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Autobiography

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of

Philosophy in Philosophy

by

Olufemi Taiwo

2018

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Autobiography

by

Olufemi Taiwo

Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy

University of California, Los Angeles, 2018

Professor Alexander Jacob Julius, Co-Chair

Professor Daniela J. Dover, Co-Chair

The project of my dissertation, "Autobiography", is to answer the question: How can we be free? Many philosophers describe the problem of freedom as arising from the limits of our agential powers, given the existence of other individuals and aspects of the world that might interfere with us. When thinking about it in the first person singular, it can seem that the task of the ethical and political philosopher is to figure out how to wrest freedom for each of us from the clutches of other people and from nature. In attempting to describe our complex social worlds, we may eventually arrive at some reformulation like: How can you and I both be free, at the same time, in the same place?

But there is another way of framing the philosophical problem of freedom: how can *we* be free? When asked from the first person plural rather than the singular, our understanding of the problem of freedom shifts from asking how to rescue the possibility of each individual's freedom from being tampered with by others, to asking how to create the possibility of our

collective freedom in the face of various historical forces that separate us from each other, especially those forces that enlist some of us to perpetuate the unfreedom of all of us.

In chapter one, I engage with "National Liberation and Culture", an essay by Amílcar Cabral that characterizes colonialism as a particular kind of historical unfreedom. I argue that the kind of unfreedom Cabral identifies both establishes what political freedom would look like from the first person plural perspective and provides a unified explanation of large-scale collective, individual unfreedom. In chapter 2, I turn to a discussion of conversation as a site of unfreedom in small-scale collectives as an intermediate case between individual and the kinds of collectives that involves nation states and races of people. I discuss how colonialism can meaningfully add to our descriptions of communicative dynamics, particularly how public information is used by differently socially positioned speakers. Finally, in chapter 3, I discuss individual unfreedom in a colonial social context, returning to Cabral's "National Liberation and Culture", providing considerations in favor of reworking foundational concepts in ethical theory and political philosophy like rational agency.

The dissertation of Olufemi Taiwo is approved.

Joshua David Armstrong

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Daniela J. Dover, Co-Chair

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University of California, Los Angeles

2018

DEDICATION PAGE

To the ancestors

To the freedom fighters

To Mom, Ebun, Dad, and Ibukun

To the music

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CURRICULUM VITA

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Public Affairs Quarterly
January 2017
 "Beware of Schools Bearing Gifts: Miseducation and Trojan Horse Propaganda"

APA Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience
April 2018
 "The Man Not and the Dilemmas of Intersectionality"

Disputatio
Forthcoming
 "Flint and Miseducation"

Manuscrito
Forthcoming
 "The Empire Has No Clothes"

Philosophia Africana
Forthcoming
 Book Review of *Groundwork for the Practice of the Good Life: Politics and Ethics at the Intersection of North Atlantic and African Philoso*

Chapter 0: Introduction

Autobiography is not an autobiography.

Don't get me wrong: the stories in this text are real stories from my life. Whatever details have been unintentionally altered: names places etc – have been altered against the best efforts of my recollection. When intentionally, they have been done so to protect the privacy of the stories of the other people involved in my life, not to mislead or editorialize.

The stories contained in this text are not stories to entertain, though you may or may not find them interesting. They are not stories to inspire or instruct, though you may or may not find them instructive. They are not stories exploring the depths of personal trauma or beautiful struggle, though not all of them are fun memories – if anything, a consistent thread running through the stories of my life is the constant salience of the triviality of my struggles on the scale of past and present human suffering. They are not stories of coming-of-age, of finding myself or my bliss (in the self-help guru kind of way), or of heroic triumph against long odds suburbia. They are not all even *my* stories, in the conventional sense – after all, one of the most important things I discovered along the way is the centrality of other people's stories to understand my own, and many of the stories contained herein are tales of things that happened to other people. The stories, you see, are not the point.

But, on the other hand, *Autobiography* is not a philosophical argument either – at least not on the whole. It contains many such arguments. But, from page to page, it is often more of an explication, in the most serious and thorough way that I know how, of how and why I came to the philosophical view that I've come to.

That explication requires that I tell you about and engage critically with Serious Things that Serious People have said. Prominently among them are towering figures: Amílcar Cabral, Plato,

W.E.B. Du Bois, David Lewis. But it also requires that I tell you about playing in jazz band, about chancey locker rooms, about ducking cops, fucking up dates, and hitting punching bags. *Autobiography* is not an autobiography, but it is a story of my life. And, if the view I've developed here is right, then, in a different but meaningful way, it's a story of yours too.

The project of my dissertation, *Autobiography*, is to answer the question: How can we be free? Many philosophers describe the problem of freedom as arising from the limits of our agential powers, given the existence of other individuals and aspects of the world that might interfere with us. When thinking about it in the first person singular, it can seem that the task of the ethical and political philosopher is to figure out how to wrest freedom for each of us from the clutches of other people and from nature. In attempting to describe our complex social worlds, we may eventually arrive at some reformulation like: How can you and I both be free, at the same time, in the same place?

But there is another way of framing the philosophical problem of freedom: how can *we* be free? When asked from the first person plural rather than the singular, our understanding of the problem of freedom shifts from asking how to rescue the possibility of each individual's freedom from being tampered with by others, to asking how to create the possibility of our collective freedom in the face of various historical forces that separate us from each other, especially those forces that enlist some of us to perpetuate the unfreedom of all of us. This is the perspective taken up in *Autobiography*.

Whatever it is to be free, there are things that we need for our freedom to be meaningful – the things that we use to make our mark in the world. The way that we rely on material resources to do things is straightforward: you can freely *decide* to build a ship, but to actually build one you'll need matter like lumber and the tools to shape it ship-ly.

But we might need the help of other people to do what we want to do: some of the goals we can form in a social environment crucially involve other people. When I resolve to go do partner dances like salsa, bachata, or waltz, I hold out for the cooperation and participation of other people. Even where we are not doing something so obviously other-involving as partner dancing or singing a duet, we still rely on resources provided by culture and past interactions to understand ourselves and to guess at how others will understand and respond to us. These *cultural resources,* which are *collective epistemic resources* include norms, thick concepts that we use to describe and evaluate actions, and background expectations about how people tend to behave.

We can all navigate social life together when these cultural resources are genuinely shared. In order to be genuinely shared, however, it is not enough for them to be epistemically accessible. Even under circumstances of oppression, it might be the case that everyone in a society is aware of and capable of guiding their action by reference to its collective epistemic resources. But this is the way that the master, tyrannical boss, or domineering patriarch 'shares' collective resources like language and norms with their slaves, employees, and family. Genuinely shared cultural resources must be collectively owned by everyone - not only accessible, but responsive to everyone's needs and projects.

Finally, material resources and cultural resources interact and mutually inform each other. Even when resolving to do something as putatively individually accomplishable as building a small raft, my reliance on the lumber and tools I use themselves rely on social expectations and considerations: whichever ones allow me to represent the lumber and tools as available to me, and that ground the hope that I won't be interfered with in the intermediate stages between starting and completing construction.

The moral of these stories is this: we need and use social structure to make things happen. Amílcar Cabral, revolutionary theorist of Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau's struggle for independence from Portuguese colonial domination, provides an instructive view of what exactly goes wrong when we can't rely on social structure. In my terms: we can no longer understand the events of our lives as our own story, ruling out the possibility of a life lived autobiographically. From this starting point we can begin to characterize what might go right when we are not alienated from the social structure: the autobiographical life.

In Chapter 1, "British Petroleum", I develop a view of what happens when I am alienated from the social structure I rely on to make things happen. I begin with a detailed discussion of Amílcar Cabral's speech "National Liberation and Culture" and develop a view of colonialism, as characterized by Cabral, as a basic characterization of unfree social structure. I discuss how colonial social structure shapes both macro-collective (races, nation-states, communities) and individual unfreedom.

In chapter 2, "Why We Can't Have Nice Things", I move to a set of cases intermediate between the larger collective and individual scales I began with in chapter 1: joint actions involving multiple people. Conversation provides a source of particularly rich cases with largely well understood intersubjective structure. I engage with ways of characterizing communicative acts in conversation provided by Carter G. Woodson, David Lewis, and Robert Stalnaker, aiming to show how these relate to history and social structure in ways informed by Cabral's discussion of social structure at the macro level of analysis. I suggest that the coloniality of an underlying social structure rules out the kind of reliance on history that would enable autobiographical participation in conversation, the kind that would be licensed under an autobiographical rather than colonial social structure. I then suggest that W.E.B. Du Bois' concept of double

consciousness can be understood as a subjective perspective on one's life licensed by understanding this about their social structure.

Finally, in chapter 3, "How We Do," I return to the individual level of analysis and to Cabral's "National Liberation and Culture". Du Bois' double consciousness, introduced in the previous chapter, discusses possible enduring subjective consequences for an individual living under a colonial social structure. I aim to show ways that this complicates and extends the characterization of individuals as rational agents, and the possibility of effective rational agency, particularly engaging with Barbara Herman and Sharon Krause's view.

This dissertation stops short of fully developing a positive view of autobiographical life, whether at macro levels of collectivity, the intermediate levels represented by conversation, or the individual level at issue in the concept of rational agency. Based on the analysis in these chapters, I can begin to identify potential necessary conditions: chief among these, the collective ownership of both material and cultural resources; collective ownership of history; and a distribution of security and precarity to agents and communities that is explanatorily downstream of the former.

An individual agent in such a society can not only rely on her own agential and bodily capacities to make things happen, but she can regard the opportunities made possible by the interaction of her capacities and her socially constructed circumstances as ones that issue from a history that belongs to her. In relying on what social structure makes doable and secure, she will be self-relying in the extended, collective, first personal sense. Moreover, when all of her potential collaborators are in the like position, the secure collaboration she enjoys will genuinely be collaboration, rather than her exploiting the social regularities engendered by others' strategic management of their social situations. This latter contrast case is the relationship she stands in to

her own capacities and social structure in colonial situations.

Chapter 1: British Petroleum

"Hacked to pieces?" Grace repeated, disbelieving.

"Hacked to pieces," Chioma repeated.

"Jesus."

Grace Sokunbi recoiled back into the house, stumbling backwards, stopping only when she felt a tug at her leg. Her second youngest looked up at her, grinning. (Dolamu, if you asked his birth certificate; Dele if you asked anyone besides.) She wondered, briefly, how in God's name she's going to explain to Dele what's happening, much less his younger brother Bayo. She thought better of it, and shooed him away.

"You need to go. Now," Chioma insisted, leaning past the doorway of the Sokunbi family home, standing over Grace. She was a thin woman in stature, and neither especially assertive nor excitable by character. These facts were now conspiring, somehow, to make the image of her looming over Grace even more ominous. Had Chioma always been so tall?

Grace knew that she was not really looking at Chioma. She was looking through her, past Ugo, past the doorway and into Port Harcourt, into the heart of the land that was fighting to call itself Biafra. War was behind her; how far behind, Grace did not know

"*Now,* Grace. Abeg, take these your children and go. Think of them."

Grace was.

Somewhere behind Chioma, in the land fighting to call itself Biafra, lay the boarding school that housed the eldest child, Femi.

"I have to pick Femi," Grace said, resolutely, turning for a moment back inside, distracted by the faint sounds of the family piano in the living room. "*We* have to pick him."

Chioma threw up her hands. Femi's school was a day's round trip. There was no guarantee that Grace could even make it there and back in time for the departure of the ship that was to carry them to safety. Not to mention that the roads that would deliver them there were the very roads where ethnic westerners – like Grace and her family – were being hacked to death. There was no guarantee that Grace could make it there and back at all.

She backed up from the doorway and looked next door, at her own house, as if trying to remember where each brick lay. "I will go pick him."

Grace's eyes widened. "Chioma-"

"I will go pick him," Chioma said flatly. Her tone and her eyes said loudly that there was to be no discussion, no pleasantries. A silence emerged between them, interrupted only by the insistent plucking of piano keys.

Grace knew Chioma's decision made a kind of sense. Chioma was Ibo, like the majority of the people in Biafran territory – this was her people's land. While pidgin English was communicable everywhere, with ethnic tensions as they were, speaking Ibo might get one out of situations that English might not.

But this was not without its own risks. Whether violence came in the form of military maneuevers, mob violence, or vigilante justice, if it got big enough it could involve and imperil bystanders. Gunfire and explosions don't respect tribal divisions. Moreover, she'd be traveling one leg of the trip with a Yoruba boy – a westerner, an outsider, a member of a group that had sided with whatever "Nigeria" was, not with Biafra.

"E se gon ni o-," Grace began. Chioma shook her head insistently. This was not the time for elaborate Yoruba thank yous, and Grace had to admit that thank yous seemed woefully inadequate – it's not as though Chioma had lent her a spare pot. She tried again:

"I commit your trip into God's hands. In his mighty name…"

The two women helds hands and prayed. The piano in the background finally stopped – whoever was playing it must have understood what was happening.

"I'll meet you at the dock. With Femi."

"In Jesus' name."

Chioma left.

Grace turned back into the house, picking things out of the kitchen and arranging them in a bag. *Do I have enough time?* The piano playing had started again.

"Yetunde!" Grace yelled. If she heard the conversation, what was she doing? "Stop that your playing and go pack up. Get your brothers."

The next day, the family piled out of the house, bags and suitcases in tow. Grace allowed herself to look back one more time. She decided that she would miss Port Harcourt; it was a lot of things, but it had been good to her family. She decided she wouldn't tell her husband, David.

"Mommy," a voice said from behind her, insistently. "What about the piano?"

Grace scoffed. Yetunde was too old for this. "Hey! Can you carry it, jor? Get in the car."

They arrived. Dele and Bayo ran onto the ship laughing, tossing their bags into the first corner they found, dangling themselves off the ships edges, trying to reach their hands to the Shell company – David's company – logo on the side of the boat. Yetunde pulled them down, exasperated. Grace left it to her.

"Madame," a shipworker said. "We have to pull anchor."

Grace shook her head violently. "*Please*, oga. Just a bit longer."

A car pulled onto the dock, and out came Chioma and Femi. Femi Sokunbi gingerly stepped

out of the passenger seat and opened the trunk, lethargically. "Oya oya oya!" Grace yelled.

"Run! They are going to leave you!"

Femi, suddenly realizing his situation, thanked Chioma one more time and took off at a

sprint, bounding up the ramp onto the ship. Grace collided with Femi at the top of the ramp as

the workers pulled it, preparing to set sail. After embracing Femi for a long moment, Grace felt

the ground shift under her, and realized that the ship was on its way. Grace let go of Femi and

rushed back to the edge. Chioma stood by the edge of the water, waving. It was all Grace could

do to wave back.

Their eyes met, full of questions.

They never saw each other again.

Yetunde sighed. What to do about this boy?

"I don't like piano!" I insisted. "I just want to play in band."

Yetunde knew the truth: her youngest child, Femi Taiwo, liked playing piano just fine. What

he didn't like was practicing. Truth be told, he didn't like struggling at anything.

America has spoiled this one, she figured.

Everything in his life was already easy: he lived in a country where the lights were always

on, where he could just get any variety of fully prepared food out of a cabinet or a box. Where

war never happened to them – when it happened, it happened somewhere else, to other people.

Americans were not other people.

To top it off, Femi was the youngest, at all of nine years old. He had been born after the leaner years the family had spent in the Bay, trying to maintain as immigrants on graduate student salaries. More than that: he had a knack for weaseling his older siblings into doing the least savory aspects of his chores by feigning confusion or, more boldly, just running outside to play before they were done. Disciplining this child was an exhausting task, and Yetunde already did the cooking and brought in the family income – what was Abiola doing?

Music, too, could be easy – if he was allowed to play the saxophone. It was an instrument you played one note at a time, and Femi had gotten good at it with a fraction of the practice it would have taken to get an equivalent level of skill at piano.

 "Oya," she said. "Just do your hand like this." Yetunde made a fist with her right hand and raked it over the raised black keys of the piano, first to the right and then to the left, tapping an individual key at the end of both the ascending and descending flourish. It made a jaunty little melody – it wasn't much, but it was what has survived Nigeria's civil war, and she was proud of it.

Femi frowned and folded his hands. "That's not how you're supposed to play piano."

He was right. It violated the basic technique they spent so much money getting Mrs. Herschenhahn to teach all three of the kids. Piano was properly played with the pads of each finger, not the knuckles. Moreover it was played with sheet music, not from memory. Daddy would frown at this: if anything was supposed to be done *properly*, with discipline, it was piano.

Her Chinese coworkers had figured this out – their children, and all the others in the Chinese schools they had constructed for themselves, all played with proper technique, which is how it seemed to her that they did everything else. They would make it, even in America, even being something other than white – which, she had learned the hard way, was much harder than it

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would look to Femi from the comfortable view of his suburban public schools, safely away from what they had seen happen to Black people in the Bay. If Daddy's experience working with Europeans in a company as white dominated as Shell hadn't made this point clear to her, her own as a Black woman scientist in Proctor and Gamble would have.

She had tried to make this point to Femi once, taking him on a tour of the Chinese night schools, back when she was trying to organize the same for Nigerians. Getting Nigerians to work together or getting this stubborn little boy to do as he was told – which was harder? Maybe he was too young, maybe it wasn't time yet. First things first: basic discipline of any kind.

"This one is special," Yetunde tried. "Just follow me." Yetunde played the piano

Femi mirrored her technique. He didn't get it right on the first try, since rolling his knuckles was foreign to him, and he was just hearing the tune for the first time. He didn't get it the second or third either. But by the fourth, he had it down. After all: it was easy.

"Okay mom," he said self-assuredly. "I got it."

By the fifth and sixth, he was already experimenting with alternate endings and starting points for the tune. Yetunde shook her head, signing. *This is why*, Yetunde figured, *he doesn't learn anything at piano lessons*. He "practices" everything except was he was told to play.

"I'm done," Femi said, getting up all of a sudden. She had just taken her attention away for a second, but he had already lost interest.

"You haven't practiced any of your music for Mrs. H. Get back here, jare!"

But he had already grabbed his soccer ball, and was out the door.

The group of us ended the song together, on the down beat.

"*Damn*, Wallace!" I said, pulling my saxophone away from my mouth and draping it lazily across my lap. "You sound like a pro."

And he did. But that wasn't precisely what I meant. I didn't know precisely what I meant. Unlike saxophone, you couldn't really distinguish yourself by tone alone – a key struck by a novice player and one by an advanced player on the same piano would generate the same note, with the same sound quality. Nevertheless, I got a very quick sense of what a pianist was capable of from just listening to them play a few bars – I never confused even the best of my fellow high school players with the really good college music students, who I rarely confused with the teachers and the pros who would occasionally show us how they got down.

I always preferred soloing with the advanced students, teachers, or pros playing the backgrounds. I was just…better, somehow. There was more sonically to work with, despite the sheet music giving me the exact same list of chords as it did when I played with other high schoolers. The difference was more than what could be explained by volume or how they struck the piano – advanced players made different decisions about what to play, and when, and how. But it just seemed like magic: we all had the same sheet music, the same chord progressions, the same "fake book" that told us how to play the jazz standards. How were some people so many miles ahead?

"Thanks bro," Wallace said. "I've been trying some new voicings out."

Voicings? "Voicings?"

Wallace motioned for me to come over to the piano. I leaned over it, curious but skeptical.

"All these are E minor."

He went through what must have been a dozen different hand positions.

"Here's all the inversions." His hands flashed across the keys. He played the same chord, but put the notes in a different order. The sound got higher and lower, thicker and thinner, but the differences seemed slight - out of the context of a song, at least.

"Here's with some color tones." Now things got interesting: the tones morphed in other ways. Some of these sounded "cool" – I realized that Wallace was doing things I had heard other people do. The grudging exceptions I had had to make to my "piano is boring" rule about the world: Herbie Hancock, Stevie Wonder, Chick Corea, Fats Domino. Not just the famous legends – but the kinds of sounds that were standard fare among pianists and organ players in the Black American churches I had been to. This didn't sound like boring classical music at all.

"E minor add 9. E minor sharp 11. Over the fifth, now over the second."

"The fuck? Bro are you even speaking English?"

But he was. I knew, faintly, at least some of these things – if you counted the notes on the scales Mrs. H had showed me way back when, you could match them up with the keys Wallace's right hand was playing. I stared harder, counting. This, I realized with a start, was what the chord progressions in our music actually were.

Chord progressions, sheet music: they weren't even maps. They barely told you anything. They stood for something else, they pointed the way to somewhere I wanted to go, they held something in them that the pros could see and I couldn't. That was why they did something so different for the pros than they did for me and the other kids in the band. Wallace had the key to that magical place they led to, and I didn't.

And I realized something else, too. Like it or not, that keyhole had the same structure, the same patterns, and the same rules as all of the stuff Mrs. H had showed me, and that had bored

me out of my mind. I had just listened to Mrs. H, I would have the background to see what the

pros saw when they saw the same lists of chords I struggled with.

"Scoot over," I said insistently. Wallace chuckled and made way. I sat next to Wallace on

the piano bench. "Show me again."

"This is a Halfway Krooks original. It's called 'What If'."

It all happened on the second chorus.

"What if somewhere and sometime,
There's a world for all I can do
One for everything that could possibly be
is there one for me with you?
And what if somewhere and sometime, there's a world for all there could be?
Oh the possibilities, let's pick one and go there, go there, go there…"

The tell-tale hum of overdrive was in the air.

That meant Eric had clicked on his overdrive pedal. Terry tapped the cymbals, filling out the

upper frequencies. It was louder than I was used to. *Not yet*, I wanted to yell. *Save space for*

later! But it was too late – Terry was in the zone, hyped off the performance. Besides, I had my

own role to play. *C# minor. Add the 11th. Don't play any bass substitutions yet.* I looked down

to check my hands were in the right spot. I looked over at the bass player, Cooney, to see if he

was ready. He was.

Eric strummed his part of the bridge. It was funkier than he normally played - shorter notes,

sharper attacks. I looked out into the crowd. Heads were nodding, some bashing like it was a

metal concert. Terry was right about the energy level after all.

No sooner than I realized that than Cooney gave me a look, and a quick grin. My left hand

snapped into action, playing the bass roots Cooney left behind on the lower end of my keyboard,

just as he abandoned the bass roots of the chord, playing long melodic lines that walked across the chord progression. Terry's hands flashed across the drum kit, starting the most elaborate drum fill I had ever heard him play, just as Curtis' saxophone sang out, hitting a colorful 9th. I was taken by so much surprise that I lost track of my hands on the keyboard. *Shit! If I'm late to the downbeat…*

I found my hand position just in time, and we all hit our notes on the downbeat of 1 with authority. The crowd roared. I sang as loud as my lungs could support.

"Let's pick one and go there! Go there! Go there!"

Cooney played first. It was a classic Cooney bassline – tasteful, out of the way, saving the business for later. Eric followed it, doubling the line. Terry thought for a moment, adopting his telltale glance off into space, off and to the right, where the drum gods apparently communed. He came back with an 8 bar drum pattern, opening the hi hat to mark the top and midpoint of Cooney's melodic phrases.

As far as patterns to jam on went, it was good enough. More than that, even. I looked at my keyboard. I had nothing to add just et – this was shaping up nicely and there would be time and space later. So I picked up the microphone, and thought about verses for songs I hadn't finished. There was something here.

My thoughts drifted to one verse in particular that I had written after my friend Luke, a graduate student in philosophy, had explained that some Australian guy came up with a theory that every way the world could be arranged actually existed. It was totally nuts, but I had to

admit it was a poetically beautiful idea. Luke said that Lewis didn't think you could get to any

of these other worlds, but when has some shit like that stopped a poet?

I rapped the verse. I sang the chorus. Half way through the chorus, Terry switched the drum

pattern, hitting cymbals on every down beat. As if calling the spirits from the depths, we all

responded – steadily increasing our volume together. We got through 7 bars – each of us,

thinking in fours, wondered what would be next. Eric strummed his way out of the lead part

he'd been playing, and Terry looked at me. I looked down at my keyboard, having figured out

what key everyone was in, and a progression to match. We all met, together, on the downbeat.

Half of a chorus occurred to me:

"What if somewhere and sometime,
There's a world for all I can do
One for everything that could possibly be
is there one for me with you?

Eric played a blazing solo, we repeated the chorus, Terry cued us out with a drawn out,

measure long drum fill. We ended together on the root, on the one. We looked at each other for

a long moment. Of all the shit we had written, this was by far the best.

"Fuck yeah," Terry whooped, wiping the sweat from his forehead. "What are we gonna call

that one?"

I.   Introduction

"The principal characteristic, common to every kind of imperialist domination, is the negation of the historical process of the dominated people by means of violently usurping the free operation of the process of development of the productive forces...the foundation for national liberation rests in the inalienable right of every people to have their own history, whatever formulations may be adopted at the level of international law. The objective of national liberation is, therefore, to reclaim the right, usurped by imperial domination, namely: the liberation of the process of development of national productive forces. - "National Liberation and Culture" [1]

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[1] Cabral, *Return to the Source*, 41–43.

Amílcar Cabral was a political and military leader who organized with the people of Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau against Portuguese imperialism.[2] This successful military campaign was one of many on the African continent in the 1950s and 60s, and this time of anti-colonial action and practice was also theoretically fruitful. Cabral, among other thinkers of his time and place, thought very seriously about the theoretical problem of freedom and the way it related to and was sedimented in social structures.

In the context of this struggle, I argue that Cabral came to the conclusion that colonial domination both necessitated and ultimately amounted to cultural domination, and also that national liberation movements started from and should be understood as cultural movements aimed at reclaiming a people's ownership of their history. I interpret this claim about the nature of the particular unfreedom of colonial domination to carry with it a philosophical claim about the nature of freedom, full stop. From this starting point, I aim to elaborate the picture of unfreedom under colonialism that Cabral developed here and begin elab from this starting point.

Cabral says that the usurpation of the "free operation of the process of development of the productive forces" is the means by which imperialists negate the historical process – importantly, the historical process *full stop* - of the dominated people. But he, also noting the importance of security, also says this: "imperialist domination…for its own security, requires cultural oppression and the attempt at direct or indirect liquidation of the essential elements of the culture of the dominated people."[3]

Earlier, in "National Liberation and Culture", Cabral had said the following:

[2] I will follow Cabral throughout in using 'imperialism' and 'colonialism' interchangeably.

[3] Cabral, *Return to the Source.*

For every society, for every group of people, considered as an evolving entity, the level of the productive forces indicates the stage of development of the society and of each of its components in relation to nature, its capacity to act or react consciously in relation to nature. It indicates and conditions the type of material relationships (expressed objectively or subjectively) which exists among the various elements or groups constituting the society in question. Relationships and types of relationships between man and nature, between man and his environment. Relationships and type of relationships among the individual or collective components of a society. To speak of these is to speak of history but it is also to speak of culture…culture is an essential element of the history of a people. Culture is, perhaps, the product of this history just as the flower is the product of a plant. Like history, *or because it is history*, culture has as its material base the level of productive forces and the mode of production….[4] (emphasis added)

It is a bit surprising, at first glance that the "liberation of productive forces" should turn out to be the key solution to what Cabral had earlier described as "cultural domination." Culture is perhaps more often associated with things like artistic traditions, sacred customs and religious rites, and festivals than things like economic output. Both history and culture are being used in technical, unfamiliar ways. But which ways, and how do the uses of these terms in the second block quote explain the connection in the first quote between the "free operation of the development of productive forces" and "national liberation" from colonial domination? I turn to that task in part II.
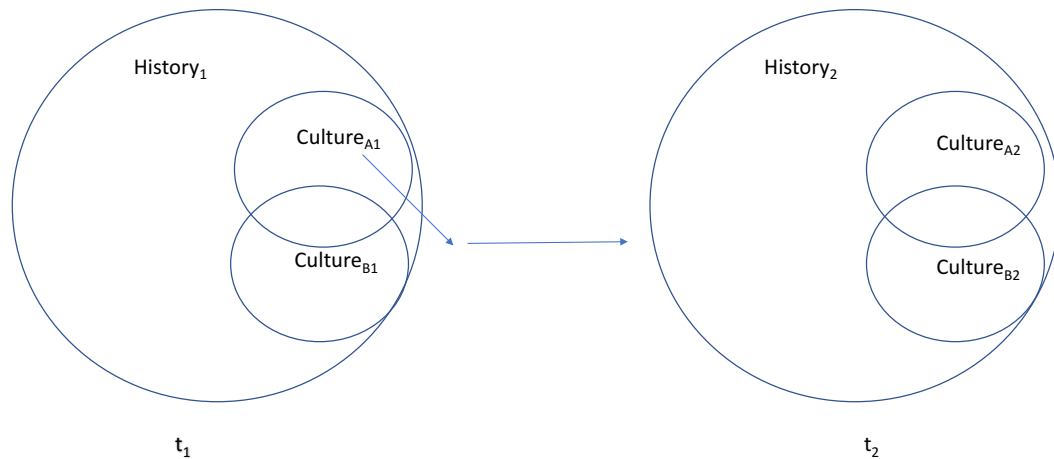
II.   Colonialism as Collective Unfreedom

The following diagram helps show the structure of the relationship between culture, history, and unfreedom:

Figure 1.1

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[4] Cabral, 42.

Colonialism

In the above figure, let 'A' and 'B' refer to two communities A and B in some sphere of interaction. The arrows above express explanatory relations. The diagram above then depicts the situation in which the culture of Community A explains the relationship of history, A's culture, and B's culture at time t_1 to history and both A and B's culture at time t_2. This expresses Cabral's sentiment of the cultural domination of one imperial culture (community A) of another community (community B).

Interpreting history as a set of narrative resources helps make sense of the previous Cabral passages and, more importantly, good sense of the world. I do not use the term 'narrative' to mark a primarily psychological or experiential relationship between people and actions, though various aspects of the philosophical view developed here (particularly, subjective security) will

be concerned with these. Instead, I use the term *narrative,* to keep track of two important observations about our actions themselves and the material and immaterial resources we use to act: first that both are separable into parts and secondly that both extend and persist over time.

History refers to the way the world has been, understood and rendered accessible by way of the available collective epistemic resources, an important set of narrative resources available to us. It is closely interdefined with *culture:* the history owned by a community of people.[5] That is, the subset of narrative resources fashioned out of the past actual relationships to nature and each other, that belong to that people and stand ready to be used for making history, that is, acting.

We use the immaterial resources of history and culture, "collective epistemic resources", to act ourselves, to interpret the actions of others, and to ground expectations about what responses to our actions will be. These cultural resources include include what "facts" we treat as public practical premises in conversation and other kinds of joint action, languages (verbal, gestural, etc), what categories we sort ourselves into and which features of particular contexts render which of them salient.[6]

These resources change over time, and both the content of their changes and the explanations we give for those changes are meaningful: a deviation from historical pattern the first steps of a new one, or mere stochastic noise against the signal provided by history. Looking backwards, (from t_2 to t_1 in Figure 2.1): culture is formed by the past experiences (and responses to those

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[5] There's a tension in Pan-Africanist thought generally between the concept of culture in an anthropological sense that one might individuate at the level of individual ethnic groups with the expanded sense of culture Cabral and other Pan-Africanists sometimes appeal to, built in response to a history of racialized colonialism. Cabral himself marks groups that anthropologists might call "cultures" with the term "societies" and "ethnic groups", mostly using the term culture when intentionally speaking to issues that cut across these. My technical term follows suit. Cabral, *Return to the Source.*

[6] I prefer this to "mutual knowledge" because central cases (related to imperialist domination and downstream social oppressions) often involve coordinating on descriptions of the world which are not factual in any sense, or that are accurate in virtue of the fact that enough of us coordinate on them. [bring up to body! Somehow]

experiences) of the community that owned them before. Their content, at any given moment in time, reflects these responses to the world as it has already been. Looking forwards (from t_1 to t_2): the narrative resources they are refined according to the experiences, needs, and stewardship of those that own them. Their content, at any given moment in time (at either of t_1 or t_2), partially reflects the world as (the community anticipates) it will be.

A dynamic conception – the one involved in Cabral's deliberate use of the term, "historical processes" – allows us to distinguish two senses of collectivity for the narrative resources provided by history and culture, as well as by material resources: publicity and ownership.

One sense in which these resources are collective is *publicity*. Narrative resources are public when they are accessible and usable by those with the relevant capabilities and in the relevant circumstances. This fails for some material resources under schemes of private property. Publicity obtains for at least some part of collective epistemic resources – at a minimum, whichever aspect of them organizes material production and its social reproduction.[7] *Ownership* is a second sense of collectivity for narrative resources - it's an explanatory relation, on which changes in these resources are non-accidentally attributable to the needs, desires, and goals of that community.

This distinction in collectivity helps explain what material production might have to do with cultural domination, and what both of these might have to do with freedom in the sense thought of by ethical philosophers. Material production is that production that provides for our material needs, so a suitable scheme of material production is the condition of possibility for material security. Material security is key to all other kinds of security. All other kinds of security are in some sense downstream of this security because our persistence is the condition of possibility for

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[7] Footnote about ideology.

the pursuit of any other ends that we might have. Whatever story I want to tell in the future, whatever actions I'd like to take, whether expressive ('culture' in the colloquial or anthropological sense) or not, I have to persist to take them.

Then, if imperialism makes it the case that material production of the colonized is not organized around its own culture, there's a problem. The productive forces of colonized countries do go through changes over time – historical processes – but it is not the culture of the colonized that explains those changes. Imperialism understood this way is, fundamentally, the attempt to own another people's history in the technical senses used here: that to create the conditions social conditions for an explanatory relation on which what happens to those under imperial domination is organized around the needs, desires, and goals of the colonizing forces.

I contend that this is what Cabral means by saying that imperialism negates the "free operation of the development of the productive forces". If the changes in the productive forces were explained by the collective needs and relationships owned by the colonized – then these needs and relationships, and the struggles internal to them, would explain why the productive forces develop in the way that they do, and in turn explain the kinds of life made possible by the material security and other downstream forms of security that scheme of production makes. If, instead, changes in the development of the productive forces are explained by British Petroleum's financial stake in securing their access to crude oil, then the basic building blocks of making a life story in Nigeria were, in the final analysis, only accidentally related to the availability of whatever securities would have made those stories good ones.

The preceding discussion has dealt almost entirely with large, macro-, collective levels of politics: whole cultures, communities, nations. The claim I have made about the implications of this reading of Cabral, however, have not been so restricted. In developing Cabral's account of

the unfreedom of colonial domination, I have claimed to be developing of view of unfreedom and of freedom full stop, not one relativized to a particular scale of politics or political situation. Then, I should show how the insights developed here apply coherently to the micro-level: individual and interpersonal interactions and situations. I turn to that task in Part III.

III.   Colonialism as 'Individual' Unfreedom

A narrative view of action helps bring out the connection between colonial domination, history, culture, and unfreedom. Recall that 'narrative' makes salient two observations about our actions: first, that they are separable into parts, and second, that they extend over time. Close attention to these facts will make clear how and why micro-unfreedom relates to macro-unfreedom.

We can make out three ways of describing the relationship between actions and history: a backward-looking relation, immanent relation, and forward looking relation.

The backward looking relation: our actions rely on history. Since we use security as a narrative resource, and since actions are narratives, the things that set our subjective security sets our possibilities for acting, and also for the consequences we use to evaluate and establish our field of practical options.

The immanent relation: Our actions reproduce history.[8] One way they do this is by signaling that the previous trajectories and incentive structures are still applicable and in effect, still the

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[8] I want to flag that I mean social reproduction in a very capacious sense here: that our actions reconstitute the practical environment that serves as historical material for future actions, full stop. That's an even broader sense than, for example, a Marxian notion of social reproduction on which the conditions being reproduced are specifically those that preserve the social conditions under which labor power can be exchanged for wages, or the notions of reproduction corresponding to notions of the reproductive labor in a familial sense that are under discussion in socialist feminist and other feminist traditions.

thing to do. Word meaning, for example, is built not only out of the one-time writing of a dictionary definition but the persistence of patterns of word usage that follow the definition.

For the same reasons, the other hand a break in the rhythm of history can signal either a momentary misstep, noise relative to the signal pattern provided by history, or a first step on the construction of a new beat. Whether we revert to old patterns, follow the new pattern, or do something else entirely is always a conceptual possibility, whatever the underlying incentive structure that guides which possibilities are likely. [30s use of 'Black' versus 70s use of 'Black' makes this contrast vivid – make clear that this paragraph is both the immanent and future. Maybe split this paragraph up into the preceding and following paragraph]

The forward looking relation: Our actions aim to become history. One aspect of this is that our actions anticipate the future in a narrative sense. By "narrative" sense, I allude to the possibility of uniting the past with the future constitutively, and not simply in the sense of domino causality. That is, part of what it will come to that the third movement of this piano concerto is the fast and exciting climax of my performance of the piece consists in the slow deliberateness with which I am now taking the second movement.

Figure 1.2

'Individual' Unfreedom
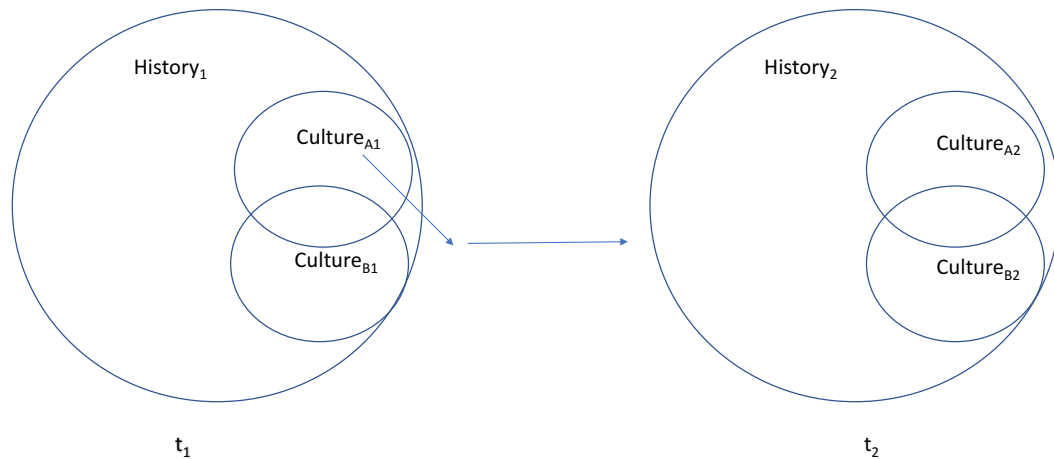
Compare this figure with Figure 2.1: the dynamics at this micro-level are exactly identical to the ones operant on the macro-level, and I have only changed the label of the figure from 'imperialism' to 'individual unfreedom'. The underlying claim about individual oppression is weighty: I don't mean to claim that personal cases of oppression follow a structure similar or analogous to the structure that describes nations oppressing other nations. Instead, I aim to show that, at the appropriate level of abstraction, the underlying structures are the identical; indeed, the very same.

In engaging with Cabral's conception of freedom, I've aimed to resist a conception of freedom that ties it too closely to actions or specific politically or socially important action-types. On such views, freedom is primarily a matter of which actions one can or cannot perform in a

literal, behavioral sense. I also want to resist a related granular analysis of freedom as exhausted by a set of free-to-do-x's and free-to-do-y's and unfree-to-abstain-from-z's as a substitute for looking into the broader orientation to one's life or a community to its flourishing that is built out of such lists and the explanations we give for them.

There's certainly something important about being able to do the x's and y's one pleases. But few if any important forms of coercion or dominance are capable of entirely eliminating the possibility of choice. More to the point: I think this view of what freedom is fails to tell the right story about the unfreedom that persists even in the space of choice that remains in the gaps of the surveillance. Such conceptions of freedom risk being reductive about what has gone wrong when prison guards, political structures, domineering patriarchs, or the plantation master's overseers prevent me from doing as I please. My preferred view of freedom is founded in an explanatory relation between ourselves and the things that we do or forego doing, not being able to do some privileged set of actions.

Unfreedom on this view, then, is not about the particular actions done or not done but rather the explanatory relations that structure the possibilities (and, critically, the incentives) for acting in the first instance.

Johann Fichte helps frame what is at stake in this claim in *Foundations of Natural Right*. There, he identifies the capacity for freedom in (something rather like) the agential sense as someone's having the "capacity to construct, through absolute spontaneity, concepts of his possible efficacy", and further identifies this as the necessary sense in which rational beings recognize each other as such.[9]

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[9] Fichte, *Foundations of Natural Right*, 9.

However, he distinguishes a being's having this capacity sharply from what it would be for a being with these capabilities to "find himself as free". For that, one must not only have the capacity for this kind of construction but it must also be the case that "the object in experience that is thought of through the concept of the person's efficacy actually correspond to that concept", or, hopefully equivalently, that "something in the world outside the rational individual follow from the thought of his activity."[10]

As I interpret this, this is an early expression of the basic notion of freedom that this dissertation calls autobiographical – that freedom is an explanatory relation between actions and authors, on which the author can properly be taken to be the explanation of the acts that issue from her behavior.

But I have also aimed to show that, although it is easy to describe our overt behaviors (movements of limbs in space and time) as though they were entirely constitutive of our acts, but our acts are not reducible to these behaviors. Our overt behaviors contribute to the acts that they help constitute, but that connection is deeply dependent on and itself partially constructed by the social environment in which they are performed. This helps point to the possibility that someone could be the origin of their activity in the causal sense, but fail to own their activity in the further sense corresponding to free, agentic action, the one autobiography is primarily concerned with.

That origination and ownership can come apart every so often is the sort of thing that appears obvious to us in cases of interpersonal, overt coercion: it is the reliable defense of the cashier who empties the register not because she believes it ought to be emptied but because a robber has her at gunpoint. But Cabral has clued us into the possibility that this relationship between one's actions and acts is not necessarily limited to exceptional, one-off episodes of life, but can be a

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[10] Fichte, 9.

relationship to a collective's actions in a more durable, social-structural sense. The task of this section is to extend this insight to the micropolitical realm. To get this done, we can appeal to the narrative structure of action.

At least some of our actions are conceptually separable into parts.

Say somebody, let's call them David, is sitting in a chair and decide to get a drink of water from the park water fountain. We could describe this action as having parts or sub-actions: including getting up from his seat, taking however many steps is required to get across to the fountain, moving his hand in such a way as will move the lever on the fountain, and moving his head downwards to the water fountain.

The reason he has to do each sub-action is derivative: he has reason to do the sub-actions only insofar as he's right that they contribute to the big one, and insofar as they actually do so contribute. (He would only pull off looking very silly if he, from his initial seated position rather than from in front of the water fountain, bent down, mouth agape. Whatever's good about hydration doesn't give him reason to do *that*.)

The "getting up" from his seated position is such a sub-action. It's good, because it will enable David's later walking (to the water fountain) and bending (to the spout) sub-actions. But his walking and bending are things that, if they happen at all, will happen in the future. He does not have direct observational knowledge about the world that could ground certainty that there will be bodily motions corresponding to his representation of walking and bending, because the relevant world – this world, two seconds from now – isn't yet. Perhaps he could not have such knowledge even in principle.

Yet, he implicitly builds assumptions that rely on features of that unobservable world as their content – at least, considering what we have said so far, the compatibility of that world with his

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walking and bending – into his description of and justification for standing – or, more directly, his understanding of what he's up to when he stands. If we were to ask him what he was doing at that sub-action, he could coherently say "getting a drink of water" even though what he was literally doing in that short interval of time would be better described as "getting out of a seat".

The major takeaway from this long, odd look at approaching a water fountain is this: from any part of an action, we implicitly rely on a story about the world: a description or set of descriptions of the world that cast it as having been, being, and going to be such that we can count on both the overt behavior (the movements of limbs) happening and having the consequence and significance we aim at.

This practical reliance on a story portraying a certain kind of stability of the world or our description of it, enables us to do the entire action from within any particular part of it. This story of the compatibility of the world with my getting across to the water fountain and drinking from it, is the unstated thing on the basis of which David does the "walking up" part of the action, in anticipation of the "operating the water fountain's lever" possibility and in partial fulfillment of the possibility that the "getting up his seat" held out for by articulating itself in the world though his behavior.

Call his conscious or unconscious reliance on the world *subjective security*. Call its opposite *subjective precarity*.

Just as the relationship between the sub-parts of an action and the whole action is not simply justificatory, subjective security is not simply a property that an action can have to a greater or lesser extent. Subjective security is also constitutive of action, for both actor and audience. A melody is not simply a list of notes, but a totality that emerges out of several intervals of key stroking and rests. The subjective security that I will play the rests and the notes that is the basis

by which I represent myself as simply "playing the melody" even while I am still in the first bar of the song, and it is also the basis by which you represent me as doing the same while you are listening to my performance.

Temporally speaking, subjective security goes in all directions. I've focused on forward looking dependencies between sub-parts for ease of exposition of the narrative concept. But for understanding Cabral, and, more importantly, the underlying concept, it's important to note that sub parts rely on parts that precede it in the same way. Maybe I have plenty of reasons to play middle C – it's as good a key on piano as any other, I only get it right in representing it as the end of the melody if I've already played the notes that come before it.

Subjective security is a narrative resource. We've already seen more apt descriptions probably a more apt description of how trips to the water fountain actually work: I just fail to consider what could go wrong. I don't look into how things have gone in the past to check whether my legs and spine are reliable, I ask no questions about the pipes, and I don't wonder whether anyone would have a problem with my drinking from this water fountain. It's a nice thing: we why we don't have to think of our actions as infinitely finely grained sub-actions.

There are some situations where we have less subjective security, affecting which actions we can simply do and which we are apt to represent in stages or parts. Consider an action like "getting across town by 4 PM". A rich person may simply be able to plan to do this later, even in the full knowledge that this is multiply realizable, because he takes himself to have effective means to make a range of versions of that happen: whether by hailing a cab or premium rideshare, driving themselves, taking a cross town helicopter, or perhaps prevailing on an employee for a "favor" that is in their career interests to satisfy. These practical options, we can further notice, needn't involve intensive use of his knowledge of the destination or of the routes,

or her vigilance in checking traffic information, so long as he can count on that knowledge and vigilance from the people whose labor makes "his" action of getting across town possible. His wealth position also makes available countermeasures for many of the foreseeable practical impediments to her goal: he may be able to afford a cab or premium rideshare which will take him directly to his destination whether others could only afford shared rideshare; he may be able to take toll roads to avoid traffic others would have to grin and bear; in cases of extreme wealth, he may even be in a position to avail himself of the use of helicopters to get from place to place in a city.

Contrast this with, say, the way a working class person may relate to the same practical objective: to get across town by a specific time. We could imagine that she must figure out the bus routes to her specific destination, hope that the different bus companies accept her transfer fare (thus making the trip affordable), and be vigilant to make sure that she gets on the right bus, because she can count on the indifference of bus drivers to her actual destination. She must further be hopeful, that the buses are running on time and traffic is not too bad. If practical impediments show up – traffic, a lengthy route to pick up another passenger in shared rideshare, bus failure – she may not be able to afford any of the "solutions" to the problems that these represent, for example, switching to an expensive but lower traffic toll road. Even if she can, she must weigh them against the other uses of her scarce dollars, and are hardly reflexively built into her intention to get across town by 4 pm in the way that it might be for the rich person, who would be solving the problems presented by the unexpected by the expenditure of an inconsequential amount of money relative to their wealth. These considerations help explain why the working class person may be more subjectively precarious with respect to the same practical objective that a rich person may be subjectively secure with respect to, and provides on

instance in which it is apparently that subjective security is differentially distributed in a community.

Security and precarity also come in objective flavors. To arrive at this, first observe the difference between one's field of practical efficacy and their deliberative field. The former is something like the truth about which effects I can make on the world in all of the relevant domains given my practical capacities. The latter is the something like that same field of practical efficacy under a description – the possibilities I consciously and unconsciously regard as available pathways for me to take.

If the subjective securities I have are not simply to be a mistake, comical arrogance, or cluelessness, then one way we might defend them by identify something that justifies or explains our use of this narrative resource. The easiest set of cases to get this going are those occasions where we are *subjectively secure* about actions which are also *objectively secure*. That is, where the way the relevant features of the world work –make what I think I'm doing likely to match what I'm doing, in the way that truths about chemistry might ground the subjective security I have in representing myself as causing a certain kind of chemical reaction when the thing I am literally doing is mixing two vials of chemicals. On these occasions, I enjoy and exploit a licensed reliance on a description of the world in order to do what I'm doing.

As we've just seen, some things relevant for security of some actions are facts about how the natural laws of the world work. But social laws, norms, and patterns of behavior also bear on the security of actions, and thereby bear a constitutive relationship to them in much the way that the physical laws and facts about the world do.

One way to make out how social structure and objective security are related proceeds from the observation that the resources we rely on for acting are public, but a crucial and important

consideration: they are alienable. Some of the ways I can remove the possibility of your use of material resources are straightforward: there are things one can do to apartments to prevent people from living in them. On a straightforward strategy, one might just board up the apartment and bolt its doors shut, or even destroy it by bulldozing or arson. When someone does something like that, they prevent me from using it in a straightforward way that ordinary uses of language are well positioned to describe.

But on a narrative view, I can also say this: it's not simply that I can't use the apartment *now*, but you also might be signaling some stable intention or disposition to keep the apartment out of my practical options into the future. That changes my narrative relationship to the material object the apartment is is – barring delusion, I can't relate to that material object of the apartment as a "tool" in my life story in the future unless, perhaps, I add a fight scene with you somewhere along the way in my projections of the future world. Then, I alter physical aspects of the world itself to prevent you from having the kind of access to the apartment that would license reliance on its availability: any remaining subjective security with respect to an apartment that has, say, burnt to the ground, would necessarily rest on a fictional description of the world.

Alternatively, the powers that be could take a subtler route and deliver me an eviction notice. The eviction notice attempts to alter social aspects of the world in order to bring about the same effects on my narrative structure that snatching it would do – that is, practically orient me away from living in the department. History may convert this sign into credible subjective precarity by making available stories of people who were victims of violence or sanction for inhabiting an apartment post eviction, or giving the reader reason to believe that this ban is effectively enforced by, say, the police. The costs of this potential violence or interruption may prevent me from pushing my luck.

The way we use immaterial resources is a bit trickier to explain, but easier to see why it might matter to talk in terms of "narratives". We use cultural resources like collective epistemic resources in order to act as well. There's something like a store of public information that we act from and on in our public acts. [11] Conversation is a clear case of this, and Robert Stalnaker marks this store of information with the term *common ground*.[12] The content of the common ground, whatever else it is, is a set of practical resources that people can use to communicate.

Social norms, past patterns of practice, and rules of etiquette can act as "whites only water fountain" signs do. These things help establish, both subjectively and objectively, which uses of public information are secure and which are precarious, to what extent, and in which contexts. For example, these may establish the schedule of imagined social consequences to playing classical music on the piano, the schedule of the same for jazz music, and a means of comparing the two and thus comparing payoffs to those practical strategies.

These also play a constitutive role in our actions. These resources are the things that allow me to map the physical behavior of entering and leaving my apartment, sleeping there, mailing rent checks, and setting up utilities as "lawfully inhabiting my apartment" (as opposed to, say, "squatting) – that is, these resources help constitute the thing my fingers are doing as what they are doing by placing them in narrative continuity with enterings and leavings of apartments, as represented by the history encoded and made practically available by the resources themselves.

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[11] I spell out the alternative view of the common ground in "The Empire Has No Clothes", connect power dynamics to the update processes of the common ground with Liam Kofi Birght in "Discourse Power", and analyze the implications of thinking that public information can be owned in "Beware of Schools Bearing Gifts". Táíwò, "The Empire Has No Clothes"; Táíwò, "Beware of Schools Bearing Gifts: Miseducation and Trojan Horse Propaganda"; Bright and Táíwò, "Discourse Power."

[12] I return to this subject in the next chapter.

Our actions rely on the resources embodied by and embedded in social structure, which is a result of historical processes in the conventional sense. In this respect, we use social structure in the same way that we use our knowledge of the natural world: we rely on our understanding of it to make our actions what they are. I walk by putting my feet on the earth – I recognize this as an action that contributes to walking because I am subjectively secure that the earth will push back against my body. I'm objectively secure – in that the laws of physics, the relevant truths about the ground under me, and the facts about where other animate and inanimate objects are and will be make it the case that my subjective security is no delusion or mistake. This helps make it the case that the full action of walking is authored by me even though only some of its component sub-actions are attributable to me, even though I can set myself to pushing my feet against the ground, but I cannot make it push back.

But social structure is a historical matter. Norms, word meaning, social institutions aren't set in stone. They're a structured story – a history - that we build out of past doings of things and the explanatory relations that both constituted those events as what they were and present them to us now as narrative material in the present, usable by us in establishing the stories to come. We fashion and refashion what the story is, and what uses of it we will make, together – this is what common ground does in conversation, and what social structures do in social life more generally.

This helps us see an important difference in kinds of licensed reliance that distinguish the relationship we typically have with natural facts about the world from the kind that may be characteristic of our reliance on social features of the world. When I mix an acid and a base in the laboratory, the relevant securities grant me two kinds of licensure in representing this action as the production of water and salt. They grant me license to have, at least a *predictive reliance*

on the world: the relevant objective securities help make it a good bet to forecast the presence of water and a salt in the near future. When we predictively rely on the world, we respond to its structure as we perceive or assume it to be. We treat the regularities or forecasts we make about the world as objects to manage, a structure to exploit or avoid. This is the way we deal with the weather, or, or each other (on a bad day).

The way that I rely on chemistry goes beyond just this. The patterns and structure of nature that explains the regularities we represent as natural laws also grant a me license to have a *constitutive reliance* on the world when doing this sort of thing. When we constitutively rely on the world being a certain way, our actions not merely that the relevant causal dominoes are arranged such that we should bet on our action coming off behaviorally and being socially constituted as the action we hoped it would be. Instead, we contribute to the world: we do our part of a larger causal chain which we treat as connected to our own – I eat the tomatoes you planted as the final step completing the large chain of actions what made them worth the effort you took to grow them, as one of the anticipated actions that fulfill the good making features held out for by the previous actions of planting the seed, harvesting the crop, transporting it, and making it available for sale. I rely on the contributions of the world and of other people, not because I can exploit them or even because I can expect them, but we are all participating in a whole made up of the parts they are doing and the parts I am doing.

This last point helps use see how far apart constitutive reliance and predictive reliance really are. There are some cases where we do our parts of whole actions for reasons other than predicting that the world will respond in the right way. I may give you advice that I don't expect you to pay attention to, knowing that even in the case of that your reaction is dismissive, I may still find it morally important to have made advice available for you to take up. I may cast a

ballot, knowing it will not be counted, as a form of protest, or as an entreaty for those whose action and inaction prevented my act from joining a whole to which it ought to have been a part (an act of voting) to defect from a similar pattern on the next go round. As you can tell, some of these cases are of the mundane variety, but others are quite morally important.

When I mix and acid and a base in a lab, they don't simply predictively count on salt and water appearing in a beaker out of nowhere: I'm now engaged in affecting the world in the way that non-accidentally related to the production of both because of the underlying facts about the world that explain the securities – that facts about chemistry that make it such that these very chemical processes that I am initiating are those that produce salt.[13] In this case, the grounds for constitutive reliance are the things that themselves underwrite the predictive reliance I have on this chemical reaction – natural laws.

This second way is the way sub-parts of our action rely on the ones that it succeeds and the ones that in turn succeed it, and the way each of us relies on each other. On a good day, in the kind of society structured to make autobiographical action possible, all of our actions can achieve this kind of reliance on the world and on its contributors. But even in our colonial social structure, we partially succeed at this kind of action in the limited zones of partial freedom that remain available to us even in the context of unfree social structures and relations: in cooking the food we make for ourselves when the master and overseer are away; in singing the songs we sing with each other at the church we go to to band together and cope with the drudgery of our wage labor; in delivering and deciphering the jokes one cellmate tells the other.

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[13] In this case, the grounds for constitutive reliance are ontologically prior to the grounds for predictive reliance. I don't expect this to generalize, even in reliance on natural facts kinds of cases (ecological causation seems like it would be rife with counterexamples, for instance).

Take, for example, the way in which I may rely on social structure to represent doing what it takes to get credentials as part of an extended action of getting a job in a related industry. I recognize doing what it takes to get credentials as a set of actions that contributes to my getting hired because I am subjectively secure that those who hire in my society will view it as something on the basis of which to make hiring decisions. I am objectively secure in that subjective stance where there are facts about social structure that explain and ground that subjective security: that the social institutions function so as to explain or ground that subjective security. Then, there is some sense in which I am licensed to rely on social structure in getting credentials such that I can see that as part of the overall action of getting a job.

It is of consequence what sort of reliance I am licensed to have. On a good day, in the good city, it is neither an accident that there are social institutions for accreditation nor that they are accessible to me. Accreditation is one potentially permissible way a society can make sure people know what they need to know to do work where that might matter, and I may find that I'm both one of the people that society is trying to protect by having standards and also that I am one of the people the society tries to create well paid work opportunities for. Then I would be licensed to have constitutive reliance on social structure: it would not simply be a good bet that the institutions will work in a way that converts my credentials into a job, but that the connection between this use of the social institutions and that outcome is non-accidental, a use of an opportunity that they were meant to provide.

On a bad day, when in Rome as a slave, when Plymouth Rock has landed on us, predictive and constitutive reliance can come apart. Perhaps I am not one of people that the standards are designed and maintained to protect, or that does not try to create well paid work opportunities for me, or for people like me, but the institutions can still be counted on, probabilistically speaking,

to work in the way I am relying on in constructing my actions in the context they create. Then I am licensed to predictively rely on the structure, but not to constitutively rely on it.

The difference between mere predictive reliance and constitutive reliance is also one thing that distinguishes a supermarket from a soup kitchen. It may be a good bet that the local supermarket will throw away edible food, and they may even do so with a regularity that makes dumpster diving as probabilistically reliable a way of getting food on Fridays as the local soup kitchen. But we needn't, and I suspect wouldn't, give the same sort of explanation for both regularities. Whatever other cynical games the non-profit that runs the soup kitchen may be playing at, they non-accidentally involve providing free food to people in Fridays who ask for it; that is plainly not the business that the for-profit supermarket is in.

Then, one important upshot of the narrative view of action is the sense it makes of this kind of claim: when I see an action as my own, I don't simply make things happen in a purely causal sense, or exploit regularities that I stand in a merely forecasting relation to. My proposal is instead that an action that would be mine in the way that corresponds to freedom has a further component. I can see such an action as a contribution to history, a contribution that is my own because even my reliance on the forecasted world is somehow mine as well. To understand the reliance as my own, I should understand my practical relationship to the world as my own.

But the efficacy that I have is at least in some domains socially constituted, in some ways we've discussed in this part and some ways that we have yet to discuss – if I am alienated from the social structures that both help constitute my efficacy and form an important part of the context against which I exercise it, we're already beginning to get a bead on what might be going wrong under imperialism, since this alienation might be the right response to seeing one's social structures as under the domination of a foreign people.

So, with this narrative view of action, we can see what's at stake for freedom even at the individual level when Cabral claims that imperialism "negates the historical process" of the colonized. This can be redescribed as a claim about the fundamental unfreedom of the colonized. To alienate the colonized from the process of making history is to alienate them from acting freely, because acting freely *is* making history.

IV.   Autobiography as Freedom

Parts II and III enable us to see that imperialism and putatively individual oppression, then, share a common problem: they involve a social structure on which people can only predictively, rather than constitutively rely. That helps explain why they are in fact the same structure of unfreedom: it is the unavailability of constitutive reliance on the narrative resources that explains why everyone is unfree. In the case of actual colonial conquest, this is the situation that results from the political state of affairs in which colonizers have attempted to insert themselves as the explanatory principle of the lives of other peoples. Recall the diagrams of imperialism and putatively interpersonal oppression given in Figures 1.1 and 1.2, reproduced on the following page:
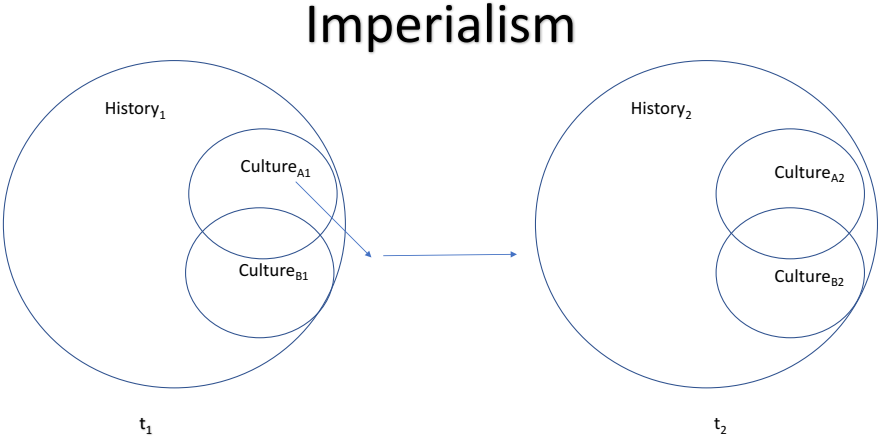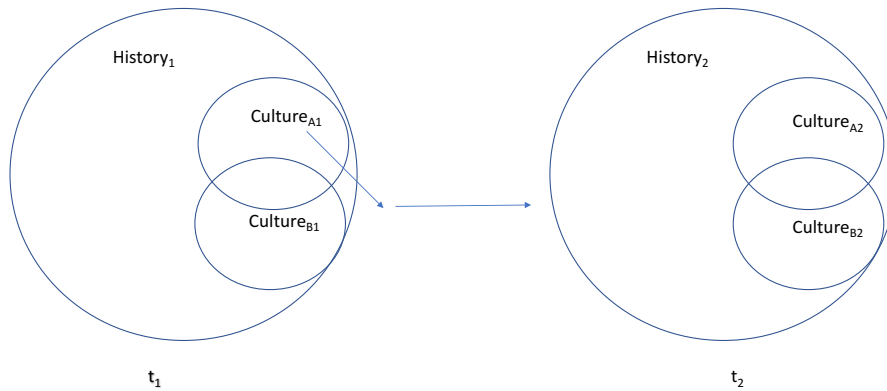
Figure 1.1

Imperialism

History$_1$

Culture$_{A1}$

Culture$_{B1}$

t$_1$

History$_2$

Culture$_{A2}$

Culture$_{B2}$

t$_2$

Figure 1.2

'Individual' Unfreedom

Notice that I have claimed that people, full stop, cannot constitutively rely on the social structure generated by imperialism – not that this is a predicament of the colonized.

But there is, I think, a surprising conclusion that the preceding helps establish: the attempt at imperial domination constitutes its own failure. Imperialists succeed at preventing the colonized from owning their own history, at the cost of cementing the like fate for themselves. There is an explanation for the material and collective epistemic resources that colonizers they get by means of plundering the colonized, and thus for the changes in the grounds of the various objective and subjective securities that constitute their practice life.

There is still a sense in which the culture of the colonizer population (culture A_1 in our diagrams) has a privileged explanatory role in the change of states of affairs from times t_1 to times t_2. However it is, at best, a game theoretic sense of explanation: the sense in which the first mover of a game structured just so may settle the dominant strategies of the rest of the players,

and thus 'explain' why everyone else plays their hand in the way that they play them. But this is the sense of explanation that corresponds to predictive reliance – the stuff of unfreedom.

The sense of explanation that corresponds to constitutive reliance is ruled out by this political relationship. The production coerced under conditions of imperialism, the goods and knowledges plundered under these circumstances, are not *for the sake of* the colonizer in the right sense – not for colonial elites, and certainly not for their largely subject, typically politically disempowered populations. These goods and resources and the changes to practical life that they occasion are simply the causal output of the self preservation of the colonized, of the best strategic response of the dominated to their domination.

Then, imperialism makes it the case that neither side of domination relation owns their history. This is, by my lights, precisely the conclusion Amílcar Cabral himself reached. In the middle of armed conflict with the Portuguese imperial forces – a conflict that eventually claimed his life – he gave the speech "Message to the People of Portugal". In this speech, he addressed the population of the nation colonizing his own, as comrades – even down to the soldiers of the Portuguese military.[14] On this view, imperialism is a story with a handful of villains, but that nevertheless consists entirely of diversely positioned victims.

If the unfree social structure is unfree because it objectifies social relations we are only licensed to rely on predictively, then the free social structure is the one that objectifies social relations we are licensed to rely on constitutively. But what does constitutive reliance look like? Figure 1.3:

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[14] Cabral and Handyside, "Message to the People of Portugal."

Autobiography
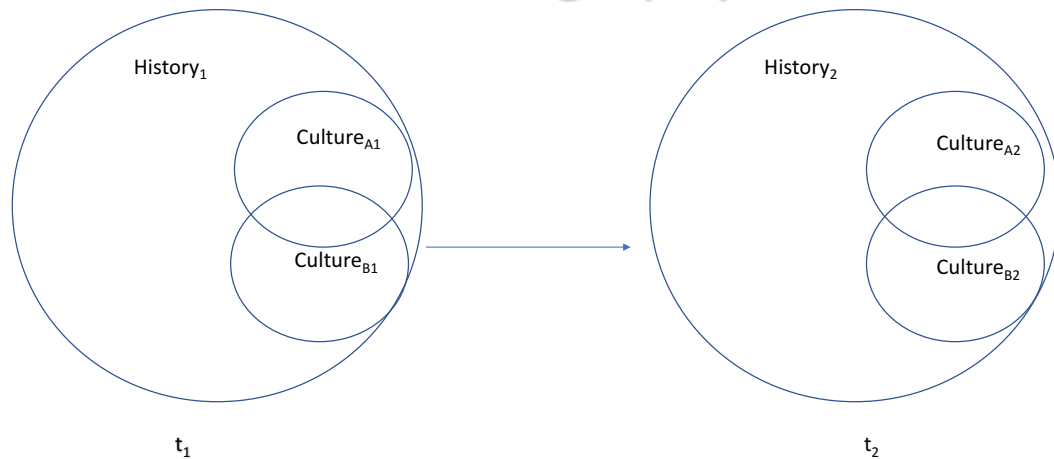
In this diagram, history itself – that is to say, no particular community's subset thereof - is the explanation of where things stand at any particular t_2 (whether viewed synchronically, as a progression from any given t_1, or as the material embodiment of a collective anticipation of a t_3 to come).

Recall the problem with colonialism at this level of abstraction: that one culture serving as the explanatory principle for changes across time generates a social situation in which the actions of some are practically oriented around others. But creating this situation of practical explanatory dependence does not make it the case that the actions of the "some" are *for* the others – on the loose assumption that the values, goals, or ends of the actions of the "some" are not similarly teleologically oriented around the "others", then any sense in which a system of social relations

structured this way is secure and reliable admits of a predictive explanation rather than a constitutive one. The same reasoning goes, mutatis mutandis, for any set of cultures attempting to exert this kind of influence on the complement of that set.

What's left is to explain why what is depicted in 2.3 can properly be described as a social structure on which are licensed to constitutively rely, and what features an actual social structure would have to have to license that reliance.

Recall that history refers to the way that the world has been, under whatever set of descriptions are available from the collective epistemic resources as they stand at any point in time. The unfreedom of the colonial social structure was not, in the final analysis, its parochiality per se. Instead, the parochiality and chauvinism of colonialism were obstacles to everyone's freedom because they eliminated the possibility of an exhaustive explanation of the behavior of and within the social system in terms of the goals and aspirations of those within it – the kind of explanation that is the stuff of freedom.

We would avoid this outcome where the system, and changes to it over time, is itself explained by the activity of those within it – not simply by their overt behavior, but also by their ends, as is bound up with engaging with one's behavior narratively. That is the situation that corresponds to collective ownership of the narrative resources: since, on the view developed here, ownership itself just is this very explanatory relation between changes in a thing and its owners.[15]

V. Conclusion

This chapter has argued, in for a particular characterization of the deep structure of unfreedom inherent to historical colonialism: that this unfreedom is the creation of a social

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[15] Ownership: on which changes in these resources are non-accidentally attributable to the needs, desires, and goals of that community.

structure on which colonizer and colonized alike are only licensed to predictably rely. It also argued that that unfreedom just is numerically identical with the structure of unfreedom at the level of an individual's experiences in a society structured this way. Finally, it argued that freedom is best understood as another kind of reliance

Important questions remain: what, if anything, is so particular about colonial unfreedom? Is the historical phenomenon on which the philosophical phenomenon here is based to be distinguished from other sorts of systematic oppression like race, gender, and sexuality? The analysis in this chapter has focused on structures of interaction over large groups of people and swaths of time, but how might we understand individual episodes of interacting? For instance, how do we understand individual interactions under unfree conditions that themselves may seem innocuous: can't the master and slave say "good morning" to each other without that being an instance of oppression, whatever the underlying structure of that interaction? And what of the the interactions that *don't* seem innocuous – harassment, microaggressions, hate crimes - what does the structure of unfreedom proposed here illuminate about these, if anything?

In the next chapter, I'll aim to get purchase on these by focusing on a particular domain of social interaction and its connections to political structure more broadly construed: conversation. The dynamics of conversation, and patterns across instances of these, help explain how a full practical orientation to the world can emerge from out of the noise of the episodic; in turn, the characterization of such an orientation to the world in terms of the structures considered here will help make out why and how unfreedom persists when the manager is asleep at the wheel, when the overseer isn't looking, and when the colonizer has left the compound to report to the Crown. These will then help flesh out what what parts of our current social reality are incompatible with it and help clarify what an autobiographical social structure and life would consist in.

Chapter 2: Why We Can't Have Nice Things

"The Negro, in spite of his open-faced laughter, his seeming acquiescence, is particularly evasive. You see we are a polite people and we do not say to our questioner, "Get out of here!" We smile and tell him or her something that satisfies the white person because, knowing so little about us, he doesn't know what he is missing." - Zora Neale Hurston, *Mules and Men*, 1933

"Y'all been eatin long enough now, stop bein greedy," said DMX.[16]

I rapped along. Playing DMX while driving was always a safety hazard – my old Nissan Sentra was hardly a speedster but managed to reach race car performance levels depending on the playlist. I glanced at the odometer after the chorus. Even for the left lane of an Indiana highway, this speed was out of pocket. I eased off the gas.

Too late. Sirens blared from behind me. *Shit.*

I pulled over and rolled down the window, hanging my left arm lazily outside of the driver's side door, music still blasting. DMX switched his flow up, as he did every few bars or so on this song, abruptly shifting from a more conversational delivery to a half growl. "And if it's cause for me to force my way in the door / I'm headhunting motherfuckers so just stay on the floor," he continued.

I get distracted for one fucking minute…Dad's gonna kill me. I had spent the better part of my fifteenth year on Earth convincing him to let me so much as get my learner's permit – getting a ticket the first year I could legally drive would be the end of my driving career.

I glanced at my driver's side mirror. An officer was already on his way. But something was unusual - his hand was on his holster. I turned to my passenger's side window. A second officer approached a few paces behind. In his hands, pointed at the ground, was a shotgun.

I guess I fit the description today.

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[16] DMX, *Stop Bein Greedy.*

I pulled my arm back inside the car and put both hands on the wheel. I turned the music off.

Abiola stared at his youngest child incredulously. "What have you done?"

Femi looked up, shaking. "I didn't know what to do. I couldn't do anything," he said, through tears. "Should I just let him kill Ebun? Or Grandpa?"

The doorbell rang again. Abiola and Yetunde looked at each other for a moment. Abiola stood up. "I'll talk to them." He left the room, fists clenched, an uneasiness in his walk. The sounds of his conversation with the police officer echoed faintly up the stairs. Yetunde pushed the door closed, but left it open just a crack, leaving it closed enough to soften the noise a bit, but not

"Femi," Yetunde tried, patiently. "What do you think the police will do with your brother? You want them to lock him up? You want them to kill him?"

The tears, the shaking stopped. In their place, an eerie steadiness loomed over Femi.

"Yes."

Yetunde waited, staring deeply into Femi's eyes. Waited for sense, for loyalty, for humanity. None came. Femi returned her stare, eyes ablaze, but steady.

"I don't care what happens to him. I wish he were dead."

Yetunde inhaled sharply, placing her hand on Femi's shoulder. He shrugged it off, angrily. She took another breath.

"Femi. I know it's not easy for you. But think about how hard it must be for him. What if you couldn't communicate with anyone? Wouldn't that frustrate you?"

"Excuses," Femi muttered. *You think I'm a monster,* he thought, *for what I* said. *But anyone who does what he does – to his own family – that's the* real *monster.*

Yetunde sighed. Her eldest, Ibukun, had an eidetic memory, and often would amble down the stairs with the address book, insisting that we wish someone happy birthday who he had met once a decade ago. Along with this memory, he had a key eye for detail. His personal things were very particularly arranged, in patterns that he could see but his siblings could not – if that arrangement were disturbed while he was in the other room, he would spot it upon returning and restore balance to his universe. No one was better at finding things, because no one could look for them nearly as methodically, and no one had as good a memory of the previous state of a room to consult to generate guesses of where the lost thing might be hiding.

But along with these things Ibukun could do were a list of socially decisive things that he could not. The doctors had given them different ways to describe Ibukun over the years: speech-delayed, developmentally handicapped, autistic. Whatever it was, it meant that almost all conversations with him, no matter how long you knew him, were the same: rudimentary questions and answers about preferences that he already knew the answer to. What's your favorite color? Your favorite flavor of cookie or cake? When are you going to school and when are you graduating? Do you like x? How about y?

Sometimes it happened when people, inevitably, lost patience with this interview process. Other times, when he was asked to do something he didn't want to do, or was interrupted in doing something he did want to do. Sometimes it happened for no discernible reason at all. Whatever the cause, he would occasionally off into violent rages, hitting and scratching, sometimes with whatever object he could fashion as a makeshift weapon. By this time, at 19, he was over six feet tall and well over 250 pounds, by far the largest person in the family, and

difficult to restrain. Abiola, a thin man, could sometimes manage it, as could Yetunde, a full-figured woman – as far as she knew, 11-year old Femi had never even tried.

Ebun, the middle child and a year Ibukun's junior, was the typical target of Ibukun's aggression and had been since infancy - unlike Femi, she had borne it, somehow, with resilience. Abiola was the next most common target. Usually, when these things happened, Femi would simply wait for Abiola or Yetunde to intervene.

But today was different. Today, Yetunde's father David was visiting the family, and Ibukun had attacked both David and Ebun, while Abiola and Yetunde were upstairs. Femi had decided, apparently, that that wasn't close enough.

The door of the room opened.

"He's gone," Abiola reported, standing in the doorway. Yetunde and Abiola breathed a sigh of relief together. Then Abiola's eyes met Femi's.

"I understand why you did this. But you can't call police for just anything," Abiola said.

Just anything? Femi thought. "Why not?" he said – a little too loudly, a little too defiantly.

Abiola looked his son up and down. *He's getting older, and he's big for his age.* "Are you going to talk to police like this? You *can't be angry*." Femi got angrier. Abiola continued.

"You need to know this now. Outside of this house you are not a boy. You are a Black young man. They can do anything to you. They can do anything to your brother. God forbid they ever encounter Ibukun when he's having one of his episodes. They won't understand. They won't need to understand…" Abiola's voice trailed off.

"*I* don't understand," Femi countered. "Him or you. The only people I'm worried about when I go to the city are Black." *Everybody trusts cops,* Femi thought to himself. *They come to our school and give presentations all the time.*

Abiola face contorted with surprise. *Suburbia has spoiled this one*, he figured.

"Don't let these Nigerians tell you this nonsense about Black Americans," he said. Now it was Femi's turn to be surprised: he had been thinking about interactions in his largely white school. But did Nigerians think that too?

"If you'd seen what I saw in Oakland, you wouldn't talk like this," Abiola continued. "Let me tell you a story."

I strongly suspected that my 8th grade social studies teacher had it out for me. It all started, I thought, with creative differences about historical research project – he had thought that my use of footage a Vietnam War execution in my music video presentation of Spike Lee's *Malcolm X* was "offensive" and "excessive", I thought the real excess we should be talking about was unrestrained US imperial adventurism, especially after last year's invasion of Iraq – but I supposed that I couldn't be sure. Even so, it was hard not to take this a bit personally.

"The correct answer is states' rights," said Mr. Lafferty. The kids dutifully corrected their assignments. Well, most of them. I raised my hand. *That's bullcrap!*

"The Civil War was about slavery. They even said so themselves!" I said. I was no expert, but I had read some primary documents – they told us last year that primary documents were important – and the motivation was plain as day. Mr. Lafferty sighed impatiently.

"The correct answer is states' rights," he repeated, matching the tone of his earlier utterance derisively. "Slavery wasn't important."

"States' rights…to legalize slavery," I insisted.

A kid next to me snickered. "So you think you're smarter than the textbook too? Nice try know-it-all." A couple other of the kids laughed. "Shut up, Scott!" I yelled, fuming, fists balled up.

"Hey!" shouted Mr. Lafferty. "Language!"

I breathed, and took a second. "I left my pencils in my locker, can I go get them?" Mr. Lafferty shrugged. I was back in control – I took each step deliberately, to avoid the impression of storming off. I managed to keep it up until I got to my locker, opening it absentmindedly, fumbling around.

Those kids don't even care if he's wrong. This whole school sucks.

I took another breath. It was during a class period, so the halls were empty. I permitted myself the luxury of slamming the locker closed. Another breath. *Okay.*

But I realized, too late, that the halls weren't entirely empty. Passing by was Vice Principal Stewart. *Oh no.*

Vice Principal Stewart stopped in his tracks. He never broke eye contact as he sauntered towards me in long, galloping, but eerily slow steps. Without breaking strike, or hesitation, he raised his right hand, placed it on my chest, and pressed it into me, pushing me into the closed locker.

He was standing over me. I was tall for a twelve year old, but not that tall – Vice Principal Stewart was tall even by grown men standards, and on the more built side. The pressure was firm but not penetrating, as though his aim was simply to guide me back against the locker, not to crush me or pin me. It was as if he didn't even contemplate the possibility that I might try to wriggle out from under him.

And he was right not to. It didn't even occur to me to resist. Adding to his imposing presence, he didn't even seem to be breathing. I, on the other hand, felt my lungs constrict. He wasn't pushing that hard – I should have still been able to breathe. But air felt far away.

Are you allowed to do this to kids? I wondered. It broke some unspoken rule that I had had in my head.

"This," he said as slowly as he had walked, "is *my* school. You will not slam my lockers."

It wasn't a challenge. It wasn't even an order. He was telling me how I would act. He was making it so.

A number of maverick, unyielding responses popped into my head. *Actually it's the taxpayers' school*, I thought I should say. *So its my school. Or at least my parents'*.

But what I said was: "Okay."

"Okay what?"

"Okay, sir."

He looked at me a moment longer, and finally I felt the pressure on my chest relent. He walked away.

I stood there for a moment, dumbfounded. Should I report this? Surely this was against the rules. But I realized it would be my word against his – and whatever he thought was true about the world that explained why he was willing to push a little kid into a locker must surely still be true about the world that would evaluate which of us was telling the truth. Was he wrong? That world had, after all, made him a Vice Principal.

And I realized something else. Whatever I thought about how adults and kids interacted and why, whatever 'rules' there seemed to be to those interactions: the pressure I had felt in my chest was the real rule.

I wandered, finally, back to class. Mr. Lafferty looked annoyed.

"That was sure a long trip," he muttered sarcastically. "Did you get lost?"

I breathed. Then I smiled, good-naturedly. "Something like that."

I gave my outline one last look through. *Solid,* I thought. The argument still had some weak points, but nothing I could fix in an hour's time – the stuff of months of deliberation, if not years. It was as good as it was going to get.

With nothing left to do, I paced the hallways of the Georgetown philosophy department, looking at the offices. *Would they really put my name on one of these if I get this right?* I thought. *What am I doing here?*

Soon afterwards, I found myself in a crowded room in the philosophy, giving my talk. "Let me tell you a story," I began. I told them a story. "Cabral explains the connection between history, culture, and colonialism in 'National Liberation and Culture'," I continued.

So far, so good. Day 2 of the job interview was going about as well as it could have. I hit my points, stuck to the outline. The initial rounds of Q&A were as tough as expected – sure enough, what I had regarded as the weak points of the argument were identified within the first salvo of questions, but my answers weren't too bad. So far, so good.

A hand raised in the back of the room. A comment culminated in a question: "Why can't the colonizers function as helpers, the way that the Americans helped rebuild Europe after World War II?"

Murmurs echoed across the room. They seemed to say: *He doesn't speak for us*. That was a good sign. But in the meantime, I had a question to answer.

I thought back to Nigeria what I had seen there. I remembered being mobbed by people begging for naira, for my email address, anything that could get them out of that place and into the country where I lived, and the opportunities they thought came with living where I live. I remembered hours spent facing the business end of assault rifles held by people who hoped me and my family had brought enough of the commodities that marked the distance between our social situations that they could make up the difference between us and them through theft.

I thought about what I had read about there: uneasy political alliances crumbling into civil wars and power structures. I thought about unreliable electricity, crumbling and absent infrastructure. I thought about the struggles over lines on maps, about Biafra. I thought about who had drew them. I thought, in general, about what colonialism seemed to me to essentially be. To have been. To mean for the future.

I thought about what he must think about it, to ask me such a question: a potentially benign set up, maybe. Perhaps an explanation of why people in places like Africa - which had contributed nothing to the world, on some people's view, and couldn't possibly have – had any institutions or infrastructure at all, rather than the explanation for why its institutions and infrastructure were so poor.

And I thought about why those were good guesses. I thought back to nationally syndicated National Geographic shows. To social studies classrooms run by textbooks that said strange things , in school districts named after the indigenous people who used to live there.

"Well, I said, smiling good-naturedly, "I suppose we could try to see them as helpers. But they would've had to have helped." The room erupted in laughter.

Some time after the talk, a colleague approached me, eager to clarify the relationship between that particular question and the opinions and norms endorsed by the rest of the room. I

nodded along. "By the way," she added, at the end of it all, "that was a master class in how to respond to that sort of question."

Maybe it was, I thought. *But I wonder what she means.*

"Here's your license and registration," said officer 1. This time officer 2 – and his shotgun – stayed in the squad car. I breathed – they apparently knew enough about the person whose description I fit to rule me out. I removed one of my hands from the steering wheel long enough to accept the pieces of paper from the officer. *Thank God.*

"Just be sure to watch your speed," he said flatly. I gave him a curt nod.

"Okay, sir."

He went back to his squad car.

Not even a ticket. Nice.

I.   Introduction

What's missing from a conversation held at gunpoint?

When we communicate with each other, we work together. After all, words, gestures, and signs are lazy – they don't interpret themselves, and it's up to their users and observers to make something out of them. Whatever else communication might be, it is a well-studied subset of joint action: a kind of action where each individual's part makes ineliminable reference to the actions of its partner actions and the whole action to be constructed by the contributing parts. This is kind of part-whole relationship that narrative analysis is built to respect.

Where the previous chapter focused on part-whole relations that were putatively within a single person (time-slices of a putatively individual act like getting a drink from a water fountain), but gave them a treatment that aimed to show how even such an action reveals and relies upon the background social structure that serves as its condition of possibility. In this chapter, I discuss the part-whole relations that stretch across persons: time-slices of joint action, for which "conversation" serves as a central case. From here, I make a similar move: I discuss the putatively narrow scoping and 'local' inter-subjectivity and sociality of conversation in a way that aims to reveal its wider scoping 'global' character and dependence on wider social structure. The outcome is the same: both kinds of activity crucially involve social structure in such a way that they can only be free if that underlying social structure is autobiographical.

In Part II I will discuss how the dynamics of interpersonal communication under colonial conditions relate to the broader explanatory situation discussed in part II and diagrammed in Figure 2.1. In Part III I will discuss the narrative implications of that situation: the extended communicative relationship to one's life as self-misrepresentation discussed by W.E.B. Du Bois as *double consciousness*.

II.   Colonialism and Conversation

a. Not-so-common Ground

To explain how colonialism as a social structure and interpersonal conversation within it relate to each other, I'll borrow the term *common ground* from philosophers of language, though I'll be returning it a bit roughed up. As Robert Stalnaker explains it: the common ground is a store of public information, "presumed background knowledge shared by participants in a

conversation", a "resource that speakers may exploit in determining what they want to say."[17]

The content of the ground is treated as "common belief" or "mutual belief" for the purposes of the conversation in question.

This language and conceptual apparatus helps explain the basic joint nature of communicative acts. To illustrate this, Herbert Clark gives the example of partner dancing. One can imagine Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers in separate rooms each doing the individual steps that correspond to their partner dance.[18] But what it is for them to waltz together is more than just a crude mathematical aggregation of what they are doing in those separate rooms. When Astaire and Rogers dance together, when they waltz, the steps that they are doing individually take on new practical character and significance: an act of mere stepping-forwards becomes an act of the lead-partner-guiding-the-following-partner-backwards; an act of stepping backwards becomes an act of following-the-lead-partner's-forward-step. The latter act of each of these pairs relies both on the actual conduct of the people dancing as lead partner and follow partner and on the facts about the context which relate them as dance partners in the first instance (crucial to distinguishing, say, the opening moves of a partner dance from an assault).

The idea of "common ground" is one way to theoretically mark the insight that our putatively individual communicative acts of asserting, asking, and warning are joint in this deep way: parts that make ineliminable reference to a rich social and intersubjective practical context. Our communicative acts exploit the common ground, in that we rely on background information for our contributions to conversation to even be intelligible as such, and additionally to have the particular content we aim for them to have. Our communicative acts also act upon the common ground: after we have spoken, the common ground adjusts in response.

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[17] Stalnaker, *Context.* Pg 34.
[18] Clark, *Using Language*, 3.

On a good day, the common ground updates to reflect the very content that we have offered

up, which would be part of what it would be for it to be really common. On a really good day,

the participants all agree about the information that is in the common ground, and thus the

contents of the common ground count as mutual knowledge in the familiar sense. On a decent

day, the participants jointly agree to treat certain pieces of information as mutual knowledge for

the time being, the sort of thing we do in order to have political conversations with folks with

whom we sharply disagree, discuss fictional stories, and entertain wacky hypotheticals together.

But hold on tight: given our interest in colonialism, bad days are ahead.

To characterize the bad days, we can help ourselves to three important observations about the

common ground that merit a bit of additional emphasis. The first two pertain to how to

characterize the content of the common ground. Stalnaker generally uses terms to describe the

content of the common ground that generalize from the good days, using terms like "common

belief" and "mutual belief". However, he is careful to name the criterion for a proposition's

being in the common ground "acceptance for the purposes of conversation", clarifying that the

putative beliefs that populate the common ground are those that are treated as common belief

"for some purpose or other", where the purpose is in some sense "social and public".[19] Some

purposes are more fun than others: we may accept propositions we don't believe to be true to

have a conversation about a fictional comic book universe, like practically accepting the

proposition corresponding to the utterance "Batman lives in Gotham", since Gotham is a

fictional environment that no one really lives in. But we also may do the same sort of thing to

avoid coercion, sanction, and violence, like practically accepting the proposition corresponding

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[19] Stalnaker, *Context*, 68, 78.

to the utterance "this water fountain is not for coloreds", since race is a fictional environment that everyone really lives in.[20]

This last example leads into the second point about the common ground's content. Stalnaker, operating in philosophy of language, pays special attention to what I call communicative acts: utterances, signs, gestures, written sentences. In one sense, there's something special about these that merits special attention, namely that these belong to the subset of actions where communication is typically the point. In another important sense, however, there's nothing special about these at all. If the common ground really is just the store of public information, then communicative acts are only some of the acts that are regulated by this store of public information. The proposition grounded by an utterance or a sign declaring that this water fountain is for whites only doesn't merely attempt to regulate how we *talk* about the water fountain. It offers a public pronouncement that concerns any action that communicates an attitude about who may use the water fountain: such as, the kind of license to use the water fountain that a Black person operating it might thereby communicate.

What characterizes the content of the common ground, then, is not that descriptions of the world they contain or embody are accepted by all parties in a deep sense. They are simply coordinated on for use in navigating public interactions. This can be rephrased in terms of the distinction offered earlier between two kinds of commonality, *publicity* and *ownership*. Publicity is a synchronic sense of commonality, obtaining where epistemic resources are accessible and usable by people in a domain of interaction, the kind of determination that remains basically

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[20] The observation that race is socially constructed is sometimes construed as a rebuttal to its characterization as fictional; similarly, the characterization of race as fictional or ideological is sometimes construed. The position I take here implies that race is both 'real' (in the sense of material) and 'fictional' (organized around ideologies and belief-like systems that are disconnected from actual history). For a fuller discussion of such a position, see: Fields and Fields, *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life.*

intelligible at any time t_1 or t_2. Ownership is an explanatory relation between changes to a thing over time (from an arbitrary t_1 to an arbitrary t_2) and the parties that interact with that thing.

Given both that the content of the common ground reflects what is publicly accepted for communicative purposes and regulates public behavior more broadly than communicative acts, I prefer to refer to the content of the common ground in neutral terms characterizing their functional role in organizing public behavior, as *public practical premises*, rather than using terms that imply any broader psychological relation to the descriptive content they contain like "belief". The sense in which the common ground is "common" is the first kind of commonality, publicity.

The old story of the emperor with no clothes helps explain what's at stake in characterizing the content of the common ground as public practical premises rather than either common or mutual belief. Hans Christian Anderson's version of the fable goes something like this: the emperor's weavers one day, and handed their emperor an empty hangar and claimed that it held a garment made of a mystical fabric which would appear invisible to the incompetent or exceptionally stupid. When the emperor paraded around the city naked, no one was willing to point this out, for fear of retribution. Finally a young child yelled: "But he hasn't got anything on!", and the whole town finally acknowledged the obvious.

Perhaps we are meant to think that the townspeople were truly convinced of the weavers' tall tale, but we needn't – we could explain what happened, and its relevance for everyday conversation, without appealing to people's gullibility or suggestibility. I prefer to think that at least some of the townspeople knew for themselves that the emperor was naked before the child said anything. They simply weren't willing to act on that knowledge.[21]

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[21] I deal with this example in the beginning of "The Empire Has No Clothes", where I also use "public practical premises" as a way of talking about language. Táíwò, "The Empire Has No Clothes."

The moral the story is meant to illustrate goes something like this: social elites needn't convince people of the rightness or plausibility of the commitments they would like others to act on in the way that debaters might. This commitment is in contrast with the picture of things that seems in the background of theoretical discussions on topics like ideology and propaganda where "belief systems", which are built out of "knowledge claims about the way the world is or what has value" are given explanatory priority when explaining social phenomena from scales as small as individual conversations and relationships to epochs of political history.[22]

But a striking aspect of this fable is that neither of the parties whose behavior affects how scores of other people decide to behave (the emperor and the young child) have the practical affects on others that they have by changing their beliefs – at least, not their beliefs about the emperor's nakedness. People treated whatever proposition corresponds to the thought that the Emperor was clothed, as an organizing principle for their behavior – ruling out straightforwardly communicative acts (utterances like "why is he naked?") and other public acts likewise liable to be interpreted as treating a contradictory description of the world as a practical premise (noticeable giggling, snickering, handing the emperor a robe to cover himself). We needn't think that this was because of their private beliefs about whether or not the emperor had clothes on alone – decisively, before the child's intervention – but we could suppose all of this went down because of their beliefs of what might happen to them if they failed to do their part of the joint action implicitly proposed and initiated by the emperor's conduct. And a good guess about what grounded those judgements of theirs: a history that includes events of people being flogged, jailed, or beheaded for behavior that the emperor or his minions interpreted as an insult to the throne: the history that objectified whatever subjective security the emperor daily was in a

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[22] Shelby, "Ideology, Racism, and Critical Social Theory," 157.

position to exploit to avoid offense and insult in interactions (to the point of, albeit for a limited time, getting to walk around with his whole ass out).

The third observation about the common ground that I make deals with how we ought to interpret changes to its content and structure over time, on the terrain of ownership. Two things affect how the common ground changes over time in ways that are incompatible with co-ownership of the common ground: direct distortions caused by the updating processes themselves or the indirect shaping pressure of the antecedent content of the common ground (broadly construed).

b. Lewis-distorted Common Ground

Consider the first category: updating processes or principles for the common ground that themselves embody the relations characterized in this work as colonial. In "Scorekeeping in a Language Game", David Lewis introduces an extreme case of such an updating principle by using a master-slave dialectic: perfectly asymmetrical "accommodation", where the rules of permissible conduct shifts to match the master's most recent utterances.[23] Call the Lewisian master "Kilgrave" and the enslaved person "Clotel", and call a common ground *Lewis-distorted* when its update procedure fails the co-ownership criterion of commonality. Consider this diagram of such a situation:

Figure 2.1 Conversation under Lewis-distortion

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[23] Lewis, "Scorekeeping in a Language Game."

'Conversation'
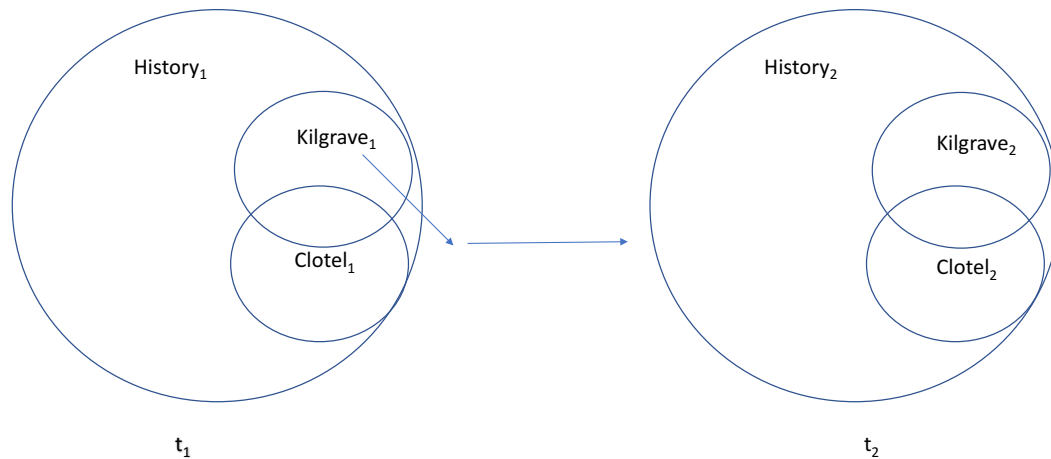
Two notes about aspects of the diagram. First, on the continued use of 'history', from earlier diagrams that dealt with interactions on a larger, collective scale, between cultures. Recall the working definition of history in this dissertation: *history* refers to the way the world has been, understood and rendered accessible by way of the available collective epistemic resources, an important set of narrative resources available to us. In the conversational terms we are using here, this would be something like the power set of all possible common grounds, given what is now known or otherwise epistemically accessible by people. The circles corresponding to Kilgrave and Clotel, then, represent how they are able to publicly behave, given their private commitments, knowledges, and incentives. This in turn represents the subset of history they are

able to coordinate on, since they are among the people whose private epistemic resources make up the whole store of potentially public collective epistemic resources.

Kilgrave and Clotel's spheres of practical possibilities are straightforwardly conditioned by history: they have only the epistemic, linguistic, and other practical capacities they are able to exercise based on past instances of learning and practicing. But the relationship between their practical possibilities and the resultant manner of update of the 'common' ground formed between them is likewise historically constituted, in that

Second, on the explanatory arrows between t_1 and t_2. That the explanatory arrows between these periods of time issue from Kilgrave's private sphere of possibilities, are the visual representation of this common ground's Lewis-distortion. However, just as we've observed in chapter one on the macro-scale, the explanation between times t_1 and t_2 are of the game theoretic sort. The colonizers, through their imposition of forced, purely behavioral cooperation onto the colonized, are licensed only to predictively rely on the resultant social system, since the colonized will not be doing their parts of the resultant patterns of social interaction for the sake of the colonizers. Similarly, at any arbitrary t_2, Kilgrave can only predictively rely on the Clotel's behavior being organized around the public practical premises of any common ground that is arrived at by this update procedure from a given t_1, since that content will not represent Clotel's genuine collaboration or independently end-directed activity but instead her strategic response to a position practically imposed by Kilgrave.

One might raise a couple objections at this juncture: first, that the relationship of Kilgrave and Clotel in the thought experiment is too extreme to generate useful lessons for the real world; second, that the account of Lewis-distortion offered does not distinguish between people empowered by a pernicious social structure and those who steamroll their way through

conversations by quirk of personality or normal variations in egocentrism. To the first, Bright

and I discuss a fully generalizable model of systematic, ranked common ground update in

"Discourse Power". This helps make the case that something milder but structurally analogous to

the extreme case Lewisian-distortion Lewis considered is plausibly an enduring feature of

conversation in a world structured like ours, a persistent structural feature lying dormant even in

innocuous seeming conversations.[24] Moreover, we motivate our model in the first instance by

appeal to real world phenomena often discussed by social/political philosophy, including

gaslighting, testimonial smothering, and epistemic injustice broadly construed.[25]

To the second, I bite the bullet: this account of distortion does not distinguish between how

the common ground updates in favor of the identity-privileged and the ways a conversation

might finds its update principles wrapped around the interests of its most narcissistic participants.

It is not simply the update procedure itself that presents an obstacle to ownership. Instead,

against the background of its historical explanation as causally downstream of a larger, socially

structured colonial system, it reveals itself as a local instantiation of the larger colonial

arrangement, the kind explained in the previous chapter and diagrammed in Figure 2.1.

c. Woodson-distorted Common Ground

"I believe that a large proportion of masters are as kind to their slaves as they can be, consistently with keeping them in bondage; but it must be allowed that this, to make the best of it, is very stinted kindness. And let it never be forgotten that the negro's fate depends entirely on the character of his master; and it is a matter of chance whether he fall into merciful or unmerciful hands; his happiness,

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[24] In discussion of the overall view we develop, we conjecture that contextual features and topics of conversation can both act to activate latent inequalities by making different aspects of the identities of the speakers and of the background social structure salient. Bright and Táíwò, "Discourse Power."

[25] See, for example: Dotson, "Conceptualizing Epistemic Oppression"; DOTSON, "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing"; Langton, "Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts"; Langton and West, "Scorekeeping in a Pornographic Language Game"; Maitra, "Silencing Speech"; Maitra and McGowan, "On Silencing, Rape, and Responsibility"; Abramson, "Turning up the Lights on Gaslighting"; Kukla, "Performative Force, Convention, and Discursive Injustice"; Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*.

nay, his very life, depends on chance." -[26] Lydia Maria Child, "An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans Called Africans"

It would be a mistake, then, to presume that a common ground that does not update in this way is therefore innocuous. As noted at the beginning, the relationship of conversational participants to the common ground's update procedure is only family of considerations that determines how the common ground changes to t_2 from a given t_1. The other family: the common ground's antecedent content.

The contents of current store of public information – or, crucially, gaps in what is treated as such – plays a crucial role in explaining how the common ground reacts to new information. A common ground is *Woodson-distorted* when colonialism structures the common ground's content: when it explains what information it does include, what information it doesn't, and what attitudes are licensed towards both. Woodson-distortion is, in this sense, an ongoing feature of conversation in colonial social environments, given that what public information there is in the common ground and how it is organized is shaped by the social practices that generate and preserve knowledge (or fail to do so) and is itself a social arrangement, as the emperor's new clothes fable demonstrates and as the characterization of this information as "public practical premises" is meant to highlight.

However, we won't always be interested in this feature of communication. Perhaps we say "two plus two equals four" rather than the equivalent expression in Cherokee. What we are interested in, then, are cases where the Woodson-distortion's effects on the realm of action are felt: when they are salient to the explanation of public actions. Woodson-distortions in the common ground are salient when:

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26 Child, *An Appeal in Favor of That Class of Americans Called Africans*, 28.

1a) the common ground includes elements that are historically attributable to colonial social structure; or

1b) the common ground fails to include elements, where this failure is attributable to colonial social structure; and

2) when the elements in 1 make a difference to how public information affects public behavior. They can make a difference by directly affecting the way the common ground updates in response to new information (thus changing the practical environment for subsequent actions), or by differentially positioning actors to affect the common ground. The latter is the condition of possibility for cases of Lewis-distortion that exploit social structure (where social identities explain conversational dominance) rather than simply traits of personality – Kilgrave's ability to exploit his social role as master in conversation with Clotel is downstream of that social role existing and its salience to organizing behavior in master-slave interactions, both of which are public information to both Kilgrave and Clotel made available by history.

The 1a cases, where the common ground calls for coordination on flawed beliefs, faulty or unreliable inferential dispositions, or affective orientations towards certain populations provide straightforward cases where the content of the common ground will problematically affect how we respond to new information, and also where those can be traced to the coloniality of the underlying social structure. Such cases are well studied and straightforward: take, for example, conversations involving the belief in eugenics or phrenology, sciences that helped justify and manage material racial hierarchy.

However, Carter G. Woodson provides an important example and discussion of an instance of 1b cases: where gaps in the store of public information in and of themselves, historically

attributable to the effects of colonial social structure on processes of knowledge formation and proliferation, exert effects on how the common ground responds to new information.

> In medical schools Negroes were likewise convinced of their inferiority in being reminded of their role as germ carriers. The prevalence of syphilis and tuberculosis among Negroes was especially emphasized without showing that these maladies are more deadly among the Negroes for the reason that they are Caucasian diseases; and since these plagues are new to Negroes, these sufferers have not had time to develop against them the immunity which time has permitted in the Caucasian.[27]

To explain why merely reporting the rates of syphilis and tuberculosis among Black folk acted as a vector for such a pernicious stereotype, we needn't appeal to the kind of distortion at fault in Lewis-distorted common ground, where the problem with update procedure reduces to a problematic practical relationship between the interlocutors. Indeed, we can imagine this utterance functioning to spread pernicious, stereotypical beliefs about Black folks just as well between genuine epistemic peers as between rivals, between intra-racial and inter-racial conversations wherever the interlocutors do not coordinate on the crucial contextualizing information Woodson reveals to us. That is because the ultimate explanation of this is not reducible to a relationship between the interlocutors but rather a relationship between the public store of information itself and the new information being added to it. Call a common ground whose content effects conversational dynamics in this distorted way a *Woodson-distorted*.

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[27] Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, pg. 19.

Figure 2.2 Conversation under Woodson-distortion
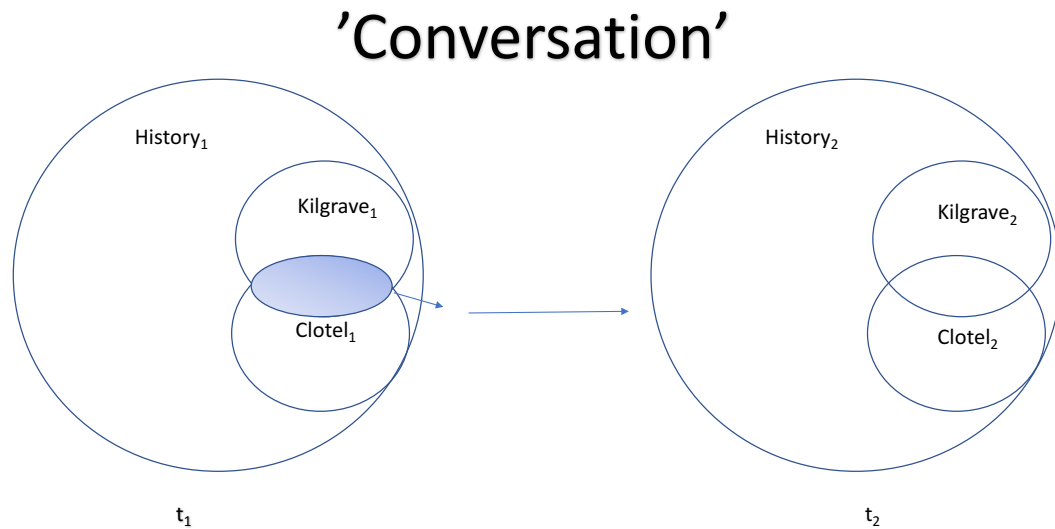
'Conversation'

Why does even this kind of conversation between Kilgrave and Clotel fail to meet the ownership criterion? Unlike in the cases of Lewis-distortion, the explanation of conversational update seems to issue from something that is, on face, mutual.

But the mutuality involved in Woodson-distortion is not co-ownership. Recall how ownership is defined: the explanatory relation on which changes to a thing are non-accidentally attributable to the goals, desires, and interests of its owners. The question for Clotel at time t_1 then is not simply about *which* conversational possibilities are candidates for putative collaboration and conversation with Kilgrave, but also why these are her possibilities. Answering that question demands a diachronic, historical explanation, not a synchronic explanation. Should

she discover that the right historical explanation of why the available public information was refined to the point that arrived at in t_1 is a system of miseducation, that this explains the pattern of expectations that structure how she should speak in the world, then she will find an instantiation of the broader global unfreedom represented by colonialism even in the local situation where she finds a conversational partner willing to genuinely collaborate with her.[28]

d. Autobiographical Common Ground

Given both Lewis and Woodson distortions, and the distinction between publicity and ownership, we have the stuff of a positive view of conversational update. A genuine conversation would license the constitutive reliance of its participants both on the antecedent common ground and the processes that govern how it updates from its present form in response to new additions. That would involve being in a situation that makes available not only constitutive reliance on one's interlocutors, but also on the broader social structure. Just like in the colonial situation, that broader social structure is built out of patterns of actual interactions in the material world, and the explanatory structure that both constitutes and relates them. This social structure then provides objective security to the intersubjective sets of mutual expectations built into the store of public information that would correspond to constitutive reliance. The autobiographical social structure is different from the colonial one only in that the patterns of interactions and their explanations license the reliance of both parties on the social structure – they can be assured that the information and resources cultivated by history for their free use has been cultivated for their sake. This possibility in turn provides the further possibility of relying on that structure together (and thus genuinely and constitutively relying on each other – they won't simply be unknowingly acting out the moves of a rigged game in using the knowledge and resources structured by

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[28] I pursue this line in "Beware of Schools Bearing Gifts". Táíwò, "Beware of Schools Bearing Gifts: Miseducation and Trojan Horse Propaganda."

history, and instead they can genuinely advance a game that has been played for their sake from the first and that they will continue on for the players of the next round. That situation would simply be this one:

Figure 2.3 Autobiographical Conversation

Conversation
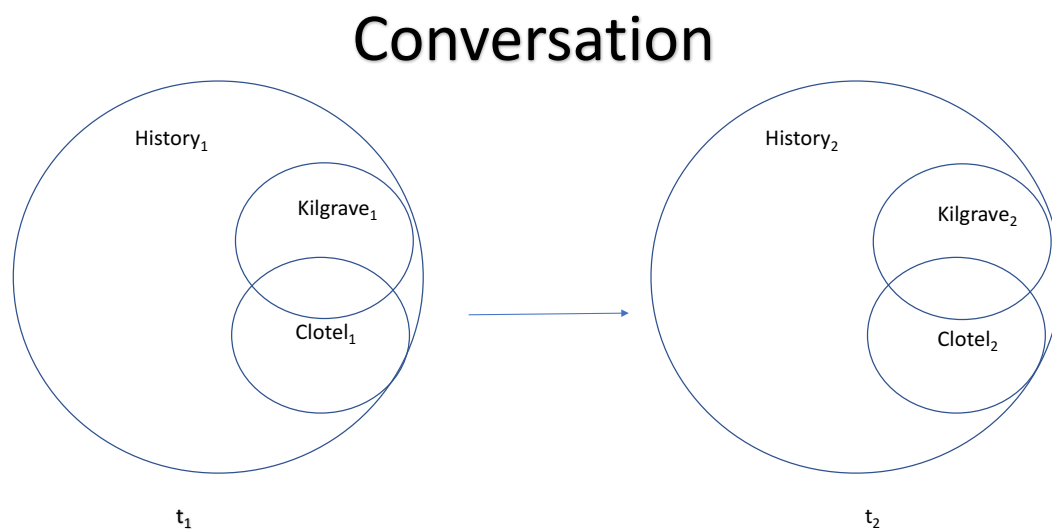
Note that this simply is the diagram earlier identified as "autobiography", Figure 2.3. The circles that originally corresponded to "culture A" and "culture B" have been reassigned to Kilgrave and Clotel, but this simply represents zooming in on the practical situation depicted in Figure 2.3, insofar as Clotel and Kilgrave's practical situation at their individual, interpersonal level is downstream of the same sort of social differentiation on the collective level that Figure 2.3 depicts.

In an autobiographical conversation between Kilgrave and Clotel, both of them would be licensed to constitutively rely on the two families of issues that correspond to the distortions considered in this chapter. First, they would be able to constitutively rely on each other to adopt the pattern of acceptance behaviors that corresponds to co-authorship of the next common ground, avoiding the kind of Lewis-distortions that arise when one interlocutor inserts themselves as the explanatory principle for changes in the conversation. Second, they would be able to constitutively rely on the content of the public information that they rely on to navigate the conversation, which amounts to a constitutive reliance on the social structure that generates the information in the common ground itself. That social structure explains the patterns of interaction that provide objective security for the subjective set of expectations that corresponds to each of Kilgrave and Clotel representing that information both as public and as orienting and organizing both of their practical orientations to the world.

If all of the preceding was successful, I've shown two families of distortions of conversation from the vantage point of communication between free people. But what, precisely, goes wrong if a conversation is Lewis or Woodson distorted? What particular problem does that make for unfreedom? To answer those questions, I consider what narrative relationship one might have to a life in which one consistently expects such distortions. In the next part, I argue that W.E.B. Du Bois offers this diagnosis of one of the problems of white supremacy and racism for human freedom with the term *double consciousness*, and argue for this as a description of the relationship licensed by the actual colonial social structure that Du Bois lived in and that we continue to live in: one characterized by merely predictive reliance on the available social structure.

III.   Double Consciousness

In Part II, we have seen how conversation involves local social structure established between the participants of an interaction, and also how that local social structure depends for its character on the global social structure which limits the possibilities of that local structure and furnishes it with the material with which it can make itself whatever it is going to be. Both of these can be sources of distortion, materially affecting how conversation proceeds: the former is the province of Lewis-distortion, the latter of Woodson-distortion. Since social structure is part of the explanation for both of these, and since conversation is just an explanatorily convenient subset of joint action, then a society structured so as to produce Lewis and Woodson distortions might be stably so; after all, this is the same structure that provides the objective conditions that licenses the manner and composition of one's schedule of subjective security. I argue that Du Bois' double consciousness is best understood as the relationship to one's life made apt when one can project such a colonial social structure across their whole life.

a. Interpreting Du Bois

Du Bois introduces the terms "double consciousness" and "the Veil" in an oft-quoted passage in first chapter of his first autobiographical work, *The Souls of Black Folk*.

> After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, —a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.[29]

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[29] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 7.

It is tempting to read "double consciousness" as an essentially psychological story about lived experience of racial domination.[30] After all, Du Bois introduces it with the word "sensation" and describes it perspectivally, as the event of looking at one's self. Then we might think that double consciousness is fundamentally a kind of psychic distance or alienation from one's self, and, perhaps further, that whatever practical concerns result from this psychic alienation are due to the ambivalence or inner turmoil of the person with double consciousness.[31]

I have another interpretation. My preferred practical reading doesn't deny that the situation Du Bois describes has important experiential consequences for all. But on this view, these experiential consequences are causally downstream of a practical dilemma. The practical relationship to the world made apt by this dilemma – however it is perceived, whatever its phenomenological baggage, or lackthereof – is double consciousness.

Du Bois himself seems, at times, to make statements that can be plausibly read as identifying some sort of practical dilemma as a target notion. Du Bois begins the chapter by noting an "unasked question" that he takes to underlie his interaction with the "other" (white) world: "How does it feel to be a problem?"[32] There is an experiential component even to this formulation, but it need not be read as the same one as in the blockquote above. After all, while all Black folk of Du Bois' time lived under the specter of racial domination, Du Bois notes a range of reactions to this context in contrast to his own:

> With other black boys the strife was not so fiercely sunny: their youth shrunk into tasteless sycophancy, or into silent hatred of the pale world about them and mocking distrust of everything white; or wasted itself in a bittery cry, Why did God make me an outcast and a stranger in mine own house? The shades of the prison-house closed round about us all: walls strait and stubborn to the whitest, but relentlessly narrow, tall, and unscalable to

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30 Though I here treat racial domination will be treated as a subset of colonial domination, this is not explicitly how Du Bois described things in in *Souls*.

31 For an example of a well-developed version of this position, see Robert Gooding-Williams' book chapter "Imitations of Immortality", particularly the section from 77-83. Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois*, 77–83.

32 Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 5–6.

sons of night who must plod darkly on in resignation, or beat unavailing palms against the stone, or steadily, half hopelessly, watch the streak of blue above.[33]

Some dark boys gave up the loftier goals and nice things represented by the "streak of blue" above and are content to "plod darkly on in resignation" within the walls of racial domination. Others give up on these heights, but with "mocking distrust" and "silent hatred" rather than grim resignation. Others sit and "watch", and still others try "half hopelessly" to change the condition of their racial domination by "beating unavailing palms against the stone".[34]

Phenomenological or experiential readings of what double consciousness means to Du Bois may rest on an interpretive mistake. This range of views Du Bois articulated represent a range of different ways, perhaps, of experiencing racial domination, most of which he seems to differentiate from his own, despite identifying important areas of overlap. This spells trouble for any view that equates Du Bois' account double consciousness to any particular one of these. Perhaps the feeling of "always looking at one's self through the eyes of others" is a feeling that characteristic of a specific range of responses to the context of racial domination: perhaps those who attempt to change their condition or that of their Black fellows by means of engagement with the other world. Whichever way that goes, it would seem that what unites Du Bois' cast of characters is not their outlook, but their prison.

Their prison has experiential consequences, but is at bottom a practical situation. On a good day, the labor involved in the production of meaning and the navigation of social interactions is distributed somewhat equitably, facilitated by a bedrock of agreement about the way in which the words should be taken to relate to the situation in which communicators find themselves. That agreement is no accident, but instead just one realm of cooperation embedded in a larger

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[33] Du Bois, 7.
[34] Du Bois, 5−7.

social scheme of cooperation. On such a day, individual instances of communication can be genuinely cooperative, and proceed on terms that allow all participants to communicate in good faith.

But, as the example of Kilgrave and Clotel illustrates, there are bad days: unfair communicative labor contracts, exploitative working conditions for the production of meaning and the navigation of social interactions that such production facilitates and is facilitated by.[35] On these bad days, the asymmetry in communicative labor is not justified by underlying common interests (as may be the story in cases of deference to expertise or parental authority, for example).

Double consciousness, as I see it, is what happens when the weather forecast for one's entire life is a full sequence of bad days, or at least when bad days are forecasted as the rule rather than the exception. The communicator on the wrong side of power may characteristically find herself in a situation that is only safely navegable by use of public practical premises that are identifiably related to a broader social scheme of unjust, false cooperation, that ties itself around the views associated with that society's Kilgraves rather than its Clotels. This is the sense in which one must measure of "one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" – one must adopt, at least for interactive purposes, a practical relationship to her own behavior organized around such views, regardless of the view she privately has.

A Clotel in such a society is characteristically in the position in which participation in bad faith becomes the thing to do: this assumption may be the one compatible with whatever subjective security is available in such a colonially structured society. This bad faith can take many forms: she may find herself asserting claims she believes to be false, acting for the sake of

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35 Indebted to Rachel McKinney here.

things she does not take to be worth pursuing, or reasoning from public practical premises she believes to be false, or simply adopting these premises as practically binding out of reflex, failing to see them as even potentially up for review. It isn't simply that, from time to time, she will need to compliment naked emperors on their fine robes, but to do that must learn to perceive when naked people will expect her to do such, and thus in some sense cultivate a durable standpoint that will allow her to see both when this is being demanded of her and how she could succeed at doing this.

The nature of the practical dilemma that forms the practical prison that licenses double consciousness is then the notion of central concern. Given the context of racial domination, Du Bois contended that it was impossible to be "both a Negro and an American…a coworker in the kingdom of culture" – a congenial turn of phrase for my purposes.[36] The problem presented by racism in experiential terms was not a doubling of the experience or personality of Black folk but "the contradiction of double aims".[37] Consider the following practical dilemma: for a person in two different socially salient interpretations could present themselves for the same action.[38] One rooted in a perspective attributed to the outer, white world (culture A, Kilgrave), and another rooted in a perspective attributed to the prison (culture B, Clotel). Double consciousness consists in the recognition that the world will be communicatively and interpretively structured around the perspectives associated with its Kilgraves: those will explain how public information affects a range of important social interactions that are crucial to life for Du Bois and his fellow inmates.

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[36] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 8.
[37] Du Bois, 8.
[38] You can think of two different sets of, families of, or origins of interpretations if it bothers you that the number is so arbitrarily low. My goal here is to keep the language relatively simple, but without this footnote you might fairly have doubted that what I've said here takes within-group interpretive disagreements seriously enough.

Consider, for a concrete example, the "double-aimed struggle of the black artisan": "on the one hand to escape white contempt for a nation of mere hewers of wood and drawers of water, and on the other hand to plough and nail and dig for a poverty-stricken horde".[39] Perhaps Du Bois imagines that it is the judgment of the black artisan that she ought to hew wood and draw water, given the reasons she has to drink and to make use of wooden tools. Perhaps, further, she believes that this is an interpretation of what she is doing that is both available to her fellow inmates and taken up by enough of them to associate that interpretation with the condition she shares with them. Yet the very same action renders her an instance of something contemptuous, something the white world considers "mere", and one she can expect to be represented as such in the public practical premises corresponding to relevant joint actions: from the obvious cases, like discussions of what she does for a living, to subtler ones like attempts to enter and navigate class-and-race stratified corners of society - perhaps the very richest, lightest skinned, Black folks with the most socially celebrated careers had a shot in hell of getting their children into a prestigious school attended by whites, but the dark skinned Black hewer of wood and drawer of water does not. Further, she knows this in advance of trying, and knows the costs of failed social experiments – her subjective relationship with things like "prestigious schools" anticipates the effect that social structure will have on her attempts to relate to them, based on what she learns from her interactions as a dark skinned hewer of wood or drawer of water.

We should not be tempted to be satisfied with a psychological story of what double consciousness is doing here, as though the problem is in the head of the artisan. Du Bois seems to explicitly reject this conclusion. The "waste of double aims, this seeking to satisfy two unreconciled ideals", on his account, is that folks in this practical situation end up doing the

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[39] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 8.

wrong things: "often wooing false gods and invoking false means of salvation", and end up doing two things when they could simply be doing what they're doing in full constitutive narrative continuity with the historical past that explains her set of practical options and incentives.

Du Bois makes a thin concession to the psychological view of double consciousness, saying that "at times" the waste of double aims "has even seemed to make them ashamed of themselves". But this is a thin concession indeed, as the psychological consequences (that take center stage in the psychological view) are marked as exceptional. I think the practical reading of double consciousness, as an orientation of "double aims" to a persistent practical dilemma, is on firmer exegetical ground than the psychological view.

b. Why double consciousness matters

If the preceding is right, then double consciousness is not a sociological claim describing how Black people generally think or experience the social world and the joint actions required to navigate it. It is a description of what experience of that world is licensed by a particular bit of knowledge about it that Du Bois takes himself to have: knowledge of what kind of reliance on its patterns and structure is actually licensed. To the extent that it is an experiential claim at all, it is about how the world is apt to be experienced by people who are consciously aware that they are only sanctioned to rely on the world in this way.

I do not mean simply that there are occasions in which such "woke" Black persons have reason to take the racism of the dominant culture into account, though this weaker claim would itself be enough. After all, if such occasions were sufficiently frequent, this claim would be functionally indistinguishable from a general description of the relevant domain's social

structure as anti-Black, since social structure does what it does – objectively secures the schedules of expectations that ground our subjective security – simply by materializing patterns of actual activity.

Even should the first claim fail, and occasions on which they guess correctly that the person in front of them generally regards Black people negatively are relatively infrequent, those occasional instances might be rather important and consequential (e.g, a job interview, a sentencing hearing, or an encounter with an armed officer of the law). In a society in which credibility is distributed unequally, some people's storytelling is more consequential than others', and thus some people's narrative tendencies are disproportionately weighty in deciding how others must navigate the social world.

One source of weight is given by the fact that the maxims by which one would 'self-govern' in order to manage implicit or explicit racial bias require certain capacities and awarenesses whose development required many habituating actions of reading the stories that she took others to be disposed to telling about her actions.   You might go as far as to call the skillful navigation of such community norms and tendencies *moral literacy*, as Barbara Herman defines it: a "capacity to read and respond to the basic elements of a moral world".[40]

A socially *literate* Black person might be in a position to know that the right action-under-description and value pair for a job interview is something like, "I will speak 'correctly' in order to get the job". To successfully 'self-govern' by this maxim she must not simply doubt that interviewers are prepared to count African American Vernacular English as correct speech, but also must have developed the capacity to speak the kind of English that won't compound the

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[40] Herman defines it as "a capacity to read and respond to the basic elements of a moral world". Herman, *Moral Literacy*, 97.

problem of credibility she faces as a Black woman.[41] This involves many past actions of

speaking 'correct' English and thus many actions of *not* speaking the dialect associated with her

identity-group. These acts of self-constitution prepare her for a world that views her kind with

contempt.

Two important questions loom here: first, how could this kind of narrative structure form at

all and, second, why is it incompatible with freedom?

The mechanical question is least threatening. If it is the case that there could be a predictable

mismatch between the two consciousnesses, and if the mismatch was responsive to predictable,

salient contextual features (e.g. the skin color of people in the room), then the derivative facts

about how one could learn when and how one should 'switch' consciousnesses would simply be a

set of sensitivities learnable in the way explored in *Moral Literacy*. Herman's account could be

retooled for a thorough theoretical explanation of the development of double consciousness

without substantial mechanical revision, though with a non-trivial revision to what 'literacy'

comes to in the cases of Black subjects (a less cheerily Aristotelian conception of 'how to live the

good, moral life' and instead a more depressing 'how to do the best you can in a world that looks

on in amused contempt and pity').

But the second question will take a closer look. In the beginning of this dissertation I

positioned myself against behavioral analyses of freedom: I don't think of freedom as ultimately

amounting to the proper list of socially permitted doables in space and time, but instead a

particular set of explanatory relations between ourselves, what is doable, and what is done. The

diagram of my understanding of double consciousness in Figure 3.4 is not only a representation

of Du Bois' thought, but a representation of an explanatory relation between actor, world, and act

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41 Linguist Geneva Smitherman notes the particular import of linguistic flexibility for Black social mobility.
Smitherman and Smitherman-Donaldson, *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America.*

– and thus a candidate, on my view, as the sort of thing we can properly direct philosophical questions of freedom towards. As I have been forthcoming about: I think double consciousness is the kind of narrative structure that forms as a response to unfreedom, and itself represents a kind of unfreedom. I turn to the task of saying how and why is the task in this dissertation's third and final chapter.

Chapter 3: How We Do

"A sáà mà jèùn (Well, you gotta eat...)" - Yorùbá proverb, often uttered in response to the observation of degrading labor, as related by Yétùnde Táíwò

"Now you see that I'm 68 inches above sea level,
93 million miles above these devils" – Ladybug Mecca[42]

I.   Introduction

> "The principal characteristic, common to every kind of imperialist domination, is the negation of the historical process of the dominated people by means of violently usurping the free operation of the process of development of the productive forces...the foundation for national liberation rests in the inalienable right of every people to have their own history, whatever formulations may be adopted at the level of international law. The objective of national liberation is, therefore, to reclaim the right, usurped by imperial domination, namely: the liberation of the process of development of national productive forces. - "National Liberation and Culture"[43]

In chapter 1, I discussed this quote by Cabral, attempting to figure out what conception of history, ownership, and imperialism would relate the ideas in this passage in an illuminating way. That effort was helped along by 'narrative': among other things, methodological preoccupation with the part-whole relations that make actions what they are and decide our relationship to them. Together, these moves helped develop a different conception of freedom, the one I took to be at work in this passage by Cabral and the one that bears the name of this dissertation: autobiography, collective ownership of the narrative of the world. That way of explaining autobiography and, generally, the gloss of autobiographical freedom given in chapter 1 was largely focused on the social structure that would correspond to it. This was an appropriate starting place, given Cabral's own characterization of this freedom in terms of macrosocial facts like the "free operation of the process of development of the productive forces". However, to leave autobiography at only that would be to leave important territory

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[42] Digable Planets, *9th Wonder (Blackitolism).*
[43] Cabral, *Return to the Source*, 41–43.

unexamined, particularly the connection between these macrosocial facts and the realm of the individual and microsocial that has often been preferred level of focus.

The task of this chapter is to reconsider the individual using the autobiographical view. Chapter 2 provided a bridge in two ways: first, by discussing how 'local', multiple-subject-involving action like conversation might relate to social structure in a way illuminated by the autobiographical view; secondly, by way of discussing double consciousness as the lasting conscious narrative relationship one would be licensed to have as a result of careful consideration of the former. In part II of this chapter, I'll discuss different aspects of people and the world that agency views have aimed to respond to. In part III, I'll introduce *authorship* – the characterization of the relationship between our practical and reasoning capacities specifically keyed to the autobiographical view.

II.   Not This

The concept of rational agency has had a special relationship with individuality and freedom in Western political philosophy. On some views, it is the decisive fact about enough of us in light of which we each merit the rights and responsibilities of free political subjects. On others, it is the proper locus of moral evaluation, rights, and responsibilities, and the proper site at which to address moral claims. Many views focus on one of these senses or upshots of agency, others treat agency as a basic notion while drawing insights at will from each of these perceived dimensions of its scope.

The concept of agency is commonly used to relate three things: an individual, their actions, and the explanatory relations taken to hold between these. Some popular articulations of rational agency treat it as an individual's capacity to *do*, in a special way: to do things "for reasons" or in

ways responsive to such things, or perhaps to do by means of a law one sets for one's self. Then, on this offered schema, an agent is the sort of individual for which we can explain some of the things that happen around them (actions) by reference to their reasons (explanatory relation).

Some ethical theory focuses on the responsiveness of an individual rational agent to reasons or considerations, and in turn the responsiveness of her actions to the first kind of responsiveness. Agents, thus characterized, are then evaluated based on their conformity with norms of rationality, or with theoretically derived principles of moral reasoning, or with characterizations of virtue, with both of those kinds of responsiveness in the background. Viewed this way, the contributions of social and political context and of the intentions of others, then, make a difference insofar as they bear on the content of aforementioned families of considerations and reasons, rather than on the character of what it is to contend with such a context more capaciously understood. The corresponding conceptions of freedom that develop readily from this standpoint might turn on whether or not the agent can make things happen in general. Put slightly more carefully, that the agent can make the things happen that she wants to happen, to do as she pleases – set her own self-governing laws, act on her own reasons. From here, there are typically some caveats: that she be in a position to exercise her agency absent the wrong kind of restrictive and distortive input from the noisy social world (e.g. active coercion, implicit threat, and misinformation) and present the right kind of input (accurate information, perhaps adequate social values).

I think this view is onto something. *Autobiography*, however, is premised on a stronger description of the relationship between actions and social structure than what seems to be at work in the views of agency considered so far. On the picture I've developed in this dissertation, social structure doesn't simply provide information and incentives for the would-be agent to act

as she does, reasons for her to take or leave. On my view, social structure bears a constitutive relationship to an individual's actions. In chapter 1, I discussed how social structure is also constitutive of the occasions of her putatively individual actions. In chapter 2, I discussed how social structure, or joint action in the 'global' sense is also constitutive of her putatively 'local' joint actions like conversation, and also begun to discuss the narrative consequences of relating to one's decisionmaking capacities in a world so structured. Taken together, these invite occasion a different sort of corresponding claim about social structure and individual agency: that the former constitutes the latter.

To help see what this stronger view adds, let's consider a range of ways of relating agency and social context. Take, for starters, these two views of agency provided by Frankfurt and the team of Fischer and Ravizza. Harry Frankfurt provides an example of this kind of view. While Frankfurt preferred "human being" or "person" in his seminal paper "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility" on moral responsibility, characteristic features of what I take to be Cartesian accounts of agency were active. In the aforementioned paper, he developed what becomes a family of thought experiments, subsequently termed "Frankfurt cases", in which a person named Jones performs an action that he would have done anyway after receiving a credible threat that he will face grievous harm should he fail to do it.   Though Frankfurt's article was intended as a challenge to theories that claim that determinism is incompatible with free will, my interest here is in the way Jones' deliberation is described. Frankfurt seemed to believe that Jones' action is properly described as an essentially socially detached mental process, in which the actions and intentions of others fit in only insofar as they provide content to the considerations that figure in the agent's reasoning.[44]

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[44] For example, in discussing the first variant of the example, Frankfurt says: "One possibility is that Jones$_1$ is not a reasonable man: he is, rather, a man who does what he has once decided to do no matter what happens next and

In *Responsibility and Control*, Fischer and Ravizza offer a contemporary account of agency that aims to clarify the role of causal responsibility for action in the determination of moral responsibility, at least partially in response to the family of complications Frankfurt discussed. They take the position that to be an agent is to be a proper candidate for morally reactive attitudes, and that one is properly considered a candidate for those attitudes when at least some of her actions are under her "guidance control", which she has when she "freely" acts (acts absent coercion or direct and literal control by another party) and where her free use of her capacities are the proximate cause of their effects.[45] She is in a position to meet the latter criterion where her action is caused by a mechanism that is reasons-responsive.[46] As with Frankfurt, other persons are relevant insofar as they provide or ground reasons to which the agent may deliberatively respond – not, as I would have it, as taking part in the guidance of the actions. They also hold that "coercive threats (and perhaps offers) rule out moral responsibility" because they rule out guidance control. The "causal history of an action matters", after all, and "[w]hen persons are manipulated in various ways, they are like marionettes" and are no longer appropriate targets of the reactive attitudes that we ought to reserve for agentic behavior.[47]

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no matter what the cost. In that case, the threat actually exerted no effective force upon him. He acted without any regard to it, very much as if he were not aware that it had been made. If this is indeed the way it was, the situation did not involve coercion at all." "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility", pg. 831.

[45] This is to be distinguished from what they call "regulative control", a stricter criterion which involves guidance control of the events that happen but also over the alternative possibilities that apply to other ways the situation could have gone. These are both distinctions, in my terms, that bear on the explanatory relations between the agent and what (or if) she has done. Fischer and Ravizza, *Responsibility and Control: A Theory of Moral Responsibility*, 30–31.

46 On pages 37-39, Fischer and Ravizza defend a view that an agent can *herself* fail to be reasons-responsive in Frankfurt cases: if Jones is coerced into doing something she would otherwise still have done, they claim she is not reasons-responsive as an agent because she would have performed the action regardless of her reasons. However, the "mechanism" by which the action occurs is still her deliberative faculties, which are characteristically reasons responsive, and so the action is hers in a way that they take to justify the attributions of responsibility and agency in some sense. I take the deliberative aspect of the "mechanism" by which these reasons are considered to correspond roughly to the kind of deliberation I will attribute to Herman's discussion of Kantian maxims.

[47] Fischer and Ravizza, *Responsibility and Control: A Theory of Moral Responsibility*, 36.

Both of these views seem to consider coercion a complicating matter. But, from the letter of their theoretical commitments about what grounds agency and responsibility, it is difficult to see how or why. If the role that agents characteristically play is in causing their actions, coercion of the gunpoint form doesn't seem to be any challenge to that at all. Whatever the gas station robber does by pointing at me, he does not thereby operate my arms at the register in the mechanistic sense. *I* do that, for the reasons I have not to get shot (there are plenty). The mental mechanism that operates in such a case, it would seem, is the kind of thing that decides which causal pathways I think are likely (which are likely to end in me getting shot and which are not) and which I think are most advantageous. That mechanism isn't even malfunctioning or otherwise operating in a strange way: "in order to not get shot" seems like a good enough reason, cost-benefit wise, to do a lot of things, and it wouldn't be terribly surprising if emptying out the cash registers of an insured gas station owned by a multinational conglomerate" (BP, perhaps?) that pays me minimum wage made the list.

Perhaps the underlying thought is something like this – while reasons and reasoning still seem to be a part of the explanation of what the agent does in coercion cases, they don't seem to be playing the right sort of explanatory role. Normally, when someone does something, we can explain why they're doing what they're doing by reference to the reasons to do *that*. The thought is something like: you see me emptying a cash register alone in a store, whatever cash-register-clearing reasons I have (or have taken on as practically orienting for the sake of maintaining my job) ought to be part of the explanation. This is the relationship coercion disturbs – if you see me emptying a register at gunpoint, it would seem easier to explain what I'm doing by my reasons not to get shot, which isn't ultimately about when or if I think cash registered should be emptied.

Even that much concession to the individualist framework risks some sense of mistake: the relevant reasons or desires for my behavior are the gunman's, which we could confirm by a series of counterfactuals. If the gunman had instead ordered me on pain of death to put all the blue M&Ms in a bag, sing the Norwegian national anthem, or do the Macarena, I suppose I'd be doing one of those things. The fact that I am emptying out the cash register – the overt behavior I'm doing - is an entirely contingent aspect of the coercive relationship that the person with the gun establishes and is in a position to revise at will. My reluctance to get shot is stable across all of these alternative scenarios, but in a very specific role: as partially constitutive of the relation that it puts me in to the gunman and his demands on my behavior and thus our (perversely) joint behavior. It is not, itself, a good explanation of my behavior, as it might be in another range of scenarios (perhaps tracking my pattern of lunch decisions the past week). The gunman's demand for me to behave this way or that way, on the other hand, match up quite well with what I end up doing across this range of counterfactuals.

To put it with some generality: referencing which behavior of possibilities x y and z was demanded by the gunman seems a complete explanation of why we are in a world where I am doing x rather than y or z, and my preference ordering or commitments to the inherent value of x-ing, y-ing, or z-ing seem largely explanatorily irrelevant. But they ought to be explanatorily relevant. That they are not is what is missing from the stories where a coercer shows up demanding that I do things.

Staring at this general point brings out a more serious problem for views like Frankfurt's and Fischer and Ravizza's. While they consider one-off cases of coercion, the kind of coercion I have considered in this dissertation is structural. Indeed, chapter 2 gives an account where the very basic structure of conversation can be understood as a site structured by coercion at the

social-structural scale, which arms some actors in society vis-à-vis their as potential gunmen with respect to even mundane interactions (Clotel saying "good morning, master" to plantation owner Kilgrave) and which structures public information itself such that it may exert these effects that would operate even if such actors would lower their weapon (the speech act performed by accurately reporting racial disparities in sexually transmitted diseases in a society that has proliferated resources that could be use to improperly contextualize this information, e.g. stereotypes about one race's sexual behaviors that would serve as a potential explanation, but has not proliferated the information that would properly contextualize this information, e.g. differential racial rates of immunity to certain infections).

Despite seeing the pull of what they are responding to, it is hard to see where either Fischer and Ravizza or Frankfurt would find the resources to make out why this should make a difference given the level of granularity with which they mark their theoretical territory. The preceding comments come down to a matter of *which* reasons, of what sort of reasons, or perhaps to invoke the *ownership* criterion I've used in this dissertation, *whose*. But their conceptions of agency and responsibility don't turn on any of these finer grained distinctions, they only on whether reasons are operating at all and their relation to activity as proximate causes – if wanting to avoid the disutility or harm of coercion is a reason. There's something left to be desired, then, in such conceptions of agency.

Other accounts of agency give a more active role to social structure and context, wiser to the role of joint action and the role of social power and public information. Accounts of agency need not center their views about what constitutes agency in the agent's internal capacities, as the previous views did. Another set of views of agency, including but not limited to views advertising themselves as 'non-sovereign' conceptions of agency, take agents as initiators of

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processes whose result, for their very character as agential processes, depend importantly on the actions and reactions of others. These views see as an individual's agency (here considered as 'ability to act agentially') as at least partially located in their environment, and in others' agency. These views of agency are closer to my view in that they tend to identify the successful exercise of agency as socially constituted, at least from episode to episode.

Barbara Herman an alternative view of what it is for a rational agent to reason among other, diverse groups of rational agents with different perspectives and locations within institutional contexts in *Moral Literacy*. Herman's conception of agency is a "formal" one, derivative of Kantian ethical theory, in that it is concerned primarily with the procedure by which agents act, seeking to minimize substantive claims about the sorts of actions that are characteristically agential.[48]

Herman identifies the "defining Kantian claim" as that which distinguishes mere "active beings" from "rational agents".[49] A mere "active" being could be moved to activity based on desires, and could even choose means for her ends, but could not act for a reason in the properly agential sense. Acting for a reason involves not just mere purposive activity, but activity that is self-governed: controlled by a judgment the rational agent has made that acting in a particular way is some sense good. The proper target of ethical evaluation on such a view is an agent's "maxim" – in her terms, the subjective representation of a person's actions that corresponds to the form in which they will those actions.

Political theorist Sharon Krause, drawing on earlier work from Hannah Arendt, advances a non-sovereign view in *Freedom Beyond Sovereignty: Reconstructing Liberal Individualism,*

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48 Thanks to Will Reckner for clarification on this point.

49 Herman, *Moral Literacy*, "Making Room for Character", pgs. 7-10.

arguing that to be an agent is "to have an impact on the world one can recognizes as one's own"[50]. Krause develops a picture on which an agent acts agentially where the "social uptake" of her behavior matches, reflects, or otherwise cooperatively completes the action initiated by the agent. One dimension of her view of agency she calls the 'efficacy dimension': that aspect of agency concerned with whether an agent's action comes off at all, or whether it has a social interpretation and effects compatible with or equivalent to those the agent intended.

Krause gives the example of two men walking hand in hand through a homophobic neighborhood to bring out this concept.[51] Their action of walking admits of heterogeneous responses whose meaning cannot be fixed before selecting a narrator. To the couple, it was an action of a night's stroll, perhaps affirming their love and commitment, perhaps just a whimisical choice about how to walk to where they're going that day. To the neighborhood – the site of the action's "social uptake" - it was an affront to their values and space. The heterogeneity of these stories prompts Krause to describe the incident as one of "failed or frustrated agency", as for her, the social uptake necessary to agency is one in which others understand your action in a way "consonant with your understanding of it."

Herman gives a similar example on the sovereign agency side of things. If the recipient of one's would-have-been act of beneficence does not recognize it as such and is instead insulted, Herman thinks the action fails to be the sort of action that I willed. Herman, too, characterizes the problem posed by this sort of case as one of the efficacy of one's agency in her action, even though she takes the lesson of this kind of example to be an illustration of the possibility that the

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50 Krause indicates that this is what it comes to affirm one's "subjective existence" in the world by means of "concrete action" on pages 3-5 of the book's introduction. To avoid a misreading of what is meant by "individualism" in the subtitle, I will note that the book is defending what she terms *normative individualism,* a view that holds that institutional protection of individual rights and choices is normatively recommended without holding a descriptive view of agency that bottoms out in rights and choices.

51 Chapter 2 of *Freedom Without Sovereignty,* 37-38.

efficacy of one's agency full stop might bear this kind of dependency to – part and parcel of the very possibility this dissertation began with in developing the autobiographical view in the first chapter.

The autobiographical view differs from these characterizations of agency, and the problems other people present for any given individual's exercise of it, in two important and related respects.[52] The implied view of the problem of freedom presented implied by the potential non-cooperation of other people seems to be of the variety resisted in the initial chapter: a conception of freedom tied to being able to do certain things at all or fully, rather than my preferred way of spelling out freedom as a matter of the explanatory relations between what is done (whatever its relation to the intentions of its doer), who is doing it, and what resources it is done with.[53] The agents Krause and Herman initiate something that would correspond to the subjective representation that corresponds to "an impact on the world one can recognize as one's own".

But episodes of failed agentic action can't be the only risk for agency presented by the potential non-cooperation of other agents. That is at most a reason why this or that exercise of agency might not come off as the would-be agent intends. But what Cabral and Du Bois describe is a more thorough, lasting narrative relationship to the world occasioned by the realities of white supremacy and colonialism: domination of the "historical processes" of the colonized and double consciousness, respectively.

When Clotel finds herself enslaved and addressing the plantation owner Kilgrave as "master", perhaps in the otherwise banal greeting "'Good morning, master", she thereby accomplishes *exactly* what was intended, and more importantly initiates an action that is socially completed by the all-too-willing cooperation of her interlocutor Kilgrave (and the background

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[52] Krause also views the 'realization of the self' or cultivation of personal identity

[53] I am indebted to Kye Barker and Megan Gallagher for helpful discussion on Krause's view.

'cooperation' of the social structure). Or, to use Krause's terminology, insofar as both parties understand Clotel's form of address of Kilgrave as performed deference, her understanding of what she is doing is certainly consonant with Kilgrave's understanding of it, however else their opinions may differ on the social relationship that makes deference the thing for Clotel to do in this situation. If there is a threat to Clotel's agency from the social structure that calls upon her to perform this behavior in conversations in the first place the "efficacy" dimension of agency seems a poor place to look for it. A behavioral conception of freedom – freedom as reducible to a list of x-ing's one can do and y-ing's one cannot – might focus on this dimension of agency, but the autobiographical view does not.

It's worth saying specifically what such a myopic focus would fail to consider. Such a view of agency rightly treats agential action in any particular instance as socially constituted, it seems to treat the relevant socially constituting forces as 'local' to the action: the action's public audience, perhaps, or those standing in the most immediate causal relations to it. Using the same case as before: we could imagine the 'local' audience for Kilgrave and Clotel's conversation as small as the pair of them, since their uptake or lackthereof decides whether or not Clotel successfully accomplishes greeting Kilgrave. But this elides the explanatory role of 'global' social structure in explaining what cultural resources that local audience has to form a common ground to interpret and co-constitute Clotel's action, and which they are incentivized to use in which ways: in this case, the slave system that constitutes Kilgrave as a master and Clotel as a slave in the first instance, which is the condition of possibility for either of their conduct in this interaction to count as reproducing or deviating from the patterns of conduct prescribed by those social identities. This focus on the local corresponds in my terms to a view where Lewis

distortions are the only impediment to conversation and other local joint action, neglecting

Woodson distortions.

Any framing that stops here leaves out a great deal of the unfreedom captured by the

autobiographical analysis, and risks mischaracterizing what it does include. It is appropriate,

then, that Herman continues:

> Facts about institutions that favor white males, as well as facts about women and racial minorities that make them especially vulnerable to informal barriers, need to be acknowledge in maxims of action in relevant contexts…The possibility of such moral complexity enjoins moral agents to develop a morally tuned sensitivity to the effects of their sincerely intended actions and to the interplay between what they intend and the social or institutional contexts in which they act. There must be intelligent anticipation about failure and subsequent response built into the initial maxims of claim and response. This cannot be restricted to some after-the-fact check. It is rather a morally required feature of judgement and deliberation – of agents' maxims – the effects of which will show in the way agents respond to morally complex circumstances and context-specific claims…
>
> In complex social circumstances, especially ones involving inequalities of power, in which differences in history (or class or ace) produce competing systems of local value, if agents on both sides of an issue are to include in their maxims (or responses to claims) that express local values that express local, values, there must be principles that provide deliberative guidance…to reconcile the content of local maxims with objective moral principle and to provide resources for the presentation of differences that allow for moral conversation and real disagreement…[t]he preservation of mutual opacity forces terms of agreement that track power and trading advantage.[54]

Herman's tasks here are prescriptive: she is describing both how agents ought to reason in a

world that is morally complex in the ways she discusses and also how theorists ought to attend to

those moral complexities. But what she says here has implications for an important descriptive

question: how to characterize maxims of action in the situations Cabral and Du Bois are

responding to, where the "interplay between what they intend and the social or institutional

contexts in which they act" track "power and trading advantage" rather than the outcome of

genuine moral conversation. Assuming that "competing systems of local value map cleanly onto

what I've here called "cultures" – the interpretive competition between these is the one

dramatized by the relationship between Kilgrave and Clotel developed in chapter 2 and

continued in this chapter. Then, the situation described by Herman here relates the "global"

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[54] Herman, *Moral Literacy*, 37–38.

situation of colonialism diagrammed in Figure 1.1 and discussed in chapter 2 to the "local"

preclusion of moral conversation between Kilgrave and Clotel diagrammed and discussed in

chapter 2. This relationship was anticipated by my reproduction of the same explanatory

structure to explain "individual" unfreedom in Figure 1.2. All of these figures are reproduced
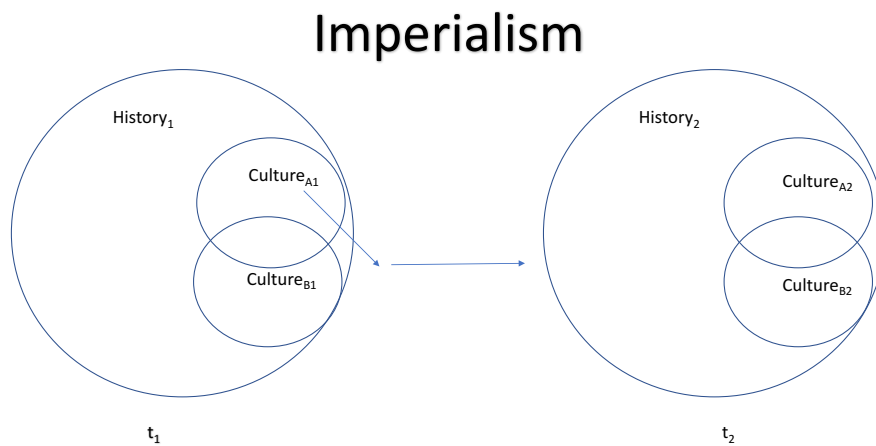
below:

Figure 1.1

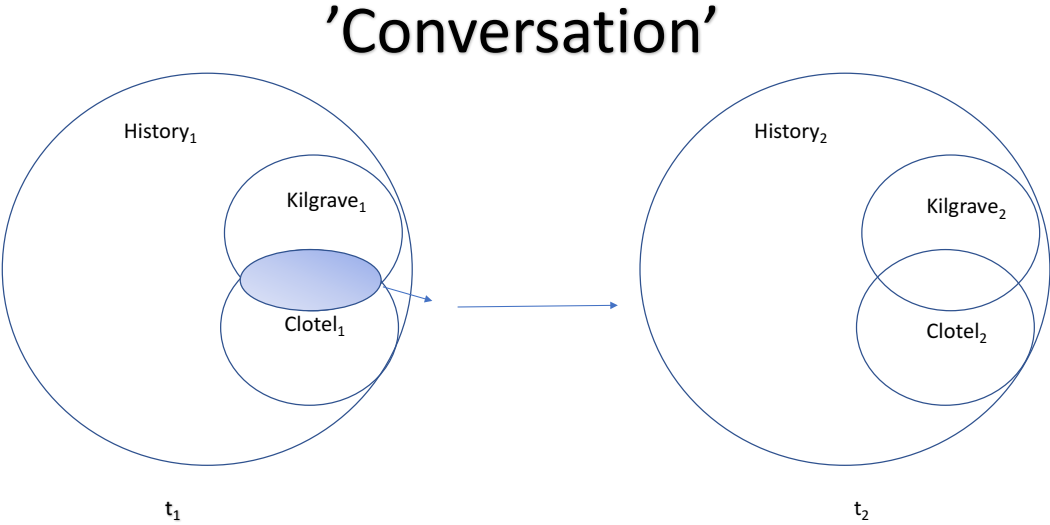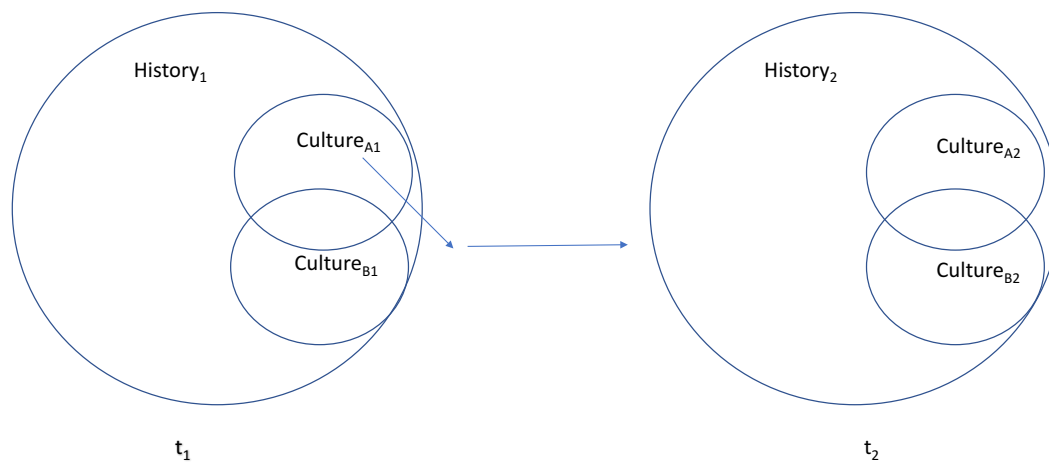## Imperialism

Figure 2.2 Conversation under Woodson-distortion

'Conversation'

History₁

Kilgrave₁

Clotel₁

t₁

History₂

Kilgrave₂

Clotel₂

t₂

Figure 1.2

'Individual' Unfreedom

$$\text{History}_1 \quad \text{Culture}_{A1} \quad \text{Culture}_{B1} \qquad \text{History}_2 \quad \text{Culture}_{A2} \quad \text{Culture}_{B2}$$

$$t_1 \qquad\qquad t_2$$

After all: moral literacy, for Herman, refers to an agent's sensitivity and attunement to the complex relationships between institutional and social context and the effect of any individual's behavior can be. But it is exactly this kind of literacy that licenses the standpoint Du Bois labels double consciousness.

To see why, consider the following. The case of a racial slur is easiest - "hey, nigger!" said to a person who understands the word to be racially inflammatory, clues the hearer into both the fact that someone who looks like her is viewed with contempt by the speaker. She is also safe to conclude that, since there's a word to express this particular kind of disdain, there are or at least have been others who share the speaker's type of regard for people who look like her.

Events involving racism will rarely be this obvious, especially in today's political context, where the appearance of 'colorblindness' and corresponding racial etiquette of 'political correctness' disguises the underlying racial structure[55]. A person will know that the way public information responds to and reflects her actions – how her actions will be socially constituted and what their social effects will be – will respond both to 'thin' aspects of what she does (e.g. how quickly she moves, the tone of her voice, the propositional content of her claims) and also 'thicker' considerations, including others' evaluation of her perceived competencies and attributes, a point well explicated and defended by Linda Alcoff and Kristie Dotson.[56] Some mechanisms by which others communicate how her actions are received will be obvious: e.g. explicit praise, compliments, and awards. Some will be subtle: shifting eye contact, passive aggressive putdowns, and the assignment of credit for a thought or insight. She is left with the task of sorting out how the aspects of her decision that she controls relates to those she does not, and how those forms of feedback relates to aspects of her decision that relate to various markers of her identity they might take her as embodying, performing, or deviating from.

This process will involve all of the labels and identity markers by which she socially constitutes and is socially constituted. Here I've explicitly considered the label 'woman', which will meaningfully interact with how people respond to her actions both directly and by interaction with other relevant labels. She can expect one set of assumptions about her knowledge, capacities, and interests should she be a heterosexual Black woman, another set

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55 For an analysis of 'colorblindness' in the context of the United States' "War on Drugs", see Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow*. Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness.*

56 In "On Judging Epistemic Credibility: Is Social Identity Relevant?" Alcoff argues both that such judgements are ordinary aspects of social reasoning and defends certain kinds of epistemic credibility judgements. Dotson analyzes morally objectionable versions of this phenomenon in "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing." Alcoff, "On Judging Epistemic Credibility: Is Social Identity Relevant?"DOTSON, "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing."

should she be a queer Black woman, another should she be a trans Black woman, and another should she be a disabled Black woman. Negotiating any of these will require reference to the ascriptive tendencies of a society that views and measures people of these identity-types with contempt. It will further involve habituated responses to how those labels interact with each other.[57] Thus the knowledge that other people have been discriminated against based on attributes she shares with them makes it the case that she should make reference to the possibility of such in the formation of her maxims, in precisely the ways and for precisely the reasons Herman describes. She'll need to know how they figure in and what to do about it – or be able to unconsciously navigate interactions structured by the patterns these historical facts convert into objective security for her actions and the actions of those with whom she interacts – in order to be morally literate.

In the present day: a morally literate Black person might be in a position to know that the right action-under-description and value pair for a job interview is something like, "I will speak 'correctly' in order to get the job". But it is not enough to merely anticipate a situation like this, or know how to navigate it in the abstract sense divorced from skill and performance. To successfully 'self-govern' by this maxim she must not simply anticipate the possibility that interviewers are ill-prepared to count African American Vernacular English as correct speech and avoid illegitimate conclusions about her competence on the basis of her use of it, but also must have developed the capacity to speak the kind of English that won't compound the problem

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57 In "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics" Kimberle Crenshaw argues for the concept of "intersectionality" – arguing that discrimination against Black women cannot be understood merely by reference to the categories 'Black' and 'woman', as the discrimination they face is in some sense greater than the sum of its parts. Intersectionality refers to the position that multiple identity markers' effects on a person's experience are mutually informing.Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics."

of credibility she faces as a Black woman.[58] This involves many past actions of speaking

'correct' English and thus many actions of *not* speaking the dialect associated with her identity-

group.

I do not mean simply that there are many occasions in which Black persons have reason to

take racism into account, though, were they sufficiently frequent, this could be enough to justify

my characterization of double consciousness as the subjective expression of conscious moral

literacy. Even were it that case that occasions on which one guess correctly that the person in

front of them generally regards Black people negatively are relatively infrequent, such

occasional instances might be rather important and consequential (e.g, a job interview, a

sentencing hearing, or an encounter with an armed officer of the law).

With generality: in a society where credibility is distributed unequally and some social roles

are more consequential than others, we would be interested not simply in the fact that there are

Kilgraves and there are Clotels (leading to Lewis distortions) or deformities in the store of public

information that will equivalently effect joint actions (leading to Woodson distortions) - but it

would be relevant where the Kilgraves of our society are distributed. If they were to be

sufficiently present at levers of power, or if deformities in public information are sufficiently

salient in some domain of practice, this state of affairs would distribute objective security in a

way that could justify entire life strategies built around anticipation of the relevant encounters

with these people or domains of life.

Such strategies could take a variety of forms: money saved for fancy education or other

forms of accreditation; avoiding some unnavigable, overly costly, or overly precarious social

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58 Linguist Geneva Smitherman notes the particular import of linguistic flexibility for Black social mobility in
Talkin and Testifying: The Language of Black America. Smitherman and Smitherman-Donaldson, *Talkin and
Testifyin: The Language of Black America.*

spheres altogether and resigning one's self to the life choices of those that remain; dreams deferred across generations. But the conscious representation of these life strategies as what they are – ways of engaging with life in general that gain their intelligibility and appropriateness from their character as responses that, in the final analysis, track "power and trading advantage" – is double consciousness. Double consciousness is then the particular epistemic achievement of a subjective narrative perspective on one's life achieved through moral literacy.

But there is, I think, a surprising conclusion that the preceding helps establish: the attempt at imperial domination constitutes its own failure. That is: imperialists can only possibly succeed at preventing the colonized from owning their own history, and the very attempt comes at the cost of cementing the like fate for themselves.

Recall the distinction between predictive reliance and constitutive reliance. Predictive reliance is the kind of reliance we are licensed to have based on our forecasts and predictions about the world: we predict that something will continue to be true, or anticipate a pattern of response of nature and/or other agents to our causal input. But we don't treat those causal responses as themselves part of what we are doing, we treat these responses as exploitable by us in doing what we are doing. Moreover, this reliance necessarily treats those forecasts as fixed is a normatively relevant sense.

A second pass at the colonial relationship helps explain why the colonizers, in attempting to create a state of affairs on which cement a state of affairs on which they can only predictively rely on social structure. Take, for instance, Derrick Bell's discussion of the United States' Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* to overturn decades of "separate but equal" policies that supported the Jim Crow system of racial apartheid in the US South in favor of integrationist policies. Bell notes deficiencies in the given legal rationales for the judgement

and proposes an extra-legal explanation for the Supreme Court's judgement: the value of ending segregation to variously culturally and ideologically positioned whites, ranging from those with a principled objection to white supremacy to those with an interest in the potential of such a judgement to increase America's standing in contest with Communism with the hearts and minds of people in the third world – the latter of which was an argument made by both the NAACP and the federal government.[59] This leads Bell to formulate a "principle of interest convergence": "[t]he interests of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites."[60]

Whether Bell's claim is correct or not is a historical and sociological matter. What's at issue, for my purposes, is what is at stake given a version of his principle of interest convergence that is more general on two specific dimensions: more general than race (any two communities or sets of communities A and B) and more general than the achievement of racial equality (the achievement of any social outcome). That is – what is at stake when some try to make their interests function as an explanatory principle of all's history. Colonialism as characterized by Cabral is just this: the effort by colonizers to organize society around such an explanatory principle. The colonial relationship is materialized in the world to the extent that actual salient patterns of human behavior conform to the ones that would obtain were it the case.

We can make sense of why Blacks would pursue their own interests in and by the strategies that respond best to an environment explanatorily governed by interest convergence between their interests and white people's. But we needn't and shouldn't explain this tendency by reference to the interests of whites, as if Black people are more . Instead, we can regard this as a best response to contingent historical matters: which ever correspond to the strategic situation

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[59] Bell, "Brown v. Board of Education and the Interest-Convergence Dilemma," 524.
[60] Bell, 523.

formed by a background context of white supremacist social structure and the relative expedience of exploiting that structure over the potentially more costly or even impossible set of alternatives involving reconstructing that basic social structure.

But *precisely because this is so*, it would follow that colonialism makes it the case that *neither* side of the colonial domination relation owns their history. The alienation from the autobiographical explanatory relation of narrative across time is – whatever material and cultural asymmetries result - fully symmetric with respect to freedom in the sense I've developed here.

Autobiography enters in when we consider the possibility that an analogous version of this situation is intelligible in the fully general social relationship that colonialism describes. That is: perhaps there is an explanation for the material and collective epistemic resources that colonizers they get by means of plundering the colonized, and thus for the changes in the grounds of the various objective and subjective securities that constitute their practice life. But that coerced production, and those plundered goods and knowledges are not *for the sake of* the colonizer in any sense – not for colonial elites, and certainly not for their largely subject, typically politically disempowered populations. These goods and resources and the changes to practical life that they occasion are simply the causal output of the self preservation of the colonized, of the best strategic response of the dominated to their domination.

Interest convergence describes, at its most stable, a strategic equilibrium between variously strategically positioned parties. The colonial side of a dominance relation can at best establish the kind of advantage that accrues to a first mover in a game, who can freely choose their decisions and whose decisions have cascading effects on the incentive structures of the other players. Depending on the structure of the strategic interaction, such a first mover may from time to time decide what – their effects on others' best strategic responses may land us in quite

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stable and forecastable equilibria, in the way that reflecting on the utterances of the robber who has me at gunpoint might make it easy to predict whether I will empty the cash register or do the Electric Slide. But I do neither of those for him, and the colonized similarly needn't do any of the things they are doing for the colonizers. We will not be acting together in the way that matters when I respond to his "do the Electric Slide with me" request – not the way worth doing, the way we would be acting together when he requested that I do the Electric Slide with him because the song came on, and because doing it together is a fun thing for us.

Then: individuals belonging to the communities of colonizer countries at best stand in strategically advantageous positions relative to the colonized. They are not, in the final analysis, free, nor are the things that happen in a colonially structured world things that happen for their sake, no matter with what regularity, no matter what level of subjective security the game might license them in having in enjoying an outsize portion of the spoils of colonial plunder. This is, by my lights, precisely the conclusion Amilcar Cabral himself reached. In the middle of armed conflict with the Portuguese imperial forces – a conflict that eventually claimed his life – he gave the speech "Message to the People of Portugal" in which he addressed the population of Portugal, the nation colonizing his own, as comrades – even down to the soldiers of the Portuguese military.[61] Colonialism tells a story with a handful of villains, but that nevertheless consists entirely of victims.

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[61] Cabral and Handyside, "Message to the People of Portugal."

Chapter 4: Conclusion

This dissertation is a large step towards an elaboration of a full autobiography view of ethical theory. It has made out a set of challenges for ethical theory and political philosophy at a variety of levels of analysis: the macro-collective level that corresponds to social structure (Chapter 1), the intersubjective level of joint action (Chapter 2) and putatively individual action (Chapters 1 and 3).

Four things remain left to be done in order to complete the theory. First, the positive characterization of the autobiographical social structure - that one in which material and cultural resources are collectively owned (in the technical sense used here) - needs a full elaboration and defense. This work largely considers negative arguments implicating the negation of these in coloniality, and treats the freedom of this way of fleshing out what an autobiographical social structure would consist in as a premise where appealed to at all.

Second, the theory needs to explicitly defend its historical commitments and make explicit the historical evidence that counts in favor of the sorts of generalizations that Cabral may have relied upon, and that are at issue for the characterization of colonialism I've borrowed from him here. The bulk of the attention paid in this project goes to theoretical statements about colonialism which ought to be accountable to the full depth and breadth of the world's study of colonial cultures, institutions, and economies .

Third, the theory needs to say fully what is meant by autobiography. This is not meant to merely be an adverb – a way of describing a way we could relate to our individual actions. I've focused on this way of speaking in the dissertation for ease of exposition of the base level concepts. But I'd like to arrive at the thought of something like a life story, an achievement for which the autobiographical social structure is necessary but importantly insufficient.

Fourth and finally, the theory needs to finish the incomplete project begun in chapter 3: saying what agency is or isn't in the context of colonial social structure, and deciding whether rational agency is a salvageable framework for relating the particular kind of efficacy available rational beings to the world in which they exercise it.

Though there's still room for much progress on each of these, I have a bit to say about the third. I made out the difference between the colonial social structure and the autobiographical social structure using reliance: by noting what sorts of reliance they would license, arguing that the former licenses only predictive reliance but the latter also licenses constitutive reliance. But I think there's more to get out of the concept of reliance, one that points towards a concept of *authorship*, which may or may not prove compatible with theories of agency as currently constituted or as conceivably constituted.

Different kinds of reliance put us in different default explanatory relations to the world, to each other, and to the unexpected. Jazz musicians often play songs armed with little else but their instruments, a tempo, and a chord progression: a worked out sequence of notes the band will play together that will serve as the harmonic context for each individual player's contribution at that time. Each chord is harmonic common ground for that bit of the song, which each player is invited to treat as a public practical premise in deciding what notes to play on that bit. The sequence of chords, combined with the tempo and rhythm, is the principle for shifting from one common ground to the next. That harmonic context will shift quickly or slowly according to the temporal schedule set by the rhythm section. Skilled 'solo' playing in this context is a matter of being where you are, where you've been, at where you're going: at once playing to the chord the band is now on, responding inventively to the chords that preceded it

and setting the melodic stage for the chord to come – chord progressions, after all, are also colloquially referred to as "changes".

As it turns out, 'soloing' really isn't. It is up to me what note to play in an absolute sense, in that it is up to me whether to press the A or the B key on the piano, but the musical character of that note will be a matter of where that fits in the overall chord the band is playing – pressing the "A" key will either be a minor or major interval relative to the chord the band is playing – irreducibly, a relationship between the note I am playing and the chord the band is playing as a whole - but I press the keys on my instrument and not theirs. This relationship of the notes that I as a "soloist" plays atop these chords played by the band decide, at a time, whether the note I select sounds consonant or dissonant,". Over time, progression of these chords whether the melodic lines of strings of notes I play succeed at leading the song back to its harmonic "root" or whether I am left stranded on a detour chord, succeed at playing "inside" or "outside" the chord changes based on what the band plays, and succeeds in the ways that matter (as inventive or boring, beautiful or ugly, cool or square) with reference to both of those sorts of things and more.

Consider a certain kind of unpredictable bass player I could play with. Yet considering a second bass player provides another version of that same practical dilemma: an individually skilled, creative player, who may deviate from the progression to provide "substitutions" that change the harmonic context, but in a way meant to contribute to the overall sound. Soloing over a rhythm section with this kind of player in it is precarious stuff – I may know what notes I will play (overt behavior) but I don't know what intervals they will represent (actions) and thus I won't know what I'm doing in the way that matters musically. Outside of allegory, this represents the situation in which I am uncertain enough about the world not to know what I am doing.

But I still think the 'solo' I play in this context is attributable to me, is authored by me. Perhaps it's because of a thought like this: in playing together, we adopt shared goals. These involve making great sound together, one formed out of our individual sounds that contribute as they do to the overall sound because of what everybody has played, is playing, and will play. I may not know that I will be playing the 9th of the chord the band is playing – because I don't know what note the bass player will play, and thus what chord will form on the basis of that note serving as the root – but I will know that I'm trying to play a great sounding one, or at least one that will contribute to an overall great song. I needn't be secure in knowing that I will succeed at that. I need only be secure in that that is what I succeed in holding out for by playing a note at all, and I can only hold out for that if I'm in a context where that's available – and that, in turn, is the context where everyone is trying to make music together.

The general version of the lesson would go something like this: I could succeed at living autobiographically even when and where I fail – when things don't go our way. There are, after all, contingencies of life that social structure can at best manage rather than eliminate, just as there are better and worse bass players, chance loud distractions that interrupt a player, instruments with poor turning. What makes me the author of something in the world is standing in the explanatory relationship to it such that its failure or success as the thing it aims to be is attributable to me.

Then, *authorship* might describe the way of explaining action with this kind of commitment: I rely on the good bass player to choose a good note to play not because I will have played a bad note if he chooses incorrectly, but because his choosing a note to play based on what he hopes or guesses or aims to prompt me to play – in a way responsive to my playing – is the condition of possibility for my note being a contribution to the song we're all playing. Each of us, in the

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band, stand in the like relation to each of the others. With generality: my individual ability to make things happen in the world is dependent on other people – not because what I would like to make happen won't happen in the right way if they don't help, but because my action won't have the character of choosing my part of one of the ways we could all live together unless we are each positioned to do the like, and empowered by a social structure that licenses holding out for the possibility that everyone will do some version of living together that they choose.

Authorship invites us to play along with history, and perform the number as we will. What will we call this one?

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