

MAGNETIZED RACIALIZATIONS OF SPACE: HABITUAL BODIES AND BODILY HABITS

Abstract:

Examining the workings of bodily/visual registries in contemporary Suriname, this paper hypothesizes alleged ventriloquizing racial practices that not only are prevalent in Suriname, but are also ubiquitous in the Netherlands, through the ideology of color-blindness/postraciality. By critically assessing the concept of the habitual body, the paper asks which phenomenological and performative processes are operating in Suriname that have seemingly sidelined a discussion on the insidious nature of racializing processes. The paper further argues that a magnetization of racial identities has been present in the former Dutch colony, one which has effectively unraced white identity, and thereby clouded other forms of racialization, processes that arguably endure both in Suriname and in the Netherlands. In order to do so, the paper firstly will discuss different positions on the concept of race. It then will demonstrate how institutional frameworks are enmeshed in racialization, in particular how white Dutch structures continue to inform spatial formations in Suriname. Consequently, two accounts of racial encounters in Suriname will highlight how the magnetization of racial identities is performatively produced. Then, a discussion on the interlocking of ocularity, corporeality, and habituality will illustrate how the hypothesis of ventriloquized racism operates.

The paper concludes that understanding and coming to terms with race as a social construct is necessary precisely to counter the widespread ideology of color-blindness, which is a tool to ventriloquize, or neatly package, the normativity of whiteness and a way to negate the ongoing primacy of and the workings of the deep workings of white selves.

On 25 November, 1975 hundreds of Dutch citizens - about to become Surinamese citizens - put on white, red, green, and yellow clothes and walked onto a field in front of a white building in the center of the city of Paramaribo. Configuring their bodies in a certain pattern, they collectively formed and became the new Surinamese national flag, as thousands looked on and celebrations started marking the formal independence of the Dutch Caribbean colony. The bodily constitution of the national flag embodied a demarcation point from which a new Surinamese identity would be constructed. The myriad of different ethnic groups would be united under the banner of the rainbow nation, thereby ending a period of more than 320 years of Dutch colonial rule. 45 years onwards, a Surinamese researcher returned to his place of birth - Paramaribo - and was struck by the ways that ethnic differences had slid into racial categorizations. Many conversations in Suriname, in particular those among members of racial groups seemed to unashamedly attach racial epithets to members of other racial groups. This practice reminded him of an observation made by Martín Alcoff, who suggested a differentiation between *ethnic*, and *racial* identity¹, a difference that emerges from: "...visible signs on the body."² Her insightful analysis of how ethnic characteristics seem to slide over into racial semantics, is explained by bold steps that do not shy away from foregrounding the ways in which we humans arguably perceive and judge others:

¹ In line with Martín Alcoff, I stress the need to come to terms with identity categories, because "Censoring identity talk only impedes the project of reassessing identities and reimagining their possible interrelationships. The meanings of identities are fluid, but segregation and silence hinder the process in which the meanings of identities may be understood more comprehensively and accurately, and hence transformed." Linda Martín Alcoff. *The Future of Whiteness* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), 43.

² Linda Martín Alcoff. *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 191.

...this mediation through the visible, working on both the inside and the outside, both on the way we read ourselves and the way others read us, is what is unique to racialized identities as opposed to ethnic and cultural identities. The criteria thought to determine racial identity have ranged from ancestry, experience, self-understanding, to habits and practices, yet these sources are coded through visible inscriptions on the body. The processes by which racial identities are produced work through the shapes and shades of human morphology, the size and shape of the nose, the design of the eye, the breadth of the cheekbones, the texture of hair, and the intensity of pigment, and these subordinate other markers such as dress, customs, and practices. And the visual registry thus produced has been correlated with rational capacity, epistemic reliability, moral condition, and, of course, aesthetic value.³

Examining the workings of such visual registries in contemporary Suriname, this paper hypothesizes alleged ventriloquizing⁴ practices that not only are prevalent in Suriname, but are also ubiquitous in the Netherlands, through the ideology of color-blindness⁵/postraciality. By

³ Martín Alcoff, 2005, 191.

⁴ I hypothesize that racial discourse tends to be framed as ethnic or cultural, akin to the practice of a ventriloquist whose puppet speaks “non-racial language” which effectively and powerfully stimulates processes of racialization. Following Omi and Winant, I would define racialization as: “...the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice, or group.” Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015), 110.

⁵ Shannon Sullivan stresses the importance to understand the link between color-blindness and racism: “...a person’s alleged belief in color blindness can go hand in hand with racist worldviews in which some people are seen as more equal than others. Parents who claimed to be color-blind regularly voiced contradictory ideas at the same time, for example, explaining that if their white daughter were to marry a nonwhite person, they would be more comfortable with an Asian man than a black man because “Asians are just like—white.” Hiding behind color blindness makes it difficult, if not impossible, to see how white privileged beliefs and habits

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SECTION I: POSITIONS ON RACE

As the very category of race is widely contested in Suriname and in the Netherlands, it is necessary to position this paper into the debates. As mentioned above, and as can be observed,

continue to function in one's life. The result is a strange kind of pride in one's interpersonal cluelessness" *Good White People: The Problem with Middle-Class Anti-Racism* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 2014), 172.

⁶ Critical race theory, I would like to propose, is a necessarily developing work-in-progress, as is my own perspective on which methods and theories, concepts and practices to employ in the furthering of science. My focus on Suriname, I realized, was always already undergirded by racial colonialism that is very much present in Suriname, which has led to the commitment to analyze the workings of contemporary entanglements of race and coloniality in the Netherlands.

race is not recognized as an official social category in Suriname and in the Netherlands. In Suriname, ethnic groups are recognized, while in the Netherlands, ethnic “minorities”⁷ are. Importantly, the dominant group, white Dutch people are not named as such in official documents. Whiteness, as many critical race theorists have argued is normative, yet oftentimes remains unmarked. Yancy argues by meticulously analyzing the operations of whiteness through the lived experiences in everyday life, that:

To say that whiteness is deemed the transcendental norm is to say that whiteness takes itself to be that which remains the *same* across a field of difference. Indeed, it determines what is deemed different without itself being defined by that system of difference.

Whiteness is that according to which what is nonwhite is rendered other, marginal, ersatz, strange, native, inferior, uncivilized, and ugly.⁸

His position is diametrically opposed to what is referred to as a nominalist approach to race, which is outlined by Martín Alcoff as follows:

Nominalism (or eliminativism). Race is not real, meaning that racial terms do not refer to anything “really real,” principally because recent science has invalidated race as a

⁷ Interestingly, “ethnic minorities” in the Netherlands are marked, but the dominant racial group, white Dutch people, are not marked in official government data. In other words, the normative is invisibilized, whereas deviance is (hyper-)visibilized.

⁸ George Yancy, *Black Bodies, White Gazes: The Continuing Significance of Race* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 22.

salient or even meaningful biological category. It is the biological meaning of racial concepts that have led to racism, but racial concepts are necessarily biological claims (as opposed to ethnic or cultural concepts, for example). Therefore, the use of racial concepts should be avoided in order to be metaphysically accurate as well as to further an antiracist agenda.⁹

This position assumes that because race cannot be condensed to a quantifiable biological concept, it does not exist. However, by doing so, a possible and enduring *social* meaning¹⁰ that derives from affective, economical, political-ideological, and cultural-historical discourses and practices is negated. A strategy to avoid racial concepts does not erase the ubiquity of racializing processes that clearly can be observed in Suriname and in the Netherlands. In this paper, I will

⁹ Martín Alcoff, 2005, 182.

¹⁰ This social meaning should be seen in light of Omi and Winant's elaboration in their text *Racial Formation*, where they state that: "One of our aims here is to disrupt and reorganize the rigid and antinomic framework of essence- versus- illusion in which race is theorized and debated. We understand race as an unstable and "decentered" complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle. With this in mind, we advance the following definition: *Race is a concept that signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies.* Although the concept of race invokes seemingly biologically based human characteristics (so- called phenotypes), selection of these particular human features for purposes of racial signification is always and necessarily a social and historical process. Indeed, the categories employed to differentiate among human beings along racial lines reveal themselves, upon serious examination, to be at best imprecise, and at worst completely arbitrary. They may be arbitrary, but they are not meaningless. Race is strategic; race does ideological and political work. Despite the problematic nature of racial categorization, it should be apparent that there is a crucial and non- reducible *visual dimension* to the definition and understanding of racial categories. Bodies are visually read and narrated in ways that draw upon an ensemble of symbolic meanings and associations. Corporeal distinctions are common; they become essentialized. Perceived differences in skin color, physical build, hair texture, the structure of cheek bones, the shape of the nose, or the presence/absence of an epicanthic fold are understood as the manifestations of more profound differences that are situated *within* racially identified persons: differences in such qualities as intelligence, athletic ability, temperament, and sexuality, among other traits" (Omi and Winant, 110).

not discuss the popular cultural phenomenon of Zwarte Piet, but ample scientific and activist attention has been given in recent years to the ways that such images and traditions powerfully perpetuate racism.¹¹

On what can be seen as the opposite spectrum of the nominalist approach is what is referred to as the essentialist position. Martín Alcoff outlines about this position that: “Race is an elemental category of identity with explanatory power. Members of racial groups share a set of characteristics, a set of political interests, and a historical destiny. The problem of racism has affected the content given to racial description rather than the method of racial description itself.”¹²

This particular approach does acknowledge that racial groups have certain shared characteristics, yet to assume that this then entails common political interests and a historical destiny, I would argue, overdetermines those members of a certain racial group by fixating characteristics onto them, and thereby assuming that in some distant future or in an entirely different context, such determinations would be absolute. Personal experiences of widely varying levels of racialization, or even a lack thereof, in social contexts as varied as India, the Netherlands and Suriname¹³ indicate that a particular social context coupled with a certain cultural history plays a crucial role in to what extent and whether a subject may be racialized. Having said this, societies that are dominated by white racial groups, are, I argue, more likely to produce racializing processes in

¹¹ For a discussion on Zwarte Piet and racism, I would like to point to the website of the European Race and Imagery Foundation: <https://erifonline.org/category/research/>

¹² Martín Alcoff, 2005, 182.

¹³ My experiences of racialization are detailed in a forthcoming book, *Dismantling Colonial Racism: Travelogue, Imagery, Poetics*.

the sense that binary racial constructions seem to be prevalent, while its operation is often negated (I will return to the dangerous consequences of such ventriloquizing racial discourses in the conclusion of this paper).

Lastly, an approach that is labelled as contextualist should be foregrounded here, as I will embrace this particular position before entering into the analyses in the following sections. Martín Alcoff states that within this framework: “Race is socially constructed, historically malleable, culturally contextual, and reproduced through learned perceptual practices. Whether or not it is valid to use racial concepts and whether or not their use will have positive or negative political effects depends on the context.”¹⁴

As we will see in the following analyses of “magnetized” racialization processes through institutional frameworks and intersubjective encounters, the reproduction and perpetuation of racial identities operates within specific social-ontological contexts which engender quite strongly the conditions for identity formation in Suriname. Moreover, as will be demonstrated, the lived realities of Brown and Black people give rise to the operation of interlocking structures of racial formation, that seem to be always already present throughout Suriname and in the Netherlands. More specifically, subjectivist-contextualist approaches, as Martín Alcoff asserts: “...begin from the lived experience of racialization can reveal how race is constitutive of bodily experience, subjectivity, judgment, and epistemic relationships. Such subjective descriptions, as Fanon gives, show how one’s designated race is a constitutive element of fundamental, everyday embodied existence, psychic life, and social interaction.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Martín Alcoff, 2005, 182.

¹⁵ Martín Alcoff, 2005, 183.

To reiterate, the Dutch structures that have quite literally given shape to the nation-state of Suriname (such as the description of the formation of the flag on Independence Square in Paramaribo in the introduction of this paper) do not only constitute the central spatiality around which the capital city was built, but in the social imaginary, the white colonial buildings, as I will illustrate now, radiate a colonial history and contemporaneity that feeds into particular epistemological and phenomenological configurations encompassing and elevating, as I will argue, a *racializing Dutchness* that has all but vanished in Suriname.

SECTION II: MAGNITIZED SPACE IN PARAMARIBO

Early in the morning, thousands of schoolchildren, carefully dressed uniformly to assume a sense of sameness, flock the streets of Paramaribo and rush to their educational institutions. And in many, if not all, so-called post-colonies, the national school system is structured following the blueprint that the former colonial power had imposed on the population. In this vein, and to the surprise of some, these children learn about the world, are taught about geography, history, and biology, in the language that has been the dominant linguistic mode since the 1660s, i.e. Dutch.¹⁶ Because of the unchallenged status that the Dutch language has in school, all the other languages that are being spoken in Suriname¹⁷ (e.g. Sranan Tongo, the de facto “lingua franca” and

¹⁶ For more about the history on Dutch colonialism in Suriname, see Kwame Nimako and Glenn Willemsen. *The Dutch Atlantic: Slavery, Abolition, and Emancipation*. London: Pluto Press, 2011.

¹⁷ For more on Surinamese languages, see Jacques Arends and Eithne Carlin. *Atlas of the Languages of Suriname*. Leiden: KITLV, 2002.

Sarnami, spoken by the largest ethnic group in Suriname, the Indian-Surinamese) are relegated a lesser status in the linguistic hierarchy. What I would like to propose in a rather bold step, is that because of the vast history of Dutch colonialism in Suriname, that not only institutional structures such as schools still inhabit the colonial character and cultural memory of white Dutch people, but that in the social imaginary, the very act of having to speak the language of the former colonizer constructs a mental image in which Surinamese cultures (through the inferior position of its other languages) internalizes and sustains the notion that culture and civilization are written in the Dutch language. The powerful message, I contend, is that because of this linguistic hierarchy, a cultural hierarchy emerges, which is perpetuated by the structures of an education system that is a blueprint of educational Dutchness. Although children speak many other languages at home, the moment they enter school, Dutch becomes the mode in which the world should be perceived and reflected. In this sense, a colonial hierarchy continues to seep into the minds of every Surinamese citizen. Not only is the mode of instruction a continuous reinscription of old colonial structures, but the order in which children are “civilized” operates, I argue, to fixate the spaces of education as sites in which the very semantic fundamentals of Surinamese socio-ontology are sedimented. The bodies of children, then, enter into what Sullivan suggests is a “co-constitutive relationship between space and bodies, the situatedness of human bodily life means that space is not primarily experienced as neutral, but as “magnetized” with particular meanings.”¹⁸ Spaces, I posit, inhabit and radiate, lived colonial structures that are

¹⁸ Shannon Sullivan, “The Racialization of Space: Towards a Phenomenological Account of Raced and Antiracist Spatiality” in *The Problems of Resistance: Studies in Alternate Political Cultures*, ed. by Steve Martinot and Joy James (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2001), 88-89.

reproduced through a matrix of power that encapsulates the subjects as they enter into the schools, reinforced by the uniformity of dress, resulting in bodies becoming entangled in a colonial web of subjugation in which the racial component is - as I will demonstrate below in the remainder of this paper - is insidiously operating.

The oceanic bond between the Dutch province of Zeeland and colonial “remnants” does not only extend to spaces like Aotearoa/”New Zealand” but has cemented a powerful legacy in Suriname as well. Situated along a bend in the Suriname river, the aptly named Fort Zeelandia reminds any onlooker since the seventeenth century that this location is a supreme site of power. Its walls of red brick enforce its eternal grip and panoptical power on whoever passes on the river and atop its walls, one can imagine figures of authority reigning down deadly force by means of gun and cannon fire. The schoolchildren in the previous section are bound to visit the Fort, which has been turned into a museum by the Surinamese authorities. In the museum, colonial history is revisited, as groups of white Dutch bodies also flock the monumental building, thereby realigning themselves – knowingly or unknowingly – with centuries of Dutch hegemony. Magnetization of space at this location, I would claim, cannot be detached from the functions that the Fort has had in previous centuries. Building on one particular insight as regards the racialization of space outlined by Sullivan, which urges us to consider that “...space is not racially neutral or empty,”¹⁹ I wish to go deeper into what I would refer to is an affective criticality that arose while thinking through the processes that underlie the racial nature of spaces, in this instance in Suriname. For one of the onlookers assessing power relations in the Fort has been me, as I tried to come to terms with the legacies of Dutch colonialism in Suriname during several visits to the Caribbean “post-colony.” As I observed white bodies in Suriname, I

¹⁹ Shannon Sullivan, 2001, 101.

began to reflect on and *feel* the meaning of entitlement as an embodiment of motility materialized in front of me. “White people may freely transact beyond their immediately inhabited spaces. The whiteness of their space is expansive and thus enables, rather than inhibits, their transactions,”²⁰ Sullivan maintains. Indeed, I pondered, as I wondered what elements of recognition could enter the minds of white Dutch people as they were confronted with Dutch architecture and narrative histories at locations such as Fort Zeelandia. Without disregarding possible critical perceptions of Dutch colonialism by white Dutch people, I want to suggest that it is productive for the broader analysis of racialization processes in Suriname to problematize and decipher the effects of performative reinscription and the result of phenomenological inquiry. This analysis should be undertaken as the visual and bodily registry arguably operates profoundly in every subject and thus co-constructs elements of racial formation. In what follows, I draw on theories formulated by Omi and Winant among others. They propose that : “The process of race making, and its reverberations throughout the social order, is what we call racial formation. We define racial formation as the sociohistorical process by which racial identities are created, lived out, transformed, and destroyed”²¹ (Omi and Winant, 108). This exact sociohistorical process is made in the present moment, I insist, and racial formations, subsequently, emerge in and between bodies as they interact with one another and their environment.

Only a stone’s throw away from Fort Zeelandia, a Paramaribo square frequented by tourists has become a hub where white Dutch bodies tend to congregate. One locality in particular, named *Het Vat* (“The Barrel”) is especially popular, and here one can enjoy the

²⁰ Shannon Sullivan, 2001, 92.

²¹ Michael Omi and Howard Winant, 108.

pleasures of cocktails with Surinamese rum, while indulging in American and Dutch food delicacies. As I continued to wonder how a magnetization of space would operate at “white locations” in Suriname, an interesting sensation began to appear. This sensation, however, referred to a reliving of a coming to terms with the Du Boisian double consciousness that was generated many years ago as a migrant living in the Netherlands. I was suddenly not so much concerned with the ways in which white bodies were smoothly and confidently moving their bodies through spaces, but was confronted with the white vision that I, too, had to internalize as I grew up in the Netherlands. Elaborated most profoundly by theorists like Frantz Fanon²² and George Yancy,²³ my lived social reality was bifurcated in a repetitive move which forcefully relocated my sense of self in two distinct, conflicting, yet entangled ontologies, i.e. a third-person white mode, and an ever-developing mode of a brown person coming to grips with racialization processes. As I moved my body intentionally through the humid air of inebriated white bodies, an eerie sensation of simultaneous double alienation began to pre-occupy my mind and body. One part of my self registered recognition with a social, cultural, and racial context that I had been accustomed to in the process of growing up in a predominantly white environment in the Netherlands. The other, emerging part of my self, began to swelter with anxiety. The end result was a deep realization of alienation, seemingly detached from both sides that vied for attention. Yet what began to appear most notably, was the realization that I suddenly felt bodily resistance: my body, moving past the tables with white bodies, felt the weight of their whiteness pushing onto my skin, puncturing me consistently with what I can analyze in hindsight

²² Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York, NY: Grove Press, 2008).

²³ George Yancy, *Black Bodies, White Gazes: The Continuing Significance of Race* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2008).

was a normative force encroaching upon my brown identity. This encroaching could be understood as a coming to terms with the white gaze that I have attempted to analyze in hindsight during a moment when I tried to linger in and understand the white gaze:

“The ocularity of the white gaze that is brutally unleashed upon me has as its simplest modality the visual characteristic of eyes that see and see me. The realization of the eyes that see me, however, engender an even more brutally entangling array of dispossessive bondages. First, there is the bodily fixation, my very corporeality is relationally mesmerized and feels captured as in a double helix in which I have no agency of disentangling. I am sucked into the stranglehold of possessive gazing, as my body as if electrified anxiously and subordinately undermines its own non-being that erupts from the dispossessive gazed bondage. My body attunes itself, habituates itself towards the gaze, as if it remembers that is being subjugated by the memories of earlier accumulated serial gazing. It is the slavishly disheartening and dislocated function of a pre-conscious flow of non-subjectivity²⁴ that attaches my para-ontological - in the sense of an unwilled yet practiced beyondness of social ontology - non-self to the process upon which I have no control. I can steer my body away from the gaze, surely, but that is not the point. During that movement of steering away, my body can theoretically move in a different direction, yet the possession of the gazed helix is not subsided, is not detached. For the gaze that operates in an strangely godlike manner has already attached to my accumulated non-selves that reside in my pre-conscious racialized sub-conscious, as they embrace the depersonalized formatted familiarity of the dispossessed serial materiality that is not part of my body, yet is fully is, as I realize that it

²⁴ I would argue that the concept of *the subject* is a “universalised” Western concept that has been colonizing the world. One could think here of the *Fanonian object*. In the same vein, “the individual” could be seen as non-sensical, as bodies are inherently social and relational, I contend.

is. It is an irreducibly real and uncannily unreal part of me as I still turn away. I can easily move away my face, but then keep on residing in the extension of the gazed helix of the now panoptically dispossessive fixation that has gotten hold of me. My body is heavy, my head is heavy as I feel the profundity of the massive energies weighing upon my bodymind. I try to detach, I try to reach some sense of self...and after some illusionary deliberation during which my thoughts can reach some other state of mind, I find my self, or some part of my self that is however carrying the burden of the marked, inscribed, raced, and para-ontologized process of post-possession, which is to say an enduring possession as the post is not temporal but operates alongside my body, hovering like a ghost that has taken my shape and can re-inscribe its outsides onto my outsides and turn me inside out as I am repetitively merged with its gazed proteanness.” This reflection of coming to terms with the power of the white gaze is an instance of the captivating co-construction of *whiteness as norm* that had been hovering over the city center of Paramaribo (resonating in-between the white colonial wooden houses) and which had permeated my body.²⁵ To stress the immense level of anxiety that I began to feel, I want to close this section by inserting – perhaps contrary to academic tradition – a voice (my poetic voice) that had previously been trying to come to terms with this particular anxiety that came over me in a different setting, but with a similar racialization dynamic as my brown body entered an all-white space at an institute dedicated to research on culture in the Netherlands:²⁶

²⁵ I would argue that the permeation started the moment my body came into this world, and was immediately confronted with the colonial racism that was and is systemic to the then colony of Suriname, and is now informing the so-called post-colony as it comes to terms with white structures and infrastructures.

²⁶ In 2015 I was an intern doing research at the Meertens Institute in Amsterdam and was assigned a desk in a room that was usually occupied by about twelve white Dutch students. The poem was written after I tried to come to terms with the continuous tension that arose in the room as my brown body entered.

FLUID COMFORT

engulfed in comfort
whiteness aligns itself
becoming spatiality
grasping temporality

risk emerges
as uncertainty enters
a brown body disrupts
in a third person singular

do I breathe tension ?
do I radiate anxiety ?
twitching of pens
twirling of hair

what do you think you see ?
why does your non-gaze gaze ?
uncanny negation ?
racial subjugation ?

epidermal schemas
ontological impossibilities
strangle my tormented mind
choke my sense of sameness

from underneath my punctured skin
I can merely offer
unsettling experiences
forging strength through pain

Figure 1: Fluid Comfort, poem by Praveen Sewgobind

In the final section of this paper I will address some of the issues that come to the fore in this particular poem. Before that, I want to analyze two more instances of magnetizing racialization dynamics that occurred in two different locations in the “interior”²⁷ of Suriname.

²⁷ I use quotation marks here, to stress some decolonial and indigenous perspectives which question the very existence of the colonially drawn borders between nation-states such as Suriname, the colony of French Guyana, Guyana, and Brazil.

SECTION III: MAGNETIZED RACE IN THE ‘INTERIOR’

The packed Twin Otter aircraft slowly descended onto what seemed to be a green cauliflower expanse. Myriad different shades of green gradually became ever more distinct as a small airstrip appeared in the midst of the Surinamese jungle. I was not particularly looking forward to engaging with the rest of the group, predominantly white and Dutch tourists who were to stay in an “eco-lodge” next to an indigenous village along the Palumeu river in the south of Suriname. Yet the trip opened up several possibilities. I knew that for me, a cultural theorist focusing increasingly on processes of racialization, I was in a privileged position to both study the social life of white people in Suriname more closely, and also to analyze their interaction with indigenous tribes in the nearby village. In this village – the socio-historical consequence of the forceful settlement scheme organized by the former Dutch colonizers – members of the Wayana and Trio tribes were now living their lives, interestingly configured around two main buildings, the local Christian church, and the local government school. The social interactions proved to be a wonderful opportunity to view in close proximity the workings of white privilege/entitlement, white solipsism, white obfuscation, white silence, white hubris, and white solidarity, within what I argue amounts to an overarching matrix of white supremacy.²⁸ In this paper, however, I will

²⁸ Charles Mills argues in *The Racial Contract* that white supremacy “white supremacy is the unnamed political system that has made the modern world what it is today.” Far more than the common perception that white supremacy refers to such groups as the KKK or Nazi organizations, white supremacy as an ideology undergirds “the most important political system of recent global history - the system of domination by which white people have historically ruled over and, in certain important ways, continue to rule over nonwhite people (...)” (1-2).

focus on one particular event that I will highlight, and which will illuminate my argument of the continuing operation of magnetized racialization processes in our “post-colonial” world.

Part of the “cultural program” of the trip consisted of visiting the nearby indigenous village, where we were “invited” (according to the Afro-Surinamese guide of the travel agency) to try out some bow-and-arrow techniques practiced by the local indigenous people. As was my expectation, the first ones to volunteer and to come forward were the white men in our group. Proudly displaying their white and male privilege, they ventured to try to target a large pomelo by shooting an arrow at it. The excitement seemed to grow despite the fact that none of the participants were able to hit the pomelo. What interested me most, though, was a seemingly rapid enhancement of the motility of the white bodies around me. At first, I had noticed some reluctance to participate in the event, possibly because of an uncertainty to become successful. Yet despite the failure of hitting the pomelo, the atmosphere became electrified with joy and what I would refer to as a typical white Dutch assertiveness, which seemed to develop even more strongly as the attempts were registered by many digital photo and video cameras. The previous reluctance had swiftly evolved in what I felt was a collective neo-colonial coup-d’état in which the collectivity of the white bodies now could radiate in this “uncanny” location. Not only are white bodies like the Dutch tourists far outnumbered in Suriname by non-white bodies, but in the “interior” of Suriname, an internal racializing dynamic emerged. The Afro-Surinamese guide who spoke Dutch fluently, “mediated” between the tourists and the indigenous population, as he realized that their ability to speak Dutch was - from the perspective of the tourists – limited. What thus appeared, as I analyze in hindsight, was an awkward dual racialization process. The

Dutch-speaking Afro-Surinamese (racialized by the long history of Dutch colonialism, I contend²⁹) was now instrumentalizing and contributing to the racialization of the white/indigenous binary, by constructing in what I felt was a denigrating show of “primitive” yet “respected” people who were still performing their culture. As the white bodies were able to and expected to participate in the event, the opportunity was given in which through a “playful and communal move” the genocidal histories of Dutch colonialism could be sidelined and at least temporarily whitewashed. In a disturbing way, a white space had been created in that small village, informed by affectively connecting the white bodies present into a magnetized bond of habitual normativity.

Four years later, I was again privileged to visit the magnificent “interior” of my place of birth. On this occasion, aim of the group of tourists was to climb a remote mountain near another “eco-lodge,” which was built on Fungu Island. Situated in the Central Surinamese Nature Reserve, the local Marron groups (descendants of escaped enslaved people who were able to flee the former Dutch plantations) were cooperating with Surinamese officials and tourism organizations in order to stimulate “eco-tourism.” In a future book project³⁰ I will elaborate more on the many accounts in which I was able to come to terms with my previously described sense of double-consciousness that re-emerged in Suriname, but for this paper, I wish to show by focusing on one particular event how “ventriloquized” processes of racialization indicate the

²⁹ I would like to stress that Suriname was a Dutch colony from 1667 until 1975, spanning an era of colonial subjugation of more than three centuries during which white Dutch people organized the plantation economy based on the labour and exploitation of black and brown bodies, as enslaved people and as “indentured” labourers respectively.

³⁰ Short essays on racism and double consciousness can be found in the text *Dismantling Colonial Racism: Travelogue – Imagery – Poetics*, which can be found here: <https://praveensewgobind.com/>

ways in which a “cultural” angle is effectively exacerbating entangled forms of racialization. During the three-day trip, a cultural event was again planned. This time around, several local Marron musicians appeared and gathered the (all-white) crowd of tourists in order to entertain them with music, mainly by performing on wooden drums. I had hoped that because of some fascinating new decolonial developments among at least some Surinamese activists, an event like this would offer a moment to reflect on the history of Dutch colonialism and enslavement. However, it should be noted that the tourists had paid a relatively large sum of money to be able to enjoy the “pristine jungle” of Suriname, which would arguably be in discursive tension with the dissemination of the history of the Marron peoples in this particular context. What began to materialize was a similar dynamic compared to my previous account. The event commenced with one musician playing one drum, which would then be followed by an increasing number of other musicians. At one point, one of the Marron musicians began to dance in front of the crowd of white bodies who were sitting in front of the musicians. He then encouraged the tourists – clearly inebriated and under influence of other kinds of drugs – to join in, after which most of the white bodies joined in the dancing which lasted for several hours, leading to an ecstatic event that resonated beyond the small island in the river in the National Park. What struck me, as I had distanced myself from the mass of dancing white bodies, was that on this occasion of analyzing the social life of white people in Suriname, the initial reluctance of the white participants was seemingly transformed into a celebration of “color-blind” happiness. The energizing music and dance, it occurred to me, subverted a possible coming to terms with Marron history and Dutch complicity.³¹ What was stimulated, was an uncritical participation in a “color-blind” social

³¹ For more about a Afro-Surinamese perspective on Marron groups and Dutch repression, see Anton de Kom. *We Slaves of Suriname*. London: Pluto Press: 2019

structure, which provided the excuse not to engage in “difficult” histories. The overall atmosphere, as mentioned strengthened by large amounts of alcohol and drugs, suppressed any possible attempt to understand why African people were living in the “interior” of Suriname in the first place. Instead, a sea of white bodies took hold of the space, whereby a similar white assertiveness again was allowed to gain traction. What radiated from the sweating mass of white bodies was more than solipsism and entitlement, I contend. That which arose from the mass of white bodies was an erasure of the Other by means of a cultural ventriloquy that enabled powerful subconscious senses of superiority to materialize. The superiority, I want to add, that was clouded by the illusion of a “color-blind” and “postracial”³² celebratory happening. In the next section, I will further elaborate on what I feel is the affective impossibility to negate racialization in a space such as Suriname, specifically when the performative power matrix of race informs identity and agency.

SECTION III: HABITUAL BODIES AND VENTRILOQUIZED RACE

In this section, I will discuss the conceptual interlocking of three notions (ocularity, corporeality, and habituality) that have been underlying the analysis in the previous two sections,

³² The importance of an open-minded approach to the dimensions of *racial* configurations is underlined by many critical race theorists, such as Martín Alcoff: “A more *realistic* account of identity, I’ll argue, would be a *realist* view that understands identities to be significant aspects of the social world and of our lived sense of who we are and how we are positioned in the immediate social environs in which we live and work. Government policies can play a large role, but not an absolutely determinative one. Part of this more realist view will involve an understanding that the categories of race and ethnicity are not always easily separable, no matter how much academics or policymakers have wanted to parse the distinction. In the real world, ethnic groups are often racialized, and racialized groups are clearly noticeable as we move through social spaces, whether they are allowed on government forms or not. The racial diversity, or lack thereof, of our immediate social space can profoundly affect how relaxed, or how fearful, we are. Even though races are not found objects, they cannot be so easily legislated away or wished out of existence.” Martín Alcoff, *The Future of Whiteness*, 2015, 45.

notions that correspond with three processes that arguably feed into the process of racialization, more specifically – for the argument of this paper – how race becomes ventriloquized performatively. The latter will be addressed in the conclusion but let us first consider the way the three notions work to interlock.

The way we perceive other bodies, I contend, is a process that follows a visual/bodily schema that has been internalized through interaction with the social world. Sullivan notes that:

One's relationship to one's race is not merely a matter of how one projects oneself into the world, as Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology suggests, and merely having good intentions in terms of attempting to disidentify as white does not erase one's whiteness. One's race is the product of transaction with one's world due to one's social "location" in it, which means that other people help constitute the racialization of one's experience through their perceptions of and reactions toward one.³³

To perceive is to engage in a transaction with the social world, which resonates with the way the body has come to be accustomed to its being-in-the-world. This *social ontology* is crucial, because it is in this particular mode that difference and sameness are negotiated by the self. A body that deviates from the self, I argue, is categorized as such, and does not "fall into place," or align with the body that is doing the perceiving. The examples given in the previous section (white bodies navigating their whiteness in relation to deviating bodies) and the poem above³⁴ address this

³³ Shannon Sullivan, 2001, 97.

³⁴ The reference to "sameness" should be seen as a utopian ideal rather than a consideration of contemporary race relations. I argue that in a world premised on colonial

issue. Being seen and being captured by photos and film in Palumeu and seeing each other's white bodies dance on Fungu Island initiates and energizes the process of ocularity. The opposite, however, occurs when my brown body moves past groups of white bodies at Het Vat, and when my body is seen in the academic location by anxious white bodies: I am seen, but the ocularity has an adverse effect in the sense that the visual registry operates to switch the racial lever towards the deviating category, in other words, I am otherized by the very transaction of being in a different kind of body. This, then, leads to the second notion of corporeality.

I suggest that the process of corporeality in this discussion refers to the *process* of being-in-the-world,³⁵ after the body has been perceived and categorized through the racializing prism that operates to categorize. This second phase can be seen as the next phase in the tri-partite circular dynamic that, as we will see, gives rise to the theory of performativity of ventriloquized magnetized race. But let let's be reminded that the underlying meta-process refers to the making

racism, white supremacy is operating powerfully, which prevents a racial sameness in the lived social reality that we find ourselves in. Eliminating white supremacy – dismantling white power/privilege structures – would be a prerequisite for creating conditions for a future “sameness.”

³⁵ George Yancy has brilliantly elaborated on white racialization, or “whitely-being-in-the-world: “...one grasps the oppressive nature of the discursive and nondiscursive modalities through which whiteness (or whiteness) becomes a deeply political, existentially *lived*, social category that shapes the subjectivities and future racist/racist practices of whites. Whiteness is a way of performing both one's phenotypic white body and one's subjectivity as structured through a specific white racist epistemic orientation. Whiteness involves creating a boundary between the (white) self and those “darkies” that elicit a flushed and astonished look on one's mother's face; creating a distance from those who cause one's parents to become enraged; knowing the appropriate degrading discourse to use when describing miscegenation; becoming aware of those dark and dangerous male bodies that sully the purity of white women; and keeping informed about the practices of those nasty “niggers” who keep money in their underwear.” George Yancy, *Black Bodies, White Gazes: The Continuing Significance of Race* 60.

of race as a social construct, stressing that this process develops “from-the-outside-inwards,” and deeply informs not only our conscious capacities, but crucially, operates to construct the ways that our unconscious *becomes*. Critical race theorists Omi and Winant stress that: “Notions of race do not only inform our conscious understanding of the social world; they also permeate our unconscious minds— shaping our perceptions and attitudes, and influencing our actions.”³⁶ The way that a body becomes can of course be analyzed from many perspectives, and much research needs to be done to align philosophical, cultural, psychological, and neuro-biological angles on processes of embodiment. However, the second phase in this discussion - the “interstice” of corporeality – is particularly important and productive, because it allows for a better understanding of how race is worked through, or rather, works on, in, and from the very materiality of the body. Having in mind the pivotal work done by Judith Butler in her groundbreaking text *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex,”*³⁷ I now seek to

³⁶ Michael Omi and Howard Winand, 117.

³⁷ I will in particular draw from what I see as a pivotal note where she discusses Foucault’s notion of the dissimulating effect of power: “This is not to make “materiality” into the effect of a “discourse” which is its cause; rather, it is to displace the causal relation through a reworking of the notion of “effect.” Power is established in and through its effects, where these effects are the dissimulated workings of power itself. There is no “power,” taken as a substantive, that has dissimulation as one of its attributes or modes. This dissimulation operates through the constitution and formation of an epistemic field and set of “knowers” when this field and these subjects are taken for granted as prediscursive givens, the dissimulating effect of power has succeeded. Discourse designates the site at which power is installed as the historically contingent formative power of things within a given epistemic field. The production of material effects is the formative or constitutive workings of power, a production that cannot be construed as a unilateral movement from cause to effect. “Materiality” appears only when its status as contingently constituted through discourse is erased, concealed, covered over. Materiality is the dissimulated effect of power. Foucault’s claim that power is materializing, that it is the production of material effects, is specified in *Discipline and Punish* in the materiality of the body. If “materiality” is an effect of power, a site of transfer between power relations, then insofar as this transfer is the subjection/subjectivation of the body, the principle of this *assujettissement* is “the soul.” Taken as a normative/normalizing ideal, the “soul” functions as the formative and regulatory principle of this material body, the proximate instrumentality of its

further the analysis of racial embodiment informed by the examples and experiences of people of color, in other words stimulate critical race theory by assessing the lived reality of racial formation in-real-life. As we have seen, the body as interstice can become a site of tremendous contestation and conflict. And these conflicts can said to be accumulating in the body, whereby a level of racial stress is actually inscribed in ways that contemporary scientists are beginning to unravel. Sullivan, for instance, has elaborated on the ways that the body endures racial oppression:

I am concerned that out of an understandable fear of appearing to be sexist or racist, contemporary feminists and critical philosophers of race might avoid examining the role that human biology plays in male privilege and white domination or might restrict the role of the body to the safer political terrain of phenomenology divorced from physiology. The body surely is phenomenological, and understanding the embodied phenomenology of racism and sexism is important to feminist and racial justice struggles. But the body also is biological, neurochemical, and physiological, and social justice movements also need to critically understand those aspects of human embodiment. Leaving out the biological dimension of bodily habits misunderstands them and thus impedes attempts to change them, and this is as true of sexist and racist habits as of less

subordination. The soul renders the body uniform; disciplinary regimes train the body through a sustained repetition of rituals of cruelty that produce over time the gestural stylistics of the imprisoned body. In the *History of Sexuality, Volume One*, “sex” operates to produce a uniform body along different axes of power, but “sex” as well as “the soul” are understood to subjugate and subjectivate the body, produce an enslavement, as it were, as the very principle of the body’s cultural formation. It is in this sense that materialization can be described as the sedimenting effect of a regulated iterability” Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex,”* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2011), 192-193.

politically charged ones. The result of refusing to engage the biological and medical sciences is to concede the domain of human physiology to white domination and male privilege, and this is a problematic concession to make. It is to give up on any sort of critical understanding of how a person's physiological responses to the world are constituted, and thus also might be reconstituted for the better.³⁸

Experiences of racism have indeed given credence to the notion that the body “remembers” such accounts and are subsequently lived and in that process continue to condition the operation of racial anxiety. The phrases “epidermal schemas, ontological impossibilities, strangle my tormented mind” in the poem refer back to the experiences in Suriname as they conjure up memories of the sense of being trapped in-between two antagonistic worlds. On one hand, there is the realization that the body – my Brown body – is perceived as different, as whiteness is pushed onto and into my skin. Crucially, as I have been accustomed to “seeing the world with white eyes,” this white vision had already been internalized and is metaphorically (but also very physically as I sense the effects of anxiety³⁹) “waging war” under my skin with a sense of self,

³⁸ Shannon Sullivan, *The Physiology of Sexist and Racist Oppression* (New York, NY: Oxford UP), 12.

³⁹ The importance of recognizing the dynamic marks of the environment on the body is elaborated further by Sullivan: “The relationship between habit and physiology is much more than metaphorical, however. On my view, physiological functions are habits, not just similar to them, and a person can have a distinctive character based on the kind of physiological habits that help compose her. The central point of comparison is that both habit and physiological function are transactional: they are constituted in and through a dynamic relationship with their environment. Taking a wide assortment of quick examples, riding a bicycle, walking in high heeled shoes, or interrupting people while they talk all illustrate how habits are constituted in and through a dynamic relationship with the world “outside” them: bicycles, sidewalk pavement, shoes, societal expectations of femininity, and other people. Walking in high heeled shoes, to stick with one example, isn't an activity that is contained within a person's feet and legs. It is located, so to speak, between feet, legs, shoes, floors, and gendered expectations. In fact, we

with my sense of *being-brown-in-the-world*. The next phase in the racializing circle is thus proposed, namely the way that the body is now being configured to perform the habituality that is the result of the processing of the afore-mentioned antagonistic construction of racialized identity formation. About the conditionalities of racial identity formation, I want to highlight an excerpt by Moten who poses some interesting questions when discussing Fanon's seminal text *Black Skin, White Masks*. Moten intercedes:⁴⁰ "What is it to be an irreducibly disordering, deformational force while at the same time being absolutely indispensable to normative order, normative form? This is not the same as, though it does probably follow from, the troubled realization that one is an object amid other objects, as Fanon would have it." This paradox of realizing to inhabit a reciprocity of both disorder and order is what underlies the deep sense of living a double consciousness. A normative white order is epidermically disrupted while simultaneously the immanent emergence of whiteness co-constructs the binary relationship. The depth and profundity of this relationship can be stressed by Fanon's epic words,⁴¹ that follow the absorbance of that epic transformative racist epithet:

I came into this world anxious to uncover the meaning of things, my soul desirous to be at the origin of the world, and here I am an object among other objects. Locked in this suffocating reification, I appealed to the Other so that his liberating gaze, gliding over my

could go so far as to describe walking in high heeled shoes as an activity done by a gendered and male privileged world by means of a woman's comportment of her feet and legs. The point of this unusual way of describing walking is not to claim that the organism is passive while the environment is active. The point instead is to counter assumptions that the environment plays little role in establishing who and how a person is." Shannon Sullivan, 10-11.

⁴⁰ Fred Moten, *The Universal Machine* (Durham, NC: Duke UP), 143.

⁴¹ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. Translated by Richard Wilcox (New York, NY: Grove Press, 2008), 167.

body suddenly smoothed of rough edges, would give me back the lightness of being I thought I had lost, and taking me out of the world put me back in the world. But just as I get to the other slope I stumble, and the Other fixes me with his gaze, his gestures and attitude, the same way you fix a preparation with a dye.

This monumental analysis is indicative for the way that the habit of the white gaze is protruding onto the body of the non-white Other.⁴² The body that instantiates the posture is an instance of the habitual body, as is the body that is the gazed upon, the receptor of the racial gaze. The concept of the habitual body, as theorized and furthered by Merleau-Ponty, Sullivan, and Ahmed and many others, leads me to propose the third and final element within the tri-partite processual development of racial formation by assessing that habituality is informed by corporeality and informs the process of ocularity. The spatial and institutional examples given in Section I now can be configured within the model that I am furthering. Educational frameworks, colonial sites of domination, and contemporary social settings are not neutral, for they are deeply culturally and historically codified. Within and through these constructs, bodies are perceived (ocularity), materialized (corporeality), and set up to attain certain habitual postures. A preliminary model of

⁴² The centrality of the white gaze that emanates from whiteness is elaborated most profoundly during a talk Fred Moten gave at Naropa University in 2018, where he says that: “To say that whiteness is property is to say that the modality in which whiteness can live or the modality in which whiteness is endured or survived is spatial. This is in turn to say that whiteness isn’t just a venal, brutal, vicious way of taking up space. Whiteness is rather the way in which so-called subjectivity is constituted as spatial or more precisely as spatio-temporal coordination. So that whiteness is also manifest as a brutal way of taking up or taking other people’s time. But to be a subject, to be a person, to be white, isn’t just to take up space-time in a fucked-up way. What’s at stake, rather, is that confluence where whiteness, subjectivity, and spatio-temporality as such converge, constitute one another and are given in that mutual constitution as being-in-the-world. One special way to describe that confluence - special, because it is a deep intensification of the exaltation and shame that goes with it - is being a poet, which is to say being a citizen of the world of poetry.” YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7SpV6xYQ8yg&t=2547s> (3:39-4:51).

the interlocking of ocularity, corporeality, and habituality can be seen in Figure 2 below. With regard to the relation between habit and body, Sullivan observes that:

In the case of both physiological functions and habit, their transactional relationship with the world means not only that the environment helps constitute the function or habit, but also the function or habit helps constitute, and possibly change, the world. The relationship between both physiological function and habit and their environments is non-viciously circular. As the environment helps form the physiological functions and habits a person has, her physiological functions and habits enable her to take up and respond to the world in particular ways, which then alter her environment and thus indirectly affect both her and other people's physiological functions and habits.⁴³

In reference to my model, the social world that goes beyond the “intersubjective”⁴⁴ ocular and corporeal components in the circle, inflects the three interlocking domains of ocularity, corporeality, and habituality. In addition to this, I would suggest that another dimension – that of historicity – is also always already inflecting the tri-partite elements that inform racial formation (i.e. the productive and performative outcome of the circle). The *inflectionality* of the racial

⁴³ Shannon Sullivan, 5.

⁴⁴ I have put *intersubjective* in quotation marks to stress that the concept of the subject, I argue, was developed and geared towards white bodies. Subjecthood, consequentially, was not extended to bodies of colour and to this day, I would contend, people of colour are categorised as a lesser *kind* of being, a kind that deviates from the white norm that underlies the very concept of the subject.

formation model by means of social structures and historical configurations underscores what Martín Alcoff has argued is key to social identities, namely that they:

...need to be understood as aspects of our shared material world in the sense that they are (generally) visible features that produce a kind of visual registry directing us toward specific forms of interaction. Identities are not merely a discursive overlay on top of materially instantiated differences, in which case it might indeed seem that we could simply, and volitionally, change the discourse and thus change the society. Rather than being simply “in our heads,” identities are part of our social worlds. Changing the meanings and significance of social identities will require changing the material conditions of our society.⁴⁵

Throughout this paper, I have shown that some bodies, the white bodies in Palumeu and on Fungu Island, a level of fluidity came into being that may be seen as the function of power and privilege resulting from cultural-historical configurations that have informed the (ventriloquized) magnetized white identities that are being performed. In particular, as I have demonstrated and felt as a spectator, the cloud of whiteness emanating from the collectivity of dancing bodies, functioned as a wall of resistance set up against my body, which was felt by recognizing a deep sense of anxiety. Akin to the metaphor of being in the water, a body can said be going with the flow, or can said to be experiencing a powerful wall – a counter-current – that causes the body to have to react physically. When, still following this metaphoricity, such events have become structural, the body will “remember,” i.e. the unconscious will have already set up the body to

⁴⁵ Martín Alcoff, Linda. *The Future of Whiteness* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), 161.

react in a certain way. This habituality, then, informs the way we perceive, and are being perceived. A body that (trans-)acts/navigates anxiously will be considered as deviating and will be treated differently. This particular notion is often seen as diametrically opposed to the way many people think they act in the “real world,” as one “does not see color” and therefore “treats everyone in the same manner.” Again, what it takes to be convinced of the contrary is to imagine seeing the world from the perspective of the non-normative perception, and to acknowledge that experiences of “living race” are radically divergent. Sullivan notes that: “Because race is dynamic and contextual, the race that one is and that constitutes one’s lived experience is composed in part by the spaces to which one is admitted, just as the race that one is and that constitutes one’s experience helps reciprocally “color” spaces in turn.”⁴⁶

In the final section below, I will synthesize the previous analyses and stress the dynamic character of the circle of processes described. For it is crucial to realize that the processes are continuously being reinscribed on, through, in, and from the body. Moreover, the racial *becomes* – as I have illustrated - magnetized and due to the ubiquitous false ideology of colorblindness, racialization tends to be ventriloquized,⁴⁷ emerging in the language of the culturally normative. This act of dissimulation, I argue has become widespread in many societies, and much research needs to be undertaken to show its clouding and grave consequences.

⁴⁶ Shannon Sullivan, 91.

⁴⁷ In an upcoming series of articles I focus on what I refer to as ventriloquized cultural racism in the Netherlands, more specifically, how modes of “packaged” racism emanating from the centrality of white normativity are embodied by white and non-white bodies.

CONCLUSION

Critical observers of race⁴⁸ as a social construct may have issues with the centrality of phenotypical features in the argumentation of this paper. As mentioned, what I have ventured to show is that from a perspective of a racialized subject, the lived reality of race is often figuratively “raining down on the body,” which then - in a very physical manner – attaches to the very corporeality of the body. The ocularity of race can otherwise be easily shown by analyzing what occurs in events – or rather structures – of racial profiling. It is typical, I need to add, that the phrase racial profiling is commonly labelled as *ethnic* profiling in spaces such as The Netherlands. To reiterate, the racial profoundly relates to the performative bind of the visual/bodily, and how this works to racialize the body itself. The ethnic refers to cultural markers. What remains to be explicated here is what I would refer to as the interlocking of the two domains or dimensions in which race operates. As Omi and Winant emphasize: “We consider that both these dimensions of race— race as “performance” and race as “phenomics”— must be synthesized if we are to conceive fully of the racial politics of civil society.”⁴⁹ Surely, a much more elaborate study is necessary to dive deeper into the entanglements of racialization in both Suriname and the Netherlands. The complexity also urges us to critically detach ourselves

⁴⁸ I reiterate that a potential inward perspective hinders a critical engagement with racial identity, as Yancy argues: “For many whites, the process of marking the white body (“Look, a white!”) is not just difficult but threatening. The process dares to mark whites as racists, as perpetrators and sustainers of racism. Furthermore, the process dares to mark whites as raced beings, as inextricably bound to the historical legacy of the “workings of race.” Hence, the process encourages a slippage not only at the site of seeing themselves as innocent of racism but also at the site of seeing themselves as unraced.” George Yancy, *Look, a White!: Philosophical Essays on Whiteness*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012.

⁴⁹ Michael Omi and Howard Winant, 141.

from what I view as the rather dominant mark that American academia had had on Critical Race Theory. But one model that is fruitful for further elaboration is worth mentioning, i.e. the framework of performativity, in particular as proposed by Judith Butler and referring to gender.⁵⁰ I would suggest that race, like gender, operates to produce agency and identity as a result of the matrices of power that operate outside of the body. The unequal power relations that are structural and ubiquitous in society, such as gender and race inequality, are internalized and cause bodies to perform a certain role. We have seen that in the case of double consciousness, a conflict may arise that can lead to self-alienation and anxiety. The character of racialization is such, I want to conclude, that powerful forces of magnetization bind, or stick together, as we have seen in the instances of white bodies in Suriname. Yet, conversely, brown or black identities that are developing in relation to whiteness/white identity may align with powerful, emancipatory, and hopeful strategies. From my perspective, this strategic alignment is a source of empowerment, which, again, should not lead to the perspective that race is an essential

⁵⁰ In particular, I draw from Butler's explication of the constructedness, resignification, and fluidity of gender as an analogy for the workings of racial formation: "...just as the psychoanalytic notion of gender identification is constituted by a fantasy of a fantasy, the transfiguration of an Other who is always already a "figure" in that double sense, so gender parody reveals that the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without an origin. To be more precise, it is a production which, in effect—that is, in its effect—postures as an imitation. This perpetual displacement constitutes a fluidity of identities that suggests an openness to resignification and recontextualization; parodic proliferation deprives hegemonic culture and its critics of the claim to naturalized or essentialist gender identities. Although the gender meanings taken up in these parodic styles are clearly part of hegemonic, misogynist culture, they are nevertheless denaturalized and mobilized through their parodic recontextualization. As imitations which effectively displace the meaning of the original, they imitate the myth of originality itself. In the place of an original identification which serves as a determining cause, gender identity might be reconceived as a personal/cultural history of received meanings subject to a set of imitative practices which refer laterally to other imitations and which, jointly, construct the illusion of a primary and interior gendered self or parody the mechanism of that construction" Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2007), 188.

category. Understanding and coming to terms with race as a social construct is, as I have tried to show, necessary precisely to counter the common ideology of color-blindness, which is a tool, I argue, to ventriloquize the normativity of whiteness and a way to negate the ongoing primacy of and the workings of the deep workings of white selves:

Colorblindness allows people (mainly whites, but not only whites) to indulge in a kind of anti-racism “lite.” While explicit forms of racial animus (such as hate speech) are widely condemned, policies and practices that continue to produce racially disparate outcomes are accepted and even encouraged under the guise of moving us “beyond” race and towards a truly colorblind society.”⁵¹

The strategy I would contend – focusing on The Netherlands as I will now, is *to see race*, to be able to undermine the damaging fallacy of color-blindness. To work through and to self-reflect is to ensure a coming to terms with ways that the universal is often wrongly equated with a European, of with a white perspective: “...colorblind racial ideology occludes recognition of race beneath the veneer of a supposedly already-accomplished universality.”⁵²

Finally, in order to undermine what I have suggested is the ideology of ventriloquized racism, the very definition of racism should be questioned and made to include the insidious ways that racism operates unconsciously, unintentionally, structurally, and institutionally. Scholars like DiAngelo⁵³ and Wekker⁵⁴ have pointed to this urgent redefinition. The rise of “cultural racism”

⁵¹ Michael Omi and Howard Winant, 243.

⁵² Michael Omi and Howard Winant, 245.

⁵³ Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk about Race* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2018).

⁵⁴ Gloria Wekker, *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

in The Netherlands (and many other spaces) should especially be a reason to reconsider the deep and dangerous workings of racialization.⁵⁵ To be hailing a culture that is steeped in racial subjugation (centuries of racialized colonialism and the terror of enslavement) and to call for the removal of *racialized* groups (e.g. Moroccans in the Netherlands) is not only perpetuating racism by effectively uplifting white supremacy, it also and dangerously creates the conditions for the re-emergence of fascism, akin to developments of conditions that led to events in the 1930s and 1940s. May an informed critical philosophy of race and dedicated anti-racist activism contribute to halting such conditions.

⁵⁵ One of the aims of this paper was to show that the objectification of bodies of color/black bodies informs the DuBoisian notion of the color-line, which is instrumental for perpetuating racial segregation. Yancy argues: “When black bodies are objectified by white gazes, reduced to surfaces, and stereotyped, this too is a species of the color line being drawn. The color line, in short, is not just a signifier of *spatial* demarcation, which presupposes a racial economy of spatial management and enforcement that is predicated on the existence, in this case, of white others who have the *sociohistorical* power to delimit space and thus inhibit mobility for, say, black bodies. rather, the color line also functions as a powerful demarcation that has profound negative *ontological* implications for black people and those of color vis-à-vis whiteness. indeed, the process of racial spatialization and the process of ontological stigmatization are mutually reinforcing.” George Yancy, *Look, a White!: Philosophical Essays on Whiteness*, 20-21.

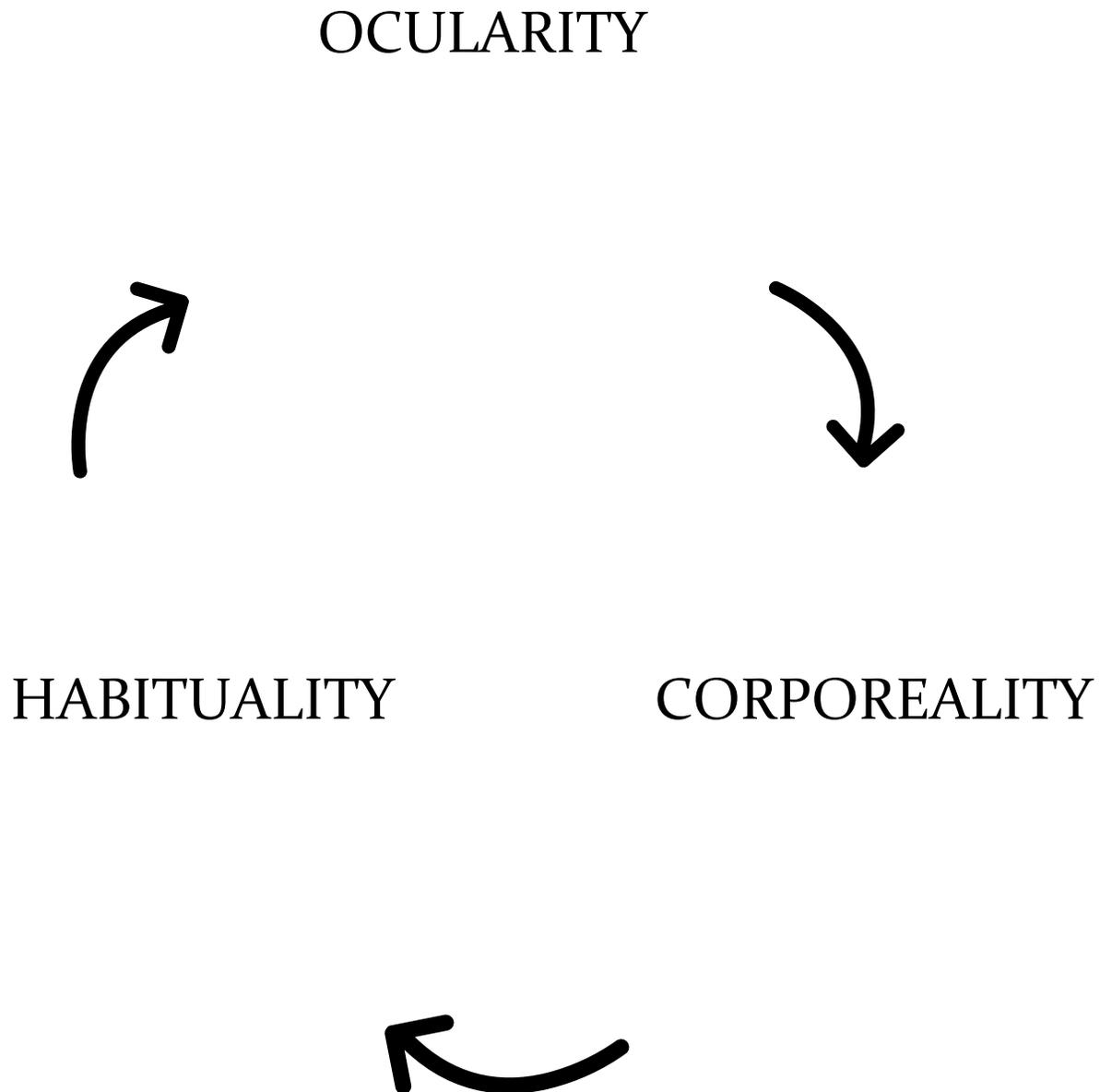


Figure 2: Circle of Racial Formation. As mentioned above, the circle itself is always already inflected by processes generated by both sociality and historicity, i.e. by sociological structures and the historical backdrop of which ocularity, corporeality, and habituality are a function.

History, I argue, is itself intensely culturally codified and resides “in the present,” that is, presentist perceptions of the past are contingent on contemporary and shifting ideas that may deviate from earlier accounts of “what happened.” A prime example of such shifting perceptions are views on the nature of Western colonialism. The sociality that is the other dimension that inflects the circle foregrounds the relationality of individuated “subjects.” The very notion of subjecthood, though, as noted earlier, refers in my view to a Western Enlightenment framework that did not de facto (possibly *de jure*) include non-white people. The intrinsic relationality of *bodies* as they engage with one another in the social world, then, undermines the very construct of the “autonomous individual.”

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