Topsy speaks?"[144] That is, what happens when the people who have been objectified through crass stereotypes resist and speak out, revealing themselves to be active subjects and moral agents? This question has profound implications for the nature of solidary relations across differences of oppression and power. These implications become apparent as Townes explores the question by analyzing a moment in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* when Topsy is interviewed by Miss Ophelia. Musing on Miss Ophelia's fumbling efforts to bond with Topsy, Townes is reminded of "those instances when those of us who have some measure of power—either by position in our sociopolitical hierarchy or by the dent of our own will—decide to attempt solidarity with groups or individuals who are among the dispossessed." Such attempts, she concludes, are often a "dismal business," in which our preconceptions get challenged, our expectations foiled, and our "recalcitrant commitment to justice remains deferred because [we cannot receive and value] the genuine differences between us." To counter such naïve efforts, Townes insists, "The challenges of forging a tough solidarity demand all of our creativity and intellect as we step toward a more just and whole society."[145]

What might such a "tough solidarity" entail? To begin with, Townes is very clear that solidarity must not be *assumed* to exist between people working for justice. Rather, she writes, "solidarity is something that is nurtured and grown in the yearning for and living out of justice." Nurturing solidarity requires many forms of "hard work," and

---

[144] Townes, 144.
[145] Townes, 149-150.

Townes's list of the work needed includes "listening, hearing, analyzing, questioning, rethinking, accepting, rejecting… respecting and being respected."[146] I find it significant that this list begins with "listening" and "hearing"—an essential initial response from the privileged "when Topsy speaks."

Copeland makes a similar argument about the necessity of working to build solidarity, rather than assuming its prior existence. She points out how "commonsense" appeals to solidarity are often based on shared identity characteristics or experiences of oppression—yet this alone, she insists, does not ensure solidarity and may even devolve into a demand for group conformity. Nor do such "commonsense" notions address how solidary relations can be constructed between and across social differences.[147] Getting beyond the "mere rhetoric" of solidarity, Copeland explains, will require commitment, effort, and openness to being convicted, converted, transformed. She details concrete practices, or steps, necessary to forge this praxis of solidarity.[148] Notably, these steps—which move from "active and attentive listening" to critical, careful "social analysis" and then to decisions and "commitment to social praxis"—echo the attitudes and actions in the above list of "hard work" that Townes has enumerated.

In addition to emphasizing the actions needed to cultivate solidarity, both Townes and Copeland underline the importance of embracing difference within contexts of solidarity. While solidarity does signify a certain kind of group unity, Townes warns

---

[146] Townes, 155.

[147] Copeland, "Theology of Solidarity," 11-12, 14.

[148] Copeland, 23. The concrete steps of moving beyond rhetoric to "Christian social praxis" are detailed in pp. 24-27. Although I will not take the space here to describe these steps in detail, Copeland's discussion offers important guidance to those of us who want to engage well in solidarity across difference. I especially appreciate (on pp. 24-26) her discussion of the necessary interplay of listening and speaking, as well as the virtues that must be cultivated to effectively enact both of these roles. Similarly, the step of social analysis she breaks down into five "moments," helpfully unpacking what such analysis requires and how it can generate action.

against making unity, rather than justice, the end goal of social activism. “Unity as a teleological goal can be dangerous and life-defeating,” she writes, “for it can overwhelm and neglect equality” and will thus end up serving only the privileged, or “those who have the power and leisure to enforce and ignore differences.” The importance of both attending to and valuing difference grows even clearer as Townes continues, “Unity is only vigorous in an atmosphere that is unafraid of difference and diversity. An atmosphere that does not view difference as a barrier but, like the proverbial stew, makes the aroma richer and provides greater sustenance for the work of justice and of forging communities of resistance and hope.”[149] I believe Townes could substitute the word “solidarity” for “unity” in this discussion, and her assertions would be equally true.[150]

Townes’s warning here about the danger of overvaluing unity (or eliding difference) leads to a corollary point she makes about solidarity: that solidarity is necessary in the struggle for justice, yet should not be treated as an absolute in itself. Solidarity—that is, working together—is necessary to end injustice because the fight is too large for, in Townes’s words, “individual acts of valor and conviction alone.” As she says, “tackling structural evil takes a whole bunch of folks with varieties of skills and insights.”[151] This is why both solidarity and difference, as fraught and challenging as they may be, are essential. Yet at the same time, there are multiple forms of solidarity and, consequently, many decisions to be made about exactly when, where, how, and with

---

[149] Townes, *Womanist Ethics,* 149.
[150] Townes does, in fact, draw this connection explicitly a few pages later, when she asserts that “standing with others across differences does not require that i [sic] be run over in a mad teleological drive toward a misbegotten notion of solidarity” (152). In this same passage, she also warns about the dangers of a “specious deontological notion of a disinterested love”—another misperception of solidarity that may occur when solidarity gets conflated with charity, and *agape* as self-sacrifice gets framed as the central Christian value. I will discuss this point further in chapter 6.
[151] Townes, 156.

whom to be in solidarity. Not only are there specious forms of supposed solidarity that must be avoided, but as Townes explains, there are also "times of reasoned (and unreasoned) dissent," which means "that we may *not* be able to work together on everything or every issue."[152]

For those of us with privilege who want to be good allies, this is such an important truth to grasp. While our overall commitment to resisting oppressions and to engaging in the hard work of solidarity should be unwavering, we also must be sensitive to the moments in which we need to step back. To *not* push our way into the spaces, relationships, or activist efforts in which our presence is not desired by those whose struggle we are trying to support. What shifts when we perceive solidarity not as a transcendent value or as the end goal, but rather as a shifting, dynamic, relational process and as a strategic tactic in the fight against systemic oppressions? These latter perceptions of solidarity, I am convinced, are fundamental to constructing a flexibly nuanced ethic of solidarity.

Turning to Copeland, we can note a similar perspective on the value of difference, especially as she discusses the need for "potential allies" to recognize "the authentic possibility that *differences might enrich rather than divide.*"[153] Relative to Townes, Copeland takes this point in a slightly different and a more explicitly theological direction. In her 1995 essay, "Toward a Critical Christian Feminist Theology of Solidarity," Copeland has begun to explore solidarity as a theological category, grounded in doctrines of the Trinity, of Jesus's incarnation, and of the Eucharist. She expands and deepens these theological reflections in her 2010 book *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race,*

---

[152] Townes, 157. Also, see pp. 156-157 for Townes's description of forms of "solidarity" that are dangerous and to be avoided.
[153] Copeland, "Theology of Solidarity," 17 (emphasis hers).

and Being.[154] In particular, she connects solidarity to the act of taking communion together—a moment in which individual Christians, in all our embodied diversity, represent the Body of Christ. Difference is essential to fully and truly representing this body. As Copeland writes, "The sacramental aesthetics of Eucharist, the thankful living manifestation of God's image through particularly marked flesh, demand the vigorous display of difference in race and culture and tongue, gender and sex and sexuality." We are only complete as the church, she insists, when *all* of us are free to come to the table, the place where our differences are simultaneously embraced and "relativized, reoriented, and reappropriated under [Christ's] sign, the sign of the cross."[155]

Undergirding this vision of Eucharistic diversity and union is Copeland's theological anthropology that centers the suffering bodies of Black women, a theology in which solidarity "denotes the empathetic incarnation of Christian love."[156] In some ways, this feels familiar: as I have noted above, many scholars assert that solidarity has roots in Christian practices of love. Yet Copeland takes this familiar theme and makes it new. As she points out, although the "duty of charity" was traditionally enacted through almsgiving, intended to remedy social and material inequities in the community, such charity did not probe the historical conditions causing those inequities. Almsgiving did not ask the wealthy to treat the poor as anything more than needy objects of charity, nor did it require almsgivers to question their own advantaged positioning.[157]

---

[154] M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010).
[155] Copeland, 82, 83.
[156] Copeland, 93.
[157] For Copeland's discussion of the "duty of charity" and its limitations, see *Enfleshing Freedom*, 92-93.

In contrast, Copeland's theology of solidarity asks us to do all of this.[158] It calls us to recognize the oppressed "other" as a subject of history and of theological reflection and, furthermore, as our brother or sister in the family of God. This theology of solidarity "begins in *anamnesis*," or "intentional remembering" of the victims of history. Beyond remembering, we are called to shoulder our "responsibility for that history," which then obliges us to "do all that we can to end [current] marginalization, exploitation, abuse, and murder" of the poor and the oppressed (which in Copeland's work, is especially a call to act with and on behalf of impoverished Black women). Finally, Copeland stresses that this "shouldering" and "agapic praxis" cannot be done by individuals working alone. Rather, it is the work of interdependent community *and* work to heal that community—work that will "re-member" the Body of Christ. Yet even as solidarity is communal work, it also "admits of particular tasks for each of us by virtue of our differing social locations." In other words, the social and material differences between us must be recognized, not elided. These differences must also be probed for how they inform each individual's particular obligations and possibilities for action in the work of solidarity.

In summary, these theo-ethical reflections by Townes and by Copeland reveal a concept of solidarity that is "tough" in both senses of the word. "Tough solidarity" is hard work, and it is also resilient, like a cord woven from several strands. The differences between us contribute significantly to making solidarity tough, that is, both challenging and powerful. This may be why Copeland and Townes make clear that a responsible theology of solidarity cannot be constructed without attending to the complications of

[158] Copeland's theology of solidarity draws on points that appear throughout *Enfleshing Freedom*, but solidarity gets discussed most directly in pp. 92-101. I consider pp. 100-101 the heart and summation of this theology of solidarity, and all the direct quotes from Copeland's text that appear in this paragraph are from these two pages.

systemic privilege. For this reason, I turn next to considering how privilege functions in Christian theology and ethics.

II. Idolatry, injustice, broken communion: The sin of systemic privilege

In the previous chapter, I gave some space to examining the concept of systemic privilege, especially through lenses of social theory and of anti-oppression activism and education. Here I want to look specifically at privilege as a theological and ethical category. In comparison to solidarity, systemic privilege is an even more recent theme in Christian ethics and theology. This is especially true of texts written from a position of acknowledged privilege and explicitly addressed to privileged readers. In part, this reflects that the academic study of privilege began in a sustained way only in the late 1980s and the 1990s. Only in the past couple of decades has the concept of privilege begun to pervade mainstream public discourse and achieve more widespread—albeit sometimes resistant—recognition. In addition, the more recent emergence of privilege as a theological theme likely reflects how systemic privilege is a provocative and often discomforting idea to grapple with. Typically, marginalized peoples are the first to see and name the mechanisms of oppression and privilege, and they must urge the beneficiaries of these systems to pay attention to privilege before the latter begin to do so. This pattern has marked the emergent academic study of privilege in various disciplines, and it is observable in Christian theology and ethics.

While systemic privilege takes many forms (e.g. male privilege, cisgender privilege, heterosexual privilege, able-bodied privilege, etc.), and these are all relevant to examining the theological implications of privilege, my discussion here will focus largely

on white privilege. As I noted in the previous chapter (and will continue to unpack in following chapters), the dynamics of racism and white privilege have particular relevance to the tactic of international accompaniment. This is one reason why the topic of whiteness looms large in my project. In addition, racism and white privilege have been the most prominent and recurring themes in much of the theological reflection on privilege to date.

When scholars discuss whiteness as a theological concern, the phrases employed include “white racism,” “white supremacy,” “white dominance,” and “white privilege.” While these terms have some different connotations (and may shed light on varying aspects of systemic racism), I consider them roughly equivalent in that all of them describe the fundamental dynamics of racism: how it is a system constructed to preserve unearned advantages and a position of dominance collectively for those of us identified as white. Therefore, in this section focused on the theological implications of systemic privilege and white privilege in particular, I include texts theologizing about white supremacy and racism because I do not see these as disparate topics. In fact, since “privilege” may sound more innocuous, I find it important to highlight its connection to “dominance” and “superiority,” words that have more ominous overtones of injustice. Cynthia Moe-Lobeda names this connection when she speaks of “white dominance and its derivative white privilege,” stressing how morally urgent it is for us to name as “structural sin” both the dominance and the privileges derived from dominance.[159]

Sin is the theological category typically used to frame systemic privilege. In this section, therefore, I examine how Christian theologians and ethicists have explicated the

---

[159] Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, “Being Church as, in, and against White Privilege,” in *Transformed Lutheran Theologies: Feminist, Womanist, and Mujerista Perspectives,* ed. Mary J. Streufert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 199.

sinfulness of privilege. As a first step in that examination, I will briefly overview how (white) privilege has emerged as a theological theme.

a. Confronting whiteness in Christian theology

At the 2001 American Academy of Religion (AAR) annual meeting, James Cone delivered a plenary address critiquing "Theology's Great Sin."[160] In this lecture, Cone describes racism as "America's original sin," and he sketches how, historically, European thinkers offered theological as well as philosophical justification for European colonization and the rise of white supremacy in the Americas and elsewhere. Yet even more than such overtly racist theologizing, the "great sin" Cone is concerned with is the contemporary silence of (most) white theologians in the face of racism—a silence that provides tacit support to racial injustice and masks how much the mainstream theological enterprise itself is entangled in the normative presumptions of white supremacy. After considering what drives this persistent white reluctance to engage racism, Cone concludes his address by urging "white theologians, ministers, and other morally concerned persons to break their silence immediately and continuously" and to develop "hard-hitting antiracist theology."[161] The urgency of this call emerges from the premise underlying Cone's argument: that theology and ethics *cannot* be neutral toward racial injustice. Either thinkers in these fields will directly confront racism and offer

[160] The American Academy of Religion is the largest professional association for scholars and teachers in the fields of religious and theological studies, with a membership of about 9000. As such, the AAR's annual meeting has a significant impact on emerging trends of scholarship and teaching in these fields. Cone's 2001 AAR address can be found in James H. Cone, "Theology's Great Sin: Silence in the Face of White Supremacy," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 55, no. 3-4 (2001): 1-15.

[161] Cone, 12. We should note that Cone is not here calling for an entirely new kind of theology; in his address, he points out how he and other Black liberationist theologians, as well as womanist, *mujerista*, and many Third World theologians, have for decades been writing and publishing theologies that confront racism and other systemic oppressions. The new development Cone seeks is for more *white* scholars to participate in this kind of theologizing.

theological, moral, and spiritual grounding for antiracist action—or these fields will remain institutions predominantly sustaining and sustained by white supremacy.

Cone's indictment of white theologians and ethicists echoes what other prominent Black voices in Christian theology have said. M. Shawn Copeland, naming white racist supremacy as a sin that has deformed the church, writes, "If there is a need for a serious and exacting Black Catholic theology that goes well beyond historical retrieval, there is an even more urgent need for White Catholic theologians to critique White racist supremacy within Church and society…. Only by confronting and combatting White racist supremacy can we take the first steps toward realizing ourselves as the Body of Christ.[162] Consider how the sin of white racist supremacy violates the Eucharistic solidarity Copeland has envisioned in *Enfleshing Freedom*, as discussed above. Those of us who are white, who are unjustly privileged by the violation, have a particular responsibility to confront and redress this sin.

Jamie Phelps presents a similar perspective on the sinfulness of racism and other intersecting systemic oppressions when she argues that these oppressions fundamentally contradict the gospel call to enter into "full communion" with God and with each other. Liberation of the oppressed, she insists, is a necessary theological commitment and corollary to communion ecclesiology.[163] Like Copeland and Cone, Phelps also criticizes the majority of white theologians and the institutional church for an "astonishing silence" in the face of racism—a lack of protest she considers "parallel" to the silent complicity of

---

[162] M. Shawn Copeland, "Guest editorial," *Theological Studies* 61, no. 4 (Dec 2000): 605, 607. Note that this was a special issue of *Theological Studies* devoted to exploring Catholic receptions of Black theology.

[163] Jamie T. Phelps, O.P., "Communion Ecclesiology and Black Liberation Theology," *Theological Studies* 61, no. 4 (Dec 2000): 672-699.

leading German theologians during the Nazi regime.[164] She closes with this call to speak out: "To get to the truth one must break silent complicity with the social evil that has marred the past and continues to mar the present reality. What must be confronted are the White supremacist, gender, and class ideologies that lead to the current patterns of interpersonal, social, and ecclesial relationships that contradict God's call to communion."[165]

Cone, Copeland, and Phelps are not the only theologians of color who have called for white scholars to confront white supremacy and privilege using the disciplinary lenses and resources of Christian theology. But I have highlighted these three texts, not only because they include such clear indictments of white silence and complicity in the face of racism, but also because they elicited direct responses from white scholars. The 2000 special issue of *Theological Studies* (which includes the essays by Copeland and Phelps) was the impetus that gave rise, first, to an ongoing session addressing white privilege and racism within the Catholic Theological Society of America and, eventually, to the 2007 publication of *Interrupting White Privilege: Catholic Theologians Break the Silence*.[166] This book is a collection of essays in which white theologians and ethicists have named, historicized, theologically critiqued, and attempted to "interrupt" white privilege.

Meanwhile, in response to Cone's 2001 AAR address, a few white scholars convened and presented the following year an AAR panel entitled "Doing Our First Works Over: White Theologians and Ethicists Talk about Race." The work from this panel was gradually developed and expanded into a 2004 volume of essays, *Disrupting*

---

[164] Phelps, 689. 692.
[165] Phelps, 699.
[166] Laurie M. Cassidy and Alex Mikulich, eds., *Interrupting White Privilege: Catholic Theologians Break the Silence* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007).

White Supremacy from Within: White People on What We Need to Do. While the editors of this book have chosen to foreground white supremacy as the evil that must be disrupted, their definition reveals its connection to privilege. White supremacy, they explain, is a multifaceted, integrated racist system, "in which whiteness—'white' bodies, 'white' persons, cultural and societal practices associated with those deemed 'white'—is seen as normative and superior." This perceived superiority results in material practices and symbolic representations that "*privilege* whiteness" and give "advantaged status" to those people identified as white.[167]

These two volumes are significant because they represent collective (and relatively newfound) attempts among white scholars to confront how racism is not only a systemic harm to people of color, but also a moral problem for white people, who are systemically and unfairly advantaged.[168] Both books turn the spotlight of attention onto *whiteness* and—as their titles indicate—present the privileged, or dominant, status of whiteness (including white culture, norms, and people) as the central problem of a racist system that must be ruptured. In this critical attention to whiteness, by white theologians and ethicists, these books enact both confession and conversion. That is, the authors here are confessing the sin of systemic privilege and attempting to turn from that sin toward

---

[167] Jennifer Harvey, Karin A. Case, and Robin Hawley Gorsline, eds., *Disrupting White Supremacy from Within: White People on What We Need to Do* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2004), 22 (emphasis mine).

[168] In addition to recalling how theologians and ethicists of color have spent several decades addressing issues of race, racism, and white supremacy in their fields (see note 161 above), I also want to note that these two volumes are not the first attempts by white thinkers to engage racism and white privilege (and sometimes systemic privilege more broadly) in Christian theology and ethics. In Chapter 1 of *Disrupting White Supremacy from Within*, "Shaking the Foundations: White Supremacy in the Theological Academy," Robin Hawley Gorsline reviews the works of white theologians, ethicists, church leaders and activists who *have* engaged racism and white supremacy. As he points out, however, these works represent individual and relatively rare voices, which have not yet effectively created change in the field of theology. He argues that we need more sustained dialogue and "a critical mass of interconnected writing and teaching about theological white supremacy" (56) in order to truly take up Cone's challenge. *Disrupting White Supremacy from Within* and *Interrupting White Privilege* are, to my knowledge, the first edited volumes by groups of white authors addressing these topics and, as such, are significant for being collective and dialogical.

new ways of living (specifically, in this case, new ways of doing theology and ethics). In the following subsection, I will draw on essays from these two volumes, as well as a few additional texts, to further explore what it means to theologize privilege as sin.

b. The sin of privilege and the call to conversion

I begin this subsection with an essay by Bryan N. Massingale, in which he analyzes ten years' worth of published statements by US Catholic bishops in order to assess how these statements theologically and pastorally address racism.[169] They are "unanimous" in perceiving racism as sinful,[170] he observes, but most of the statements overlook the structural nature of racism and the systemic power imbalances between whites and people of color. The sin of racism thus gets framed as personal prejudice and interpersonal hate speech or malicious acts—a limited vision that permits one prelate to "define racism as 'a sin against fraternal charity' rather than as a violation of justice."[171]

To critique this inadequate theology, Massingale draws on James Cone's description of sin as idolatry, or denying one's creaturely status and cherishing "an inflated sense of one's own importance." This is the sin undergirding the injustice of racism, he insists. Summarizing Cone, Massingale explains, "The systemic relationships of domination and privilege that White Americans enjoy and defend are manifestations of the desire to be 'like God,' the living a lie, the claiming more for oneself than one ought, which are of the essence of sin."[172] Thus, Massingale's critical analysis not only widens

---

[169] Bryan N. Massingale, "James Cone and Recent Catholic Episcopal Teaching on Racism," *Theological Studies* 61, no. 4 (Dec 2000): 700-730. Note that this is the special issue of *Theological Studies* in which the above-referenced essays by Copeland and Phelps also appear.
[170] Massingale, 718.
[171] Massingale, 706.
[172] Massingale, 719.

the emphasis from (inter)personal sin to structural sin, but also shines a light on the moral wrong that white privilege is.[173]

Such framing of white privilege and white supremacy as sinful idolatry reappears in one of the essays in *Disrupting White Supremacy from Within*. In this chapter, Sally Noland MacNichol writes, "Theologically, we can speak of white supremacy as an idolatrous faith, a spiritual disease…. We can speak of it as a corrosive and deadly sin that subverts creation and salvation."[174] She goes on to present racism and whiteness as a manifestation of the demonic "powers" discussed in the Bible, that is, evil spiritual forces that enslave people and wreak physical, psychic, and social havoc.

Understanding whiteness in this way helps MacNichol unpack how it is destructive, not only to the people of color harmed by racism, but also to white people, whose souls have been "crippled" and "stunted" by "the lies of white superiority."[175] Furthermore, this theologizing clarifies how white supremacy and systemic privilege are more than just social problems to be resolved through public action. Because they are also spiritual ills from which we need to be liberated, appropriate responses from those of us who are white include mourning and lament, confession of the collective guilt into which we have been born, and conversion. Citing Cone, MacNichol proclaims that "redemption through God's grace [is] possible," but it requires "radically reorienting

---

[173] This latter point emerges most explicitly in Massingale's concluding recommendations for constructing a "more adequate ethics of racial justice" (726). The first of his six proposals is to shift from a focus on racism to a focus on white privilege. Without a "serious analysis of 'whiteness' as a social location of structured advantage and dominance," a theological understanding of racism remains "superficial," Massingale insists (727).

[174] Sally Noland MacNichol, "'We Make the Road by Walking': Reflections on the Legacy of White Anti-Racist Activism," in Harvey, Case, and Gorsline, *Disrupting White Supremacy from Within*, 189. In this essay, MacNichol acknowledges the influence (especially) of James Cone in helping her come to see whiteness as sinful idolatry.

[175] MacNichol, 191.

one's existence in the world"—a reorientation away from reliance on whiteness and into alliance with the oppressed and active antiracist struggle.[176]

Similar notes are sounded in several of the essays in *Interrupting White Privilege*. Throughout this volume, white privilege appears as a theological and moral evil. Margaret E. Guider, for example, presents racism as a devastating "counter-witness to the gospel," and as such, it is a sin committed both in and by the church, requiring confession and penance.[177] In language that echoes MacNichol's description of white supremacy as a demonic power, Guider insists, "Racism and white superiority will not be exorcised unless they are called by name."[178] Barbara Hilkert Andolsen offers another angle on the sinfulness of racism and white privilege when she details how they violate the ethical norms of justice and the common good.[179] Likewise, Mary E. Hobgood explicates how white privilege produces "economic and erotic alienation," rupturing the interdependent, just relations for which humans were created.[180] As Hobgood has argued elsewhere, "In order to do the theological work of constructing rightly related communities as a response to the God of justice and love, social relations informed by structures that promote an unjust distribution of power and privilege must be dismantled and transformed."[181]

As this brief overview reveals, when systemic privilege is theologized, it is consistently framed as sin. The language differs from one discussion to another: I have

[176] MacNichol, 201, 210.
[177] Margaret E. Guider, "Moral Imagination and the *Missio ad Gentes,*" in Cassidy and Mikulich, *Interrupting White Privilege*, 95-123.
[178] Guider, 98.
[179] Barbara Hilkert Andolsen, "Social Justice, the Common Good, and New Signs of Racism," in Cassidy and Mikulich, *Interrupting White Privilege*, 56-74.
[180] Mary E. Hobgood, "White Economic and Erotic Disempowerment: A Theological Exploration in the Struggle against Racism," in Cassidy and Mikulich, *Interrupting White Privilege*, 40-55.
[181] Mary Elizabeth Hobgood, *Dismantling Privilege: An Ethics of Accountability,* rev. ed. (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2009), 2.

seen privilege variously described as a manifestation of injustice, idolatry, greed, abuse of power, complicity, structural violence, alienation and broken relationships, the violation of communion, and disobedience to God's call or will. But whatever the specific language used, privilege is again and again depicted as a moral and spiritual wrong that must be confronted and redressed.

Theologizing systemic privilege as sin is significant, first, because of how this unmasks the evil lurking beneath what many of us experience simply as everyday life. Cynthia Moe-Lobeda points this out when she describes the systemic privileges that some of us enjoy because of white racism and global economic exploitation—privileges as basic to us as where we live or what food and clothes we buy. Explaining how our easy access to these resources has resulted from other people's exploitation, she names this "structural violence" and declares, "This is the horror of structural sin: that simply by being white, I participate in white privilege."[182]

As Bryan Massingale observed in his 2000 study discussed above, it is common for Christians and churches to label racism as "sin"—but too frequently such labeling focuses only on personal prejudice between people of different races, leaving larger systemic injustices ignored and unchanged. This limited vision of systemic oppressions such as racism allows the privileged to presume a moral "innocence" we do not have. Nor has the situation changed much in the years since Massingale's study. As Elizabeth T. Vasko writes in a book published in 2015, "While most white Christians only condemn overt forms of racial violence, racism and white privilege continue to malform white Christian identity through unethical silence and privileged indifference to suffering."[183]

---

[182] Moe-Lobeda, "Being Church," 203.
[183] Elizabeth Vasko, *Beyond Apathy: A Theology for Bystanders* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 88.

Second, theologizing privilege as sin is significant because it calls privileged people to confession, repentance, and conversion—steps of faith that must begin with telling the truth about the systems in which we are implicated. As Moe-Lobeda asserts, "The call to renounce sin—including structural sin—is a call to confess it and repent of it. However, sin unrecognized cannot be confessed or repented."[184] But if we can see and name the structural sin that systemic privilege is, then we can begin to turn toward a different way of being. Again, Moe-Lobeda articulates this hope as she writes of her belief that, "while my social location always will be white, I can change my social stance, moving—however haltingly—toward a justice that reflects the God whom Jesus loved. White people can actively resist white privilege and white dominance, even while not fully escaping them."[185]

Third and finally, theologizing privilege as sin has weighty implications for the question at the heart of this dissertation: how do we ethically analyze and respond to calls to the privileged to "use our privilege" for good? As I argued in the previous chapter, such calls can dangerously—and all too easily—slide into perceiving privilege as a morally neutral tool for social action. Theologizing systemic privilege as sin counters this impulse. Even more, staying attentive to the sinful nature of privilege reminds us that our larger calling is to dismantle such unjust systems. In our daily work toward that end, when those of us with privilege are discerning whether or how to draw on the material resources, access or influence our privileges have granted us, it is important that we do this in a spirit of moral responsibility and accountability. Our efforts of solidarity should

[184] Moe-Lobeda, "Being Church," 199.
[185] Moe-Lobeda, 206.

participate in what Moe-Lobeda has depicted as movement, “however haltingly,” toward a justice that reflects the heart of God.

III. Privilege and solidarity in tension

By this point in the chapter, it is clear that the moral value of solidarity and the moral wrong of privilege are in tension with each other. For some Christian theologians and ethicists, this tension leads them to posit solidarity as the antidote to privilege. In other words, they see solidarity as a principle and practice that can right the wrongs of systemic privilege.

A stark example of a theological text that frames solidarity as opposed to privilege—and thus as the solution—is an essay by Roger Haight tellingly titled “The Dysfunctional Rhetoric of ‘White Privilege’ and the Need for Racial Solidarity.”[186] In this piece, Haight critiques the public rhetoric of “dismantling white privilege” because, although such language is descriptively and analytically apt, he complains that it “focuses the problem on whites in a negative, accusatory way,” without providing an alternative, positive vision of what we should be working *towards*.[187] He prefers the “positive concept of racial solidarity,” arguing that this better focuses attention on commonality, mutuality, and cooperative resistance that can be “shared by all.”[188]

I find Haight’s essay problematic, illustrative of ways the privileged may try to back away from grappling with the discomforting reality of privilege. When Haight argues that “racial solidarity” is the true opposite of “racial injustice,” he seems to be

[186] Roger Haight, “The Dysfunctional Rhetoric of ‘White Privilege’ and the Need for Racial Solidarity,” in Cassidy and Mikulich, *Interrupting White Privilege*, 85-94.
[187] Haight, 88-89.
[188] Haight, 90-91.

seeking an ethic that can be applied universally, across all races. This approach contradicts the insight of liberationist ethicists, who insist our ethics must be *particular*, grounded in and responding to our own social locations. As Jennifer Harvey points out, a "particularist ethic" is especially important when addressing racism because such an ethic better illuminates "the different work required of differently racialized groups in the context of white supremacy."[189] If the rhetoric of white privilege seems to "isolate" and "accuse" whites, as Haight suggests, Harvey would likely respond by explaining how whiteness itself has been historically and materially constructed to set apart and privilege white culture and those of us identified as white. Furthermore, in Haight's call for a "racial solidarity" grounded upon "commonality," I hear precisely the kind of elision of difference that Townes warns against when she writes, "Unity as a teleological goal can be dangerous and life-defeating for it can overwhelm and neglect equality."[190] Haight's vision of "racial solidarity" does not reflect the "tough solidarity" Townes has called for, nor does his discussion of Copeland's theology of solidarity do justice to her careful theorizing of difference.

Haight's argument about the so-called "dysfunctional rhetoric" of white privilege may seem like an outlier in a volume entitled *Interrupting White Privilege.* However, by proposing solidarity as the solution, he echoes other included authors who also lift up solidarity as a Christian value standing in opposition to systemic privilege. Such a perspective appears when Jon Nilson critiques the majority of white Catholic theologians, himself included, who have marginalized Black theology. This marginalization, Nilson

---

[189] Jennifer Harvey, *Dear White Christians: For Those Still Longing for Racial Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2014), 59-60.
[190] Townes, *Womanist Ethics*, 149.

argues, has led to “our failure in solidarity.”[191] Likewise, Charles Curran highlights Catholic social teaching’s emphases on solidarity in order to show that racism and white privilege violate Catholic ideals.[192] When these theologians point to privilege as a breach of solidarity, they also imply that living into solidarity will help us overcome the problem of privilege, as if the two were simple opposites.

One of the most extensive discussions opposing solidarity to privilege appears in Mary Elizabeth Hobgood’s *Dismantling Privilege: An Ethics of Accountability,* which is one of the earliest (and still one of the broadest) critiques of systemic privilege written from the perspective of a white Christian ethicist. Alongside her detailed analyses of the interlocking injustices of systemic privileges based on race, class, gender and sexuality, Hobgood insists, “The solution is solidarity.”[193] She especially stresses the importance of building “solidarity across differences,” that is, “mobilizing differences to challenge our assigned roles as dominants and subordinates and to interrupt the unshared power of dominant groups at various sites of privilege/oppression.”[194] Hobgood thus suggests that enacting a “politics of solidarity” will offer privileged persons a way to overcome our privilege and, eventually, to dismantle the systems conferring upon on us these unearned advantages.[195]

Hobgood’s text provides much fruitful analysis and, in counter to Haight’s argument, effectively demonstrates why it *is*, in fact, so important to focus public attention and rhetoric on dismantling privilege. However, her call to solidarity does not

[191] Jon Nilson, “Confessions of a White Catholic Racist Theologian,” in Cassidy and Mikulich, *Interrupting White Privilege*, 31.
[192] Charles Curran, “White Privilege: My Theological Journey,” in Cassidy and Mikulich, *Interrupting White Privilege*, 79.
[193] Hobgood, *Dismantling Privilege*, 108.
[194] Hobgood, 139.
[195] Hobgood, 41.

really wrestle with how current conditions of privilege inevitably impinge upon privileged persons' efforts to engage in solidarity. Robin Hawley Gorsline notes this failing in Hobgood's argument when he critiques her for moving "rather quickly" into the call to solidarity, without sufficient attention to the work the "overprivileged" must first do within and among ourselves to prepare for solidarity.[196]

More broadly, Gorsline and his fellow editors of *Disrupting White Supremacy from Within* express a certain caution toward solidarity. They note how, when attention turns to racism, white theologians and ethicists are "overwhelmingly concerned with reconciliation and 'inclusion,'" employing discourse "characterized by too quick and too abstract a call to solidarity."[197] These editors have not given up on solidarity altogether as a value and a goal. But the solidarity they envision is "deeper" and "new," and white people cannot enter it without first engaging in the reparations and repentance needed to transform "discursive and material conditions."[198] Rather than representing solidarity as a straightforward answer to systemic privilege (and to white privilege and white supremacy specifically), this perspective holds up solidarity as a possible—though hardly guaranteed—future reality, achievable only *after* conditions of privilege and power imbalances have been confronted and changed. As Harvey insists, "The theo-ethical learning from a critical analysis of race and race's history is that repentance and concrete

---

[196] Gorsline, "Shaking the Foundations," 45-46. One example Gorsline names of the kind of work needed is for the privileged to begin to divest ourselves of our belief that we should receive "credit" for our anti-oppression activism (or even for our good intentions). Within accompaniment activism, this desire for credit—which Gorsline names as a "sense of entitlement"—manifests as a tendency to perceive accompaniers as "heroic" or "innocent," thus masking the actual power dynamics occurring during accompaniment.

[197] Harvey, Case, and Gorsline, eds., *Disrupting White Supremacy from Within,* 28.

[198] Harvey, Case, and Gorsline, 28-29.

repair remain prior conditions for reconciliation and solidarity between white people and African American people."[199]

Insofar as solidarity is perceived, like reconciliation, as a state of healed relationships—a restoration of the human community, which has been torn apart and unbalanced by the systems that privilege some people over others—then I agree that solidarity across difference is fully possible only after systemic privileges have been dismantled. The very existence of oppressions and privileges violate the principles of equality and justice that are central to solidarity. However, I believe it is also possible to think of solidarity as the activism and struggle in which we must engage in order to reach that future state of full equality, reconciliation, and restored communion. Further, I find it valuable to think about solidarity in this latter way because it helps us grasp the importance of building alliances and working in coalitions in order to achieve social change.

Even as these difference-embracing coalitions are necessary in order to build political power, we must also understand how such coalitions call each of us into particular, different yet complementary tasks, relative to how we are each positioned in relation to the unjust material conditions we seek to change. Harvey is clear that when white people enter antiracist coalitions, our particular responsibility is to disrupt white supremacy and privilege. She writes, "In the clarity and mobilization that particularity makes possible, we can then move against whiteness as white people. Such work is a far more intimate posture of solidarity with communities of color… than attempts to generate

---

[199] Jennifer Harvey, "Race and Reparations: The Material Logics of White Supremacy," in Harvey, Case, and Gorsline, *Disrupting White Supremacy from Within*, 115.

intimacy and relationships through talking about our shared humanity."[200] At times our particular responsibilities and the tasks of solidarity will require that we work side-by-side with people whose social identities differ from our own. Other times, solidarity may be more effectively served by working apart. But what holds us all together—what constitutes the solidarity between us—are our shared goal of justice and our shared work toward radical structural change.

In her discussion of what an antiracist commitment requires of white people, Harvey identifies what she calls "a paradoxical path out of the very conundrum of whiteness." This paradox requires us, on the one hand, to "attempt to constantly be white"—that is, to persistently name, own, and take responsibility for our histories and privileged social locations. Yet simultaneously we must also "actively and endlessly refuse to be white"—that is, we must redress and repair these histories by resisting, rejecting, and disrupting the privileges we experience.[201]

I believe the paradox Harvey has articulated is similar and related to the "moral paradox of privilege" that shapes the central question of this dissertation. As this chapter has made clear, there is an irreducible tension between solidarity and systemic privilege. We cannot resolve that tension by simply choosing to live in solidarity instead of living with privilege. Rather, our efforts to engage in solidarity will necessarily be shaped by the social and material conditions of privilege that we experience. Ethics of solidarity must take this into account. Furthermore, such ethics can only be constructed through careful attention to particularity. And so, in Part Two of this dissertation, I will turn to a particular form of solidarity activism, international protective accompaniment, and then

---

[200] Harvey, *Dear White Christians*, 170.
[201] Harvey, *Dear White Christians,* 190.

to a particular organization doing accompaniment, Christian Peacemaker Teams, in order to consider what these examples may teach us about the complications of privilege within the work of solidarity.

Chapter Three:
Accompaniment Activism: Privilege in Action?

In one of the earlier studies of international protective accompaniment, Liam Mahony and Luis Enrique Eguren define accompaniment as "the physical presence of foreign volunteers with the dual purpose of protecting civilian activists or organizations from violent, politically motivated attacks and encouraging them to proceed with their democratic activities."[202] In other words, accompaniers travel to conflict zones to be physically present with civilian communities and individuals endangered by the violence. In some cases, these endangered civilians are refugees, internally displaced persons, racial or ethnic minorities, subsistence farmers, or other vulnerable populations. In many cases, the endangered civilians are grassroots activists, whom the perpetrators of the violence target because of the activists' work for justice, peace and human rights.[203] The goal of accompaniment, therefore, is not only to lessen violence and heighten the safety of civilians at risk, but also to expand the space for these local activists to continue their resistance movements and struggles against an oppressive status quo. Indeed, Mahony and Eguren carefully point out that accompaniment should be seen most fundamentally as "a *tool* used by actors in the conflict," and so in contrast to models of international intervention that expect external actors to resolve the conflict, "accompaniment helps local civilian activists become protagonists in their own search for peace."[204]

---

[202] Liam Mahony and Luis Enrique Eguren, *Unarmed Bodyguards: International Accompaniment for the Protection of Human Rights* (West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press, 1997), 2.

[203] By naming these various cases, I am trying to communicate something of the range of situations in which accompaniment has been and may be used—but the categories I list should be seen as frequently overlapping, rather than separate or exclusive cases. In many situations of conflict, communities or populations who are targeted because of their identity and/or are vulnerable because of their socioeconomic status are also very active in nonviolent resistance and movements for social change.

[204] Mahony and Eguren, *Unarmed Bodyguards*, 6 (emphasis theirs).

In another early study of accompaniment, Barry Levitt offers a definition that echoes some of Mahony and Eguren's emphases while evoking further nuances and questions. Levitt writes, "The essential idea of accompaniment is that foreign citizens use their 'power' as foreigners in an attempt to safeguard the security of individuals or groups at risk of harassment or persecution by their own state or an agent thereof." In the same paragraph, he stresses that accompaniment is more "substantive" than a process of simply observing or monitoring human rights; it is a "practice that is done for or with a *person* or a *group*" and contains elements of "transsocietal solidarity."[205]

Like Mahony and Eguren, Levitt presents accompaniment as an effort to increase safety for at-risk groups and individuals, and he assumes that those doing the accompaniment will be "foreign"—outsiders to the conflict, who have come from another nation or society. Even more, he implies that the "power" accompaniment draws on to accomplish its ends is grounded in this "foreign" status of the accompaniers. Though neither he nor Mahony and Eguren name this explicitly in their definitions of accompaniment, the majority of accompaniers come from North American and Western European countries, while most accompaniment projects occur in the Global South.[206] So

---

[205] Barry Levitt, "Theorizing Accompaniment," in *Journeys of Fear: Refugee Return and National Transformation in Guatemala*, ed. Liisa L. North and Alan B. Simmons (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), 238 (emphasis his).

[206] Sara Koopman, "Making space for peace: International protective accompaniment in Colombia," in *Geographies of Peace*, ed. Fiona McConnell, Nick Megoran, and Philippa Williams (London: I.B.Tauris, 2014), 109-110. Koopman's work represents the most recent and thorough research into accompaniment organizations and projects throughout the world, but this point about who is doing accompaniment where appears in other studies as well, and some writers draw further connections between citizenship and racial and class privilege. For example, Clare Weber points out how most accompaniers are "Euro-American or European, White and middle class," while those being accompanied are usually "person[s] of color in the South." For her, this indicates that the "North to South direction" of international accompaniment is "inherent" in this form of activism. Weber, *Visions of Solidarity: US Peace Activists in Nicaragua From War to Women's Activism and Globalization* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006), 43. I also want to acknowledge that, although Mahony and Eguren do not specify in their definition of accompaniment that the "foreign volunteers" usually come from the Global North to work in the Global South, they do note this dynamic at the end of their book as they are discussing further challenges for accompaniment. Mahony and

what Levitt obliquely calls the accompaniers' "power as foreigners" might be more precisely understood as the global weight and worth often accorded to Western citizenship—what may be referred to as "passport privilege."

Yet at the same time, Levitt's mention of "solidarity" draws attention to the grassroots relational networks—links stretching between and among activists residing in different countries and social locations—that international protective accompaniment both relies on *and* aims to strengthen and extend. This emphasis on solidarity seems in line with Mahony and Eguren's accent on the support role that accompaniers play to aid the struggle in which the accompanied are the main actors. To frame accompaniment as a form of transnational solidarity activism offers a somewhat different vision of where and how agency and power reside in the relationship between the accompanied and their accompaniers. In this paradigm, the focus is less on how accompaniment may protect vulnerable populations, and more on how it may serve the agency of those being accompanied and strengthen their connections to international constituencies of concerned citizens.

Already in these early discussions of international protective accompaniment we can see a tension between, on the one hand, accompaniers necessarily and visibly coming from outside of the conflict to provide security for those within and vulnerable to the conflict, and on the other hand, accompaniers standing with those they are accompanying in a show of solidarity and common concerns. This tension illuminates how the paradox of privilege sits at the heart of accompaniment work. Is systemic privilege (especially,

---

Eguren write, "A second problematic area for accompaniment work is related to the fact that most volunteers come from the so-called first world, and most projects operate in the third world…. Most accompaniment volunteers have been Western European or North American and white" (*Unarmed Bodyguards,* 251).

though not solely, of citizenship and race) a necessary power for achieving the goals of increased safety and violence reduction? Does the privileged status of (only) some activists indicate a troubling inequity interfering with the solidarity that accompaniment aims to enact? Does systemic privilege function in both of these ways simultaneously?

In this chapter I explore this tension without aiming to resolve it. My goal here is to give an overview of international protective accompaniment in order to illustrate how systemic privilege has been entangled in this form of activism since its rise in the 1980s. Even as accompaniers have deliberately leveraged systemic privilege, those practicing and studying accompaniment activism have also questioned and wrestled with the implications of privilege. This double-edged nature of systemic privilege—how it both enables and constrains actions in the cause of solidarity—emerges already in the early history of accompaniment, which is the focus of the first section below. The double-edged nature of privilege comes even more into focus when we compare the conceptual paradigms that get used to frame international accompaniment, as well as the varied theories about what makes accompaniment "work"—the topics, respectively, of the second and third sections below. As I demonstrate in this chapter, those working in international protective accompaniment must dwell within the paradox of privilege, which we cannot do ethically or strategically without interrogating our assumptions about power, agency, and the ends we hope to achieve.

I. "Breaking new ground": The rise of accompaniment in the 1980s

The term "accompaniment" was first used for this form of nonviolent activism by Peace Brigades International (PBI), which sent their first sustained international team to

Guatemala in 1983. That year also marked the beginning of Witness for Peace (WFP), an organization whose tactics included physical accompaniment in Nicaragua, as well as nonviolent direct action and political advocacy campaigns in the US. This same context of activism and urgency inspired the vision for the founding of Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT), as I will discuss in greater detail in the next chapter.

In the decades since, accompaniment activism has grown gradually yet significantly. During the 1990s, at least seven organizations from North America and Western Europe coordinated large-scale accompaniment of refugees returning to Guatemala.[207] Not only has accompaniment expanded in terms of the number of organizations engaged in this work; also, the practice of accompaniment (as well as requests from those desiring it) has spread into other regions, notably the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and elsewhere in Latin America. According to peace researcher Sara Koopman, by 2014 there were 24 organizations practicing accompaniment in twelve countries.[208]

International protective accompaniment has deep historical roots in nonviolence movements and humanitarian service. The concept of unarmed civilians offering

---

[207] See Levitt, "Theorizing Accompaniment"—as well as *Journeys of Fear,* the volume in which his essay appears—for detailed discussion of this refugee return and the (partial yet hopeful) related transformation of politics and human rights practices in Guatemala. In his essay, Levitt notes how significant was the agreement signed in 1992 between the government of Guatemala and the Permanent Commissions of Guatemalan Refugees in Mexico. Previously, the security of refugees had been considered the domain of the UN and of the individual governments involved. But this 1992 agreement explicitly stipulated that the returning Guatemalan refugees would be accompanied through the "physical presence," not only of UN and governmental bodies, but also of various NGOs, religious and lay organizations, and renowned individuals. This opened new space for citizen activism and encouraged several NGOs active in refugee issues to launch accompaniment programs. Liam Mahony calls this large-scale accompaniment of returning refugees "the biggest step in the institutionalization of accompaniment" in Mahony, "Peace Brigades International: Nonviolence in Action," in *Nonviolent Intervention Across Borders: A Recurrent Vision*, ed. Yeshua Moser-Puangsuwan and Thomas Weber (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, 2000), 147.

[208] Koopman, "Making space for peace," *Geographies of Peace*, 109-110. In a note on p. 127, Koopman lists these accompaniment locations as: Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Mexico, First Nations territory in North America, Palestine, Kurdistan (Iraq), Mindanao (Philippines), Sri Lanka, Nepal, Sudan. In her text, she also notes that thirteen groups serve in Colombia, making this country "far and away" the one with the highest number of accompaniment organizations (110).

protective presence and nonpartisan intervention in conflict zones goes back at least to the formation of the International Committee of the Red Cross in 1863.[209] Several researchers who discuss the history of accompaniment include among their examples such prominent 20th-century nonviolence campaigns as Gandhi's Shanti Sena, or peace army, and the Freedom Riders in the US civil rights movement.[210] Mahony and Eguren cite the letter-writing campaigns of Amnesty International, begun in 1961, as a venue for "everyday citizens" to use the "deterrent effect of international moral pressure" to support human rights around the world.[211] They further note how the accompaniment work of PBI and WFP in Central America in the 1980s pulled on strands from various already established international movements of nonviolence, human rights, liberation theology, antinuclear protest, and resistance to war and militarism.[212] In particular, Latin America solidarity activism and broad congregational involvement in the Sanctuary Movement[213] deepened public awareness of what was occurring in Central America and expanded the constituencies of concerned supporters upon which PBI and WFP relied.[214]

---

[209] Mahony, "Peace Brigades International," 139.

[210] See, for example, Lisa Schirch, *Civilian Peacekeeping: Preventing Violence and Making Space for Democracy* (Uppsala, Sweden: Life & Peace Institute, 2006); Weber, *Visions of Solidarity*; Christine Schweitzer, ed., *Civilian Peacekeeping: A Barely Tapped Resource* (Belm-Vehrte, Germany: Sozio Publishing, 2009); and Sara Koopman, "Making Space for Peace: International Protective Accompaniment in Colombia (2007-2009)" (PhD diss., University of British Colombia, 2012).

[211] Mahony and Eguren, *Unarmed Bodyguards*, 3.

[212] Mahony and Eguren, 3-4.

[213] Inspired by the 19th-century Underground Railroad, the Sanctuary Movement was a campaign during the 1980s in which religious congregations (as well as student groups and other activists) across the US declared themselves "sanctuaries" for Central American refugees fleeing political persecution. Because US immigration policies at the time made it very difficult for Central American refugees to gain asylum, those involved in the Sanctuary Movement were openly opposing federal law as they offered shelter, material and legal aid to the fleeing refugees. For more detailed discussion of the Sanctuary Movement, see Susan Bibler-Coutin, *The Cultures of Protest: Religious Activism and the US Sanctuary Movement* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993); Hilary Cunningham, *God and Caesar at the Rio Grande: Sanctuary and the Politics of Religion* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995); and Robin Lorentzen, *Women in the Sanctuary Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991).

[214] Mahony credits the Central American solidarity movement as the "biggest" source of PBI volunteers and support, noting how the movement "provided a base of financial support, interested and politically educated volunteers and a broad network of political pressure to protect PBI in the field" ("Peace Brigades

Still, Mahony and Eguren insist that the accompaniment tactics these two organizations pioneered were "breaking new ground," as volunteers not only protested and took action in their home countries, but also traveled to conflict zones to be physically present and "stand beside" those in danger.[215] Although PBI and WFP began their work at the same historical moment and in the same region of the world, each had a distinctively different genesis. PBI was founded by nonviolent activists from around the world who wanted to develop an international organization "committed to unarmed third party intervention in conflict situations."[216] Meanwhile, WFP emerged from the responsibility North American faith-based peace activists felt to disrupt and prevent US-funded violence in Nicaragua.

The early history of each organization can tell us something about the character and dynamics of international accompaniment. However, I find the story of WFP particularly apt to the questions of my dissertation—both because of the Christian influences prominent in WFP's formation and because of the ways the organization's strategy explicitly drew on WFP volunteers' privileged status as US citizens. So in the remainder of this section, I will briefly review the beginnings of PBI, and then examine with more detail the early years of WFP.[217]

International," 139).

[215] Mahony and Eguren, *Unarmed Bodyguards*, 3-4. The authors also point out how the "uncontrolled state violence against civilians" occurring in Central America at this time played a role in inspiring "historically unprecedented" movements of international support. I follow Mahony and Eguren in reading international protective accompaniment as a new form of nonviolent activism begun in the 1980s, and this is why PBI and WFP feature prominently in my brief historical overview here. In studies of accompaniment, these two organizations get prominently discussed and frequently cited as the oldest and most established currently active accompaniment organizations.

[216] "About PBI: Our History," Peace Brigades International, accessed February 27, 2018, http://www.peacebrigades.org/about-pbi/pbi-history/?L=0.

[217] The early histories of PBI and WFP also help to contextualize the development of Christian Peacemaker Teams. Although CPT's first delegations and violence-reduction projects in conflict zones did not begin until the 1990s, the vision for its founding was inspired in the mid-1980s.

a. Peace Brigades International

Representing an effort to develop the use of nonviolence as a "practical and vital tool for confronting violent conflicts,"[218] PBI was founded at an international nonviolence conference held in Canada in 1981. After a year of building interest and investigating possible project locations, PBI sent their first team to Guatemala in March of 1983, during a time of severe governmental repression and terror, including disappearances of civilians. When Guatemalan women formed the Grupo de Apoyo Mutual (GAM), or Mutual Support Group, to protest and investigate such disappearances, they held their weekly meetings in the PBI house, which afforded GAM a measure of security and support. However, in 1985 two GAM leaders were assassinated, while others were threatened. This is the point at which PBI members began their 24-hour protective accompaniment of the group's leaders, providing what Mahony describes as "round-the-clock unarmed bodyguards."[219]

This service continued for the next four years and became PBI's defining role in Guatemala. In addition to this consistent physical presence of foreign volunteers, the organization developed a rapid-response network so that if any of the accompanied leaders experienced a threat or attack, PBI could quickly alert supporters from around the world, who would then contact the Guatemalan government in protest, applying wide-scale international pressure to prevent the violence. Strikingly, no GAM leaders were killed once PBI began its protective accompaniment, and several of the human rights activists whom PBI has accompanied believe that the PBI presence kept them alive.[220]

---

[218] Mahony and Eguren, *Unarmed Bodyguards,* 4.
[219] Mahony, "Peace Brigades International," 137.
[220] See "About PBI: Our History" on the PBI website; and Mahony, "Peace Brigades International," especially pp. 138, 144, 149, 160.

In the decades since, as PBI has grown as an organization and been involved in over a dozen projects around the world, PBI's work has included various forms of nonviolent action, including peace education and workshops, mediation and conflict resolution, human rights monitoring and reporting, and political advocacy. Yet protective accompaniment, as developed on the ground in PBI's first years in Guatemala, has remained the central, best-known feature of PBI's work. Such accompaniment tactics offer a model for other organizations to copy and implement. As Mahony summarizes, "What began as an ad-hoc, heartfelt response to the murders of GAM members in 1985 has become an institution transcending PBI. It is a legacy PBI can be proud of."[221]

b. Witness for Peace

While PBI grew from a broad vision of using nonviolent activism for peacemaking, Witness for Peace was born out of a specific conflict, the Nicaraguan war between the reform-minded socialist Sandinista government and the US-backed Contra rebel forces. The genesis of WFP can be pinpointed to a very particular date and encounter—and to the sense of guilt, responsibility and shared solidarity this encounter elicited. On April 8, 1983, the Contras shelled and nearly destroyed El Provenir, a tobacco plantation on the Nicaraguan-Honduran border. The following day, a busload of visiting North Carolinians arrived. The US citizens, part of the Carolina Interfaith Task Force on Central America, had traveled to Nicaragua for a two-week fact-finding delegation.[222] As they toured the damaged tobacco farm and heard the story of the assault, some of the US visitors noted

---

[221] Mahony, "Peace Brigades International," 153-54.

[222] This delegation included Gene Stoltzfus, who later became the first director of Christian Peacemaker Teams. See Kathleen Kern, *In Harm's Way: A History of Christian Peacemaker Teams* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2009), 3.

the presence of Contra forces on the distant hillside just across the border. One man asked, "Why aren't they shooting now?" The answer came back: "Because you're here." As the visit neared its end, the Nicaraguan hosts were clearly reluctant for their guests to leave, while some of the visiting delegates were equally distraught to go.

Although no delegates did remain at El Provenir that night, on the bus ride home they began to talk about how to stop the war. Chronicling the early history of WFP, Ed Griffin-Nolan recounts the perspective of one of those delegates, Jefferson Boyer. Griffin-Nolan writes, "The Contras, funded by the United States, would not dare attack while US citizens were in town. In his anger [Boyer] blurted out, 'If the United States is funding this, then let's put fifteen hundred… volunteers here to stop this fighting. If all it takes to stop this killing is to get a bunch of Americans down here, then let's do it.'"[223] Illustrating emotions that frequently motivate accompaniment volunteers, this anecdote also reveals what it means for accompaniers to, in Barry Levitt's words, "use their 'power' as foreign citizens." It is hardly coincidental that WFP began among US citizens—not simply "outsiders" to the conflict in Nicaragua, but Westerners connected to a powerful and implicated government. As US citizens, WFP volunteers were foreigners whose presence in Nicaragua carried significant symbolic weight.

That bus-ride brainstorming led to further conversations and planning and then, in July, to a delegation of 153 US citizens traveling to the Nicaraguan border town of Jalapa to hold a peace vigil. From this vigil emerged the vision of establishing a permanent presence on the violence-ridden border as an ongoing witness for peace. A pivotal planning meeting was held in Philadelphia over the weekend of October 8, and by the end

---

[223] Ed Griffin-Nolan, *Witness for Peace: A Story of Resistance* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 27-28.

of the month, the first team of long-term WFP volunteers had arrived in Jalapa. Meanwhile, WFP continued to send short-term delegations in order to create a "perpetual, rotating presence of US citizens," who would go to Nicaragua and then return home to share widely what they had seen, heard and experienced.[224]

WFP was thus born with a dual goal: first, of getting US citizens on the ground in Nicaragua to try to prevent killings and other forms of violence; and second, of changing the US policy of supplying weapons and military aid to the civilian-terrorizing Contra fighters. Over the next several years, a few thousand WFP volunteers made trips to Nicaragua, while many more got involved in political advocacy and anti-war protests. Participation was motivated by faith convictions, by political ideology, and by a sense of responsibility for and complicity in what WFP members believed to be destructive US policy toward Nicaragua. Activities ranged from "spirit filled" public witness and symbolic action—what Griffin-Nolan calls "prophetic dramatic actions"—to "analytical and political work to capitalize on the attention generated" and gain the ear of both the US public and Congressional staff.[225]

The religious identity of WFP as an organization has been both a contentious point and a significant source of the movement's social and political influence. Griffin-Nolan recounts how faith basis was one of the "thorniest questions" during the Philadelphia meeting. The statement of purpose adopted by the meeting's end described WFP as a "prayerful, biblically based community," and though it did not require participants to identify with any particular faith, for several years the organization's

[224] Griffin-Nolan, 75.
[225] Ed Griffin-Nolan, "Witness for Peace," in Moser-Puangsuwan and Weber, *Nonviolent Intervention Across Borders*, 304.

profile was markedly Christian.[226] In Clare Weber's critical analysis of WFP, she argues that WFP's "self-representation" as biblically based gave the organization greater access to US politicians, as well as "moral and religious authority to challenge US policy." Yet such access and authority, she claims, also reveal and rest upon the white and middle-class privileges undergirding WFP's political organizing and strategies.[227]

Indeed, the story of Witness for Peace—as well as the ways that story has been told and assessed—illuminates the powerful presence of systemic privilege in accompaniment activism, as well as how such privilege may be simultaneously effective and limiting. Griffin-Nolan's 1991 book, *Witness for Peace: A Story of Resistance,* details WFP's beginnings and development through the 1980s and is the earliest published discussion of accompaniment activism that I have encountered. I am struck by how this depiction of accompaniment foregrounds systemic privilege in action, especially in the dramatic incident with which Griffin-Nolan has chosen to open his book.

Although WFP began in 1983, the prologue of *Witness for Peace* recounts a Contra rebel attack on the village of Mancotal that took place several years into WFP's history, on the night of March 1, 1988. One WFP volunteer, Richard Boren, was in the village that night and taken captive by the rebels, along with several of his Nicaraguan neighbors. After nine days, most of those prisoners had vanished; only Boren and a man named Victor Rodríguez remained. According to Griffin-Nolan, Boren "enjoyed a measure of protection as a US citizen" and so "struggled to save Rodríguez, to extend to

---

[226] Griffin-Nolan, *Witness for Peace*, 59-61.
[227] Weber, *Visions of Solidarity*, 49, 55. Weber argues, "The fact that many WFP activists were motivated by moral outrage rather than political ideology made it harder for them to be dismissed by political representatives and the mainstream media as 'communists'" (49). Thus she notes how WFP's religious identity contributed to what was an effective strategy in the US political landscape of the time. She also relates this faith basis to white privilege, since most of the churches involved in WFP were predominately white. Her larger argument, which I will discuss in more detail later, concerns how white privilege has both shaped and limited transnational solidarity activism, such as that which WFP exemplifies.

him the immunity granted Boren by his US passport." Underlining this distinction between the two men, the author writes, "In the strange moral calculus of America in the 1980s, the death of Rodríguez would make him just one more dead *campesino* in a war in which scores of Nicaraguans died unseen and unheard by the world. Any harm that befell Boren, however, would become an international incident."[228]

Griffin-Nolan's commentary here shines a stark light on how WFP's strategy of international protective accompaniment drew on a system of privilege that accords some lives greater value than others. The incident with Boren and Rodríguez thus poignantly reveals the double-edged nature of systemic privilege in accompaniment activism. On the one hand, such privilege may at times effectively save lives. In the case of Boren and Rodríguez, both men were eventually released—but the Contras only let Rodríguez go after Boren consistently refused to leave without him.[229] Yet on the other hand, the incident—along with Griffin-Nolan's unself-conscious reference to the "strange moral calculus" undergirding it—leaves readers with disquieting questions. Does international protective accompaniment, by using systemic privilege, reinforce an unequal valuing of some (Western, white) lives more than others? Does it shine a heroic light on the accompaniers, like Boren, who seem to play the more active role, while those accompanied, like Rodríguez, appear as vulnerable victims to be saved?

These concerns about privilege emerge even more blatantly in *Witness for Peace* because of Griffin-Nolan's authorial narrative choices. By making this incident the focus of his prologue and then returning to it in one of his final chapters, Griffin-Nolan holds up the abduction and eventual release of Boren and Rodríguez as the paradigmatic

---

[228] Griffin-Nolan, *Witness for Peace*, 17.
[229] See Griffin-Nolan, *Witness for Peace*, chapter 12, especially pp. 206-208, for a detailed account of how the release came about and how Boren leveraged his US citizenship in confronting the Contras.

example of what WFP's accompaniment looked like and how it worked to save lives. Significantly, this is not the only story of abduction and release Griffin-Nolan includes in his book. A similar event occurred in 1987, when WFP volunteer Paul Fisher was kidnapped along with Nicaraguan Rolando Mena. As Griffin-Nolan narrates this incident, he points out how Fisher's presence functioned to save Mena's life—yet he also notes how the Nicaraguan was able to assist the less acclimated *gringo*: "Rolando Mena stayed as close as he could to Fisher, helping him out when he could, explaining where they were and how they should act, trying to ground him in reality and help him weather the psychological assault."[230] In this account, agency seems more shared between the two hostages, and the support and help flow both ways. But this is not the story foregrounded in the book's prologue.[231]

Although Griffin-Nolan makes some attempt to show WFP accompaniment as an "encounter" in which the US volunteers also received and learned from their Latin American brothers and sisters,[232] he much more strongly accents the strategic effectiveness of WFP's accompaniment as grounded in US citizenship and privilege. Richard Boren becomes the representative model of WFP volunteers, who "tried to use a bit of the safety and privilege given them by accident of birth to shield their Central American brothers and sisters."[233] Ultimately, *Witness for Peace* leaves readers with a lingering image of accompaniment as privileged people shielding less privileged

[230] Griffin-Nolan, *Witness for Peace*, 194-95.
[231] The impact of Griffin-Nolan's authorial choices can also be seen if we compare the 1991 *Witness for Peace: A Story of Resistance* to Griffin-Nolan's essay "Witness for Peace," included in *Nonviolent Intervention Across Borders*, an edited collection published in 2000. The "Witness for Peace" essay is clearly a condensed summary culled from the book, echoing much of the earlier text's rhetoric and key points, sometimes directly incorporating whole paragraphs. However, the essay does not include the story of Boren and Rodríguez, nor does it make any explicit mention of privilege.
[232] Griffin-Nolan, *Witness for Peace*, 229-30.
[233] Griffin-Nolan, 19.

others.[234] And this reinforces a common presumption about international accompaniment: that the work, essentially, is about using (or trying to use) unearned systemic privilege for "good."

Clare Weber's more recent (2006) study of Witness for Peace even more overtly—and critically—emphasizes WFP's use of systemic privilege in political activism and organizing. She initially describes accompaniment as "based on citizenship privilege,"[235] echoing Griffin-Nolan's depiction. But Weber goes a step further, naming how WFP's strategies and political priorities display the systemic privileges also of race and class. She notes not only how WFP drew on a constituency of predominately white churches, but also how the organization asked volunteers to pay (or fundraise) for their own travels, and consequently there were fewer participants from communities of color or lower-class communities. According to her, white privilege was the basis of WFP's political clout—both in the US, where participants "drew on their privileged social locations" to gain "access to elected representatives," and in Nicaragua, where visibly white accompaniers "lent a degree of security" since "the Contras were less likely to target them for fear of international political outrage."[236]

---

[234] The idea of accompaniers acting as a "human shield" has been both prevalent and controversial throughout the history of international protective accompaniment—including at the beginning of WFP's activism. The initial WFP press release described the group's aim as providing a "protective shield," or what came to be known as a "shield of love." Even as the release was going out to media, some members of WFP objected to the term and its connotations. Yet the image caught media and public attention in ways that Griffin-Nolan suggests resulted in wider coverage and recruitment. Griffin-Nolan's narrative attends to both the power of the "shield" image and the objections to it (see especially pp. 76-77)—yet even while he raises questions about the term, *Witness for Peace* does paint a picture of accompaniment that seems in line with the "shield of love" idea.

[235] Weber, *Visions of Solidarity*, 22.

[236] Weber, 54-55. Weber supports this latter point (i.e. that the "security" which accompaniment offered stemmed from accompaniers' visible whiteness as much as from their US citizenship) by describing how WFP delegates of color were treated differently. When a WFP delegation included a person of color, she writes, "the issue of personal security became more complicated and risky" (55-56).

Yet at the same time, this reliance on white privilege is a questionable and limiting strategy. Not only does it restrict participation in the work, but it also constrains political analysis and action, as Weber's assessment of WFP points out. She critiques WFP's political analysis during the 1980s for failing to make connections between the racism of US imperialism overseas and the racism of US domestic policies oppressing communities of color at home. For Weber, this as an example of how white privilege determined the organization's "political priorities and frames," i.e. by setting aside such connections "as a diversion or as a secondary issue," while keeping a tight urgent focus on ending US military involvement in Nicaragua.[237] Weber reads this privilege-dictated, overly narrow focus as a missed opportunity to "build cross-racial and class alliances" and to develop a broader, stronger movement "based on shared power."[238] Reiterating this point in her conclusion, she insists that using systemic privilege to access power "limit[s] an organization's ability to build and participate in broad-based multi-racial coalitions," which ultimately weakens the movement for global justice.[239]

While Griffin-Nolan's history is a fairly unabashed celebration of what WFP was able to achieve in the 1980s, Weber's study takes a longer view[240] and presents a more mixed picture. In part, this reflects the different historical moments of each book's publication (1991 and 2006, respectively) and the growing critical attention paid to the

---

[237] Weber, 52, 66.
[238] Weber, 53, 66-67.
[239] Weber, 136.
[240] The larger story Weber tells about WFP is of the organization's transformation "from an anti-war struggle to an anti-globalization struggle" (1). In 1990, when the Sandinista government was voted out of power and the war ended, WFP decided to maintain a presence in Nicaragua, shifting the focus of their concern to the structural adjustment programs that were pushing the country further into poverty. The delegations that were a cornerstone of WFP's work during the war years have continued to be central to the organization's activism against economic violence and for changes in US foreign policy. As Weber writes, "Just as WFP worked to put a 'human face' on the contra war, WFP would work to put a 'human face' on neo-liberal economic policies" (111). Through the 1990s and since, WFP has expanded the scope of their programs and advocacy to include other Latin American countries.

impact of systemic privilege within international accompaniment. But this is not the only shift I trace from the earlier text to the later one. I also find it significant how prominently Weber's book features the rhetoric and values of solidarity, beginning with her title, *Visions of Solidarity*. One of her primary concerns is to help activists more effectively enact transnational solidarity across differences of race, class, gender, and social location; Weber presents WFP as one example of solidarity activism from which her readers can learn. With solidarity as the end goal, it is hardly surprising that Weber's book should demonstrate greater attentiveness to and criticism of the influential presence of systemic privilege within such activism. Meanwhile, Griffin-Nolan's account depicts WFP as an organization that tactically chose to structure itself as politically independent and nonpartisan in order to more effectively perform nonviolent intervention and political lobbying.[241] Not only is solidarity far less a concern in this earlier portrait of WFP, but the urgent goal of ending the war and saving lives overrides critical attention to the "strange moral calculus" of systemic privilege, which gets leveraged as a means toward reaching that end goal.

These differently shaded portraits, I would suggest, do not merely result from two different authors' perspectives and narrative choices. Rather, they illuminate the multi-faceted nature of international accompaniment and ways that the field itself is variously framed and shifting over time. Because the paradox of privilege plays out, not only in the

[241] When Griffin-Nolan narrates the pivotal planning meeting in Philadelphia, he notes that one of the key philosophical issues the WFP founders needed to face was how they would position themselves in relation to the Sandinista government (see chapter 3 of *Witness for Peace*, especially pp. 65-66). The result of this discussion, Griffin-Nolan writes, was that "Witness for Peace became an anti-intervention organization, quite distinct from a solidarity group" (66). One might argue that WFP volunteers did stand in solidarity with the Nicaraguan civilians they were accompanying, and this idea of solidarity does appear at least implicitly in Griffin-Nolan's book, especially when he describes accompaniment as "simply being at [the people's] side" (82). That said, there is still a striking contrast between Weber's focus on solidarity and Griffin-Nolan's primary emphasis on WFP as active in nonviolent resistance and intervention—and the sections that follow will clarify more fully why such a distinction matters.

performance of accompaniment, but also in how accompaniment gets understood and discussed, we should therefore attend to these varied and shifting perceptions and articulations. So that is the topic to which I turn next.

II. Situating accompaniment: Nonviolent intervention, peacekeeping, or solidarity?

Research into civilian (or grassroots activist) efforts to disrupt or reduce violence quickly reveals a dizzying array of terminology. Besides “accompaniment,” terms employed include: “third-party nonviolent intervention,” or its alternative “cross-border nonviolent intervention”; “civilian peacekeeping,” which may be further described as “unarmed” or “nonviolent”; “peace teams,” or related variations “peace force” and “peace army”; and “solidarity activism,” often with an additional adjective “transnational,” “international,” or “global.” While some of these phrases at times get used interchangeably, and all of them depict related and overlapping forms of activism, the labels carry varied connotations and may specify distinctive objectives and methodologies. Therefore, paying attention to the terms and contexts referenced in discussions of international accompaniment can elucidate underlying assumptions about power and privilege.

In this section I examine three key terms designating broad categories of social activism: nonviolent intervention, civilian peacekeeping, and transnational solidarity. Within my research, I have found accompaniment described as a particular form of each of these categories of activism. Each of the three terms calls up a distinctive history underlying the practice of accompaniment, and together they provide a broad picture of how accompaniment fits within larger landscapes of nonviolent resistance, peacebuilding, and movements for social change. It is also instructive to compare these three categories

to see how each offers a different conceptualization of accompaniment. Specifically, each of the three paradigms explains in a somewhat different way what is the end goal of accompaniment, as well as what methods or sources of power accompaniers use to try to achieve these aims. Such study reveals that accompaniment is not just one thing. Furthermore, since how we frame accompaniment guides how we do it and who we believe can effectively perform it, these conceptualizations of accompaniment participate in shaping its long-term social and political impact, including its impact on global systems of privilege. This is why it matters whether we perceive international protective accompaniment as nonviolent intervention, peacekeeping, or solidarity.

a. Nonviolent intervention

Accompaniment was initially perceived as a form of nonviolent intervention in conflict zones. As revealed in my preceding history of the rise of accompaniment in the 1980s, the activists and groups who first developed this tactic drew heavily on traditions of nonviolent resistance. Many of those earliest accompaniment activists had been committed to and involved in nonviolence campaigns for years. So the development of international protective accompaniment—whether motivated by religious faith or political convictions or both—endeavored to build on and enlarge that commitment, in what is sometimes described as "an experiment in creative nonviolence."[242]

The publication that most explicitly sets accompaniment within this context of nonviolent intervention is *Nonviolent Intervention Across Borders: A Recurrent Vision*. Editors Yeshua Moser-Puangsuwan and Thomas Weber introduce this collection by observing how calls for and actions of unarmed intervention into violent conflicts have

---

[242] Griffin-Nolan, *Witness for Peace*, 21.

been increasing throughout the 20th-century. "Interest in this type of activism has never been higher," they write.[243] Yet theirs is the first volume to compile a history of what they name "Peace Teams," that is, ordinary citizens nonviolently working for peace in situations of conflict in the international arena.[244] Their book gathers an array of stories of such intervention efforts. It also intends to help systematize study of nonviolent intervention, and so a key chapter is Robert Burrowes' "Cross-border Nonviolent Intervention: A Typology," which classifies different types of nonviolent intervention and serves as the organizing framework for the book's subsequent chapters.[245]

Burrowes' typology identifies nine categories of cross-border nonviolent intervention. Here I will highlight just two of his categories in order to reveal an essential distinction in approaches to nonviolent intervention. "Nonviolent interposition" Burrowes describes as unarmed activists positioning themselves "between conflicting parties to help prevent or halt war."[246] The hope in this action is to reduce or end violence by maintaining a buffer—indeed, being that buffer oneself—between parties who would potentially harm each other. Meanwhile, "nonviolent witness and accompaniment" occurs when third-party nonviolent supporters use their presence to "create a safe, localized political space so that activists can engage in nonviolent activity."[247] Creating this space occurs, first, as witnesses document and publicize human rights abuses, and second, as the accompaniers provide escorts or safe meeting places that enable the threatened activists to continue their work.

---

[243] Moser-Puangsuwan and Weber, *Nonviolent Intervention Across Borders*, 6.
[244] They do acknowledge there are also many examples of nonviolent intervention in domestic or local contexts; however, the focus of their volume is on interventions that cross national borders.
[245] Robert J. Burrowes, "Cross-border Nonviolent Intervention: A Typology," in Moser-Puangsuwan and Weber, *Nonviolent Intervention Across Borders*, 45-69.
[246] Burrowes, 62.
[247] Burrowes, 58.

A key difference between these two forms of nonviolent intervention lies in how the interveners get positioned: whether *between* conflicting parties, or *alongside* endangered activists. This difference in positioning illuminates underlying assumptions about power and agency, especially the question of whose role it is to resolve the conflict necessitating the intervention. Interpositioning relies on outsiders' power to effectively disrupt a conflict. In contrast, accompaniment presumes that the intervening outsiders will fill a support role, enlarging the space for local activists to resist the violence—and *this* resistance, it is hoped, is the work that will resolve the conflict and effect change.

The categories of Burrowes' typology get used to title subsections in *Nonviolent Intervention Across Borders*, with each section containing one or more essays about relatively recent nonviolent actions that exemplify this form of cross-border intervention. Most sections include one or two essays. "Nonviolent witness and accompaniment" includes five—signaling that this form of nonviolent intervention is most commonly practiced.[248] Indeed, elsewhere in the book, Thomas Weber paints the history of cross-border nonviolent intervention as a story that moves from earlier visions (and a few attempts) of large-scale interpositionary forces toward "more modest and practical accompaniment and witness initiatives." Although the former may capture public attention and imagination, he believes the latter are more appropriate, realistic, and capable of producing "tangible results."[249]

---

[248] Among others, PBI and CPT are featured as examples of "nonviolent witness and accompaniment." Meanwhile, the essay on WFP appears under "nonviolent interposition," an editorial choice that likely reflects the early (and controversial) depiction of WFP as a "shield of love." However, WFP's current self-presentation does not include the language of "interpositioning"—but does depict WFP activism (initially in Nicaragua and in other projects since) as an effort to "accompany" or "stand with people seeking justice." WFP's self-description includes emphasis on their work to "witness," report on, and protest the harm caused by US governmental policies and/or corporate practices. See "Mission & History," About Us, Witness for Peace, accessed March 9, 2018, http://witnessforpeace.org/about-us/mission-history/.

[249] Thomas Weber, "A History of Nonviolent Interposition and Accompaniment," in Moser-Puangsuwan

This move from interpositioning to accompaniment is a significant shift in the theory and practice of nonviolent intervention because of how it increasingly emphasizes the work and agency of the people local to and endangered by the conflict, as I have noted above. Nonetheless, the paradigm of "nonviolent intervention" as a whole continues to place more weight on the agency and actions of outsiders. This may be inevitable as long as we think in terms of "intervention," which by definition means "to come between" and implies entering from the outside to interfere in a situation already underway. Such accent on the agency and actions of outsiders is apparent in *Nonviolent Intervention Across Borders,* which intentionally focuses on the role activists may play in confronting direct and structural violence occurring outside their home countries. Yet these border-crossing activists are not distributed evenly throughout the world. Tellingly, nearly all the included stories portray interventions by North Americans and Europeans, who usually travel to Latin America, Asia, Africa or the Middle East. These dynamics of personnel and project location are precisely what most overtly draw attention to the issue of systemic privilege playing out in nonviolent intervention.[250]

---

and Weber, *Nonviolent Intervention Across Borders*, 39. This contrast between interposition and accompaniment—and the assessment that the latter holds more promise for present and future nonviolent intervention efforts—also gets drawn by the editors in the book's conclusion, especially pp. 323-324.

[250] In the conclusion of *Nonviolent Interventions Across Borders,* Moser-Puangsuwan and Weber discuss this dynamic—i.e. that "currently all peace teams are based in the northern Euro-American, wealthy countries"—as a problem to be addressed in order to further develop nonviolent intervention for the future. They claim that being visually distinguishable as a "foreigner" is important for deterring violence, but they suggest that such visual distinctiveness can be achieved through uniforms and symbols, thereby lessening "reliance on the color of a peace team's skin." See pp. 329-331. Other scholars also stress the need for accompaniment teams to become more multinational and multiracial, and they underline how recognizable uniforms and symbols may mitigate the higher risks for accompaniers of color. See, for example, Patrick Coy, "The Privilege Problematic in International Nonviolent Accompaniment's Early Decades," *Journal of Religion, Conflict, and Peace* 4, no. 2 (Spring 2011). However, some scholars point out that, as important as these suggestions are, none of them really eliminates the presence of racial privilege and passport privilege from accompaniment. As Sara Koopman argues, "Wearing a white uniform shirt can be a way to wear whiteness itself." Koopman, "Making Space for Peace" (PhD diss.), 305.

b. Civilian peacekeeping

"Civilian peacekeeping" is another phrase that shows up—almost as early and often—in the literature surrounding international protective accompaniment. While the paradigm of "nonviolent intervention" emphasizes the grassroots activist nature of accompaniment, placing it within a history of nonviolent resistance and movements for social change, the language of "civilian peacekeeping" situates accompaniment within the politics and policies of peacebuilding, alongside United Nations or other government-sponsored peace-seeking initiatives.[251] The UN website presents peacekeeping as "one of [their] most effective tools" to help countries "navigate the difficult path from conflict to peace."[252] Begun during the mid-century Cold War era, UN peacekeeping originally focused on monitoring ceasefires, and still a primary purpose in deploying such operations is to end direct violence and maintain security. But as the UN has increasingly taken a multi-faceted approach to not only achieving but also sustaining peace,[253] peacekeeping operations have expanded to include supporting political processes such as democratic elections, promoting human rights, and restoring the rule of law. Notably, such an approach is grounded in a vision of liberal peace, with its underlying values of pluralistic democracy, international cooperation, and orderly sequenced development.

---

[251] While the two phrases do call up differing histories and contexts, there is also significant overlap in the terminology. I often find "nonviolence" and "peacekeeping" language together in the same texts, seemingly used interchangeably to talk about accompaniment organizations. In fact, "civilian peacekeeping" frequently appears with the further adjective "unarmed" or "nonviolent," while the language of "intervention" certainly gets used to describe "peacekeeping" or "humanitarian" missions, armed or unarmed, of the UN and other organizations. Despite this overlap in the terminology, I find it useful to look at these two categories separately, in order to tease out different connotations of the rhetorical choices and to more thoroughly contextualize the practice of accompaniment.

[252] "What is peacekeeping," United Nations Peacekeeping, United Nations, accessed March 9, 2018, https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/what-is-peacekeeping.

[253] In 1992, UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali published *An Agenda for Peace*, which stressed the importance of using preventive diplomacy to supplement peacekeeping missions. The document also introduced the concept of "post-conflict peacebuilding," that is, efforts to identify and develop social and political structures that can sustain peace and prevent relapses into violence.

Within the literature on accompaniment, I have found "civilian peacekeeping" terminology most prominently in the writings of Lisa Schirch and Christine Schweitzer, who each use that term to name programs which deploy unarmed civilians on the ground in conflict situations in order to prevent or reduce direct violence.[254] Beyond their rhetorical choices, Schirch and Schweitzer are similar in that each has conducted a significant research project into the theory and practice of multiple peace teams. Both of these projects were sponsored by institutes seeking to assess and ultimately promote third-party nonviolent intervention as an alternative to traditional military peacekeeping.

In 1994, the Life & Peace Institute, a Sweden-based ecumenical center for peace research and conflict transformation programs, commissioned Schirch to study the practice of interpositioning. As she interviewed peace team volunteers, Schirch realized that interpositioning played a minor role in the teams' activities, and she broadened the scope of her report to cover an array of civilian peacekeeping tactics in conflict zones, with "accompaniment and presence" identified as one of those forms of peacekeeping.[255] Originally published in 1995 as *Keeping the Peace: Exploring Civilian Alternatives in*

---

[254] The exact definitions each writer offers differ somewhat in emphasis but highlight similar key points. In Lisa Schirch, *Civilian Peacekeeping: Preventing Violence and Making Space for Democracy* (Uppsala, Sweden: Life & Peace Institute, 2006), the author writes that civilian peacekeeping "involves unarmed individuals placing themselves in conflict situations in an intentional effort to reduce inter-group violence" (16). Christine Schweitzer, in her "Introduction" to *Civilian Peacekeeping: A Barely Tapped Resource* (Belm-Vehrte, Germany: Sozio Publishing, 2009), defines civilian peacekeeping as "the prevention of direct violence through influence or control of the behavior of potential perpetrators by unarmed civilians who are deployed on the ground" (9). Both researchers acknowledge other terminology which they believe refers (more or less) to the same activity—lists that include "nonviolent intervention," "peace teams" and "peace force"—but "civilian peacekeeping" emerges as their preferred descriptor.

[255] Notice how this research project's changing focus mirrors Thomas Weber's reading of the history of nonviolent intervention. He draws a contrast between interpositioning and accompaniment, while Schirch articulates a difference between "interpositionary" (i.e. standing between) and "intercessionary" (i.e. acting on behalf of another) actions. She introduces this language in her 1995 text *Keeping the Peace*, and while the language is less present in the 2006 version of her report, the two categories continue to shape how Schirch delineates various forms of peacekeeping.

Conflict Prevention, the report was updated and revised in 2006, now appearing as *Civilian Peacekeeping: Preventing Violence and Making Space for Democracy*.[256]

Meanwhile, in 2001 an international team of peace researchers, coordinated by Schweitzer, conducted and wrote the *Nonviolent Peaceforce Feasibility Study*.[257] This very detailed report (over 300 pages in length) examines the field practices, recruitment and training of personnel in various peace teams and civil peace services. The study was part of the research phase of developing Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP), a nonpartisan, unarmed civilian peacekeeping force whose aims are to foster dialogue and provide protective presence in conflict zones. NP put its first team on the ground in Sri Lanka in 2003 and has become one of the most recognized organizations doing international protective accompaniment (among other practices). More prominently than other organizations doing this kind of activism, NP has governmental ties: the United States Institute of Peace supported the research of the NP Feasibility Study, and in 2007 NP gained Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.[258] In line with these governmental ties, NP is also one of the few peace teams that employs the rhetoric of peacekeeping to describe their work and mission.[259] Schweitzer, who served as the NP Programme Director until 2008, has likewise

---

[256] I find it striking how the two goals of civilian peacekeeping as represented in Schirch's title—to lessen violence and increase opportunity ("space") for democracy—mirror the way Mahony and Eguren describe the dual objectives of protective accompaniment, even in the language of "opening space."

[257] The team of researchers included: Christine Schweitzer, Donna Howard, Mareike Junge, Corey Levine, Carl Stieren, and Tim Wallis. *Nonviolent Peaceforce Feasibility Study* (St. Paul, MN: Nonviolent Peaceforce, 2001) is available for free downloading at http://nvpf.org/about-3/about-12/111-nonviolent-peaceforce-feasibility-study.

[258] "11 organizations win approval for consultative status as NGO committee postpones action on applications of 26 others," Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, United Nations, May 15, 2007, http://www.un.org/press/en/2007/ecosoc6267.doc.htm.

[259] For this comparison between NP and other peace teams, I am indebted to Koopman, "Making Space for Peace" (PhD diss.), 156-157. The language of "civilian peacekeeping" was prominently visible on the NP website (http://www.nonviolentpeaceforce.org) when I accessed it May 6, 2015. Later access on March 9, 2018, did not reveal as much "civilian peacekeeping" language, but the home page included discussion of "unarmed civilian protection" and much emphasis on protecting civilians in the midst of violent conflict.

continued to use the language of peacekeeping when she writes about civilian interventions in conflict.

As Schirch acknowledges, some people object to the term “civilian peacekeeping” because of its military connotations. Yet those very connotations seem to be why Schirch believes this term is the most apt description of the “unarmed civilian accompaniment, interposition, and monitoring” she has studied. Such work “plays very similar functions to armed or military peacekeeping,” she argues. These tactics of intervention can be performed “by either armed UN ‘blue helmets’ or unarmed civilians. In both cases it is a process of separating the groups and deterring violence.”[260] Schirch believes that military and civilian peacekeepers share similar goals but use different methods and forms of power to “coerce or persuade groups to stop fighting.”[261] Similarly, Schweitzer claims that the “function of peacekeeping is to prevent or at least lower the level of violence,” and she adds that peacekeeping gets “implemented by both military and civilian forces.”[262] Notice how, in these descriptions, the primary function of peacekeeping is to reduce violence and hostilities. Thus, depicting accompaniment as a form of peacekeeping foregrounds accompaniers’ urgent, immediate goal of disrupting violence and saving lives. At the same time, this paradigm of “civilian peacekeeping” places accompaniment within a larger program of strategic actions aimed at building a sustainable peace, which includes economic and political development, as well as

[260] Schirch, *Preventing Violence*, 9-10. Schirch does not simply make this argument herself; she also claims there is “general and broad consensus within the groups doing the work described in this book” that “civilian peacekeeping” is an apt descriptor.
[261] Schirch, 15. In a later chapter, “How Civilian Peacekeeping Works,” Schirch expands on this contrast in methods.
[262] Christine Schweitzer, “Civilian Peacekeeping: Providing Protection Without Sticks and Carrots?” in *People Power: Unarmed Resistance and Global Solidarity*, ed. Howard Clark (London: Pluto Press, 2009), 112.

fostering human rights, democracy, grassroots community education, mediation and other nonviolent forms of conflict resolution.[263]

Although the paradigms of “civilian peacekeeping” and “nonviolent intervention” call up different histories, they seem similar in objectives and methods. Both forms of activism foreground the goal of violence reduction—focused primarily on direct lethal violence, yet with attention paid also to how eliminating such immediate violence contributes to lessening longer-term structural violence. As part of this overriding objective to reduce violence, both forms of activism rely on nonviolent means, eschewing all forms of killing or any use of lethal weapons. In her contrast between military and civilian peacekeeping methodologies, Schirch devotes a whole chapter to detailing the “forms of nonviolent power” civilian peacekeeping substitutes for militarism and arms.[264] Schweitzer similarly argues that civilian peacekeeping “works” by drawing on various nonviolent tactics, from boycotts to symbolic direct actions to grassroots empowerment, in order to “escalate pressure without resorting to direct physical violence.”[265]

Despite these significant similarities in objectives and methods, nonviolent intervention and civilian peacekeeping do differ in a key way. Nonviolent intervention, perhaps by definition, seems consistently performed by outsiders to the situation, as I discussed above. However, neither Schirch nor Schweitzer restricts civilian peacekeeping to external agents. As a primary example and important historical precedent of civilian peacekeeping, both researchers prominently cite Gandhi’s Shanti Sena, a “peace army” of

---

[263] See Lisa Schirch, *The Little Book of Strategic Peacebuilding* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2004), for how Schirch maps four general approaches to participating in the broad field of strategic peacebuilding.
[264] Schirch, *Preventing Violence*, 44. See the whole chapter, pp. 44-55, for Schirch’s detailed discussion of such forms of nonviolent power, including moral or legal authority, mass mobilization and media attention, the political and social leverage of “naming and shaming” strategies, creativity and spontaneity, as well as various aspects of the peacekeepers’ identities or status.
[265] Schweitzer, “Sticks and Carrots,” 120.

Hindu and Muslim Indians who would de-escalate tensions and violence in their own neighborhoods. Schweitzer declares, "Peace-keeping is not confined to 'internationals,'"—a point she supports by stressing how respect and trust within the local community are important sources of power and protection.[266] Schirch similarly notes "insider" status as one of the forms of nonviolent power that civilian peacekeeping may draw on to accomplish its ends.[267]

In fact, in her survey of civilian peacekeeping stories, Schirch makes a point of beginning with "indigenous" examples, noting how "historically, civilian peacekeeping has emerged from within war zones." She does then add that in recent decades, it has become "more common for international civilian groups to intervene in conflicts in other countries,"[268] and the majority of her text focuses on NGOs providing "international presence" in conflict zones. Still, by highlighting civilian peacekeeping's historical roots in local movements, Schirch and Schweitzer complicate assumptions about how peacekeeping "works" and who can successfully engage in these efforts. This returns us to the question of systemic privilege. If peacekeeping actions such as accompaniment can be performed by people coming from many different countries and social locations, experiencing varying degrees of systemic privilege, then just how strategic is it to try to leverage the power of privilege in violence-reduction efforts?

At the same time, in what might seem like a contradiction to the previous point, the peacekeeping paradigm tends to emphasize the importance of peacekeepers operating from a nonpartisan stance. This is certainly true for UN peacekeeping, which holds "impartiality" as one of its three basic principles and as the foundation for a peacekeeping

---

[266] Schweitzer, 118.
[267] Schirch, *Preventing Violence*, 50-51.
[268] Schirch, 17-18.

operation's perceived "credibility and legitimacy."[269] Similarly, Nonviolent Peaceforce describes itself as "visibly nonpartisan"[270]—a necessary characteristic, they insist, for engaging the trust of civilian communities in conflict.

NP is hardly alone in this assertion. Within the field of international accompaniment, there is an ongoing debate as to whether accompaniment is best practiced from a stance of nonpartisanship and relative neutrality or from a stance of solidarity, more explicitly aligned with those being accompanied.[271] While there are pragmatic political reasons for taking one position or the other, I believe this debate more fundamentally reveals differing beliefs about what the objectives of international accompaniment should be. Since objectives are tied to the forms of power and the means used to try to achieve those ends, this issue again intersects with the paradox of privilege—which will become more apparent in the following subsection, as I consider how accompaniment gets situated as a form of transnational solidarity.

c. Transnational solidarity

The rhetoric of "solidarity" is a third lens for talking about and understanding international protective accompaniment. While occasional references to solidarity appear in earlier studies of accompaniment,[272] this language has emerged much more

[269] "Principles of Peacekeeping," United Nations Peacekeeping, United Nations, accessed March 9, 2018, https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/principles-of-peacekeeping. Note that they carefully distinguish between "impartiality" and "neutrality or inactivity." The website declares, "United Nations peacekeepers should be impartial in their dealings with the parties to the conflict, but not neutral in the execution of their mandate."
[270] "Our Mission," Nonviolent Peaceforce website, © 2017, http://www.nonviolentpeaceforce.org/mission-history.
[271] For an argument in favor of nonpartisanship, see Patrick Coy, "Nonpartisanship, Intervention and Legality in Accompaniment: Comparative Analyses of Peace Brigades International, Christian Peacemaker Teams, and the International Solidarity Movement," *The International Journal of Human Rights* 16, no. 7 (2012): 963-81. For the alternative argument in favor of solidarity, see Koopman, "Making Space for Peace" (PhD diss.).
[272] Recall, for example, Levitt's 1999 essay "Theorizing Accompaniment," which I discussed above.

prominently in recent literature—which may reflect a growing rhetoric of solidarity among the practitioners of accompaniment and related forms of nonviolent activism. Gada Mahrouse opens her 2014 book on transnational solidarity activism[273] by describing how an Internet search for "international solidarity" yields "countless" calls for volunteers to travel to conflict zones to serve as witnesses, accompaniers and activists. Mahrouse cites a few of these calls, and while one comes from PBI, the others she mentions are from organizations or movements founded since 2000 and tellingly named: the International Solidarity Movement (ISM),[274] the Oaxaca Solidarity Network,[275] and Project Accompaniment and Solidarity with Colombia (PASC).[276] I find it striking that the earliest established accompaniment organizations have names that accent peace and peacemaking (e.g. Peace Brigade International, Witness for Peace, Christian Peacemaker Teams); the accent on solidarity in such organizations' names is a more recent phenomenon.[277]

This rising emphasis on a solidarity that crosses national borders mirrors how the growth of globalization has had an impact on conflict and on activism for justice and

---

[273] Gada Mahrouse, *Conflicted Commitments: Race, Privilege, and Power in Transnational Solidarity Activism* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014). Mahrouse glosses "transnational solidarity activism" by stating that those who take part in it may "understand themselves to be acting as protective accompaniers, witness-observers, 'unarmed bodyguards,' or 'human shields'" (4). One of her later chapters includes fuller discussion of the connotations and tensions in these various labels; see pp. 137-42. Mahrouse herself most often uses the term "accompaniment-observer activism."

[274] ISM is a movement dedicated to supporting Palestinian nonviolent popular resistance. Founded in August 2001 by Palestinian, Israeli, and American activists, the organization calls international volunteers to travel to Palestine to participate in nonviolent direct actions and protests, as well as to engage in lobbying and public awareness campaigns in their home countries.

[275] The Oaxaca Solidarity Network was founded in 2006 to sponsor emergency human rights delegations to Oaxaca, Mexico, during the 2006 conflict and government repression.

[276] PASC is a collective based in Montreal that, since the early 2000s, has been fostering a direct solidarity network between Canadian and Colombian communities and social movements. Their methods include international accompaniment, disseminating "alternative information," and denouncing violations of human rights.

[277] This is not to say that the emphasis on peace has disappeared or even diminished. "Peace" continues to feature prominently in the names of several more recently founded accompaniment organizations, such as the International Peace Observatory, Peace Watch, International Action for Peace, and International Women's Peace Service, to name a few.

peace. For ill and for good, globalization is felt in various ways—from the economic integration represented by multinational corporations and "free trade" zones; to greater legal and political concern for human rights and humanitarian intervention; to the explosion of information and transportation technologies, which have created broader, quicker access to news, communication, and face-to-face encounters, as well as more possibilities for collaboration across distance. As globalization increases interdependence and connectedness throughout the world (even if not felt equally everywhere), this affects the nature and scope of conflicts, as well as the means of resistance, of engaging conflict, and of working for change.

Against this backdrop of globalization, the 2009 edited collection *People Power: Unarmed Resistance and Global Solidarity* brings solidarity into the foreground of transnational nonviolent activism—not only in the book's title, but also in its selected inclusions, overall structure, and stated goals. The volume gathers stories of citizen activists' involvement in various resistance movements around the world. As editor Howard Clark notes, the "authors are activists and researchers seeking to enhance the effectiveness of transnational solidarity yet also being aware of its pitfalls"—most significantly, the danger of taking over someone else's struggle with one's own agenda, rather than listening to what the other really needs and wants.[278] Consequently, a basic premise throughout the text is that transnational solidarity must take shape in response to local strategies and initiatives.

While transnational solidarity is not necessarily nonviolent, many of its current manifestations are (at least in tactics if not also in principle), and the field as a whole

---

[278] Howard Clark, ed., *People Power: Unarmed Resistance and Global Solidarity* (London: Pluto Press, 2009), 1-2.

seems to both build upon and offer correctives to the earlier developed field of nonviolent intervention. Comparing *People Power* to *Nonviolent Intervention Across Borders* concretely illustrates this. Especially in its second section, *People Power* references and builds on the earlier compilation.[279] However, while *Nonviolent Intervention* focuses almost entirely on activism originating in North America and Europe, *People Power* begins with analyses of mostly non-Western unarmed resistance movements in their own local contexts.[280] Only in Section II does the book shift its focus to nonviolent actions performed by outsiders, with the examples ranging from PBI's "protective accompaniment" to the "more defiant" forms of nonviolent presence enacted by ISM or Voices in the Wilderness.[281] Following this, Section III explores solidarity movements that extend across nations and are based on commonalities such as shared gender identity or sexual orientation, religious faith or political beliefs. Thus, in structure as well as content, *People Power* foregrounds solidarity more than intervention, and its essays on accompaniment are surrounded by essays highlighting local movements and their supporting relational networks.

What difference does this make? Campaigns and actions of intervention are often motivated by threats to a vulnerable community and by outsiders' sense of responsibility to disrupt the violence—as the early history of Witness for Peace so aptly illustrates. Yet

---

[279] Clark makes this claim explicitly in his editorial introduction to Section II of *People Power*. In addition, the section's title, "Nonviolent Citizens' Intervention Across Borders" seems a deliberate echo of the earlier book's title.

[280] The examples are drawn from Serbia, Burma, Zimbabwe, Colombia, and India. As Clark notes, this range illustrates the global nature of unarmed resistance to repression, civil war, and exploitation, while still presenting such resistance as localized and particular. In addition, while the accounts do highlight how these movements incorporate transnational elements and draw on foreign support, these initial essays model a basic principle informing *People Power:* that transnational activism must necessarily start with the local context.

[281] Clark, *People Power*, 2, 91. Voices in the Wilderness was a campaign that took more than 70 delegations of US and UK citizens to Iraq between 1996 and 2003 to protest and defy the economic sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council.

as *People Power* makes clear, concentrating on threats and suffering may compromise the empowerment of that local community. In his closing reflections, editor Clark urges transnational solidarity activists to focus not only on "what is being *done to* people or communities but also [on] what they themselves are doing to overcome that." With such a framework in place, he concludes, "for the actors concerned—both the local movement and those in other countries—the central element of transnational solidarity is likely to be their own relationships, that is, their common commitment, their mutual understanding and the quality of their cooperation."[282] When we see accompaniment as primarily a form of solidarity activism, even more than a form of nonviolent intervention, we are more likely to understand accompaniment as the work of building and maintaining mutually supportive relational networks, rather than simply the work of violence-reducing actions.

The paradigm of "transnational solidarity" also presumes a different genealogy than the histories called up by "nonviolent intervention" or "civilian peacekeeping," and this genealogy shapes both the objectives of solidarity activism and the critical questions such activists are asking. The authors of the manual *Decolonizing Our Solidarity* point out that transnational solidarity initiatives are grounded in the "internationalist thinking" present in social movements since the 19th century, such as the International Workers' Association.[283] Making a direct link to accompaniment, Celis et al. also highlight movements that have supported national liberation struggles and revolutions since the 1960s, and they write, "Anti-imperialist internationalism is still visible today in the form of international accompaniment projects in conflict zones. These new brigades are anti-

---

[282] Clark, *People Power*, 217-218 (emphasis his).

[283] Leila Celis et al., *Decolonizing Our Solidarity*, trans. Mary Foster (Montreal: Projet Accompagnement Solidarité, 2011, 2014 in English), 33.

militarist and openly condemn foreign interests involved in fomenting armed conflict."[284] *Decolonizing Our Solidarity* is a publication from one such brigade, the Accompaniment and Solidarity Project with Colombia (PASC). PASC explicitly positions itself as working, not in humanitarian intervention or aid, but in a "direct solidarity." They define such solidarity as "establishing horizontal relationships" to support "civil resistance processes and… social struggles waged by people in the South. The goal is to move beyond Band-Aid interventions and build solidarity which addresses the deep causes of poverty and oppression."[285]

PASC and the writers of this manual are clearly in favor of solidarity. Still, they critically contextualize the practices of international solidarity by more broadly surveying the many influences on contemporary solidarity organizations. Beyond the above mentioned movements, such historical roots and current influences include: Christian charity and missionary work, intertwined with European colonialism; humanitarian aid organizations (both religious and secular) that grew from this mix of charity and evangelism; humanitarian interventions by military forces and NGOs; international resistance movements, such as the World Social Forum; development assistance, whether facilitated by governments or NGOs; and a growing movement of "world citizenship," expressed through such actions as "responsible" tourism or "fair trade" consumerism.[286] Thus, the authors of *Decolonizing Our Solidarity* present a variegated, tangled picture of solidarity, in which benevolent impulses may yet fail to appropriately challenge—or may

---

[284] Celis et al., *Decolonizing*, 34. This discussion of anti-imperialism also includes a sidebar about how liberation theology emerged in Latin America, connecting Christian social justice activism and the "People's Church" to struggles for national liberation and against dictatorships—a significant note in the history of protective accompaniment, given how it developed in Central America and supported resistance to repressive state regimes.

[285] Celis et al., 29. This definition is quoted from the pamphlet *Direct Solidarity through accompaniment of communities in civil resistance* (PASC, 2007).

[286] Celis et al., 25-60.

even actively bolster—the deep structures of colonization, oppression, and violence. This variegated portrait of solidarity echoes the previous chapter's discussion of Christian theologies of solidarity, which likewise encompass and shift between paternalistic altruism, more mutual alliances, and revolutionary forms of resistance.

Such a mixed picture of solidarity reflects the challenge with which the paradox of privilege confronts us. Although framing accompaniment as solidarity might initially seem like a solution to move us beyond the tensions and presence of privilege, I have actually found that the framework of transnational solidarity most strikingly illuminates the contested nature of accompaniment activism. The debate might get summed up thus: to what extent is accompaniment part of subversive direct action challenging the status quo, and to what extent is it part of an ongoing history of Western colonialism and global hegemony? The "nonviolent intervention" paradigm apparently presumes that accompaniment subversively disrupts an oppressive status quo. The "civilian peacekeeping" paradigm embeds accompaniment within peacebuilding programs that, arguably, promote Western values and governmental aims. Meanwhile, the "transnational solidarity" paradigm both holds up solidary ideals of equality and mutuality—*and* critically interrogates how well (or not) accompaniment theory and practices support those ideals. The crucial question becomes: to what extent—and how, exactly—can accompaniers affect the subversive or hegemonic nature of their work by the ways they perform their activism? But to answer this question first demands that we look more closely at the workings of accompaniment and interrogate the power relations within which such work is embedded, the topics to which I turn in the next section.

III. Leveraging—and interrogating—power: Theorizing how accompaniment "works"

Asked to give examples of successful accompaniment, Liam Mahony has observed, "One of the tough things about analyzing the impact of accompaniment is that you can only be really certain if you fail."[287] In this radio interview, Mahony tells a dramatic story about when PBI accompaniers were spending the night with a Colombian human rights activist who had received death threats. That night armed men came to the door. But when the PBIers introduced themselves as internationals accompanying the activist, the death squad left. Such a scenario is rare—perhaps, Mahony suggests, because when accompaniment is working well, the armed actors are already aware of it and so choose not to show up. "We don't know how many times they don't knock on the door," he concludes. Koopman, referencing this incident and Mahony's commentary, additionally points out that "we have no way of knowing *why* they choose not to knock."[288]

Still, despite the challenge of measuring the results of accompaniment, it is important to analyze how accompaniment "works" (when it does, if one believes that it does)[289] in order to better understand its short-term and long-term impact and

[287] "Peaceful strategies for protecting human rights defenders," *Peace Talks* (June 25, 2010), radio program and transcript available at www.goodradioshows.org.
[288] Koopman, "Making Space," *Geographies of Peace*, 110, emphasis hers. She also includes a few more specific details about this story of Colombian human rights worker Mario Calixto, a story included in a video documentary about protective accompaniment in Colombia, *In the Company of Fear*, written by Jill Sharpe and directed by Velcrow Ripper (Vancouver, 1999).
[289] Mahony and Koopman are honest about the difficulty of clearly proving the efficacy of accompaniment, yet they both do believe that accompaniment works, at least some of the time, and that it makes a significant difference over the long haul. In the above cited radio interview, Mahony notes that if we consider the survival rates of the activists PBI has accompanied, we see a much more positive statistic than the survival rates for activists "who are not getting this kind of protection." He also points to the ways organizations receiving accompaniment have been able to not only survive but also to flourish and grow in political and social influence over time. In light of this, he claims, "the activists truly believe [accompaniment] works and they feel very encouraged and build their movements much more powerfully because they have this presence with them." Similarly, Koopman assumes that accompaniment in Colombia generally does work. She grounds this assumption in the testimony of the activists and

implications. Such analysis not only attends to the methods of accompaniment, i.e. what accompaniers concretely do, but more deeply, it assesses what forms of power these activities leverage or try to leverage. The story from Colombia that opens this section vividly displays what is perhaps the most prevalent understanding of how accompaniment works: preventing violence by deterring aggressors. But the theories of how accompaniment works include other emphases as well: that accompaniment serves to encourage and empower nonviolent activists, to change the balance of power relations, and/or to forge transnational alliances and networks of solidarity.

Running through all this analysis of the mechanisms of accompaniment is the persistent, urgent question: how much does international accompaniment rest on power that is derived from neo-colonial global relations and embedded in unequally distributed privileges of citizenship and race? In other words, if accompaniment "works" because of pressure potentially applied by Western governments and economic forces—or even more insidiously, because of the value accorded to whiteness and "white" bodies—then is accompaniment truly "working" at all? Or does accompaniment simply disrupt immediate instances of direct violence, while also reinforcing the systems of privilege that will sustain this very violence over the long haul?

a. Accompaniment as deterrence

The most substantial and influential theory developed to try to explain the workings of accompaniment comes from Mahony and Eguren. Their 1997 *Unarmed Bodyguards:*

communities receiving accompaniment, who "regularly say that they believe they are alive because of accompaniment," and in the reality that more and more Colombian groups are requesting international accompaniment, "far more than currently receive it" ("Making Space," 110). Koopman's comments about the testimony of Colombian activists and communities echo what I also observed and heard during my dissertation fieldwork with CPT-Colombia.

International Accompaniment for the Protection of Human Rights is the earliest published and most detailed discussion of this theory, although each thinker has authored later texts that reiterate and develop these ideas further. Mahony and Eguren propose that accompaniment works through deterrence, encouragement, and political space[290]—that is, accompaniment serves to deter perpetrators (or potential perpetrators), to encourage the targeted activists, and to change the political space in which all of these actors operate. Their later iterations of this theory continue to emphasize, first, the protection that comes through deterrence, and second, the empowerment that comes through encouragement. These iterations also describe an additional impact of accompaniment, which is to influence societal attitudes or, stated a bit more grandly, to build a "global movement for peace and human rights."[291]

As I will show, all three components of Mahony and Eguren's theory are interlocking and mutually reinforcing. Yet deterrence is the part of their theory that receives the most attention. According to Mahony and Eguren, deterrence occurs as foreign observers publicize threats to endangered activists and mobilize the international community to apply economic, political, legal, and/or moral pressure on those who would attack the activists or engage in other human rights abuses. The authors depict the accompaniment volunteer as "literally an embodiment of international human rights concern, a compelling and visible reminder to those using violence that it will not go

---

[290] Mahony and Eguren, *Unarmed Bodyguards,* 84.
[291] Mahony is more systematic in listing these three impacts of accompaniment, which he alternatively calls "proactive presence." See Mahony, *Side by Side: Protecting and Encouraging Threatened Activists with Unarmed International Accompaniment* (Minneapolis: New Tactics Project of the Center for Victims of Torture, 2004), 7; and Mahony, *Proactive Presence: Field Strategies for Civilian Protection* (Geneva: Henre Dunant Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, 2006), 35. The "global movement" language I cite comes from Mahony, *Side by Side*, 7. While Eguren does not so explicitly list these impacts, all three points are woven through his discussion in "Developing Strategy for Accompaniment," in Clark, *People Power*, 98-107.

unnoticed"[292]—or unpunished. Clearly, for accompaniment to make a difference, there must exist this broad and sustained international concern with human rights, a concern manifested through media attention, through protest or condemnation of the violence, and through a pattern of governmental bodies holding the violators responsible. Without the backing of international interest and support, accompaniment "is a façade with no real protective value"[293]—or at best, accompaniment will only "witness" instead of protecting.[294]

At the same time, accompaniment represents a form of immediate deterrence—a specific message directed toward a specific aggressor—that becomes necessary when the general deterrence of international support for human rights is not sufficient to prevent particular attacks on community leaders and grassroots activists.[295] In those cases, the visible presence of an outsider may be enough to stop an imminent attack, as we see in the PBI story from Colombia that opened this section. In addition, accompaniment's

---

[292] Mahony and Eguren, *Unarmed Bodyguards*, 1.
[293] Mahony and Eguren, 85.
[294] Eguren, "Developing Strategy," 103. I think that Eguren here (in 2009) has nuanced his and Mahony's original assessment (in 1997) to recognize that even when accompaniment does not provide immediate protection by deterring an attack, to witness and document that attack may still make a valuable contribution to the larger goal of holding perpetrators responsible and building a culture of respect for human rights.
[295] In his later theorizing about how accompaniment works, Mahony explains with more detail how general deterrence may fail because international human rights pressure gets directed toward top-level decision-makers, not (usually) toward the direct perpetrators of attacks. Although a chain of command links these high-level officials to the perpetrators, the former may still deflect or deny responsibility because of their distance from the particular attack. International accompaniers apply pressure throughout the chain of command: by being directly visible to potential attackers, by meeting with officials at both local and national levels of the hierarchy, by generating "first-hand witness" accounts that are harder for governments to deny, and by engaging their own embassies and home governments. See Mahony, *Side by Side*, 8-9. Another theorist, Brian Martin, further analyzes the dynamics of deterrence by delineating various tactics aggressors (especially state actors) use to try to quell the public outrage that powers deterrence. Martin then details how accompaniment may effectively circumvent each of these tactics, and he argues that accompaniment is most effective when strategically designed and implemented to counteract aggressors' specific methods of inhibiting public outrage. See Brian Martin, "Making Accompaniment Effective," in Clark, *People Power*, 93-97. Although Martin presents his ideas as "another framework" for assessing how accompaniment works, I find that Martin's proposal dovetails neatly with Mahony's discussion of how top-level decision-makers may try to use the chain of command to deflect or deny their own responsibility and how accompaniment makes such deflection harder.

immediacy and on-the-ground observation create eyewitness testimony and written, photographic, or video documentation of what is happening. This in turn helps to promote globally the values of justice, truth-telling and accountability. As Eguren notes, the effectiveness of accompaniment "derives from the existence of international norms and the responsibility of states to uphold them," and simultaneously, when first-hand observers monitor norms and "frame the issues" under public discussion, they help to strengthen those norms and remind states of their responsibility.[296]

All the theories I have read about how accompaniment works acknowledge that deterrence is at least part of the picture—whether such deterrence occurs because the presence of a foreign observer is enough to give a potential perpetrator pause, or because that observer's first-hand account of the violence gets used to mobilize international pressure and protest, in what Schirch calls a "naming and shaming" strategy.[297] Still, some scholars express concerns with the implications of deterrence. Schweitzer observes that protective accompaniment deters (a particular) violence by relying on external governments to apply pressure or punish the offending regime, and from this she names two criticisms. First, nonviolent actors set in motion a chain of response that is then "out of [their] hands" and may include military threats or intervention—thus essentially using one form of violence to forestall another. Second, the external governments appealed to are typically North American or European, so even if military violence is not the outcome, the tactic of deterrence rests on "existing power imbalances, neo-colonial dependencies and patterns of privilege, even to some extent reproducing them."[298]

---

[296] Eguren, "Developing Strategy," 103-105.
[297] Schirch, *Preventing Violence*, 45-46.
[298] Schweitzer, "Sticks and Carrots," 113.

This concern about how accompaniment may leverage power derived from a legacy of colonialism and global systemic privileges appears also in Mahrouse's study. Although her focus is not on deterrence per se, Mahrouse observes that, in the prevalent calls for "internationals" to participate in solidarity campaigns, the word "international" actually implies "First World" and usually means "white."[299] Like Schweitzer's critique, Mahrouse's pointed observation raises the question: when Mahony and Eguren depict accompaniment as leveraging the deterring power of "international" norms and pressure, are they in fact referring to the power of "First World" dominance?

Ivan Boothe and Lee A. Smithey express similar concerns that third-party nonviolent intervention "depends on the economic, political, and symbolic capital of the West or Empire."[300] They note how international accompaniment is presumed to deter violence by relying on the accompaniers "being visibly foreign"—that is, by leveraging passport privilege and racial privilege, mediated through the accompaniers' "own place [or perceived place] in relation to sources of institutional power."[301] Such privilege-dependent intervention may temporarily reduce direct violence, but it also reinforces the structural inequities at the root of that violence. Boothe and Smithey's greatest concern with accompaniment is the danger that this tactic will undermine and disempower local activists and social movements. Interestingly, they do not suggest accompaniment should (or can) avoid the use of privilege altogether. Rather, they speak of "sharing privilege," and they urge accompaniers to "continue to use the rank they have to influence conflict

---

[299] Mahrouse, *Conflicted Commitments*, 4, 6.
[300] Ivan Boothe and Lee A. Smithey, "Privilege, Empowerment, and Nonviolent Intervention," *Peace & Change* 32:1 (Jan 2007): 41.
[301] Boothe and Smithey, 47.

situations positively"[302]—but to do so with attentiveness and self-awareness, not only to deter violence in the moment, but with the greater end of empowering the accompanied.

b. Accompaniment as empowerment

Schweitzer follows her critique of nonviolent deterrence by insisting this should not be construed as the *only* mechanism at work in accompaniment. She offers examples of civilian peacekeeping in which the effectiveness depends less on "international clout," and more on local empowerment and on respect and dialogue within the community. In this, her ideas may seem to resemble the second part of Mahony and Eguren's theory (which Schweitzer ignores in her essay), that is, their emphasis on how accompaniment may encourage and empower endangered activists.

To unpack accompaniment's mechanism of empowerment, Mahony and Eguren detail how repressive regimes use terror "to manipulate fear to control the population."[303] Visible acts of violence—such as abductions, torture, or assassinations—against those the state deems "subversive" create an atmosphere in which the threat of violence hangs over anyone who might challenge the state or even sympathize with the challengers. This atmosphere stifles activism and breeds suspicion between neighbors; activists who do risk continuing their work must do so in an environment of trauma, stress, and isolation. Accompaniment counteracts this by legitimizing the activists' struggle and forging links to a world outside. Mahony and Eguren write, "The [accompaniment] volunteers are a supportive reminder that the activists are not alone in their search for truth..."[304]

---

[302] Boothe and Smithey, 56.
[303] Mahony and Eguren, *Unarmed Bodyguards*, 89.
[304] Mahony and Eguren, 93.

In their discussion of political space, Mahony and Eguren bring together the deterring and encouraging effects of accompaniment. Every actor in a conflict situation—armed or nonviolent, working for the state or resisting it—perceives an array of possible actions she might take, each with associated costs. What the actor perceives as unacceptable costs will set the boundaries that delimit her available political space, circumscribing which activities she feels able to pursue. Accompaniment is an attempt to adjust that border: to change both the actual and perceived costs of political activity, such that the nonviolent activists experience a larger space of relative safety within which to pursue their work, while the aggressors experience less space of impunity within which to carry out their attacks. As the activists' available political space expands, the impunity space of the aggressors shrinks.[305] This, too, is part of accompaniment's contribution to the "global movement for peace and human rights": lessening a culture of impunity, while empowering the nonviolent activists whose work strengthens civil society.

Thus, Mahony and Eguren—like Schweitzer, like Boothe and Smithey—are concerned with how accompaniment not only deters aggressors, but also helps to empower activists. However, in Mahony and Eguren's theory, the empowerment and protection flow one way: toward those being accompanied. Boothe and Smithey's article similarly stresses the empowerment accompaniers may *offer*, provided these accompaniers practice their nonviolent intervention with care.

And here, Schweitzer's theory differs significantly, as she identifies a "double mechanism of protection" operating in accompaniment. The accompaniers from outside provide the "eye and ear of the world" and, as nonpartisan outsiders, are able to engage

---

[305] For much more detailed explanations, including illustrative diagrams, of how accompaniment alters the mapping of actual and perceived political space, see Mahony and Eguren, *Unarmed Bodyguards*, 93-99; Mahony, *Side by Side*, 14-16; and Mahony, *Proactive Presence*, 17-27.

all sides of the conflict in dialogue. Yet simultaneously, for their own security accompaniers must depend on trust from the local communities and civil society partners. Schweitzer depicts this as "a relationship of mutual support and protection."[306] Strikingly, Schweitzer's theory of accompaniment—even her language of "mutual support and protection"—echoes what I heard many times in the in-depth interviews I conducted with CPTers working in Colombia. I will say much more about this in chapter 6; here I simply want to highlight that Schweitzer's theory reflects how (at least some) activists on the ground experience and talk about the work of accompaniment.

What makes this back-and-forth assistance in Schweitzer's picture of accompaniment so radical is how it shifts our understanding (and possibly the reality) of power relations and agency. In this new vision, instead of accompaniers alone using their "power as foreigners," whether to deter or encourage, the accompanied as well have a necessary power, grounded in their own identity as locals. According to Schweitzer, the primary "role of transnational intervention by nonviolent groups is to contribute to a power shift."[307] That is to say, accompaniment and other forms of peacekeeping are not only—or even chiefly—about leveraging already existing power within international relations. More deeply, accompaniment is an effort to create new forms and realities of power, especially in local communities.

c. Accompaniment as alliance-building and solidarity

A similar concern with how accompaniment does—or should—leverage and shift power emerges in the work of Sara Koopman, who has done the most detailed research to date

[306] Schweitzer, "Sticks and Carrots," 115.
[307] Schweitzer, 120.

into the question of how accompaniment "works."[308] As a political geographer, Koopman is particularly concerned with how accompaniment works *spatially*, and so a starting point for her study is Mahony and Eguren's theory about political space, i.e. how accompaniment simultaneously compresses spaces of impunity while enlarging space for nonviolent activism. She critiques Mahony and Eguren for treating space as abstract and fixed in nature, essentially a "container" for society and social interactions—one that may be expanded or shrunk but that remains consistent in its character as a neutral "box" to be occupied.[309]

In contrast, Koopman proposes a different imaginary: space as relational, both shaping and shaped by human interactions and power relations. She argues that accompaniment participates in a constant (re)creation of space, consequently "chang[ing] the configuration of power in the space, particularly by networking to power in and from other spaces…"[310] Such networking provides the central image Koopman uses to portray accompaniment: "chains" of connection and communication, of influence and solidarity.[311] Concretely, she depicts those "chains" as appearing like this:

> In the case of Colombia, the general depends on US military aid, that aid depends on votes from US Congress, the member of Congress depends on votes from their constituency, and one of those constituents just got an email from, say, someone they go to church with whose niece is in Colombia serving as an accompanier. If this chain happens enough times, the accompanier may eventually be able to call the general directly when a threat happens, and without mentioning the chain the general will know that this kind of pressure can be generated.[312]

---

[308] Koopman, "Making Space for Peace" (PhD diss.). Koopman's essay "Making space for peace" in *Geographies of Peace* offers a succinct version of the main points addressed in her dissertation.
[309] Koopman, "Making Space for Peace" (PhD diss.), 213.
[310] Koopman, "Making space for peace," *Geographies,* 121.
[311] Koopman's choice to use the terminology of "chains" draws on Galtung's theory of "chains of nonviolence," which emphasizes the crucial work of building and mobilizing social ties that reaffirm the humanity of the oppressed and reconnect these people to the oppressors, in whose minds they have been dehumanized. See Koopman, "Making space for peace," *Geographies*, 122-23.
[312] Koopman, "Making space for peace," *Geographies*, 123.

While this description may seem to reflect the ways accompaniment operates through deterrence, what is distinctive in Koopman's theory is her insistence that the necessary stance and essential work of international protective accompaniment is *solidarity*.[313] More than other theorists, she stresses how accompaniment "functions through grassroots organizing"—not only because accompaniment itself is a form of such organizing, but also because it supports and extends the work of the "incredibly brave and powerful organizers" who are being accompanied.[314]

Koopman's emphasis on solidarity and on the agency and power the accompanied activists are already exercising does not lead her to ignore the presence of systemic privilege in accompaniment. Rather, like the solidarity activists referenced above, she pays even greater attention to this dynamic, seeing it as fundamental in the way accompaniment works. She explains accompaniment as "a grassroots peacebuilding strategy that uses privilege by putting internationals who are less at risk—literally—next to locals who are under threat because of their work for peace and justice…. Ironically, accompaniers use the reality that their lives 'count' more in the current geopolitical system, to try to build a world where everyone's life is respected, where everyone 'counts.'"[315]

Koopman admits that, when she began her research into international accompaniment organizations active in Colombia, she hoped to discover that accompaniment "uses" privilege in such a way as to "use it up," i.e. to dismantle the very systems that grant it. Her study did not lead her to this conclusion. However, she did

---

[313] In fact, she is highly critical of the trope of "civilian peacekeeping" for understanding accompaniment, and likewise, she argues that practicing accompaniment from a stance of nonpartisanship and impartiality is more likely to maintain the status quo of unjust power relations. See Koopman, "Making Space for Peace" (PhD diss.), chapters 5 and 6.
[314] Koopman, "Making Space for Peace" (PhD diss.), 285.
[315] Koopman, "Making space for peace," *Geographies*, 109-110.

come to believe that accompaniment may over time "wear down" structures of privilege and domination—but only if it is perceived as transnational solidarity and alliance-building. Even as accompaniment leverages difference—leverages the power that comes from accompaniers' status as "foreigners"—it must also, Koopman argues, "prioritize building connections *across* difference and distance, through chains of solidarity."[316]

I follow Koopman (and others) in understanding accompaniment as, primarily, a form of solidarity activism. More than protective interventions done *on behalf of* another, accompaniment is work done *with* another. It assumes different roles and activities for different actors, roles that develop relative to each actor's identity and place in the immediate conflict situation as well as in global politics and international relations. As accompaniers from elsewhere travel to conflict zones to be physically present with those they intend to accompany, this practice of accompaniment embodies a solidarity that oscillates between distance and proximity, between difference and shared struggle. Yet as my study of international protective accompaniment demonstrates, such a vision of solidarity in no way allows us to transcend the challenges and tensions of systemic privilege. Rather, it requires us to more consciously and critically dwell within and confront this paradox of privilege.

---

[316] Koopman, "Making Space for Peace" (PhD diss.), 313-314.

Chapter Four:
Christian Peacemaker Teams and the Double-Edged Implications of Privilege

In the previous chapter, I explored how the paradox of privilege is writ especially large in the context of international protective accompaniment. This paradox emerges in even a relatively brief overview of the history of accompaniment as a nonviolent strategy. The complicating impact of privilege on accompaniment activism is further apparent when we compare varied frameworks for explaining what accompaniment is and how it works to reduce direct and structural violence. In reviewing the literature about international accompaniment, I find it significant that those who frame accompaniment as transnational solidarity—depicting solidarity as the strategy and/or the goal of accompaniment activism—pay *greater* attention, not less, to the presence of systemic privileges and power imbalances within this type of activism. Engaging in solidarity is not an escape from the dangers and limitations of systemic privileges and oppressions. Rather, in our efforts to be in solidarity, we must attend more closely to these unjust systems if we want ultimately to participate in dismantling them.

Now in this chapter, I tighten my focus to an even more specific context: Christian Peacemaker Teams, a faith-based organization that has been doing international accompaniment for nearly three decades. As I narrated in chapter 1, I was serving with CPT when I first began to wrestle with the paradox of privilege and its implications for justice-seeking activism. Most of my accompaniment work with CPT occurred in the country of Colombia and in the West Bank of Palestine, and in both these locations, I witnessed many instances of systemic privilege affecting the dynamics of a conflict situation. With other CPTers, I also participated in organization-wide efforts to rely less (both individually and collectively) on the power of privilege. My personal experiences

with CPT have given rise to my central research question, which is part of the reason I choose to feature this organization in my dissertation. In order to learn from specific examples of activists who are engaging in solidarity—and are confronting the paradox of privilege as they do so—during the summer of 2015, I returned to the CPT project in Colombia and interviewed CPTers who were then working on team or present in country.

There are three reasons I believe CPT offers a compelling, relevant context for exploring my research question. First, CPT is a faith-based organization that strives to honor and embody the spirituality of nonviolence. While the organization has changed over time in religious identity and membership,[317] CPT has consistently presented nonviolent witness and peacebuilding as a manifestation of "the reconciling love of God" and as part of "the Gospel liberation of all people."[318] Given how CPT reads their work through a theological lens, the organization is a natural fit for my project, which is in conversation with and building upon Christian theologies of solidarity.

Second, for many years CPT has been on an intentional journey to deepen their antiracist identity. Issues of systemic oppression and privilege are thus a persistent thread

---

[317] As I will detail below, CPT began as a mission of the historic peace churches. From its earliest days, it has been influenced by and open to other peace- and justice-oriented Christian traditions, such as the Catholic Social Worker movement or mainline Protestant church ministries focused on peace and justice. CPT's pacifist roots and ecumenical orientation are each visible in the make-up of the CPT Steering Committee, which currently or in the past has included representatives from: Mennonite Church USA, Mennonite Church Canada, Friends United Meeting, the Church of the Brethren, On Earth Peace, Every Church a Peace Church, the Congregation of St. Basil (Basilians), the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, and the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America. For many years, CPT required individuals to personally identify as Christians if they wished to officially join the Peacemaker Corps (although what that identification meant was individually and quite variously interpreted; CPT has tried to avoid having a "litmus test" to determine whether someone is Christian). In more recent years, CPT has also included members who adhere to faiths and forms of spirituality other than Christianity. See CPT's "Statement of Identity" and "Membership Policy," which are available on the CPT website, © 2015, https://cpt.org/participate/peacemaker/membership. For a brief discussion of these religious issues within CPT, see Kathleen Kern, *In Harm's Way: A History of Christian Peacemaker Teams*, 559-562.

[318] These two quoted phrases are from the opening of CPT's "Statement of Identity," which reads, "Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) is an organization gathered in the reconciling love of God, identified with Jesus of Nazareth and led by the Spirit. Renouncing violence and dominative power, CPT seeks the Gospel liberation of all people through the power of forgiveness and nonviolence."

running through the narrative of CPT, especially overt in publications and training materials. Anyone who has completed CPT training or spent time working on a team in CPT has had to reflect on and discuss oppressions and privileges. Therefore, interviewing CPTers about privilege and solidarity seemed likely to yield generative texts for analysis, fruitful for constructing an ethic of solidarity that deliberately attends to the presence and moral complications of systemic privilege.

Related to this, the third and most important reason I have chosen to feature CPT—and the team in Colombia specifically—is due to the personnel make-up of this team and the impact that has had on CPT overall. CPT established their Colombia project in 2001, and since 2002, Colombians have served on team alongside volunteers from the US and Canada (and occasionally, but less commonly, other countries). This mix of nationals and internationals on team is still relatively unusual in the practice of international accompaniment, and it has pushed CPT to wrestle more profoundly with the paradox of privilege. As CPTers have questioned assumptions about how accompaniment works and have developed approaches to solidarity that value and draw on additional forms of power (other than the power of passport privilege and white privilege), this has allowed the organization as a whole to become (somewhat) more international and racially diverse. While other CPT projects now also include nationals working on team alongside internationals—thus pressing at questions of racial and passport privilege and how such privileges function in accompaniment—the Colombia project has the longest, richest history with this issue.

The purpose of this chapter is to lay out the rationale, context, and methodology for my dissertation fieldwork in Colombia, from which I have generated the constructive

portion of my dissertation. In the following sections, therefore, I first give a brief history of CPT, with particular attention to how the organization's self-understanding has shifted over time. Next, I overview the Colombia project and the role it has played in CPT's antiracism work. Finally, I summarize my fieldwork methodology and explain whom I interviewed. All of this serves to contextualize the interview excerpts and fieldwork learnings that will appear in Part Three.

I. A brief history of CPT: From "peace army" to "companions on the road"

The vision for CPT was born in the mid-1980s—the same era in which Peace Brigades International and Witness for Peace began accompanying human rights activists and civilian communities in Central America.[319] Like Witness for Peace, CPT is a faith-based organization: members of CPT are primarily people of faith attempting to live out religious and spiritual convictions. But while WFP began in response to a very specific geopolitical conflict, CPT grew out of the theology and practices of historic peace churches, that is, the Mennonites, Church of the Brethren, and the Religious Society of Friends, or Quakers. CPT was founded by Christian pacifists who wanted to be more radical in their pacifism by intervening nonviolently in conflict zones, even at the risk of their own lives.[320]

---

[319] The inspiration for CPT is often credited to Ron Sider, who gave a pivotal speech in 1984, the year after PBI and WFP began their work in Central America. In his speech, Sider holds up WFP's work as an example of the public witness Christian pacifists should aspire to. Also, Gene Stoltzfus, who became the first director of CPT, was in the 1983 delegation of US citizens to Nicaragua that sparked the beginning of WFP. See note 222 in chapter 3.

[320] Various historical trends and influences led to the founding of CPT. Among these is certainly the gradual shift of the traditionally pacifist Anabaptist churches from a stance of nonresistance and quietist social withdrawal into a stance of more active civic engagement that included humanitarian aid, disaster relief, and conciliation services. Events throughout the twentieth century—from the two World Wars to Vietnam War protests and the civil rights movement—prodded North American Mennonites to rethink the implications and concrete applications of their peace theology, and the story of CPT can be read as part of

As an explicitly Christian organization, CPT has always framed accompaniment and nonviolent action as part of the church's mission in the world and has sought to engage the broader church in efforts of resisting violence and ending war. At the same time, over the course of the organization's three-decade history, CPT's vision of its mission and work has changed in ways that mirror the shifting frameworks for international accompaniment that I discussed in the previous chapter. CPT began as a radical Christian "peace army" with the goal of "Getting in the Way"[321]—rhetoric and a self-image that connote the disruptive (and counter-cultural) nature of nonviolent activism and intervention. Over time, CPT's self-presentation has increasingly stressed solidarity, collaborative work for justice, and resistance to systemic oppressions—emphases captured in the mission and vision statements CPT adopted in 2012. CPT's mission statement now reads: "Building partnerships to transform violence and oppression"; and the organization works toward this guiding vision: "A world of communities that together embrace the diversity of the human family and live justly and peaceably with all creation."[322]

This shift in self-presentation is important not only because it illustrates broader trends in the field of accompaniment activism. Even more significantly, this shift has

---

this rethinking/reworking. See Joseph S. Miller, "A History of the Mennonite Conciliation Service, International Conciliation Service, and Christian Peacemaker Teams," in *From the Ground Up: Mennonite Contributions to International Peacebuilding*, ed. Cynthia Sampson and John Paul Lederach (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3-29.

[321] This slogan, "Getting in the Way," was developed by the 1995 group of CPT trainees, and for most of the next two decades, it functioned as CPT's informal mission statement. (The official mission statement was two paragraphs long and difficult to recall or recite. Whereas this short, catchy slogan was memorable and frequently referenced.) When I joined CPT, it was explained to me that "Getting in the Way" had an intended double meaning: the phrase referenced how early Christians were known as "people of the Way," while it also signified CPTers' goals of disrupting violence, often by literally "getting in the way" of armed actors or weapons. For a brief discussion of the slogan's origins, see Kern, *In Harm's Way*, 18-19.

[322] CPT's mission and vision statements can be found on the CPT website, https://cpt.org/about/mission. These two statements, along with new organizational branding and a fresh CPT logo, were the key results of a 3.5-year, organization-wide Mission and Presentation Revisioning process (known in CPT as MAPR). The MAPR process itself grew directly from CPT's work to deepen its organizational antiracist identity.

been driven by CPT's deepening commitment to dismantling racism and other systemic oppressions, and as such, it demonstrates some of the self-awareness and critical practices that an ethic of responsible solidarity demands. In this and the following section, as I briefly overview CPT's development as an accompaniment organization, I want to highlight how CPT's antiracism work and increasingly diverse personnel have prodded the organization to both interrogate and broaden the strategies they employ in nonviolent accompaniment.

The standard telling of CPT history opens by referencing a keynote speech Ron Sider delivered at the Mennonite World Conference in Strasbourg, France, in 1984.[323] In this address, Sider declared the end of the twentieth century one of the most violent, unjust eras in human history and, as such, a "kairos" moment for Anabaptist pacifists who had been striving for centuries to follow Jesus's call to peace and love of enemies. Sider challenged his audience to "move from the back lines of isolationist pacifism to the front lines of nonviolent peacemaking." What this requires, he insisted, is for followers of Jesus to "be ready to start to die by the thousands in dramatic vigorous new exploits for peace and justice"—thus embodying the same courage and willingness for self-sacrifice that soldiers exhibit in combat. Sider spun a vision of a distinctively Christian

[323] Ron Sider, "God's People Reconciling," address at Mennonite World Conference, Strasbourg, France, 1984. Text available on the CPT website, https://cpt.org/resources/writings/sider. It is striking to me how consistently the CPT story is told in this way. Reference to Sider's speech opens the "History" page on the CPT website, https://cpt.org/about/history. This same pattern—beginning the story of CPT by referencing Sider's speech—appears also in Miller, "A History," 25-26. Likewise, CPTer Kathleen Kern, who has written more about CPT than has anyone else, follows this pattern in her narrations of CPT's history. See Kathleen Kern, "From Haiti to Hebron with a Brief Stop in Washington, D.C.: The CPT Experiment," in Sampson and Lederach, *From the Ground Up*, 183-200; and Kern, "Christian Peacemaker Teams," in Moser-Puangsuwan and Weber, *Nonviolent Interventions Across Borders*, 175-190. However, in her most recent and detailed history of CPT, *In Harm's Way*, Kern sets Sider's well-publicized address into a larger context of Anabaptist Christians who had already been working in and promoting nonviolence for many years.

"nonviolent peacekeeping force of 100,000 persons ready to move into violent conflicts and stand peacefully between warring parties."

As CPT historian Kathleen Kern points out, the central call of Sider's address—for Christian pacifists to engage in nonviolence more radically—was not entirely new.[324] Within the historic peace churches, some members had been advocating for years for a more activist peace position, and some were already involved in nonviolent direct action. However, the prominence of Sider's speech and his influence in Anabaptist circles served to legitimize this activist position and draw more attention to the spiritual and social potential of nonviolence.

In light of this, it is significant to note how strongly the speech celebrates nonviolent intervention and interpositioning—roles for third-party outsiders. Although Sider mentions "the small family of Anabaptists scattered across the globe," his call is actually addressed to "comfortable North American and European" Christians. His vision foregrounds heroic, risk-taking peacemakers inspired by their own faith convictions and by the courage of soldiers in war. But Sider does not mention solidarity, partnership, or the courageous work already being done by the civilian communities and grassroots nonviolent movements local to the conflict zones. He says nothing about the importance of following local leadership, nor does he suggest that outsiders should wait for an invitation or request from those most affected by the conflict before rushing in to intervene. These emphases—and absences—in Sider's speech are telling. Certainly, as Kern has noted, his words were not the only or even the most important influence in the founding of CPT.[325] Likely because of the involvement of people with more significant

---

[324] Kern, *In Harm's Way*, 1-4.
[325] For example, Kern emphasizes the important perspective offered by former Mennonite Central

international experience, CPT has always worked more closely with local communities and leadership than Sider's vision would suggest. Notably, it has been a foundational practice for CPT to go *only* where and when they are invited: CPT will not send a team to a conflict site or establish a violence-reduction project without an invitation and request for support from at least one local community or party to the conflict. Nonetheless, Sider's vision of a Spirit-filled "peace army" did shape CPT's early self-understanding and is embedded in the organization's history.

Sider's keynote address inspired discussion in Mennonite and Brethren churches across North America, which led to a proposal for CPT. The CPT steering committee met for the first time in 1987 and hired a half-time coordinator the following year. By 1992, CPT had sent short-term delegations to Haiti, Iraq, the Oka Indian reservation in Quebec, and the West Bank of Palestine. Leaders had also discerned the need for a "Peacemaker Corps" of trained activists, which would enable CPT to respond more quickly and extensively to crises. The organization held its first training in 1993 and began to establish and staff violence-reduction projects. Since 1993, CPT has held at least one training each year, building up a corps of approximately 200 volunteers.[326] Some work full-time with CPT; others are Reserve Corps members, or "reservists," who volunteer each year for a term that may range from two weeks to a few months.

Having this trained corps of volunteers has permitted CPT to staff projects in a more ongoing fashion, sometimes for many years. Currently, CPT has four full-time

---

Committee (MCC) volunteers, who "helped bring a reality check to Sider's vision" because they understood "the damage that hundreds of naïve North Americans without international experience could do if they were suddenly dumped into a violent conflict" (*In Harm's Way*, 3).

[326] Kern reports that, by the end of 2006, CPT comprised 47 full-timers and 154 reservists (*In Harm's Way*, 551). Although I have not seen hard numbers, I do not believe the size of the current CPT corps has changed substantially from this in the years since, though of course, the total number of people who have completed CPT trainings and worked with CPT at some point is larger than 200 and continues to grow.

projects: in Palestine, Colombia, Iraqi Kurdistan, and an Indigenous Peoples Solidarity project based in Canada. While each of these projects has changed in focus (and somewhat in location) over the years, each represents a long-term CPT investment.[327] By remaining in these particular countries for several years, CPT collectively has been able to build more substantial relationships and deeper collaborations with the local communities CPT accompanies. This, in turn, has shaped the ways CPT engages in accompaniment and nonviolent direct action. It has also changed how CPT tells the story of nonviolent struggle, as well as how CPTers understand their role in that story.

Sider's vision for a "nonviolent peacekeeping force" thousands of Christians strong bears scant resemblance to the reality of CPT—and not only because the organization has remained far smaller in numbers. Most CPTers would likely recognize themselves more readily in the metaphor developed by Kern, who writes, "CPT serves as a guest in the house of the disenfranchised. Rather than building our own house between the houses of the two groups in conflict, we accept invitations to live with the oppressed. Within that role, we find ourselves better able than our hosts to greet the oppressors at the door."[328] Kern uses this metaphor to explain how CPT's nonviolent witness is conducted from a stance of solidarity with the oppressed, rather than neutrality in the midst of conflict. The metaphor also illuminates the nature of the relationship between CPTers and

---

[327] CPT began full-time, continuous presence in Palestine in 1995 and in Colombia in 2001. CPT's first full-time project in Iraq began in 2002 in Baghdad, where the team was based until 2006, when they moved to northern Iraq (Kurdistan). The work of the Indigenous Peoples Solidarity team is a bit different, since CPT has engaged in multiple briefer accompaniment projects with several different indigenous nations in Canada (and sometimes the US) over the course of many years. In CPT's 2013 Annual Report, this project was described as "ongoing presence since February 1999" (vs. "continuous presence," as the other three projects are described). In addition to these four current full-time projects, CPT has done accompaniment work in many other locations, sometimes through short-term delegations and sometimes by maintaining a full-time presence in an area for some months or years. For a fuller history of CPT's accompaniment projects, see Kern, *In Harm's Way*.

[328] Kern, "From Haiti to Hebron," 199. This metaphor reappears in *In Harm's Way*, 209.

their accompanied partners. The partners are the hosts and the owners of the house. They have exercised agency by asking CPT to come and live with them for a time. (As I noted above, CPT only goes where invited.) Meanwhile, CPTers have a distinctive service to offer and role to play—but they must never lose their sense of being guests, who have much to receive and learn from their hosts and who owe their hosts respect and gratitude.

What it means for CPT to behave as "guests in the house of the disenfranchised"—and how far CPT has traveled from that early inspiration of Sider's "peace army" vision—is captured most vividly in an address CPTer Sandra Milena Rincón delivered at the 2009 Mennonite World Conference in Asunción, Paraguay.[329] Marking the 25th anniversary of Sider's challenge, Rincón gave her speech to describe how CPT has grown from that call and how, as she declares in her title, "the challenge continues." Even more significantly, she used this opportunity to spin a fresh vision of what it looks like to be Christian peacemakers and nonviolent activists in the world.

Rincón's speech calls attention to the local communities CPT has accompanied, those who have "opened the door to us so that we could actively participate in their projects for justice and peace, in their hopes and in the challenges they faced." Naming several of these specific communities, Rincón further presents these accompanied partners as protagonists and initiators when she continues, "They have offered us hospitality, warmth and the blessing of considering us their brothers and sisters in the midst of their struggles, companions on the road." This is a depiction of solidarity and of relationship, not of nonviolent intervention or interpositioning.

---

[329] Sandra Milena Rincón, "The Challenge Continues," address at Mennonite World Conference, Asunción, Paraguay, 2009. Text translated by Carol Rose and available on the CPT website, https://cpt.org/resources/writings/rincon-challenge-continues.

In Rincón's address, CPT appears not as heroic peacekeepers but as humble journey companions, sometimes stumbling, always needing to learn and grow. She is clear that CPT's learning has come largely through accompaniment relationships and by entering into solidarity with those local communities "who have taken on the challenge long before we did." In particular, she highlights how CPT itself has been transformed by doing this work of accompaniment—pushed to engage in analysis of power dynamics and structural violence, critical self-reflection, and internal changes on the way to becoming a more inclusive, ecumenical, diverse organization. Thus, Rincón demonstrates how solidarity requires more than the willingness to risk our lives to transform a violent world. Solidarity requires vulnerability and openness to being transformed ourselves. For CPT, this journey has been intertwined with the organization's "undoing racism" work and attention to systemic privilege.

II. Undoing oppressions in CPT: Using privilege or resisting it?

As a former CPTer, I am moved by Milena Rincón's address to the 2009 Mennonite World Conference. This is not only because of the power of her words and vision but, more deeply, because Rincón herself embodies the growth and transformation of CPT that her speech describes. Rincón is a mestiza[330] Colombian woman who has served as a CPTer since 2002. In 2008, she became the Coordinator of the Colombia project, and she

[330] Mestizo or mestiza (literally "mixed" in Spanish) is the racial/ethnic designation given in Latin America to people of mixed European and indigenous descent. This is distinct from indigenous peoples in the region who have maintained their own ethnic and cultural identities, languages, and tribal affiliations. It is also distinct from Latin Americans who identify as white, that is, as fully of Spanish or other European descent. In Colombia, racial identifications and social class are entangled. The upper class, which is approximately 5% of the population, identifies largely as white, and the middle class, roughly 20% of the population, identifies mainly as either white or mestiza/mestizo. Meanwhile, the poorest Colombians are mestiza/ mestizo, indigenous, or Afro-Colombian. See Kim Lamberty, *Eyes from the Outside: Christian Mission in Zones of Violent Conflict* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 15-16.

has continued in CPT administration since then. Currently, she is the Program Director, overseeing CPT's project development and operations around the world.

For many years, CPT has been on a journey to deepen its antiracist and anti-oppressive identity as an organization, work that CPT refers to as "undoing oppressions." In part, this work has meant striving to expand from CPT's North American and largely white Anabaptist Christian roots, in order to become a more international and racially diverse organization. CPTers of color and CPTers from the Global Majority—those such as Rincón—have been pivotal to this journey. One of the ways they have contributed to transforming CPT has been by prodding the organization to wrestle more deeply with the presence of systemic privilege in accompaniment and to begin to change (at least in part) how CPT engages in this activism.

If CPTers in general are relying (whether implicitly or self-consciously) on white privilege and/or Western passport privilege to disrupt and reduce direct violence, yet not all team members have these privileges, then what does this mean for how CPT collectively and CPTers individually perceive and attempt to do their work? What does it mean for relationships on team, across the organization, and with accompanied partners in the field? In other words, what does it *truly* mean to be in solidarity and to build alliances across differences of privilege and oppression, whether those differences exist within a team or between accompaniers and the accompanied? These are the kinds of questions CPT has confronted in their antiracism journey—and the Colombia project in particular has forced these questions.

CPT's Colombia project (also known as "CPT-Colombia") was initiated when the Colombian Mennonite Church (IMCOL) invited CPT to send an exploratory delegation

to Colombia in April of 2000. At the time, Colombia had been enduring several decades of internal violent conflict, with the main armed actors being government security forces (both military and police), left-wing guerrilla groups, and right-wing paramilitaries.[331] During the 1990s, thousands of politically and socially motivated homicides occurred, making Colombia the deadliest country in the Western hemisphere. Those targeted for assassination included human rights defenders, community organizers, union members and leaders, anyone perceived to sympathize with the guerrillas, and people considered socially undesirable or "disposable," such as homosexuals, prostitutes, or indigents. Meanwhile, guerrilla and paramilitary forces competed for control of rural areas and the lucrative drug trade, with devastating consequences on indigenous, Afro-Colombian, and *campesina* communities. In 2000, the US government signed into law Plan Colombia, a package of US foreign and military aid aimed at combating narco-trafficking and guerrilla insurgents in Colombia. Alarmed at how this would increase violence, poverty, and displacement—especially in rural areas of Colombia—IMCOL asked CPT to come.

The April 2000 exploratory delegation led to another delegation in 2001, then to the start of CPT's full-time presence in Colombia. CPT decided to base this

---

[331] The roots of this conflict are complex, extending back into the history of Spanish colonization of Colombia. This colonization resulted in the indigenous peoples, Afro-Colombians, and many mestizo/mestiza Colombians living in underdeveloped and often isolated rural areas, while wealth was concentrated in the hands of a small group of powerful elites and wealthy landowners. The history of the current conflict is usually told as beginning with "La Violencia," a civil war from 1948-1958 between the ruling Conservative and Liberal political parties. During this decade, thousands of people were tortured and killed, and nearly a million were displaced. Although the parties reached a power-sharing agreement that lasted nearly two decades, underlying social and economic inequalities were further entrenched, and this led to revolutionary guerrilla groups forming in the 1960s, then to the rise of paramilitary groups that have collaborated with and/or been supported by Colombian elites and the national military. Civilians get caught in the crossfire between these armed groups, often because they are suspected of being collaborators or sympathizers with the opposition. Further complicating the picture, Colombia is a country rich in land and natural resources, and much of the violence directed against *campesina* communities is motivated by the economic imperialism of multinational corporations and other wealthy elites. While all of the armed groups have contributed to the violence, the vast majority of assassinations and human rights abuses have been committed by the paramilitaries. For more detailed (yet still succinct) discussion of the Colombian context and how this has shaped CPT's work in Colombia, see Kern, *In Harm's Way,* chapter 10, "Colombia"; and Lamberty, *Eyes from the Outside,* chapter 1, "The Colombia Context."

accompaniment project in the city of Barrancabermeja (colloquially known as "Barranca"), which, after decades of being under guerrilla influence, had been taken over by paramilitaries who were terrorizing the population. The team also received a request to accompany subsistence farming communities on the nearby Opón River, who were likewise targeted by paramilitary attacks. For the first few years of CPT-Colombia, the team's work consisted largely of establishing a presence in Barranca and networking with human rights groups there, while pairs of CPTers would make regular brief trips (of a few days) along the Opón to accompany the *campesina* families who lived and farmed on the riverbanks. At times, the presence of internationals on the Opón caused armed actors to refrain from injuring or killing community members. CPT-Colombia also publicly denounced (often through banners or symbolic actions) the violence that did occur, and they supported and publicized the river communities' commitment to peace.

As CPT-Colombia's work became known, they received accompaniment requests from other communities and organizations throughout the region. By 2005, the need for international presence on the Opón was lessening, and the team began to shift their accompaniment work more and more to other rural communities that were confronting paramilitary violence, engaging in nonviolent resistance, and struggling to remain on their land. Currently (at the time of this writing), CPT-Colombia regularly accompanies three such rural communities by making periodic brief trips to visit them, publicizing the communities' concerns, and engaging in political advocacy and nonviolent direct action campaigns to support these communities' efforts to gain legal titles to their land. The team continues to live in Barranca, where they partner with Colombian human rights defenders, union leaders, and other peace activists.

In the story of CPT-Colombia, a pivotal moment was the team's visa crisis in 2002-2003. Perhaps because of the CPTers' confrontational public witness actions and denouncements of the violence (including that perpetrated by the Colombian national military), in the spring of 2002 a CPT reservist was denied entry into Colombia when he landed in the Bogotá airport. For a year and a half, the Colombian government refused to grant CPTers any visas. In addition, the government began to deport CPTers already in the country. Soon the team was down to three persons. To sustain the work, three Colombians affiliated with IMCOL began to intern with CPT-Colombia.

This initial step has had profound consequences on CPT-Colombia, as well as a ripple effect on CPT as a whole. In 2003, two of these interns traveled to Chicago to complete CPT training, then continued with the Colombia project as full-time CPTers for the next three years. One was Rincón, who is still with CPT today. By 2008, three more Colombians had trained with CPT. Then in 2009, CPT held its first training in Colombia. Most of the ten participants completed the training and became either full-time CPTers or reservists.

The presence of Colombians on team began to shift CPT-Colombia's ways of working. Spanish, which had always been used to communicate with accompanied partners, became the primary language on team as well. CPT-Colombia started to publish their press releases in both Spanish and English. More significantly, CPTers in Colombia began to question the assumptions underlying CPT's practice of accompaniment—assumptions Kern summarizes as "effective racism," or "using the fact that North American and European lives are considered more valuable than African, Asian, and

Latino lives to protect threatened people."[332] Colombians on team, who could not rely on a foreign government or embassy to pressure Colombia on their behalf, would not be helped by "effective racism." Nor did white North Americans on team want to lean on this principle, bolster its power, and reinforce the privileged treatment they might receive relative to their Colombian teammates.

In September 2006, CPT hosted a three-day antiracism training in Chicago, attended by about 35 full-time and reservist CPTers. During this training, CPTers "noted that the CPT website was full of references to how North American privilege had protected the people among whom CPT had set up projects."[333] Recognizing this as a problematic representation of CPT's work—and painfully exclusionary to Colombian CPTers—most participants agreed that changes in CPT's accompaniment tactics were needed. Troubling the tacit assumptions undergirding CPT's practice of accompaniment was only one of the ways this training prodded CPT to confront white privilege and commit more deeply to antiracism work. This was not an entirely new concern within CPT: from the beginning, CPT trainings had included an "Undoing Racism" module, and by 2006, there was an Undoing Racism Working Group pushing for internal critiques and changes in the organization. However, as Erin Kindy concludes in the CPTnet release she wrote to report on the antiracism training, "CPT finds itself at a watershed moment, where decisions made and steps taken will either send the organization with the strong current of the racist status quo or will move the organization upstream in active anti-racist action that will include transformed perspectives and structures."[334]

---

[332] Kern, *In Harm's Way*, 27.
[333] Kern, 414.
[334] Erin Kindy, "Structural Racism and Christian Peacemaker Teams," CPTnet, October 19, 2006. Archived on the CPT website, https://cpt.org/cptnet/2006/10/19/torontochicago-structural-racism-and-christian-

CPT has been trying hard to move upstream. In 2007, Sylvia Morrison joined CPT administration as the organization's first Undoing Racism Coordinator. In addition to consulting with teams, facilitating parts of CPT training, and providing various antiracism resources, Morrison shepherded CPT through a racial justice "audit," in which two external consultants spent ten months thoroughly evaluating CPT life and work with an antiracist lens. This audit culminated in February 2009 with a two-day strategic planning meeting, from which emerged seven "strategic directions for shaping an anti-racist identity for CPT."[335] These strategic directions begin with the goals of "resourcing the wellbeing of CPT and its members" and "cultivating a CPT culture that is anti-racist, anti-oppressive, and anti-colonial." They call for changes in CPT's mission and self-presentation, communications strategies, fundraising practices and expectations, and decision-making processes. The final strategic direction on the list envisions a CPT more transparent and accountable to partners in the field.

Since 2009, CPT has continued to work at their strategic plan to cultivate a deeper antiracist identity. Some significant changes in the organization have occurred: shifts in leadership, organizational culture, policies, and communication practices; new mission and vision statements; a new logo and visual brand identity. In some ways, CPT has grown more diverse and more equitable. In 2014, Morrison transitioned out of her full-time position as Undoing Racism Coordinator, affirming her sense that her work in that role was done, that she was leaving an organization "transformed" by their "unwavering

---

peacemaker-teams. This training was convoked by CPT's Undoing Racism Working Group, on which members of CPT-Colombia had a prominent presence. Both Colombian and non-Colombian CPTers from the Colombia project influenced the tenor of discussions during the antiracism training. For example, Kindy, the author of the CPTnet release about the training, was then a full-timer with the CPT-Colombia team.

[335] Sylvia Morrison, "Could This Be Our Finest (H)Our?" CPTnet, March 1, 2009. Archived on the CPT website, https://www.cpt.org/content/undoing-racism.

commitment to undoing racism and other forms of oppression within the organization."[336] In her parting reflection, Morrison notes several areas in which CPT has looked critically at itself, questioned and assessed practices, and made changes—areas ranging from hiring practices and budget priorities to partner relationships, power flow, and accountability.

Yet in many ways, CPT still has a long road to travel. As Morrison declares in the same reflection, "The work of undoing oppressions will never end. It is a lifelong journey…. The responsibility to continue this work is built into the fabric of the organization at all levels…"[337] My dissertation fieldwork reflects this portrait of an accompaniment organization in the midst of the journey: still wrestling with the paradox of privilege, simultaneously resisting it and using it, but always with the larger end goal of dismantling the inequitable system.

III. Methodology and summary of my dissertation fieldwork

As fieldwork for this dissertation, I spent a month and a half in Colombia during June and July of 2015. For five weeks, I lived in the CPT-Colombia house in Barranca, where I observed and participated in team life and accompaniment trips. My fieldwork also included nine in-depth interviews that I conducted with Colombian and non-Colombian CPTers who work on the Colombia project and were in country at the time.[338]

---

[336] Sylvia Morrison, "Undoing Oppressions: The Journey Continues," CPTnet, December 31, 2014. Archived on the CPT website, https://cpt.org//news/sott/articles/2014/cpt-international-undoing-oppressions-journey-continues.

[337] Morrison, "Undoing Oppressions."

[338] The nine CPTers I interviewed were selected through a combination of intentionality and happenstance. I have already explained my motivations for choosing to focus my fieldwork on CPT-Colombia. I was also intentional in ensuring that these in-depth interviews would include Colombian CPTers because I felt their perspectives on privilege and solidarity (and on CPT) would be important to my project. Three Colombian CPTers (whom I selected because of their depth of history with CPT) I contacted ahead of time, to try to set up interviews with them while I would be in country. Two of these individuals were among the eventual nine interviewees; one was unable to participate because of logistical and scheduling constraints. Beyond

Readers may wonder why my fieldwork did not feature in-depth interviews with accompanied partners as well. It is certainly true that those being accompanied offer important perspectives on the work of accompaniment and solidarity activism, which can further inform and nuance an ethic of solidarity.[339] However, I needed to maintain a manageable scope for my research, and the purpose and parameters of my project made interviews with CPTers in Colombia particularly relevant. My fieldwork with CPT-Colombia gave me opportunity to interview individuals who, while positioned differently in relation to global systems of power and privilege, work together on a single team, wrestling with how best to confront and navigate the complications of privilege. These interviews generated as much material and complexity as I am able to address within this dissertation.[340] During the fieldwork, I did meet, observe, and talk with some of CPT-Colombia's accompanied partners. My observations of these partners' interactions with (and requests of) CPTers have provided some insight into, first, how these partners strategically use accompaniment, including the power of privilege as embodied by CPT, and second, how these partners engage in solidarity and mutual collaborations with CPT. These observations contribute to the ethic of solidarity that I articulate in Part Three.

---

this, I interviewed each person who was on team during the time of my fieldwork, as well as one CPTer who happened to be in country at that time, leading a CPT delegation. As I note later in this section, the resulting nine interviewees were (serendipitously) relatively representative of CPT-Colombia's team personnel in terms of identity demographics. When requesting interviews, I made clear that the choice to be interviewed or not (or to respond to any particular question during the interview) was entirely up to each individual CPTer. That said, every person I asked was very willing to be interviewed, and none displayed any reluctance during the interviews in answering any of the questions. Altogether, the team was highly engaged in and supportive of my research.

[339] A former CPT colleague of mine, Kim Lamberty, has completed a research project that entailed 21 interviews with Colombian community members and leaders whom CPT-Colombia was accompanying at the time of her project. I commend Lamberty's 2014 book, *Eyes from the Outside: Christian Mission in Zones of Violent Conflict,* which includes significant assessment of accompaniment from the perspective of those being accompanied.

[340] In fact, during 2015, I also conducted interviews with five CPTers who at the time worked in CPT's Chicago office and (like the CPTers I interviewed in Colombia) occupied various social locations and positions within the organization. These conversations in Chicago were fascinating and fruitful; however, given limitations of space, time, and focus, I could not ultimately include them in this dissertation.

To a limited extent, I employed qualitative research methods during my fieldwork, specifically in-depth interviewing and participant observation.[341] In participant observation, the researcher studies a community by living with them, often for an extended period of time. The researcher participates in the group's communal life, cultivates personal relationships with community members, and engages those members in individual conversations and/or collective discussions about the community's customs, beliefs, history, and current conditions. By establishing rapport with group members and taking part in group life, the researcher is able to gain more intimate and detailed knowledge of the community, both by observing how members behave and interact and by listening to how they express their beliefs and explain what is going on. From the data collected and interpreted, the researcher constructs a "thick description" of the community.[342]

My dissertation fieldwork reflects this methodology insofar as I combined participation in and observation of CPT-Colombia's shared team life and accompaniment work. Like a participant observer, I was both "insider" and "outsider" to the community I was observing—although, as a former CPTer who had served on the Colombia project,

---

[341] My most direct training in qualitative research methods occurred through a four-day workshop, "Qualitative Research Methods," taught by Monique Hennink, Ph.D., associate professor of Global Health in the Rollins School of Public Health at Emory University. The theory and methods covered during this workshop are expounded on in Monique Hennink, Inge Hutter, and Ajay Bailey, *Qualitative Research Methods* (London: SAGE Publications, 2011). In addition, I have been exposed to ethnographic methods by taking one course each in the fields of anthropology and sociology during my graduate career. That said, most of my training and scholarship have occurred in humanistic fields, and I approached my fieldwork as a humanistic scholar and ethicist, *not* as a sociologist or anthropologist. That is, I did not make my data collection or analysis systematic in the way social science research demands. As a constructive Christian ethicist, I have followed a method akin to Traci West's dialogical method, as I explained in chapter 1.

[342] According to Hennink et al., "A 'thick description' aims to explain people's lives by describing the cultural meanings that underlie their actions. To better describe people's lives, one needs to become immersed in their culture to observe and understand their everyday actions" (*Qualitative Research Methods,* 49). The term "thick description" is most associated with cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz, who adopted (and further developed) this concept to explain his own ethnographic methods and goals. See Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

my status was much more fully that of insider than outsider.[343] In particular, I already had working relationships with many of the CPTers I interviewed; six of the nine I had met prior to visiting Colombia in 2015, and five of these six had been teammates of mine at some points during my term as a CPTer. Although five weeks is a relatively brief time to spend in field research, I was building on significant previous experience and knowledge of CPT and of CPT-Colombia specifically. Throughout my five weeks with CPT-Colombia in 2015, I kept a journal of observations and personal reflections. Most significantly, I talked at length with CPTers then in Colombia. These in-depth interviews constituted the heart of my fieldwork, and they provide direction and primary source material for the constructive ethic of solidarity that I elaborate in Part Three.

I need to be clear that I do not consider this fieldwork and my dissertation project ethnography: my goal has *not* been to create a thick description of CPT-Colombia.[344] Nor

---

[343] Among ethnographers and other qualitative researchers, there are debates about the merits and demerits of a researcher being positioned as an "insider" or an "outsider" relative to the community being studied. The debates focus on how an emic (insider) or etic (outsider) perspective each affects the research process, findings, and (especially) interpretations of those findings and the resulting arguments made. Traditionally, ethnographic studies have been conducted by researchers who are outsiders (*not* members of the community under study), although engaging in participant observation may cause the researcher to move somewhat closer to insider status. Some ethnographies are created by researchers who are insiders or relative insiders to the community. Consider, for example, *Black Picket Fences: Privilege and Peril among the Black Middle Class*, by Mary Pattillo-McCoy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999). Pattillo-McCoy grew up Black and middle-class in Milwaukee, and her own experiences motivated her study of a Black, middle-class neighborhood in Chicago. She conducted her research over three and a half years, which included much active involvement in community life and a year of actually living in the neighborhood. In what she calls "close-to-home ethnography," Pattillo-McCoy discusses the advantages and challenges of being so closely identified with the community she was studying. I was arguably even more an insider than this to CPT-Colombia. However, like Pattillo-McCoy, I hope that my positioning and resultant inability to be "either an objective or dispassionate observer" has ultimately "enriched" rather than "stifled" my work in this dissertation project. See Pattillo-McCoy, *Black Picket Fences*, 7-8.

[344] Compare my project to what I would consider a genuine ethnography: Pattillo-McCoy's *Black Picket Fences*. Pattillo-McCoy's book offers a thick description of one Black, middle-class Chicago neighborhood: nine chapters (about 200 pages) that extensively detail the neighborhood's social and economic history, ties to surrounding neighborhoods, manifestations of youth culture, and two oral histories that exemplify the experiences of youth growing up in this neighborhood. After all this descriptive work, in the conclusion (approximately 20 pages), Pattillo-McCoy turns to constructive suggestions of social and economic policies that could benefit the Black middle class in this Chicago neighborhood and elsewhere. In contrast, the weight of my project lands far more heavily on constructive ethics, with some descriptive detail from my field research included, mostly to contextualize and clarify the interview

did I conduct qualitative research with the intended purpose of evaluating the outcomes or effectiveness of CPT's work or of accompaniment activism in general. Rather, the intent of my project is to construct a more robust Christian ethic of solidarity, attending more deeply to the complications posed by systemic privilege. Because I believe all theologies emerge from lived contexts, and because international accompaniment is a context in which the complicating impact of privilege on solidarity is highly visible and explicitly discussed, I thus believe the voices of faith-based accompaniment activists can fruitfully contribute to ethical and theological conversations about solidarity and privilege. My own experiences as a CPTer (and my reading and analysis since) formed the starting place for my theological reflections and constructive ethical work. To deepen and expand upon my thinking, it has been important to draw into my project the voices of other accompaniers, especially those whose social locations and hermeneutical horizons differ from mine. The primary purpose of my dissertation fieldwork, therefore, was to generate material through which I could engage such additional voices and perspectives.[345]

During my dissertation fieldwork with CPT-Colombia, I participated as fully as I could in team life, including morning reflection times, meals and social gatherings, household chores such as cooking and cleaning, and the team meetings (held roughly every one to two weeks) in which all members who are present discuss local news and accompaniment plans, team decisions and policies, CPT business, and any other matters requiring the team's attention. My five weeks on the project also accorded me the opportunity to participate in three brief accompaniment trips (ranging in length from two

---

excerpts I draw on in Part Three.

[345] A secondary purpose was to refresh and update my knowledge of CPT-Colombia, since I had served as a full-time CPTer with the Colombia project during 2007-2009 but had not been back to the country since.

to four days) into rural areas where CPT-Colombia's primary accompaniment work occurs. Two of these trips were for the purpose of visiting subsistence farming communities who are nonviolently resisting displacement. The third trip was at the invitation of a Colombian human rights organization, which has become a close partner of CPT-Colombia. Members of this organization wanted internationals with them as they traveled into a region rife with paramilitary violence, and they wanted international presence as they sought to meet with (and demand accountability from) government and military officials in that region.

As I have noted, a major component of my fieldwork was conducting in-depth interviews with CPTers who were then serving full-time or part-time with the Colombia project. I conducted nine such interviews, which varied in length from forty minutes to an hour and a half. Of the nine CPTers I interviewed, five were then full-time, three were reservists (although two of these had previously served full-time with CPT for three or more years), and one was an intern who planned to complete CPT training later in the year and join the team as a full-time member. At the point when I interviewed them, the length of time these nine CPTers had worked with the organization ranged between one and nineteen years, with an average of nine years.[346] As is apparent from these numbers, collectively these activists have extensive experience with CPT, accompaniment, and the Colombian context.

Because questions of social identity (and the resulting experiences of privilege or exclusion) are central to my dissertation topic, I will also overview here the social

[346] I figured these time lengths based on when each CPTer began to work on a team, whether in full-time, reservist, or intern status. However, for most of these CPTers, their experience with CPT began well before the point of joining a team, since the typical process of becoming a CPTer includes participating in a short-term CPT delegation and completing the month-long CPT training. I should also mention that at least five of the CPTers I interviewed had also served on one or more additional CPT projects (beyond CPT-Colombia), and two had previously done accompaniment work with other organizations.

identities of the nine CPTers I interviewed. Five interviewees were men, and four were women.[347] Three were Colombian and could aptly be identified racially as mestiza or mestizo.[348] All three of these Colombians articulated the challenges of being a racial, cultural, and linguistic minority in a US-based, predominately white organization that uses English as its primary language for communication.[349] They were also highly attentive to the mixed ways systemic privilege operates in the context of accompaniment. Of the six non-Colombian CPTers I interviewed, five were white North Americans—two from the US and three from Canada (although one has married a native of Barranca and now resides in the city permanently with his family). Every one of these interviewees described ways she or he had experienced and witnessed white privilege and "international" privilege at work in accompaniment activism. They were also keenly, critically aware of how varying levels of access to such privileges impact CPTers' accompaniment work and experiences within the organization. Finally, the sixth non-Colombian was from India and identified himself as indigenous. Discerning his place on the team, he told me, was complicated by his status of being simultaneously a "foreigner"

---

[347] Although my study has not attended to gender-based oppressions and privileges as much as I have focused on the unjust systems based on race, national origin and citizenship, it was striking to me that every woman I interviewed talked about her experiences of sexism (usually in conjunction with how she experiences either racism or white privilege), and several of the men also mentioned this topic. I also want to note that CPT includes both straight and queer-identified members, and this diversity was reflected in the identities and topics discussed during the interviews. In CPT training, the "Undoing Oppressions" modules focus on racism, sexism, and heterosexism—and these organizational foci may have influenced the topics that emerged in my interviews.

[348] One of the Colombian CPTers has identified herself specifically as mestiza while in conversation with me. Although I did not hear either of the other two use that category in naming themselves, in their interviews they did make clear that (at least within the context of CPT work) they identify as people of color and feel racially different from their white-identified teammates.

[349] Because CPT-Colombia uses Spanish to communicate with partners and uses either Spanish or English (or both) for internal team communications, depending on who is on team at any given time, it has been possible for people who speak Spanish but not English to join CPT and serve in Colombia. However, their access to and participation in the rest of CPT is limited, despite the organization's best efforts to provide translation as needed. Only one of the Colombians I interviewed spoke English (which she learned after joining CPT), though she also chose to hold her interview with me in Spanish. This topic of English as the dominant language of CPT came up in a few of the interviews, and both Colombian and non-Colombian interviewees pointed to this as one of the ways systemic privileges and exclusions operate in CPT.

and a person of color, an indigenous person who would often be mistaken for Colombian—at least, until he started to speak and his Spanish would mark him "foreign." In his racial, ethnic, and national identity, he disrupted the typical categories of the CPT-Colombia team, in which, he noted, "it's basically either somebody who comes from the Global North, from the United States or Canada, mostly… or [is] Colombian."

Altogether, these nine CPTers are fairly representative of the team composition and relative diversity of CPT-Colombia. In the interviews, I asked these CPTers about their experiences with CPT, their faith commitments and motivations for engaging in the work, and their reflections on solidarity, power, and privilege in accompaniment activism and in CPT. (My interview guide is included in the Appendix. I rarely followed the exact order of all these questions, but I did cover all main topics in the guide in each interview.) These interviews generated a fascinating portrait of accompaniment activists who are creatively collaborating across difference; who both draw on privilege and resist it, depending on what the circumstances of the moment require; and who are striving to engage in solidarity while remaining aware of their limitations and failings. Although I will not attempt to describe that whole portrait in detail, in Part Three of my dissertation, I will unpack two major themes that emerged from the interviews, explaining what I believe those themes imply for an ethic of responsible solidarity.

Chapter Five: A Strategic Realist Approach to Privilege and Solidarity

So far in my dissertation, I have laid out the paradox of privilege as it ethically complicates calls to and practices of solidarity. I have used international protective accompaniment as a particular context for examining how this paradox of privilege may play out in activists' actual efforts to live into solidarity. In addition, I have overviewed the "undoing racism" journey of Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) to confront their own complicity in systemic privilege. Drawing on my interviews with CPTers of different national origins and racial identities, I have begun to sketch a more complex portrait of how faith-based solidarity activists navigate this paradox of privilege in their lives and work. Now, in this final part of my dissertation, I present a constructive ethic of responsible solidarity, highlighting two themes that emerged from my fieldwork interviews and learnings: strategic realism, and solidarity as mutuality.

First, the CPTers I interviewed in Colombia displayed an ethical perspective I call "strategic realism."[350] This perspective became visible as the CPTers described for me how they perceive—and at times use in their work—the power of systemic privilege.[351]

---

[350] Within the field of international relations, strategic realism is a theory associated with Thomas Schelling, particularly with his book *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960). Schelling drew upon game theory to explain and analyze foreign policy decision-making and diplomacy. The ethical perspective I am talking about is *not* Schelling's theory—although there may be certain resemblances between these two "strategic" ways of thinking and acting, since both include careful analysis of a given situation, attending to available power and resources, and choosing means calculated to achieve desired ends.

[351] This idea of utilizing privilege for strategic purposes echoes Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of "strategic essentialism." As a postcolonial feminist theorist, Spivak critiques essentialist notions of identity, that is, the idea that all group members of a particular gender, race, ethnicity, etc. share some essential, fixed traits and that identity can be reduced to (or summed up by) this "essence." Nonetheless, while recognizing the dangers of essentialism, she has proposed "strategic essentialism" as a political tactic in which members of a disenfranchised and/or minority group temporarily "essentialize" themselves as a strategy to pursue particular political interests and desired social changes. See "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography (1985)" in *The Spivak Reader,* ed. Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean (New York: Routledge, 1996), 203-236. Note that Spivak's concept of strategic essentialism (if truly done strategically) is a deconstructive tactic, which exposes and interrogates the terms of essentialism. Similarly,

Strategic realism is characterized by maintaining a tension between, on the one hand, an activist's ideals of justice and vision of the world as she believes it ought to be, and on the other hand, attention to the current reality of the world as it is, particularly the ways in which power struggles and imbalances contribute to conflict and violence. Power analysis is a key element of strategic realism. Because of this, I find Reinhold Niebuhr's Christian realism and his assessments of how power works in the world to be a useful resource for illuminating facets of strategic realism.

Although none of the CPTers I interviewed mentioned Niebuhr, nor do I assume that any of them would identify as Christian realists, I was struck by how their discussions of power and privilege seemed to echo the blend of pragmatism and idealism that characterizes Niebuhrian thought. In his ethics, Niebuhr prioritizes humans' responsibility to act against evil, including using impure means when necessary. Still, even while he argues that our best efforts to act for good will always fall short of the ethical ideal, Niebuhr never discounts the moral importance and social relevance of that "impossible" ideal.[352] Likewise, the CPTers I talked with persistently critiqued the presence of privilege as a moral and relational problem, which falls short of their not-yet-fully-realized ideals of justice. At the same time, they discussed why and how they sometimes choose to draw upon (or urge their teammates to draw upon) the ethically troubling means of privilege, at moments when the power of privilege can function to disrupt violence or support acts of solidarity.

---

the stance of strategic realism that I describe in this chapter employs the power of systemic privilege in a critical fashion that will, it is hoped, interrogate and ultimately participate in dismantling that system.

[352] In *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, Niebuhr describes the absolute love perfectionism that Jesus taught and modeled as an "impossible possibility"—an ideal which finite, sinful humans never fully achieve in history, yet which persistently prods us toward higher "approximations" than we might otherwise reach. Chapter 4 of this book is tellingly entitled "The Relevance of an Impossible Ethical Ideal."

A strategic realist approach to privilege and solidarity is the focus of chapter 5. In this chapter, I detail how I have observed this ethical perspective in CPTers' words and actions, especially in the interviews I conducted while in Colombia. I demonstrate how strategic realism resonates with aspects of Niebuhr's ethics, particularly his emphases on responsibility, humility, and the possibilities and challenges of using power for good ends. Similar to Niebuhr's Christian realism, strategic realism acknowledges that acting well (or as well as possible) in this world requires drawing on available sources of power—while also, with humility, facing one's limitations and letting go of one's own pretensions of innocence or heroism. Yet beyond these similarities between the two ethical stances, the CPTers I interviewed expressed a more contextualized and nuanced account of power and its purposes than is apparent in Niebuhr's writings. In particular, as the CPTers discussed various kinds of power significant in solidarity and nonviolent activism, they displayed a richer conceptualization of power than Niebuhr's more limited perspective. Overall, careful attention to power dynamics and to the multiple forms of power at work in accompaniment—attention that is realistic, strategic, *and* responsive to ideals of justice and anti-oppression—suggests practices that can help privileged persons engage in a responsible yet humble praxis of solidarity.

Then in chapter 6, I turn to the second theme of my constructive ethic: a vision of solidarity as mutuality. Here my thinking departs more sharply from the ethics of Niebuhr, who elevates self-sacrificial love as the gospel ideal and presents mutual love as merely the best we can achieve in history. Such idealizing of self-sacrifice also has had traction in the field of faith-based nonviolent activism. Yet every interview I conducted in Colombia strikingly drew a picture of solidarity as a mutual partnership, in which the

accompaniers and the accompanied together resist violence and work for change. From these interviews, I have concluded that an ideal of mutuality—rather than aspiring to self-sacrifice—more closely aligns with the actual practices of (at least some) solidarity activists. I assert that such an emphasis on mutuality, collaboration, and interdependence can better equip us to navigate with accountability the paradox of privilege.

I do not consider it a coincidence that these two themes—strategic realism and the mutuality of solidarity—both emerged from my field research with CPT-Colombia. These are not disparate, unrelated ethical perspectives. Rather, strategic realism is a necessary starting point for enacting mutuality. Without the power analysis, critical self-awareness and accountability of a strategic realist approach, we cannot truly engage in practices of solidarity that express interdependence and mutuality. Instead, we will continue to perceive and enact nonviolent activism as if self-sacrificial love were the highest ideal. We will remain caught in pretensions of innocence or heroism, and our activism will manifest in unrealistic, irresponsible, often damaging ways. Therefore, I assert that an ethic of responsible solidarity must weave together the clear-eyed analysis of strategic realism with the openhearted practices of mutuality. This final part of my dissertation examines these two features of responsible solidarity, beginning with the ethical stance of strategic realism.

I. "I've learned to live with tension": Between ideals of justice and realities of privilege

I began to identify and articulate this paradigm of strategic realism during my fieldwork research with CPT-Colombia. Because team members as individuals experience greater

and lesser access to systemic privileges—notably, though not exclusively, those of citizenship and race—the team has had to explicitly wrestle, individually and collectively, with the implications of privilege for their activism. The results of such wrestling, a tangle of conviction and unease, were threaded throughout my conversations with the CPTers and became most apparent whenever we turned to the topics of privilege and power.

As I listened to the CPTers talk about the presence of privilege as both a problem *and* a source of power in their work, I was struck by how these activists seem to inhabit an ethical space very like what Niebuhr describes as a necessary "tension between the ideal and the real."[353] One North American white woman said to me, "I often feel kind of revered as an international, which makes me uncomfortable, but I also realize that it's kind of central to the work that I do, so it's that forever non-ending tension." When I asked her how she addresses this discomfort, her initial response was, "I guess I've just learned to live with tension. What else are you going to do?"

This reply may sound like resignation. However, this CPTer went on to discuss how she and her teammates stay vigilant to issues of systemic privilege through frequent "check-in" conversations among themselves or with local partners, in order to share observations, engage in power analysis, or call each other out when needed. One concrete practice CPT-Colombia has developed is to include in their regular team meeting agenda a ten-minute "undoing oppressions" check-in. During this time, team members relate specific examples of systemic oppressions—or resistance to such oppressions—that they

[353] Reinhold Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1935; New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 12. Citations refer to the Seabury edition.

have witnessed or experienced during the past week or two on project.[354] The main purpose of these check-in conversations is to foster among team members, first, the habit of noticing oppressive dynamics, and second, greater facility in naming and discussing such dynamics with each other. The assumption is that paying critical attention to the many ways systemic oppressions and privileges manifest in daily life is a needed first step to resisting and dismantling those systems. Although these "undoing oppressions" check-ins represent a relatively brief time commitment—ten minutes within a meeting agenda that often extends a few hours—the CPTer I was interviewing described the practice as "invaluable." For her, notably, these conversations do not resolve or even lessen the tension she feels; rather they help her to dwell in that tension with heightened, critical self-awareness, by providing a recurring "space to ask the unanswerable questions, to know that you're not the only one feeling these situations and feeling uncomfortable."

---

[354] This check-in time offers ten minutes of space for open sharing, and because it occurs during the team meeting, it includes anyone who is present on team at the time. No one is required to speak up during the check-in, but anyone is permitted to name whatever noticings she or he wishes to share. Follow-up questions or comments from others are permitted and sometimes do happen, but they are neither required nor necessarily expected. Occasionally an observation may unfold into a larger discussion, but often the noticings are simply shared without further commentary. Sometimes the team members present have much to share; other times there are few comments, and the ten minutes pass largely in silence. In addition, the examples named may come from anywhere: internal team dynamics or happenings occurring in the larger CPT organization; interactions with neighbors, accompanied partners, or armed actors; local, national, or international new stories; even an individual team member's recent reading or reflection. So these check-in conversations vary considerably. What is consistent is that they always are given a minimum of ten minutes. An appointed timekeeper will watch the clock, and even if there is little sharing, the team will not move forward to the next agenda point until the ten minutes are up.

From my own experience as a full-time CPTer, I believe part of the motivation for so carefully guarding these ten minutes of check-in time is to ensure that the team has a consistent space in which to name and begin to discuss any problems or conflicts that arise from inequities on team—rather than waiting until problems occur and only then finding the time and energy for such discussions. Because oppressive dynamics are more often noticed by those disempowered by the dynamics, the burden of bringing up these problems usually falls most heavily on the least privileged and most vulnerable team members. So the regular "undoing oppressions" check-in—in addition to fostering greater personal attentiveness among all team members—is a proactive attempt to diminish power imbalances on team and to lessen the challenge of bringing up issues of systemic inequalities, by making this a "normal" part of team conversation, rather than something that feels unusual or disruptive.

For this woman, learning to live with tension has meant holding on to her ideals of equity and anti-oppression,[355] while also remaining uncomfortably aware of her own implication in systems of domination and privilege. Further, it has meant never losing sight of the problem that unearned privilege represents—even when that international privilege or white privilege is the force she and her teammates are drawing upon to help the Colombians they accompany make it safely through a military checkpoint or gain an audience with local authorities. An ethical approach of strategic realism requires attending to the many ways that systemic privilege may impact a given situation—for ill and for good—and, more personally, attending to how one's own attitude and actions might play into or influence those power dynamics. In the context of CPT activism, systemic privilege is both a problem, a concrete example of the social injustices the team is working to transform, *and* a power that may be used to resist injustice, albeit only with great care and in consultation with the accompanied partners. As this woman explained, "I don't think we could do our work without the power that we have, but then there's also that fine line of using that power and not abusing it."

a. Confronting the problem of privilege

Every CPTer I interviewed shared this sense that systemic privilege is—to quote one of them—"a double-edged sword" to be wielded with attentiveness and caution. They all

[355] Ideals of equity and anti-oppression are arguably apparent in this woman's discomfort with being "kind of revered as an international." One example of when her ideals were more explicitly on display during the interview occurred when she was describing what motivated her to join CPT. She told me about a thesis she had written for a university course on global humanitarianism. This paper was a comparative study of CPT and two other international humanitarian organizations, analyzing how each organization used language (in their literature and in spoken interviews) to either reinforce or resist the power dynamics of colonialism. In this woman's analysis, she found CPT to be "many steps ahead" of the other organizations in "breaking down that colonialism that exists in our language," and this was a significant positive factor in her motivation to join CPT.

agreed that privilege is operating in their activism and in their organization, and they offered me concrete examples of how they have seen this play out. Sometimes their examples identified ways privilege reinforces harmful hierarchies, causing damage in accompaniment work or relationships.

One interviewee expressed his frustration with how "international privilege" allows activists from the Global North to skate by with less knowledge, tempting them to rely instead on the impact of appearing visibly "foreign." He pointed to how the Colombian human rights defenders whom CPT accompanies have a deep knowledge of relevant local and international laws, especially in the area of international humanitarian law. In contrast, he continued, CPTers are too often ignorant of those legal details yet willing to cite the law in vague terms when confronting Colombian authorities. He described this move as "such a play on privilege," explaining, "Just because I say 'international humanitarian law' and I wear this blue CPT jacket, working for an international organization, somebody [i.e. a military or government official] just assumes I know what I am talking about. But then, somebody from [a Colombian human rights organization] has to specifically say *why* this is a violation and prove their point. Whereas maybe I don't have to."

This example illustrates both the unearned benefits and the burdens caused by systemic privilege. For those activists who look white and/or carry a Western passport, privilege may grant a perceived authority grounded merely in appearance, not in actual knowledge and experience. Simultaneously, the system devalues the expertise of the accompanied partners. These two sides of the damage systemic privilege does—how it creates barriers and risks for the marginalized, while permitting the privileged to dodge

responsibility—reappeared in other CPTers' critiques of the presence of privilege in their lives and work. Not only did non-Colombian CPTers acknowledge ways they are treated with greater (yet unearned) deference than are the Colombians they accompany, but CPTers also observed how these dynamics of differential treatment play out within the team itself.

One CPTer from the US told of a time he had engaged in what he thought would be a strong prophetic witness by writing a "scathing" public letter confronting a multinational mining corporation.[356] When the corporation then angrily threatened the team with a lawsuit, this US CPTer's initial response was amusement and satisfaction that the letter had been taken so seriously. "They listened to us… and they're pissed off about us, so this is good," he reported thinking. But one of his Colombian teammates had a very different reaction: she reprimanded him for putting the team at risk and questioned why he had not first had the letter read by a Colombian lawyer before firing it off to the company. Most tellingly, she pointed out how not everyone on the team would experience equally the risks of such a reckless action. "Look," she said to the US CPTer, "you can go home at any moment. But these charges are going to stick with me and my name forever in Colombia." Her words starkly revealed to him the "huge distance" between his own globally privileged status as a white man from the US and her status as

---

[356] Multinational corporations are arguably complicit in the structural and direct violence experienced by Colombian *campesina* communities. For example, large-scale mining corporations have advocated for governmental policies and regulations that are much harder for *campesina* traditional artisanal mining communities to comply with. These policies thus threaten the livelihood of these *campesinos* and *campesinas*, who are living in rural, isolated mountainous regions. Beyond such legal and economic violence, the subsistence communities are sometimes the targets of direct violence enacted by paramilitary or police forces, apparently at the behest of wealthy landowners or corporations. This direct violence may force an immediate displacement, or it may be intended to intimidate the community into giving up their struggle to remain on the resource-rich land they are working. For CPT-Colombia's analysis of this situation, see Pierre Shantz, "The deadly cost of gold mining," October 13, 2011, posted on a team blog, http://cptcolombia.wordpress.com/2011/10/13/the-deadly-cost-of-gold-mining/; and "Militarisation serving extraction," April 23, 2014, posted on a team blog, http://www.ecapcolombia.org/2014/04/militarisation-serving-extraction/#.WXOAyiMrLY0.

a mestiza Colombian woman. An unthinking reliance on his own privilege, he realized, especially when paired with insufficient knowledge or attention to the Colombian context, would cause him to act irresponsibly, even dangerously.

Other non-Colombian team members admitted how they have had to confront a sense of entitlement or the "hero" impulses systemic privilege may breed among advantaged social justice activists. One North American white woman, when asked what had motivated her to begin working with CPT, described "coming in [to the project] as this young, invincible… justice-focused" person, then added, "I do remember it being a heroic, like, 'Let's save the world' kind of thing." She is hardly alone in entering CPT with this savior mentality. A Canadian CPTer who has been with the organization since the 1990s described how he has witnessed many young CPTers enter the work with such a "superhero" attitude—himself included. "When I first started, I think—well, I was 21," he told me. "When you're 21, you're just cocky, especially [if you are] a white man from North America, and you're ready to confront anything, especially the bad guys." While he critiqued this attitude as simplistic, inaccurate, and a reflection of privileged status, he did note that it can be fed by the drama of accompaniment and the dynamics of the work on the ground, especially when the accompanied communities are thanking and praising CPT. For him—as well as for CPT as a whole, he believes—this "superhero" model of accompaniment has been profoundly challenged (and to some extent, corrected) by the inclusion of Colombian nationals on the Colombia project.

As these examples reveal, CPTers often become more starkly aware of their own forms of privileged status when they work alongside others who do not experience that

same privilege.[357] This awareness can be a call to action and change: even if the privileged CPTers cannot readily shift how other people treat them with unearned deference, they can cultivate humility toward their status and roles in accompaniment, alertness to their own limitations in this work, and a non-defensive openness to receiving critique when they are, as one CPTer put it, "playing on privilege." Moreover, at least two of the examples I have just discussed suggest actions that CPTers (or other similarly positioned solidarity activists) can and should take in order to lessen their reliance on the privilege of "foreignness." As the CPTers themselves noted, international accompaniers have a responsibility to learn about the political and legal contexts in which they work. When they cite laws or policies, they should back up their claims with real understanding. Most significantly, they should recognize that local partners have deeper knowledge about and higher stakes in the immediate context than do outsiders. So consulting with Colombian advisors before acting is an important way for CPTers to mitigate over-reliance on systemic privilege and to lessen or avoid the damage that can cause.

I emphasize these actions because, as noted earlier, "learning to live with tension" may sound like resignation to the status quo. However, I assert that to truly remain in the tension requires instead that one stay attentive to the reality and injustice of unearned

[357] The examples I have given so far in this chapter are each of a non-Colombian CPTer explaining how she or he, as an "international," has experienced more deferential treatment or less risk than a Colombian colleague, whether that colleague is an accompanied partner or a fellow CPTer. Thus, the forms of privilege these examples highlight are status derived from being perceived as Western and/or white—and these forms of privilege are admittedly significant in the work of accompaniment, as I have explained in previous chapters. However, I do *not* want to imply a simple dichotomy between non-Colombian CPTers with privilege and Colombian CPTers without. The reality is far more complicated than this, in part because not all non-Colombian CPTers are white (nor do all carry passports from nations in the Global North). In addition, there are other forms of privileged status (or lack thereof) that appear in the work of accompaniment. Some examples of this that came up in my interviews include the privileges that accrue from being (or being perceived as) male, heterosexual, or educated. Most of the CPTers I interviewed, when asked about their personal experiences of privilege or lack of privilege, described a mix of experiences. In particular, it is striking to me that the Colombian CPTers not only discussed their own absence of passport privilege or racial privilege, but also acknowledged ways they do experience privileged status, especially relative to many of the rural communities CPT accompanies.

privilege, while also working toward an ideal of justice, in which all people are treated fairly. An attitude of resignation lets go of that guiding ideal, collapsing into complacent or despairing realism.[358] For realism to be ethical *and* strategic, it is not enough to stay alert (even uncomfortably so) to the presence of privilege and one's own implication in that. Recognizing the problem of privilege should lead one to think and act differently, to challenge the structures and the status quo that sustain systems of privilege and oppression. Still—and this is where the paradox of privilege complicates the picture—at times the very actions taken in an attempt to resist or redress the harms caused by systemic privilege may draw upon the power of privilege to influence a situation.

b. Using—and sharing—the power of privilege

Even as the CPTers I interviewed readily identified the dangers of systemic privilege, they also asserted it is a force that sometimes can be used for good—and further, that

[358] The danger of realism collapsing into an attitude of resignation, complacency, cynicism or despair is a significant critique sometimes leveled against Niebuhr's Christian realism. Traci West articulates this danger when she notes Niebuhr's emphasis on the "inevitability" of human pride and desire for power. She then argues that this emphasis "poses serious difficulties for envisioning antiracist political change…. If one adopts a Christian realist approach of settling for proximate solutions to social problems, it may require accommodation to certain forms of racist inequalities that are considered to be by-products of unchangeable human dynamics." West, "Reinhold Niebuhr on Realism," in *Beyond the Pale: Reading Ethics form the Margins*, ed. Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas and Miguel A. De La Torre (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 124.

Niebuhr himself sometimes seems aware of the danger of realism collapsing into resignation. For example, in *The Nature and Destiny of Man,* vol. 2, *Human Destiny* (New York: Scribner & Sons, 1943), he warns against the limited vision of "pessimists," who cannot see any possibilities for international cooperation beyond a balance of power, and the even greater danger represented by "cynics," who would organize the world by imposing imperial power (285). However, despite Niebuhr's attempts to balance between ethical allegiance to a high moral ideal and realistic attention to power and struggle, by the time of his death, his Christian realism had become more associated with an ideology presumed to serve the interests of the powerful and maintain the status quo. For an example of a critical reading of this perspective, see Bill Kellerman, "Apologist of Power: The Long Shadow of Reinhold Niebuhr's Christian Realism," *Sojourners*, March 14, 1987, 14-20. Even those scholars sympathetic to Niebuhr's perspective, who find his Christian realism relevant to contemporary politics and ethics, still acknowledge that Niebuhr may have underscored human self-interest and power in ways that lost sight of hope and the potential for social change. See, for example, Robin Lovin, "Christian Realism for the Twenty-First Century," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 37, no. 4 (2009): 669-682, especially pp. 673-675.

privileged activists have a responsibility to try to do this. One of the Colombian team members I talked with poignantly described how she perceives this. When I asked her (as I asked in each interview) what she considers the most significant forms of power at work in accompaniment, she began her answer by bluntly naming racism, then added, “whether we like it or not.” She pointed out how being a blond-haired, blue-eyed, English-speaking foreigner has “weight” in Colombia, even more so if that foreigner also happens to be a man. Such weight results in the non-Colombian CPTers having more apparent influence among Colombian military or governmental agents. The relative weight is also noticeable during CPTers’ interactions with the communities they accompany: it is not unusual for community members to perceive the non-Colombian CPTers, especially men, as the leaders of the team and to listen more closely or respectfully to their voices.

The Colombian CPTer I was interviewing continued, “Gender, power, racism are all mixed up there. You know, this is very subtle, and this is present. But it’s something that CPT has, and I say to them, you have to use it… I can’t take this away from you, that you are blond and blue-eyed and speak English. I can’t take this away from you. The only thing to be done is to use it with wisdom and with subtlety.” As she further explained, using the power of privilege wisely means “to delegate it to others who don’t have such power, but also to turn it over to the community.”

This woman’s words acknowledge a certain inevitability—at least in the current context within which accompaniment occurs—that systemic privilege *is* present and *will* exert influence. By so readily naming this dynamic “racism,” she offers a pointed moral critique. Yet she is clear that the way forward lies not in backing away from the power of privilege, but in facing it and “using” it. Furthermore, she is clear that there is more than

one way to wield this double-edged sword of privilege, and it is important to handle it in ways that will support and strengthen the agency of those without such privilege. Ultimately, this Colombian CPTer calls on her teammates to use their unearned privilege in a manner that contributes to creating a different, more just world. As the interview proceeded, she explained, “My posture is that it is necessary to use this power [of privilege] to empower the community, not to take advantage of the community or use the community as a servant.”

All of the CPTers I interviewed, Colombian and non-Colombian alike, shared this sense that the power of systemic privilege is a force accompaniers can and should employ strategically and for good ends. As examples of what this may look like in practice, several told me accounts of times when CPT presence has enabled accompanied partners to gain a hearing from a government official or to make it through military checkpoints more quickly or safely. One CPTer explained how Colombian human rights workers traveling through the countryside are frequently stopped at checkpoints by soldiers, who may accuse them of being guerrillas. At best, the human rights workers get delayed, perhaps denied passage through the checkpoint; at worst, they may be killed or disappeared. “Whereas if they are traveling with an international,” the CPTer continued, “they are not stopped. We breeze through checkpoints because the military is afraid of committing human rights violations in front of us, whom they know will publish and will make it known what’s happening in the region. So that’s one very concrete example of how our privilege as internationals [functions].” Another interviewee, a veteran of several CPT projects, echoed this explanation when she described how someone “from the outside” who has been invited in to accompany a community “can, perhaps, have an

impact in the moment, where somebody [being accompanied] won't get killed, or arrested, or beaten, because of your presence. That of course, I suppose, is one of the few positives—one of the ways that you can use privilege for good. Instead of for oppression."

Beyond citing these examples of potentially saving lives or otherwise increasing the safety of accompanied partners, CPTers also emphasized that using privilege for good requires—in the words of the Colombian CPTer quoted above—"delegating" this power, or "turning it over" to those being accompanied. Such moves are frequently a matter of sharing access to spaces of power and of amplifying partners' voices. As one CPTer noted, being visibly foreign, especially from the US or Canada, or working for an international organization creates perceptions that one has access to people in positions of power and authority in the Global North. As an "outside observer," he continued, "if you're talking to the army or different armed actors… you're representing someone that has access to places that the [accompanied] community doesn't have access to, right?" But having the access alone is not enough. The real power for change, he insisted, comes through "offering the community access to those spaces we have access to."

In other words, using privilege for good is more complicated than a privileged activist simply drawing on her own status and influence in order to offer protection or aid to another, less privileged person. Such a use of privilege may produce some immediate good, but it leaves the hierarchical system in place. For deeper systemic transformations to occur, the power that privilege represents—respect and acknowledgement that one's life and experiences matter, the potential to have one's voice heard and one's perspective listened to, the influence to create change—must get extended beyond those individuals

who have benefited from systemic privilege, to those who have been marginalized by the same system.

Exactly how this extending of power occurs may vary, but it often requires finding ways for the less privileged to assume the positions and symbols of power, to participate in networks of influence, and to occupy platforms for speaking out and getting heard.[359] Within accompaniment, power-extending strategies include sharing stories from accompanied communities in ways that highlight the community members' human dignity and agency, as well as helping the accompanied connect to global networks of citizens committed to human rights, so that the concerns of the accompanied can be more widely heard. Other power-extending strategies include supporting the accompanied in gaining access to platforms from which they themselves can broadcast their messages—platforms such as websites, email lists, or social media; lobbying visits to influential politicians; or speaking engagements and tours.

The importance of using privilege to not merely protect, but *support* and *empower* accompanied partners was echoed by a Colombian team member who asserted, "We [in CPT] are not here to lead the process, but to accompany, to walk alongside… We have

[359] My focus in this section is on how accompaniers may share and extend the power of privilege to those being accompanied. But I want to acknowledge that, insofar as the tactic of accompaniment draws on the power of global systems of privilege (especially white privilege and the privilege of Western citizenship), power-extending strategies are also required for individuals without those forms of privilege to be effectively integrated into accompaniment teams. Several CPTers I interviewed pointed to the challenges Colombian CPTers may face in being acknowledged and respected while interacting with Colombian officials (and sometimes with accompanied communities). One way to extend the power of "international" privilege to Colombian nationals is for team members to wear a recognizable CPT uniform, so that any CPTer—whatever her or his visible appearance and nationality—will be immediately perceived as a representative of an international organization, with access to the influence that entails. This is an example of how an individual on whom racial and passport privilege is typically *not* bestowed may be able to assume some of the position and symbols of the power of privilege. I acknowledge that this strategy still falls far short of the ideals of justice; as long as systems of privilege exist and value some lives more than others, we have more work to do in the long term to struggle for justice and change. Nonetheless, in the intermediate term, the strategy of using a uniform or other visible symbols to mark activists as part of an "international" team *does* help to foster greater diversity within the team and to lessen the distinctive risks faced by team members who are not visibly white and/or citizens of Western nations.

some privileges that we can use to support the community's struggle, with guidance from the community." Later she delineated such privileges as "the access to information, the access to relationships with organizations, with governments." Then she added, "We have this access because there is a basic privilege, no? In this case, the privilege is that [CPT] is an organization that comes from the United States. Therefore, instead of feeling guilty, we use this so that the communities may speak."

I am struck by how this woman's words reflect both the problem and the power that privilege represents. The moral burden of privilege is apparent in her acknowledgement that the privileged have some reason to feel guilty. Yet (like many anti-oppression activists and educators), this CPTer does not recommend that privileged persons linger in feelings of guilt, but rather that they—or "we" (and her use of the first-person plural pronouns includes her in this category of persons with privilege)—use the power of privilege for good ends. Further, her words reflect essential attitudes and practices that must characterize accompaniment if it is to leverage such power in truly transformative ways. First, accompaniers must be committed to playing a support role, taking guidance from the community. Second, they must resist the temptation to speak *for* the community, and rather use their influence and networks to open space for the community's own voices and concerns to be more clearly heard.

What does this look like on the ground? I saw this occurring most vividly during one of the accompaniment trips I was able to participate in during my fieldwork in Colombia. A group of Colombian human rights defenders, alarmed about a region suffering from paramilitary killings and a brutally enforced curfew, planned to travel to the capital city of that region to discuss the situation with governing authorities. The

group requested accompaniment from CPT. Specifically, they wanted us as internationals to take the lead in convening the meeting, since they did not believe that the authorities would be as willing to meet with local Colombians.

When we all arrived at the mayor's office, our group included about half a dozen Colombian human rights workers and three of us (all white North Americans) from CPT. The Colombians pushed to the front of the group the three of us who were obviously foreigners, so that we would be the ones negotiating for the meeting. Their strategy was to use the implicit pressure of our visible status (and presumed connections) as North Americans. When we finally secured from the authority an agreement to meet the next day, the Colombian human rights defenders left the office in jubilant spirits. Outside, they crowed to us, the foreigners, "It was all you! Did you see how he was shaking in his shoes when you confronted him?" The next day, as we all gathered with civil and military officials, it was again one of the Canadian CPTers who presented the agenda to open the discussion. But then, as planned, the CPTers' role in the meeting diminished. The accompanied Colombians took over the talking, detailing the human rights abuses they had documented and demanding action from the authorities.[360] By the end of the meeting, the government officials had agreed to further meetings with these human rights defenders and to other follow-up steps to address the violence.

---

[360] While the accompanied Colombian human rights defenders did much more of the talking in the meeting—which was according to plan—the CPTers did still make occasional comments. This level of CPT participation is characteristic of CPT's accompaniment style, which emphasizes solidarity and active partnership, in consultation with those CPT is accompanying. In contrast to this, also present during the meeting were two members of another international accompaniment organization, whose accompaniment style is limited to nonpartisan protective presence, witnessing, and documentation. Notably, these other two accompaniers did not vocally participate in the meeting. Furthermore, they sat at the edge of the room, outside the circle of chairs. Meanwhile, the CPTers, at the request of the accompanied partners, sat in the circle alongside the human rights workers.

As this story shows, systemic privilege is one form of power operating in accompaniment. Yet as the story also indicates—and as I heard reiterated in every interview I conducted—privilege is not the only, or necessarily the most important, power at work. The activists I interviewed emphasized how the real power for change lies in the communities themselves. As one CPTer said, “The only thing that we can do is to help them and encourage them, give them energy to carry on. But all the answers to all their problems—the community has those.”

This point reveals another characteristic of strategic realism: it is important for privileged solidarity activists not only to acknowledge and use the power of systemic privilege when needed, as morally vexing as that may be, but also to *decenter* that very power by highlighting and supporting other forms of power that are equally or even more essential to the success of nonviolent resistance and activism for social change. In a later section in this chapter, I will further explore what decentering the power of privilege means and requires, and what this implies for a strategic realist approach to power and solidarity. Before that, however, I turn to Reinhold Niebuhr’s Christian realism in order to examine the telling—and admittedly, somewhat surprising—resonances between Niebuhrian ethics and the strategic realism I observed in my fieldwork research. Examining strategic realism through the lens of Niebuhr’s Christian realism enriches the ethical analysis of just how a strategic realist perspective may perceive and employ power, including that which accrues from systemic privilege, for the goals of enacting solidarity, decreasing violence, and increasing justice.

II. Strategic realism in conversation with Reinhold Niebuhr's Christian realism

As I have just explored, an ethical stance of strategic realism is characterized by dwelling in—rather than trying to escape or collapse—the tensions inherent in practicing solidarity from a position of privilege. Paradoxically, systemic privilege represents both a problem and a source of power for justice-seeking activists. In acknowledging these dual aspects of privilege, a strategic realist approach will neither shirk responsibility for using privilege when called to do so in accompaniment, nor presume to act from a position of innocence or heroism. Strategic realism demands an honest, critical appraisal of what is really going on and what power dynamics are playing out—not only in the larger political context within which accompaniment occurs, but also in the immediate interpersonal interactions of accompaniment and in one's own motivations, decisions, and actions as an accompanier.

These essential characteristics of strategic realism—tolerance for tension and moral ambiguity, a spirit of responsibility and humility, and close attention to the interplay of power and competing interests—are the points where I find resonance between strategic realism and Niebuhr's Christian realism. In this section, therefore, I will take a closer look at how these similar tones resound in Niebuhr's writings and in the development of his ethics. In particular, I highlight the significance of power analysis in both of these realist ethical stances.

Nonetheless, while the verbal echoes between these two ethical stances are telling, I also acknowledge the startling nature of the connections I am drawing between Christian realism and the ethical positioning I observed in the CPT interviews. Within the field of twentieth-century Christian social ethics, Christian realism and Reinhold Niebuhr

specifically are typically read as opposed to both Christian pacifism and liberation theology—each of which is much more explicitly influential among CPTers and in the history of CPT as an organization. In fact, the CPTers I interviewed, when they mentioned the influence of Christian theology at all, referenced Latin American liberation theology, post-colonial theology, feminist thought, or Anabaptist peace traditions—but never Christian realism.

However, a startling connection can be revealing because of its very unexpectedness. By placing strategic realism in conversation with Niebuhr's Christian realism, I hope to accomplish two purposes. First, I use Christian realism to further illuminate important facets of strategic realism. Second, I offer strategic realism as a critique and perhaps a partial corrective of some of the blind spots and limitations in Niebuhr's theorizing about the nature and uses of power.

a. Realism as the ground for political engagement and social activism

The pivotal center of Niebuhr's ethics is what he considers an inevitable and necessary "tension between the historical and the transcendent," or what I earlier cited as a tension between the real and the ideal. In crafting his ethics, he attempts to hold together "what is and what ought to be" in much the way that a taut bowstring draws together both ends of the bow, creating the tension necessary to propel an arrow forward. The gap between these guiding ethical ideals and humanity's highest yet still falling-short moral achievements in history causes a tension that "bends the bow from which every arrow of moral action flies."[361] In other words, Niebuhr articulates a Christian social ethics in which discerning the best choices and behavior in any given situation requires careful

[361] Niebuhr, *Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, 5.

attention to—and shrewd navigating between—ethical principles, desired goals, potential means to achieve those goals, and acknowledgement of our own limitations and mixed motives in acting.

For Niebuhr, then, what constitutes the "ideal" and the "real" that must be held in tension like two ends of a bow? In *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, he threads the bowstring through a chapter about the ethic of Jesus, depicted as an uncompromising "love perfectionism" counter to any form of self-interest, and a chapter about the Christian conception of sin and human finitude. The love perfectionism Jesus modeled and taught, Niebuhr argues, is a transcendent ideal generally impossible for "natural man" to follow, since this ethic conflicts with both natural human impulses of self-assertion and the necessary prudence required to survive in a world rife with violence and evil.[362] Even if individual persons are occasionally able to overcome self-interest and act sacrificially for the good of others, Niebuhr asserts that human societies are incapable of that level of moral behavior.[363] The best we can hope to achieve in our political relations, he asserts, is a "proximate" justice derived from balancing power with power and from maintaining an uneasy equilibrium between competing national or group interests. Still, he never rejects the transcendent ideal as socially irrelevant or morally superfluous, since he believes the ideal represents an essential criticism of relative temporal values, as well as an ethical guide that can prod us toward a better morality than we would otherwise aspire to.

In summary, Niebuhr posits that a responsible ethical perspective will neither lose sight of the transcendent ideal nor pretend that we are fully living into (or even capable,

---

[362] Niebuhr, *Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, 28, 60.
[363] This is the thesis, memorably captured in the dichotomized title, of Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932).

within human history, of fully living into) that ideal. This latter point in particular drives his well-known critiques of early twentieth-century Christian liberalism and pacifism. These traditions optimistically lifted up human progress and believed that poverty, crime, and war could be overcome by means of education, faith-based social reform, and appeal to moral principles.[364] Niebuhr, however, came to read such hopes as naively utopian, as an overly simplistic application of Jesus' love ethic to a sociopolitical reality in which corruption and conflict would inevitably persist. Although he shared liberal Christianity's concerns with justice and peace (and in his earlier years identified as a socialist and a pacifist), he was far less optimistic that humanity was moving toward a world order characterized by cooperation and love of neighbor. In fact, to deceive ourselves that we were doing so, he believed, would give rise to moral hypocrisy, blindness, and a denial of how much we are each driven by our own self-interests. Further, he found such self-deception and lack of realism dangerous, allowing the forces of injustice and tyranny to expand unchecked.

In contrast to the then-current liberal emphasis on human goodness, Niebuhr's theology accents human sinfulness, which he characterizes as expressing itself in two fundamental forms: either pride, which manifests as self-assertion and pretense, as a will to power and frequently an abuse of those with less power; or sensuality, which manifests

---

[364] The preeminent example of such optimistic streams of theology and activism is the Social Gospel movement, which preached that Christian faith should get lived out as faith-based civic engagement, fighting institutionalized sins such as oppression and extortion. The Social Gospelers hoped to end poverty and violence and to bring about God's kingdom on earth. See Walter Rauschenbusch's books *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (New York: Macmillan, 1907) and *Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York: Macmillan, 1917) for articulations of this theology. For further discussion of how liberal Protestant pacifism manifested in the early twentieth century and of how Niebuhr developed his realist critique of this position, see John Howard Yoder, *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution*, ed. Theodore J. Koontz and Andy Alexis-Baker (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009).

as indulgence, sloth, and a flight from responsibility and agency.[365] In concert with this theological anthropology, Niebuhr's ethical stances presume a grittier political and moral realism, which he (in a rare moment of defining his terms) presents as "the disposition to take all factors in a social and political situation, which offer resistance to established norms, into account, particularly the factors of self-interest and power."[366] While Niebuhr never discounts the significance of these established norms—the "transcendent ideal" end of the bow—he is much more associated with the realism espoused in his Christian social ethics, a realism that proved increasingly influential in mid-century US public thought and politics.

Similar to Niebuhrian Christian realism, the ethical approach I have identified as strategic realism requires taking into account the multiple factors and competing forces that may influence a social and political situation. Strategic realism is guided not only by ideals of social justice and equality, but also by a keen awareness of how violence and

---

[365] Niebuhr's most systematic theological anthropology (and most developed discussion of sin) appears in his Gifford Lectures, which were revised and published as *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation* (New York: Scribner & Sons), with vol. 1, *Human Nature*, published in 1941 and vol. 2, *Human Destiny,* published in 1943. Especially in chapters 7 and 8 of vol. 1, Niebuhr explores how he perceives sin as pride and as sensuality, with both forms of sin rooted in human anxiety and attempts to escape finitude and vulnerability. However, even as he names these two fundamental forms of human sinfulness, Niebuhr prioritizes pride as the "more basic" or "primary" biblical conception of sin (see pp. 186, 228). This emphasis on sin as pride has given rise to pointed critiques of Niebuhr's work, especially from feminist and liberationist scholars who highlight how Niebuhr's limited reading of human nature reflects his own social positioning, biases, and blind spots. In chapter 6, I will say more about these critiques of Niebuhr's theological anthropology, with particular attention to the alternative theologies of moral goodness and love these critics and other theologians propose. Here I simply note that the earliest feminist critique of Niebuhr on this point appears in Valerie Saiving, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," *The Journal of Religion* (April 1960): 100-112; reprinted in *WomanSpirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*, ed. Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (San Francisco: Harper, 1979), 25-42. For an overview and critical evaluation of feminist perspectives on Niebuhr that follow in the trail Saiving blazed, see Aurelia Takacs Fule, "Being Human before God: Reinhold Niebuhr in Feminist Mirrors," in *Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971): A Centenary Appraisal*, ed. Gary A. Gaudin and Douglas John Hall (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 55-78. In *Disruptive Christian Ethics*, West also cites several white feminist theologians who criticize Niebuhr's male-centric understanding of sin as pride. She then draws race explicitly into her analysis to point out limitations in both Niebuhr's perspective on sin *and* these white feminist critiques of Niebuhr. Again, I will return to West's analysis in chapter 6.

[366] Reinhold Niebuhr, "Augustine's Political Realism," in *Christian Realism and Political Problems* (New York: Scribner & Sons, 1953), 119.

power struggles pervade the sociopolitical order. In the context of international accompaniment and solidarity activism, it is especially relevant to see and name the deep-rooted—and, in our current order, inescapable—presence of systemic oppressions and privileges. Furthermore, to name this reality in general is not enough; strategic realism also demands acknowledging the ways we ourselves are implicated in these inequitable systems that value some lives more than others. In my above discussion of how CPTers confront the presence of privilege in their own activism, I have tried to show that ignoring the moral problem that privilege represents—or the social and political force it exerts—will actually increase the damage done by privileged persons and will magnify the marginalization and risks faced by those with less privilege. Consequently, it is important to acknowledge both the problem and the power of privilege, with honest and self-critical attention to the play of privilege within one's own life. This willingness to face the world as it is and to confess one's place within an unjust world, then becomes the ground upon which activists committed to solidarity can construct a strategic response.

Of course, there is a danger that this very attention to one's own position and complicity within unjust systems may lead an activist toward cynicism, guilt-inflected despair, and/or withdrawal from political engagement. This danger haunts international accompaniment, especially because the paradox of privilege—or what Patrick Coy calls the "privilege problematic"—is writ large in this form of nonviolent activism. As Coy observes in his study of international accompaniment, some accompaniers become openly critical of their organization's methods, and some end up resigning and disavowing this form of activism.[367] Likewise, Gada Mahrouse, who argues that transnational solidarity activism is more likely to *reinforce* than to transcend global white

[367] Coy, "The Privilege Problematic." See especially Coy's discussion of the "rejectionist" perspective.

hegemony, acknowledges that the first question her study raises is whether volunteers from the Global North should participate in such interventions at all. However, withdrawal from a less-than-ideal form of activism is not necessarily a more ethical or effective position to take. Mahrouse goes on to argue that such withdrawal "denies complicity, and obscures the ethical issue of choosing not to act."[368] For this reason, strategic realism's attention to power and to self-critique must be accompanied by an urgent sense of responsibility to engage politically in working for social change. Yet at the same time, such convictions of responsibility must be grounded in humility and accountability, rather than in an inflated sense of one's own power and status.

b. Power in action: Weaving together responsibility and humility

The emphasis on responsibility is one of the major themes of Niebuhr's social ethics, as well as one of the strongest resonances between strategic realism and his Christian realism. Despite Niebuhr's persistent underscoring of human failure (and inability) to live up to the highest moral ideals, he never permits this point to become an excuse for inaction. Indeed, when we are confronted with social evils and political injustices, he asserts, inaction is a greater moral failing than imperfect actions that attempt to resist or redress those evils.

Yet at the same time, he recognizes how the power and willingness to act get too easily framed as virtue or heroism, and he is unwilling to allow this conflation. For Niebuhr, ethical responsibility necessarily entails a spirit of humility, even contrition, which acknowledges the limitations and compromises, mixed motives, and impure means that characterize our decisions and actions in the world. This, too, resonates with strategic

[368] Mahrouse, *Conflicted Commitments*, 146-147.

realism. Similar to Niebuhr's Christian realism, strategic realism highlights the need to eschew a superhero attitude and to practice solidarity *humbly*, even and especially while leveraging the power, access, and status that stem from systemic privilege.

An early but well-known articulation of Niebuhr's perspective on ethical responsibility appeared in 1932, when Japan invaded Manchuria and Reinhold publically disputed with his brother, H. Richard, about the appropriate way for the US to respond. Against his brother's call for US noninvolvement and repentance, Reinhold questioned, "Must we do nothing?" In his essay of this title, Reinhold argues for the necessity of US intervention, including through coercion and military force if needed, in order to counter what he reads as Japanese aggression. Though agreeing with H. Richard's critique that US action would stem more from national self-interests and imperial ambitions than from the ethical purity of disinterested humanitarian concern, Reinhold nonetheless asserts that his brother's "moral perfectionism" results in an inadequate and irresponsible social ethic. Assuming a "responsible attitude towards the problems of society," Reinhold explains, demands that we "must try in every social situation to maximize the ethical forces and yet not sacrifice the possibility of achieving an ethical goal because we are afraid to use any but purely ethical means."[369]

This statement reveals much about the character of Reinhold Niebuhr's ethics, in which efficacious actions and responsibility toward others are valued more than moral purity or faithfulness to an abstract ideal. I have already discussed the central tension, between transcendent ideals and lived reality, which vibrates at the heart of Niebuhr's

---

[369] Reinhold Niebuhr, "Must we do nothing?" *The Christian Century,* March 30, 1932. For a succinct summary of the two brothers' exchange and a comparison of their differing perspectives, see John D. Barbour, "Niebuhr Versus Niebuhr: The Tragic Nature of History," *The Christian Century,* November 21, 1984, 1096-1099.

ethics. Niebuhr's argument in "Must we do nothing?" highlights a further, related tension that often occurs when we try to live out our ethics in the world: potential friction between ends and means. According to Niebuhr, a morally excellent goal, such as seeking justice for the oppressed, may sometimes require using impure means, such as coercion and violence—or, as in the situations this dissertation studies, the power of systemic privilege—to achieve that end. He therefore recommends that actions be evaluated not simply on the basis of intrinsic moral values, but also (perhaps more) in instrumental terms, that is, in light of the ends they aim toward or achieve.[370] Meanwhile, he believes that if we have the potential and the power to do something to resist an injustice, and yet we refuse to take action because the means of resistance are less than pure, then we are morally culpable for allowing that injustice to continue. Sacrificing a good end (especially when that end encompasses the lives and wellbeing of others) in an effort to avoid ever employing any impure means is, at best, irresponsible and hypocritical, and at worst, implicit support for and participation in the injustice and oppression we have declined to fight.

For Niebuhr, then, ethical responsibility requires using the power at hand (morally ambiguous though it may be) to act in the world for a greater good. Yet even as Niebuhr stresses the moral necessity of action, he remains aware that there is no innocent position from which to act, that often responsibility means "making choices between greater and lesser evils."[371] So he also underscores the importance of humility, of acknowledging that

---

[370] *Moral Man and Immoral Society* provides further insight into how Niebuhr perceives this potential tension between means and ends, especially in terms of how a moral evaluation of either one will necessarily impact the evaluation of the other. Niebuhr demonstrates this when he writes, "A political policy cannot be intrinsically evil if it can be proved to be an efficacious instrument for the achievement of a morally approved end. Neither can it be said to be wholly good merely because it seems to make for ultimately good consequences" (171). See also pp. 174-175 and 233-236.

[371] Reinhold Niebuhr, "Theology and Political Thought in the Western World," in *Faith and Politics*, ed.

neither one's means nor motives for acting are ever entirely pure. Stephen Okey describes these dual notes in Niebuhrian ethics as a "dialectic between humility and responsibility, between recognizing the limits of human possibility and the unconscious motivations of action on one hand and the need for action—even compromised action—on the other."[372]

It is important to see how both of these poles in Niebuhr's ethics, responsibility *and* humility, are shaped by his understanding of how power works in the world. This comes through most clearly perhaps in his writings about the role of the US in international politics. Niebuhr is famous for urging US military intervention and global engagement, first during the rise of Nazism and World War II, and later during the mid-century Cold War. For him, American responsibility in the world has accrued from the country's prominent military and economic powers. He counters the call for US isolationism and withdrawal by insisting that "the disavowal of the responsibilities of power" will involve individuals and nations in a "grievous guilt." Yet simultaneously, he cautions against the American tendency to read our global prowess as resulting from innocence, virtue, and a special status in the eyes of God. We need to act, he insists, but only with honest self-awareness and humility, because "power cannot be wielded without guilt, since it is never transcendent over interest."[373] This telling comment exposes Niebuhr's ambivalence toward power, an ambivalence that underlies the moral tensions and ethical limits characterizing his Christian realism. We are guilty when we wield power in this world, Niebuhr believes—and we are guilty when we refuse to wield the power we have.

Ronald H. Stone (New York: George Braziller, 1968), 56.

[372] Stephen Okey, "Responsibility, Humility, and Intervention: A Niebuhrian Assessment of *The Responsibility to Protect," Political Theology* 14, no. 6 (2013): 714.

[373] Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History* (New York: Scribner & Sons, 1952; University of Chicago Press edition, 2008), 37.

c. Niebuhr's ambivalent theory of power: Morally necessary, yet always dangerous

The workings of power in the world constitute an essential theme in Niebuhr's ethics. Indeed, Larry Rasmussen writes, "If the Social Gospel, of which Niebuhr was both heir and critic, moved ethics somewhere near the center of Christian faith, Niebuhr moved power somewhere near the center of Christian ethics."[374] In part, Niebuhr's concern with power reflects the times in which he lived, as the twentieth century generated amazing scientific and technological advancements alongside of world wars, genocides, and massive atrocities. For a Christian ethicist such as Niebuhr, whose public scholarship emerged in dialogue with domestic and international social issues and political events, human potential and prowess were bound to be recurring topics. Yet more than anything, Niebuhr's theorizing about power was driven by his abiding commitment to social justice. Consequently, his writings pay particular attention to the role and impact power has in government, social order, and social change.

In *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, published in 1932, we can already see these concerns well on display as Niebuhr argues that the collective egoism and will to power of any large social group—whether a nation-state, social class, or other demographic with aligned interests—can be kept in check only by the pressure of countervailing power. Dominant groups, he asserts, will never voluntarily yield power "because it is the source of privilege" and of "their eminence and superiority in society."[375] Yet Niebuhr portrays

---

[374] Larry L. Rasmussen, "The Contours of Niebuhr's Mind," in Gaudin and Hall, *Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971)*, 143.

[375] Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 121. In this chapter, "The Ethical Attitudes of Privileged Classes," Niebuhr perceptively highlights the hypocrisy and self-deception of the privileged, who justify their social advantages as the result of intellectual or moral superiority and thus as a merited status that may even serve the common good. In light of this analysis, he reveals how the seeming generosity of philanthropy and the apparent peace and harmony of social order serve to mask and maintain inequities and

power not only as the source of such inequities, but also as the necessary means for resisting systemic injustice and provoking change. Countering the liberal educators and social scientists who believe that moral and rational suasion will be sufficient to bring about a more just social order, Niebuhr insists, "Conflict is inevitable, and in this conflict power must be challenged by power."[376] Later, he applies this principle to the concrete example of the "emancipation of the Negro race in America," declaring that "the white race in America will not admit the Negro to equal rights if it is not forced to do so."[377] Notably, the power Niebuhr deems necessary to achieving any measure of justice is *coercive* power—whether this power compels through violent or nonviolent means.

As we can see here, Niebuhr's assessments of pacifism, militant revolution, and nonviolent resistance tell us much about his perspective on power. He disputes those who would draw an absolute demarcation between the power of violence as intrinsically bad and the power of nonviolence as intrinsically good. In contrast, he presents violent *and* nonviolent resistance as being on a single continuum. He suggests that, despite the differing tactics employed, both styles of resistance use coercive pressure and forced persuasion, cause some form of harm to others, and therefore fall short of the gospel ideal of perfect love, self-abnegation, and nonresistance.[378]

---

structural violence. (See especially pp. 123-127 and 129-120.) I highlight this point because there exists a similar danger that privileged solidarity activists may fall into hypocrisy and self-deception. Niebuhr's analysis on this point may be helpful in navigating the precariously fine line between, on the one hand, strategically drawing on the power of privilege in an effort to ultimately dismantle that system and, on the other hand, using privilege in ways that justify and sustain the system.

[376] Niebuhr, *Moral Man,* xv.

[377] Niebuhr, *Moral Man,* 253.

[378] It should be noted that, while Niebuhr sees violent and nonviolent resistance as aligned on a single continuum, he also sees important differences between them, most significantly that violence is more aggressive and pursued with the *intent* to cause destruction, whereas nonviolence is generally associated with a spirit of less resentment, greater goodwill, and more nuanced moral discernment. See *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, chapter 9, "The Preservation of Moral Values in Politics," especially pp. 240-256. In this discussion, Niebuhr tellingly describes nonviolent resistance as "a type of coercion which offers the largest opportunities for a harmonious relationship with the moral and rational factors in social life" (251).

Still, Niebuhr is wary and often starkly critical of Christian idealists who try to apply the gospel's "law of love" through principled pacifism. He notes that traditional, absolutist pacifists must disavow political engagement and responsibility, limiting themselves to the sectarian witness of being separatist communities. When liberal Christian idealists instead try to preach principled pacifism in the arena of secular politics, he decries their pacifism as heresy and moral perversity. Such pacifism, he argues, ignores the real power of sin and evil, promotes "the absurd idea that perfect love is guaranteed a simply victory over the world,"[379] and ultimately allows tyranny and systemic oppressions to continue unchallenged. Consequently, Niebuhr concludes that a realistic, politically relevant Christian ethic must accept and promote the use of coercive power (including, at times, lethal force) as vital means for achieving greater justice. Nonetheless, even as he makes this argument, he demonstrates his ambivalence toward such power, naming coercion "ethically justified," while simultaneously conceding it is "always morally dangerous."[380]

This ambivalence toward power—perceiving it as both a moral necessity and a moral threat—reappears often in Niebuhr's writings, especially when he is attending to how power functions within society and politics. As he writes in *The Nature and Destiny of Man,* "The very power which organizes human society and establishes justice, also

---

His conviction that nonviolence is the preferred form of resistance whenever possible is reinforced by this suggestion: "There is no problem of political life to which religious imagination can make a larger contribution than this problem of developing non-violent resistance" (254).

[379] Reinhold Niebuhr, "Why the Christian Church is Not Pacifist," (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1940), reprinted in *The Essential Reinhold Niebuhr: Selected Essays and Addresses*, ed. Robert McAfee Brown (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), 104. This essay offers one of Niebuhr's most succinct and stark renderings of his argument against pacifism. Note that here he also criticizes pacifists who read Jesus's ethic as one of nonviolent resistance. Despite his generally positive evaluation of nonviolence, Niebuhr insists there is "not the slightest support in Scripture for this doctrine of non-violence" (107), and he reads Jesus's ethic as one of nonresistance and self-denial.

[380] Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 172.

generates injustice by its preponderance of power."[381] He further elaborates on this paradox when he explains how two principles of social power are needed to hold human communities in a state of tenuous harmony: the organization of power and the balance of power. The former manifests in the coercive, organizing power of a central government, which maintains a relative peace and social order by setting up a bulwark against the centrifugal forces of anarchy. Yet a powerful centralized government is always in danger of degenerating into tyranny, and so a balance of power is also required. In other words, additional institutions and interest groups, which exercise restraint upon or even resistance to government, are necessary in order to keep in check the concentrated power and overbearing interests of the politically dominant. However, the struggles between these competing forces can readily tip into social disorder and violent civil conflict, which represents a different kind of threat to the most vulnerable in society. Thus, Niebuhr concludes, "These twin evils, tyranny and anarchy, represent the Scylla and Charybdis between which the frail bark of social justice must sail."[382]

In this discussion of the relationship between power and the structures of justice (or injustice), Niebuhr identifies various types of social power, ranging from physical strength to spiritual vitalities, or "soul force." Soul force may accrue from "mental and emotional energy, the possession or the pretension of virtue, the prestige of an heroic life, or of a gentle birth."[383] Meanwhile, examples of collective power include military, religious and ideological, political, and economic powers, as enacted by soldiers, priests, monarchs and governors, landlords and capitalists. What is most striking to me about Niebuhr's discussion here is that each of these forms of power, whatever its source,

---

[381] Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny of Man,* 2:21.
[382] Niebuhr, 2:258.
[383] Niebuhr, 2:261.

succeeds by functioning as a kind of superior force that allows the interests of one person or group to prevail over against the competing interests of another.

Here and elsewhere, Niebuhr's characterization of power matches what social theory identifies as *power-over*—a conceptualization of power as dominance and control, as a zero-sum game in a context of conflict and competition. Even when talking about God, whom he recognizes as the only being who "can perfectly combine power and goodness,"[384] Niebuhr still presents divine power as strength and ability that stem from a position of superiority, of being greater than. Divine benevolence thus becomes an example of *power-on-behalf-of* a subordinate other. Although Niebuhr recognizes varied types of social power, and he can certainly see how power may be used for different ends, he never seems to depart from his basic conception of power as dominance.

This may be why—even as he asserts that power is not evil in and of itself—Niebuhr regards any exercise of power by humans within history as morally tainted. This drives him to conclude, "Perfect goodness in history can be symbolized only by the disavowal of power," such as that which he believes Jesus embodied as a "suffering servant" Messiah.[385] Indeed, Niebuhr's Christology is entangled with his wary assessment of power, as Larry Rasmussen points out. Rasmussen notes that Niebuhr's Jesus "transcends" power conflicts, standing aside from the social and political fray while perfectly practicing a pure, disinterested, "power-denying love." How would a Niebuhrian ethic of power be different, Rasmussen wonders, if Niebuhr had read Jesus

---

[384] Niebuhr, 2:22. Note how Niebuhr here describes the mixed nature of power and demonstrates his ambivalence toward power. He writes, "To recognize that only God can perfectly combine power and goodness is to understand that power is not evil of itself; but that all power in history is in peril of becoming an instrument of injustice because it is itself one of the competing powers in human society, even while it seeks to become (as is the case of the power of government) a transcendent power through which subordinate conflicts are harmonized."
[385] Niebuhr, 2:22.

instead as “deeply involved in power conflicts and choices”?[386] What if Niebuhr had glimpsed, as Rasmussen does, a Jesus engaged in empowering others, ministering amidst the marginalized and “evok[ing] a power among them they hardly knew they had”?[387] Would such a Christology have helped Niebuhr better attend to more positive, life-giving forms of power?

Rasmussen further suggests that Niebuhr’s theological accent on the doctrine of sin is responsible for limiting him to a “paradigm of power as a domination dynamic in a fallen order.”[388] I find this an apt assessment. Certainly, Niebuhr’s understanding of power grows out of his theology of sin. His reading of human nature stresses how, as free yet finite creatures, humans experience a fundamental anxiety because of our limitations. Our attempts to escape this basic insecurity and vulnerability, Niebuhr argues, issue in sinful assertions of self-interest, pride, and will to power. For him, therefore, exercising power is very much about attempting to control circumstances, people, and even the course of history. Meanwhile, in his ethical paradigm, moral goodness requires transcending self-interest and practicing a self-sacrificial, power-denying love. In chapter 6, I will explore more fully how and why I find such a framing of sin and goodness inadequate to a Christian ethic of solidarity. Here what most interests me is how Niebuhr’s conception of power as dominance reflects and likely emanated from his own position of social and academic privilege and influence.

---

[386] Larry L. Rasmussen, “Niebuhr on Power: Assessment and Critique,” in Gaudin and Hall, *Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971)*, 177.
[387] Rasmussen, 181.
[388] Rasmussen, 180. Rasmussen additionally proposes that paying greater attention to the doctrine of creation could lead to richer, more generative accounts of power, especially what he describes as “power-to, power as the energy inherent in ‘being,’ power as the agency of creation itself, the dimension of vitality pervasive of all existence as such.” Rasmussen’s discussion of power, including his use of phrases such as power-over and power-to, has been influential in my own reflections on power and in my writing here and in the following section.

As many scholars have noted, despite his concerns with justice for the oppressed, Niebuhr's writings and intellectual energies focused much more on the powerful: on the sins and temptations of power and pride, on the responsibilities that accompany power, and on ethics relevant to the situations and choices faced by the politically powerful. Some scholars generously read this focus as evidence of Niebuhr's role as critic of and prophet to the powerful.[389] Others are more critical, reading this focus as evidence of Niebuhr's own bias. Bill Kellerman, for example, characterizes Niebuhr as an "apologist of power" and a "priest of the present order," whose Christian realism too easily justifies US militarism and imperialism.[390]

In assessing Niebuhr's limitations in his theorizing of power and oppression, I find James Cone and Traci West especially helpful. Both Cone and West have attentively analyzed Niebuhr's mixed legacy regarding race and racism. Cone appreciates Niebuhr's argument that coercive, demanding power is necessary in the struggle for racial justice. Yet Cone also faults Niebuhr for "call[ing] for gradualism, patience, and prudence" and for failing to engage Black intellectuals as peers and dialogue partners. It seems that Niebuhr, as a relatively powerful white academic, fell into the very dilemma he himself has analyzed in *Moral Man and Immoral Society*: a limited capacity to transcend one's own self-interest and will-to-power and to empathize with and risk oneself for another.[391]

Similarly to Cone, West values Niebuhr's Christian realist attention to social context and lived experience—while she also explicates how his own context and

---

[389] For examples of this perspective, see Rasmussen, "Niebuhr on Power," 175; and Robin Lovin, "Reinhold Niebuhr: Impact and Implications," *Political Theology* 6, no. 4 (2005): 459-471, especially p. 465.

[390] Kellerman, "Apologist of Power," 15, 20.

[391] James Cone lays out this appreciative yet critical assessment of Niebuhr in "'The Terrible Beauty of the Cross' and the Tragedy of the Lynching Tree: A Reflection on Reinhold Niebuhr," in *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012), 30-64. For the specific points in Cone's argument that I have cited, see especially pp. 58, 39, 42, and 40.

experiences (as well as his own lack of experience or lack of engaging with others' experience) shaped his theology and ethics in ways that limit their antiracist and liberative potential. She, too, critiques Niebuhr's white superiority, paternalism, and calls for gradualism.[392] In an analysis especially relevant to understanding the implications of Niebuhr's conceptualization of power, she points to his insistence that "the need for power is part of [prideful] human nature and sinfulness."[393] Given Niebuhr's position as a "great thinker" (not coincidentally white and male), his viewpoint has been accepted as universal truth. However, West argues, more contextualized and particular analysis would reveal different faces of power and pride. For those enduring and resisting oppression, pride is not "a quintessentially sinful human need that fuels the drive to dominate others," as Niebuhr frames it. Rather, in contexts of oppression, pride can be an assertion of human dignity, a source of empowerment, and a move toward liberation.[394]

Just as West has pointed out how liberationist ethics demand more varied accounts of the nature and uses of pride, so I argue that responsible solidarity requires more varied accounts of power than Niebuhr's theorizing affords. Such varied accounts emerged in my interviews with CPTers. The interviewees did acknowledge how systemic privilege represents *one* form of power at work in their activism. However, unlike Niebuhr, who consistently conceptualized power as dominance and superior force, the CPTers did not simply conflate power and privilege. Nor did they share his general suspicion of power as always morally tainted. Rather, they offered examples of multiple forms of power at work in accompaniment, including examples of power expressed as

---

[392] See West, "Reinhold Niebuhr on Realism," in *Beyond the Pale*, 119-128; as well as West, *Disruptive Christian Ethics*, chapter 1, "Context: Niebuhr's Ethics and Harlem Activists," 3-35.
[393] West, *Disruptive Christian Ethics,* 7.
[394] West, *Disruptive Christian Ethics,* 10.

agency, ability, expertise, creativity, or collaboration. In particular, they emphasized and celebrated the power they see exercised by the accompanied in the work of nonviolent activism and social change. The CPTers' reflections on power exemplify a broader, more contextualized, more nuanced assessment of power. And this kind of assessment—attentive to positive, generative forms of power, as well as to coercive or deterring forms of power—is essential to a strategic realist perspective.

III. "Privilege must be brought down": Decentering privilege through a more complex account of power

Most basically, power may be defined as the ability to accomplish something, to act so as to have an impact or to effect change. Within organizational theory, different ways of perceiving and exercising power are often classified as power-over, power-with, or power-to. As I noted above, the *power-over* paradigm is a model of domination, in which influence flows from a position of superiority or greater strength, and decision-making relies on coercion and control within a zero-sum game. In contrast to this, *power-with* is a model of collective power-sharing and of empowerment. This paradigm presumes that power can be generated through integrating diverse stakeholders and fostering dialogue, collaboration, and negotiation amongst them.[395] Also in contrast to power-over is *power-to*, a model that emphasizes power as ability and represents power as emancipation,

---

[395] Mary Parker Follett (1868-1933), a social worker and pioneer in the field of management and organizational theory, appears to be the theorist who originated these terms "power-over" and "power-with." In her book *Creative Experience* (New York: Longman Green and Company, 1924), Follett describes the former type of power as "coercive" and the latter type as "coactive." For more on Follett's theorization of the contrast between "power-over" and "power-with," see also the posthumously published *Dynamic Administration: The Collected Papers of Mary Parker Follett*, ed. Henry Metcalf and Lionel Urwick (London: Pitman, 1941).

sometimes as resistance to domination.[396] Power-to and power-with may be perceived as closely associated. The paradigm of power-to underscores individual capacity and agency, and this, within a context of power-sharing, becomes the basis for the collective strength and joint action of power-with.

Although the CPTers I interviewed did not use this language of "power-over," "power-to," and "power-with," their assessments of power reflected such an understanding that power manifests in multiple ways. In each interview I conducted, I asked what the interviewee considered the most important forms of power at work in accompaniment. As I have discussed, the CPTers readily explained how they perceive the force exerted by systemic privilege, especially the passport and racial privileges associated with CPT's presence as foreigners. Yet the interviewees were also quick to name other forms of power, distinct from the power of privilege, that they consider essential to the tactic of accompaniment. In some cases, they described additional forms of power exercised by accompaniers, particularly team members who are Colombian; in some cases, they gave examples of power leveraged by and within the accompanied communities. Altogether, these cumulative examples contribute to a more complex account of how power may operate in solidarity activism and specifically in international accompaniment.

---

[396] My understanding of these three paradigms of power has been aided by Bruce K. Berger, "Power Over, Power With, and Power to Relations: Critical Reflections on Public Relations, the Dominant Coalition, and Activism" *Journal of Public Relations Research* 17, no. 1 (2005): 5-28; and Mark Haugaard, "Editorial: Reflections upon Power Over, Power To, Power With, and the Four Dimensions of Power," *Journal of Political Power* 5, no. 3 (2012): 353-358. Berger presents the three variations of power as quite distinct models of (respectively) dominance, empowerment, and resistance. Haugaard's discussion is less clear on the differences. Both power-with and power-to he presents as traditionally theorized in contrast to power-over. He seems to represent power-to as the most basic form of power, the ability to accomplish actions or changes. Yet then he considers how power-to and power-over may be inextricably entangled with each other.

Certainly, the dynamic of power-over is present when accompaniers use systemic privilege to deter or compel armed actors or government authorities—and such coercive power contributes to the success of accompaniment as a tactic. CPTers did not shy away from naming this. Nearly every interview included some discussion of how being perceived as a "foreign" observer or as part of an "international" organization heightens the accompaniers' influence. One CPTer explicitly described the "exercising of unearned privilege in solidarity with our local partners" as a "coercive power" because it is "derived from structural injustice." He acknowledged, "In a just society, I think there is no room for coercive power." Yet he also asserted that he would be remiss if he failed to use such unearned privilege to act in solidarity, adding, "I think that unearned privilege is additional responsibility, or responsibilities, that we can use in terms of furthering the objectives of our Colombian partners." As I have noted, many CPTers I talked with expressed such a sentiment. So, in a strategic realist stance not unlike Niebuhr's Christian realist perspective, these activists are willing to draw on coercive power-over when such means are needed to achieve appropriate, good ends.

However, the CPTers also offered examples that could more aptly be said to display power-to and power-with. The CPTers presented these forms of power as equally significant—or often, even more essential—in the work of preventing violence, increasing justice, and creating social change. The same man who described how "coercive power" appears in accompaniment also talked about "non-coercive" power, which he glossed as forms of power that are not "threatening" nor "imposed" but instead are based on dialogue, persuasion, experience and knowledge. When I asked him how he saw such non-coercive power playing out in accompaniment, he gave a response that

sounded much like the classic understanding of power-with. He explained, “Some of it would be just participating in conversation about looking for solutions to particular problems, you know…. It would be listening to each other, hearing the ideas… it would be strengthening and networking, strengthening solidarity and improved collaboration.” Then he went on to recount specific stories of how he had experienced such conversations and collaborations with community partners that CPT accompanies.

Other examples that reflect power-to or power-with emerged as CPTers discussed how those without racial and passport privilege contribute to accompaniment in important ways because of the distinctive, valuable skills and knowledge they bring to the work. Two Canadian CPTers, each of whom has logged several years on project in Colombia, both named as an important power their Colombian teammates’ deeper understanding of the language and culture. As one explained, “[As] foreigners, a lot of things go over our heads, and we miss the subtleties of what the community is trying to tell us. So there’s the [Colombian CPTers’] power of understanding, and *deeply* understanding what is happening. And that has provided that added power to the team, having Colombians on team.” In other words, the presence of Colombians has expanded the forms of power-to, or skills and aptitudes, as well as the forms of power-with, or possibilities for collaboration, that the team can draw upon.

The Colombian CPTers themselves named this dynamic as well. One told me of how, when she first started working with CPT, she bought into the stereotype that the “foreigners” knew more. But over time, through working with the accompanied communities, she began to realize that she had a much finer-grained understanding “of the culture, of the actions of the communities…. I came to realize that we Colombians,

yes, support much the work of accompaniment. In the end, we complement each other. Not because of our nationality, but more because of our own abilities, no? And as Colombians, we can bring much more perspective to the work of the team." Another Colombian CPTer echoed this sentiment. He acknowledged how, despite sometimes feeling "ornamental" as a Colombian accompanier, he can nonetheless often communicate better with accompanied communities *and* with armed actors than can non-Colombian CPTers, who are navigating a greater linguistic and cultural divide. "Many times the people put more confidence in me," he said, "and they understand me a lot more, and they believe me." Overall, he concluded, he can move more easily through the Colombian context because he is so familiar with it.

These examples illustrate how power-to and power-with are essential components in effective accompaniment. Yet at the same time, the force exerted by systemic privilege (which seems most aptly characterized as power-over) is still threaded through the work of accompaniment. The Colombian CPTer who talked about being able to move more easily in the Colombian context also acknowledged that if he were to go into the countryside simply as himself, the police would pay him no mind. On the other hand, he continued, "if I go into the countryside with the cap and the vest [of the CPT uniform] and I present myself as part of CPT, an international accompaniment organization—totally different. They pay attention to me and even listen to me." So while this Colombian man does not experience passport privilege or white privilege as an individual, there are still indirect ways that his activism pulls on those threads, through his association with CPT.

Thus we can see how, in any given moment of accompaniment, varied forms of power-over, power-to, and power-with may be entangled and operating simultaneously. Systemic privilege is a part of this mix, but it is only one thread in a more complicated weave of multiple types of power, ability, and access. A strategic realist stance, therefore, requires attending to these multiple threads of power and making careful choices about when and how to use them. In particular, when it comes to the power of systemic privilege, there are times when accompaniers intentionally draw on that power—and other times when they try to undercut its force and decenter privilege. This is especially apparent in their interactions with and reflections about the accompanied communities.

In several of the interviews I conducted, when I asked the interviewee about the most important forms of power at work in accompaniment, the answer given highlighted forms of power exercised within and by the accompanied communities themselves. One Colombian CPTer began to talk about the communities' "power to resist—the hope, the nonviolence, the love. Because they [the communities] have more—they have much more power than we do, really." As an example of what he meant, the CPTer observed the "impressive power" of the rural communities who have "resisted thirty years in the same place… maintaining their way of life despite all the invasion… maintaining their *campesino* essence, their essence of working on the land. And to be able to defend themselves, to be able to defend their identity and their right to live as *campesinos* and *campesinas*, that is a very great power."

Even more specifically, he told me a story from one of the farming communities CPT-Colombia accompanies. In this story, we can see how power-with merges into power-to, resisting and foiling the attempted domination of power-over. On this

particular day, the CPTer said, armed men showed up at a house in the community, firing shots and intending to force the residents to displace. But within fifteen minutes, at least two hundred *campesinos* from the community and the surrounding countryside had arrived. By standing in front of the armed men, ready to die in defense of their land, this *campesina* crowd interrupted the violence and prevented the planned displacement. "So there it is!" the CPTer concluded triumphantly. "They themselves can defend their own land!"

Several CPTers I interviewed stressed the importance of grassroots power, agency, and organization as exercised by the accompanied communities. Some CPTers further reflected on how such forms of power could fruitfully intersect with the access and power leveraged by CPT. One interviewee, a long-time CPTer who has been with the Colombian project since its early years, stated, "The form of power most important in accompaniment is that which comes from the community. When the community is organized, clear, has their mission, their clear goal, is united as much as possible…. If they feel they are strong, this permits us to do our work of accompaniment." She explained this by describing a community CPT-Colombia had earlier accompanied, which did not have clear goals and seemed to rely heavily on the team for advice and direction. "That was a real challenge for us," she said. "We were always kind of measuring how much [we could do] until we were creating dependency." Then she contrasted this with a community CPT currently accompanies, one with much stronger community processes and vision. Such community organization, she concluded, is what enables the leaders of this community to approach CPT with specific requests or to discuss proposals with the team as equals.

In other words, if accompaniment activism is not merely using one's own privilege to protect more vulnerable others, but is rather an effort to draw on access and resources in ways that will support and further strengthen the accompanied communities, then the most significant forms of power in this work are those exercised by the communities themselves. Furthermore, for the accompaniers, systemic privilege may offer some tools for the work, but ultimately that power is less significant than the power-to of agency, local expertise, and knowledge, or the power-with of dialogue and collaboration.

Overall, the CPTers I interviewed concluded that the power of privilege is present in accompaniment and must be recognized, analyzed, and sometimes used—but it must not be kept at the center of this work. This was expressed most plainly by the Colombian CPTer who talked about racism and sexism as weighty forms of power at work in accompaniment—dynamics that are simultaneously painful for her as a Latina woman *and* something she urges her teammates with privilege to leverage "with wisdom and with subtlety." As her interview continued, however, she insisted that CPTers must also behave in ways that diminish the power of these systemic oppressions. CPTers must "unmask what is happening," she said, and be mindful of what messages they communicate to the accompanied communities. She described how accompaniers can model racial equality and gender equality, both within their accompaniment teams and in the ways they interact with accompanied communities. In particular, she stressed, CPTers should name the power that resides in the communities, who have been resisting for decades, far longer than CPT has been accompanying them. The power of privilege, she asserted, is hardly the only power at work. "What's necessary is to strengthen the power

of the community," she concluded. "That is to say, the power of privilege cannot be above the power of the community. Privilege must be brought down."

This vision of bringing privilege down indicates the ideals of justice and equity that drive the work of solidarity activism, such as CPT's international accompaniment. Although this vision is not yet fully realized, it offers a guiding ideal informing the accompaniment strategies CPTers follow in their work. This is why, although CPTers at times are willing to draw upon (or urge their teammates to draw upon) the morally troubling power of privilege, they still critique and decenter that power. As the CPTers I interviewed talked about the important forms of power in their work, over and over again the stress landed on forms of power other than privilege: the power of nonviolent commitment, community organization, local expertise, dialogue and collaboration. This, finally, is the larger power they perceive as most important to the work of solidarity: the power of recognizing human interdependence, of engaging in solidarity as a practice of accountability and mutuality.

Chapter Six: Solidarity as Mutuality

The second prominent theme to emerge from my interviews was a vision of solidarity as mutuality. At first blush, this may not seem remarkable. After all, does not "solidarity" by its very definition imply common interests and mutual support for shared goals? Yet I find the prominence of this theme more striking in the context of international accompaniment activism, a tactic that developed to take advantage of the "outsider" status of accompaniers. Recall how Barry Levitt, in one of the earliest studies of accompaniment, summarizes the underlying strategic thinking of this form of activism: "The essential idea of accompaniment is that foreign citizens use their 'power' as foreigners in an attempt to safeguard the security of individuals or groups at risk of harassment or persecution…"[397] In light of this description underscoring the *difference* between the status and power of the accompaniers and of the people accompanied, it appears more radical for the CPTers to talk so much about the mutuality they experience with the communities they accompany.

Granted, CPT has worked hard to move their activism beyond what Levitt's theory encapsulates, and as noted in earlier chapters, CPT's goals are more complex than to simply use the global weight of Western citizenship and whiteness to disrupt violence and heighten the security of more vulnerable communities. Fielding accompaniment teams that are more nationally and racially diverse—teams in which not all members possess the "power" of "foreignness"—has pushed the organization to interrogate how they do their work and which forms of power they are relying upon to accomplish their ends. Nonetheless, as the previous chapter makes clear, the weight of systemic privilege

---

[397] Levitt, "Theorizing Accompaniment," in *Journeys of Fear*, 238.

is one strand that still runs through CPT-Colombia's activism. It is naïve and dishonest to ignore this reality or to elide the differences and sociopolitical power imbalances that currently exist, both among team members themselves and between the team and their accompanied partners. Overlooking or downplaying the dynamics of privilege can result in damaging actions and in heightened risks for the vulnerable. As I have argued, a more responsible and constructive approach to solidarity demands a stance of strategic realism, marked by honest, critical awareness and accountability.

At the same time, such strategic realism is in danger of collapsing into a resigned or cynical status quo (or even worse, a defense of an unequal status quo) if it is not directed by a vision of equitable relations. For this reason, it is all the more significant that in my interviews with CPTers, they so persistently stressed the mutuality they experience across differences of privilege and access. In some ways, this concept of solidarity as mutuality is aspirational, a guiding ideal that informs the team's decisions and actions as they try to navigate a present reality of violent oppressions and power imbalances. Yet their comments also reveal how the CPTers *already* have felt experiences of mutuality and interdependence with their accompanied partners. Furthermore, their emphasis on mutuality indicates how they perceive and value these partners as equals and leaders in a collaborative struggle for justice—not merely as less powerful people in need of protection and support.

In this final chapter, then, I will draw on my fieldwork interviews to flesh out what I mean by solidarity as mutuality: a solidarity that expresses itself through partnerships, or alliances, of equality in the midst of acknowledged difference. Three key features characterizing these alliances emerged from the interviews and are highlighted in

this chapter. First, the interviews displayed an emphasis on intersubjectivity, that is, the recognition that humans are fundamentally relational, and these relational connections are what motivate, demand, and shape the work of solidarity. Second, interviewees depicted solidarity as lived out through concrete actions in the context of shared goals. In other words, solidarity may be inspired by feelings of empathy or responsibility, but a genuine solidarity must move beyond feeling and into doing, into ways of acting alongside and in concert with the particular persons and communities with whom one is trying to be in solidarity. Third, and perhaps most strikingly, the interviews presented solidarity as relationships of interdependence. Solidarity was never portrayed as moving in only one direction, from the accompaniers to the accompanied. Rather, CPTers consistently talked about the give and take they experience in their activism, highlighting how they are helped by, receiving from, and learning from the communities they accompany. This acknowledgement of interdependence—including a willingness to be transformed oneself, even as one is working to transform situations of oppression and violence—goes to the core of what it means to enact solidarity as mutuality.

Significantly, while all three of these features—intersubjectivity, collaborative action, and interdependence—express mutuality and can help us live out a belief in human equality, none of them supposes *sameness* between persons. On the contrary, the mutuality of solidarity is grounded in a value for human diversity. Even more, such mutuality illuminates how the very differences between us become the reasons we need each other. As Shawn Copeland insists in her critical theology of solidarity, we must recognize "the authentic possibility that *differences might enrich rather than divide.*"[398] Or as Emilie Townes poetically articulates, such difference in the "proverbial stew" of

[398] M. Shawn Copeland, "Toward a Critical Christian Feminist Theology of Solidarity," 17 (emphasis hers).

our coalitions and collaborations "makes the aroma richer and provides greater sustenance for the work of justice and of forging communities of resistance and hope."[399] If solidarity is mutual, it cannot be primarily about acting *for* or *on behalf of* another, nor can it presume one's own self-sufficiency or leave participants unchanged. Rather, a mutual solidarity requires acting *with* and *alongside* others in ways that will impact one's own self.

Based on my fieldwork findings, as well as on my own experiences in international accompaniment, I assert that these attitudes and practices of mutuality are an essential part of responsible solidarity. This constructive ethic is not only for those directly engaged in political activism. More broadly, the gospel call to love our neighbors is a call to practice mutual love—and this call comes in an especially pointed way to those of us in positions of systemic privilege, upending the very hierarchical relations that bestow on us those unearned advantages.

By lifting up the necessity and value of mutual love, I aim to challenge a deeply embedded tradition within Christianity that perceives self-sacrificial love as the highest form of virtue and the most valid way of following Jesus's example and command to love others. While this tradition may inspire some radical forms of generosity, it is less successful at dismantling underlying relational and structural inequalities. This limitation comes into clearer focus when we consider a specific exemplar of the tradition: Reinhold Niebuhr. In his ethics, Niebuhr elevates disinterested, self-sacrificial love as the "impossible possibility" of Jesus's "love perfectionism" ethic, while representing mutual love as merely the best we can achieve in history. This understanding of moral goodness and of love, which Niebuhr frames as a "transcendent" ideal, is entangled in his overly

[399] Emilie M. Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, 149.

narrow conceptualization of power. So, as I argued in the previous chapter, while Niebuhr's ethical thought offers some resources for responsible social action, it is finally insufficient for solidarity and for an activism that can lead to deeper structural change. To help us better navigate the paradox of privilege, we need not only more contextualized and varied power analysis, but also a different guiding ideal of love.

The previous chapter ended with a call to recognize the importance of multiple forms of power at work in accompaniment, especially forms of power-with. This chapter builds on that argument, moving from the theme of power to the theme of love. The chapter unfolds in three stages. First, I return to Niebuhr's thought to examine more fully the limitations and dangers of his idealization of self-sacrificial love. Next, I turn to liberationist theologians Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Roberto Goizueta for theo-ethical models that frame Christian love instead as solidarity and as accompaniment. These models lay a groundwork for the third section, the heart of this chapter, in which I use interview excerpts to sketch a concrete picture of solidarity as mutuality, highlighting the three features named above.

This portrait of mutuality is drawn from the particular context of international accompaniment, and in this particularity, it emerges with greater clarity—and, I would suggest, with wider relevance.[400] As I have claimed, this constructive ethic of solidarity as mutuality is not limited to the field of international accompaniment or to those engaged in full-time activism. Rather, by lifting up the voices of these activists, I aim to help clarify how, across a variety of contexts, the attitudes and practices of mutuality are

[400] See note 17 and pp. 39-41 of chapter 1 for discussion of how Emilie Townes and Traci West frame (and exemplify in their own methodologies) the relationship between particularity and broad relevance. I follow Townes and West in asserting that self-consciously contextualized ethics, foregrounding the ethicist's own particularity, can actually speak *more* (not less) effectively across and into varying contexts. At least in part, this may be because such explicitly contextualized ethics are better able to avoid (the superiority of) masking one's own particularity as supposedly universal, "standard," or "normal."

necessary for resisting systemic oppressions and privileges. As we listen, we may hear a clearer call to love our neighbors in ways that are more truly just and more likely to foster social change.

I. How idealizing self-sacrificial love reinforces structural inequities

Within Christian teaching, there is a weighty tradition of regarding love as the highest theological virtue,[401] as well as the greatest commandment in both the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian New Testament. Further, this love is typically read as the Greek concept of *agape*, or "other-focused" regard and care.[402] The gospels move from Jesus's citing of the Levitical command, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:39 NRSV), to his instruction to his disciples, "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another" (John 13:34b NRSV). In this movement, the model and measure of love appear to become more radically self-denying, as Jesus's "self-giving love… replaces traditional references to self-love as the standard."[403] Perhaps it is not surprising that Christian tradition has so highly valorized self-sacrifice and an altruism that appears to prioritize others' welfare over one's own wellbeing.

However, this idealization of self-sacrificial love has been much critiqued by feminist, womanist, and other liberationist thinkers, who insist that such an ethic furthers

---

[401] Ramón Luzárraga, "Charity, Works of," in *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics*, ed. Joel B. Green (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 132.

[402] Anders Nygren is a relatively recent and influential example of a theologian who promotes (this particular understanding of) *agape* as the authentic form of Christian love. Nygren's perspective is hardly unchallenged. Other theologians draw on the Greek terms *philia* and/or *eros* to offer alternative or fuller accounts of Christian love. However, within Christian teaching and practice, the conflation of love with *agape* and with other-focused regard and care has been the dominant stream of thinking and has generally wielded the greatest influence.

[403] Thomas W. Ogletree, "Love, Love Command," in *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics*, ed. Joel B. Green (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 492.

the oppression and exploitation of the most vulnerable. White feminists have argued that a Christian ethic centered on this vision of *agape* compels women to sacrifice themselves in ways that stunt their own moral growth and burden or even shorten their lives.[404] Womanists and feminists of color offer a similar yet expanded critique by calling attention to race and class as well as gender. These scholars lament how a Christianity that preaches service and self-sacrifice as the highest forms of goodness falls most heavily upon those women who, because of racism and poverty, are most relegated to sacrificial servanthood.[405]

These are apt and necessary criticisms. Here, I build on them to further show how an ethic of self-sacrificial love reinforces structural inequalities—not only by placing inappropriate moral demands on the vulnerable, but also by calling privileged persons to exercise disinterested benevolence instead of working toward relationships of mutual love. It may be tempting to think that the call to love others self-sacrificially, however damaging when forced upon the oppressed, is nonetheless an appropriate ethic when directed toward the socially powerful and undertaken voluntarily.[406] Might not such an ethic prod the privileged to transcend self-interest and let go of unearned advantages? Yet this notion is dangerous. It elides how altruism presumes unequal power relations, and it masks the material history of how those relations have developed. A love that claims to be disinterested is motivated by the neediness of the beloved, who remains merely an

---

[404] See, for example, Barbara Hilkert Andolsen, "Agape in Feminist Ethics," in *Feminist Theological Ethics: A Reader*, ed. Lois K. Daly (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 146-59.

[405] As Jacquelyn Grant poignantly notes in her critique of Christian "servant" language: "Some people are more servant than others." Grant, "The Sin of Servanthood and the Deliverance of Discipleship" in *A Troubling in my Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil & Suffering*, ed. Emilie M. Townes (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 204.

[406] Timothy Jackson exhibits a perspective like this in his defense of *agape*. He acknowledges feminist critiques and tries to answer them by insisting that, while openness to self-sacrifice is central to *agape,* such sacrifice must be "constructive and consensual," never wasteful or coerced. See Jackson, *The Priority of Love: Christian Charity and Social Justice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 54-55.

object of charity, acted upon instead of with. Altruism flows out of the lover's own self-sufficiency and moral goodness, rather than from desire for the beloved or need for another—or, even more significantly in the context of my project, from any sense of moral debt or accountability to the one being loved. [407] While it is sometimes necessary to love others in ways that transcend one's apparent or immediate self-interests, elevating self-sacrificial love as the height of virtue is hardly a helpful model for solidarity and justice activism, given the relational hierarchies embedded within this model. Furthermore, as Niebuhr's work makes clear, idealizing self-sacrificial love serves to promote an ethic that is both morally wary toward the use of power and ultimately individualistic, all of which is inimical to struggles for justice and social change. Let me turn now to Niebuhr and his critics to illustrate what I mean.

a. Love disavowing power: Self-sacrifice as perfection, mutuality as second best

In the previous chapter, I discussed how Reinhold Niebuhr's ethical paradigm pivots on what he perceives as an inevitable tension between current historical realities and transcendent ideals. The gritty realism that he develops from wrestling with this tension can be useful to activists, since such realism resists the naivety that would frame our good intentions as more innocent or efficacious than they truly are. However, the tension running through the center of Niebuhr's ethics also leads him to develop a troubling dichotomy between behaviors that are socially responsible and those that are fully loving.

---

[407] Anders Nygren, in his seminal study, *Agape and Eros: The Christian Idea of Love,* trans. Philip S. Watson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982; orig. 1932-1939, rev. 1953), makes this point in a way that graphically illustrates the hierarchical relationship embedded in altruism. In contrast to the upward movement of *eros*—using the object of love as a means for one's own ascent—Nygren presents *agape* as downward motion: "a love that descends, freely and generously giving of its superabundance." (See pp. 212-214.) As these spatial metaphors make clear, such a framing of *agape* presumes that the one who loves agapically is positioned above (hence, superior to) the one(s) loved.

To see how this dichotomy occurs, we must read the tension at the axis of Niebuhr's ethics alongside his theological anthropology, in which the primary sin is pride, manifesting as overweening self-interest, self-assertion, and will to power.[408] Niebuhr depicts any human displays of pride or power as sinfully tainted. Only God is capable of combining perfect goodness and absolute power, he believes. Within human society, he sees an irreducible tension between goodness and power, such that he insists, "Perfect goodness in history can be symbolized only by the disavowal of power."[409]

I believe Niebuhr's conceptualization of power—limited to power-over, or power exercised through dominance and superiority (even if exercised in an apparently benevolent fashion)—is foundational to his ethical paradigm, in which the highest form of moral goodness appears as disinterested, self-sacrificial love. To counter the fundamental sin of pride, he posits that the transcendent ethical ideal is embodied in Jesus's "love perfectionism," or a love renouncing all self-interest and any claim to power. For Niebuhr, then, Christ on the cross represents "the perfection of sacrificial love." Such love becomes the ideal for us to aspire to—even as it remains an "impossible" ideal for humans to reach and, as such, exposes and judges the limits of historical existence. Meanwhile, "mutual love, in which the concern of one person for the interests of another prompts and elicits a reciprocal affection" appears as the highest good available within history.[410]

Thus, suspended in the tension between the real and the ideal, Niebuhr both idealizes self-sacrificial love *and* cautions against making it the basis for a social ethic.

---

[408] As noted in chapter 5, Niebuhr posits two basic forms of human sinfulness, pride and sensuality, but his writings accent the former more heavily, as the "primary" biblical conception of sin. See footnote 365.
[409] Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny of Man,* 2:22.
[410] Niebuhr, 2:68-69.

Because he believes this transcendent norm can be neither fully achieved nor justified within human history, he is sharply critical of those who try to apply such love as the guiding principle in politics and societal relations.[411] Only occasionally (albeit rarely) in the realm of interpersonal relations can an individual rise to the moral heights of self-sacrifice, he insists, while the behavior of social groups is always more immoral and so must be governed, or controlled, by other principles.[412] Nonetheless, Niebuhr still presents this love, or *agape*, as the superior form of moral goodness. This is clear when he asserts that sacrificial love "completes the incompleteness of mutual love (*eros*)," since the latter is always in some way oriented toward the self's own desires and seeks to elicit a reciprocal response from the loved one. A self so preoccupied, Niebuhr writes, is not "sufficiently free… *to lose itself* in the life of the other."[413] In contrast, he portrays *agape* as motivated always (and only) by intent to conform to God's will; any responses of mutual affection that sacrificially loving acts elicit are simply unintended side benefits.[414] For him, the essential characteristic of *agape* is disinterestedness.

Unlike Anders Nygren, Niebuhr does not see sacrificial and mutual love, *agape* and *eros*, as rigid opposites. Rather, he believes that, by inspiring a necessary measure of self-transcendence, sacrificial love makes mutual love possible in history.[415] Yet although he holds up mutual love as a high good—and in fact, the more prudent norm for historical

---

[411] See, for example, *Nature and Destiny of Man*, 2:886-88.
[412] This is Niebuhr's essential thesis in *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (1932). In later writings, he appears more skeptical about human abilities to transcend self-interest, so much so that he suggests that a more apt title for his book might have been *Immoral Man and Even More Immoral Society*.
[413] Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny of Man*, 2:82 (emphasis mine).
[414] Niebuhr, 2:84.
[415] Niebuhr, 2:247. See also p. 96 in the same volume: "But such strategies of mutual love and of systems of justice cannot maintain themselves without inspiration from a deeper dimension of history." Note that Niebuhr perceives both mutual love and justice as the highest norms available within history, while both still fall short of *agape*. Thus he posits a relationship between love and justice that is complementary yet also in tension. This contrasts with liberationist perspectives, which typically align love and justice much more closely.

existence[416]—Niebuhr still sees it as falling short and ultimately judged, even contradicted by the disinterested, self-sacrificial love embodied by Jesus on the cross. He writes, "The Cross represents a perfection which contradicts the false pretensions of virtue in history and which reveals the contrast between man's sinful self-assertion and the divine *agape*… [It] symbolizes the final goodness which stands in contradiction to all forms of human goodness in which self-assertion and love are compounded."[417] The "final goodness," or highest form of virtue, can be enacted only by an individual who—like Jesus, in Niebuhr's reading—cedes all claims to political power or personal flourishing in this world. Meanwhile, mutual love remains a form of "human goodness" in which the love expressed is still mingled with some self-assertion, even when one's own interests are partially transcended for the sake of others. As such, mutuality apparently cannot rise above the "false pretensions of virtue in history" that are always lesser than what Niebuhr considers the "perfection" of the cross.

b. From disinterested altruism to dialogical relationship: Feminist responses to Niebuhr

Feminist theologians and ethicists have heavily criticized Niebuhr for his exaltation of self-sacrificial love. This criticism is one strand of a larger set of related critiques feminists have lodged against Niebuhr's work, and it is telling to consider how these critics tie the idealization of self-sacrifice to sexism, individualism, and an excessive

---

[416] Strikingly, in the midst of this discussion of the relationship between sacrificial and mutual love, Niebuhr argues that, since perfect love is not possible for humans to achieve, "it is not even right to insist that every action of the Christian must conform to *agape*, rather than to the norms of relative justice and mutual love by which life is maintained and conflicting interests are arbitrated in history" (*Nature and Destiny of Man,* 2:88). He makes a compelling argument here that, as soon as one's actions or policies begin to affect the lives and interests of people other than oneself, then sacrificing those interests is an unjust betrayal—rather than an appropriate act of loving "self-sacrifice." However, if we follow Niebuhr's argument here through to its logical conclusion, we are left with a Jesus who behaves in a fashion that appears, at best, socially marginal and, at worst, irresponsible toward others.

[417] Niebuhr, 2:89.

accent on the sin of pride.[418] Several white feminists have criticized Niebuhr for his lack of careful attention to gender and the distinctive particularities of women's experiences.[419] In some cases, these thinkers accuse Niebuhr of being explicitly sexist in his reflections on gender roles, as well as in his dichotomized divisions between public political life and private interpersonal (especially familial) life. In other cases, these feminists fault him for simply ignoring gender altogether in his theologizing about human nature. Such oversight leads Niebuhr, first, to present a model of human selfhood that is overly individualistic and autonomous, and second, to overemphasize the sins of pride, self-assertion, and will to power. Following from this, Niebuhr's understanding of moral goodness exalts disinterested love and the transcendence or even sacrifice of oneself. And such an idealization of self-sacrificial love, many feminists complain, is damaging and disempowering to women.

In her overview of these critiques, Rebekah Miles highlights an important difference between Niebuhr's thought, which emphasizes transcendence (both as a divine attribute and as an aspect of morality), and feminist theologies, which often image the divine in immanent and relational terms, thus communicating greater value for

---

[418] To develop the summary that follows, I have drawn on Rebekah L. Miles, whose book *The Bonds of Freedom: Feminist Theology and Christian Realism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) contains one of the most thorough reviews of feminist criticisms of Niebuhr's work, as well as her own critical analysis of those critiques and her constructive proposal for a "feminist Christian realism." If readers wish to know more about the specific authors and texts that express the following critiques, then I recommend Miles's book, especially chapter 2, "What's So Bad about Reinhold Niebuhr: Feminist Criticisms of Niebuhr." Miles organizes feminist responses to Niebuhr into four primary critiques, and while my summary does not entirely follow her organization, it is indebted to her review and the points she highlights.

[419] However, as West points out, these white, middle-class and educated feminists largely ignore the equally important dynamics of race and class in their discussions of "women's experience." Thus, the white feminist critics fall into the same "overgeneralizing" error of which they accuse Niebuhr, as they overgeneralize "based upon the privileges of whiteness in much the same way" that Niebuhr overgeneralizes "from the privileged experience of maleness." See West, *Disruptive Christian Ethics*, 23-24. West offers the most deeply contextualized critical feminist reading of Niebuhr that I have found, and I will say more below about the important points her analysis illuminates.

community and relationships among humans. The significance of this difference—and of the underlying contrasting views of selfhood—emerges as Miles articulates Niebuhr's understanding of salvation: "For Niebuhr, the self-transcendent human, tempted to make itself the center, finds its true self by *losing* self in relation to God and others. *The loss or breaking of the self, then, is necessary to salvation.*"[420] In striking contrast to this, Miles depicts a feminist model of salvation as "a healing of the self in relationships."[421] I am fascinated to note that in both cases, salvation apparently comes in the context of relationship. Yet in each model of salvation, that relationship plays out in markedly different ways: consuming the self to be saved *or* making that self more whole.

This distinction clarifies why it matters whether we frame self-sacrificial love as moral "perfection" or as morally troubling, and mutual love as second best or as the intended goal. Depending on which perspective we take, the self who loves will be impacted in dissimilar ways. Further, each perspective prompts us to relate to others differently, as Beverly Harrison explains in "The Power of Anger in the Work of Love." In this essay, Harrison critiques a supposedly transcendent love, which is grounded not in vulnerable relationship but in autonomous "self-possession." She describes such love as "patronizing… the love of the strong for the weak"—or, one might say, the benevolence of the systemically privileged toward the oppressed. In contrast, Harrison insists that mutual love, in its exchange of giving and receiving, is the more truly equal, radical love and, as such, represents "the central virtues of the Christian moral life."[422]

---

[420] Miles, *Bonds of Freedom*, 35 (emphasis mine). Notice how a salvation thus construed echoes the way Niebuhr has described the incompleteness of mutual love (quoted above): that a human who is never able to fully transcend his or her own self-interest is "insufficiently free" to "lose [oneself] in the life of the other."
[421] Miles, 35.
[422] Beverly W. Harrison, "The Power of Anger in the Work of Love," in *Making the Connections: Essays in Feminist Social Ethics*, ed. Carol S. Robb (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 17-18. Although Harrison does not here critique Niebuhr by name, the contrast she sets up between the two kinds of love—including a

Harrison and other white feminists have done important work in reclaiming the value of mutual love and pointing out dangers that occur when, as is true in Niebuhr's ethics, self-sacrificial love is elevated as the highest ideal. However, Traci West is the liberationist feminist critic of Niebuhr who most fully demonstrates his blind spots that accrue from privilege and that limit the antiracist (and overall anti-oppressive) potential of his work. Pushing her analysis much further than the white feminists who home in solely on gender, West more fully contextualizes Niebuhr, reading him alongside Black women activists who, like him, were working to address social concerns in Harlem during the 1930s and 40s.[423] Using a "dialogical method,"[424] West places Niebuhr's perspective and writings into conversation with the life experiences of Black women and thus shines a light on his privileged status as a white man and as a "middle-class, German American, Christian minister-professor." She exposes how this social location shaped his ethical concerns and how, despite his wariness toward self-assertion, he "implicitly inject[ed] his own self-interest" into his moral values and claims.[425]

Although West does not focus specifically on Niebuhr's idealization of self-sacrificial love, her analysis sounds related notes as she interrogates his value for "the

reading of Jesus's death that values his solidarity with the excluded, more than his sacrifice—offers an implicit corrective of Niebuhr's ethic.

[423] West does these comparative readings in two published texts: "Constructing Ethics: Reinhold Niebuhr and Harlem Women Activists," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 24, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2004): 24-49; and in chapter 2, "Context: Niebuhr's Ethics and Harlem Activists," of *Disruptive Christian Ethics*.

[424] In chapters 1 and 4 of this dissertation, I have already referenced and discussed West's dialogical method, explaining how it serves as a model for my own methodology. Here I want to note that West's methodological approach to Christian ethics also expresses the values and practices she believes are more truly just and liberative in a society marked by pluralism. As she explains, "Community cooperation across cultural and religious boundaries depends upon our ability to dialogue with one another, and dialogue is precisely the core element of a socially liberative method for Christian ethics that I stress in this book. A method for Christian social ethics that trains us in how to have 'conversations' across boundaries prepares us for the task of building shared ethics in a pluralistic world" (*Disruptive Christian Ethics,* xv). This point seems relevant to the "communal ethic" West calls for (and models) in her book; I will say more about this communal ethic in upcoming paragraphs.

[425] West, "Constructing Ethics," 43.

quality of disinterestedness as a moral ideal,"[426] examining this aspect of his ethics in light of his "paternalism toward blacks." She implies that his efforts to maintain a "distant, objective stance" did not, in fact, help him forge a universally applicable ethic or develop practices more resistant to self-assertion and will to power. Rather, Niebuhr's stance appears to have supported his assumptions of white superiority, hampering him from entering into the contextualized analysis, dialogue, and accountability needed for more fruitful antiracist activism and structural change.[427] If we wish to genuinely work for justice, fostering mutuality and relationship seems to be a more foundational approach than is self-transcendence.

It is not that West eschews altogether any efforts to transcend one's immediate self-interests. The picture she draws is more complicated than that. To see this, we must look at how she extends and challenges white feminist critiques of Niebuhr's overemphasis on the sinfulness of pride. West similarly points out the oppressive limitations in Niebuhr's view when she writes, "Unlike Niebuhr's view of pridefulness as a quintessentially sinful human need that fuels the drive to dominate others, for [the African-American dentist, Dr. Bessie Delany], taking pride in her achievements represented an empowering reassurance of her own human dignity. For blacks, the ability to take pride in one's self (and group) is a source of power that white racism tries to rob."[428] At the same time, however, West refutes the overgeneralized assumption that pride and domination are *not* primary sins for women when those women (such as white

---

[426] West, *Disruptive Christian Ethics*, 15.
[427] See especially pp. 13-16 of *Disruptive Christian Ethics,* although nuances of this argument are also developed elsewhere in the chapter. West's observation that Niebuhr's writings about racism and racial justice suffer from a lack of dialogue and accountability with Black thinkers and activists is more implied than stated outright in this chapter, though I would argue that this conclusion can be drawn from her point that Niebuhr appears uninfluenced by (perhaps unaware of) the Black-led boycotts occurring in Harlem during the 1920s and 30s. (See pp. 8-9 and note 15 on p. 183.)
[428] West, *Disruptive Christian Ethics*, 10.

housewives hiring Black domestic workers) stand in a position, at least partially, of systemic privilege. West appreciates the feminist push to move "away from a Christian social ethic that maintains the polarities of self-negating moral behavior as virtuous and self-assertive moral behavior as sinful"—*and* she asserts the "imperative to understand how persons (even white women) can simultaneously occupy the position of sinfully negating and sacrificing themselves for others as well as sinfully asserting their own interests in a way that sacrifices the well-being, dignity, and fairness others deserve."[429]

This more plural vision of morality leads West to call for a "communal ethic… that has differing, particular responsibilities for resistance to injustice. Producing this resistance could mean that one must take pride, mute one's pride, create space to find one's pride, or repent for one's pridefulness."[430] In this ethic, pride (and I would extend this to include exercising power) is not necessarily an indication of sin, but it may be so. In other words, there is no singular ethical ideal for *all* people to strive toward, nor can a decontextualized "transcendent" ideal effectively guide us in navigating historical realities. Instead, we must engage context more deeply and responsively, determining ethical choices on the basis of our own and other people's particular social locations, needs, possibilities, and varied access to forms of power.

I find it especially significant that West names this a *communal* ethic. The actions that will best increase justice and lead to structural change are not individual, heroic acts of self-transcendence and self-sacrificial love. Rather, what is needed are the ongoing dialogues, collaborations, and accountability of mutual relationships. As I noted in the chapter introduction and stress again here, such mutuality must recognize and embrace

---

[429] West, *Disruptive Christian Ethics*, 24.
[430] West, *Disruptive Christian Ethics*, 35.

(not elide) difference. This kind of mutuality is not an easy reciprocity, nor is it necessarily comfortable to practice. In the language of Townes, it is "tough solidarity." It demands much of us—although, as I argue below, it also offers much.

II. Alternative visions: Love as solidarity and accompaniment

As I have tried to demonstrate, Niebuhr's elevation of self-sacrificial love as the "transcendent" ethical ideal is neither sufficiently contextualized nor sufficiently communal to provide an adequate foundation for the practice of solidarity. Niebuhr prioritizes a disinterested *agape,* suggesting that this kind of love is the guiding ideal for the "historical approximation" of mutual love, inspiring us to greater moral heights than we could otherwise reach. However, I would argue that Niebuhr has mixed up the priorities and that mutual love—and the relational connections in which such love immerses us—must be primary, providing the inspiration and guide for moments in which we are called to rise above our own immediate interests. Therefore, the practice of solidarity is better served by an ethic that prioritizes mutuality, an ethic I saw reflected in my fieldwork interviews in Colombia.

Before I turn to those interviews to further examine solidarity as mutuality, I want first to lift up two theo-ethical models of love that offer an alternative to Niebuhr's paradigm. In her essay, "Solidarity: Love of Neighbor in the Twenty-First Century," which appears in *Mujerista Theology*, Ada María Isasi-Díaz argues that the active, mutual praxis of solidarity must replace charity as the appropriate way of loving our neighbors in today's world.[431] In *Caminemos con Jesús: Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of*

---

[431] Ada María Isasi-Díaz, "Solidarity: Love of Neighbor in the Twenty-First Century," in *Mujerista*

Accompaniment, Roberto S. Goizueta represents accompaniment, or living and walking with the poor, as the praxis of solidarity that embodies God's love in the world.[432] Both Isasi-Díaz and Goizueta provide theological insights that resonate with my fieldwork findings, enriching this chapter's theme of solidarity as mutuality. In addition, Isasi-Díaz and Goizueta, as US Latinx scholars working in the tradition of Latin American liberation theology, help me to forge a more explicit link between the orthopraxis of solidarity that propelled the emergence of Latin American liberation theology (as discussed in chapter 2) and the practices of solidarity as mutuality that I learned about from CPTers currently doing accompaniment in Latin America.

a. Ada María Isasi-Díaz: Love as solidarity

Isasi-Díaz's essay grows out of two concerns. First, she is critical of how the central Christian command to love our neighbors has been interpreted as a call to charity, commonly understood as "one-sided giving, a donation almost always, of what we have in abundance." She argues for a paradigm shift that would instead envision neighbor love as best expressed through solidarity, especially solidarity with "the least of our sisters and brothers… the poor, the oppressed."[433] Although Isasi-Díaz does not use the word *agape* in her essay, she does speak out against "the false notion of disinterest, of doing for others in an altruistic fashion."[434] Thus her critique echoes other feminist criticisms of *agape* (and of self-sacrificial love) and makes more starkly clear that, from a liberationist perspective, the grave problem in traditional Christian interpretations of *agape* lies in

---

Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 86-104.

[432] Roberto S. Goizueta, *Caminemos Con Jesús: Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003).

[433] Isasi-Díaz, "Solidarity," 88.

[434] Isasi-Díaz, 89.

how these interpretations frame power relations, positioning some people as already sufficient givers and others as needy recipients. She is not against giving per se, but she is wary of giving that flows one-sidedly from positions of privilege or excess, toward those who do not experience similar abundance. Such charity merely reinforces hierarchical relationships and social structures, leaving current injustices in place. Instead, Isasi-Díaz seeks to promote radical social activism and revolutionary change.[435] For this reason, she presents genuine neighbor love as *solidarity*—with all the political (as well as theological) associations that word contains.

The second concern informing the essay is how easily the concept of solidarity gets diminished to mean merely a disposition of sympathy or agreement with a cause. When solidarity is understood like this, Isasi-Díaz worries, "one can have it for a while, put it aside for whatever reason, and then pick it up again" in an "ephemeral" attitude of support that has little to do with ongoing commitment and "liberative praxis."[436] The necessity of liberative praxis, or concrete public actions that resist particular oppressions, is a key point in Isasi-Díaz's efforts to return to the original meaning of solidarity. Without action, solidarity—as well as the mutuality she insists must characterize solidarity—becomes simply "a 'soft word,' a passing whimsical reaction which is often privatized and removed from the public sphere, from the political reality of the struggle for liberation."[437]

Therefore, Isasi-Díaz is careful not only to frame solidarity as the appropriate expression of Christian love, but also to detail what she believes solidarity must entail.

[435] In an earlier version of the essay, Isasi-Díaz tellingly writes, "The goal is not the participation of the oppressed in present societal structures but rather the replacement of those structures by ones in which full participation of the oppressed is possible." Isasi-Díaz, "Solidarity: Love of Neighbor in the 1980s," in *Feminist Theological Ethics*, ed. Lois K. Daly (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 81.
[436] Isasi-Díaz, "Solidarity… Twenty-First Century," 87.
[437] Isasi-Díaz, 99.

She insists solidarity must be understood as both theory and strategy, both worldview and praxis. In opposition to the theory of oppression, which operates through control and domination, the theory of solidarity recognizes “the commonality of interests that links humanity.”[438] The importance of this fundamental interconnectedness between people pervades Isasi-Díaz’s theology as well. She defines sin as alienation, which divides humans from God and from each other, manifesting not only in interpersonal relations but also in the societal norms and institutional structures that sustain injustice and hold hierarchies in place. In overcoming that sinful alienation, salvation is worked out through love and through liberation, which Isasi-Díaz describes as “the unfolding of the ‘kin-dom’ of God.”[439] Participating in that movement requires active solidarity with the oppressed; Isasi-Díaz thus considers solidarity “the *sine qua non* of salvation.”[440]

Given how relational Isasi-Díaz’s theology is and how much her theory of solidarity is grounded in recognizing human interconnectedness and common interests, it is no surprise that she describes the strategy of solidarity as the “praxis of mutuality.”[441] Mutuality, she asserts, must be practiced among various oppressed groups as they recognize their common interests and build solidarity with each other—*and* mutuality must be established between the oppressed and their oppressors. I find it striking (and relevant to my project) how much space in her essay Isasi-Díaz gives to exploring how

---

[438] Isasi-Díaz, 93.
[439] Isasi-Díaz, 89. Isasi-Díaz has coined the term “kin-dom” to replace the biblical language of God’s kingdom, a concept she finds sexist, hierarchical, and elitist. In contrast, her word proclaims that “when the fullness of God becomes a day-to-day reality in the world at large, we will all be sisters and brothers—kin to each other; we will indeed be the family of God” (103, note 8). Note also how different Isasi-Díaz’s theology is from Niebuhr’s theology: while he frames sin in the more individualistic terms of pride and self-interest (or else sensuality, losing oneself to pursuit of pleasure), she focuses on the communal implications of sin as broken relationships and oppressive social structures. Similarly, her emphasis on the commonality of human interests stands in stark contrast to Niebuhr’s concern with conflicts of interest, held in check only through a tenuous balance of powers.
[440] Isasi-Díaz, 88, 90-91.
[441] Isasi-Díaz, 93.

mutuality can come about between people differently positioned within systems of oppression and privilege.

She describes this mutuality as a dialogue in which the oppressed speak the first word—through their suffering and/or their protests—and this word offers the oppressors challenge and opportunity. Oppressors who listen and respond can "become 'friends' of the oppressed." In this new role, they are called to "question and judge the structures that they have supported and from which they benefit, thus becoming co-creators with the oppressed of new liberating structures."[442] As these "friends" open themselves to critique, develop critical consciousness, and take responsibility for how they have participated in oppression, the growing mutuality between them and the oppressed will, in turn, allow the oppressed to learn from the "friends," perhaps to re-envision their own goals or to resist the temptation to seek vengeance. For Isasi-Díaz, mutuality is at the heart of solidarity, requiring "a true dialogic relationship between oppressed and 'friend.'" Furthermore, this mutuality must go beyond "reciprocal understanding and support"; it must push the oppressed and their "friends" into "revolutionary politics" aimed toward creating "alternative nonoppressive systems."[443]

In summary, Isasi-Díaz would likely agree with Beverly Harrison that mutual love is a radical act, central to Christian morality. For Isasi-Díaz, mutual love enacted as solidarity is also politically charged, committed to ongoing struggle for liberative social

---

[442] Isasi-Díaz, 96. Isasi-Díaz bases her ideas about the relationship between the oppressed and those oppressors who become "friends" (or what I think of as "allies") on Juan Carlos Scannone, *Teología de la Liberacíon y Praxis Popular* (Salamanca: Ediciones Sigueme, 1976), 133-86. Scannone uses the word *hermano*, or "brother," in his discussion. Isasi-Díaz has chosen to use "friend" instead, to avoid the sexism of a gender-exclusive term. (See Isasi-Díaz, "Solidarity," 104, notes 24 and 25.) I appreciate her anti-sexism choice. However, I think substituting "friend" for "brother" loses some of the closeness and kinship implications of the latter term. While friends may indeed be very loving, I believe words like "brother," "sister," or "sibling" better capture the familial connections and resulting demands upon one that Isasi-Díaz intends to communicate when she speaks of solidarity (and of "kin-dom").
[443] Isasi-Díaz, 97-98.

change. With echoes of West's "dialogical method" and "communal ethic," Isasi-Díaz offers a provocative picture of how solidarity can extend across differences of privilege and oppression. In this "true dialogic relationship," both parties see their inter-connectedness, learn from each other, and collaborate in political action—elements we will see reflected in the interview excerpts below.

b. Roberto S. Goizueta: Solidarity as accompaniment

Goizueta entitles his book *Caminemos con Jesús* (Let us walk with Jesus)—words from a Holy Thursday liturgical procession, taught to him by Mexican-American Catholics of the San Fernando Cathedral parish in San Antonio, Texas. Goizueta's study of US Hispanic popular Catholicism focuses on this particular parish and these significant rituals, read through lenses of Latin American liberation theology and of his own story as a Cuban-American exile, or *caminante* (traveler, literally "walker"), from the land of his birth. Drawing on these resources, Goizueta articulates an anthropology and a theology reflective of Latinx experience in the US. As the book's title indicates, the theology he constructs centers on the significance of accompanying—companioning, being with and walking with—those who suffer. For him, accompaniment is the essence of what it means to imitate God's preferential option for the poor.

Although Goizueta draws this image of accompaniment from religious symbols and liturgical processions—a rather different context than that of international nonviolent activism—his "theology of accompaniment" speaks aptly to my study of faith-based solidarity activists who are accompanying communities threatened by violence and displacement. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to fully discuss Goizueta's book, but I

do want to highlight here a few of his points that complement and expand on important accents in Isasi-Díaz's essay. Like Isasi-Díaz, who emphasizes interconnectedness and common interests, Goizueta expresses an intersubjective worldview, which he presents as the basis for a preferential option for the poor. Further, he argues that living into this option requires engaging in solidarity with *particular* poor persons in time and place—walking with them in the contexts in which they live. Finally, Goizueta again echoes Isasi-Díaz when he stresses how this solidarity as accompaniment can lead to genuine justice and change *only if* it is undertaken as a dialogic interaction with the poor as equals. When such accompaniment does occur, it breaks through the structural and geographical boundaries established to separate "us" from "them." This is how we come to know and love "the God whom the poor themselves love," Goizueta writes, adding, "That God will transform and liberate us all—if we will but walk together."[444]

Goizueta's intersubjective worldview emerges as he explains the anthropology implicit in US Hispanic popular Catholicism: a vision of the cosmos and of humanity as "intrinsically relational." In other words, no entity is an isolated individual. Each person, in his or her concrete particularity, mediates the universal and "is defined and constituted by his or her relationships."[445] In contrast to the individualism of dominant US culture, in Latinx culture(s), community and relationship precede individuality. As Goizueta summarizes in the chapter subtitle, the community functions "as the birthplace of the self." In turn, as these selves encounter and interact with each other, the "community is defined by such intersubjective relationships."[446]

---

[444] Goizueta, *Caminemos,* 210-211.
[445] Goizueta, 49-50.
[446] Goizueta, 75. For a fuller discussion of this anthropology, see chapter 3, "Nosostros: The Community as the Birthplace of the Self," 47-76.

This vision of humanity (and of each human person) as intrinsically relational becomes the foundation for liberation theology's central tenet of the preferential option for the poor. Because we are all, wealthy and poor alike, bound together in a web of human connectedness, we are all experiencing the harmful consequences of poverty and oppression.[447] Therefore, Goizueta argues, our choice "is not whether to be with the poor, but whether to do so *self-consciously* and *intentionally."* When we who are privileged choose to be with the marginalized, we are not choosing against our own self-interests, but rather choosing "to be that which we already *are* through no choice of our own: individual persons defined by our *a priori* relationships to others, to humanity, to the universe, and, ultimately, to the Triune (i.e., intrinsically relational) God."[448]

Living out this preferential option for the poor—intentionally choosing to engage in solidarity with them—can only be done, Goizueta insists, by accompanying particular, flesh-and-blood persons in the particular places where they "live, die, and struggle for survival."[449] In other words, to accompany the poor we must go to where they are and live and walk with them there, much as Jesus did. Such a praxis of accompaniment transgresses the geographical and social boundaries that have been erected to confine the poor and secure privileges for the powerful. This is risky. As Goizueta reminds us, Jesus "was not crucified so much for what he *did* as for *where* he *was*; he 'walked with' the wrong people and in the wrong places."[450] Yet these subversive acts of accompaniment

---

[447] I agree with Goizueta's argument here, though I find it also important to acknowledge we do not all experience the *same* harmful consequences, nor to the same degree. Goizueta offers a compelling list of "enslaving" consequences experienced by the privileged, from fear of others and anxiety about protecting our possessions, to psychological problems and broken relationships (178). These are indeed debilitating—but less life-threatening than the exploitation, physical dangers, and lack of access to basic rights and resources regularly experienced by those who are materially poor and politically disenfranchised.
[448] Goizueta, 178-179.
[449] Goizueta, 192.
[450] Goizueta, 203 (emphasis his).

have a liberating power, as they both disrupt systems of oppression and recognize the worth and personhood of the oppressed.[451] I will say more below about Goizueta's reflections on the ethical-political significance of "walking with." For now, I simply point to how Goizueta's theology maps onto faith-based international accompaniment, illuminating religious and political implications of what these activists endeavor to do.

The final point from Goizueta that I want to highlight now is that "the act of accompaniment necessarily implies equality." Accompaniment does not occur as an autonomous individual offers her or his presence to a "needy" poor person; rather, it is by definition a walking *with,* entailing shared dialogue and interaction. As Goizueta warns, "The struggle for social justice will, in the long run, simply perpetuate the dehumanization of poor persons if not undertaken *together with* poor persons."[452] This point recalls Isasi-Díaz's depiction of how mutuality can develop between the oppressed and those oppressors who become their "friends": through a dialogic relationship in which the oppressed speak the first word, the oppressors hear and convert, and both sides together learn from each other and become "co-creators" of new, liberative systems. As both these theologians underscore, mutuality is essential to solidarity—and *this* is what it looks like for us to love our neighbors as the Bible commands.

---

[451] As Goizueta notes, "To be a human being is to be in relationship with others, and to be in relationship with others is to be '*acompañado*'" (205). Note the etymological link between "accompany" and "companion." Spanish seems to foreground this connection more strongly than English. In Spanish, when a person *está acompañada* (is accompanied), it means that someone else is with that person, perhaps physically escorting her, sympathizing with her, or in a partnership or intimate relationship with her. *Acompañamiento* and *acompañar* are more commonly used terms in Spanish than "accompaniment" and "accompany" are in English, and the Spanish words carry a wealth of associations.

[452] Goizueta, 206-207.

III. Building partnerships: The mutuality of accompaniment activism

Isasi-Díaz and Goizueta provide strong theological and ethical models of love as solidarity, accompaniment, and mutuality. Their texts emphasize (among other themes) intersubjectivity, collaborative action, and interdependence in ways that resonate with the perspectives and experiences shared by the CPTers I interviewed. This is why I have prefaced my discussion of the interviews with a brief consideration of the ideas Isasi-Díaz and Goizueta articulate. As I describe below what I heard from CPTers in Colombia, I want to place their remarks in conversation with these two liberationist theologians' arguments about solidarity. Through this conversation, I intend my discussion to not only contribute to constructing an ethic of responsible solidarity, but also to illustrate in concrete particularity what it can look like when activists are aspiring to, practicing, and reflecting on solidarity as mutuality—that is, solidarity expressed and enacted as partnerships of equality in the midst of acknowledged difference.

a. "Part of my essential being": Intersubjectivity as the ground of solidarity

As I interviewed team members in Colombia, asking what inspired them to work with CPT, I was struck by how often they named relationships as a primary motivation. They talked about the close personal ties they had built over time with the communities and local leaders the team accompanies. One CPTer told me, "I've come to know people who've become friends of mine. People who I've gotten to know well. I know their families, I know their children, I know their relatives. And I've slept in their house, I've eaten their food. I've shared in their life." This "human connection," he explained, was his biggest motivation to stay on with CPT-Colombia. "I want to see that right is done in

the world, and those kinds of things," he acknowledged. "But I think what motivates me more is the personal connection that I have."

This CPTer's words remind me of Goizueta's point that social transformation must be "rooted in an everyday accompaniment of the poor, that is, in the everyday act of walking with, living with, breaking bread with particular poor persons in the concreteness of the poor persons' everyday struggle for survival."[453] In addition, such accompaniment must occur in particular *places*, that is, in the homes, the *barrios*, the neighborhoods where these persons live. As Goizueta emphasizes, loving cannot be done in the abstract, for the universal is always mediated by the particular. Therefore, we can only love "the poor" by loving particular, flesh-and-blood poor *persons* as we build embodied, empathic relationships with them.

Yet these meaningful friendships with particular people are not only the inspiration for (or a happy benefit that occurs from) doing the often hard, sometimes risky work of international accompaniment. Such deeply felt relational connection with their accompanied partners also suggests CPTers' belief that human intersubjectivity is the ground for solidarity. This intersubjective worldview surfaced most clearly in moments when I would ask an interviewee how she or he defines or understands solidarity. While the answers given highlighted various aspects of solidarity, a persistent theme was the idea that solidarity is, as one CPTer said, "a profound image of this idea of the power of oneness." To illustrate what he meant, the CPTer spoke of Oscar Romero, the archbishop assassinated in 1980 for his stand against the violent repression of the poor in El Salvador. When Romero was threatened, he promised, "But I will rise up in the El Salvadoran people," the CPTer explained. "And that to me is an image of great

---

[453] Goizueta, *Caminemos,* 207. See also pp. 194-195.

solidarity. An idea that you are one with what is happening here, you know?... For me, that's solidarity: that I've joined, I've become united with the struggle."

With echoes of both Goizueta and Isasi-Díaz—who each presents oppression and privilege as interconnected systems that negatively affect us all, however we are located in relation to them—CPTers were careful to clarify that this "struggle" they have joined is not merely on behalf of other people, but rather touches on their own lives and interests as well. One CPTer referenced an Australian aboriginal activist and paraphrased her famous declaration to would-be allies: "If you come here to help me, leave. But if your liberation is tied to mind, then you're welcome to join in the struggle."[454] This, he explained, was how he was trying to engage in solidarity: "I'm going to do the work of joining the greater struggle for change, for better."

Or as another CPTer put it, solidarity is *not* "that you've become an advocate for somebody. It's that you too recognize the problem and are part of that group or community… that's working on a solution." In other words, solidarity is neither disinterested altruism on behalf of another nor a form of self-sacrifice. On the contrary, it can actually be a way of furthering our own true interests—yet not at the expense of other people, but rather in union with them as we realize how our lives are intertwined and, as Isasi-Díaz reminds, how our interests lie more in common than not.

---

[454] Although he could not in the moment remember her name, the activist he referenced is Lilla Watson. As reported by Michael F. Leonen ("Etiquette for Activists," in *YES! Magazine*, May 20, 2004, http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/a-conspiracy-of-hope/etiquette-for-activists), during the 1985 UN Decade for Women Conference in Nairobi, Watson stated: "If you have come to help me, I don't need your help. But if you have come because your liberation is tied to mine, come let us work together." This quote has become quite famous, is cited frequently in activist circles, and appears online and elsewhere with slight variations. According to blogger Mz.Many Names, some of the quote's familiarity and popularity likely stems from a poster created and distributed by the Northland Poster Collective in 1994. Significantly, the blog post describes how Watson prefers that the quote be credited not to her alone, but to the collective process of the Aboriginal rights group she was part of in Queensland in the 1970s. Mz.Many Names, "Attributing Words," November 3, 2008, http://unnecessaryevils.blogspot.com/2008/11/attributing-words.html.

In addition to recognizing that the struggle for liberation which they have joined touches intimately on their own lives, CPTers also acknowledged how closely their lives and very being are connected to those with whom they are trying to be in solidarity. One of the most poignant expressions of this sense of oneness came from a Colombian CPTer, who defined solidarity as "being at the side of someone or of a community, in a process of identification, like the other is an extension of myself. I am there not because I am good or because 'oh poor thing'—no. It is because others are extensions of me, part of my essential being. For this [reason] I owe solidarity to the other, because it is as if I owed it to myself." Or as Goizueta puts it, accompanying others means "living with them as internalized constituents of one's own personal identity."[455]

Another Colombian CPTer articulated a similar notion of solidarity when he stated, "Solidarity is not born out of a difference. That is, I am not solidary because I am more, or because I have more money, or because I have a car, and so for this reason I have solidarity with those who have nothing. It is not this." Instead, he insisted, solidarity is "indispensably" about identifying with others and feeling their pain. This kind of affective identification with another cannot be practiced at a distance, I would argue, nor is it something one can offer to another without being influenced oneself. Indeed, this Colombian CPTer illustrated this very point in the next moment of the interview. My next question to him was, "Are there persons or communities with whom you are trying to be in solidarity?" and he immediately responded, "I believe they are in solidarity with me. Yes. I have discovered in the work we do in CPT that this work is two-way." He went on to explain how he feels CPT's partner communities are in solidarity with him. "They have been kind to me," he said, "and they have helped me to change."

[455] Goizueta, *Caminemos,* 208.

As the interview proceeded, he talked at length (and with strong emotion) about the transforming power of relationships in the work of accompaniment, especially the life-changing relationships he has experienced while getting to know the accompanied communities. In part, this Colombian man's comments mirror what other CPTers shared about how meaningful they find the friendships they have built in the course of their work with CPT. Yet this man's remarks more fully expressed the intersubjectivity that ties us to other people.

At the close of the interview, when I asked him if he had anything further to add, he said, "Well, yes, just one thing." He began to describe how, prior to his work with CPT, he had lived in Bogotá with "absolutely no idea" of what was happening in the Colombian countryside. "Yet now that I am here," he said, "I can't imagine living without the communities, truly." Now, when he takes days off team to spend time at his home in Bogotá, he explained, he cannot stop thinking about the accompanied communities, wondering what is happening and how they are doing. "Before I could live without them," he concluded, "and now I really can't." I find this statement a striking acknowledgement of human intersubjectivity: that we truly cannot "live without them." This sense of profound relational connection then becomes the ground for concrete actions of solidarity, which I will examine further in the next section.

b. "Helping each other along the way": From walking to working together

During the interviews, the most common image CPTers used to explain solidarity was that of people walking alongside each other. One woman, when asked what first came to her mind at the mention of "solidarity," described a photograph her teammate had taken,

which showed a community leader walking through a village while a CPTer walked beside him. Other interviewees used the image more metaphorically, such as the woman who glossed solidarity as "a form of active empathy… walking together with those who are in resistance, or are fighting for their land, or for their rights. Without imposing on the other person, but walking together."

This image of walking side by side is revealing in what it connotes about the work of solidarity activism. Because walking together is the central image in Goizueta's text, I draw on his reflections as well to elaborate on what solidarity demands. First, walking implies embodied activity and forward motion. As Goizueta writes, walking is both "a concrete, physical, historical act" and an act that "implies directionality: one walks in a particular direction."[456] The CPTer I just cited named solidarity as "*active* empathy." In other words, solidarity must be more than a feeling or an attitude; it should manifest in concrete actions, aimed toward particular goals.

This echoes Isasi-Díaz's warning against a watered-down, "fashionable" solidarity that has become as simple and thin as applauding a speaker, feeling sympathy for the poor, or feeling inspired by a people's cause. The necessity of *acting* in the struggle for liberation is a clear note persistently sounded throughout Isasi-Díaz's argument. She describes these actions as "the signs and deeds of mutuality" and, further, as "eschatological glimpses" of the liberating, unfolding kin-dom of God. "Liberation is not a condition that already exists," she writes, "simply waiting for the oppressed to grasp it. Rather, liberation is a historical possibility that takes form and shape according to the actions of the oppressed and their 'friends.' Liberative actions born out of commitment to

---

[456] Goizueta, *Caminemos,* 206.

mutuality, therefore, are not only glimpses of the future but eschatological actions making parts of the future present now."[457]

In international accompaniment, at times the needed action is quite literally walking together (as the CPTer's photograph testifies) through dangerous territory, military checkpoints, or in the villages and fields where the accompanied communities are living and farming in an effort to secure their claim to the land. At other times, the needed actions might be accompanying partners to a meeting with government officials, visiting the US or Canadian embassy to lodge a complaint, planning and implementing vigils or demonstrations in the streets, or emailing news releases and urgent action calls to a global network of supporters, persuading them to make the phone calls or send the faxes that will apply pressure on the perpetrators of violence. Broadly, this image of solidarity as "walking together" communicates the importance of accompaniers being present on the ground and taking action to disrupt violence and support nonviolent resistance. But notice that it is "walking *together*," which suggests doing (or at least planning) these actions collaboratively, alongside those being accompanied. This brings up the second implication of walking with others: that it connotes equality and shared decision-making.

Goizueta underscores this point when he talks about the directionality of walking. Implicit in that directionality, he says, are questions such as "In which direction?" and "Who determines the direction?" For him, these are "ethical-political questions" that must be answered in "dialogue and interaction" with those being accompanied. Furthermore, as he has earlier pointed out, "before there can be genuine dialogue or conversation among different social groups (racial, cultural, gender, class, etc.), these

[457] Isasi-Díaz, "Solidarity," 99-100.

must be recognized as equal partners in the dialogue."[458] This importance of equality—of a level positioning between accompanier and accompanied—was named by the CPTers in their interviews. As one CPTer noted, "You're never in front of the people you're in solidarity with." Another interviewee similarly noted the equality implied in walking side by side, and then took her analysis a step further as she added, "And so we are helping each other along the way." Her words suggest not only shared activity and goals, but also a working partnership characterized by collaboration and mutual aid.

Much of this collaboration occurs as the team regularly consults with and takes direction from the accompanied communities. As one interviewee explained, "We're not dictating what their objectives should be, but we are respecting their analysis." Yet even as CPTers stressed the importance of following their partners' lead, they also emphasized the dialogic exchange between the team and these partners—reminiscent of Isasi-Díaz's depiction of the "true dialogic relationship between oppressed and 'friend.'"[459] In other words, the team does not merely take direction without question or discussion. Rather, CPTers also offer their own opinions and proposals—or sometimes, pushback.

One long-term Colombian CPTer portrayed this exchange of ideas between CPT and the accompanied communities as an effort to construct "relationships as symmetrical as possible with the communities." She explained, "We don't only say to the communities, 'Tell us, tell us, tell us' because… that is not a relationship. But as they tell

---

[458] Goizueta, *Caminemos,* 206, 180.

[459] Isasi-Díaz, "Solidarity," 97. Isasi-Díaz is clear that the mutuality of solidarity means that not only do the oppressors-turned-friends learn from the oppressed, but also that we must recognize how the oppressed need to learn from their "friends" as well. She writes, "If we fail to recognize that the 'friends' need to do more than simply help the oppressed implement their strategies for liberation, no real mutuality, no real solidarity will exist. The process of conversion that becomes an intrinsic part of the lives of the 'friends' makes it possible and necessary for them to question the oppressed about their goals. It makes it possible for the 'friends' to participate with the oppressed in creating strategies for liberation, in deepening and clarifying the understanding of mutuality that is at the heart of liberation."

us things, we also are able to respond to the community, no? In certain aspects. Not just to believe every single thing they say, but also we can kind of argue and discuss and doubt." She depicted such an exchange as grounded in the desire to have "a mutual conversation, a symmetrical one."

It is important not to confuse such mutuality and symmetry with sameness, with an eliding of differences. On the contrary, the interviewed CPTers revealed awareness of important differences between team members and accompanied partners. These differences mean that each party in the mutual relationship has something distinctive to contribute *and* to receive as they collaborate. One CPTer noted, "There's a lot of mutual benefit from the work that we do with one another." Then he went on to explain, "We [in CPT] are fulfilling a certain role in the needs of some of the communities, and they also are offering to us things that we need for us to be able to do the work that we do. And hopefully that partnership that we are building together is something that will not only help change their situation, but also is a process of learning for us, in understanding what it means to need to ask from them."

His comment reminds me of West's "communal ethic," in which different people have different responsibilities relative to how each one is positioned socially and politically. This is certainly the reality of solidarity and of accompaniment: that the partnership entails both equality between persons *and* differing levels of access to resources and influence, as well as varied forms of power that can be drawn upon. So there are multiple roles to be played within this collaborative work. But the CPTer's comment goes further than simply pointing to variable, complementary roles. He also highlights how CPT and the communities *need* each other. This brings us to the third

feature of solidarity as mutuality: interdependence. In particular, I find it significant how this man has represented CPTers as needing to learn from and ask from the communities—a portrayal that seems to challenge some of the embedded assumptions and original tactics of accompaniment, as I will explain further in the next section.

c. "Dual accompaniment": Interdependence that leads to transformation

The idea that accompaniment activism entails *mutual* aid and support emerged in several of the interviews. Two CPTers compared the work of accompaniment to a "two-way street." Another called it "dual accompaniment," insisting, "There's no way in the world that we could go into the communities that we accompany without the communities accompanying us." His teammate echoed and expanded on this sentiment, explaining, "All the communities we visit and have accompaniment agreements with, accompany us too…. They make sure that we have a place to stay. They make sure that nothing happens to us. They make sure that we are safe…. The kind of accompaniment that CPT here in Colombia does, is very much mutual."

In each interview I conducted, I asked the CPTer two related questions: "Are there people or communities with whom you're trying to be in solidarity?" and "Are there people or communities that you feel are in solidarity with you?" I was not surprised when, in answer to the first question, many of the interviewees talked about their efforts to be in solidarity with the communities CPT-Colombia accompanies. These responses seem in line with the current predominant understanding of international accompaniment as a form of transnational solidarity activism.[460] However, I had not expected the second question to elicit expressions of how the CPTers feel the accompanied communities are

[460] See chapter 3 of this dissertation, especially pp. 120-126 and 135-138.

exhibiting solidarity towards them. When I asked interviewees how they experienced that solidarity concretely, they would mention details such as those named by the CPTer just cited: ways in which the communities offer hospitality, guidance, and protection to the team. These answers feel important, worth attending to with some detail, because it seems to me they offer some evidence that the CPTers' accounts of the mutuality of accompaniment express not only aspirational desires, but also (perhaps even more) the actual interactions occurring between team members and the communities they accompany.

CPTers receive hospitality when they are hosted in and by the communities they are accompanying. Often this hospitality takes a literal form, since the communities are located some distance away (i.e. several hours of travel) from the city of Barranca, where CPT-Colombia is based. To maintain regular contact and offer some (physical) international presence, CPT-Colombia will send a small accompaniment team of two or three people to visit a community for three to five days. During these accompaniment trips, the CPTers are guests of the community. They may stay in community members' houses or eat meals at their tables. At a minimum, each family the CPTers visit will surely invite them inside and offer them coffee or lemonade. But the hospitality most deeply felt and appreciated by the CPTers I interviewed is the community's willingness to share their world, their lives, and their stories with these "foreigners." As one CPTer said, "They [the community members] often say we're giving them so much, what can they give back? But really, they are giving us so much… through the hosting in their houses and through letting us into their world, and sharing, kind of, daily life." Her words echo those of the CPTer I cited earlier in this chapter, who described the close relational

connection he feels with community members: "I've slept in their house, I've eaten their food, I've shared in their life."

In addition to naming such acts of hospitality, several of the interviewed CPTers emphasized how the accompanied communities provide the team with guidance and protection. Most broadly, this guidance occurs as the team consults with the communities to determine what plans and actions are appropriate and needed. More concretely, the CPTers often receive literal guidance through the territory, without which they might get lost or stumble into danger. As a long-term CPTer pointed out, "There are so many dangers out there that we face, that sometimes we're aware of and sometimes not aware of." He began to enumerate: "Poisonous snakes, deadly animals, large wild cats. Bees, poisonous frogs. Land mines."

This list made sense to me. During my field research, I participated in two multi-day accompaniment trips into rural areas, in which we could travel only by canoe, on motorcycle, or on foot. On these trips, the CPTers and I relied on local guides and community members for directions—and frequently, to ferry or drive us or walk with us to where we needed to go. Although I did not myself encounter the specific dangers this CPTer named, I did witness how the local Colombians were clearly more cognizant than we of how to move safely and successfully through the remote, often overgrown areas we were traversing. This particular CPTer has worked with the Colombia project for well over a decade, so he has logged many hours and days being guided through the countryside by accompanied partners.

However, in the next moment of the interview, his list took a turn I had not expected. The CPTer went on, "Armed groups who have learned to respect the

community that we are going to accompany, and if it wasn't for the community saying, 'They're coming with us, leave them alone,' we might be harmed by an armed group that is in the territory already." These words startled me because in this depiction, it seems as if the roles in accompaniment have been reversed: suddenly the local community members are the ones offering intervention and, through their presence, apparent protection to the international activists. For another five minutes or so, the CPTer continued to explain how he believes that the community members would stand up for any outsider they perceive as a partner in their struggle for justice. If armed actors physically threatened or harmed that outsider, community members would surely confront those armed actors, this man insisted. Wondering about the basis for his conviction, I asked whether community members had said or done anything to make him think this. He replied, "Yeah. They have said they would protect us at all costs." Then he added, "Which is kind of funny because they feel that we're protecting them."

I have dwelt with some detail on this moment in the interview because I believe it illuminates how deeply CPTers perceive and experience their accompaniment activism as mutual and two-way. Accompaniment as a nonviolent tactic was originally developed to offer a measure of physical and political protection to vulnerable communities, as I have detailed in chapter 3. Such protection certainly can be part of what accompaniment provides,[461] yet the protection does not simply flow one-way. Furthermore, this man was

---

[461] That accompaniment *does* provide some protection is a point that emerged in my study of international protective accompaniment (see chapter 3, especially the examples cited on pp. 127 and 136), as well as in my fieldwork research. In their interviews, several CPTers mentioned ways that accompaniment can offer physical and/or political protection to endangered partners (as noted in chapter 5), and one CPTer told me how one of the community leaders CPT-Colombia regularly accompanies had recently told a visiting delegation that he (the leader) was still alive today because of CPT's presence. In addition, during the accompaniment trip I describe in chapter 5 (see pp. 180-181), I had the opportunity to observe the power of "foreignness" at work, both as CPTers helped the Colombian human rights defenders secure the meeting with authorities, and as we moved swiftly and safely through military checkpoints during our travel.

not the only CPTer who named “protection” as one of the ways the communities accompany—or enact solidarity with—CPTers. Another team member memorably depicted the communities as “watching out for our backs in their areas, in their territories.”

Clearly, there are concrete ways CPTers need support and aid from their accompanied partners in order to continue their activism. Yet the interdependence these CPTers talked about appears to go further than that. Recall the quote from the CPTer cited at the close of the previous subsection: “And hopefully that partnership that we are building together is something that will not only help change their situation, but also is a process of learning for us.” If we read this man’s comment through the lens of Isasi-Díaz’s “true dialogic relationship,” in which both parties need to learn from each other, his words remind us how interdependence is a necessary element in the transformations that lead to justice and liberation. And indeed, in his interview, this CPTer went on to spin a vision of how the accompaniment partnership could contribute to changing, not only the immediate community’s “current situation, but also maybe the national situation, maybe even the world situation.” Much as Isasi-Díaz envisions personal conversion as a part of the larger movement toward structural change, so this man—like many of his teammates—perceived a connection between what CPTers have been learning from their partners and how such learning might change the world.

International accompaniment is obviously concerned with transforming the context of violence provoking the need for accompaniment. Yet in addition, it was striking to me how often the CPTers I interviewed mentioned ways they had personally been transformed through accompaniment relationships—ways they had been

enlightened or convicted, humbled, empowered, or freed. One CPTer, who has worked either full-time or part-time with the organization since 2000, told me, "In the process of being in solidarity, I am also somehow transformed. And freed…. It's like, becoming a fuller, more whole person, by knowing people's stories around the world." She acknowledged the trauma and heaviness that can result from witnessing so much violence and suffering—she herself has at times been "leveled" by the trauma—but she concluded, "In the end, it's made me more whole and more attuned to who I am, who I am in this kingdom of God."

For several North American CPTers, the most significant transformations they have experienced through accompaniment relationships have occurred as they have learned about privilege and power. One interviewee, who identified himself as a white, hetero-normative male, reflected on how accompaniment activism pushes participants to develop "our own deeper understanding of how violence lives within us." He explained, "I think a lot of people come to CPT with, like, 'Oh, I'm a nonviolent activist, I don't believe in violence. But as we work with communities and work together, we begin to see how we're perpetrating violence many times, as much as anyone else is." So the violence getting transformed through this work, he clarified, is "not just guns and weapons" but also that of "microaggressions." He added, "And I think CPT has offered me a way to think about how to walk through this world without doing as much damage as I [otherwise] possibly could."

In a similar vein, a long-term Canadian CPTer admitted he had learned "that we are far from being superheroes… coming in to save." Instead, he noted, "We're all doing the work together, and we have our role as an organization, but it's part of a larger

structure of building movement for change." This Canadian also discussed how CPT as a whole has experienced such a shift in self-understanding. After years of living by the motto "Getting in the way," in 2012, CPT revised their mission statement, which now reads: "Building partnerships to transform violence and oppression." The newly articulated mission reflects a growing awareness that the most important work of accompaniment—and more broadly, of solidarity—is not accomplished by thrusting oneself into the middle of a conflict to perform heroically. Nor is it achieved through altruism or self-sacrifice, performed on behalf of others while overcoming one's own interests. Rather, it is done by building partnerships and collaborations, being present over time, sharing risks and power while walking together in interdependent mutuality.

IV. Conclusion: Still wrestling with the paradox of privilege

As I noted in chapter 2, some Christian theologians and ethicists try to frame solidarity as the answer, or the antidote, to the problematic presence of systemic privilege. My argument is different. Because none of us can "shed our skin" or step outside of our own particular social locations, we can only engage in solidarity from the positions in which we stand, bringing to those efforts all of our complex, intersecting identities and life experiences. For those of us who experience forms of systemic privilege, solidarity activism will not permit us to transcend or escape that privilege. Rather, we must attend even more closely to the presence and impacts of privilege in our work. Instead of trying to collapse or resolve the paradox of privilege, we must self-consciously, critically remain in that tension.

This is the strategic realist stance I observed among the CPTers in Colombia. On the one hand, they frankly acknowledged the moral and relational problem privilege is, and they reflected on ways they can confront that problem and lessen its sway. Yet on the other hand, they also discussed why and how they choose at times to draw upon (or urge their teammates to draw upon) systemic privilege as a source of power. The practices of strategic realism—practices that include cultivating humility and awareness of self and others, contextualized power analysis, dialogue with and accountability toward partners—can help solidarity activists better navigate this paradox of privilege. Or, as one CPTer put it, to "learn to live with tension."

Nonetheless, while the presence and power of systemic privilege are part of the current reality of solidarity activism, this represents only a *part* of the reality. Therefore, wrestling with the paradox of privilege also requires that we place that paradox within a much larger frame of vision—a frame wide enough to see and name the multiple sources of power important to the work of solidarity and social change, forms of power that include local expertise and leadership, grassroots community organization and nonviolence, dialogue and collaboration across difference. This, too, is what it means to wrestle with the paradox of privilege: that we simultaneously attend to privilege *and* decenter its power, with the larger goal of ultimately dismantling the system.

Because multiple identities and forms of power are necessary in the work of solidarity, we must—as Copeland and Townes remind us—embrace, not elide, the differences among us. It is when we engage these differences as a strength, like multiple strands braided into one cord, that we can best practice a resilient "tough solidarity." This requires acknowledging our interconnectedness and interdependence. Whether we are

physically walking and working together *or* engaged in different aspects of the work of political accompaniment (e.g. writing letters or making phone calls from afar), we need each other in the shared struggle for justice.

Such tough solidarity is also hard work. It demands honesty, critical appraisal, and dialogue about discomforting truths. It demands facing our own complicity in the structural sin of systemic privilege and heeding the call to conversion. At times it may require acts of personal risk or sacrifice. Ultimately, however, what we are practicing is not an altruistic, self-sacrificial love, but rather what Isasi-Díaz describes as the "praxis of mutuality"—the transformative give-and-take relationships that stitch us together into the unfolding kin-dom of God.

Appendix: Interview Guide

Opening Statement

Thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed. I am studying solidarity and privilege in the context of faith-based activism, such as CPT. So I would like to ask you questions about your experiences with CPT and your perceptions of CPT work. Please feel free to take your time in answering the questions. You should also feel free to decline to answer any question.

I am recording the interview so that I'll have an accurate record of what we talked about. Please know that I will hold your story with care and respect. Although I will identify CPT in my dissertation, I will do my best to keep identifying personal details and experiences anonymous (unless I get explicit permission to do otherwise).

Questions

A. Personal history with CPT

Research question #1: What religious beliefs (or other religious influences) have shaped CPTers' participation in accompaniment activism?

1. How did you first get involved with CPT?

(Probe: how long ago? ... where? ... significant influences?)

2. What inspired or motivated you to get involved? Have your motivations for working with CPT changed since you first got involved?

If so: How? What do you think has caused the change?

3. *(If not mentioned already)* Were there religious or spiritual beliefs (people, practices, motivations, etc.) that inspired you to get involved? What were they?

4. Have your religious beliefs or practices changed during the time you've worked with CPT?

If so: How have they changed? What do you think has caused the change?

B. Concept of solidarity

Research question #2: How do CPTers define/understand "solidarity," and how do they feel about it (e.g. value & promote it, feel any wariness toward the concept, etc.)?

5. When you hear the word "solidarity," what images or ideas come to your mind?

6. Are there people or communities with whom you're trying to be in solidarity?

   If so: What do you do to be in solidarity with them?

7. Are there people or communities that you feel are in solidarity with you?

   If so: How do they show that solidarity?

8. Is "solidarity" a word you use [or might use] when talking about the work of CPT?

   If so: In which contexts do you use the word? *(E.g.* when talking with other CPTers? with the communities you accompany? to explain CPT to people unfamiliar with the organization?)

   If not: How do you explain the work of CPT?

   (Probe: other words or images that you think more accurately portray CPT work?)

C. Going deeper into your understanding of CPT work & the goals of that work

Research question #3: How do CPTers perceive and experience accompaniment relationships with partners and teammates?

9. The CPT mission is: "Building partnerships to transform violence and oppression." How would you explain, to someone unfamiliar with CPT work, what those partnerships are?

   (Probe: who are the people or communities involved in the partnerships? … how do the partnerships get built?)

10. How does building such partnerships transform, or help to transform, violence and oppression?

   (Probe: what factors make a partnership transformative? … are there factors that block transformation?)

11. Could you tell me examples or stories of transformative partnerships you've experienced or witnessed in your work with the Colombia team?

12. Do you think being Colombian [non-Colombian] has had an impact on how you've experienced working as part of the CPT-Colombia team? In what ways?

(Probe: in relating to team partners … to teammates … to CPT as a whole?)

D. Privilege and power

Research question #4: How do CPTers perceive and experience power getting exercised in the work of accompaniment?

13. What forms of power do you think are most significant in the context of accompaniment?

14. In CPT work, how have you seen these forms of power getting exercised?

15. How have you personally encountered or experienced these forms of power?

Research question #5: How do CPTers define/understand "systemic privilege," and how do they perceive its impact on CPT work?

16. I know in CPT we talk a lot about privilege. When you hear the word "privilege" what comes to your mind? How would you explain "privilege" (perhaps to someone who hasn't participated in CPT training/work)?

17. What sort of impact do you think privilege has on CPT work? How do you see this playing out in CPT?

18. Have you noticed any ways that CPTers with more or less privilege may engage differently in CPT work? (That work may be internal, within the organization, or external, in the practices of accompaniment.)

19. What are ways you've experienced privilege working against you in your life? Working for you?

20. How do these experiences influence the ways you engage in CPT work?

E. Closing

21. Is there anything else you would like to talk about, or anything further you want to add to what you've said?

[22. How did it feel to talk with me about your experiences and perceptions of CPT?]

Bibliography

Allen, Theodore W. *The Invention of the White Race*. New York: Verso, 1994.

Andolsen, Barbara Hilkert. “Agape in Feminist Ethics.” In *Feminist Theological Ethics: A Reader,* edited by Lois K. Daly, 146–159. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994.

———. “Social Justice, the Common Good, and New Signs of Racism.” In Cassidy and Mikulich, *Interrupting White Privilege*, 56–74. Maryknoll. NY: Orbis Books, 2007.

Barbour, John D. “Niebuhr Versus Niebuhr: The Tragic Nature of History.” *The Christian Century*, November 21, 1984.

Barndt, Joseph. *Understanding & Dismantling Racism: The Twenty-first Century Challenge to White America*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007.

Baum, Gregory. “Structures of Sin.” In Baum and Ellsberg, *The Logic of Solidarity*, 110–126.

Baum, Gregory, and Robert Ellsberg, eds. *The Logic of Solidarity: Commentaries on Pope John Paul II’s Encyclical “On Social Concern.”* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989.

Bayertz, Kurt, ed. *Solidarity*. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic, 1999.

Berger, Bruce K. “Power Over, Power With, and Power to Relations: Critical Reflections on Public Relations, the Dominant Coalition, and Activism.” *Journal of Public Relations Research* 17, no. 1 (2005): 5–28.

Beyer, Gerald J. “The Meaning of Solidarity in Catholic Social Teaching.” *Political Theology* 15, no. 1 (2014): 7–25.

Bibler-Coutin, Susan. *The Cultures of Protest: Religious Activism and the U.S. Sanctuary Movement*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1993.

Bilgrien, Marie Vianney. *Solidarity: A Principle, an Attitude, a Duty? Or the Virtue for an Interdependent World?* New York: Peter Lang, 1999.

Bishop, Anne. *Becoming an Ally: Breaking the Cycle of Oppression in People.* 2nd ed. London: Zed Books, 2002.

Blum, Lawrence. “‘White Privilege’: A Mild Critique.” *Theory and Research in Education* 6, no. 3 (2008): 309–321.

Boff, Leonardo, and Clodovis Boff. *Introducing Liberation Theology*. Translated by Paul Burns. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987. See esp. chap. 5, "A Concise History of Liberation Theology."

Boothe, Ivan, and Lee Smithey. "Privilege, Empowerment, and Nonviolent Intervention." *Peace & Change* 32, no. 1 (Jan 2007): 39–61.

Brackley, S.J., Dean, and Thomas L. Schubeck, S.J. "Moral Theology in Latin America." *Theological Studies* 63 (2002): 123–160.

Brunkhorst, Hauke. *Solidarity: From Civic Friendship to a Global Legal Community*. Translated by Jeffrey Flynn. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005.

Burrowes, Robert J. "Cross-border Nonviolent Intervention: A Typology." In Moser-Puangsuwan and Weber, *Nonviolent Intervention Across Borders,* 45–69.

Carbado, Devon W., Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, Vickie M. Mays, and Barbara Tomlinson, eds. "Intersectionality: Challenging Theory, Reframing Politics, and Transforming Movements." Special Issue, *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 10, no. 2 (Fall 2013).

Case, Kim A., ed. *Deconstructing Privilege: Teaching and Learning as Allies in the Classroom*. New York: Routledge: 2013.

Cassidy, Laurie M., and Alex Mikulich, eds. *Interrupting White Privilege: Catholic Theologians Break the Silence*. Maryknoll. NY: Orbis Books, 2007.

Celis, Leila, Maude Chalvin, Blandine Juchs, Mélissa Leblanc, and Gada Mahrouse. *Decolonizing Our Solidarity*. Translated by Mary Foster. Montreal: Projet Accompagnement Solidarité, 2011, 2014 in English.

Christian Peacemaker Teams. "About: History" and "About: Mission | Vision | Values." Website © 2015. https://cpt.org/about/history; https://cpt.org/about/mission.

———. "Statement on Identity and Membership." Under "Get Involved: Become a CPTer." Website © 2015. https://cpt.org/participate/peacemaker/membership.

Christian Peacemaker Teams and Operation Dove. *The Dangerous Road to Education*. December 2010. https://cpt.org//files/palestine/shh-report_school_patrol_2009-10-the_dangerous_road_to_education.pdf.

Clark, Howard, ed. *People Power: Unarmed Resistance and Global Solidarity.* London: Pluto Press, 2009.

Clark, Meghan J. *The Vision of Catholic Social Thought: The Virtue of Solidarity and the Praxis of Human Rights*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014.

Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge, 1991.

———. *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*. New York: Routledge, 2004.

Cone, James H. "'The Terrible Beauty of the Cross' and the Tragedy of the Lynching Tree: A Reflection on Reinhold Niebuhr." In *The Cross and the Lynching Tree,* 30–64. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012.

———. "Theology's Great Sin: Silence in the Face of White Supremacy." *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 55, no. 3–4 (2001): 1–15.

Copeland, M. Shawn. *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010.

———. "Guest Editorial." *Theological Studies* 61, no. 4 (Dec 2000): 603–608.

———. "Toward a Critical Christian Feminist Theology of Solidarity." In *Women and Theology*, edited by Mary Ann Hinsdale and Phyllis H. Kaminski, 3–38. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995.

Coy, Patrick. "Nonpartisanship, Intervention and Legality in Accompaniment: Comparative Analyses of Peace Brigades International, Christian Peacemaker Teams, and the International Solidarity Movement." *The International Journal of Human Rights* 16, no. 7 (Oct 2012): 963–981.

———. "The Privilege Problematic in International Nonviolent Accompaniment's Early Decades." *The Journal of Religion, Conflict and Peace* 4, no. 2 (Spring 2011). http://www.religionconflictpeace.org/volume-4-issue-2-spring-2011/privilege-problematic-international-nonviolent-accompaniment's-early.

CPT-Colombia. "Militarisation serving extraction." April 23, 2014. http://www.ecapcolombia.org/2014/04/militarisation-serving-extraction/#.WXOAyiMrLY0

Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *The University of Chicago Legal Forum* 140 (1989): 139–167.

———. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (July 1991): 1241.

Cunningham, Hillary. *God and Caesar at the Rio Grande: Sanctuary and the Politics of Religion*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995.

Curran, Charles. "White Privilege: My Theological Journey." In Cassidy and Mikulich, *Interrupting White Privilege*, 77–84.

Day, Keri. *Religious Resistance to Neoliberalism: Womanist and Black Feminist Perspectives*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

Day, Tammerie. *Constructing Solidarity for a Liberative Ethic: Anti-Racism, Action, and Justice*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

de Leon-Hartshorn, Iris, Tobin Miller Shearer, and Regina Shands Stoltzfus. *Set Free: A Journey Toward Solidarity Against Racism*. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001.

Douglas, Kelly Brown. "Twenty Years a Womanist." In *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*, edited by Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, 145–157. New York: New York University Press, 2006.

DuBois, W. E. B. *Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1935. Reprinted with introduction by David Levering Lewis. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Durkheim, Émile. *The Division of Labor in Society*. 1893. Translated by W. D. Halls, 1933. Reprinted New York: Free Press, 1997.

Eguren, Luis Enrique. "Developing Strategy for Accompaniment." In Clark, *People Power*, 98–107.

Ferguson, Sian. "Privilege 101: A Quick and Dirty Guide." *Everyday Feminism*, September 29, 2014. http://everdayfeminism.com/2014/09/what-is-privilege/.

Follett, Mary Parker. *Creative Experience*. New York: Longman Green and Company, 1924.

———. *Dynamic Administration: The Collected Papers of Mary Parker Follett*, edited by Henry Metcalf and Lionel Urwick. London: Pitman, 1941.

Frankenberg, Ruth. "Introduction: Local Whitenesses, Localizing Whiteness." In *Displacing Whiteness: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism*, edited by Ruth Frankenberg, 1–33. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997.

———. *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

Fule, Aurelia Takacs. "Being Human before God: Reinhold Niebuhr in Feminist Mirrors." In Gaudin and Hall, *Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971)*, 55–78.

Gaudin, Gary A., and Douglas John Hall, eds. *Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971): A Centenary Appraisal*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994.

Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.

Goizueta, Roberto S. *Caminemos Con Jesús: Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003.

Gordon, Lewis R. "Critical Reflections on Three Popular Tropes in the Study of Whiteness." In *What White Looks Like: African-American Philosophers on the Whiteness Question*, edited by George Yancy, 173–193. New York: Routledge, 2004.

Gorsline, Robin Hawley. "Shaking the Foundations: White Supremacy in the Theological Academy." In Harvey, Case, and Gorsline, *Disrupting White Supremacy from Within*, 33–62.

Grant, Jacquelyn. "The Sin of Servanthood and the Deliverance of Discipleship." In *A Troubling in my Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil & Suffering*, edited by Emilie M. Townes, 199-218. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993.

Griffin-Nolan, Ed. "Witness for Peace." In Moser-Puangsuwan and Weber, *Nonviolent Intervention Across Borders*, 279–304.

———. *Witness for Peace: A Story of Resistance*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991.

Guider, Margaret E. "Moral Imagination and the *Missio ad Gentes*." In Cassidy and Mikulich, *Interrupting White Privilege*, 95–123.

Gutiérrez, Gustavo. *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation.* Translated and edited by Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973. First published 1971 by CEP (Lima).

Haight, Roger. "The Dysfunctional Rhetoric of 'White Privilege' and the Need for Racial Solidarity." In Cassidy and Mikulich, *Interrupting White Privilege*, 85–94.

Harrison, Beverly Wildung. "The Power of Anger in the Work of Love." In *Making the Connections: Essays in Feminist Social Ethics,* edited by Carol S. Robb, 1–21. Boston: Beacon Press, 1985.

———. "Theological Reflections in the Struggle for Liberation: A Feminist Perspective." In *Making the Connections*, 235–266.

Harvey, Jennifer. *Dear White Christians: For Those Still Longing for Racial Reconciliation*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2014.

———. “Race and Reparations: The Material Logics of White Supremacy.” In Harvey, Case, and Gorsline, *Disrupting White Supremacy from Within*, 91–122.

———. *Whiteness and Morality: Pursuing Racial Justice through Reparations and Sovereignty*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Harvey, Jennifer, Karin A. Case, and Robin Hawley Gorsline, eds. *Disrupting White Supremacy from Within: White People On What We Need To Do.* Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2004.

Haugaard, Mark. “Editorial: Reflections upon Power Over, Power To, Power With, and the Four Dimensions of Power.” *Journal of Political Power* 5, no. 3 (2012): 353–358.

Hennink, Monique, Inge Hutter, and Ajay Bailey. *Qualitative Research Methods*. London: SAGE Publications, 2011.

Hinze, Christine Firer. “Over, Under, Around, and Through: Ethics, Solidarity, and the Saints.” *CTSA Proceedings* 66 (2011): 33–60.

Hobgood, Mary Elizabeth. “Conflicting Paradigms in Social Analysis.” In Baum and Ellsberg, *The Logic of Solidarity*, 167–185.

———. *Dismantling Privilege: An Ethics of Accountability.* Rev. ed. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2009.

———. “White Economic and Erotic Disempowerment: A Theological Exploration in the Struggle against Racism.” In Cassidy and Mikulich, *Interrupting White Privilege*, 40–55.

Hooker, Juliet. *Race and the Politics of Solidarity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Isasi-Díaz, Ada María. *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996. See esp. chap. 5, “Solidarity: Love of Neighbor in the Twenty-First Century.”

———. “Solidarity: Love of Neighbor in the 1980s.” In *Feminist Theological Ethics*, edited by Lois K. Daly, 77–87. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994.

Jackson, Timothy P. *The Priority of Love: Christian Charity and Social Justice*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003.

John Paul II. “Encyclical Letter: *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*.” In Baum and Ellsberg, *The Logic of Solidarity*, 1–62.

Johnson, Allan G. *Privilege, Power, and Difference*. 2nd ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2006.

Kellerman, Bill. “Apologist for Power: The Long Shadow of Reinhold Niebuhr’s Christian Realism.” *Sojourner’s*, March 14, 1987.

Kendall, Frances. *Understanding White Privilege: Creating Pathways to Authentic Relationships Across Race*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

Kern, Kathleen. “Christian Peacemaker Teams.” In Moser-Puangsuwan and Weber, *Nonviolent Intervention Across Borders*, 175–190.

———. “From Haiti to Hebron with a Brief Stop in Washington, D.C.: The CPT Experiment.” In *From the Ground Up: Mennonite Contributions to International Peacebuilding*, edited by Cynthia Sampson and John Paul Lederach, 183–200. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

———. *In Harm’s Way: A History of Christian Peacemaker Teams*. Cambridge, U.K.: Lutterworth Press, 2009.

Kindy, Erin. “Structural Racism and Christian Peacemaker Teams.” CPTnet, October 19, 2006. https://cpt.org/cptnet/2006/10/19/torontochicago-structural-racism-and-christian-peacemaker-teams.

Koopman, Sara. “Making space for peace: International accompaniment in Colombia (2007-2009).” PhD diss., University of British Colombia, 2012.

———. “Making space for peace: International protective accompaniment in Colombia.” In *Geographies of Peace*, edited by Fiona McConnell, Nick Megoran, and Philippa Williams, 109–130. London: I. B. Tauris, 2014.

Lamb, Matthew L. “Solidarity.” In *The New Dictionary of Catholic Social Thought,* edited by Judith A. Dwyer, 908–912. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1994.

Lamberty, Kim. *Eyes from the Outside: Christian Mission in Zones of Violent Conflict*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014.

Leonen, Michael F. “Etiquette for Activists.” *YES! Magazine*, May 20, 2004. http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/a-conspiracy-of-hope/etiquette-for-activists.

Levine-Rasky, Cynthia. “Critical/Relational/Contextual: Toward a Model for Studying Whiteness.” In Levine-Rasky, *Working through Whiteness: International Perspectives*, 319–352.

———, ed. *Working through Whiteness: International Perspectives*. New York: State University of New York, 2002.

Levitt, Barry. "Theorizing Accompaniment." In *Journeys of Fear: Refugee Return and National Transformation in Guatemala*, edited by Liisa North and Alan B. Simmons, 237–254. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1999.

Lipsitz, George. *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998.

Lorentzen, Robin. *Women and the Sanctuary Movement*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991.

Lovin, Robin. "Christian Realism for the Twenty-First Century." *Journal of Religious Ethics* 37, no. 4 (2009): 669–682.

———. "Reinhold Niebuhr: Impact and Implications." *Political Theology* 6, no. 4 (2005): 459–471.

Luzárraga, Ramón. "Charity, Works of." In *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics*, edited by Joel B. Green, 130–133. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011.

MacNichol, Sally Noland. "'We Make the Road by Walking': Reflections on the Legacy of White Anti-Racist Activism." In Harvey, Case, and Gorsline, *Disrupting White Supremacy from Within*, 188–215.

Mahony, Liam. "Peace Brigades International: Nonviolence in Action." In Moser-Puangsuwan and Weber, *Nonviolent Intervention Across Borders*, 133–162.

———. "Peaceful strategies for protecting human rights defenders." *Peace Talks*, June 25, 2010. Radio program and transcript, www.goodradioshows.org.

———. *Proactive Presence: Field Strategies for Civilian Protection*. Geneva: Henre Dunant Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, 2006.

———. *Side by Side: Protecting and Encouraging Threatened Activists with Unarmed International Accompaniment*. Minneapolis: New Tactics Project of the Center for Victims of Torture, 2004.

Mahony, Liam, and Luis Enrique Eguren. *Unarmed Bodyguards: International Accompaniment for the Protection of Human Rights*. West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press, 1997.

Mahrouse, Gada. *Conflicted Commitments: Race, Privilege, and Power in Transnational Solidarity Activism*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014.

Martin, Brian. "Making Accompaniment Effective." In Clark, *People Power*, 93–97.

Massingale, Bryan N. "James Cone and Recent Catholic Episcopal Teaching on Racism." *Theological Studies* 61, no. 4 (Dec 2000): 700–730.

McIntosh, Peggy. "Reflections and Future Directions for Privilege Studies." *Journal of Social Issues* 68, no. 1 (2012): 194–206.

———. "Teaching about Privilege: Transforming Learning Ignorance into Usable Knowledge." In Case, *Deconstructing Privilege*, xi–xvi.

———. "White Privilege, Color, and Crime: A Personal Account." In *Images of Color, Images of Crime,* edited by Coramae Richey Mann, Marjorie S. Katz, and Nancy Rodriguez. Los Angeles: Roxbury Publishing Company, 1988.

———. "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women's Studies." 1988. Reprinted in *Privilege and Prejudice: Twenty Years with the Invisible Knapsack*, edited by Karen Weekes, 7–18. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009.

Miles, Rebekah L. *The Bonds of Freedom: Feminist Theology and Christian Realism.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Miller, Joseph S. "A History of the Mennonite Conciliation Service, International Conciliation Service, and Christian Peacemaker Teams." In *From the Ground Up: Mennonite Contributions to International Peacebuilding*, edited by Cynthia Sampson and John Paul Lederach, 3–29. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Moe-Lobeda, Cynthia. "Being Church as, in, and against White Privilege." In *Transformed Lutheran Theologies: Feminist, Womanist, and Mujerista Perspectives*, edited by Mary J. Steufert, 197–210. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010.

Morrison, Sylvia. "Could This Be Our Finest (H)Our?" CPTnet, March 1, 2009. https://www.cpt.org/content/undoing-racism.

———. "Undoing Oppressions: The Journey Continues." CPTnet, December 31, 2014. https://cpt.org//news/sott/articles/2014/cpt-international-undoing-oppressions-journey-continues.

Moser-Puangsuwan, Yeshua, and Thomas Weber, eds. *Nonviolent Intervention Across Borders: A Recurrent Vision*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, 2000.

Mz.Many Names. "Attributing Words." November 3, 2008. http://unnecessaryevils.blogspot.com/2008/11/attributing-words.html.

Niebuhr, Reinhold. "Augustine's Political Realism." In *Christian Realism and Political Problems*, 119–146. New York: Scribner & Sons, 1953.

———. *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1935. Reprinted New York: Seabury Press, 1979.

———. *The Irony of American History*. New York: Scribner & Sons, 1952. Reprinted Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.

———. *Moral Man and Immoral Society*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932.

———. "Must we do nothing?" *The Christian Century*, March 30, 1932.

———. *The Nature and Destiny of Man*. 2 vols. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941–1943. Reprinted with introduction by Robin W. Lovin. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996.

———. "Theology and Political Thought in the Western World." In *Faith and Politics*, edited by Ronald H. Stone, 55–66. New York: George Braziller, 1968.

———. "Why the Christian Church is Not Pacifist." London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1940. Reprinted in *The Essential Reinhold Niebuhr: Selected Essays and Addresses*, edited and introduced by Robert McAfee Brown, 102–119. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987.

Nilson, Jon. "Confessions of a White Catholic Racist Theologian." In Cassidy and Mikulich, *Interrupting White Privilege*, 15–39.

Nonviolent Peaceforce. "Our Mission." Under "Who We Are: Mission & History." Website © 2017. http://www.nonviolentpeaceforce.org/mission-history.

Nygren, Anders. *Agape and Eros: The Christian Idea of Love*. 1932–1939, revised 1953. Translated Philip S. Watson. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.

O'Connor, Anne-Marie. "In West Bank, Israeli Troops Still Escort Palestinian Children to School." *The Washington Post*, November 1, 2014. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/in-the-west-bank-israeli-troops-still-escort-palestinian-children-to-school/2014/11/01/68d513ca-5b89-11e4-b812-38518ae74c67_story.html?utm_term=.4cf5ae332d22.

Ogletree, Thomas W. "Love, Love Command." In *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics*, edited by Joel B. Green, 490–494. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011.

Okey, Stephen. "Responsibility, Humility, and Intervention: A Niebuhrian Assessment of *The Responsibility to Protect*." *Political Theology* 14, no. 6 (2013): 699–720.

Omi, Michael, and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States*. 3rd ed. New York: Routledge, 2015.

Pattillo-McCoy, Mary. *Black Picket Fences: Privilege and Peril among the Black Middle Class*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

Peace Brigades International. “About PBI: Our History.” Accessed February 27, 2018. http://www.peacebrigades.org/about-pbi/pbi-history/?L=0.

Pease, Bob. *Undoing Privilege: Unearned Advantage in a Divided World*. London: Zed Books, 2010.

Perrin, Paul B., Sriya Bhattacharyya, Daniel J. Snipes, Rebecca R. Hubbard, Martin Heesacker, Jenna M. Calton, Ruperto M. Perez, and Jill Lee-Barber. “Teaching Social Justice Ally Development among Privileged Students.” In Case, *Deconstructing Privilege*, 49–62.

Peters, Rebecca Todd. *Solidarity Ethics: Transformation in a Globalized World*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014.

Phelps, O.P., Jamie T. “Communion Ecclesiology and Black Liberation Theology.” *Theological Studies* 61, no. 4 (Dec 2000): 672–699.

Puar, Jasbir. “‘I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess’: Intersectionality, Assemblage, and Affective Politics.” *inventions* (Aug 2011), transversal texts of the eipcp – European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies. http://eipcp.net/transversal/0811/puar/en.

———. *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007.

Rasmussen, Larry L. “The Contours of Niebuhr’s Mind” In Gaudin and Hall, *Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971)*, 143–153.

———. “Niebuhr on Power: Assessment and Critique.” In Gaudin and Hall, *Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971)*, 173–185.

Rauschenbusch, Walter. *Christianity and the Social Crisis*. New York: Macmillan, 1907.

———. *Theology for the Social Gospel*. New York: Macmillan, 1917.

Rincón, Sandra Milena. “The Challenge Continues.” Address presented at Mennonite World Conference, Asunción, Paraguay, July 2009. Translated by Carol Rose. Text available on the CPT website, http://www.cpt.org/resources/writings/rincon-challenge-continues.

Roediger, David R. *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*. New York: Verso, 1991.

———. *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White*. New York: Basic Books, 2005.

Rothenberg, Paula S., ed. *White Privilege: Essential Readings on the Other Side of Racism*. 3rd ed. New York: Worth Publishers, 2008.

Rothman, Joshua. "The Origins of 'Privilege.'" *The New Yorker,* May 12, 2014. http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/the-origins-of-privilege.

Saiving, Valerie. "The Human Situation: A Feminine View." *The Journal of Religion* (April 1960): 100–112. Reprinted in *WomanSpirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*, edited by Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow, 25–42. San Francisco: Harper, 1979.

Scharen, Christian, and Aana Marie Vigen, eds. *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics.* New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011.

Schelling, Thomas. *The Strategy of Conflict*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960.

Schirch, Lisa. *Civilian Peacekeeping: Preventing Violence and Making Space for Democracy*. Uppsala, Sweden: Life & Peace Institute, 2006. Originally published as *Keeping the Peace: Exploring Civilian Alternatives in Conflict Prevention*, 1995.

———. *The Little Book of Strategic Peacebuilding*. Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2004.

Scholz, Sally J. *Political Solidarity*. University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2008.

Schweitzer, Christine. "Introduction: Civilian Peacekeeping – A Barely Tapped Resource." In *Civilian Peacekeeping: A Barely Tapped Resource,* edited by Christine Schweitzer, 7–16. Belm-Vehrte, Germany: Sozio Publishing, 2009.

———. "Civilian Peacekeeping: Providing Protection Without Sticks and Carrots?" In Clark, *People Power,* 112–121.

Schweitzer, Christine, Donna Howard, Mareike Junge, Corey Levine, Carl Stieren, and Tim Wallis. *Nonviolent Peaceforce Feasibility Study*. St. Paul, MN: Nonviolent Peaceforce, 2001. http://nvpf.org/about-3/about-12/111-nonviolent-peaceforce-feasibility-study.

Shantz, Pierre. "The deadly cost of gold mining." October 13, 2011. *Prayer. Resistance. Community: a blog of the Christian Peacemaker Teams Colombia*. https://cptcolombia.wordpress.com/2011/10/13/the-deadly-cost-of-gold-mining/

Sider, Ron. "God's People Reconciling." Address presented at Mennonite World Conference, Strasbourg, France, 1984. Text available on the CPT website, http://www.cpt.org/resources/writings/sider.

Snarr, C. Melissa. *All You That Labor: Religion and Ethics in the Living Wage Movement.* New York: New York University Press, 2011.

Sobrino, Jon, and Juan Hernandez Pico. *Theology of Christian Solidarity*. Translated by Phillip Berryman. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography (1985)." In *The Spivak Reader,* edited by Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean, 203-236. New York: Routledge, 1996.

Stjernø, Steinar. *Solidarity in Europe: The History of an Idea*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Tabb, William K. "John Paul II and Fidel Castro: Two Views of Development." In Baum and Ellsberg, *The Logic of Solidarity*, 155–166.

Tanner, Kathryn. *Economy of Grace*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005.

Townes, Emilie M. *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

Thistlethwaite, Susan Brooks, and Mary Potter Engel, eds. *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside*. Rev. ed. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998.

United Nations. "11 organizations win approval for consultative status as NGO committee postpones action on applications of 26 others." May 15, 2007. Meetings Coverage and Press Releases website. https://www.un.org/press/en/2007/ecosoc6267.doc.htm.

———. "Principles of Peacekeeping" and "What is peacekeeping." United Nations Peacekeeping website. Accessed March 9, 2018. https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/principles-of-peacekeeping; https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/what-is-peacekeeping.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. "Solidarity." Under "Beliefs and Teachings: What We Believe: Catholic Social Teaching." Website © 2018. http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/solidarity.cfm.

Vasko, Elizabeth T. *Beyond Apathy: A Theology for Bystanders*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015.

Welch, Sharon D. *Communities of Resistance and Solidarity: A Feminist Theology of Liberation.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985.

Weber, Clare. *Visions of Solidarity: U.S. Peace Activists in Nicaragua From War to Women's Activism and Globalization*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006.

Weber, Thomas. "A History of Nonviolent Interposition and Accompaniment." In Moser-Puangsuwan and Weber, *Nonviolent Intervention Across Borders*, 15–41.

Weinberg, Cory. "The White Privilege Moment." *Inside Higher Ed*, May 28, 2014. https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/05/28/academics-who-study-white-privilege-experience-attention-and-criticism.

West, Traci C. "Constructing Ethics: Reinhold Niebuhr and Harlem Women Activists." *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 24, no. 1 (Spr/Sum 2004): 24–49.

———. *Disruptive Christian Ethics: When Racism and Women's Lives Matter*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006.

———. "Reinhold Niebuhr on Realism." In *Beyond the Pale: Reading Ethics from the Margins*, edited by Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas and Miguel A. De La Torre, 119–128. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011.

Wise, Tim. *White Like Me: Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son*. New York: Soft Skull Press, 2007.

Wise, Tim, and Kim A. Case. "Pedagogy for the Privileged: Addressing Inequality and Injustice without Shame or Blame." In Case, *Deconstructing Privilege*, 17–33.

Witness for Peace. "About Us: Mission & History." Accessed March 9, 2018. http://witnessforpeace.org/about-us/mission-history/.

Yoder, John Howard. *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution*. Edited by Theodore J. Koontz and Andy Alexis-Baker. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009.