

Solidarity and Alienation

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INTRODUCTION:

This research project is an instance of interdisciplinary scholarship. It is an analysis at the intersection of culture, politics, and literature. The first chapter, “Ecocide, Extractivism, and the Speculative,” of Dr. Ballard’s book, *Genre Frictions*, explores the relationship between solidarity, environmental justice, and speculative fiction in the **Vietnam era**. Speculative fiction uses imaginary elements. Environmental justice is the idea that everybody deserves a safe environment and to participate in the decisions made about it. There is debate over how to understand a framework of environmental justice that both includes peoples with very different experiences of risk and provides a basis for solidarity. Dr. Ballard argues that the **social movements and speculative literature of this era can point us in the right direction**. By conducting citational editing on the chapter, I developed my own personal research question that I explored. **What is the relationship between solidarity and alienation?** My goal was to see if there was an unlikely alliance between the two and challenge the traditional idea that alienation is something bad and to be avoided. Hence, it might point to a framework for solidarity.

RESEARCH PROCESS:

1st: Dr. Ballard’s Independent Research

Dr. Ballard conducted a plethora of research and analysis in her manuscript, putting together her argument.

2nd: Citational Editing

My research partner, Amanda Lowry, and I divided the first chapter of the manuscript, copyedited it, formatted citations, and ensured that the manuscript did not misrepresent any of the sources. While doing so, we were encouraged to dive into the sources and develop our own research question.

3rd: Individual Research:

Having completed the citational editing, we cultivated our own research question. My initial observation was that **the short story “The Village” by Kate Wilhelm** tried to encourage Americans into solidarity with the Vietnamese by alienating them from their lives: imagining that an American small town was victim to the same horrors that occurred during the My Lai massacre, something that could never actually happen. It got me to ask is there a relationship between solidarity and alienation? My individual research process was to tackle the question in three parts:

- Instances of Solidarity:* I looked at social movements in the **Vietnam era** that encouraged solidarity, looking for any relations to alienation.
- What is Alienation?:* I looked into the term, how it has been theorized in the past, and tried to pin down its very broad and surprisingly elusive definition
- Literature:* I looked at how stories from the time-period might demonstrate a connection between solidarity and alienation, similar to the Kate Wilhelm short story.

DEFINITIONS:

Solidarity: To unite in a common cause.

Alienation: Being separated or estranged from oneself and identity.



Figure 1: Analyzed text, a Chicano newspaper selected for showing solidarity with a speculative cartoon.

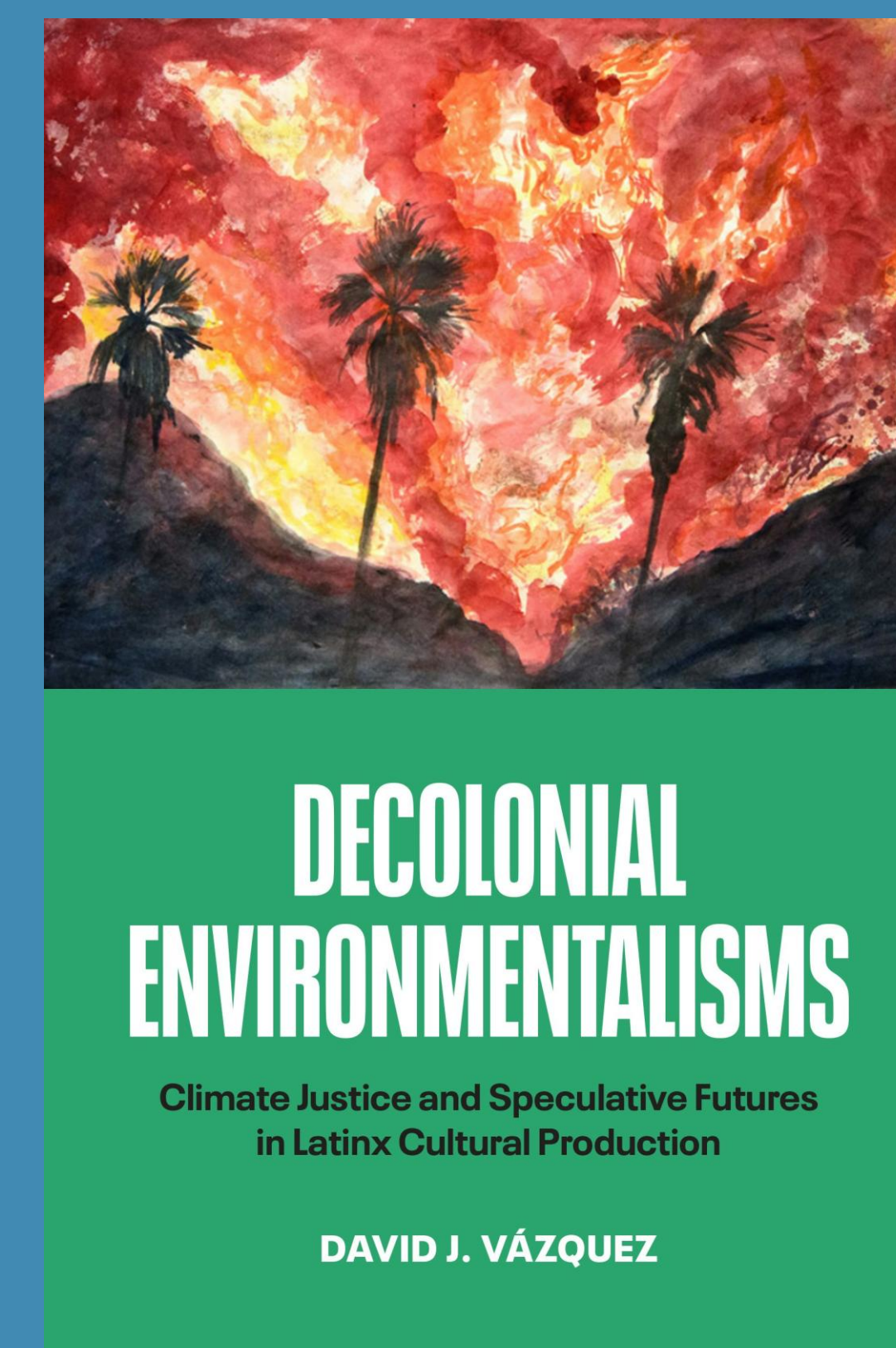


Figure 2: Theoretical book, selected for explaining the faults of recent theories of solidarity.

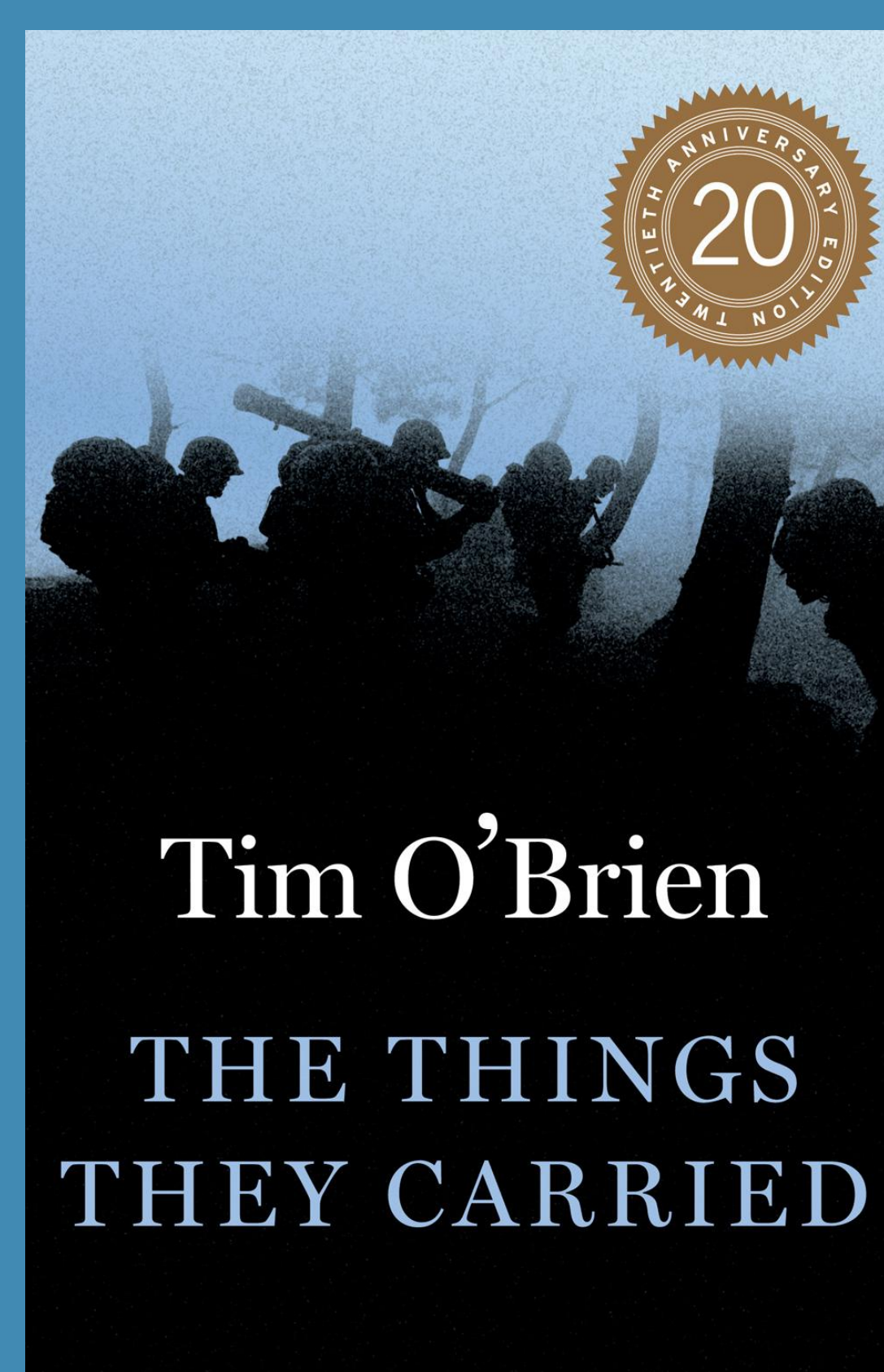


Figure 3: Analyzed text selected because it explores the alienating effects of the Vietnam War.

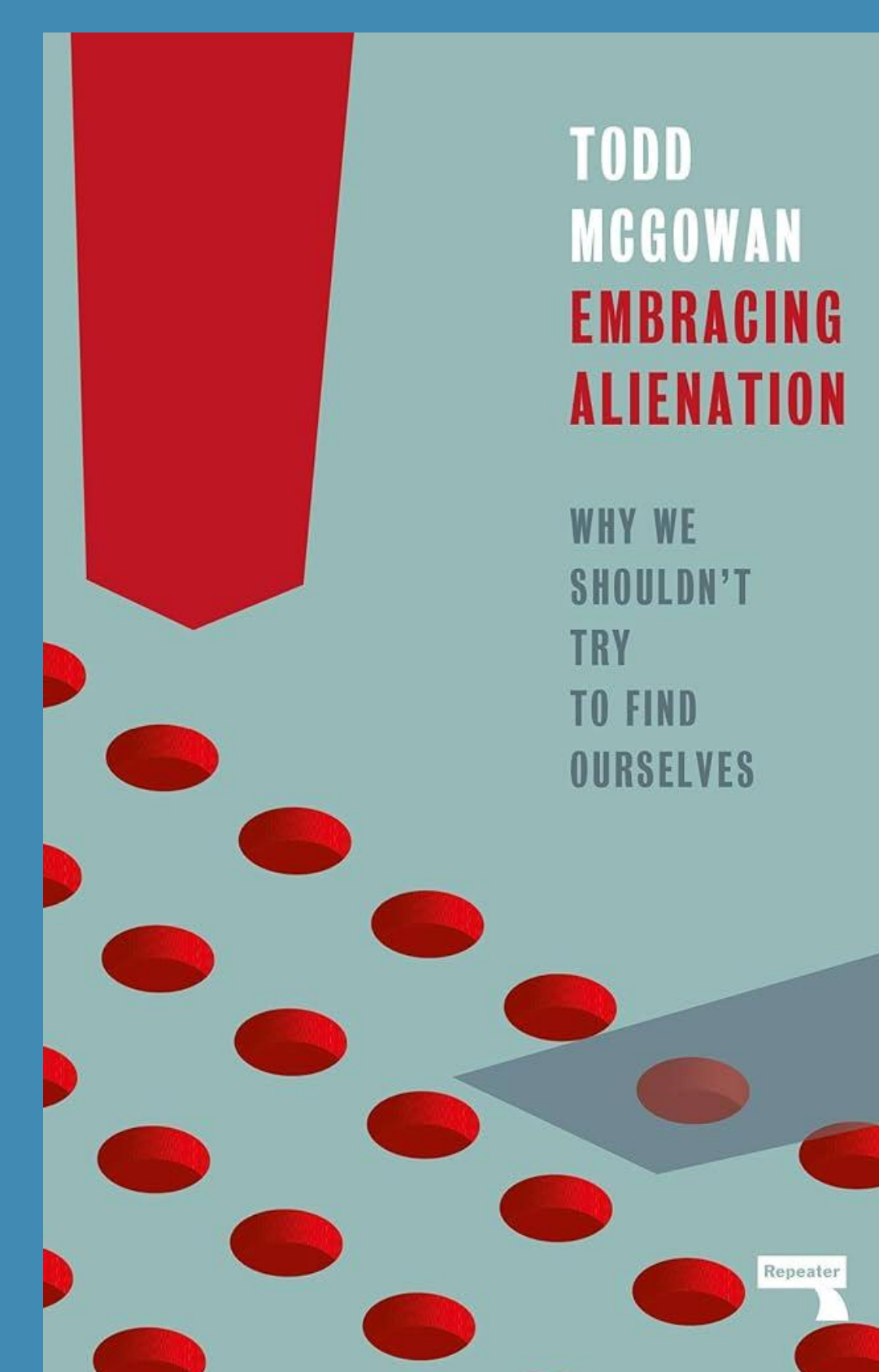


Figure 4: Theoretical book, selected because it explores alienation as a political act.

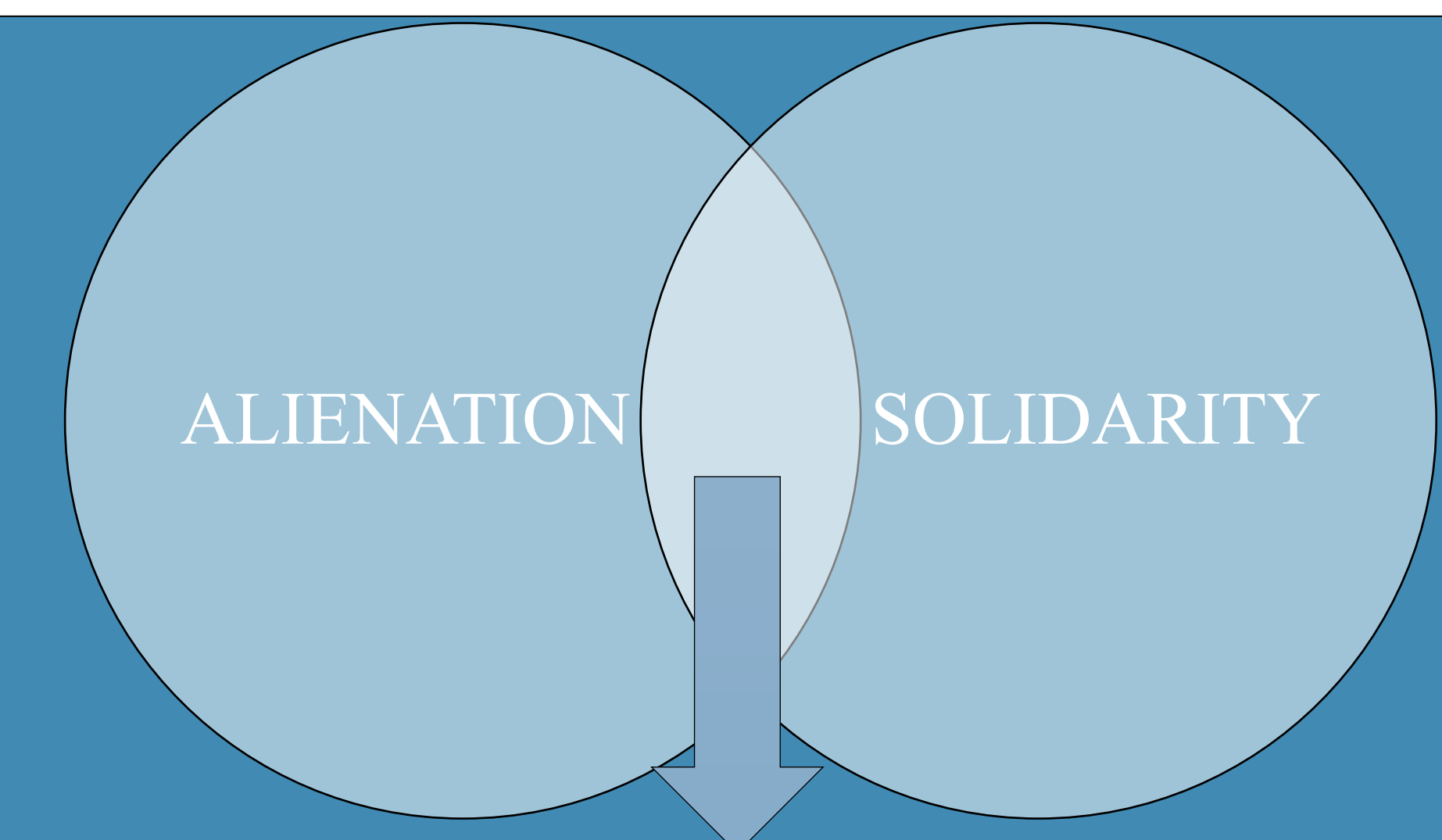
RESULTS/WHERE THEY OVERLAP:

Privileged Communities:

People in privileged positions are often in solidarity with those experiencing marginalization. This **solidarity appears to always alienate the privileged person**. Examples: *The Things They Carried* and *The Village*.

Marginalized Communities:

For marginalized people, solidarity with those in other marginalized communities is often a **response to the alienation they feel as a result of their marginalization**, and the solidarity serves as a solution to it. Examples: American Indian Movement (AIM) and *Vietnam Campesino*.



CONCLUSION:

- Solidarity and alienation often coincide. However, **their relationship differs based on who is in solidarity with who**.
- Those in privileged groups in solidarity with those in marginalized groups become alienated from themselves. They must advocate positions which undermine their social position as the dominant group and lose their sense of identity within that group.
- Those in marginalized groups in solidarity with another marginalized group are often looking to broaden their sense of community and combat the sense of alienation conferred by their societal oppression, as they are often treated as less than human.
- For privileged people, solidarity alienates.**
- For marginalized people, solidarity combats alienation.**
- In some cases, embracing alienation is a basis for solidarity and coalition building, in others, overcoming it is what does so.
- So, alienation ultimately fails to provide a universal basis for solidarity, but has an intimate relation to it.

FURTHER INQUIRY:

- I only looked at America in the 60s and 70s; does this differ in other times and/or places?
- Is there any way to reconcile these observations with theorists who claim solidarity is *always* alienating: not just for privileged individuals?
- How can these observations be more formally theorized?

REFERENCES:



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